

Children's Ministries Revisited

September 29, 2013 AM
Matthew 28: 19,20

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Introduction:

This morning I am presenting yet another installment in the Ministry at the Chapel series. This is intended to be an overview of how we view ministry here at Clearcreek Chapel and briefly how each ministry area serves the larger purpose. Pastor Russ introduced the series in two sermons. He presented the underlying Biblical principles for ministry and then how ministry functions to serve the Great Commission. Pastor Dan gave an introduction to the work of evangelism and what we refer to as "Spreading the Gospel of God Ministries" here at the Chapel.

I presented an attempt to define and ground what is referred to often as "discipleship" in the work of the church as seen as the gathered community of believers. Discipleship was defined as the meaning and function of being a disciple, that is one who is committed follower of God, in particular his Son, Jesus Christ; following His life and teaching in such a way that it controls and governs our entire life and thought.

I also asserted that Children's ministries are to be accomplished in tandem with family and church working in unison. Pastor Tim Nixon presented adult education in this light as well.

Exposition:

Let's begin by looking again at the text Pastor Russ used several weeks ago, Matthew 28: 19,20.

This text is framed around a central imperative with a contextual note and two descriptive phrases as to what this imperative involves. Almost every translation makes the contextual framework look like the imperative. The imperative is to "make disciples." Because of the position of Christ and the arrival of His kingdom and authority, we are to extend that understanding and submission by making disciples. We are to do this "as we go." Another way to think of this is as we continue in our living under the realm of the authority of Christ we should be actively seeking to enlist others as disciples as well.

This is done in a two-fold manner. The means of "making disciples" involves these two concepts. There is a natural sequencing to these tasks. Baptism involves the initial acceptance of Christ and His kingdom and in Matthew's context would assume the gathering of those baptized as participants in the church where relationships would grow, and worship is expressed. Baptizing implies a confession of the gospel. The use of the idea of "baptizing" implies that the facts of the gospel are heard, understood and believed.

The next component involves “teaching to observe.” This implies learning with an express purpose to obey, grow and change. It will involve encouraging one in faith and love. It will challenge one to trust and serve. It will fill one with wisdom and empower them to utilize the gifts that they possess.

Children:

So how does this apply to ministry to and for children? In essence what we are doing in the work of children’s ministries is the application of this text. We are involved in the making of disciples in this case of children.

Therefore much of children’s ministry is a Preparatory ministry. When you begin to read the children’s ministry literature there is often an approach that speaks strongly to the ideas of worship and service. This assumes that the child is indeed a disciple and should begin to be “learning to observe”. But that is not the case for many if not most of the especially younger children. So children’s ministry serves to set the context for understanding the gospel and its claims. This context includes who God is. We need to understand what He is like, what He has done and what he expects of His creation. To become a disciple you need a context of Biblical authority/consistency. And a disciple will come to grips with the context of Christ/Gospel centrality. These are the ideas that are presented, rehearsed, and reviewed that need to have principle place in the work with children. Understanding they are made by and for God, under His and His delegated authority, and He speaks to them in His Word, the Scriptures is the foundation. To understand how God teaches us this is by engaging His Word and seeing the overall intention of the Bible.

Included in this is also a clear context for Christian life. This should become clear for those who come to faith in the gospel and be presented as well to those who have not. Therefore children’s ministries should be seen as fostering a sense of their belonging as a group (the Bible refers to this group as “church”), that functions in and as community, that serves and worships together under authority of Christ and those committed as under-shepherds to lead, to hear and obey God’s Word.

Ministry:

From the previous sermon, the family should be oriented in this line as well and supporting and engaging the work of ministry. I am going to highlight the various children’s ministries and briefly outline their focus, intention and content.

Nurseries:

1. The principle purpose of the nursery ministry is to provide childcare to allow parents to worship and listen. It can be viewed as a respite, but not essential. We should not view children as a bother or a hindrance. Worship is not to be viewed as illegitimate if it is punctuated by noises. And yet it is encouraged to share in this ministry as a kind of co-operative between parents to allow some respite.

2. Nurseries can also be an avenue to provide the context for family support. This area we are probably the weakest in especially in terms of intention. I think many serve this purpose incidentally but we could improve here. I would love to see someone with a burden and giftedness to minister in this regard, to inculcate parenting and nurturing wisdom to this identified group as a Pastor for Family Ministry.

3. It is in the context of the nurseries where we make the initial steps to begin to share loving community, introduce God oriented language, and present Bible sourced stories.

Beginners:

1. Two year sequence for those ages four and five (traditionally pre-kindergarten and kindergarten in our school organizational context).

2. Here they are more formally introduced to Bible and content in a classroom, group-listen setting. It is presented in such a manner to have the child recognize God as the Bible's author and main character. They are told and helped to understand that Christ and Gospel are the Bible's center.

3. This small group approach allows the child to begin to function as community, preferring one another, listen to those in authority. Play is a principle way children relate to one another and is used with this in mind. There could be built upon in every age group, but not by sacrificing the time spent hearing and rehearsing content.

4. We recently added evening for more contact and contemplated morning worship time as well. We are not engaging this group to provide mere babysitting, but more interpersonal and Bible engagement. The more parents work in this area, the more effective it is hoped to be.

Primaries:

1. What we refer to as "Primaries," is the three-year age span where a child traditional is involved in the first through third grades. Again, we are following the cultural convention for simplicity and consistency, not because of Biblical mandate.

2. As the children work into this age and developmental framework allows even more in-depth content but we intentionally still focus on overall meaning of Bible.

3. We still value and continue to promote learning in community. This continues to foster a sense of care with one another and builds an attitude of submission to authority, two key concepts for Christian living.

4. This age group also engages one another in the context of play and we could have even more activity but again not to the loss of content.

5. This also is an area where an increase in “effectiveness” is seen when reinforced at home. Our adding of evening program is intended to reinforce and provide additional content and contact.

Junior:

1. Our “Juniors” are organized around the three years that corresponds to grades four to six. Sixth graders in some contexts are viewed as Jr. High or Middle schoolers and create their own interesting concerns.

2. In this age group we begin a more conversational-style of learning, yet they should be beginning to “master” some common concepts. Presentation, memorization and rehearsal can yield great rewards for the future.

3. It is intentional that there is still a very strong emphasis on the overall meaning of Bible. It is important to see framework and build the details into this as they understand how to read, interpret and apply the Bible.

4. This age still needs opportunities to build community (often in a more structured play context and there are many opportunities for parental engagement in this arena).

Conclusion:

As we engage in Ministry to children, we prepare them for the gospel. It sets the context for understanding the gospel and its claims. This context includes who God is, beginning to understand what He is like, what He has done and what he expects of His creation. We attempt to present and build in them to have a maturing context of Biblical authority/consistency. And we hope to help them come to grips with the context of Christ/Gospel centrality. Understanding they are made by and for God, under His and His delegated authority, and He speaks to them in His Word, the Scriptures is the foundation. To understand how God teaches us this is by engaging His Word and seeing the overall intention of the Bible.

Pizzazz is not the key although we feel we are called to do all ministry in a context of excellence. We like things to look good, in the hope that is “tastes as good as it looks.” I want to conclude with two quotes (one a quoted quote itself) from a nice presentation of issues involved in family ministry, *Perspectives on Family Ministry, Three Views*.

The first comes from pages 6 and 7, the other on page 9.

