

Text: Heb. 12:4-11

Title: "The Father's nurturing of the faithful"

Time: 6/12/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – The pleasant sight of a disciplined home is a great credit to a faithful father. I can remember growing up with admiration for the home of my Sunday school teacher. His oldest son is now the pastor of the church I grew up in. What I remember about that home was that it was one of the larger ones in our church (there were seven children), that they were always on time to all the services even though they lived the furthest away, and that they were very well-behaved in church. The Bible teaches that where you see a home like that, you ordinarily have the presence of a father that is doing the job the Lord gave him to do. Eph. 6:4 is where the Lord gives fathers this job: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

The word *nurture* in that command to fathers comes from the Greek word for *child*, and it basically means *to give a child the training he needs*. Paul says that the Bible is profitable for this activity (2 Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture . . . is profitable . . . for *instruction* in righteousness"). So we see that children are not the only ones in need of the kind of instruction children need.

The other usages of that word translated *nurture* in the New Testament all occur in our passage (4 times). In addition to these occurrences of the word, another related noun and a related verb are used an additional four times for a total of eight times in these eight verses. In his book called *Family Fundamentals* (p. 62), Pastor John Ashbrook translated this word as *instruction with discipline*. That is the kind of

training every child needs, and it is also the kind of training every child of God needs from his Heavenly Father.

Let's read the passage again using the idea of *instruction with discipline* to translate these words. So instruction with discipline is what the Lord means when he says that fathers should raise their children in the nurture of the Lord, and it is what He does for us as our Father. I have titled the message, "The Father's nurturing of the faithful," and I want us to notice three things the Lord does for us as His children as He instructs us with discipline.

I. Our Father nurtures us with encouragement that He does not want us to miss (vv. 4-5).

Ill: Our state's motto is "Live Free or Die." That is a good motto to have, and we all would say that we are glad it is on our license plate. But be that as it may, the truth be told, we citizens of New Hampshire have been willing to give up a whole lot of living-free before facing the prospects of having to die. We are not going to die over our demand to drive a car without a license plate, for instance. And yet, there are some freedoms worth dying for.

Freedom of religion is one of those. God tells us to worship, to preach the gospel, and to teach and obey His Word the Bible, and for those freedoms we should be willing to die long before we are willing to quit faithfulness to these things.

Appl: The Hebrew Christians who first read these words are being rebuked by the author in these verses. He points out that they are giving up long before having to die for the faith, the one thing most worth dying for. We have the same problem in a much greater way today.

And then he says that in doing so they were missing out on or forgetting a great blessing – the blessing of our heavenly Father’s nurturing encouragement. It is found in Prov. 3:11-12. Those are the words of King Solomon to his son, but our author affirms also that they are God’s words to us, His sons and daughters. What we have in the Scripture is the Word of God to us. We need to make sure we do not miss this encouragement by getting into our Bibles before we make the decision to quit. Are we content to miss out on that daily encouragement? If so, we are in danger of fainting.

App12: The word *speaketh* in v. 5 is a somewhat loaded term. It refers not only to speaking to someone, but also to speaking to him about a difference between you and him. It normally refers to contexts in which the audience does not agree at first with the one who is speaking (Acts 18:4, “And [Paul] *reasoned* in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks”).

Ill: You ever have to speak to one of your kids knowing at the outset that they do not agree with what you are about to say? And do you remember the joy that came to your heart when they finally said, “You know, Dad, you were right about that. I’m sorry I did not listen to you sooner”?

Well, that is what is going on here as the Lord speaks to us about His determination to be a good father to us. We are told not to despise this work of God in our lives, and then not to faint at His rebuke. *Despise* in this context means *to regard as unimportant* or *to not care much about something*. Quitting on God is always preceded by apathy about God’s determination to correct us. We must not miss this encouragement. We must not be like the rebellious child who does not care what God has to say. If we plan on continuing in

sin and disobedience and idolatry and all the while expect that life is going to be great as a child of God, we have completely missed the encouragement, despised God's nurturing, and our apathy will lead to fainting.

II. Our Father nurtures us with scourging that He wants us to understand (vv. 6-8).

III: We are celebrating Fathers' Day around here a bit early with this passage. The first time I ever saw a paddle used to spank someone, I was in the second grade at a public school called Orchard Hollow Elementary School in Mentor, OH. I think that would have been the fall of 1971. I can remember seeing a teacher use a paddle on a girl in my classroom. Throughout my early educational career, from time to time I became even closer acquainted with a paddle at school. At home, my Mom would use a wooden spoon until she got tired of breaking them, at which point she switched (no pun intended) to a metal spoon that was far more durable. Well, the experts today tell me that I should look at the discipline my parents and my teachers provided for me as somehow harmful and illegal. The Bible, however, assures me that their care for me was helpful and right.

