

SM 051020

Moms – Imperfect People Doing a Job That’s Impossible to do Perfectly

Sunday Morning Message

Text – Genesis 16; 21

Congregational Reading – Genesis 21:14 - 16

Introduction

Typically on Mother’s Day, in the past, I have sought a passage of scripture that presents a mother from the Bible who, at least on the Scriptural surface, appeared to be a perfect woman that made all good decisions, which ultimately resulted in the rearing of perfect children who went on to serve God and received God’s best blessings. In the past, I have preached on Mary, the mother of Jesus; Lois and Eunice, the mother and grandmother of Timothy; Lydia, the seller of purple who lead her household to follow the faith of the Apostle Paul; Hannah, the mother of Samuel; Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

One of my favorite maternal heroes was the un-named virtuous woman from Proverbs 31 who really could have been portrayed wearing a super-hero uniform with a cape. She was perfect: she got up early, stayed up late; made beautiful clothes for her children; ran a profitable business; helped the poor in her community; and still had time to take care of her husband. The problem is that the Proverbs 31 woman does not exist, at least not exactly as she is presented in the Bible. If you are familiar with that passage then you know there is no name given, though some believe the passage was written by Solomon pseudonymously. We know from the Bible record that Solomon’s mother, Bathsheba, was not a perfect woman, and neither was her husband, David.

Transition

The point I am trying to make is this: perfect mothers do not exist; neither do perfect fathers. It has been my observation that most mothers are just imperfect people doing a thankless job that is impossible to do perfectly.

The particular mother that God put on my heart to talk to you about this morning is Hagar. To my knowledge, I have never heard a mother’s day message about Hagar, but I believe Hagar was a lot like many of the mothers that we have in this church: just an imperfect woman who was put in a very difficult situation, and did the best that she could.

We first meet Hagar in Genesis 16 (read and explain the entire chapter)

Verse 1 – Though the Bible does not explicitly tell us, it makes sense because the Scripture states that Hagar was an Egyptian, that Abraham and Sarai first found her when they “sojourned” down in Egypt (see Genesis 12).

Hagar was hired (or purchased) as a servant, or handmaid, to Sarai. This was probably not the life that this Egyptian girl dreamed of while growing up in Egypt.

Verse 2 - 3 – Here we see that Sarai asks her husband to sleep with her servant so that she could give birth to a child for Sarai. The child would be Sarah and Abraham’s. You will notice that it does not appear from this passage that Hagar has any choice in this matter.

Verse 4 – When Hagar realizes that she is with child, her maternal instincts kick in, and she is not happy about this arrangement. That child is hers, not Sarai’s, and the prospect of giving the child up for her mistress is unbearable for her.

Verses 5 – 6 – Sarah and Abraham “dealt hardly” with her, which probably means that they beat her. The Hebrew word translated into the phrase, “dealt hardly,” carries the idea of humbling, afflicting, and oppressing. Hagar then runs away.

Verses 7 – 16 – She is met by “the Angel of the Lord” out in the wilderness who tells her:

- To go back and submit herself to Sarai. This is probably not what she wants to hear, but she obeys God anyway and does it. She submits to Sarai, not because of Abraham and Sarai, but because it is what God wants.

Note to wives – You are supposed to submit to your husbands because God wants you to.

Note to husbands – You are to unconditionally love your wives because God wants you to.

- The angel also gives her the name for the boy – Ishmael – which means, “God will hear.”
- The angel also tells her about her son’s future. He will be a wild man. He will fight with everybody, and he will live “in the presence of his brethren.” This prophecy has more to do with the descendants of Ishmael. The Arab nations will descend from Ishmael. They are still fighting with their brethren – Israel.

Keep in mind, none of this is Hagar’s fault. She is just a young mom-to-be at this point trying to do the best she can for her family.

I’d like to be able to say that life gets better for her Hagar and her son, but unfortunately, it will get worse.

Turn to Genesis 21:9 – In Genesis 21:1 – 8 we read about the birth of Abraham and Sarah’s own child. By the way, she is Sarah (princess) now, not Sarai (my princess). God changed her name back in Genesis 17:15.

