

Mother's Day

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[0 : 00] your great love for us. We thank you that in your love for us, in Christ's blood which has been poured out for us, you cover over a multitude, not just of our sins, but the sins of forefathers and the sins of our mothers. We thank you for them though, and we pray, Father, that we would give them the due honour that is theirs, as you've commanded us to. So help us to take your word seriously, be reminded of it now, but to put into practice not just Mother's Day 2009 or 2010, but day by day as we live as your servants. Amen.

Carlos Teresa was a fairly typical teenager. He spent much of his time watching TV and much of his time arguing with his mum. One day Carlos had an especially large argument with his mum, and he decided that he had had enough, and so he hired a hitman to take out his mum and to make it look like a robbery. The only problem was that the hitman he hired was actually an undercover detective. It was reported that Carlos provided everything that was required for the hit. He gave the detective a map, a key to the apartment, and a picture of the intended victim with one last final instruction. Make sure nothing happens to the TV.

Now, I don't know about you, but I reckon that's a long shot from Exodus chapter 20. Honour your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God has given you. It doesn't say honour your TV. It says honour your father and your mother.

The word honour there means to esteem. It means to give way to or to glorify it. It is acknowledging significance and responding appropriately to that significance.

[2 : 01] But I reckon these words are difficult words to talk about honestly on Mother's Day. There is a sense where simple, superficial platitudes are actually easy to give on a day like today.

As soon as we start talking honestly and say what the Bible says, we start treading into areas where many of us have hurts and disappointments and frustrations and anger and guilt.

Some of us have recently lost our mothers. Some are struggling to become mothers. Some are struggling to be mothers.

Some are still struggling to forgive mothers. But it's not just a difficult message for us because maybe we've got some issues associated with motherhood. It's difficult because our society doesn't highly regard motherhood.

This is a quote from a website where a woman describes herself. She says, That particular woman is the founder of a movement which has as its logo, the picture of a baby with a circle around it and with a line through it.

[3 : 37] It's called the child free zone. And this in part explains why some mums are now describing themselves in terms of, I'm just a mum. When they're asked, what do you do?

As if somehow the activity of mothering is unimportant or minor. What is it to be a mother? Well, clearly motherhood, you know, involves procreation.

But it's not limited to having the baby any more than having a dog is limited to buying it from the pet shop. A mother is one who nurtures her children. Two examples from the Bible are 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 7.

But we were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children. And Romans 16, 13. See, the very heart of it, mothering is relational.

It's the whole work of caring and nurturing and loving and serving and helping and teaching. This goes back to the very way that God made us right at the beginning. He created us male and female and told us to be fruitful, to fill the earth, to subdue it.

[4 : 42] In other words, I don't know if you realise this, the very first command from God was to have sex. So God's pro-sex, okay? Very first command from God. Motherhood is therefore not a job.

It's not a job. At its very heart, it's part of the very nature and being and person. It's by the way that we have been made by God.

It's part of our biology or their biology. But there is another aspect of motherhood that is picked up at the beginning of the Bible. And it's the painfulness of motherhood.

The painfulness of motherhood in a sinful and fallen world. Where there is failure all around because of our rebellion against God. Because we've chosen to rule and to relate in God's world our way.

As I said last week. Genesis 3.16, God says to Eve, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing. With pain you will give birth to children. See, even coming to birth is risky and dangerous.

[5 : 47] There are so many things that can go wrong, both for the mother and the baby. I still recall vividly the day that Isabel was born. I could not describe it as the most relaxing day I've ever had in my life.

I remember driving on the way to the hospital, if that's what you call it, what I was doing at the time. And considering as Nat was crawling... Sorry, honey. As she was making all sorts of awful noises. Crawling at the roof of the car, I considered for the first time in my life that driving on the footpath was a logical option.

I arrived at the hospital noticing that there was a bit of a line-up, maybe one car, waiting to get into the car park. And thinking, I haven't got time for that.

And so I just drove straight into the disabled car parking zone with warning signs all over, do not park here. Obviously, unless you're a disabled car park, in the car park with a disabled sticker.

[6 : 52] And I drove straight in between two police cars. And parked there. And basically had to beckon the policeman out of the way so that I could park there as they were talking in front of the car.

I rushed past them. I was prepared to argue with them. No worries about that at all. I got to the reception because Natalie needed a wheelchair. I couldn't see any other way we were going to get there.

Needed a wheelchair. And the lady at the reception said that we do not give wheelchairs out terribly lightly here. Love. Which they always called me love for some reason.

And I said, listen here, lady. There's a guy there wanting a wheelchair. He's got a wheelchair. He doesn't look like he needs it. You either give me one or I'm taking his. And she obliged.

I ran with Natalie in the wheelchair down the wrong hallway of the hospital. I didn't know where I was heading but the baby was going to be born in the hospital somewhere.

[7 : 52] And after much distress and panic we arrived at the birthing unit. And the very first words that came out of the midwife was to Natalie, Is the pain too much, dear?

You're kidding me, right? The most frightening thing was though that we're in the birth unit and it was too late for painkillers for me.

