

May 11, 2014
Community Baptist Church
Sunday Morning Service
Mother's Day
643 South Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2014 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study about three broken-hearted mothers.

1. What was Rebekah's chief deficiency, and how do you tend to manifest the same weakness?
2. How would you advise Rizpah to respond to her unique trial in life?
3. Describe the depth of Mary's faith in God as you think it might have been.
4. How do you respond to disappointment? Is there anything you should change about your response?

THREE HEART-BROKEN MOTHERS

Today is Mother's Day, the day set aside each year for honoring mothers, or at least the institution of motherhood. For us, it is generally a day when we consider one of the great examples of motherhood from the Bible. Or we might pick a text from the Bible that encourages and challenges moms to do better.

Overall, we naturally expect Mother's Day to be upbeat, positive, and full of hope. So we do the flowers, cards, dinners, hugs and pats on the back kind of things. Then tomorrow we get back to reality. Am I saying that the reality of being a mother is not all that sweet and desirable like a box of candy? All I am saying is that being a mother is not for sissies! Wait a minute. We agree that being a

Marine, or a sky diver, or a first responder—that kind of stuff is not for sissies. But the picture of mom sitting in her recliner, in the comfort of her home, with soft music playing while she cuddles her cooing infant is the exact picture of sissy-hood, isn't it? Sure. But that is not the whole picture of motherhood.

Motherhood sometimes looks more like a minefield. It looks like a video game where mom is trying to clear the path of life of all the dangers and bad people and pitfalls so that her children can safely follow her as they strive to reach their goals. And along the way, mom sort of gets blown up sometimes. No, motherhood is not for sissies. There can be very discouraging circumstances that come in the wake of being mom. Sometimes the children themselves are the cause of great heartache. That's real life. The question is: "What can moms do about that heartache?" The answer is found in God Himself. Let's consider a few examples of real life mothers.

Rebekah (Genesis 25:21-28:5).

It appears that Rebekah's heart was indeed broken. It was broken by her own choices. We know the story about Rebekah's twin sons. She created a mess for herself when she decided to love one son above the other. The historical statement says: *When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob (25:27-28).*

Maybe Rebekah loved Jacob because Jacob was a quiet man who hung around the tent all day. That does seem to be the emphasized contrast that caused Dad to love Esau and Mom to love Jacob. Or it is also possible that Jacob was a quiet man who hung around the tent all day because his mother coddled him.

A wise mother will guard against showing favoritism for one child above the others. This kind of mistake must be taken seriously because it is natural to pick out a favorite child or to realize that you connect better with one child than with another. Often a mother gets along better with a son than a daughter because the daughter perceives competition or is perceived by the mother as competition.

But, natural or not, favoritism will almost always have negative consequences. The children who are not favored will see the unfairness and respond with various negative attitudes. Esau manifested that kind of response by marrying multiple wives from a pagan background just to spite his mother. She felt the consequences. *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I loathe my life because of the Hittite women" (27:46).* In fact, 28:8-9 reveal that Esau intentionally married more pagans **because** it displeased his parents. It is also possible that the child who is favored will be spoiled and end up breaking the mother's heart by not fulfilling the mother's desires.

Rebekah also laid the ground work for heart break when she manipulated circumstances according to her own desires (27:13). Because she favored Jacob, she desired for him to receive his father's blessing. Rebekah had overheard Isaac tell his favored son Esau, *"Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me" (27:3).* The plan was for Isaac to give Esau the coveted patriarchal blessing when he returned with a fresh venison steak. In the Hebrew culture, it was very important for a son to receive the father's blessing. Especially in this case, it meant that the blessings God promised Abraham would flow through the recipient of Isaac's blessing. In other words, the future of the nation of Israel hinged on this blessing. Of course Jacob would receive a secondary blessing and a sizeable inheritance simply because he was also Isaac's son. But Rebekah desperately wanted Jacob to be the channel of Israel's future.

Why was this mother so motivated to manipulate the patriarchal blessing? Something had to drive her to do something that would turn around and break her heart. This is a difficult conclusion for us to draw. It is clear that Rebekah's heart was broken in the will of God. Before the boys were born God had revealed to Rebekah His will for the twins He gave. He had made it clear before birth that the elder son would serve the younger. *And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger" (25:23).*

No doubt this certain knowledge played a large role in Rebekah's choices for her favored son. Why wouldn't she favor the younger if she knew that God planned to pass His blessing through

him? Actually, that is not a valid reason for playing favorites, for loving one son but not the other. At the same time, we must realize that it is doubtful that she understood all the ramifications that we know from the advantage of hind-sight. For example she could not have understood that God's blessing would be so huge that He would rename Jacob "Israel" and his twelve sons would become the founding fathers of the nation that carries the same name to this day.

Rebekah's heart broke in the process of God doing His will through her and through her son. We can read the story through Genesis of how God had to put Jacob through some very painful trials in order to shape him and make him dependent on God. Mother Rebekah had to share in some of those trials. Worse is that because of Rebekah's manipulation of circumstances, Jacob had to flee for his life (28:1-5). But worst of all was the fact that Rebekah never saw her favored son again. Do we wonder how that could be God's will? Mother's with broken hearts will always question God's will in the matter. What else can they do? They could trust God.

