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LEADING A CHRIST EXALTING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY: WITH A WORD OR TWO FROM ASAPH

Introduction

You can't lead a Christ exalting children's ministry if you remove the cross from your curriculum.

The Gospel of Christ is the reason we worship. It is the basis of the exaltation of Christ. Consider Paul's instruction to the Philippians in Philippians 2:8-11

Psalms 78:1-8 – A Maskil of Asaph

A. Three points from the text:

1. **Parents are Primary** - Fathers are charged with the primary responsibility to pass the message of the Gospel to the next generation.
 - a. Children's ministry is not a substitute for Parental training.
 - b. Parents desire to train their children.

"In a survey of church parents with children under the age of thirteen, 81 percent said that no church leader had ever spoken to them about how parents could be involved in their children's spiritual development. When asked about their family's most pressing needs, more than three-fourths (77 percent) of church-involved moms and dads specifically mentioned their desire to know how better to help their children to grow spiritually. The same percentage of parents also wanted to be better equipped to teach Christian values in their homes. And so, the issue seems to be not so much that parents have resigned their role as primary disciple-makers. It isn't even that parents don't desire to disciple their children. In most cases, the problem is that churches are neither expecting nor equipping parents to disciple their children."ⁱ Timothy Paul Jones

2. **Proclamation is a Partnership** - The Church is charged to partner with parents.

- a. The people of God have a corporate responsibility to teach our children the glorious deeds of the Lord.

“In ancient Israel parents were to talk about God’s commandments and his mighty saving deeds on behalf of Israel to their children and were to do so continually (Deut. 6:1-9; 11:18-21). This labor was to be supported by the entire community (Ps. 78:1-8).”ⁱⁱ Timothy Paul Jones

- b. While the parents of children are primary, there is a corporate charge to the church community to declare the glorious deeds of the Lord.

3. The Christ Exalting Gospel is the message

- a. The Christ Exalting Gospel is the most glorious of God’s deeds. All his other deeds point forward to it.
- b. The Christ exalting Gospel is the only message that can save our children.
- Romans 1:16-17 “ For I am not ashamed of the gospel”
 - Yet there are some who, in their desire to simplify the Gospel, strip it of its core, and would have us use child-centered terms.

“Ask young children if they want the blood of the lamb to wash away their sins, and they’ll think you’re pretty gross. Tell kids that Jesus says he’ll be in trouble for all the wrong stuff they do, and there’s a strong chance for interest. Yes, words matter.”ⁱⁱⁱ David Staal – Making Children’s Ministry the Best Hour of Every Kid’s Week

- It is wise to avoid using big theological terms. Much better to say that Jesus died in our place that Jesus is our substitute. We don’t need to use the word propitiation. But we should not take sacrifice out of the cross and we shouldn’t remove the language of sin.

“The things that are essential to salvation are so exceedingly simple that no child need sit down in despair of understanding the things which make for his peace. Christ crucified is not a riddle for sages, but a plain truth for plain people. True it is meat for men, but it is also milk for babes.”^{iv}
Charles Spurgeon

- c. The Gospel Basics

- All kids, are all sinners

- God is holy
- Jesus lived a sinless life
- Jesus died to take our punishment
- Jesus rose again
- We must respond (Repentance and Faith)

B. Christ is the central figure to all of Scripture

1. Asaph's prophetic look forward - With all that he knew Asaph Exalted Christ.
 - a. Jesus in Matthew 13:34
 - b. Peter - 1Peter 1:10-12
 - c. God opened the eyes of the prophets sufficiently that they new there was something bigger than Israel, a redeemer would come, Asaph was motivated by that gospel vision.
 - d. Psalm 78:5-7a "He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God"
2. We need to give our children the same prophetic look forward.

If all of scripture points forward or back to Christ and his saving work on the cross, then we must point our children to Christ in the way we present the Bible.