And also for Nat. The only thing that was left was happy gas. And apparently Nat needed that more than I did. And she sucks back on the happy gas and she passed out.

Just like that. It dropped to the floor. The nurse was trying to get her attention. And then she said to me, Steve, would you mind pushing the emergency button, please?

And I'm like, excuse me? She said, push the emergency button. A nurse came running in. She said, I don't need you. I need a specialist. Get a specialist in here now.

[8 : 59] Specialist comes in and they start checking for vital signs. We've never had this happen before. And so I'm over there in the corner of the room going from moment of adrenaline and being ecstatic to tears welling up in my eyes saying, God, this can't be happening.

This is meant to be the most exciting moment or potentially the most exciting moment of my life. And my wife's life is at risk here. This can't be happening.

And to actually pray at that moment, your will be done. It's a hard prayer to pray. Of course, she came around with the next contraction came.

That's enough to wake anyone from the dead. Me included. You see, this whole childbearing, raring thing is fraught with pain and danger.

What pain is there in a miscarriage and stillborns? And what tragedy when a young woman dies in labour? The whole work of nurturing and raising young is so time-consuming and costly and sacrificial and tiring.

[10:07] Who is as exhausted as defeating mother after a bad night with a sick child? Who is so emotionally wrenched and tormented as the mother of wayward teenagers?

Proverbs chapter 10 verse 1 says, A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son, grief to his mother. But of course, mothers fail in this fallen world as well.

All are sinful. Some are forgetful. Some are selfish. Some are cruel. And some of us have the unpleasant memories of what mum was and how far she fell short of what was considered to be the perfect ideal.

Again, though, friends, the Bible knows it. If that's your experience, the Bible knows it. And God uses that as an illustration of the perfect faithfulness of himself to us, his people.

Isaiah 49, 15. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born? You see, God poses this question.

[11:15] You think, well, actually, that's unthinkable that a mother would forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born. Yes, it's unthinkable. Yes, it's unthinkable. Yes, it's very real.

Yes, it's true. Yes, it does happen. And God says, not me. Though she may forget, I will not forget you. I will not forget you.

Though you may have disappointments and hurts and frustrations and guilt. But I will not forget you. I will not fail to love you. I will not fail to accept you.

And so we can see why we have things called the child-free zone. Listen to some of the testimonials from their website. Having children would prevent me from doing many of the things I enjoy, such as riding and showing my horse.

If I'm already happy with my life, why should I make such a major change? I don't see any benefits that would make up for the sacrifices that I would have to make. Or again, I know that child-rearing done well is a selfless activity, allowing no time for the mother's personal needs.

[12:21] I'm not willing to give up the time I have as a single person. I see it as a huge restriction. Or again, I was initially a clinical psychologist, then decided to study medicine at age 30, completing my degree at 36, then undertaking my residential medical officer years.

This would not have been possible if I'd had a child. And so in the face of a growing tide in our society, away from motherhood and downplaying that which God has put into place, what does it mean for Christians to take God's word seriously?

When we turn to the New Testament, there's quite a number of places where the fifth commandment is actually reflected on. And I want to mention just three tonight.

The first is Ephesians 6, which David read out for us. Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and your mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. The first thing to note is that Paul makes it clear that Christians are people who are to be known as people who honor their fathers and mothers.

[13:39] When they tell us to pick up our clothes, to do our homework, to set the table, God is expecting that we will do those things if we're children.

God is expecting us that we will do those things. There are, however, other ways of, or sorry, a number of ways of obeying. You see, you can either do it willingly or you can do it grudgingly. If your mum asks you to set the table for dinner, you can happily obey, you can willingly obey and make it clear that you are obeying. Or you can make it clear that while on the outside you're obeying, on the inside you're not.

And so you stomp out of the kitchen and you pull the drawer out to grab the cutlery and hopefully you pull the whole drawer out so that it goes on the floor. Slam things down on the bench. Do you really actually think that's honoring your father and your mother at that point?

I think the command expects here that as children that we would obey our parents and that we would do it cheerfully and willingly. The second thing to note, though, about those verses is that Paul emphasizes the mutual nature of our relationship.

[14:49] Paul doesn't just say to children, obey your parents. He also says, fathers, do not exasperate your children. And if we're parents, if there's parents here, you need to hear this. You need to hear this.

If you want your children to honor you, then you need to act honorably towards them. It's sad but true that some parents do not act honorably towards their kids. Instead of loving them and caring for them and nurturing them, they criticize them, they bully them, they harass them, they harang them. And instead of growing up with a healthy self-image and a positive example of the fatherhood of God, what they end up with is what we call issues. Issues that leave deep emotional furrows and scars in their life which they may never fully recover from.

And I spoke to an elderly woman this morning about those issues. Mum has long, long, long gone. But the emotional scars and furrows are still there.

[15:59] And that is a deep tragedy. A deep tragedy. And so mums and dads, see that you don't exasperate your children. Don't emotionally manipulate them or starve them.

Recognise instead the precious privilege that is yours to shape and mould that life in a positive and godly way. What they need, young people need in their parents and grandparents, and frankly can I say that all the adults of this church is what they need is what is termed nowadays as an adult guarantor.

