

6-16-24

## We Started It, Father Finished It

Ephesians 2: 11 – 18

Fatherhood is a good thing. It has its rewards. I should know, I have five kids. But it definitely isn't all fun and games. There are times when a father shakes his head and wonders how he can possibly survive another day of fatherhood.

Children have a knack for trying one's patience.

On Father's Day, we generally focus on and celebrate the good stuff about being fathers, about what it means to be a father. For the day, we're blind to the trials and challenges and heartaches.

It's good that we do this, because there will be ample days to face the hardships, and it will be almost more than we can bear.

Take for example the dynamics of sibling rivalry. It can be an ongoing battle from sunup to sundown, sometimes for years on end!

I understand and accept that each child needs space, to find their niche and unique identity, but does it have to come at the expense of harming another sibling's psyche – even their soul?

I grew up with two younger brothers and can recall some pretty intense rumbles on the King farm, especially with the one closer to my age.

Jim, being my junior by five years, was at a distinct disadvantage, but he evened the playing field by throwing sharp metal toys at me like Tonka trucks and metal yardsticks. I guess the King boys learned the art of rioting from a very early age.

Now that I'm a father, I've experienced what my mom and dad had to endure, although I must admit, that conflicts between sisters typically don't take on the same physical nature as brotherly quarrels.

And with brothers, once the fight's broken up, we tend to cool off and get back to the task at hand. Girls seem to have a longer memory and are better at plotting revenge!

Now, on the one hand, it's tempting to minimize the issue of sibling rivalry and chalk it up to just part of growing up. I do that sometimes, thinking to myself that it's just a stage kids go through, and for the most part I'm right.

But on the other hand, doesn't this struggle for position and advantage and supremacy also speak to a deeper underlying issue in our lives - namely, the desire to find acceptance and security especially in the sight of those relationships we deem most important?

Let's face it.

When we sense that someone is about to challenge us in an attempt to dislodge us from our desired position, whether in a family, at work, or some other social situation, our defenses go up and our fight and flight mechanism kicks in.

Self-preservation becomes key, and most would agree that it's built right into our DNA. We fight for survival and what we think is rightfully ours.

But what if someone else were to fight for us?

What if someone else could wage our battles?

Then maybe we wouldn't have to fight so much and we could learn to trust more.

I remember watching a movie that was made several years ago called "The Bear." Maybe you've heard of it or have even seen it. It's an interesting movie because there is no human dialogue or narration.

It's all about a grizzly bear cub growing up in its natural surroundings. The cub's mother's life comes to a tragic end early in the movie when a large boulder falls on her while she was digging under it. Now the little bear would have to learn to survive on its own.

The climax of the movie occurs when the young grizzly has to fend off a ferocious mountain lion, and it looks as though he's going to meet his demise. But he's determined to not go down without a fight.

Up to this point, he had done everything he could to evade and elude the big cat, but now he has to face it head on.

So, with all the strength and courage he can muster, he rises up on his hind legs and is about to let out his angriest roar, when all of a sudden the cat miraculously and unexpectedly slinks away with her tail between her legs.

The little bear stands there in almost comic disbelief, wondering what just happened.

Well, I bet you can guess what happened: A massive grizzly maybe five or six times the size of the cub appears out of nowhere and comes to the little bear's rescue. He towers over the little guy.

In the same way, God fights for us and has fought for us. And because He has, we no longer have to fight!

This is such an important truth for us today. As we try to digest the news of what is happening in different parts of our country and even in different parts of the world and see the destruction of personal property and businesses, and witness the harm and abuse and injury of

one person or a group of people against another, we cannot help but watch in disbelief.

We see people taking up rocks, bricks and other projectiles to express their frustration and anger. And like many, we're tempted to ask ...  
"Who started this?"

Who started this conflict that has passed its boiling point and reached international proportions?

Was it the white supremacists of the twentieth century?

Was it the revolutionist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century?

Was it the Colonialist of the 15<sup>th</sup> century or the European explorers?

Was it the class warfare of the aristocracy who placed the harsh yoke of serfdom on the peasants?

Wasn't it William Wallace who led the Scottish against the English land barons to fight for what was rightfully theirs?

But who lived there before they laid claim to it?

What about the Christian crusades that sought to remove Islam from power?

I'm not a history major, and don't pretend to know all the conflicts and wars that have been waged throughout the centuries, but I think you know where I'm going with this, and you understand my point:

No matter the conflict, everyone wants to know the answer to the \$64,000 question: Who started it?

Well, I'm here to tell you that maybe we're asking the wrong question. Maybe the question, "Who started it?" isn't the most important question to ask. Maybe the answer to the question, who started it, isn't nearly as important as the answer to ... Who will finish it?

When my kids act up and I have to remove myself from my easy chair to intervene and play referee, and yell, "Knock it off!" You know what's the first thing out of their mouth? "He started it!"

I'm quick to respond, "Oh yah? Well, I'm finishing it!"

The person who finishes the conflict is more important than the one who starts it.

