

IS IT WELL WITH THE CHILD?

2 KINGS 4:26

(Funeral Sermon for a Child)

Although we know from the day a child is born it is old enough to die, when it happens, it devastates us. Everything about the death of a child is wrong. It's not supposed to happen.

We expect parents and grandparents to die. Sometimes, it is even a blessing. But we don't expect children to die. As one broken-hearted father said to me, "Preacher, we're not supposed to bury our children, they are supposed to bury us."

But they do. And when death does come to a child, as you well know today, nothing helps. No words can take the pain away.

Somehow, when a tragedy like this comes, we must find a way to cope with it. That's why we turn to the scriptures today. They, and the Lord who gave them to us, are our only hope for comfort and strength.

The Bible records the deaths of many children. One is the son of the shunammite woman. This lady and her husband had often befriended the prophet Elisha by providing him food and lodging. Out of gratitude, the prophet asked if he could do anything in return for their kindness to him. The woman was childless and desired a family. And Elisha promised her God would give her a son.

In due time the son was born and grew. One day, while running to his father who was working in the field, he fell and injured his head. He was rushed to his mother and while she held him on her knee he died.

The woman instructed her servants to quickly saddle the animals and take her to the prophet. As she approached him from a distance he sensed something was wrong and asked,

“Is it well with thee?
Is it well with thy husband?
Is it well with the child?”
And she answered, “It is well.”

We wonder, under those circumstances, how anyone could make such a response. Right now, you are asking yourself if things will ever be well again. You are feeling that the **I** want to suggest three things that may help you find light and hope in the midst of the darkness and despair you are now experiencing.

Live with gratitude
Look to glory
Lean on God

Life is a Gift

First, live with gratitude. Life is a gift, not a right. To see it that way changes our whole perspective. It helps us focus more on being thankful than on being resentful.

I don't want to be simplistic about this, as if a few words from the lips of a man could suddenly ease your deep grief and lift you up. But if you could see your child as a gift from God and be grateful for the time you had together and what the life and death of your child has taught you, what a difference it could make.

Then try to focus on the joy your child has brought you, the blessing he/she has been, on the influence he/she has had. Gratitude helps lessen grief.

Your child's life is over, and there is nothing you can do for your child anymore. Now the question is, what has your child's death done for you? Of course it has brought you great grief. I understand that. But it can do no more. Rufus Jones once declared that his boy who died had been a greater influence over him than all the others. Sometimes a child brings us closer to God. Sometimes they teach us things we

would never learn otherwise. Sometimes they teach us to lean on the Lord.

Remember that length alone does not become the proper criteria for judging the significance of a life. Methuselah lived 969 years, but in his almost 1,000 years of life, the only noteworthy thing was the list of his children.

The artist Raphael died at 36,
John Keats, the poet, died at 24;
Frederick W. Robertson, the English preacher, was only 37 at his death.
Even Jesus Christ was only 33 when he died.

His accomplishment is not judged by the length of his life.

We cannot understand why some people live such a short time. For them the flower of their life grows up for just an instant and then it is swept away, and we are aghast. But remember, your child who died was a gift and has left you with a legacy of memories.

We must remember that we, and our children, are like every other human being, and that means we can die at any time.

There is a simple statement in the Bible about physical life. It says:

“As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” (Ps. 103:15-16).

None of us are indestructible.
Death is inevitable.
Life is a gift and we must thank God for the time we had.

Their New Life

Second, look to glory. It will help you if you do not think too greatly of your own loss, but think of the joys of the children

in heaven.

Try to look beyond the grief and the grave to the glory. So much of our grief is self-centered. Our tears are tears of self-pity. If we will think of the glorious place to which the child has gone, it will console us. A mother of a young lad who had died wrote a friend, "I hardly know how to tell you, but I have not told you before simply because I did not have the heart to do so, that our dear boy entered his new life last month. Only the thought of his rich and wonderful experience in these first days of his new life consoles us, or in any way makes up for the loss we feel in his absence."

There is to be a future glory for all God's children. "For I reckon that the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). "Reckon" is a bookkeeping term. In the language of a certified accountant, Paul says he has added up all the columns and the sum of our destined glory far outweighs the sum of our present problems. The outcome is: the glory of our future life outweighs any glory of our present one.

There are times when our current problems so overwhelm us that we despair of a future glory. There are times when we question the progress by which we are arriving at eternity.

Humility in the presence of divine providence is not always easy. We think we see too many inequities. God has promised one thing: the triumph of his purpose to those who have responded to his call; he promises that good can be brought out of every circumstance (Rom. 8:28).

Grace for This Hour

Third, lean on God. I realize that the death of a child makes faith almost impossible for some people. How can God let this happen? As parents turn away from the grave of their child, they sometimes feel this question pushes its way between their clenched teeth. But, believe it or not, faith in

the Lord helps. If you will look to him and lean on him and learn from him, he will give you grace for this hour.

John Albrecht Bengel, a godly scholar, once said, “When a pilgrim enters that better world, the door opens and a little breath of heaven always sweeps over those most closely involved, strengthening them until their turn for the good, good journey arrives.”

We must never think that because God allows pain and suffering to come into our lives he does not love us. Malachi tells us that God looks upon his children as his most precious treasure (Mal. 3:17).

I remind you God lost his son, too. If you grieve because of the death of a child, remember God knows your grief. He has also grieved. God often uses the rugged pass to accomplish his ends. George MacDonald reminds us that God will not force any door. He may send a storm to shake the house, crumble its foundation, blow in the window, but he will not enter until invited. MacDonald says, “Every tempest is but an assault in the siege of love.”

Joseph Bayley, who lost three children—one 18 days old, another 18 years old, and still another five years old—tells how he and his wife can never forget. And the brothers and sisters never forget either. His eight-year-old daughter said, “It’s like something pinned to the front of your mind all the time.”

If this is the way it is with you, then I would like to suggest that, right next to the ever-present memories and the images, you add this: the remembrance of Jesus, who died so that you could be sure of the love of God. Your grief will probably never go away entirely, but as you experience it you can also experience the reality of the love of God.

Psalms 103:13-14 says, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers we are

dust.” God, who gave us his son for our salvation, is the father of all those who believe in Jesus. Believe in Jesus and now, in your grief, go to that great Father, who knows exactly how you feel.