Appl: Solomon makes clear throughout Proverbs that corporal punishment with a well-designed tool for the job is an important part of a father's loving nurturing of his child (Prov. 22:15, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him"; Prov. 23:13-15, "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine"). These passages are not calling for injuries, but for a gift of the sensation of sharp physical pain with the board of education applied carefully to the seat of learning.

Appl2: The passage quoted here tells us that God examples that nurturing care of a father in His dealings with us as His children. The word *scourge* (v. 6) means *to use a whip* on someone. The point is that many of the difficult trials the Lord brings into our lives are gifts of His fatherly love which He only gives to His sons, and the Lord wants us to understand them that way. As we contemplate this truth, I want to issue a couple of warnings:

1. It is important to work at interpreting your own trials in the light of these truths and not the trials of others. In the Book of Job, Eliphaz saw the trials of Job and concluded that God was disciplining Job for sin in his life. He counseled Job this way: "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (Job 5:17). What we know from the rest of the story, however, is that Eliphaz had it all wrong, and God rebuked him for that. Job suffered not under God's discipline for his sin, but as a showcase of faithful obedience.

The disciples of Christ made the same mistake in regard to a blind man whom the Lord healed. "And his disciples asked him, saying, 'Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him'" (John 9:2-3).

2. It is also important to be concerned about a lack of trials in your life if you are continuing on in known sin or idolatry. Some human fathers fail to discipline their children, but our Heavenly Father never fails in this way. If you are continuing in disobedience to the Word of God and life is great, you need to be worried about whether you are truly a child of God. It may be that life is good

because you are actually on the broad road to destruction.

Our Father nurtures us with scourging that He wants us to understand. May He give each of us that understanding in regard to His dealings with us.

III. Our Father nurtures us with a goal that He wants us to obtain (vv. 9-11).

Ill: There were news reports this past week of a high-speed train crash in Belgium. Trains crash when they are on the wrong track at the wrong time, or on no track at all. To be on the right track at the right time is to be restricted to a path that is going to take the train safely to its correct destination.

Appl: What those tracks do for trains, our Father's nurturing does for us. We might want to be free from the influence of this nurturing, but that kind of pseudo-freedom leads to a crash, what our passage calls fainting rather than being faithful. The Lord tells us what the goal of His nurturing in our lives is, and then He tells us how to stay on the track to get to that goal.

The goal is twofold: (1) sharing His holiness and (2) experiencing the peaceable fruit of righteousness (vv. 10-11). *Holiness* is that attribute of God's nature that most fundamentally defines His goodness. It sets Him apart from all that is less than He is. He is love, but He does not love everything, because His love is holy. He is holy in regard to everything, in spite of the fact that He is also love. When the seraphim praise Him around His throne, they cry out, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" Our Father's goal for our lives is that we should share in His holiness, that holiness would fundamentally

define our goodness. Is that our goal? Do we want to be holy? Do we want to be distanced from our sinful former selves so that we can be more like Him?

App12: The goal is also described as *peaceable fruit of righteousness*. A train is at peace when it is lined up correctly with the right track. What a contrast that is to a derailment. Our lives as children of a disciplining Father will be at peace when they are lined up correctly with the righteousness that is revealed to us in His law. In the Bible righteousness is always obedience to God's law. So peace and obedience to God's law always go together in the work of the Lord. When Christ reigns on earth in the coming kingdom, there will be great peace on earth because earth will be a place of perfect obedience. That is the way God's spiritual kingdom in our hearts works as well. We will have great peace in our hearts when our lives reflect careful obedience. If we line up well with the confining tracks of the Word of God, that inner peace will be there to sustain us on our way.

Conclusion: But how do we get to those goals? Very simply – submission (v. 9). We respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us (there was a time when an author could assume this as a given). We should more so submit to our Heavenly Father and live. As the songwriter put it, "You have longed for sweet peace and for faith to increase, and have earnestly fervently prayed. But you cannot have rest or be perfectly blest until all on the altar is laid. Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? Your heart, does the Spirit control? You can only be blessed and have peace and sweet rest as you yield Him your body and soul."

Christ is our inspiration for this submission. He subjected Himself under the will of His Heavenly Father, obeying

Him faithfully even unto death on the cross for our sins, and now He lives. Let's answer the question the passage lays before us this morning the way He did (v. 9). Shall we not also much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and then truly live the life of blessing, holiness, peace, and righteousness that He wants us to live? Shall we? Will you?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*