

sermon for Sunday, January 18, 1981, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D, Pastor
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"THE BLOOD ON OUR CHILDREN'S HEADS

St. Matthew 27:15-26

Text: "And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'"

St. Matthew 27:25

Today is our quarterly Baptism Sunday and at the eleven o'clock service eight children will be presented for the sacrament of baptism. The parents take vows at the baptism of their children in which they make promises about the kind of parents they will be. But that is true for the congregation as well. As the children of believing parents, these little persons are a part of the whole family of God, especially as it finds expression in the particular congregation--in this case, Central Presbyterian. In a real sense, these little ones belong to all of us. They are a part of our Christian family. And it is appropriate that not only the parents, but all of us together share in the commitment to provide spiritually for them.

Because of this, I think it appropriate this morning for us to think together about how we parents influence and impact the lives of our children. You see, the fact is the Bible makes it perfectly clear that who and what we are as parents impacts the lives of our children in a tremendous way. The Bible says that the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. And that is true, isn't it? Who and what we are has a tremendous influence on what our children become.

In our Scripture this morning we are presented with the picture of the Hebrews before Pilate, screaming for the death of Jesus. Finally, when he doesn't know what else to do, Pilate let's them have their way. He washes his hands of the whole affair and says, "His blood be on us and on our children." That's interesting, isn't it? They admitted--they recognized and accepted the fact--that what they did in a real sense involved their children.

Is there blood on the heads of our children? Are the things we are doing as parents having terrible repercussions on our children? Most of us have been horrified this past week over three dreadful stories in the papers. First, a mother left eleven small children unattended. That night, very late, the house caught on fire. Those who tried to save the children were driven back by the flames. They could hear the footsteps of the children and hoped against hope they could get out. But all eleven tragically died. Who of us can forget the picture on the front page of one paper with eleven little coffins lined up side by side? Yes, in a very literal way, the sins of the mother brought blood to the heads of her children.

A second story also griped our hearts. A little five year old boy was beaten to death by his mother and her boy friend. The coroner's report said he died from internal bleeding and that he had over 170 bruises on his tiny body. The mother had poured blood on her little son's head.

The third incident, even more incredible, was the discovery of the body of a little baby girl, only several days old, who had been smothered to death. Like a worn out doll, her body had been discarded in the waste container of a department store restroom. Someone had poured blood on her little daughter's head.

Does all of that appall you? Do you think, "Why, I would never do that to my child." Yet, you do not have to use fire or fist or smothering to destroy a child. There are other ways to pour blood on the heads of our children. You can be so harsh and critical and judgmental that you destroy the self-esteem of a child and you have poured blood on his head. On the other extreme, you can be so lenient and permissive that a child never learns responsibility and discipline and duty and in a real sense that child's potential is killed. A child can be destroyed spiritually. He can be told about the

things of God, but when he does not see them in the lives of his parents, he rejects them and scorns them. And some of us, by the lives we have lived and the examples we have set, have condemned our children to eternal death--a far worse fate than physical death.

No, we are good people who would never be cruel physically to our children. We would never let fire destroy them; we would never beat them to death or smother them. Yet, the fact is, there is growing evidence in our society today that the blood on our own hands has stained the heads of our children.

Look at the evidence! Our college campuses have been characterized by sexual immorality, the use of drugs, disobedience to law, and even the loss of a sense of honor. Remember several years ago when a certain university withheld grades of over 600 students? Why? Because they were suspected of submitting papers as their own when in reality they had been bought from firms who specialized in such fraud.

A recent book entitled The Changing Values On Campus reports that only one student in four regards casual premarital sex relations as morally wrong. Only 50% believe in going to war even to counteract aggression from without. 41% of the students believe that interchange of partners among the married is acceptable and 74% see nothing wrong with relations between consenting homosexuals.

St. Paul once said that in the last days men will be arrogant, disobedient to parents, unholy, profligates, haters of good, reckless, lovers of pleasure (II Tim. 3:1-4). Many see this as a description of our world today and are wondering out loud if all of this is not moving us closer towards the final collapse of human society. For example, one writer has listed five reasons for the collapse of a civilization. Here they are: 1. The rapid increase of divorce and the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society. 2. Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public money for free bread and entertainment for the populace. 3. The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more and more exciting and more brutal. 4. The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy is within, the decadence of the people. 5. The decay of religion--faith fading into mere form--losing touch with life and becoming impotent to guide the people. Do you think those five indications of decay and collapse of a society fit us? Are they not a fair description of our world today? Well, they were written in 1788 by Edward Gibbon. When he wrote his great work, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, those were the causes to which he attributed the collapse.

