

Sunday 14 May 2017

Otumoetai Baptist Church

Prayer and Self Denial

People are Treasure

God Chose His People; they are His treasure

Good morning everyone. As its mother's day today I've focused my message around children and thought it'd be appropriate to start by sharing some light-hearted moments from children.

Because, as any parent or teacher can tell you, kids sure can say the darndest things, so here's a few examples:

A mother asked her daughter, "How was your first day of school?"

"Fine," she said. "They want me to come back tomorrow."

A preschooler asked his mum, "Can you play with me?"

"Not now," she said. "I have too much work to do around the house."

Taking her hand, and with the wisdom of one who has lived many a lifetime, he said, "Mum, I have some advice for you. When people tell me to do work, I don't listen to them. Then I don't have work to do. It works for me. You should try it."

During a Thanksgiving dinner, young Mackenzie started fiddling with her dad's wedding ring. Dad said, "That never comes off.

You know why? Because I love your mother."

That's when Mackenzie informed him, "Mum takes hers off."

Seven-year-old Lily is very polite and her grandparents wanted her to know just how proud of her they were. She smiled gratefully and said to them, "That's OK; I'm just trying to get through Christmas."

Children are known as "Little Treasures".

(SLIDE 1)

They're full of gold, keep you coming back for more, and a delight to be around. Every child is made in the image of God and is to be treasured.

Oh yes, all kids have their moments, and push their parents' buttons by fighting with their brothers or sisters, spilling milk on the kitchen floor, drawing on walls with permanent ink, somehow having bottomless stomachs, not listening very well, having messy rooms, and so on and so forth – but what a joy, what a blessing, what a treasure are all children.

Hold on to that image for a bit. Even if you don't have children, I hope you can see how much of a treasure they are.

As you think about that, think about this: You are God's treasure. He thinks you are full of gold, He keeps coming back to you for more, and in His eyes you are a delight to be around. That's right – YOU! God sees you as a treasure. A Treasure handed down.

(SLIDE 2)

That's the theme for this year's Prayer and Self Denial. 'Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho'. "Treasures handed down."

Last week Transzend leader Andrew Paige spoke about the Gospel as Treasure.

(SLIDE 3)

He used the analogy of a person who found hidden treasure buried in a field and sold everything he owned to buy that field.

And that begs the question, what would we give, or what have we given for that same treasure? The treasure of the gospel. Would we sell everything and change our lives for the sake of the gospel? Numerous amounts of people have literally done that and are now missionaries here or overseas.

Here's a glimpse of some of them in our Baptist family.

(SLIDE 4)

Over Prayer and Self Denial we can choose to do two things: Firstly, we can pray. So important. Prayer for missionaries here and overseas is crucial. Prayer works. Prayer focuses us on the

everlasting God who provides and cares for his people, his treasure.

Secondly, we can deny ourselves of something – like a coffee, a doughnut, a magazine – anything really. And then we can use the money we might have spent to put into this kete and give it to the NZ Baptist Missionary Society to support their missionaries.

(SLIDE 5)

'Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho'. "Treasures handed down."

Treasures handed down from God ... people.

If someone was to ask you what the Bible is about, or what the Big Bible story is, I wonder what answers we might get ...

Possibly ...

A list of do's and don'ts.

A navigation manual. A GPS for life.

An instruction book.

Or maybe a story, a very long story, about God and His people.

In Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, it says that God created people in His image, male and female, Adam and Eve, and he blessed them.

(SLIDE 6)

People were the pinnacle of His creation. His Mona Lisa. God saw that people he created were *very good*. God was pleased with his treasure and enjoyed spending time with his treasure.

Things were very good.

Unfortunately, things were not very good for long. See, both the man and woman chose to do something. They chose to disobey God. And that's when things changed.

And God's treasure became His displeasure.

But one thing about God is that He is faithful. And he always has a plan. And even though people stuffed up royally, God's plan was to journey alongside and live with them.

So after Adam and Eve came Cain and Abel. And Cain ruined things there in a spectacular way. Then came Seth; then eventually a man called Noah and through Noah and his family, God made a fresh start with His people.

Soon after this, a man named Abram arrived on the scene and God changed his name to Abraham and promised to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. Then came Isaac and Jacob. God changed Jacob's name to Israel, because God was going to do a new thing through him.

This new thing was the birth of the Israelites – God's chosen people.

At the end of Genesis, Jacob (Israel) dies, his family is brought back together, and before his son Joseph dies, Joseph says to his brothers (the remainder of Israel) that God will bring them out of the land they are prisoners in, into the Promised land which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

So God raises up a deliverer (a rescuer) – a guy called Moses. Now, Moses was not the typical person for this mission. He murdered someone, He hid in the wilderness for forty years, and then when God called out to him to go free his people, Moses made up any excuse he could to not get involved.

