

"Guardians at the Gate"

FATHERS' DAY 2022

³⁰[Jesus] said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth,³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." Mark 4:30-32

It had seemed like the negotiations would never end. Both sides had come to the bargaining table convinced that they were absolutely, morally, ethically, right. Because both sides believed in their position so much, neither side had been willing to concede a point, or give an inch in the negotiations. Yet, right from the beginning, there was no doubt about the outcome of this marathon bargaining session.

One side, the side that was stronger and richer, eventually won the battle of negotiations. The end result was ... Dad finally managed to get his little son into bed.

"And that is that," Dad, thought to himself kind of smugly.

But that wasn't that. Dad didn't know his son as well as he thought he did, and Junior was not entirely convinced that his cause had been lost. So, from the boy's bedroom came the plea, "Da-ad. Da-ad." "Da-ad, will you read me a story?" "No, I've already read you a story."

"Da-ad, I forgot to get my GI-Joe Action Figure." "He'll be where you put him in the morning."

"Da-ad, I forgot to tell you I love you." "You just did. I love you, too. Go to sleep."

The straw that broke the camel's back was, "Da-ad, I'm thirsty. Will you bring me a drink of water?" Dad called back, "You've had your chance for a drink. Now be quiet. I don't want to hear another peep out of you. If I have to come in there, I'm going to be comin' to give you a spankin'."

Finally, there was silence; a long silence. Then, from his son's room came the boy's voice: "Da-ad." "What?" "Dad, when you come in to give me a spankin', will you bring me a drink of water?"

Now, I'm not advocating child abuse. That story isn't meant to encourage or discourage spanking. It's just a story about the challenges of fathers with children. This is Fathers' Day, and the role of men in the family is crucially important.

Well, that may be stretching the facts, just a little. You see, most of the rest of the world doesn't remember -- or maybe doesn't care -- that today has been set aside to remember Dads. If you forget Mother's Day, it's a big deal. If you forget Mother's Day, you're in the doghouse until you can redeem your guilty conscience with an especially nice gift, or card, or flowers, or candy for her birthday or Christmas. But when you forget Father's Day, well that's sort of like forgetting to rotate your tires or not flossing after every meal. You know you ought to do it, but it's no big deal, right?

That's the way it is in many people's lives; and that's the way it is in churches, too. When Mother's Day rolls around, churches encourage family worship; they praise Moms for having been so good, loving, caring, gentle, nurturing, compassionate, forgiving, faithful, (hah) and every positive virtue that the dictionary contains. But that's hardly the way it is when Dad's Day rolls round. When Dad's Day comes up on the calendar, the tone of many pastors gets a little harder, the look in their eyes a little sterner, the messages they preach a little harsher. Most pastors find it easy to criticize and scold men with statistics like:

- * Twenty-five percent of children have no father waiting for them at home when they're born.
- * One million children a year are the victims of divorce and 90 percent of those children will live with their mother;
- * Thirty-seven seconds is the average amount of time a middle-class father spends with his small child every day.

Nobody can argue it. Those are staggering, awful, statistics. Maybe that's why nobody seems to mind when pastors give dads a

good chewing out about their spiritual shortcomings. (sounds like we're in for some fun today, doesn't it?)

Too many of us have come to believe that a father's sentence structure is confined to things no more profound than: "Ask your mom," or "This is going to hurt me more than it is going to hurt you." Things like: "You kids, be quiet, I'm trying to watch the game."

The end result is that in America we have demoted fathers to being a person who doesn't do much and who can be removed from the family without any noticeable loss or scarring.

This Father's Day, I want to go on record as saying that this common view of Dads in America is not what God thinks. It's not what the Bible teaches.

