

SNATCHING THEM FROM THE FIRE
Raising Champions for Christ – Week 2
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The title of this sermon is “Snatching Them From the Fire.” This is week 2 of our sermon series “Raising Champions for Christ.”

We’re devoting six weeks to learning how to train up our kids to live for Christ for a lifetime. **The big idea of the series is this: If our kids are champions on the field but go to hell, then we have failed them.** What’s the point of raising your kids to succeed in athletics, academics, or the arts, if in the end they die and go to hell? What a waste!

Several years ago a movie came out called “The Gladiator,” starring Russell Crowe. Russell Crowe plays the part of the top Roman General. Right before the Romans go into battle, he gives a speech, a pep talk, to his men. **He says**, “Hold the line. Stay with me. If you find yourself alone, riding in green fields with the sun on your face, do not be troubled; for you are in Elysium, and you're already dead! Brothers, what we do in life, echoes in eternity.”

What we do in life, echoes in eternity. That statement could not be more accurate for parents. How you raise your kids will make a difference for eternity. Your actions as a parent do not just impact whether your child will grow up happy or sad, good or bad, rich or poor, successful or unsuccessful, a criminal or a good citizen. Your actions impact your child’s eternity.

THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT THINGS PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

If I had to narrow down everything I know about parenting, and everything the Bible says about parenting, into just four statements, this is what I’d say.

ONE: HELL IS REAL.

Matthew 10:28 “Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

The words of Jesus are found in 1,830 verses in the Bible, and thirteen percent of those deal with hell. The Greek word for hell is Gehenna. It is used twelve times in the New Testament, and eleven of those are from Jesus Himself. Hell is all too real.

What is hell like? It is a place of “outer darkness (Mt 8:11-12).” There is “weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 8:11-12).” It is an “unquenchable fire (Mk 9:43-44),” and an “eternal fire (Mt 18:8; 25:41).” It is a “blazing furnace (Mt 13:42).” It is described as a place where “the worm does not die (Mk 9:43-44).” It is called the “lake of fire.” The devil and his demons will be there (Mt 25:41). Those who go there will be “tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev 20:10).” We can conclude from the Bible that hell is the most horrible place imaginable. It is a place of non-stop, indescribable physical and emotional suffering. And it is eternal. Once a person goes to hell, there is no escape; no second chance (Heb 9:27). Once in hell, always in hell. There is no death in hell; only constant torment for all eternity.

Matthew 18:8 “If your hand or your foot causes you to fall away, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire.”

Dutch Reformed theologian **William Nicol** wrote, “The heat of the fire will everlastingly torment them and the stench of brimstone will offend their senses while the blackness of darkness will continually horrify them. For the damned who inhabit that place of eternal wrath, hell is truth learned too late.”

You might be thinking, “That’s not a very happy subject. That’s not a very positive thought. This is a very negative sermon. I’m not going to scare my kids with the idea of hell.” Many parents seem more concerned with saving their kids from the fear of hell than from the punishment of hell.

As a parent, you need to keep hell in mind, and you need to teach your kids to keep it in mind.

Bruce Ware wrote, “What would people think about someone who knew about a planned disaster but didn’t do anything to warn people that it was going to happen? Suppose you had a friend who knew for sure about a plan to set off a bomb at a local school. And suppose your friend thought, ‘I don’t want to tell anybody. That’s not happy news.’ What if a doctor found cancer in one of his patients but thought, ‘I don’t want to talk about cancer. Nobody wants to hear about it. I want my patient to leave uplifted and encouraged.’”

If hell is real, then it is important to keep it in mind, and to teach your kids about it. If you think it is important to teach your kids about the dangers of playing in the road, and the dangers of strangers, then surely it is important to teach your kids about the dangers of hell.

TWO: ETERNITY IS A LONG TIME.

Your child will live for eternity. The Bible says that one day Jesus is going to come back, and He is going to judge everyone who has ever lived. And all people will go to one of two places – heaven or hell. And both of them last for eternity.

Matthew 25:46 “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

So I want you to think about this. Hell is real, and those who go to hell will stay there for all eternity.

The famous theologian **Jonathan Edwards** wrote, “Consider that if once you get into hell, you’ll never get out. If you should unexpectedly one of these days drop in there; there would be no remedy. They that go there return no more. Consider how dreadful it will be to suffer such an extremity forever. It is dreadful beyond expression to suffer it half an hour. O the misery, the tribulation and anguish that is endured!”

