

# **Sermon Text for Mother's Day May 10, 2015**

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Matthew 15:21-28, Genesis 17:15-22

“A blessed woman”

I want to wish all of you women here today a happy mother's day. I have learned a long time ago that the definition of a mother includes not just biological mothers but all of those women who are able to bless others with their care and comfort. This mother's day we are going to look at Sarah and see how God promises to bless her so that she will in turn be able to be a true mother to the generations to come.

We are flying through Genesis, from chapter 2 all the way to chapter 17..., okay, just for Mother's Day we find ourselves with Sarah. We find today that it is through her that God's blessing of the covenant will be fulfilled. Women, all of you women, you are the key to the future of the covenant that God has made with humanity and which will be carried on through our children.

Today we will see how both Sarah and the Canaanite woman that we heard from earlier, how they, and we in turn, are called to be a blessing to those around us. This is our calling, especially on this Mother's Day.

One of my favorite experiences of ministry when we were living in Russia was being able to take groups to an orphanage that was absolutely special. It is about three and a half hours outside of Moscow. 60 girls live in the orphanage and they come from atrocious realities. Some of them had been gathered from families and situations that are desperate and dangerous. Some are picked up literally naked and brought in and loved by a family of mothers, nuns, women who would stop the world to care for them. These nuns tell them about the love of God and gradually bring them back to life. They sang and danced for us in native costume while we humbly watched feeling unworthy of the attention and received from them more than we could ever give. The care of the women of that orphanage allowed these girls from ages 3 to 17 to have a new lease on life, literally.

The mothers of our lives give us what we need to put one foot ahead of the other. They also speak truth into our lives at times when we need it the most. I have a friend who is a pastor and he has a great story of when he was a young preacher. One of his members was a woman who had down syndrome. She was considered one of the greatest

joys for the congregation as they rallied around her and cared for her. It was also considered that she had the gift of prophecy because she would usually speak up at any time and say exactly what was on her mind. She would usually say the things that the people around her were thinking but were afraid to say.

One Sunday as he was preaching he sensed that in spite of his preparation and his sincerity the people just were not getting his point. They had that blank, glazed, numb look on their faces like they were having an outer body experience. He was winding down in the sermon and was struggling trying to find a way to bring it to a strong close so they would leave on a positive note. All of a sudden this woman spoke up and again said what probably everybody in that building was thinking: "Does anybody know what he is talking about?" He said his sermon was over at that point and he gracefully bowed out of the pulpit.

The prophet in the midst of the congregation, saying things that everybody is thinking but that nobody wants to say. In the past women, especially within the church, have been relegated to the sidelines when it comes to leadership roles. Many people think that it is biblical for women to play a minor if any role in leadership in the church. I am not one of those people. I wonder how those who believe that could miss Deborah the judge who we heard about last year on mother's day, she was a warrior and an Old Testament judge. They also somehow miss Phoebe and Lydia and other female disciples who served with Paul in the New Testament. But more than any other references as to how God uses women as primary vehicles for his Word and actions and is a blessing for others is seen in the resurrection scenes. In every single Gospel we find that the women become the first evangelists, the first to bring the good news to the world about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today we will look at Sarah as the one who is picked by God to be blessed and in turn to be a blessing to others.

In Genesis we find Abraham and God in a dialogue. Sarah is not even present. Fairly typical for the Old Testament where the male thinks he is in charge while all along we see it is God who directs and coordinates all the events. God tells Abraham that Sarah's name is going to be changed to mean princess. Abraham had just had his name changed and he was aware, as we should be, that to change your name means that God has a very particular and special destiny laid out for you.

The change of a name means a special blessing that God will impart upon you. Simon, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my kingdom. Jacob, you shall be named Israel because you are no longer striving against God, but rather God has prevailed. Sarai which means argumentative will be switched to princess. I'm going to leave that one alone. I'm not getting hear that.

But the next thing that God tells him, as almost adding to the name change, is that I will bless her. That can stand by itself. Sarah, will be blessed, she will give rise to the nations, kings of people shall come from her. Now, times have changed, we know that, but back then the sign of God's blessing was children. The sign that God was on your side was that your name would be continued. Today, the sign that a mother is blessed, the sign that a woman is blessed is that those around her will call her blessed.

Jesus describes a woman who is blessed as someone whose faith is so great that she is persistent and will not let up. Another example of what a woman who is blessed looks like can be seen in the widow who knocks incessantly on the door of the judge demanding justice, and he finally gives it to her. A woman who does not tire in reaching out to the Lord and whose children see her faithful, who those around her see her faithful and striving for the way of the Lord.

Children are confused today because they see their parents come to church but don't see their parents follow what is taught at home. A woman who is blessed is one who follows what Scripture describes and lives it out day after day. Abraham, your wife will be blessed and it will be through her that your nation will be established.

Keep going in the Genesis Scripture and we see God tells Abraham, again, that in a year from now, now he gives him a specific time, a year, she will have his child. The scene is comical if you were to watch it from far away. God and Abraham are talking, God says something to Abraham which makes him bend over in laughter, and he is laughing so hard that he stumbles and trips and falls flat on his face. I can't decide if Abraham is laughing because God changes her name from argumentative to princess. I'm sure it was the fact that she was going to have a baby at 90. No seriously, what did you want to tell me. Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90, why don't you make it easy on yourself and just use my boy Ishmael. That was a good one though, Sarah is going to have a baby.

But God insists that it will be through Sarah that nations and kings will rise. How many times had God told Abraham that they would be part of his covenant. The promises that he had made to him so long ago were finally going to come through. But Abraham's disbelief almost got in the way. God knew that he would use Sarah to bless the earth.

Jesus finds himself in our New Testament Scripture in a debate with a gentile woman who wants her child blessed. He basically states no, he emphatically states no, but she is persistent enough and does not give in. This is what I think we need to see in all women as they are raising their children. This tenacity, this protectiveness that God has for his children so we need for our children. God insists that his children, the children of promise come through Sarah. It is so easy to abandon and discard children because your life is too complicated. There are good reasons why Sarah wouldn't be the right person to be a mom. Look how she treats Ishamel. I have seen children discarded. Believe me, I have seen it, I have helped pick up the pieces once the children have been discarded.

But God commands us, all of us to be a blessing to those around us and not a curse. To be able to care for and protect not just your biological children but the children of the covenant. Every child that enters these doors should have 200 mothers fighting to take care of the child in the promises of the covenant. I don't know if you've noticed but we have a number of families that either just had children or are about to have kids. It may take a village to raise a child but it takes a church to raise a village in which children are raised.

Yesterday was so beautiful. I was only there for the beginning. Then I happened to come in while they were eating. 7 kids, 25 adults paying attention, careful attention to those kids. A bit overkill right, a ratio of over 3 to 1. No, absolutely not. You should have seen the look on the parents faces as they left the church with their kids safely in the hands of these adults. Some of them ran out to take advantage of the time.

This mother's day we not only celebrate all those women who have raised children, all those women who have sacrificed of themselves to ensure that they would be a blessing to those around them. Allow yourself to ask if you are a blessing to those around you. Ask yourself is God is using you in your life to ensure that this kingdom is realized through you. Amen.