

GAME CHANGER

MVP

Mark 9:2-8

June 15-16, 2019—Pastor Mark Toone—Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

EW-Welcome to Father's Day at Chapel Hill! My name is Ellis White, I'm the Pastor of Weekend Services, and I'm so glad you are joining us this weekend. It's a special weekend for me, because today/yesterday is not only the birthday of my son, but also my Father's birthday. We have a lot to celebrate this weekend!

Pastor Mark and I thought it would be fun to team-preach this message since it would provide a view of fatherhood from two different generations. I have two young kids; Mark's are out of university and gainfully employed. We come at parenting from different perspectives, different ages, even different cultural backgrounds. But we are united in this conviction: Dads are MVPs in their kids' lives. They are able to uniquely contribute to their kids development, in a way no one else can match.

MT-Proverbs 17:6 in the Bible has something important to say about this. "...the glory of children is their fathers." That word "glory" can be translated "weight"...and here's what it means: God designed the relationship between a father and his child to weigh that child down...in a positive way! To stabilize him; to keep him grounded. I took SCUBA diving as a kid. When you SCUBA dive, you wear a weight belt to neutralize your buoyancy. If you don't, you float and flail helplessly. Likewise, every kid does best when they have the stabilizing "weight" in their lives that an engaged father provides.

And one of the most powerful stabilizing tools a father has are the words he speaks. Most dads have NO IDEA the impact their words on their kids. For good or for ill. Every child...every child...longs for...drinks up...the words of blessing from the father, no matter their age. Every daughter...every son... swells and grows and is emboldened when they hear their father's blessing. **Including the Son of God.**

EW- In the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, we only hear the voice of God the father two times: once at Jesus' baptism and once on top of a mountain in one of the most powerful and bizarre moments in Jesus' ministry. In both instances, the Father said essentially the same things to or about his son, Jesus. This weekend, we are going up on that mountain with Jesus and his closest three friends: Peter, James and John. And we are going to listen in as the heavenly father brags on his son. We're in Matthew 17: 1-8.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my

beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

MT-As many of you know, our daughter Rachel is the campus pastor of Montreat College in North Carolina. Tuesday morning I got a call from her...which I always love. She told me of a recent coffee date with a young couple who were preparing to go into the mission field. They were sharing their life-story with her and she was trying to encourage them as they prepared for this mission.

While they were having this sweet conversation, an eaves-dropping woman walked over and blasted Rachel: “You are an abomination to the gospel, a heretic, and what you said is repulsive.” They were all shocked. Rachel replied calmly: “I think you might have missed part of the conversation. What did I say that was so offensive?” The woman said something about her being hypocritical and judgmental (which Rachel found quite ironic.) Getting nowhere, Rachel finally said, “Well...I’m sorry you feel that way.” And the woman replied, “Why do you feel like you need to get the last word?”

Wow. Abomination of the gospel. Heretic. Rachel was laughing when she told me the story...but I’m sure at the time, it wasn’t so funny. Sometimes Rachel calls her mom. Sometimes she calls me. This was a Dad call. Maybe because she knew I have faced attacks in my ministry and could relate. But maybe...it was because this was one of those moments when she needed to hear some words of encouragement from her father. So she got them. I said, “Well, Rachel...you are my favorite Abomination!”

Actually, it would take a lot of verbal abuse to offset the blessings I have poured into my kids their whole lives. And in this story, we see the importance of the Father’s blessing.

EW-I certainly know what it means to have a Father’s encouragement in my life, and in this passage we see that Father’s encouragement in the life of Jesus. The passage I read is referred to as the Transfiguration, which is a fancy way of saying the moment when Jesus was transformed into something more beautiful or elevated than his present form. Really, in this moment we’re getting a glimpse of who Jesus really is.

A few years ago there was a TV show called Undercover Boss. The TV show featured CEOs of large corporations who were disguised as regular workers and went undercover to see the lives of their employees on the front line. Then, at the end of the show, they reveal who they really are to the employees they’ve been working with, very often with incredible consequences. In many ways, Jesus, who has always existed as God, is like an Undercover Boss, coming to live and walk among the regular people. But in this moment, he takes off his disguise and the 3 friends get a glimpse of who Jesus really is.

And frankly, Peter, one of the three, doesn’t know quite what to do. He just starts blabbing. He can’t keep his mouth shut, but then a voice from heaven cuts him off. And it

is the voice of the Father at a really important moment in Jesus' ministry. Jesus is moving toward Jerusalem where he knows he will be arrested and executed. This is Jesus' destiny; this is why he came to earth, ultimately; to give his life as a sacrifice for the brokenness of the world. God the Father knows this will be a frightening and difficult time for his precious son.

So...to encourage...to strengthen...to stabilize him in this moment, God speaks words of blessing to his Son. They are essentially the same words he spoke to Jesus at his baptism when his ministry first began, and we hear them again at this crucial moment as Jesus faces his destiny. They are the words that Jesus needed to hear from his father...and this is important: they are the words EVERY child needs to hear from their father. If JESUS needed his father's blessing to fulfill his God-given destiny, how much more do OUR children need OUR blessing to fulfill THEIRS.

MT- Here are the three parts of the Father's blessing: You belong; You are Loved; You are Valued. First, You belong. God said of Jesus "This is my beloved **son**..." The beginning of blessing is the security that comes from knowing you are part of a family. Jesus was the beloved **son**. Our children need to hear from dads that they are part of us; that they belong to us. Not in a possessive way, but in a protective way. They are part of our family. They carry our name. They carry on our legacy.