They need adults who love them before there's any good reason to do so. In the way that God has loved us. When there's every good reason for him not to.

The second passage that I want to look at is Luke chapter 9 verses 57 to 62.

One looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. They're fairly shocking verses really when you think about it. The requests that these people make of Jesus seem to be fairly reasonable sort of requests.

[17:34] I mean, you know, come on. I mean, I'll follow you but let me go and bury my dad. Or let me go and say goodbye to the family and pack my bags. What's so wrong with that? Well, the point that Jesus is trying to make is quite simply this.

It's a really simple point. The fifth commandment is the fifth commandment, not the first. That's the point. It's the fifth commandment, not the first commandment. That is, you shall love, you shall have no other gods before me.

Jesus is saying to these men and he's saying to us that if you want to follow me, then you need to set your priorities straight. Above everything else, I am your God.

And you serve and you honour me first. We are not to have any other gods. And friends, one of the gods that I think that we have these days is the God of family.

Where we can consistently submit to the whims and wishes of our family's desires over our lives.

And they force us to go this way and that way and all sorts of things because we want to keep them happy.

[18:47] Jesus says, you've got to put me first. The third passage I want to look at is Mark chapter 7, verse 6. These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Jesus is talking about the Pharisees here.

They worship me in vain, but their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and holding on to the traditions of men. And he said to them, you have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions.

For Moses said, honour your father and your mother and anyone who curses his father and mother must be put to death. But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, whatever help you might have otherwise received for me as Corbin, that is as a gift from God, then you no longer let him do anything for his father and mother.

Thus you nullify the word of God by your traditions that have been handed down and you do many such things as these. You see, what the Pharisees were doing is something like this. They were saying, okay, you know, like I owe my mum and dad, you know, honour.

But in order to please and honour God above my mum and dad, what I've got to do is I've got to take what I owe mum and dad and I give it to God instead and I don't give mum and dad anything.

[19:58] And Jesus says, in effect, Steve Jeffrey paraphrase, hey dudes, sounds great in theory, but you're a bunch of hypocrites. You're a bunch of hypocrites, you're not fooling anyone.

The way that you please God is not to try and weasel out of the commandments and pick and choose which ones you obey and which ones you don't obey. The way you honour God is to actually obey them all.

He says, honour your father and mother. So honour them. Fulfill your obligations. The way that we do that will vary with our ages and circumstances.

When we're young, as I said, if you're young, you know, you need to obey mum and dad, you need to obey your parents. When we get a bit older, I think that it means that we ought to respect our parents, speak politely and truthfully about them.

All parents, in one way or another, make sacrifices for their children and they deserve our respect, the respect that God says that they ought to receive from us. And this is a hard one.

[21 : 00] Let me say that from a personal experience, that both Mother's Day and Father's Day are very difficult days for me. When I became a Christian, my family rejected me.

My whole extended family rejected me. I've had no relation with my mother or my father for the last 16 years. For the last 16 years.

Although I want to say, by the grace of God, there has been little glimmers of hope just recently. Just recently. God is a good God. He can restore all things. What does it mean for me to honour my father and mother who don't want to be honoured by me?

What does that mean? Does it mean that, well, they're my parents, they've chosen, they don't want me to honour them, so okay, fifth commandment, tick the box, done that one. How do I take the fifth commandment seriously at this point?

It's the word of God to me. There's no escape clauses here on this one. At the very least, as I've wrestled with this passage for 16 years and really wrestled with this passage for 16 years, at the very least, it means that I speak truthfully about them, that I don't make the scenario and situation that I'm currently in with them any bigger than it is, to paint a picture of them any darker than what it is, to not make all the history that I have with them a bad and difficult history, than to see the positive stuff as positive and the bad stuff as bad stuff, but to still, to speak with them in an honourable way as my parents.

[22 : 41] When we get a bit later in life and our parents become aged, we ought to respect them for, by looking after them and taking an interest in them at least. That may mean that we invite them to come and live with them in our homes, though it won't necessarily mean that.

Not everyone's circumstances will actually allow that. And it's very convenient that I actually have a nursing home just across the road from me. Not everyone's circumstances will allow it.

But friends, I want to say that in our selfish culture, we need to at least be flagging it. As Christians, what does it mean to me to be sacrificial at this point? At the very least, it will mean that we will take care of their needs and have an interest in them, that they're making sure that they are being looked after and catered for and well catered for.

No matter what stage of life we're at, we ought to honour our father and our mother as the opportunity is there to do so. We need to take these words from God seriously. For some of us, therefore, this Mother's Day, mother is but a distant memory for us.

For others, honouring her is shown in obedience, bringing her honour in the way that we live or caring for her. For some of us, the scars are deep, the furrows are still there in our lives.

[24 : 04] But as I prayed and as I've said, God can cover over a multitude of sins. God will never fail us or leave us or reject us.

Even when those who are closest to us in this world have done so. And I want to say for us as a church, we need to set an agenda. For us here in church in Australia, to actually stand up for mothers.

Getting rid of the, I'm just a mother put down. And actually reclaiming the wonder and the dignity and the value that God places on motherhood.

Amen.