‘The closest thing to God's love is a Mother's love.’

9.30a.m. Sunday 14 May, 2017 (Mother’s Day)

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Introduction:
We’ve been looking at the book of Hebrews for a few weeks now, but today I want to put that on hold while we honour Mothers. Next week we will continue in Chapter 9 in the Book of Hebrews.

My message today is titled ‘The closest thing to God’s love is a Mother’s love’.

Let’s pray …

Gracious God & our Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your amazing love through Jesus and displayed so remarkably through Mothers, Grandmothers, Aunties and those who love and nurture us. May your love touch our hearts as we open your Word today. Reveal to us the truth of your son Jesus this morning.

We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen

The closest love to God's love is to witness the love of a good mother. We know from the mistakes of the past or things that have gone wrong even in our own families at times, or from the TV News reports that sadly this is not always the case, but it is the best model we have to follow. It’s a model given to us from God.
What makes a good Mother?

Here is a question for you, what exactly are mothers, or should I say, what makes a good mother?

[Ask some of the children ‘What makes a good Mother’?]

Well good mothers can be teachers or disciplinarians, but they can also be nurses and doctors and psychologists and counsellors.

And good mothers are also developers of personalities, and shapers of attitudes; ... and yet mothers can have soft voices that can say, "I love you", with an affection that is a direct link to God himself.

I remember my Mother many times giving up most of her meal so that us children could have more on our plates. I remember my Mum teaching us songs about God. I remember my Mum (& my Dad) teaching us the Bible. I remember my Mum’s cooking and her dedication to the task of being a Mum.

Good mothers are all of these things, and more.

The Bible has so many examples of good mothers – here's just a few:

**Hannah (1 Samuel 1)** - Hannah was a woman of prayer and she would run to God in prayer. Hannah kept her vow to God, and Samuel, her son, became God’s preacher in Israel.

**Mary – the Mother of our Lord Jesus.** She carried the Son of God. Had to convince people that she was a virgin – that must’ve been so hard for a young girl in the society she lived. She, along with Joseph, raised Jesus, loved Him and taught him the Scriptures. She also watched his Son’s ministry blossom and saw many come to know God. But she also saw her innocent son accused falsely & hung on a cross. You might think that would’ve crushed her, and those who have seen the Movie ‘The Passion of the Christ’ saw her anguish portrayed. But God had a plan for this good mother. She also saw her Son, our Saviour & hers, resurrected.

Mary Was Committed to God’s Will (Luke 1:38). She was called to give birth to the divine Christ child (Her Saviour). Mary was calmed when she understood that this was God’s plan (The Gospel plan). She submitted to God’s will for providing a Saviour.
Mothers Day - the closest thing to God’s love is the love of a Mother

Eunice (II Timothy 1:5) who displayed unmoving faith - We do not see her husband named in the scriptural account, but Eunice still trained Timothy spiritually (her husband was Greek). We see how Eunice had a godly mother named Lois, and how her mother influenced her life and then her son, Timothy’s life for good. The Scriptures refer to Timothy as if he was instilled with spiritual truth in his childhood.

There are so many more examples in the Bible of Mothers who stood steadfast in their faith in God, showing God’s love in tough circumstances, displaying courage and teaching the Lord’s ways to their children.

There is a very famous American columnist and author called Erma Bombeck, who focused on suburban home life, and she said "that on the day God created mothers, he put in a lot of overtime, so much so that an angel said to Him, "Lord, you are spending a lot of time on this one."

But the Lord turned round and said, "Have you read the specification on this model? ... She is to have a kiss that will heal everything from a broken leg to a broken heart. ... She is to be able to function on coffee and tea and leftovers; and she is supposed to have six pairs of hands."

"Six pairs of hands, that is impossible", said the angel, "Yes, but it is not the six pairs of hands that bothers me", said the Lord, "It is the three pairs of eyes. ... She is supposed to have one pair of eyes that sees through closed doors so that whenever she says, 'What are you kids doing in there?', ... she already knows what they're doing in there".

"She also has to have another pair eyes in the back of her head to see all the things that she is not supposed to see, ... but must see. ... And then she has one pair of eyes right in front that can look at a child that just messed up, and communicate love and understanding without saying a word".

"But that's too much." said the angel, "You can't put that much in one model. Why do you not rest for a while and resume your creating tomorrow?"

"No, I can't," said the Lord. "I am nearly finished, as I have created someone like myself. ... I have created a model who can heal herself when she is sick, ... and feed a family of six with one pound of mince, ... and who can persuade a nine year old to take a bath."
Then the angel looked at the model of motherhood a little more closely and said, "She is too soft"!

"Oh, but she is tough," said the Lord, "and you will be surprised at how much this mother can do".

"Can she think?" asked the angel. "Oh yes, she can she think," said the Lord, ... "and she can also reason and compromise and persuade". ... Then the angel reached over and touched her cheek. "But this one has a leak", he said, "I told you that you couldn’t put that much into one model".