We have tried to reinforce that sense of belonging throughout our kids' lives. When we were vacationing in Scotland, we noticed that every castle had a family crest that included a Latin motto and images representing their identity. I asked our kids, "If someone found the Toone family crest 300 years from now, what would we want them to know about us?" So...we created this: Images that represent our love of music, sports, study and travel...with the cross of Jesus in the center. And we settled on this motto: "Esse Quam Videri"; "To be rather than to appear." Then...in the greatest Christmas gift ever, my kids found someone to recreate our family crest in wood.

I gave a copy of that to each of our kids when they went off to college to remind them of who they are...and **whose** they are. It was a physical reminder that, no matter what they faced, no matter how they struggled, no matter how lonely they might be, they would always be a Toone; they would always belong to our family.

Our culture is increasingly disconnected. Our cell phones make it possible to connect with millions of people with a touch of a screen, and yet we are increasingly DISCONNECTED. Ironically, there is a GREATER sense of loneliness... of UN-belonging... than perhaps any time in history. The foundation of a father's blessing is the assurance that his child belongs; their family tie that can never be broken. "You are my son! You are my daughter. You can never un-son yourself; never un-daughter yourself. You will ALWAYS belong to me...no matter what!"

You belong...and you are loved. God said of Jesus, "...this is my BELOVED son..." The second part of the Father's blessing are the words, "I love you." Spoken out loud. Spoken

often. Spoken while looking right into their eyes, maybe even holding their cheeks so that their attention doesn't wander. I love you.

My generation had dads who struggled speaking these words. When I've asked large crowds of men, "How many of you ever heard your father say the words, 'I love you?' ...two-thirds of those men kept their hands down. They say things like, "I knew my father loved me...he showed me he loved me. But they **never** said it."

This generation is better at this. Young men are less uncomfortable about speaking these words than their dads were. And hear me men...you **NEED** to speak those words. Out loud. If Jesus...who had a perfect relationship with his father, needed to hear HIM speak words of love, how much more important is it to **your** kids? You cannot say it enough. It never gets old. When kids hear these most important of words from the most important man in their lives...it fills the sails of their souls with a wind that propels them forward. You belong to me. I love you. And the third part of the blessing is, "I'm proud of you."

EW-I'm proud of you. The Father says to Jesus, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." In other words, the Father is saying to the son: "I'm proud of you." I'm so thankful that I had a Father who always told me how proud of me he was. He would say it all the time, to the point where I was like: "Okay, okay, I get it!" In fact, one member of my rugby team, who played on the wing, right next to the sideline would tell me just how much my dad's words meant to HIM. He told me that when he would make a mistake, he would hear the other parents shouting exasperatedly, "Oh, Alex!" But after the noise had died down, my dad would always say, "You've got this Alex!" or "Keep going Alex!" My dad used his words to great effect in my life and the lives of others.

But three years ago my dad died suddenly and those words went away. I had lots of people ask me what I missed most about my dad, and as I reflected on it, I realized I missed his words more than anything. I missed the sound of his voice. I missed hearing him say, I'm proud of you. Even after all those years of telling him, "I know! I get it."

Around a month after my dad passed away I was giving a talk on a college campus on the subject "What happens when we die?" It was certainly a difficult moment in my grief journey, but I will never forget what happened after I finished. One member of the team I was working with came up to me and said this: "Ellis. I don't normally do stuff like this, but I felt like God was asking me to tell you something, because you've missed hearing it from your dad. I felt like he wanted me to tell you: 'I'm proud of you.'"

There is something incredibly powerful in those words from a Father to a child. And if you are a Father, we want to help you put that into practice. In your worship guides you'll find a bookmark, and on it are some words that both Mark and I use to speak to our kids. My kids are little, and Mark's kids are grown up, but we both still use these words. We speak these over our kids. "You belong to me." You're mine. You're my son, you're my daughter. "I love you." And I will always love you. "And, I'm proud of you." These are the things I notice you do well. I want to encourage you, today, to take some time to say

these words to your kids. Even if it means picking up the phone because they live far away or sending a letter or email because you aren't in regular contact with them.

And for Fathers of young kids, like me, we also have some tattoos which you can pick up from the ushers on the way out. We want to invite you to say these words to your kids tonight when you tuck them into bed, and as you do, put this tattoo on them. It says You belong. You are loved. You are valued. Put it right on their forearm where they can see it. And as you do it, speak those words over them: You are mine. I love you. I'm proud of you. And then every night this week, point to the tattoo to remind them, and repeat those words.

MT- It's hard to speak words that were never spoken to you. There might be some men here who never knew this kind of blessing relationship with their dads. And it's not just boys who need this. Every man needs and longs to hear paternal words of blessing. My dad STILL calls me on some Sunday afternoons to tell me he liked my sermon. I'm 62 years old. I've been at this a long time. I'm pretty confident about my calling. And yet...when dad calls me to brag on me....it still fills my soul.

So, for those who never received the weightiness of these words, I want to close by pronouncing a blessing upon. As your spiritual father. I invite you to receive these words of blessing as if it were your heavenly father speaking them. HANDS UP? Ready?

You are my son, you belong to my family, I love you and I am proud of you. And there are things about you that are really, really good!

I speak the fruit of the spirit into your life.
 Where there is apathy I speak love.
 Where there is sorrow and depression, I speak joy.
 Where there is anxiety or turmoil, I speak peace.
 Where there is anger, I speak patience.
 Where there is cruelty, I speak kindness.
 Where there is evil, I speak goodness.
 Where there has been betrayal, I speak faithfulness.
 Where there has been harshness, I speak gentleness.
 And where there has been alcoholism or adultery or violence or addictions or gambling...
 I speak self-control.

I speak into the emptiness that remains from any hatred or unforgiveness that lingers in your soul. I speak the power and presence and fruit of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

You are a son of the king. I love you. And I am proud of you.

Now raise your hands and repeat after me: "I receive this blessing in the name of Jesus Christ." Amen.