

**SERMON TITLE-** "Child Dedication- In Joy And In Sorrow"

**TEXT-** 2 Corinthians 2:1-11

**PREACHED AT-** Neighbourhood Church

**BY-** James Toews

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### **Child Dedication**

Friesen-	Natasha & Glen-	Avery and Heidi
Dick-	Sarah & Colin-	Rupert
Sutton	Kati & Adrian-	Rebecca
Magtiza-	Arden & Bobbi-	Cason

### **The Message**

#1. Children Belong to God-

-the meaning of bringing the children forward

#2. Parents Are Stewards

-the parent's affirmation- "We do!"

#3. The Church Is A Covenant Community

-the church's affirmation- "We do!"

### **Prayer of Child Dedication**

God of us all, You tend us like a kindly shepherd  
and carry these lambs in Your arms.

keep these little ones in Your loving care.

In infancy, may they be loved

by parents and friends who know You and Your grace.

As children, may they absorb from living models  
all that is good and true and pure and of good report  
so that they may happily learn the Kingdom way.

As youth, may they be guided

by precept, example and invitations

to choose Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

As a members of His flock may they fulfill

the high hopes of all who share in the blessings today.

Shepherd these children through life,

call **Avery, Heidi, Rupert, Rebecca and Cason** by name,

and lead them by refreshing streams.

And if there are valleys of dark shadows,

be the source of strength and courage,

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

### **Prayer of Parent's Blessing**

We bless you, **Natasha & Glen, Sarah & Colin, Katy & Adrian, Arden & Bobby-** and  
ask that God strengthen you for the many challenges of parenting.

May you bring up your children to love and serve God, by instructing them in the faith,  
disciplining them with gentleness, blessing them with favour, and not provoking them to  
anger.

May your children respond with love, respect and obedience maturing as believers who  
take their place in the family of faith.

Today we have participated in a Child Dedication service. It is a wonderful time of celebration and commitment. Holding children in one's arms is a tangible reminder that the Kingdom of God is not a theoretical challenge- it is a practical challenge.

Even in the planning of a Child Dedication service we are reminded that for all of the wonderful settings that we would like to create- we are never allowed to forget that the subjects of this service are not going to be impressed with our wonderful ideas. Our program may find them sleeping, ready to be held, displayed, prayed over and generally put into a pedestal- but it may also very well find them unimpressed with it all. We may, and in a larger group, almost certainly find that one or more disrupts all our plans.

That's life in a Child Dedication- and frankly for it to be real- this is how it should be. Life is not posed.

And so it is that our theme in the study of 2 Corinthians is perfect for a Child Dedication service- Life In The Real World.

Today's text brings a theme to us that I think every parent and child will connect with.

Let me begin with a story from my childhood. I grew up in a time when there was no debate about whether or not children should be spanked. The spanking stories were not about "if"- they were about "how." Each parent and family its ways of delivering the goods.

In our family there was a wooden spoon and also for a period of time- a belt that was hung up in the bathroom as a visible reminder that sin has consequences.

But while I remember that I did have spankings- what I remember even more vividly were the precursors to the spankings. In our household, the reality was that it was my mother who ended up giving the spankings most of the time.

And what I remember was not how much the spankings hurt- but my mother's emotions when a spanking was about to take place. She would be heartbroken having to administer this punishment.

The standard line was, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." I'm sure you know what the instinctive responses to this would be. First it was, "So why do you do it then?" and second, "You're right, it doesn't hurt that much."

But it was the pain of the parent that filled the memory of my childhood disciplinary experiences and as Paul moves us through his "Life in the Real World" teaching in 2 Corinthians- it is the pain of discipline that we meet.

Listen to how Paul describes his heart in a similar situation-

**So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? 2 Corinthians 2:1-2**

Paul was in the middle of a matter that required correction and he realized that correction comes with pain- and the person who is administering the correction is generally avoided. The people Paul had to correct were, like the children of a loving parent, the people he deeply loved.

