

MOM'S AND OTHER SERVANTS 5-14-17

More than ever, I have heard in this last year that we are a divided nation, a fragmented society. Some even speak of a second civil war going on with the battles being fought in media and politics. Maybe so. But, there are a few things we still pretty much agree on. With few exceptions we feel positive toward the American soldier. God bless our troops! This used to include police officers, but there is more division there than ever. We also feel uniformly positive about voting. The divisions over how to vote are enormous but everyone speaks positively of voting. And then there are moms. Fathers poll pretty good, but not nearly as high as moms. And there is a good reason for that. Moms, most often, are the ultimate servants. Our meditation today from God's word is on motherhood, but more particularly servanthood. We read a mother-story from Matthew's gospel 20:**20-21** *Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor. 21 "What is your request?" he asked. She replied, "In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left."* We don't know the age of James and John at this point, but we have reason to think they were full-grown men; and yet here is their mom running interference for them with Jesus. Who here would be embarrassed if your mom did something like this? Yea, but in this case, it seems that the boys were in cahoots with Mom. Maybe they put her up to this. When Jesus responded to the appeal he didn't speak to Mrs. Zebedee but to her sons. **22-23** *But Jesus answered by saying to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?" "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!" 23 Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. My Father has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen."* **24** *When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. 25 But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 26 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. 28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

For many weeks now we have focused on the servanthood of Jesus, most powerfully expressed by what He did in giving his life as a ransom. Today, we turn to a particular gospel application – that of living a servant-lifestyle, which is perfectly represented by Jesus but has been,

for most of us, also represented by the behavior of our mothers with respect to children. Although we are generally selfish beings by nature, something very wonderful remains by nature, in the mothers of most species, humans included. Now, to be sure, not all mothers exhibit a deep self-sacrificing regard for their children. Some renege. For some, even the natural impulses are blocked by godless habits of life and thought. Some mothers destroy their offspring before birth, before some of the natural bonding is able to kick in and before the law requires more of them. Other mothers ditch their maternal duties by checking out and doing as little as possible. This is far more common among men, but is not unheard of among the women. Such moms as this are usually given over to alcohol or drugs which serve to soothe the otherwise agitated conscience. I am sure some of us had mothers like this who were clearly not servants. If that is your case, and you are today a child of God, rejoice that you have a perfect father in heaven and resolve to learn from the positive example of Jesus and the negative example of your parent. And, as is appropriate for gospel lovers, we forgive and we love, for Jesus' sake.

From here I want to speak of mothers as examples of servanthood, but I think it may be good to show how sin corrupts our service, pollutes it, and diminishes the blessing of it for ourselves and others. There is a reality among fallen humans that so much of what we do for others is corrupted by motivations that are, in part or in whole, actually selfish. It's true among those who serve in church, or in the local Little League, or in the hospital. Humans often do charitable things, kind things, self-giving acts with a view toward meeting their own personal needs. Moms too.

Some mothers may be very devoted to their children, but, for them, a keen motivation involves an interest in their own reputations, their own social status. They raise their children with an eye toward being thought well of in the community or the church or the world of Facebook. Their parenting goal may be to have bright, healthy, talented or even godly children in hopes that their efforts and brilliance will win for them, not only the esteem of the children, but the esteem of those to whom they look for acceptance. We can only guess what the motivation was for the wife of Zebedee, but it appears to be something of this sort. She wanted to be the mother of not just one but two members of the president's cabinet. Caring for, teaching, disciplining her sons, sacrificing to send them to the best schools – all of that, had this end in mind – her reputation as a super mom. Did she love her boys? I expect so – but there were other motivations that entered in and corrupted that love. This kind of thing is common among helpful, giving people in all spheres of life. This is why Jesus warned in Matthew 6:**1** *Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.* This motivation of concern for our own reputation is hugely common among us

but it is something to watch out for lest it pollute our best intentions to serve and bless our children and others.

Another common but unhealthy motivation for moms and other servants is that of looking to the children to be our emotional supports in life. This tends to happen particularly when the marriage is not very healthy and when the mother is lacking in close friends. The intense closeness with a child begins to meet needs that were previously unmet. A psychological dependence develops, not from the child to the parent but from the parent to the child. This kind of thing can work for a number of years but eventually it breaks down and ends in calamity. Mom becomes too clingy, too protective. She manipulates because her inner fears of losing relationship dominate. In addition, this self-interested form of parenting keeps the mom, the servant, from finding satisfaction in her relationships with God and with her spouse where it is meant to be found. Children are a stewardship. We have them for a season with the goal of growth and release. Attachment is critical for that end, but dependence is deadly. Our children and anyone else we are called to serve must come after our devotion to God and to our spouses. That is God's order.

A third way servants, moms included, seek to serve themselves while serving others is motivated by an internal need to feel good about oneself. I want to be clear of conscience, feel like I am a good person and for many of us, when we take care of the weak or we engage in something altruistic we do feel better about ourselves. We usually get some nice feedback too. Hugs, smiles, thank-yous that affirm us. And who among us likes to be affirmed? Well that number hovers around 100%. Can I get some affirmation on that?

Well, being fallen persons, almost all of us fall into this trap to some extent. We do what we do from mixed motives. Now, a lot of good gets done out of those mixed motives. Whether I taught my kids the Bible and disciplined them diligently because I wanted to be admired as a good dad, or wanted a happy wife, or wanted them to know God – it was a good thing that I did. But where the mistaken motivations bubble up and cause trouble is in the emotional turmoil that can occur when our crooked goals are frustrated. Our kids don't make us look good. They don't stay close or support us like we had hoped. They don't say nice things to us. They may even tell us they hate us. Oh my! Hard-working servant-moms, and servant-dads, and servant church members – when we get treated like, uh, well, servants – when we don't get the rewards we had expected – Ouch! We get angry. We get depressed. We might get disillusioned and quit. Consider this. What you do is important. But, how you think about what you do is a big deal as well. Take tithing for example. If I am giving to the Lord a tenth of my income, but in my heart I think that happiness would be found

in all the things I could have purchased with that money, I won't give it cheerfully. If I think that following Dr. Doe's pathway to having healthy, holy kids will give me healthy, holy kids and it doesn't, I am set up for bitterness, not joy in the Lord.

So, where does all this take us? Simply here – gospel parenting or gospel servanthood of any kind, means that I see myself as serving the Lord by serving my kids, by serving my church. I do what I do for the Lord's sake, before an audience of One. As unto Him, from His strength, through His love, for His glory. It is about Him. Our goal as parents is to honor our God, or King, our Savior by raising our children to honor Him too. And even if they grow to not do that, is your Lord pleased? Has He been honored by you? Oh why yes. Yes He has! Speaking directly to servants, employees, Paul says this in Ephesians 6:7 *With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men.* Sometimes the people we are serving and trying to help and trying to bless don't appreciate it or don't respond positively to it. Some of you have experienced that with older parents. Some of you experience it with adolescent children. If you were doing it only for them, or only to advance your reputation or gain their support, quite possibly, you will grow resentful. Our invitation is to do it for the Lord's sake. Look at the next verse in Ephesians 6:7-8 *With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men 8 because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do.* The Lord will reward. We look for His smile, His touch, His comfort. If we get it from our children or those we serve, that is nice, but it cannot be our goal. Our hope? Sure. Our prayer? Definitely. But what we live for is the final embrace of our Master who says to His servant – *“Well done, good and faithful mother. Good and faithful father. Good and faithful Sunday School teacher. Enter into the joy of your Master.”*