He thought: "Yeah Nah it's not really me God." (I think of that Mitre 10 advert on TV where the voiceover says you want to be someone who does the DIY yourself and not pay someone else to do it!) Moses wanted to pay someone else to do it, but God had other plans. He chose Moses to go rescue His treasure.

And the hunt was on.

And what a treasure hunt it was. Moses triumphs; the Israelites are free, God is with His people.

God was faithful to his people. Not just the Israelites but all those who had come before them: Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Noah and even Adam and Eve. God had not left his treasure. God was pursuing his treasure. And things are getting set for the greatest treasure hunt the world has ever seen. But before we get to that exciting adventure let's check back in with the Israelites and see what God says about them.

If you have your Bible, let's go to Deuteronomy chapter 7. Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Bible and perhaps one that you've not read too much of. There's a lot of stuff in it about the way to live and God's different commandments.

Very briefly, in Chapter five we have a recap of the Ten Commandments, then in chapter six we have the Greatest Commandment, which is: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Deut 6:4)

The Israelites are then warned about disobedience to God and the consequences of not following Him. But God doesn't leave things there for them, He speaks to them about who they are and why He has chosen them.

And I believe that this is a message for us today, so let's read

chapter 7, verses six to eleven:

(SLIDE 7)

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. His treasure.

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

(SLIDE 8)

But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, King of Egypt.

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

(SLIDE 9)

But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him.

Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.

Imagine that your child, your little treasure, has deliberately disobeyed what you told her to do. Maybe she's taken a favourite toy off her baby brother. And this is not the first time it's happened.

(SLIDE 10)

You sit her down and you have the talk. You know the one, "Sharing is caring, don't take what's not yours, wait your turn."

I'm sure plenty of us have had this talk with our children. The little girl listens, beams her beautiful blue eyes at you, "Yes mummy, (or) yes daddy, I won't do it again."

Brilliant! You've just cracked Parenting 101. It turns out all you need to do is say one thing only one time to your child and they will behave perfectly. Not such a hard thing this parenting, right?

Well, no, not really at all. See, the same thing happens again. Maybe the next day. Or in my house more than likely probably within the next five minutes! And so you sit her down again. "So, missy, what happened? I thought we talked about this. It's not right to take what isn't yours. That hurts other people's feelings. Remember? So why did you do it?"

(SLIDE 11)

The child looks down, ashamed. "Sorry mummy and daddy, but he didn't really need it. I thought I could look after it better.

And I thought I needed it more."

Subtitle: I want it more and will do what I like to get it.

And so the exchanges continue.

The behaviour might change a little bit, but it's constantly about disciplining and training the child in what is right. She just doesn't get it straight away.

(SLIDE 12)

Israel is that little child. She just doesn't get things straight away. She wanders far from what God has instructed her to do. She does her own thing. She worships idols – things other than God. Or she follows God for a bit, while things are going well; but when things change, she complains and decides she can do life on her own.

Any parent can tell you that when a little child tries to do life on her own, it's a recipe for disaster.

So Israel is this little child who sometimes lives dependent on God following his commands for her life, but other times lives independent of Him and does her own thing.

And yet, Israel is the apple of God's eye. We read:

(SLIDE 13)

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Israel was a holy people, chosen by God and called into a covenant with Him. That alone sets her apart from all people. Let's stop and ask ourselves, why was Israel chosen by God to be his treasured possession? What made her so special?

See, Israel was a small group of people without great culture or prestige. She possessed no special personal qualities, which would warrant such a choice.

She was disobedient, took a lot of time to learn from her mistakes, and just as a little child, would often make the same mistake – or even worse!

So why did God choose Israel?

Well, we find our answer in the next few verses:

(SLIDE 14)

*The Lord did not set his affection on you (Israel) and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of **all** peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he*

brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, King of Egypt.

The Lord chose Israel out of divine love. It was nothing that Israel had done or not done. It wasn't whether she was good this week and deserved a reward. It wasn't love based on condition, as we often love. God loved Israel and chose her because of who He is. See, God is love and everything He does is out of that love.

God looked at Israel and loved her.

Knowing all about her independence and disobedience, God peered down from heaven and said, "That's my child. That's my treasure."

In the same way, God peers down from heaven and looks at your life and says, "That's my child. That's my treasure."

You are God's masterpiece.

(SLIDE 15)

Why? Because God is love and God loves you. That's it. That's the whole message in a nutshell.

There is nothing you can do to earn his love, so stop trying.

There is nothing you can do to lose his love, so stop worrying.

There is nothing you can do to make him love you any more.

And there is nothing you can do to make him love you any less.

Some of you are sitting here this morning and you get this. Others of you are sitting here this morning and you don't get it. You might be thinking, "How can God love me and call me his treasure? You don't know what I've done. Or what my life has been like or how much distance there is between God and I. He can't love me unconditionally."

Do you know what, I've had similar thoughts too...

