

“Mothers – Broken and Spilled Out”
Genesis 30:22-24a

Today is Mother’s Day. Every one of us has had a mother, obviously – however, we don’t all see her in the same way. For instance, there was the poor mother who was concerned about her eldest son’s use of profanity. She asked her friend for advice, and she told her that each time her son cussed, she should slap him. [Bad advice, to be sure].

The next morning as her sons came to the breakfast table, she asked them what they wanted to eat. The eldest said, “I want some ‘blankety, blank Post Toasties.’” His mother slapped him hard. As he sat dazed on the floor, she turned to the younger son and asked what he wanted to eat. He said, “Well, I sure don’t want any Post Toasties!” [P]

Here’s a classic one – there was a little girl who, when shown the wedding pictures of her parents, asked her father, “Daddy, is that the day you got Mom to come and work for us?” [P] Careful with what you say next, dad!

What comes to mind when you think of a mother? A mother is a teacher, a nurse, a psychologist, a chauffeur, a coach. Mothers are molders of vocabularies, shapers of attitudes, developers of character ... But perhaps most significant of all, mothers are a link to God, a child’s first impression of God’s love.

Theirs is a love that sacrifices to bring life into being. It is a love that journeys with you through the dark storms and deep valleys. It is a love that smiles and sings with you in your celebrations. It is a love that gives of itself over and over again – so much so that she would even lay down her life. That’s a mother’s love.

Because of this, *mothers so often have the single greatest influence on their children’s souls*. That is the simple point I want to make today.

Genesis chapter 30 finds Rachel in dire straits. Her husband loves her, but she has borne him no children. Her sister and even their maids have given him ten sons together. She has none. So she prays, and prays more fervently, and prays still more intently. And finally her prayer is answered.

Fourteen years after she and Jacob were married, she gives him a child, a son. She knows immediately the source of her blessing, for she names him “Joseph,” which means “The Lord adds.” God gave her this child. And she would love him until the day she died giving birth to his brother Benjamin. The Jewish people venerate the place of her birth to this day. Rachel’s story illustrates well the relationship of motherhood to pottery. What do I mean by that? Let’s consider 3 facts. #1: **The contents of a clay vessel are its value.**

In Rachel’s day, clay pots were a common household item. They were made simply to accomplish desired tasks. As their version of pots & pans, they would be used frequently, and so, naturally, they would begin showing their wear. They would get dirty, scoured, chipped, cracked ...

Let me ask you, especially during these challenging days, weeks, and months – What has been your “form” lately? Do you feel worn, bruised, broken, empty? [P] Then let me encourage you with one of my favorite verses: 2 Cor. 4:7 – *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”*

What is the Apostle Paul talking about? What are the jars of clay? What is the treasure? We are the clay jars – simple vessels, marred by imperfections, nothing extravagant in and of ourselves. But that is what makes the treasure contained within all the more attractive, all the more distinct. What’s the treasure? Paul proclaimed it 3 verses earlier – *“The light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God!”* (2 Cor. 4:4).

Paul says that we are jars of clay carrying the treasure of the gospel, displaying the glory of Christ! [P] And as such, it is not our *form* that ultimately matters, it is our *function*.

We are to judge the pot by its function/faithfulness, not its form. Some pots may be beautifully decorated, but contaminated on the inside. Or, they may be common on the outside, but cleansed on the inside, ready to carry that which is valuable and precious.

So too with mothers. Your eternal value lies not in your status in the eyes of your society, your possessions, or appearance, or achievements. Your greatest value *as a mother* is caring for the soul of the child given to you.

#2: The vessel seldom knows the ultimate result of its work.

Water poured from the clay pot grows flowers the pot never sees. It helps thirsty people the pot never knows. Its use extends far beyond the pot which held it.

Rachel never knew that her son Joseph would one day save his brothers and his nation. She died never knowing that he would be second in all of Egypt, and the most famous son of her family and people. She never knew the eternal significance of the life she gave to the world.

You will likely never know the eternal significance of the souls entrusted to your care, either ... But God does. And that is enough.

#3: The vessel is the first influence upon its contents. Its purity or contamination is directly transmitted to that which it holds. So too with mothers and their children.

Rachel was faithful to God, and God was faithful to her. She was Joseph's first spiritual influence. She prayed to have Joseph, a fact we never find out about Jacob. She loved Joseph when his brothers were jealous of him. She was his first model of spirituality.

Mothers can have the single greatest influence on their children's souls. That's my point. Let's see if it holds up across biblical history and life today. First, some biblical stories.

Consider this text: *"On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me on a platter the head of John the Baptist'"* (Mat. 14:6-7). Her mother implicated her daughter in one of the worst crimes in Scripture.