The Puritan **Thomas Watson** wrote, “The torments of hell abide forever. Time cannot finish it, tears cannot quench it. The wicked are salamanders who live always in the fire of hell and are not consumed. After they have lain millions of years in hell, their punishment is as far from ending, as it was at the beginning. If all the earth and sea were sand, and every thousandth year a bird should come, and take away one grain, it would be a long time before that vast heap would be removed; yet, if after all that time the damned might come out of hell, there would be some hope; but this word ever breaks the heart.”

Eternity is a long time. It is unfathomable. And the Bible says that is the duration of hell – conscious existence in a place of unimaginable torment for all eternity.

THREE: JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN.

The Bible couldn’t be clearer on this point. **John 14:6** “Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The only way that your child can go to heaven is through Jesus Christ. They need Jesus.

Your child can’t get to heaven through doing good deeds; they can’t go to heaven through Buddhism, or Hinduism, or Judaism, or Islam, or Mormonism, or the Watchtower (Jehovah’s Witnesses). Your child needs Christ.

Your children will be lost forever unless they personally accept Christ.

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Make no mistake about it. Sinners go to hell. And your child is a sinner. You might think, “My child is different.” True. Your child is completely unique; there has never been a sinner like your child before. And if your children do not repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ, they will go to hell.

It doesn’t matter that their parents are Christians. It does not matter that they were raised in church every Sunday. It doesn’t matter how well they know the

Bible stories. None of that matters. All that matters is what did they personally do with Jesus. Did they accept Him as Savior and Lord, or reject Him.

1 John 5:11-12 “11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

FOUR: MOST CHRISTIANS ACCEPT CHRIST WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG.

A study by the Barna Research Group found that 77% of born again Christians make the decision to accept Christ as their Savior before the age of 21.ⁱ

Why is that? Young people are more humble. They are more trusting. They are less addicted to their sin. They are less skeptical. They have been exposed to fewer bad ideas. Whatever the reason, the numbers do not lie.

The best time to reach someone for Christ is when they are a child; when they are still living at home with their parents.

This means that if you do not reach your kids for Christ before they leave home, the chances that they will ever accept Christ and get saved are not good.

YOUR MOST URGENT AND IMPORTANT PARENTING TASK

Because these four things are true, the your most urgent and important parenting task should be obvious. **Your most urgent and important task as a parent is to snatch your children from the fire.**

Jude 1:23 “Save others by snatching them from the fire....”

Most parents are focused on the wrong things. They are focused on raising their kids to be successful, and happy, and wealthy. But what’s the point of gaining the whole world if you lose your soul?

Jesus asked that very question. **Mark 8:36 (KJV)** “For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

In other words, your child may grow up to be the next great American athlete, or discover the cure for cancer, or become a five-star general in the military; your child may grow up to be a famous singer; your child may grow up to be a billionaire; but if they don’t accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, then they will go to hell.

The Bible says that there is one unforgiveable sin. It is the sin of rejecting Christ. There is also an unforgivable parenting sin. It is the sin of not doing everything within your power to save your children from the fire. God will forgive you; but if your children don’t accept Christ, then they will die in their sins and spend eternity in hell. Don’t commit the unforgivable parenting sin.

Most parents want to be good parents. They love their kids. So they dress their kids with name brand clothes. And they buy their kids the best toys. And they put their kids in the best schools. And they drive their kids to soccer, and ballet, and piano, and karate. But many of those same parents do very little to rescue their children from the flames of eternal hell.

If you want to be a successful parent, then you need to parent for the line, and not the dot. Picture a line, with a dot at one end, and an arrow at the other end. The dot represents the time your child will spend on this earth. It is small. It is finite. It is very short. It is very limited. But the line represents eternity – the time your child will spend either in heaven or hell. It goes on forever. It is infinite. It is never-ending. Most parents parent for the dot. Their focus is on helping their kids have a happy, successful, wealthy life on earth. And it’s not wrong to parent for the dot. The dot is important. But the line is so much more important. The line is infinitely more important. Without neglecting the dot, parents should focus primarily on the line; on eternity; on your child’s eternal destination. Your most urgent and important task as a parent is to snatch your children from the fire.

HOW TO BE A HOME MISSIONARY

To be a successful parent, you must see yourself as a missionary. Your primary mission field is your home; your own children. Southern Baptists have two kinds of missionaries. Foreign missionaries, those who minister in another country. And home missionaries, those who minister within the United States. But I think there's a better definition of a home missionary. Home missionaries are parents who recognize that God has called them to reach their kids for Christ, and who take that calling very seriously. Home missionaries are parents who are on a mission to lead their children to Christ. To snatch their children from the flames. To be an effective home missionary you must do three things.

