

Sermon Series: “Biblical Family Portraits” – Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN – 2/14/2010

Title: “Why Can’t I Have a Baby?”

Text: 2 Kings 4:8-37

Intro.: *Illus.: The Laughter of Little Children*

Theme: In the miracle and gift of life, we entrust ourselves to God’s gracious plans for our family and look to him for resurrection comfort and purpose when we walk through dark times which are confusing and devastating.

What God says about having children

- Part of his plan for marriage in the beginning before the fall into sin
 1. *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it.” Genesis 1:27-28*
 2. Pain and brokenness came into the process of the gift of life because of sin’s presence in the world: (*God said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children. Genesis 3:16*)
 - a. Infertility was evident throughout history--even among Bible families (*Abram/Sari & Zacharias/Elizabeth*)
 - b. Unfortunately, humans attach stigma and curse to every childless situation (when it is not Biblical to do)
- Despite our vast science and learning, conception and birth are still a divine mystery and a miraculous gift
 1. God is the giver of life (*Even the woman who was childless gives birth to seven children, but the mother of many children grieves all alone. The LORD takes life, and he gives life. He makes people go down to the grave, and he raises them up again. 1 Samuel 2:5-6*)
 2. God has a specific and special plan for each child conceived and birthed
 - a. **Psalm 139:13-16**
 - b. **Illus.: Choosing to let the baby live**

Waiting on God’s perfect timing in delivering the baby

- Hidden in our midst is the silent heartache of childlessness
 1. The story of the Elisha and the couple from Shunem highlight our need to be discerning and sensitive
 - a. **2 Kings 4:8-15**
 - b. Elisha’s well-meaning gratitude illustrates how all of us communicate without enough listening
 - c. *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. Proverbs 10:19*
 2. Similar with the case of the woman of Shunem, looks can be deceiving, so be careful with your assumptions
 - a. The woman seemed to have it *all together* – prominent, well-to-do, means to carry out her philanthropy
 - b. Elijah assumed her need was on a power/income/position basis (*vs. 13a*) but he was wrong (*13b*)
 - c. **Illus.: Flawed assumption**
 - d. When really the silent need was “*she has no son and her husband is old.*” (*vs. 14*)
- Learning to live with joy even in the midst of trials
 1. What’s remarkable is Shunemite woman had turned the exile of childlessness into opportunity to share/care
 - a. Her personal tragedy did not define who she was— she shared grace rather than spreading bitterness (**8**)
 - b. She showed hospitality giving from God’s gifts which he **had** given to her (**9,10**)
 - c. She gave over-and-above what might be expected (**10 and “careful for us with all this care”-13**)
 2. When our focus is on God who gives in all our need, we can give from poverty or want or hurt and find joy in it
 - a. *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Romans 12:10-13*
 - b. Often God gives us seasons when we are spouse-less, childless, and jobless to be freed to serve others and Him
 - c. Assume no evil from those who innocently want to help you (**2 Kings 4:16-17**)
 3. Discerning that God’s timing of childlessness may involve sparing and preparing you (**2 Kings 4:18-28**)
 - a. The little boy grew, was loved, but suffered what might have been a heat stroke and died
 - b. In grief the mother assumed that God or God’s man did this to her (**vs. 28**) when neither was true
 - c. When ministering to another in pain, expect backlash, don’t take it personally (**vs. 27**), and comfort graciously
 - d. **Illus.: Imperfect story**
- Living with a resurrection hope in God’s dealings with you (**2 Kings 4:29-37**)
 1. This is the first O.T. resurrection story but trust in God’s resurrection power was not rare
 - a. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. Hebrews 11:19
 2. Thru Jesus we always have a “*living hope of the resurrection*”(1 Peter 1:3) governing our mind and heart as we live

The Laughter of Little Children

John and Sylvia Van Regenmorter and Joe McInaney Jr., *"God Why Can't I Have a Baby?"* Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986, (quote from page 13-14)

Choosing to let the baby live

In 2009, an article in the U.K.'s Telegraph reported that of all women in the U.K. who find out through prenatal testing that their baby will have Down syndrome, about 90 percent choose to have an abortion. ABC News reports a near-identical rate among women in the U.S.: 92 percent of those who find out their child will have the chromosomal defect decide to abort. Ellen and Al were thrilled to learn they were expecting a child—a boy, in fact. But their excitement turned to concern when Ellen's OB/GYN noticed choroid plexus cysts on the baby's brain during a standard 20-week ultrasound. Having seen the same images, a second specialist uttered the words no expecting parent wants to hear: "Something is very wrong with this baby." The doctor suspected chromosomal problems that were generally "incompatible with life." Ellen and Al were told that if their baby was born alive, he would likely die within a day. At best, he might survive for 6 to 12 months. Looking back on this critical moment, Ellen offers this powerful word: "The most important day in my life is the day we decided to let our son live." Soon after their decision to keep the baby, she writes that they began to refer to him as Elijah instead of "the baby." They decided that "even if he didn't survive the pregnancy, he was alive now and [they] would enjoy him as long as [they] could." On April 8, 37 weeks into the pregnancy, Ellen gave birth to Elijah Timothy Hsu, and after several difficult weeks, Elijah was released from the hospital. Ellen concludes her article with these words: "Elijah has developmental delays and sometimes takes longer to learn new skills, but for the most part he's a normal kid doing normal kid stuff. Elijah's first year was sometimes difficult and overwhelming, but life with Elijah has settled into its own routine. I can't imagine life without Elijah anymore. He brings us so much joy. I'm so glad he's alive and that he's a part of our family. And I look forward to the day when Elijah can tell me about the most important day of his life." **Ellen Hsu, "The Day We Let Our Son Live," Hermeneutics blog, Christianity Today International (11-2-09)**