"That is not a leak", said the Lord, "that’s a tear".

"What’s a tear for?" asked the angel. "Well a tear is for joy, ... it is for sadness, ... it is for sorrow, for disappointment and for pride." "You’re a genius," said the angel.

And this brings us to our Gospel reading this morning and with all this in mind, maybe we will be able to understand Mrs. Zebedee, (assuming she was married), the mother of James & John a little better.

**Let’s read Matthew 20:20-28. It is titled, “A Mother’s request”**

Note that Mrs. Zebedee here, was aware of the teachings of Jesus, and about the kingdom. She was also very aware of the fact that her sons, James & John, were close to Jesus; in fact they were two-thirds of the inner circle of Peter, James, & John; so you can understand her thinking, because the Lord was about to form His kingdom, and she was making sure her sons had pride of place, positions of authority. Any Mother would probably have asked the same thing.

However, in the first part of this very chapter (Matthew 20), Jesus told a story that must have disturbed her; a story about a landowner who went out to hire labourers early in the morning, agreeing upon giving them a fair day's wage for a fair days work. Then at noon this landowner went out and hired more labourers, and they started work also. Then towards the evening the landowner went out and hired even more labourers and they started work also: yet when the Lord paid them off at the end of the day, they all received the same wage.
That must have caused Mrs. Zebedee to wonder "whether her sons would have positions of authority in the Lord’s new kingdom?" So you see, when the opportunity presented itself to her, she did not waste a second, she came right out with it, and sort of demanded that her sons be in authority beside Jesus.

And so we might very well criticize Mrs. Zebedee for her presumptuousness, however today is Mother’s Day, and we will show her a wee bit of grace, and look at some of the positive things about Mrs. Zebedee. You may have noticed that although Jesus did not grant her request, he did not deny it either. He simply reminded her of the fact that the cost of being seated on the right or left hand of Jesus would entail suffering ... and that the order of authority was determined by God the Father himself, and no one else.

There are 3 things I want to share about this Mother’s special request from our passage today:

1. **She asked that her sons be part of the kingdom.**
You might have read this passage heaps of times, and you might have formed a perspective about Mrs. Zebedee. Perhaps you might’ve thought that she was a bit brash or rude in her request. But I think there is more to this passage than meets the eye. I think it’s one of the greatest things a Mother could think or pray or ask – that her sons be part of God’s kingdom & God’s work. What do you think?

Anyway, the good things about Mrs. Zebedee. Well the first thing we see is her coming to the Lord kneeling, asking him humbly, that her sons might be a part of His almighty Kingdom. We can get the wrong idea here. We can quickly assume that she was just interested in her sons getting the best deal with Jesus and His kingdom.

But when you think about this, you must conclude with me that there is no task more important than to seek and ensure that our children be part of the Kingdom of God. Yes? That’s the one thing I want for my children and my grandchildren. I want to see them worshipping & serving the Lord in their Church and in their community and in their jobs and in their everyday life. I think that’s what God expects we should be praying. Here we have a Mother who steps up to her role and asks the Lord directly for something important (the most important thing) for her sons.

Being a parent is not easy I know: sometimes it is filled with joy but sometimes with sadness. Sometimes our children make us so proud ... and at other times you cannot find enough handkerchiefs to dry our tears. And what good is it if our children are successful in making money, driving fine cars, have a wonderful house & property and living well with good friends and neighbours, if they do not know God, and his love & wisdom in their lives? Seems all in vain doesn’t it?
What does it matter if they gain the whole world, but lose their souls? Yes, it is not easy, in fact it is difficult, but Mrs. Zebedee gives us a valuable example here, for she prayed earnestly that her sons would be a part of His kingdom and we need that same concern for our children, that they be saved from eternal damnation, and become children of the light, children of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, not only did this Mother humbly ask that her sons be a part of the kingdom, but we also see that ...

2. She asked for her sons to work in the Kingdom.
Secondly, not only did Mrs. Zebedee pray that her children would be a part of His kingdom, but she asked Jesus, (or you could say she prayed), that they would be actively involved in the work of His kingdom. But when you think about it, where does the spirit of this service begin? It begins at home, with mothers & fathers setting the examples and praying to the Lord that their sons and daughters might be involved in the work of the kingdom.

I wonder how many of us pray asking the Lord that our children might have a great career or a great marriage or a happy life. But here we have a greater example. Mrs. Zebedee asked that her sons be part of this kingdom and we need to follow in her footsteps, and encourage our children also.

Yes this is easy for me to say, but this is the standard we are to aim for. Ask the Lord that our children might work for the Lord, be involved in the work of the kingdom. What greater calling? My Mother tells me that I used to tell her from a 3yo that all I wanted to be was a minister. I know that must’ve pleased her heart to know that her son wanted to serve the Lord. We need to encourage these things and pray for them in the lives of our children.