Consider Ahaziah, the ancient king of Israel, and this statement: *"He too walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother encouraged him in doing wrong. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord."* (2 Chr. 22:3-4). This mother's son suffered a violent, dishonorable death for the sins she taught him.

But there are many good examples of our point as well. Moses, for instance, was raised in the culture, traditions & religion of Egypt. And yet, because of his spiritual mother, he never forgot his God or his people, and one day led them to their Promised Land.

Samuel's mother, Hannah, was fervent in prayer, trusting God for a son. She gave that son back to the Lord. And he became Israel's last judge, first prophet & great spiritual leader.

Mary was but a teenage girl when the angel Gabriel asked her to risk her family, her future, her marriage, and her life in becoming the mother of the Messiah. She said, "*I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said*" (Luke 1:38). And it was.

Paul said to young Timothy, "*I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and now lives in you*" (2 Tim. 1:5).

Is it not true that what their mothers were, their children became?

Does the pattern continue across history?

The mother of Nero was a murderer, as was he.

Of the 69 kings in France's history there have been only three who were truly loved and respected by their subjects—the only ones reared by loving mothers.

John Newton's mother prayed for her wayward son every day. Finally he came to Christ, and later wrote Amazing Grace, the most beloved hymn of all time. We have it because of his mother.

Ab. Lincoln said, "I remember my mother's prayers; they have always followed me. They have clung to me all of my life. All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."

G. Campbell Morgan was one of the greatest preachers of the previous century. He had four sons, all of whom were preachers too. Someone asked his son Howard, "Who is the greatest preacher in your family?" Howard had a great admiration for his father and looked right at him; then, without a moment's hesitation, he answered, "My mother."

Do you believe that mothers have the greatest spiritual influence in their children's lives?

Does your mother deserve your gratitude for her spiritual influence upon *your* life? [P]

Have you been given the privilege of being a mother? On this Mother's Day, would you renew your commitment to the life and soul of the one entrusted to you? Would you pray

for them right now? Would you ask God's help and wisdom in shaping the eternal clay put into your hands?

There's a metaphor which seems especially appropriate for us today. It is taken from the vivid story of Jesus' last days, when "*Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.*" (Jn 12:3). This was actually 12 ounces of one of the most expensive perfumes of their day. To do this with our perfumes today would cost about \$500.

She broke the *clay vessel* and poured out its contents unto her Lord. In the very same way, God has given every mother the privilege of pouring out the child given to her, unto God.

Christian artist Steve Green wrote a song about this event. I want to share the words with you. May this be our commitment to Christ this day:

*One day a plain village woman, Driven by love for her Lord,
Recklessly poured out a valuable essence, Disregarding the scorn.
And once it was broken and spilled out, A fragrance filled all the room
Like a pris'ner released from his shackles, Like a spirit set free from the tomb.*

*Broken & spilled out for love of You, Jesus; My most precious treasure lavished on Thee.
Broken & spilled out and poured at Your feet in sweet abandon; Let me be spilled out and
used up for Three.*

*Lord, You were God's precious treasure, His loved and His own perfect Son,
Sent here to show me the love of the Father; Yes, just for love it was done.
And though You were perfect and holy, You gave up yourself willingly.
You spared no expense for my pardon; You were used up and wasted for me.*

*Broken & spilled out for love of me, Jesus; God's most precious treasure lavished on me.
Broken & spilled out and poured at my feet in sweet abandon; Lord, You were spilled out
and used up for me.*

In sweet abandon, let me be spilled out and used up for Thee.

Disciple of Christ, would you spill yourself out with extravagant love for him, as he has for you?

Mothers, would you give your most precious treasure, that which God has given to you, back to him, right now? [P]

I recognize that for many of you, today is a difficult day. Perhaps you're a child who has suffered the loss of your mother. Perhaps you're a mother who has suffered the loss of your child. Or perhaps, something has come between you and your mother, or between you and your child. Maybe you haven't seen or spoken to each other in a long time. Perhaps you have not had the best mother in the world. Or, you may be flying solo as you work hard to nurture your child in every way. Or, like Rachel in our passage, some of you simply long for a child.

This morning, there are those who feel a sense of loss, or a sense of brokenness – maybe you feel like an empty vessel – maybe you are questioning your value, your influence.

Where do we go from here? If you will permit me, let me offer a suggestion to every person listening: No matter who we are, no matter what our situation, let us take on the privilege of loving every child of God and every motherly role model – especially those starving for it. Let us love them attentively, sacrificially, and gratefully.

To my Mom, thank you for loving me, for raising me, for praying for me. In you, I met Christ. In you, I experienced His love. In you, I learned to live for Him.

To my wife, Nikole, thank you for instilling the same in our children.

To all the women of God, thank you for pouring your lives into ours.

May we all strive to model such love. To God be the glory.