God knows that neither a mother or a father are handed an owner's manual or a quick-start guide when they first become parents. So God provides us with His help in being parents. He gives us priorities of what He wants parents to say and do. In the Old Testament, He instructed his people to: ***"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that your LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth."*** Deuteronomy 6

With those words, God was letting fathers and mothers know, no matter what else they do or don't do; no matter what else they say or don't say; no matter what else they may give their children; they must always, first and foremost, give them God's Word. They must point their little ones to Jesus, their Savior. To back up that command in the Old Testament, in the New Testament God commands, ***"Fathers... bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*** Ephesians 6:4

Our world thinks fathers are not essential in a home. But God thinks that Christian fathers ought to be the prime protectors, the first line of defense for the children that have been placed into their care.

Fathers aren't like mothers. Fathers may not cocoon their children with the same care as many mothers do. But God has designed both men and women, fathers *AND* mothers, to be equals but different in the family. Fathers and mothers – each in their own way -- leave their children a legacy of love – love that is received from Jesus and love that reflects Jesus. God gives fathers the command to provide their little ones a safe haven, a spiritual home where the greatness of God's love and care, the love of Jesus in His sacrificing His life on the cross, and the victory of Jesus' resurrection permeate every room and brighten every corner. God wants earthly fathers to be His personal representatives. God wants earthly fathers to be His powerful hands-on protectors in the lives of their children. That is what God wishes for fathers. He wants them to be guardians at the gates of their homes.

God wants Christian fathers to stand faithful, to stand watch as guardians at the gates of their homes. God has trusted them with the duty of a guardian at the gate as they welcome God INTO their home, while at the same time they do their best to keep Satan and keep the empty values of our world, OUT of their home.

What happens in our homes when God *isn't* intentionally and consistently brought INTO the home? What happens in our homes when the Evil One and the influences of our world aren't kept OUT of the home? It's disaster! It results in selfishness, bickering, fighting, jealousy, abuse, and violence of all kinds. Just check the news on any day you want – and you can find out what happens in a home when God isn't brought in and the devil kept out. So, God KNOWS how much rests on a Christian father to faithfully fulfill his duty to guard the children God has placed in that home. Children are GOD'S possession. He made them. He loves them. He gave His Son to die for them. God knows the importance of the work He has given to the guardians of the gate - and so does Satan. And that's why the Evil One so often makes Christian fathers his first targets.

A quick read through the Bible will show you that many of the heroes of faith, messed up their responsibility as guardians at the gate

of their homes. The men were successful in so many ways, yet they still failed when it came to their own families and children.

- Abraham doubted God would provide him with the son God promised so he took the matter into his own hands. He didn't trust God to give him the son God promised, so Abraham had a son, Ishmael, born through one of his slave women.
- The child God promised turned out to be Isaac. But Isaac created family frustration by showing favoritism between his children.
- The prophet Samuel could lead the worship life of the nation and serve as president and supreme court for the country, but he could not lead his own sons.
- King David had difficulty keeping his marriage vows and brought rebellion to his home and revolution to his country through his own son, Absalom.

These are just a few examples of how the Evil One and his demons use their most effective weapons on Christian fathers, because they are God's appointed guardians of the gates. Apathy, laziness, seduction and selfishness lead to family discord, and destruction.

Satan knows that if he is able to turn a father's eyes from Jesus to insignificant projects – and there are lots of insignificant things a man can care dearly about -- if he can tempt a father to forget the one thing, the one person who is really needed in the home for THIS life and ETERNAL life; if Satan can stop a father from living as a witness to Jesus in the home, then the devil has accomplished a lot.

Satan knows that when a father no longer stands as guardian at the gate of his home; when dad is no longer a buffer between the home and the seduction of this world's selfish attitude and selfish living; when a father's words have lost their wisdom from God; when a father's sinful morality has stripped him of spiritual authority, then the devil's plot to steal the souls of the children God has placed in that home is made a lot easier.

This is why fathers must stand guard at the gate.

We know the neighborhood drug dealer is willing to GO wherever, SAY whatever, DO whatever is necessary so he can make a sale to our children.

We know that pornographers are relentless in using the latest and best Internet technology to try to pervert our children and to distort our kid's morality.