The day before Pilate, the Jews cried out, "His blood be upon us and on our children." It hardly seems fair, does it, that what they did would have dreadful impact on their children? Yet, like it or not, that is a fact of life. The sins of the father are indeed visited upon the children, even unto the third and fourth generations.

I really don't like that do you? I don't like it that who and what I am, what I do, has a bad influence on my children. The Jews didn't like it either. Before Pilate, in the heat of the moment, they were perfectly willing to have the blood of Jesus on them and their children. But over in the fifth chapter of Acts we make an amazing discovery. Now we discover the Jewish leaders don't want responsibility for what they did. We find them saying to Peter and John, "We strictly charge you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." (Acts 5:28)

No, after the heat and passion is over, we wish the blood wasn't on us and our children. Often we would like to deny that there ever was any blood. But it doesn't work that way. Some of you may have read the book, Games People Play. This is a popularized version of a counseling process that tries to help us understand how people relate to one another. One of the things the author discovered was that bad games played in

families, bad ways of relating to one another in the home environment, we've learned by the children. When they became adults, they played the same bad games, they related in the same inappropriate and inadequate ways. And it was discovered that the same games had been passed down for several generations. Yes, we would like not to have that blood on us, but its there and it drips on the heads of our children.

One of my favorite books is entitled, A Faith for Tough Times. There is one part that you have heard me quote many times, "The family counts," it says, "It is humanity's primary cell." And then the author goes on to add, "But the fact remains that the world never gets a Christ, or anyone Christlike, except through a holy family." Isn't that where the solution begins? Doesn't the answer to our problems lie in homes that are holy, homes where Jesus is loved and honored, homes where children first see Jesus in the faces of their parents, in the lives of their mothers and fathers?

One way to have a holy home is to have a disciplined home. In Proverbs we read, "Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart." (29:17) Recent studies of delinquency reveals that one of the major causes of children getting into trouble is lack of discipline in the home. Young people need the restraining hand of parents to guide their footsteps. They need the emotional security of having set limits beyond which they may not go. In the Old Testament we are told of a high priest of the Jews named Eli. God said he would judge Eli's house forever. And do you know why? The Bible says, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." If young people have no respect for authority at home, they will not have respect for authority in society.

But there is another side of discipline. If we expect our children to submit to discipline, we ourselves must lead disciplined lives. Recently a lady said to me, "My father used to say, 'do as I say and not as I do.'" And then she added rather wistfully, "There is no way that was going to work." Our children will willingly submit to our authority if they see us submitting to God's authority. Parent--Grandparent--Uncle--Aunt--whoever-- if we want those young people we love to observe discipline, we must also live disciplined lives for Jesus Christ.

A second way to have a holy family is to have a deep faith. Do you have that this morning? Do you know what a Christian should believe? Do you know your Bible, the Word of God? Can you teach your faith to your children? When God brought the Hebrews out of Egypt he told them to love him and then he said this, "These words you must learn by heart, this charge of mine; you must impress them on your children." Then God added, "you must talk about them when you are sitting at home and when you are on the road, when you lie down and when you rise up." Do you know what that meant? It meant they were to live their faith 24 hours a day.

Do you do that? I find it hard to do. But no matter how hard it is, I pray that my children and my grandchildren may alway see in me a man who tries to live a disciplined life and who knows what and whom he has believed. Isn't that what you want, too?

In a church I served in Texas there was a fine young man. His mother was one of the sweetest Christians I have ever known and his father was a prominent doctor and an elder in the church. That young man seemed to have so much going for him. Yet, as he came to me and we counseled several times, I felt he was turning his back on God. I couldn't understand it for at one time I had been so sure he would decide to become a minister.

Later it came out that his father had been having an affair. Then I knew that long before it was public knowledge, the young man had known. The moral discipline he had been taught and the spiritual faith he had been told about were no longer real to him. I often wonder about that young man--where he is, how he is faring. So much potential seemed to have been destroyed because a father with blood on him had gotten it on his son's head.

That day they said, "His blood be on us and on our children." We may not like it, but that's the way it is. For my children--and for their children--I need to commit myself to a stricter discipline and a deeper faith. Do you?