ONE: KNOW THE GOSPEL. The word "gospel" means good news, and it refers to the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Why do you need to know the gospel? For your kids to be saved and go to heaven, they have to understand, and believe the gospel. **Romans 1:16** "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek." And that means that if you want to snatch your children from the flames, then you need to know the gospel so that you can communicate it to them. The gospel can be remembered with four words:

One: God. God loves you and created you for a relationship with Him. **John 3:16 (CEV)** "God loves the people of this world so much...." When God created the first people, He created them to live forever in perfect, unbroken fellowship with Him. And in this relationship with God we find happiness, and purpose, and significance, and meaning, and wisdom.

Two: Sin. You sinned against God, breaking your fellowship with Him. **Romans 3:23** "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Everyone has sinned. Sin is failing to do God's will. And the punishment for sin is separation from God. When the first people, Adam and Eve, sinned, God expelled them from the Garden of Eden. They could no longer live in unbroken fellowship with God. And since sin is an offense against eternal God, then the punishment for sin must be eternal separation from God in hell.

Three: Jesus. God sent Jesus to save you by dying on the cross for your sins.

Romans 5:8 “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is the primary reason that Jesus came to earth. When Jesus died on the cross, He was being punished in your place, for your sins, so that you could be forgiven and be reconciled to God.

Four: You. To be saved, you must repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ.

John 1:12 “But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name.” Jesus died to make forgiveness and heaven available. But each person must make the decision to accept or reject Christ as Savior and Lord. You must turn from your sins – hand over the steering wheel of your life to Jesus, and believe in Jesus Christ as God’s payment for your sins.

The decision to accept Christ usually involves three steps – A, B, and C. A: Admit that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Admit that you deserve to go to hell, and that you cannot save yourself. B: Believe in Jesus Christ. Believe that He is God’s Son, that He died on the cross for your sins, that He is the only way to heaven. C: Call out to Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. To be saved, you have call on Jesus to save you and to be the Lord of your life.

TWO: PREACH THE GOSPEL. The second thing you must do to be a home missionary is to preach the gospel. Obviously, it is not enough for you to know the gospel. If you want to reach your kids for Christ, you must preach the gospel to them. **2 Timothy 3:16 (HCSB)** “Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching.” To reach your kids you must regularly, daily, preach the gospel to them.

Don’t wait for someone else to share the gospel with your kids. You do it. Don’t pray for someone else to share the gospel with your kids. You do it.

Don’t hope and pray that your child will hear, understand, and respond to the gospel when it is proclaimed in church. You need to sit down with your kids and

personally share the gospel with them. Make sure that they hear it. Make sure that they understand it. And plead with them to respond to it.

Parents are careful to communicate certain messages to their kids. “I love you. Brush your teeth every day. Stay away from drugs and alcohol. Do your best in school. Get your elbows off the table. Say ‘Yes Ma’am’ and ‘No Ma’am.’ Say ‘Thank you.’ Keep your eye on the ball. It’s important to share with others. Be nice. Don’t hit girls. Don’t steal. Don’t cheat.”

But most parents neglect to teach their kids the most important message of all – the lifesaving gospel of Jesus Christ. Preach the gospel to your children!

Parents are diligent to ensure that their children understand certain information. They make sure that their kids understand reading, writing, and arithmetic. They make sure that their kids understand the basics of science, and history. We make sure that our kids understand music theory, and the rules of baseball, and basketball, and football. Parents are so careful teach their kids important information.

But most children grow up without ever hearing the most important information – the gospel. And many grow up hearing it, but they don’t understand it. Their parents have never truly explained it to them in terms that they can comprehend. Parents, the most important information you can share with your kids is the gospel. Preach the gospel to your children.

Don’t get into the habit of missing church. Some parents are absent more often than they attend. Get your kids in church every week. Why? So that your children can hear the gospel. Yes, you need to preach the gospel to your kids all week long. But by bringing your kids to church, they can also hear it from the pastor. And the more times your child is exposed to the gospel, the more likely they are to embrace it.

THREE: LOOK FOR THE GOSPEL.

To reach your kids for Christ, you must look for the evidence that your child has truly embraced the gospel.

Don't be deceived by the false evidence. Just because your child prays a prayer does not mean that they are saved. Just because your child has been baptized does not mean that they are saved. Just because your child enjoys going to church does not mean that they are saved. Just because your child is obedient to you and makes good grades at school does not mean that they are saved.

The Bible says that there are certain signs that are visible in a person who has been saved. What are these signs?