Serving the Lord – next week in Chapter 9 of Hebrews I want to touch more on this topic. I believe we can only serve if we worship. Only when we worship the Lord, does service in the kingdom come spontaneously. Without worship, we don't have authentic service. I wonder if we are teaching our children how to worship at home? I love hearing stories of how Mums sing about God to their children. I sat last night with a Mum in Toowoomba hospital with her sick adult child, and she sang “Jesus love me this I know” to her as she watched her child suffering. The tears streamed down my face as I joined in singing. It brought this message – that the closest thing to God’s love is the love of a Mother – so much closer to my heart.

So, not only did this Mother humbly ask that her sons be a part of the kingdom, and also work in the kingdom, but we also see that ...
3. SHE HAD BIG EXPECTATIONS
Thirdly, Mrs. Zebedee had big expectations, and I like that. She was a Mother with big godly expectations. She didn’t just ask that her children be in the kingdom doing any old task, she wanted them to be on the right hand and left hand of Jesus himself. Big call! When in any kingdom, there are no higher positions than those on the right and left of the King himself, and that is what she wanted for her sons.

Yes we consider Mrs. Zebedee as brash and presumptuous, but we admire her boldness as too often (even as parents) we settle for mediocrity. We just want them to be happy! “I’ve done my parenting, now it’s up to them.”

It is therefore time that we too take our positions in the kingdom, in our outreach of the church, mobilizing it to make sure that the Gospel is communicated throughout the world as the Lord calls us to be His disciples, and be effective labourers in His kingdom. God needs people to be someone like himself, as I quoted at the start of this sermon.

Mums, I think it is fine to have big expectations for your children as they relate to the work of the Kingdom. To kneel before the Lord with your requests for your children – the next generation.

I suppose that is why today is very special, because we recognize that the love of a good mother is probably the closest example we have to God’s love.

It’s a great thing to say – it’s the type of thing that mothers like to hear, which can sometimes get you into trouble. But if you think about it, can you honestly give me another example of God’s great love here on this earth? It’s hard, and there are others, but God’s love is a love that goes through the valley of the shadow of death, to bring life into being, then it is a love that sacrifices itself over and over again, even daring to lay down its life for its own offspring.

We see God’s love daily through the example of our Mothers.

**CONCLUSION:**

I am going to finish with a true story of such love, from the holocaust of the Second World War that took the lives of millions of people, and in particular, a man called Solomon Rosenberg & his family.
Solomon Rosenberg and his wife and their two sons, and his mother and father were arrested and placed in a Nazi concentration camp. It was a labour camp, and the rules were simple. "As long as you can do your work, you are permitted to live. When you become too weak to do your work, then you will be eliminated."

As they were old, Rosenberg soon watched his mother and father being marched off to their deaths, and he knew then that the next would be their youngest son David, because David had always been a frail child.

Every evening Rosenberg came back into the barracks after his hours of labour and searched for his family, and when he found them they would huddle together and thank God for another day of life.

One day Rosenberg came back and didn’t see those familiar faces, but he discovered his oldest son Joshua, in a corner crying. He said, "Josh, tell me it’s not true", but Joshua turned and said, "It is true, David was not strong enough to do his work, so they came for him and marched him away".

"But where is your mother?" asked Mr. Rosenberg. "Oh" he said, "when they came for David, he was afraid and he cried, so Mummy said, “There is nothing to be afraid of David” and she took his tiny hand and they marched off together.

That is motherhood, Mothers and this is your day, may God bless you in it.

So Mothers ... we pause to honour your commitment & sacrificial love today and to give thanks to God for His special example of love to us through you.

May God’s blessing be upon not only our Mothers here today, but upon all Mothers around the world.

Let’s pray.

Father, we thank you for Jesus, we thank you that he gave his life for us, to hold our tiny hands, to show us the way, and be with us on the journey of life.

Father I pray that when we walk through that valley of the shadow of death, which we will, we will feel your presence and we will recognize your hand reaching out to us, saying, "there is nothing to be afraid of, I am with you”.

Father we pray for mothers everywhere today, that they may know your love, and pass that love onto others. We recognize & honour the love that you have designed.
for Mothers. We are all recipients of your great love through Mothers. We pray too God for those mothers who do not know your love, we pray that in some way you will reveal yourself to them, so that your love may shine out to all around them.

Finally Father we pray also for ourselves, that we appreciate your love through our mothers; that we be an inspiration for others to follow. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.

What vision do you for your children? From this great account in Matthew’s Gospel we see a Mother’s vision for her children – that Jesus would be their vision.

**Closing Song ~ Be Thou my vision**
Matthew 20:20-28  (New International Version)

A Mother’s Request

20 Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him.

21 “What is it you want?” he asked.

She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

22 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

“We can,” they answered.

23 Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”