Rizpah (2 Samuel 21:1-14).

This mother's heart was broken by circumstances beyond her control. We do not have very much information about this person. However, we do know that she had committed herself to Saul who became king of Israel. The first part of verse eight reveals that *the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth (21:8a).* An important statement within the statement is that Rizpah bore these two sons to Saul. Further reading helps us understand that at some point this woman had become Saul's concubine. In the context of Saul's kingdom unraveling, we read, *Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?" (2 Samuel 3:7).*

The idea of concubines certainly strikes us as being outside the boundary of acceptability. However, concubinage was common in the Middle East during much of the Old Testament period. Some of the most important patriarchs in God's economy fell into this sin. It was so acceptable that even four of the sons, whose names are attached to the twelve tribes making up Israel, were born of concubines. Among

the Hebrews, concubinage ranged from the legality of having physical relations with a slave to taking a woman other than a wife to “complete” the family. The children of the concubines became joint heirs with the wife’s (or wives’) children. Since the concubines were the king’s special possession, to have relations with her (as Abner was accused of doing) was to usurp the throne for oneself. Rizpah was in one of those “special” relationships with King Saul.

A fair question might ask if this woman could not have refused the king’s desire to take her into his harem? This is a hard question because we do not know the circumstances. On the one hand, we know that it was generally dangerous, or at least not advantageous, to resist the king. On the other hand, it would have been possible for her to request that her father not permit the transaction (assuming she had a father). But we must bear in mind the practical ramifications in store for a common girl in Israel who the king wanted for a concubine. Being part of the king’s harem definitely brought material benefits she would never have enjoyed as a commoner. Maybe Rizpah saw this as a deal too good to pass up. At any rate, we are probably somewhat accurate to conclude that this was a bad choice on Rizpah’s part.

Being Saul’s concubine, she was bound to be effected by Saul’s sins which carried consequences. The text tells us how these consequences jumped up to bite Rizpah: *Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, “There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.” So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah. And David said to the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?” The Gibeonites said to him, “It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel.” And he said, “What do you say that I shall do for you?” They said to the king, “The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we*

may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD.” And the king said, “I will give them” (2 Samuel 21:1-6).

Saul had breached God’s instruction regarding the Gibeonites. God’s instruction came about because of trickery on the part of the Gibeonites. A tribe of people called the Gibeonites were afraid of Joshua and the Israelites when they came to conquer the Promised Land (Joshua 9:1-3). Therefore, they deceptively lured Israel into a covenant (9:4-15). God is never in favor of deception. However, because God’s people established a covenant with these folks, God required His people to honor their side of the contract. At some point in his reign as king, Saul chose to disobey God in this matter. So we read that *in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah*, Saul killed some of the Gibeonites, and, therefore, committed the sin of not keeping the nation’s word in a covenant.

Often the greater tragedy of our sins is that they affect innocent people around us. No one’s sins effect only himself or herself. Innocent people get swept up into the consequences of sin in divorce, DUI, prison sentences, and other such painful circumstances. How often does this heartache go back to a bad choice of friends or spouse? Rizpah paid a serious price as two of her sons were executed to pay for Saul’s punishment. We read, *The king [David] took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; (2 Samuel 21:8a).*

That the king delivered Rizpah’s sons to the Gibeonites for a revenge execution is tragic. In the tragedy, Rizpah revealed her love for her sons (21:10). *Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night (2 Samuel 21:10).* How many times did this mother pine, “Why did I ever get involved with Saul?” How she was like many a mother who has grieved over her sons’ paying the consequences of sin.

The issue that is difficult for human wisdom to grasp is that Rizpah’s heart was broken in the will of God, just like Rebekah’s heart was broken while God was working out His will. Notice in this story that it was God who gave David the order for retribution. *Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after*

year. *And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death."* Retribution was required because God's people did not keep their part of the covenant. Was God unjust to expect His people to keep their word?

Sometimes, we have a hard time understanding and accepting God's justice. But put the shoe on the other foot and ask if it was right for Saul to kill people from Gibeah when the people of God promised to let them live? There was sin and there needed to be a covering for that particular sin. *And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make **atonement**, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" (2 Samuel 21:3).* The execution was the atonement.

How utterly tragic! Rizpah had no choice but to submit to the circumstances (21:8-9). She had no other recourse. That is precisely where mothers we know often find themselves when their hearts are broken. A mother cannot hit the reset button when life suddenly goes berserk. There is no such button in real life. What is done is done. How is such a mother to respond? Fatalism concludes, "Oh well, let's move on." Bitterness decides, "I'm going to get even." Depression finally thinks, "I can't cope." Or maybe anger with God lashes out at Him shouting, "Why did You let this happen?" Hang on to those thoughts for a moment. We'll try to answer the question after we consider one more mother as an example.

Mary (Luke 1:26-55; 2:25-51; John 19:26).