First, your child must understand the gospel. Can your child explain the gospel back to you? If not, then how can they believe in what they don't understand?

Another sign to look for is the fruit of the Spirit. When someone gets saved, the Holy Spirit indwells them and goes to work, producing the fruit of Christlike character. **Galatians 5:22-23** "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control."

Look for the fruit of the Spirit in your child. Do they love God and others? Do they have the joy of the Lord? Do they seek peace with others? Are they patient? Are they kind? Are they good – voluntarily doing good deeds and acts of mercy? Are they faithful – honest? Are they gentle? A third sign of salvation is obedience to God's word.

1 John 2:3 "This is how we know that we know Him: If we keep His commands." If your child is saved, then they will desire and pursue obedience to God. They won't be sinless, but they will sin less and feel worse.

CONCLUSION

In Luke 16 Jesus tells the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus.ⁱⁱ The traditional name for the rich man is Dives, which is the Latin word for "rich man" in the Latin Bible. Dives was rich, and he lived a life of luxury and abundance. But he was not

saved. And that was obvious because a poor, homeless man named Lazarus lived outside of the man's gates, but Dives never did anything to help him.

Eventually they both died. Lazarus, the poor man, went to heaven. But Dives, the rich man, went to hell.ⁱⁱⁱ It says that the rich man was in agony in flames. And he begged for just a single drop of water to cool his tongue. But the Bible says that there is a great chasm fixed between heaven and hell; a chasm that cannot be crossed.

The story illustrates three things.

First, your eternal state is much more important than your earthly state. Your kids may grow up to be very successful and wealth and happy, but none of that matters if they die and go to hell.

American parents are too concerned with this life, not concerned enough about the next life. You must parent for the next life.

Second, the story illustrates the agony of hell. The rich man was in luxury on earth, but in agony in hell. I hesitate to ask you to imagine your beloved child suffering in torment for all eternity. But that what will happen if they die without Christ.

Third, the story illustrates the finality of hell. Once your child dies, their eternal home is fixed. There are no second chances in the next life. It is either heaven or hell for eternity. There is a chasm between the two cannot be crossed.

The word "gospel" means good news. But it is only good news if your children hear it in time. Do whatever you can, whatever you have to, to reach your children for Jesus.

3 John 4 "I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

If you are a true believer, then you can heartily agree with these words. If you believe that hell is real, that eternity is a long time, and that Jesus is the only way to heaven, then there is nothing that will bring you joy than to know that your children are walking in the truth of the gospel and are heaven-bound.

But at the same time, if you are a true believer, then nothing will bring you more sorrow than to know that your children are rejecting Christ, and that they are hell-bound.

Your most important and urgent parenting task is to snatch your children from the fire.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the movie “The Gladiator,” General Maximus Decimus Meridius said to his men before battle, “What we do in life echoes in eternity.” How does this statement apply to Christian parents?
2. The sermon described the four most important things parents need to know. One: Hell is real. Two: Eternity is a long time. Three: Jesus is the only way to heaven. Four: Most Christians accept Christ when they are young. What does our culture say about these ideas?
3. Why are these four truths so important for parents to know?
4. Read Matthew 10:28. What do most people in our culture believe about hell? What does the Bible teach about hell?
5. The doctrine of hell is scary. Should parents be talking to their children about such a scary subject?
6. Studies show that the vast majority of Christians accept Christ before the age of 21. What does this mean for parents?
7. Read Jude 1:23. In light of the four most important things for parents to know, your most urgent and important task as a parent is to snatch your children from the fire. Why is this a parent’s most urgent task?
8. To be an effective parent, you must be a “home missionary.” You must embrace the role of a missionary, and view your home as your primary mission field. Do you see yourself as a missionary to your children? Explain.

9. To be an effective home missionary, you must know the gospel. Do you think that you have a firm grasp on the gospel message so that you can effectively preach it to your children?
10. To be an effective home missionary, you must regularly preach the gospel to your children. Do you preach the gospel to your children enough? Explain.
11. A third way to be an effective “home missionary” is to look for the gospel in your children – look for the evidence that your child has truly embraced the gospel. What are some of the signs that your child is truly saved? (See Galatians 5:22-23; 1 John 2:3.)

ⁱⁱ <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/>

ⁱⁱ See Luke 16:19-31.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dives did not actually go to hell, but to Hades, which is the place of torment for unbelievers when they die. After Jesus comes back as judge of the living and the dead, all unbelievers will be thrown into hell with Satan and his demons. Hell, the final punishment of unbelievers, is also known as the Lake of Fire.