- Every King of Israel
- Every priest of Israel
- Every prophet of Israel
- Every lamb offered up for the remission of sins
- Every salvation wrought by prophet, plague, warrior, king, collapse of a wall, opening of a sea, healing of a disease, providing of food or

drink or child for a barren woman points to Jesus and the salvation he purchased for us on the cross.

C. The Gospel Story for Kids Curriculum

1. The history of the curriculum
2. The organization of the curriculum
 - 3 year scope and sequence for children 3 years-old to 6th grade.
 - 3 different learning levels which present the same lesson on any given Sunday to all the children to make follow up easy.
3. The family devotionals
 - Long Story Short – 78 weeks (a year and a half) of family devotions on the Old Testament
 - Old Story New– 78 weeks (a year and a half) of family devotions on the New Testament
4. The Gospel Story Bible
 - Follows the same scope and sequence
 - Every Story Connects to Jesus and the gospel
5. A few thoughts on Your Children’s Ministry music curriculum
 - a. There is a general call to all peoples (saved and unsaved) to worship God in song, so you need not be concerned that the children are not all believers.
 - All of creation is called to praise. “Sing to the Lord, all the earth! Tell of his salvation day to day. Declare his glory among the nations.” (1 Chronicles 16:23,24). On this basis we can call the children to respond to God with praise.
 - b. Song selection
 - Consider the theological content of songs.
 - Songs which repeat are easier and often more fun to sing.
 - Avoid songs with obscure lyrics.

- Fold in hymns – let’s teach children some of the classic hymns many of us learned as children.
- c. Timing and breaks
- Younger children do better with frequent breaks and change.
 - Interacting with the children as you teach about a particular song.
- d. Hand motions keep the children focused
- Every church has a creative mom who can make up hand motions for the songs you want to sing if they are not available.
 - Have adults up front lead the children. Have other children participate by helping lead the hand motions.
 - Include lifting and clapping of hands to God as a worshipful act. Most children get the idea that God is bigger than them, and is worthy of praise.

D. Asaph’s Example – Living a Christ Exalting Life before his kids

- a. Asaph’s Example - Asaph worshipped with his sons. (1 Chronicles 25:1-2)
- b. Later in his life after serving at the tabernacle after King Solomon has built the temple, we find Asaph and his sons there at the dedication. (2 Chron. 5:12-14)
- c. 100 years later Jahaziel a descendant of Asaph prophesies to King Jehosaphat.
- d. 250 years later King Hezekiah is commanding a group of Levites many of which are descendants of Asaph to “Praise the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer.” (2 Chron 29:30)
- e. 320 years later when the book of the Law is found and King Josiah decides to celebrate the Passover. The musicians that are left are the descendants of Asaph who take there place in the prescribed places (2 Chron 35:15)
- f. After the 70 year captivity, 400 years after the dedication of the temple, now destroyed and being rebuilt, Nehemiah and Ezra record that the descendants of Asaph are the only singers left.
- g. Over 400 years later the fruit of Asaph’s life is still evident

Ezra 3:10-11 *“When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, **and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel.** 11 With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: “He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.” And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.”*

E. A Final thought from Asaph Psalm 73:1-3, 13-17, 23-28

While Asaph knew his own sin (Psalm 73:1-3) he put his sin to death and lived righteously, not wanting to stumble the children (Psalm 73:15) and God met him in that. Consider his own passion filled words and where he ends, considering his task of telling the next generation.

Psalm 73: 25-28

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, **that I may tell of all your works.**

ⁱ Paul Jones, Timothy. Family Ministry Field Guide. 2011 Wesleyan Publishing House. Pg. 108.

ⁱⁱ Packer, J. I and Parrett, Gary A. *Grounded in the Gospel*. p. 195

ⁱⁱⁱ Miller, Sue with Staal, David. Making Children’s Ministry the Best Hour of Every Kid’s Week. Pg. 73.

^{iv} Spurgeon, Charles. Spiritual Parenting. Pg. 58.