Having perfectionist tendencies can have its advantages, but it also comes with many disadvantages. I like things to be just right. For example, I never sign off on something until I'm completely happy with it. I rarely make a phone call without rehearsing how it's going to go. I can't go to bed unless my bedside drawer is neat and tidy and the blankets are pulled up just right on the bed. And I often can't approach God unless I think He is happy with me.

The thought becomes I need to please God. Or I need to appease Him somehow. Either way, it impacts how I approach Him.

I know in my heart that all he wants is for me to come to him as a little child. Full of faith and full of love, with all my heart. And even though I try to, I still struggle with this. And I don't think I'm alone.

For those of us struggling with this, there is great comfort in the next words we read:

(SLIDE 16)

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

See, it's not about me and it's not about you. Being made right before God is not about us. It's about Him. God is God and we are not.

He is the faithful one – not us! – He *keeps his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.*

When God makes a promise, he keeps it. In that way, God can be trusted. He is the faithful fiancé who pledges and lives up to his love on his wedding day. He is the trustworthy father or mother whose children can rely upon. He is the reliable friend who's not too busy to help you when you're in a jam, or if you just want to talk. He is the Lord of all who sees you as His treasure.

God is there when you need Him most.
And when others need him most.

I think of unborn children. Unwanted children.

(SLIDE 17)

Often they have no one to fight for them, no one to be their voice, no one to be there for them when they need it the most. Without getting into the morals around it, people sometimes decide for whatever reason that abortion is the only way.

(SLIDE 18)

A few weeks ago, Brian and I met with Janice Tetley Jones, the woman who started Pregnancy Choice here in Tauranga. Pregnancy Choice has a number of counsellors, staff, and mentors who journey alongside mothers and families in this whole area and help them in their decision-making process.

Janice feels like God has asked her, and Pregnancy Choice, to be there for mothers and families and unborn children. His treasure.

During our meeting with her, Janice told us stories about God miraculously intervening in the lives of mums and families, and some who came in looking to have an abortion have ended up with a healthy, happy baby and loving being a mum.

Currently, Janice has a young mum to be living with her and even though the situation has caused her a lot of stress, she knows that without taking her in, this young woman could be out living on the streets. With no one to treasure her.

The team at Pregnancy Choice are involved in inspiring work. Some people here are involved as well. We have formed a partnership with Pregnancy Choice, with the intention of some OBC'ers mentoring some of the mothers, families, and even some of the dads too.

If you think you might be interested in becoming a mentor and walking alongside people who come to Pregnancy Choice, then come have a chat to myself or Brian. This is such important work and highlights today's central message that people are treasure. The mums, the dads, the families, the unborn children.. They are all treasure. And God is right there with them.

(SLIDE 19)

There is a Maori proverb that says this:

He aha te mea nui o te ao?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

(SLIDE 20)

What is the most important thing in the world?

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

In choosing Israel to be **His** people, his treasure, God came to this poor oppressed people in bondage to the Pharaoh of Egypt, and in a series of great saving acts through Moses and others, He rescued them.

Israel was chosen because God loved them and kept his covenant with their ancestors.

Israel sinned so many times and lived independently of God, but He kept his promise to them.

Israel needed a saviour, and God raised one of them in the person of Moses.

We are chosen because God loves us and keeps his covenant to us.

We sin so many times and live independently of God, but He keeps his promise to us.

We needed a saviour, and God raised one of them in the person of Jesus.

(SLIDE 21)

God, in Jesus Christ, came to men and women who were in the bondage of sin and freed them from the power of darkness and through the great saving act of the Cross, He brought them into the kingdom of His beloved Son.

Translation: God, in Christ, went after his treasure. Us. And He got us back. It cost him everything He had, but Jesus went and brought that field with treasure hidden in it, with his life. He paid our ransom, our ticket price, and he took our penalty. He rescued us.

Jesus left country, family, and the peace and stability of heaven. And He has made us His treasure. We are now treasure hunters for Him.

(SLIDE 22)

All of the Baptist missionaries are out there looking for His treasure. People. They have given up things to buy that field. They have left country, family, jobs, stable income, and the peace and stability of New Zealand.

Let's remember them in prayer. Let's deny ourselves of things in our everyday lives so that we can help support them. Let's get involved in the overall mission of God, the divine treasure hunt that was set in motion the second God made people in His image. He loved us immediately. He knew what it would cost him. He chose us anyway. And we, all people, are His treasure. Treasures handed down.

(SLIDE 23)

I started this morning with some great comments from little treasures, so before I close and pray let's finish with one more:

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson.

"If Jesus were sitting here, he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'

Quick as a flash, Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!"

Let's pray:

God, thank you that we are all your treasure. Thank you for all the missionaries out there that are treasure hunters. Thanks that we get to be a part of your great treasure hunt. Lord, strengthen and resource and encourage your people so that they can continue the good work with you and with each other too. Thank you that we are part of your great mission. And thank you most importantly that you came to find us. Your treasure.

In your name Lord Jesus we pray, Amen.