

“God’s Children”

Sermon preached by Elder Gary Blacklidge

Kirkmont Presbyterian Church

Beavercreek, OH

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Text: Deuteronomy 14:1-2; Matthew 7:9-11; Romans 8:14-17

Let me start with a disclaimer: I have not attended Princeton, been to Princeton, or even in the same state with Princeton. I have, however, been privileged to hear sermons by Carmen, Eric, Pastor Watson and Marcy, among others who have attended Princeton. In this regard, you are receiving the benefit of a second-hand Princeton education.

And, if I may, paraphrase Charles Dickens in “A Tale of Two Cities,” “This is by far a far harder thing than I have ever done before.” You may not believe it, but this is far harder for me than preparing and singing a solo.

In Carmen’s sermon about sheep last week, the first in this series, she approached the topic both from our human side as God’s sheep, and God’s side as our heavenly shepherd. This morning we are going to follow that same line of thought, for without looking at the reality of God as our heavenly Father and what that means to us, we cannot fully understand our role as His children.

God is the Father of all who believe in Christ in a special sense not shared by unbelievers. God is called our Father, first of all, because we have new standing before Him. Unbelievers are the offspring of God because He created them. In Acts 17:28-31, Paul is addressing this with the Greeks in Athens, and we read: “for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘for we are also His offspring.’ Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

The unbelievers, though God’s offspring, do not have the standing as sons. Rather, their standing is as condemned sinners before God the judge. In John’s gospel, he reveals the nature of this judgment in Chapter 3:16-21. Jesus tells us: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the Judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved this darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

God is the Father of believers also in the sense that He gives them new life. This relationship is a family one involving many of the same realities that exist between an earthly father and child. Just as in earthly lives the first reality is that of the birth of a child. I realize that there are some here this morning that have not had the blessed opportunity to watch their child or children being born. I must tell you however, that in each instance of the birth of our children, I felt great humility and in some ways much closer to God than most times in my life. With the birth of our children, I felt the great and painful reality of God's sacrifice through His Son Jesus in a way I had never before grasped.

In an earthly sense, can you envision God looking upon the birth of His Son, Jesus, to Mary on that night so long ago, knowing the price this newborn child was to pay for our sins?

Our earthly lives start at birth and in John 3:3, 5, 6, 7, Jesus tells us how our heavenly lives start and our relationship with God as our heavenly Father begins. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' "

If we as weak and sinful humans can marvel at the birth of our children, how much more so must God feel joy when one of us as a wayward, sinful, unbelieving child is born again into a salvation relationship with Him as our heavenly Father?

As with earthly fathers, God cares for us as our heavenly Father. All of us here this morning can relate from the viewpoint of a child to a parent, a mother or a father. The reality is that no matter how hard a parent tries, we are human and therefore fall short at times. I don't know about you, but I thought my dad was one step short of Superman until I became a teenager and realized I knew it all and was far smarter than I had a right to be. The truth is, my father was no less of a good father, I just saw things differently.

As a father, I can see realities of what my parents went through, and realize that no matter how hard I try, I will blow it at times.

Before she was the beautiful young lady she is today, and Kirkmont's Youth Intern, Sara was Jodi's and my little girl. When Sara was about 4 or 5 years old, she was a wide-eyed dainty little girl, and everyone at the church we were attending always made over her.

That winter there was sufficient snow for sledding. So one Saturday, Jodi and I bundled the kids up and went into the backyard to sled. Well, Sara was hesitant to go by herself so I got on the sled and she got on top of me and down we went. Only at the bottom of the hill we hit a rock and went rolling and became entangled and poor little Sara was hurt. You can imagine how I felt when, despite my best intentions, I had hurt my dainty little Sara. To add insult to injury, by the time we got to church the next morning, one of Sara's big brown eyes had black, green and yellow skin around it, a real shiner. And of course, everyone asked their little Sara what had

happened. To which she would reply, "Daddy did it!" If I explained the sledding accident once that Sunday, I explained it 20 times.