And now they were hurt by him. So Paul explains himself.

**I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For**

**I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. 2 Corinthians 2:3-4**

It is clear that Paul was heart broken at the thought of having had to administer discipline to this church. This is cry of a truly wounded parent.

And with that cry we see a truth that we would surely rather avoid-

### **#1. Sadness Is Part Of Being God's Family**

As we look at the children that we have dedicated to God today this is something that we would rather avoid talking about. Today, after all is a day that we celebrate with anticipation and joy. Surely we don't have to have a dark cloud on every horizon, do we?

No we don't, but the reminder that sadness is part of life in God's family and in human families is not to moderate how much joy we feel- the need for this reminder is to build our hope for the joy and anticipation we celebrate on a real foundation.

Hollywood is famous for its ability to create amazing scenes. As technology advances the Hollywood magic is no longer confined to elaborate sets- it is now able to create scenes almost entirely with computer generated models.

This works great for story tellers- but not as a basis for real living. When we gather for a child dedication or a wedding we are not attempting to create a scene- we are trying to lay down a foundation for a Kingdom life.

And laying down a foundation for a well-anchored Kingdom life means that reality, not illusion, is squarely recognized.

That is why in the marriage vows the following couplets are included-

**“in plenty and in want,  
in joy and in sorrow,  
in sickness and in health,”**

These do not detract from a celebratory wedding celebration- they remind us that a marriage celebration is not just a well-planned event- it is the beginning of a life.

Similarly, the reminder that sadness is part of family anchors what we do in an important reality.

But a big part of this letter deals with an important reason for sadness. There is lots of sadness in the world- and it comes from lots of sources. We have recently been reminded of the tragic events in Haiti. An earthquake wreaks destruction on an unsuspecting nation. The sadness of it all is overwhelming.

But there is another source of sadness that is even more heart breaking-

### **#2. Sin Is Part Of Being God's Family**

Natural disasters are terrible- but they are not nearly as terrible as the avoidable sadness caused when people wound each other. The Bible describes this as the result of sin.

And sin is part of families.

Again, in some ways, as we looked at the children who stood before us today, I doubt that anyone had “sin” in mind. Frankly, if the idea of sorrow might seem like a downer as part of a joyful celebration- the idea of sin thrown into the mix is downright miserable.

But the reality of sin enters the equation of life immediately in human families- and the reality of sin enters into God's family as well.

It is there.

In the case of the Corinthians Paul had addressed the matter of sin in his previous letter-

**But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat . . . "Expel the wicked man from among you." 1 Corinthians 5:11-13**

That was very harsh. In fact it is so harsh that we would rather not even imagine that such an action would ever be required within the church.

But there it is- there's no way around it-

### **#3. Sin Must Be Dealt With**

If there is a consistent theme in the Bible that carries forward into the Kingdom of God- it is that when sin finds its foothold- dismissing it is not optional.

There are things that we can ignore. When you drive your car there are all kinds of vibrations and noises- most of them due to the mechanics of the machinery. But there are some noises and warnings that you must not ignore. The other day a car passed us with 2 seriously low tires. There was no way to warn the driver and on he drove. But one thing is certain- those low tires will either be fixed or they will fail. They will not just get better.

It is the same thing in families. As children grow up they will discover the wonderful effectiveness of lying. This is not shocking- it is simply part of growing up. But lying left unattended leads to disaster. Lying must be dealt with.

And just as sin needs to be dealt with in human families, Paul has reminded the Corinthians that it needs to be addressed within the Kingdom community.

We are to be people who live by a moral code delivered to humanity, by God Himself.

The reality is that there are times when we will fail and then action needs to be taken. We don't have permission just turn the other way.

One of the sad stories that gets repeated over and over again sounds like this. Often it involves alcohol. "My father was an abusive alcoholic but not one did anything. My siblings and mother suffered under that while people turned the other way."

In Kingdom communities this is something that easily happens because noticing opens up a big can of worms. Once you notice what are you supposed to do?

