



Sermon Notes

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Title: Mothers in Israel

Text:

1. Parenting is a real challenge, it always has been, and it always will be. It should be a relief to many of us that we recognize that motherhood, and fatherhood for that matter, are not unambiguously good; being one is good but the experience isn't always good. Modern therapists spend much of their time sorting out the mess resulting from (often well meaning) parenthood. Whether parents love too little or too much, things can go wrong. And of course lots of maternal relationships are not necessarily very happy, either for the child or the mother. We believe and confess that they can be redeemed by God's grace, but we can't assume that all mother/child relationships are lovely and unproblematic. There's bound to be some atypical family relations in any average congregation. Surely the Christian good news is that God loves us and we can love others irrespective of our family relationships? We are not dependent on our family relations for our value as Christians.
 - a. The desire of motherhood is intense and natural; the problem of barrenness grieves many women. In many cultures, the ability to bear children is one area of significant worth for women as well as the safety net for future security.
 - b. The privilege of motherhood is awesome and overwhelming; it is inherently life changing.
 - c. The price of motherhood is high as it carries innate and internal costs and blessings that are difficult to express in words.
 - d. God created a different parenting style for men and women. Mothers nurture & cherish, fathers exhort & comfort. (cf. 1 Thess. 2:7, 11) Allow for these differences.
2. Characteristics of Mothers in Israel
 - a. Rebekah (cf. Gen. 24-28)
 - i. She was extraordinary in her willingness and quick response to help and then return with Abraham's servant to an unknown husband. (cf. Gen. 24)
 - ii. Her experience of carrying twins who fought even in the womb causing her pain and grief, led her to inquire of the Lord and He spoke to her – equal access! (cf. Gen. 25:21-24) Rebekah heard from God that the older would serve the younger, did Isaac know?
 - iii. Did her foreknowledge lead her to prefer the younger? Could something different have been done by both Isaac & Rebekah?
 - iv. Things all go downhill as she then counseled Jacob to willfully deceive his father which at the minimum cost her 20+ years of separation from her son. (cf. Gen 27)
 - v. In the end, God wasn't done with Jacob and true to character brought about the needed transformation.
 - b. Jochebed (cf. Ex 2:1-11, 6:20)
 - i. She risked her life for the prized life of her child; *“when she saw that he was a beautiful child...”* Who knows what a child can become? *“What’s one baby”* takes on a new meaning when we understand that

God has a holy vocation for everyone. Note also how the plaintive cry of a Hebrew child touches the heart of an Egyptian princess.