We know our children's friends with bad intentions are trying to use social pressure to push our sons and daughters to give up on faith in Jesus and give up on life itself.

Christian fathers, LISTEN: You are God's appointed guardians at the gate. This is why we give thanks for you and we encourage you.

And at the same time, let us not forget that there are things which the most devoted father, the most dependable and dedicated guardian cannot successfully keep out. No matter what you do, you can't stop Satan from putting troubles and illness and temptations in the way your children will go through in life. Even the most powerful father is not strong enough to save his children from sin, death, and Satan. Against those enemies, only Jesus is strong enough. Only Jesus, is victorious.

Jesus is the only one who loves our children more than we do. He came into this world so that our children might, -- no matter what evil attacks them, no matter what tragedy troubles them, no matter what sadness strikes them -- that in spite of these things, our children might be given forgiveness. He came that our children can have God's guidance, know God's loving acceptance of them just as they are, and take confidence in their future which is heaven to come.

Children these days are filled with despair that we as adults didn't know when we were kids. They doubt there is hope for a happy life ahead. When children, however, know that they are saved because Jesus died on the cross for them; when children trust that Jesus who loves them so much to die for them also holds them in His hands, then children become confident' they are confident that they are not just strugglers against the world's wild storms. They are confident they are conquerors -- more than conquerors, because of a

victory Jesus has already won for them. Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose so that all children might be saved. Our children included.

This Father's Day we give thanks for Jesus who is the only One who can guard our children against their ultimate enemies of sin, death, and Satan. We give thanks for what He has done. We know the love of Jesus ourselves. We know we are empowered by the Holy Spirit who lives in us. So this Fathers' Day we respond by promising to kick it up a notch. We dedicate ourselves that in the way we live, in the way we walk, in the way we work, in the example we set we will be guardians at the gates. We will be God's servants in carrying out God's saving work in our homes.

Men, if a kidnapper were to break into your house, you know, and I know, that to reach your family, they would have to go through you. You would fight! I know you would gladly die to keep your family safe.

But, a kidnapper is somebody you can see, someone you can fight. How can you help your children survive the onslaught of sin, Satan, and death? How can you, a physical man, be the guard at the gate against these evil spiritual forces which have so often proven to be fatal?"

To answer that question, Jesus said, ***"The kingdom of heaven is like a small mustard seed, which, when it is sown on the ground is the smallest of all the seeds of the earth; yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches."***
Mark 4:30-32

Jesus was saying that God can bring great things out of small beginnings. God can bring great things from small beginnings. God brought forgiveness and the gift of heaven for all people of all time from a baby who was born in a stable and had an animal's feeding trough for His bed.

And for us here, on this Fathers' Day, God can bring great things out of small beginnings. God has the power to use just one, sinful man, to point children to His Son; He can use you to bring about great things.

Do you wonder how? I could give you a lot of answers, good answers, but let me give you one, just one. Be men of integrity.

Our children are growing up in a world where the attitude is: "take WHAT you can, WHENEVER you can, from ANYONE you can, in whatever WAY you can." In this world, a Christian man of integrity stands out like a beacon.

We cannot totally prevent our children from hearing foul language on TV, but Christian fathers of integrity can strive to make sure children will never hear those words come from their mouths. You may not be able to shield your children from immorality at the movies, but you can make sure at home the children know that you take your marriage vows seriously. We may not be able to keep our children from having their spirits crushed by cruel comments made by classmates, but Christian fathers of integrity can be there to hold a wounded child in their arms and assure him that Jesus always loves him, and they do, too. You may not be able to make sure that your children will succeed in this world, but Christian father makes it a priority that kids know Jesus who is preparing a place for them in heaven.

I hope in our homes, every day of the week, we all have integrity – the integrity of knowing God's love through Jesus personally, living WITH Jesus and FOR Jesus every day, and sharing Jesus' love with our children, as Guardians at the Gate.

Amen.