Mary's heart was broken while she was in ministry for God. Mary did what she did because God had chosen her to that end (Luke 1:26-37). God sent Gabriel to Mary (1:26). Gabriel explained that God was with her, meaning that God was in a special, chosen relationship with her (1:28). The angel told Mary that she was a recipient of God's grace. And the angel said to her, "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God*" (Luke 1:30). Human wisdom would conclude that this was the prelude to the perfect life. What could possibly go wrong for the person who is the object of God's choice and the recipient of God's grace?

Once she got over the initial shock of being addressed by an angel and that she was special to God, Mary was delighted to be God's servant (Luke 2:38, 46-55). She volunteered for service and submitted to God's will. *And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* *And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:38).* Her soul magnified the Lord who had chosen her and she rejoiced in God her Savior (1:46-47). She knew that all generations would call her blessed. What mother would not exchange places with such a favored woman? Surely most mothers would trade in their dull, mundane, and sometimes heartbreaking circumstances for a life like this!

Let's remember that things are not always as they appear to be. Mary, who learned that she was really special to God and the recipient of God unique grace, also learned that along with her privileged life there would be some serious trials. She discovered throughout life that the sword often pierced her heart. Simeon promised such would be the case (Luke 2:35). And so, Jesus' responses to Mary were no surprise though they had to hurt. For example, when she made it clear that she was concerned for His safety and He rebuked her. *And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress" (Luke 2:48).* *And He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).* We are not surprised that Mom and Dad didn't understand (v.50).

Another time, Mom was concerned to make Jesus her Messiah son famous. He rebuked her for trying. *When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine" (John 2:3).* *And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4).* That had to hurt.

Later when Jesus' ministry was extremely demanding, mother Mary was again concerned for His well-being and He rebuked her in her concern. The story went like this: *Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." . . . And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was*

sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you” (Mark 3: 20-21; 31-32). And how did Jesus answer Mary’s concern? *And He answered them, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around Him, he said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! Whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother”* (Mark 3:33-35).

Those responses had to be like a sword piercing Mary’s heart. But never was her heart broken more than when she looked at her son tortured and dying on the cross. Her heart was terribly broken while her Son was bringing glory to God. Mary knew that Jesus was the Christ. Gabriel made this fact very clear when he told Mary that her son was Jesus who will save His people from their sins, the Son of the Most High who will sit on the throne of David. Had not her cousin Elizabeth called Mary’s baby, “*her Lord*”? Hadn’t the shepherds related the angels’ message that this was the “*Savior, Christ the Lord*”? Had the “*king makers*” not worshiped Jesus as the promised King? Didn’t Simeon promise that this child was “*appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed . . . so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed*”? Surely she knew that her cousin’s son, John, had introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Yes, Mary had pondered these truths in her heart many times. But it is quite certain that Mary didn’t understand how her child’s death could glorify God. Okay, God’s eternal plan was to bring incomprehensible glory to Himself by offering salvation from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ! Tell that to the mother who is watching her son suffer torture and death. How did Mary think Jesus would atone for sins apart from sacrifice? Orthodox theology is wonderful truth and ought to be believed. But Jesus was still Mary’s baby. Your theory about how God gets glory is fine as long as you are not talking about my son’s suffering! Human nature struggles to put fine theories into practice when the heart aches for relief. But what can the brokenhearted mother do?

The Best Response for Heartbroken Mothers.

Understand the purpose of a broken heart. God intends for tribulation to reveal our limitations. Paul had a physical tribulation that God refused to remove. Why? Paul related that *He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me* (2 Corinthians 12:9). We really do not understand full faith, full dependance on God until God brings us to the end of ourselves. Therefore, God is kind to use children as instruments in his hands to help mothers seek Him. Hanging on for dear life and fighting tooth and toenail is not nearly as secure a condition as resting quietly in the will of God. Isaiah offers us a very important principle about turning to God when circumstances break our hearts. *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you* (Isaiah 26:3).

God intends for heartbreak to make us malleable. That might sound okay until we consider what the word malleable means. It means, “able to be hammered or pressed into shape without breaking or cracking.” That definition is put to work on us because by nature we depend on our selves. When God gets us to the point of depending on Him, He is able to teach us, shape us, mold us into His own image. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*” (Matthew 11:28-29).

God allows us to have broken hearts so that we will come to know the Healer of the broken heart. Of course that begins with salvation. To be born again is to know God. When we learn about God who is holy, just, and willing to forgive, we confess our sins that we have committed against Him. Becoming His child puts us into a relationship to know Him better. Knowing God better is a process of depending on self less and depending on God more.

To depend on God fully is to know God. That is when we discover that complete trust yields to God in every situation. The practice gives us the confidence of Paul who wrote: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are*

regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

To know God is to learn how He heals the broken heart. Like David who concluded, *Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice (Psalm 51:8). The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:17).*

Because life is infected with the sin principle, there will be disappointment. It is sad that disappointment often is an unavoidable part of motherhood, which should be blessed and honored. But none of that surprises God. That is why He offers Himself, His grace, and His love to all who have been run over by the circumstances of life. His invitation to come to Him and find rest for your souls is always current, always valid, always extended.