**WORLD ORPHANS SABBATH**Sermon: R. Edward Turner, Ph.D.
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* **Sermon Title: *WHAT DO YOU DO WITH AN ORPHAN?***
* **Scripture: James 1:27 (RSV):** *“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”*
* **Recommended Hymns:***Under His Wings**Rock of Ages*

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What do you do with an orphan?

Walk with me along the shores of the Indian Ocean in West Africa. As we walk along the beach, in the distance there appears an object on the beach. It’s not a log or a beached animal. Closer we find a half-naked, scared and shivering 18-month-old girl with a garbage bag next to her. In the bag were some clothes and a piece of paper with her name. We will call her Grace to protect her identity. Her mother did not want her, so she abandoned her. More about Grace later…

Again, I ask you… What do you do with an orphan?

Today, we celebrate World Orphans Day.

Most of us growing up are very familiar with orphans since we rescued homeless and injured animals… a baby squirrel lost from its parents… a baby bird who fell out of the nest… a baby deer whose mother was killed on the highway.

However, the orphans I am talking about are young, vulnerable, and neglected children at risk. Listen to these statistics…

* According to UNICEF, 153 million children worldwide are orphans.
* According to UNICEF, an estimated 61 million children of primary-school age are out of school; 53 percent of them are girls.
* The World Bank estimates there are 69 million children worldwide who suffer from malnutrition.
* According to the WHO, in 2017, there were about 15,000 deaths **every day** of children under the age of five… most of them orphans.
* Again, from UNICEF, 5.6 million children under the age of 5 died in 2016, equivalent to 11 children every minute.

For thousands of years, orphans have been a part of our history. In literature they appear as main characters, such as Cinderella, Tom Sawyer and Little Orphan Annie. Much of the time their hopes and dreams come true and they live happily ever after.

Even Scripture mentions famous orphans

* Esther… whose parents died and then was adopted by her older cousin Mordecai.
* Joseph… orphaned when his jealous brothers sold him to merchants traveling to Egypt.

Some orphans in secular history you may not be aware of…

* Johan Sebastian Bach… one of the world’s great music composers
* Herbert Hoover… 31st President of the United States
* John Lennon of Beatles fame
* Steve Jobs… founder of Apple which is the first Company to become a trillion dollar company

We celebrate the success of these famous orphans. They succeeded, and their dreams came true.

However, our focus for World Orphans Day is to discover how we can fulfill the Biblical Mandate for the 153 million orphans in the world whose hopes and dreams have not come true.

The Biblical mandate is very clear. Scripture has many passages reminding us of our responsibility to orphans. Here are some of the best known.

* James 1:27… *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is the: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*
* Psalms 68:5… *A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling.*
* Exodus 22:22… *Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless.*

I challenge you to remember the last time you have heard a sermon on orphans. We’ve heard numerous important sermons on The Sabbath, The Sanctuary, The 10 Commandments, The Three Angels Message… but it is sad that there is ***a deafening silence on orphans.*** That is now changed. The General Conference now has World Orphans/Vulnerable Sabbath in the official calendar until the year 2020.

I want to refresh our memory about the qualifications for citizenship in heaven. Join with me in reading Matthew 25…

***31****"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.*

***32****Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,*

***33****and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.*

***34****Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;*

***35****for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,*

***36****I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'*

***37****Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink?*

***38****And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee?*

***39****And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?'*

***40****And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'*

My fellow Christians, the clearly identifiable qualification for entering the Kingdom of God is **HOW WE TREAT PEOPLE**… people who are hungry, people who are thirsty, people who are naked, people who are in prison. The factor for entrance into the kingdom is simple… **HOW WE TREAT PEOPLE**… especially the most vulnerable.

Is it possible that our priorities need further study? Is it possible that our emphasis on Evangelism needs to be expanded to include “the least of these?” And orphan children are the most vulnerable of that group.

Listen to what Ellen White says,

*Among all those whose needs demands our interest, the* ***widow and the fatherless*** *have the* ***strongest claims*** *upon our tender sympathy. They are the object of the Lord’s special care.* ***They are lent to Christians in trust for God****.* 6T:

Many of you have heard the song “Tomorrow” from the 1982 musical **Annie**. I remember the words from its signature song “Tomorrow,” “The sun will come out tomorrow… “

Well, I have good news for every orphan in the world. The **SON** came out two-thousand years ago and the SON’S light shines down through the centuries… and His light shines bright today. With the Son, there is no “tomorrow”. Today is the day of salvation. That’s the “Good News” for orphans. As we join in the benediction… remember, the benediction is the beginning of service. As you enjoy your Sabbath meal, realize that there are millions of orphans who have little food and dirty water. My challenge to each one in the congregation is to discover how you can help orphans.

Again, I ask you the question… *what do you do with an orphan*?

The opportunities are all around us. Here are a few ways you can fulfill the Biblical mandate on orphans.

* Adopt or support an orphan through one of the ministries that focus on neglected children.
* Go on a mission trip with one of these children’s ministries.
* Donate monthly to provide water, food, shelter, education and medical care.
* Look in your own backyard, maybe even in your congregation. Children who have been abandoned through death or divorce are “the fatherless”. They need our care.

On this World Orphans Day let your Signature Service to God be to those of “the least of these”.

And whatever happened to Grace whose mother abandoned her and was found half naked on the shores of the Indian Ocean? She is now two years old and doing well in an orphanage along with 40 other children. She still is uncomfortable visiting the beach and hearing the roar of the waves… it reminds her of earlier abandonment. However, she is doing well because someone is fulfilling the Biblical mandate of Matthew 25.

Let us pray…

Heavenly Father, too many children around the world have become orphaned or abandoned for so many different reasons and have never known the love of a mother or father… yes, some of them in our midst. Lord we know that You care for all people - but have a special heart for little children and orphans.

Watch over these children and young people, we pray. Comfort them in their trials and provide for them when they are in need. Educate them when they are abandoned, protect them from those that would take advantage of their vulnerabilities and heal the physical and emotional hurt that so many have had to face in their young lives.

And Father we ask that you continue to challenge each one of us to find ways to meet the vulnerable orphans at the point of need. In the name of Jesus, Father to the Fatherless, we pray, Amen.