Verse 9 – Isaac, the son of promise, is born when Ishmael is fourteen. Ishmael is now fifteen or sixteen. Ishmael is doing what any knucklehead teenager would do. He is “mocking,” presumably mocking the new toddler running around Abraham’s house. This was probably not anything sinister or evil. The word, “mock,” just means to “play” or “make sport of.”

Verses 10 – 13 – Sarah is a jealous and protective mon. There is no need any more for Ishmael to exist – get rid of him. Throw him and his mom out. Abraham does not want to do this, but God intervenes and assures him that it will be best, in the long run, for both Isaac and Ishmael.

Verse 14 – This is the part that I do not get. Abraham is a rich man. He could have given Hagar and Ishmael much more of a sendoff, but they only get bread and water. Hagar is basically thrown out of her home; she is now a single mom, given the responsibility of raising a teenager. As far as we can see from the Scriptures, none of her problems were of her own doing. All of this was Sarah’s idea, and Abraham listened to her. God was not behind any of this. Now, Hagar is paying a dear price for decisions that were made for her.

Note – a lot of times we suffer for things that we cause ourselves, but there are also many times that we are negatively affected by the decisions of others. It’s called life. The question is what are we going to do now. Are we going to sit and wallow in our misery, or are we going to get up and make the most out of a difficult situation.

Verses 15 – 21 – Hagar really has no choice – she must move forward. At one point, she is sure that both the boy and herself would die of thirst, but God intervenes again, and gives her the things that she needs to survive. One of the things that she needed, perhaps even more than the water, was encouragement. God assured her that it would be OK, and it was. They survived. The boy became an archer, and Hagar was able to find him a wife. Life went on as best as it could.

Hagar was just an imperfect mom who deeply loved her son, and did the best that she could considering the “cards that she had been dealt.”

By the way, forget all of the things that we think we know about Ishmael and Hagar, and consider this. There is not one record in the Bible of Hagar disobeying God. As far as Ishmael is concerned, there is nothing bad recorded about him, either, with the sole exception of

him having a little fun with his little brother. In Genesis 25, we see him right alongside of Isaac, burying his father. By the way, he received no inheritance from his father. Abraham gave everything to Isaac.

I am convinced that Hagar did a pretty good job considering.

There are other notorious mothers in the Bible that also have a very bad reputation that I think have been treated unfairly. Lot's wife comes to mind. She looked back and turned into a pillar of salt, but did you ever consider why she looked back? Could it be that she looked back because she had children and possibly grandchildren back in Sodom who were perishing? How about Job's wife. She told Job to curse God and die, but she just lost every one of her ten children, not to mention all that she and Lot owned. She lost everything and everybody.

For the most part, these and other mothers in the Bible were no different than the mothers in Jersey Shore Baptist Church. You are doing the best that you can in, at times, very difficult situations. The one thing that you all have in common is that you love your children deeply, and would do anything in your power to help them.

Conclusion

Illustration – Cindy

When we first got married at a very young age, I avoided most of my parenting responsibilities and justified because I believed I had to spend most of my time working. Work is a good thing; earning a living is a good thing; but I was away from home far more than I should have been. I was gone seven days a week, often for twelve or more hours per day. Looking back now, I can see that I was really just avoiding my responsibilities at home – my obligations as a father; my duties as a husband.

My wife was the one who handled all of the problems. She had no choice, because I wasn't there. She took the kids to the doctors; she stayed up nights with them. She dealt with the problems at school with the teachers; she was the one who made sure the kids had birthday presents and birthday parties; she was the one who decorated the house and made Christmas special for the kids; she was the one who dealt with the bill collectors when they called. I avoided all of that. My kids owe me nothing; I was not there for them, especially in the early years, but they owe a great debt to their mother. Everything that they are, they are because of her. Cindy did the best that she could in the midst of sometimes very difficult circumstances, and she always loved her children.

I bet the same could be said about every mother in our church.

That's my message for Mother's Day –

- no points;
- no “here is what you need to do to be a better mother;”
- no “here is a perfect woman in the Bible and you need to be more like her.”

Just thanks – thanks for being mom.

Thanks for loving us no matter what.

Thanks for doing an impossible job, the best way that that you knew how.

We know that you made some mistakes along the way; we know you weren't perfect, but we see you that way. You are a hero in our eyes.