- ii. Moses' time with his mother, about two years until he was weaned, had obviously left a mark on him such that he clearly identified himself as a Hebrew. Do not disparage the importance of those first two years of a child's life; *Teletubbies* v *Telos*
- c. Naomi (cf. Ruth)
 - i. Became bitter from her losses. (cf. Ruth 1:20-21)
 - ii. Adopted a Moabite woman as her daughter.
 - iii. Was blessed and the book ends with a very un-bitter Naomi.
 - iv. The story of Ruth is one of redemption with Boaz playing a Christ-like role in the narrative. Naomi's first family left the promised land due to a famine and experienced loss and suffering making her bitter. The famine was during the time of the judges, a period of filled with the repetitive cycle of faithfulness, rebellion, punishment, repentance, and blessing. In the end, God brought her back with a remarkable young Moabite woman to Bethlehem, "*house of bread*," where her "*kinsmen-redeemer*" rescues them and brings them back into the center of Jewish life. What's even more remarkable is the eventual genealogy of the story: Ruth, Obed, Jesse, David, and Jesus.
- d. Hannah (cf. 1 Sam. 1-2)
 - i. Her grievous barrenness amplified by the spite of her coépouse. However, her husband, Elkanah, was amazing and unusual for the time. Despite his assurance of his love, barrenness still represented a lack of blessing in their lives.
 - ii. Her prayer and her dedication to God. Even after Samuel entered service at the Tabernacle, each year she would bring him a new tunic.
- e. Bathsheba (cf. 1 Kings 1)
 - i. Championed Solomon to become king.
- f. Solomon's mother with child (cf. 1 Kings 3:16-28)
 - i. Her love of her child's life made her willing to sacrifice her heart.
 - ii. The value of human life and of adoption; she'd prefer that her child lived with another than die.
- g. Athaliah (cf. 2 Kings 11)
 - i. She was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel and mother of king Ahaziah. Her bad mothering is evident, not in the way she raised her son, but in the way she put herself first at the expense of an entire nation as well as her family. Athaliah came on the scene during a very bloody chapter in Israel's history. Jehu had just eliminated the crown princes of Ahab's family, including Ahaziah. Rather than mourning the loss of her son, Athaliah had the rest of the royal family killed, specifically the grandchildren who might have a legitimate claim to the throne. That cleared the way for this evil queen mother to take the throne unopposed and rule for the next 6 years. She is the only ruling queen in Israel's history. Unknown to her, however, a grandson named Joash remained in hiding; ready to take the throne at the age of 7 after a coup instigated by the high priest.
- h. Elizabeth (cf. Luke 1)
 - i. Faithful and bold in her insistence to name the baby John despite the cultural pressure placed upon her.
 - ii. She was also an encourager to another young woman who recently became pregnant. She walked beside Mary in the midst of what can only be difficult time of being pregnant outside of marriage.
- i. Mary (cf. Luke 1)

- i. Faithful and brave to bear a child with such grace in what must have been very embarrassing for a young woman.
 - ii. Wise in that she sought out her older relative and took refuge there for a time.
 - iii. A companion to her Son during His ministry. Mary is everywhere in the Christ narrative.
 - j. Herodias (*cf. Mt. 14:1-12*)
 - i. This was a granddaughter of Herod the Great who first married Herod Philip, by whom she had a daughter, Salome, probably the one that danced and pleased Herod. Josephus tells us that this marriage of Herod Antipas with Herodias took place while he was on a journey to Rome. He stopped at his brother's; fell in love with his wife; agreed to put away his own wife, the daughter of Aretas, King of Petraea; and Herodias agreed to leave her own husband and live with him. They were living, therefore, in adultery; and John, in faithfulness, though at the risk of his life, had reproved them for their crimes.
 - ii. Used her daughter's sexual wiles to gain her desire of John's death; this was a violation of all the rules of modesty and propriety for one great principle of all eastern nations is to keep their females from public view. No modest woman would have appeared in this manner before the court, and it is probable, therefore, that she partook of the dissolute principles of her mother.
3. Conclusion – mothering is a tough task that isn't always good either for the mother or the child, but it's an awesome privilege that can impact generation upon generations.
- a. Despite the lifelong influence a parent can have upon their children, God deals with each person according to their choices. Similarly, God draws and perfects each one so that even mistakes can be redeemed for the good. (*e.g. Rebekah, Naomi*)
 - b. Parents aren't perfect, God is sanctifying them at the same time He is sanctifying the child. Let go of past hurts; see one another as learners at different phases of life.
 - c. Defend your children against the destructive forces at work within and without. "*Train up a child...*" (*e.g. Jochebed, Herodias*)
 - d. Disciple our children to know God and to walk in His ways, then release them to fulfill the purposes of God in their lives. (*e.g. Hannah, Elizabeth, Mary*)
 - e. Promote and advocate for your children, but in a godly way. (*e.g. Rebekah, Bathsheba, Mary*)
 - f. Parenting must be selfless, not self promoting. (*e.g. Herodias*)
 - g. Remember that at the end of the day – marriage is a covenant, parenting is a privilege. Do not neglect your marriage nor make your child an idol. Healthy marriages make for a balanced home life and for healthy children. (*e.g. Rebekah, Hannah, Ruth, Elizabeth, Mary, Herodias*)