True, as fallen members of the human race, we're all, to some extent, guilty of starting things we wish we hadn't, and in the process have hurt others more deeply than we're aware. And yet the Bible teaches us that we can go back in history and point the finger toward an individual who actually did start it.

Paul writes in Romans 5:12, *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all men, because all sinned."*

Yes, it's true and we can all go ahead and say it with 100% conviction: "Adam started it!"

But as I mentioned earlier, the one who started it is not nearly as important as the one who finishes it. And the Apostle Paul agrees.

Romans 5:15: *"But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification."*

So yes, go ahead and shout it from the mountain tops: Adam started it!

He's the guilty party! He's the one who's opened pandora's box which has wreaked havoc on the entire world.

Go ahead and tell the world.

People want a scape goat, they want to be able to direct their hatred and vitriol toward the fall guy.

Adam! He's the one through which sin entered the world and by letting sin in, we get death.

Thanks Adam! There's blood on your hands and death in your wake, and because we're your descendants, we're guilty as well, and death is our destiny.

Yes, go ahead and say it, because it's true.

And hey, if we speak and admit the truth, at least we're progressing. But I beseech you and warn you: Do not stop here.

Give the other man credit as well. Give credit where credit is due and proclaim His Name as well –

the name that is above all names,

the name of whom every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father because the One who has finishes it is greater than the one who started it.

I quote the Apostle Paul again: *“For if, by the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life **through the one man, Jesus Christ.**”*

Jesus finished it. God the Father in heaven finishes it and has finished it. And because he has, we no longer have to fight.

This is a Biblical theme that runs through the entire Bible.

Remember what Moses told the Israelites as they were seemingly trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's Egyptian army?

*"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see before you today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

And remember, this was **after** the Lord brought an assortment of plagues down on Egypt due to Pharaoh's obstinance.

In other words, God demonstrates time and again that He will go to battle for his people.

But will we listen and have faith in Him?

Remember God's promise to the Israelites through Moses immediately after the spies returned to report on the conditions of the Promised land: Moses said to them get ready to enter.

*"Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes."*

But the leaders were afraid and had no faith, and thus began their forty years of wandering in the desert. America is wandering through a desert place right now.

How long will it last? I don't know

It will last until we repent and become people of faith in the Living God again.

But the list goes on, whether its Joshua at Gilgal

David against the Philistines

Gideon or Nehemiah,

These men of faith all experienced victories because God fought for them.

And He fights for you and me.

Does that mean we are to do nothing?

Of course not. We still must move out and act in faith and stand firm, or do whatever God calls us to do, but we must have faith and trust in the Lord's power and mighty righteous arm and trust in the Lord's promises that He will come to our rescue and that He has already come!

As David writes in Psalm 18: *"He parted the heavens and came down; He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters and brought me out into a spacious place."*

God fought for us, and He did it in the most spectacular, and I must say, the most unusual way.

When we think of someone fighting on our behalf, we usually think of our hero being the aggressor and pummeling the enemy, but Jesus did it completely opposite.

Oh, don't get me wrong, Jesus completely destroyed the enemy - our sin and the death we deserve - but He did it so extraordinarily different.

He let himself be ...

treacherously abandoned

violently beaten

verbally abused

unjustly accused

horrifically crucified.

And he did it for our sakes.

He became the perfect lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, to fulfill his Father's will perfectly so that God could forgive humanity and restore our relationship with Him while at the same time maintaining his own integrity and remain faithful to his own nature and character – perfectly holy, righteous and loving.

Many ask, how could a loving Father allow such a horrible thing happen to his only begotten son?

Why couldn't he just forgive us and do away with the sacrifice?

It's because God understands the seriousness of sin and its capacity to twist, harm, and destroy everything and everyone he created.

It had to be completely eradicated and – pulled out by its root - and that could only happen with the shedding of blood – offering up the life of one so precious.

He did it because it would the most complete and tangible way could God demonstrate the fullness of his love for his creation of which we are gloriously a part.

So, He magnificently and completely did it, and now we can stop fighting.

This leads me all back to the text in Ephesians.

You see, when our lives are separated from God,  
when we're excluded from the citizenship of God's kingdom,  
and we realize we're without hope,  
we lash out, we cry out, and act out.

We become angry, and look for a scapegoat upon which to pour out our grievances.

We miss out on God's restorative power and forgiveness.

But the One who finishes is among us!

And as Paul writes, we who were once very far from Him and were even considered his enemies have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. He now is our peace, our hope, our joy.

He fought sin, Satan and death so that now we can again love God and love each other.

God finished what we started – something we could not and cannot finish ourselves.

Now by faith in Christ it's possible to be reconciled to God and to each other.

Now we have reason to live and to hope and to have peace and to love!

I close with this wonderful truth from the book of Hebrews chapter 10:

*"But when this priest – speaking of Jesus- had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins – his perfect and holy being – he sat down at the right hand of God – symbolic of an act of absolute completion.*

*"By this one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."*

Do you see our hope and future in this singular and supreme act of God on our behalf?

Then begin living it today!

No more fighting because our enemy is dead, courtesy of God.

The One who finishes is greater than the one started it. Amen.