Flawed assumptions

The photographer for a national magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. Smoke at the scene hampered him and he asked his home office to hire a plane. Arrangements were made and he was told to go at once to a nearby airport, where the plane would be waiting. When he arrived at the airport, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, "Let's go! Let's go!" The pilot swung the plane into the wind and they soon were in the air. "Fly over the north side of the fire," yelled the photographer, "and make three or four low level passes." "Why?" asked the pilot. "Because I'm going to take pictures," cried the photographer. "I'm a photographer and photographers take pictures!" After a pause the pilot said, "You mean you're not the instructor?" **The Jokesmith.**

An Imperfect story

In October 1864, word came to President Abraham Lincoln of a Mrs. Bixby, a Boston widow whose five sons had all been killed fighting in the Civil War. Lincoln later wrote his condolences: "Dear Madam, I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save. I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom. Yours very sincerely and respectfully, Abraham Lincoln." How beautiful the story would be if it ended here with the simple, literary elegance that was Lincoln's alone. But the story took an ironic turn just a few weeks after the letter was sent. No sooner had Mrs. Bixby received her letter when it was leaked to the press by someone in the White House. It was proclaimed a masterpiece for some weeks until a reporter went to the records of the Adjutant General and discovered that the President had been given bad information. Mrs. Bixby had not lost all five of her sons in battle. One was killed in action at Fredericksburg. One was killed in action at Petersburg. One was taken prisoner at Gettysburg and later exchanged and returned to his mother in good health. One deserted to the enemy. One deserted his post and fled the country. Word got out, and the press, as well as the rest of the Union, became divided in its support of the President. Some said he had been innocently duped. Others said his feelings were sincere if the cause was not. Carl Sandburg, in his exhaustive biography of Lincoln, has the last word: "Whether all five had died on the field of battle, or only two, four of her sons had been poured away into the river of war. The two who had deserted were as lost to her as though dead. The one who had returned had fought at Gettysburg. ... She deserved some kind of token, some award approaching the language Lincoln had employed. Lincoln was not deceived." How like the Bixby family is each one of us: a mixture of success and failure, honor and shame. Yet, knowing the whole story of our lives, Christ will honor those who serve him. **Dean Feldmeyer in Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching (Baker), from the editors of Leadership**

Psalm 139:13-16

¹³You alone created my inner being. You knitted me together inside my mother.

¹⁴I will give thanks to you because I have been so amazingly and miraculously made. Your works are miraculous, and my soul is fully aware of this.

¹⁵My bones were not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, when I was being skillfully woven in an underground workshop.

¹⁶Your eyes saw me when I was only a fetus. Every day of my life was recorded in your book before one of them had taken place.

2 Kings 4:8-37

⁸Now there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman, and she persuaded him to eat food. And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. ⁹She said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually. ¹⁰"Please, let us make a little walled upper chamber and let us set a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it shall be, when he comes to us, *that* he can turn in there." ¹¹One day he came there and turned in to the upper chamber and rested. ¹²Then he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite." And when he had called her, she stood before him. ¹³He said to him, "Say now to her, 'Behold, you have been careful for us with all this care; what can I do for you? Would you be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the army?'" And she answered, "I live among my own people." ¹⁴So he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Truly she has no son and her husband is old." ¹⁵He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway.

¹⁶Then he said, "At this season next year you will embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant." ¹⁷The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, as Elisha had said to her.

¹⁸When the child was grown, the day came that he went out to his father to the reapers. ¹⁹He said to his father, "My head, my head." And he said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her lap until noon, and *then* died. ²¹She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut *the door* behind him and went out. ²²Then she called to her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and return." ²³He said, "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." And she said, "*It will be well.*" ²⁴Then she saddled a donkey and said to her servant, "Drive and go forward; do not slow down the pace for me unless I tell you." ²⁵So she went and came to the man of God to Mount Carmel.

When the man of God saw her at a distance, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Behold, there is the Shunammite. ²⁶"Please run now to meet her and say to her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?'" And she answered, "It is well." ²⁷When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came near to push her away; but the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is troubled within her; and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me." ²⁸Then she said, "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'"

²⁹Then he said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins and take my staff in your hand, and go your way; if you meet any man, do not salute him, and if anyone salutes you, do not answer him; and lay my staff on the lad's face." ³⁰The mother of the lad said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." And he arose and followed her. ³¹Then Gehazi passed on before them and laid the staff on the lad's face, but there was no sound or response. So he returned to meet him and told him, "The lad has not awakened." ³²When Elisha came into the house, behold the lad was dead and laid on his bed. ³³So he entered and shut the door behind them both and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm.

³⁵Then he returned and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes. ³⁶He called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Take up your son." ³⁷Then she went in and fell at his feet and bowed herself to the ground, and she took up her son and went out. [NASB]