Thankfully, though we as humans fall short, we have a heavenly Father who does not. In Matthew 6:31-33 and our Gospel lesson for the morning, Matthew 7:9-11, Jesus tells us: "Do not be anxious then, saying 'what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or with what shall we clothe ourselves?' "for all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven, give what is good to those who ask him?"

A third reality of family life and a father-child relationship is that of discipline. Whether we as earthly parents like it, we realize that for the safety and wellbeing of our children, we must at times discipline them. Again, before she was the beautiful young lady she is today and a member of Kirkmont's PNC, Jenna was our little girl. When Jenna was about 5, she got into trouble one night for something she kept doing which she knew she wasn't supposed to do. (I know you will all find it amazing that Jenna ever did anything wrong!) Well, she was sent to bed early to think about what she had done. I went in later to ask her what she had arrived at. Her reply was, "I can't help it that I behave this way, God made me like this!" Well, how do you answer that? I am sure I came up with something.

Hebrews Chapter 12:4-11 provides insight into God's discipline of us as His children. "In your struggles against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.' Endure hardship as discipline: God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline) then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Furthermore, this Father-child relationship carries with it new brothers and sisters.

Obtaining God as Father is not a result of our own merit but a result of Christ's. For we as God's children continually sin and fall short and fail to appreciate the blessings and wondrous benefits of having the one and only true God as our heavenly Father.

In Paul's writings we see our path to God as our Father through Christ as both the heir and the inheritance. In Galatians 3:16-18 we see Christ as the offspring of Abraham and therefore the heir of the promise to Abraham. "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say "and to his seeds", as referring to many but rather to one, 'and to your seed,' that

is Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise: but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.”

What is this promise? Galatians 3:8, “And the scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham saying ‘all the nations shall be blessed in you.’ ”

Furthermore, Christ is also revealed as the fulfilled promise of blessing to Abraham. He is also the inheritance. Galatians 3:10-14, “For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse: for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law to perform them.’ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident: for ‘the righteous man shall live by faith.’ However, the Law is not of faith: on the contrary, ‘He who practices them shall live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’ In order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

Through faith in Jesus Christ we become Abraham’s true heirs and through God’s gift, the gift of a new relationship in Christ, we are adopted as God’s sons and heirs.

As our epistle lesson of the morning from Romans 8:14-17 reads: “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption, as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ ‘The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”

This morning we have looked at our relationship as children to God our heavenly Father. In addition, we’ve seen that that relationship is only possible because Christ, as God’s only begotten Son and only true heir, willingly gave up His life and His inheritance that through His death and resurrection we might receive adoption by God and thus Christ’s inheritance.

With this being the case, what should our response as obedient children be? Christ tells us in Matthew 22:37-39, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind” “This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

In addition, Christ tells us a way in which our love for Him should be manifested. In John 21:15-17, “Christ tells Peter: ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord: you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my lambs.’ ‘He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, You know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd my sheep.’ “He said to him a third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time ‘do you love

Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, you know all things; You know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ ”

As God’s children, we have the opportunity in our personal lives to daily worship and glorify Him as our Father and to obey His commandments to love Him and our neighbors.

Collectively we have the opportunity with our brothers and sisters in Christ here at Kirkmont as we Go, Grow, and Glorify to serve God and love our neighbors. In Christ’s first question to Peter, He said “feed My lambs.” As Lydia told us last week in the children’s sermon, lambs are the young sheep, children. At Kirkmont, this feeding can mean helping Pat with Sunday School, or Sherrie with Vacation Bible School, or Jody with the Harvest Fest or the Easter Egg Hunt.

Through Kirkmont’s Missions, Outreach, Worship and Stewardship, we are blessed as God’s children to have many opportunities to “Shepherd” and “Tend” Christ’s sheep. From financial support of Missions, helping the Gospel Mission, Habitat for Humanity, the Women’s Center, to partaking in Outreach Projects with Cecilia like Egg Hunts or Cruise-Ins, to singing in choir, lay reading, or praying for our services, ask God and seek what “sheep” or “children” He would have you feed and tend at Kirkmont.

Amen