There are 2 things that Paul demonstrated to the Corinthian church.

First, we need to visibly notice. We are not allowed to pretend that it is OK. It begins by saying something to the person himself. This is a miserably hard thing to do.

Now let's not be confused with talking to a person and talking about a person. This is the second most difficult thing in the life of the church family. Actually sitting down and talking to a person who is doing something that you know is wrong will be an enormous challenge. In fact it is a challenge that is rarely undertaken.

Second, at some point action does need to be taken. In the church, unlike in society there is very limited recourse. When children are young, spanking is an option but it is not long before that isn't appropriate. Then parents must find other recourse.

In the church there is very little recourse when someone violates the moral code other than a cessation of association.

In the case of Paul and the church in Corinth it got down to this and Paul was heart broken over it.

This has been a difficult topic, one that we would rather not have to deal with on any Sunday. Life would be so much better if we could just live without any need for correction.

Unfortunately, that's not how it is.

But fortunately that is not where this story ends.

Paul has had to deal with a very painful circumstance.

Paul has had to personally commit himself to tackling it far more personally than he ever wanted to.

But for all the difficult lead up journey that we have been on- today's sermon is not about sorrow and pain- it is a sermon about the joy of family.

Paul does face the pain squarely-

**If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. 2 Corinthians 2:5-6**

In facing the pain he reminds us of another critically important Kingdom principle-

#### **#4. There's No Joy In Meting Out Punishment**

Now this truly is a principle of the Kingdom of God and not a principle of the Kingdom of this world.

As much as Kingdom people are saddened by having to face sin- it is not because sin is somehow unique to the Kingdom of God. Far from it. It is not just the story of the church that children and spouses suffer from abuse and no one says anything.

Sin and suffering are part of life- and their consequences are all around us. The most visible consequences are the prisons. At the end of the day- that is the recourse that society has set for those who violate its laws.

And what is society's reaction? You hear it all the time- "Lock 'em up and throw away the key!" When people violate society's laws- society reacts. We want evil doers to suffer. Even as I was working through the sermon and I heard one of the "law and order" talk show hosts discussing the problems with the justice system in our country. There was much that he said which it was hard to disagree with- but it was also hard to avoid the impression that few things would have given him as much pleasure as seeing retribution delivered to the criminals among us. And it was not hard to get on the bandwagon. After all when a person with 100 criminal convictions for various driving offenses gets behind the wheel of a car and crashes into and kills a family in a mini-van outrage seems like the most appropriate response.

And while that is the right response in the Kingdom of God joy in meting out punishment is not part of the program.

In the Kingdom of God however there is a deep sadness that fills the hearts of Kingdom people. There is the grief that Paul describes.

And Paul goes on-

**Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. 2 Corinthians 2:7-8**

And in this comes the true joy of this difficult reality-

#### **#5. The Goal Is Restoration Not Retribution**

The goal of the Kingdom of God is not retribution but restoration.

This is such an important Kingdom principle that is can hardly be over stressed. Of course restoration or rehabilitation are very popular concepts even within our society's approach to sin. Our prison system spends enormous amounts of money on programs that try to make rehabilitation their end.

It is difficult to see much hope in the system. In some ways I think it is because of an unwillingness to really see sin as sin and not merely as mistakes. If the evil in the world is simply about a series of mistakes that are being made then the solution is indeed rehabilitation.

The Bible describes a different situation. The deepest problems are not the mistakes we make- the big problem is the evil within us.

Evil cannot be tolerated. It must be confronted and addressed.

This is a painful process that few people have the courage to engage.

It is a process that causes mothers to weep when they punish their children.

But while the mother weeps that her child must face the punishment due to sin- the heart of the mother is driven to do everything she can to bring about the restoration of the child.

This picture is the one that Paul brings to the church in Corinth. It is a picture that any person seeking to live as Jesus instructed us must firmly understand and put into practise.

**9The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. 10If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven— if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. 2 Corinthians 2:9-11**