

Dedicating the Little Children

“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15b)

Many parents promised to serve the Lord with their children. Many assumed that as they dedicated their little children to the Lord, whatever circumstances they grew in, later the Lord will call their children back to serve Him because they have been dedicated for God’s service. But training children to serve God is in the hand of the parents, and the Scripture says, ***“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)***

Many churches consider the ceremony of child dedication especially for new born babies. It is a good practice to do because it is scriptural, but if we only do for the sake of the procedure and the ceremony without the real commitment of the parents to obey God to teach and discipline the child as he/she grows according to God’s instruction, then there is no point for the ceremony of dedicating the little child to God in the Church.

“^{d3} Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. ¹⁴ Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” ¹⁵ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.”(Matthew 19:13-15) The Lord Jesus desires that the children would come to Him and no one should hinder them. But coming to Jesus would not mean only to bring the children to the church physically and perform the dedication ceremony, but to raise them up and nurture them in the ways of the Lord.

God spoke to His people through Moses when He told them, ***“⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”(Deuteronomy 6:6-9)*** We ought to put the commands of God in our hearts and impress them in our children’s hearts and mind by continuously demonstrating and teaching them the ways of God. What the Lord requires of us is not only to ceremonially dedicate our children to Him but to raise them in the ways and in the fear of God and serve Him. So significantly, we need to dedicate ourselves to God to serve Him, and to dedicate our family life to nurture our children in the fear and service of the Lord.

The attribute of Jesus’ birth and how He was raised up by His earthly parents would help us understand the true meaning of child dedication:

“^{d8} This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” (Matthew 1:18-19) Joseph was a righteous man. He was pledged to marry Mary but he found her with a baby so he wanted to divorce her. He needed to divorce her because according to the Scripture the virgin who is pledged to be married or betrothed is considered married and is already a certain man’s wife. But they are not allowed to meet or go outside together until the wedding day is over. This is the principle of God’s Word and not the Middle Eastern culture as some think. So when Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant he decided to divorce her. But since he was a righteous man he wanted to do it secretly and not to expose her to public disgrace.

The marriage according to the Bible is not based upon a man and a woman who like each other, but wait upon God who calls two royal priests to come together in holy matrimony to lead their family in righteousness and to raise a godly offspring. Marriage is never built on Eros love or lust. According to the Scriptures, when two priests are called by God to lead a family, they are pledged to get married. And during that period they are prepared and trained to develop the kind of love that the Lord requires:

1- Agape love: The Lord requires unconditional and sacrificial love between couples to serve Him. This type of love will enable the man in the future to care for his wife and family, and it does not depend on the condition of the wife or the circumstances in life.

2- Philadelphia love: The Lord requires brotherly love, and to respect each other's rights as man and woman created in His image and likeness. Having this kind of love between the couple would inspire them to carry each other's burden in building and leading the family.

In the family of Jesus, Joseph was a righteous man and Mary was God's servant. Both of them were living for God and were willing to do God's will and plan for a godly family. Here from the narrative of Jesus' birth, let us learn what is meant to build a family to serve God, and how to dedicate our children to God's service:

- 1- ***^{d19}Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:19-21)*** Truly Joseph was a righteous man, and God would speak and direct righteous parents how to protect their children. God spoke to Joseph to take Mary as wife and he obeyed even though God's proposition was not acceptable to his mind and emotion. God directed Joseph through dreams to let the birth of Jesus and His childhood life to be victorious. God is the unchanging God who speaks and reveals His plan of marriage to righteous, humble, and obedient people like Joseph and Mary. *As servants and priests of God, we dedicate our coming children to the Lord, firstly, by dedicating our lives to be married to the man/woman whom God chooses for us and secondly, by dedicating our lives as husband and wife to live and serve God and thirdly, we commit ourselves to become parents of godly children.*
- 2- ***^{d24}When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." (Matthew 1:24-25)*** Joseph respected Mary and the plan of God for the birth of the Saviour. Joseph was humble, righteous, wise, and full of understanding. ***"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."*** (James 3:13) Righteous and dedicated parents could raise children to serve God. Joseph and Mary raised our LORD Jesus Christ in God's ways and will. In the same way, Joseph and Mary raised all their children in a godly manner and they finally became part of God's Church as we read in the book of Acts: ***"They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."*** (Acts 1:14) James was one of Joseph's and Mary's son and the half brother of Jesus. James became one of the pillars of the Jerusalem Church, and he was the one who wrote the book of James. *As royal priests we commit ourselves to the right decision to lead all our children to be dedicated to God, and become servants of God.*
- 3- ***^{d22}When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." (Luke 2:22-24)*** Joseph and Mary fulfilled their obligation of having a firstborn son, Jesus. They presented Jesus to the temple and brought with them the offering that they were able to afford according to the Law of Moses. ***"Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord."*** Mary and Joseph fully dedicated their lives to serve God with their firstborn and their whole family. Hence, they were able to bring up Jesus and the rest of their children in the way that God had planned and ordained for them as a family. *In the same manner we need to commit ourselves to fulfill all our obligations to God as we dedicate our children to Him.*
- 4- ***^{d13}When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. ¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son," (Matthew 2:13-15) ^{d19}After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead. ²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel." (Matthew 2:19-21) ^{d22}But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene." (Matthew 2:22-23)*** God spoke to Joseph through dreams and instructed him how

to protect Jesus from the enemies who wanted to kill Him. Also, God continually directed the affairs during the childhood of Jesus through Joseph, His earthly father. The same situation should be applied for us and for our children. If we live a righteous life, God will continually come to us, inspire us, and speak to us what to do for our children. Thus we dedicate our children to the Lord by dedicating our lives to listen to God's instructions for our children. We commit ourselves to read, study and to meditate on the Word of God so we can grasp and understand what God is speaking to us. Joseph knew the Scriptures, and God spoke to Joseph in the dream to marry Mary to fulfill the Scriptures. God explained to him that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit: ²² **All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us."** (Matthew 1:22-23) Righteous parents should know the Scripture to understand what God is speaking to them and what He wants them to do.

Jesus is the Son of God born to men, and he lived as a man to give eternal life to all mankind who believe in Him. However, God was behind the growth of Jesus, from birth unto His childhood and Joseph and Mary did their part as His earthly parents. ***"And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."*** (Luke 2:40) Joseph and Mary took care of Jesus from birth and as He was growing up they made Him involved in the occupation of Joseph as carpenter, and in going to the temple. ***"Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover."*** (Luke 2:41)

"And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." (Luke 2:52) To highlight the childhood life of Jesus: *First*, God planned for His birth and His parents. *Second*, the completion of the role of Joseph and Mary as dedicated godly parents. They did well the task that was entrusted to them.

We are the royal priests called to accomplish the goal as godly parents. And God would make our children grow according to His good plan to prosper them and serve HIM if we could inculcate in our children's young mind that they are born in this world to serve God's purpose.

Let us be assured that our children grow in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men. As royal priests and godly parents we need to care and train our children, physically and spiritually at home and in the church. Let us learn from the Scriptures and understand what God wants us to do and how God wants us to rear our family and children. Ceremonial child dedication would not be helpful unless we dedicate ourselves to bring up children to serve God and His Church.