



Today is Mother's Day and I'm going to speak to you about mothers. We've been studying Revelation but the only mention of mothers in Revelation is Babylon, "mother of harlots." So we're going to take a break from Revelation! But I've learned over the years that some of you may dread coming to church on this day. You'd just as soon do eight loads of laundry or get a root canal than listen to a Mother's Day sermon! One group says, "What does he know about being a mother? He's a guy!" Another group says, "I'm tired of getting hammered on Mother's Day with impossible expectations. I'm not perfect. I'm just trying to get through the day!" A third group says, "Mother's Day is hard for me. It's painful. All I feel is loss." Perhaps you're a woman without children or without a mom.

Jenell Paris offers a helpful reminder, "A quick look at our culture shows that idealized images of motherhood are inaccurate, and Scripture reveals the same. Ruth was left childless and widowed at a young age. Rachel, Hannah, and Sarah were infertile. Eve and Mary lost sons under terrible circumstances. Two mothers of two kings, both named Ahaziah, encouraged their sons to be wicked and unjust... Scripture tells stories like those in our churches: women in diverse life circumstances, sometimes thriving, sometimes coping, and sometimes going under. The fairy tale of marriage and motherhood is just that—a fairy tale. Our culture is one of motherhood deferred due to later child-bearing, motherhood disrupted by divorce, motherhood lost by infant/child death and miscarriage, and motherhood unachieved due to infertility and undesired singleness. Of course, our culture also includes wonderful families with strong marriages and happy children. The point is that there is not a one-size-fits-all journey of womanhood, and we hurt women in our churches by venerating one path over all others."

I think she's right. So to start this morning I want to say, "Relax! I don't want to add to the pressure or pain that you might feel today. What I want to do is encourage you from the Bible about the impact you can make on the next generation. It may be your children, if you're a mom. But it could also be grandchildren, nieces, nephews, students, or just kids in your neighborhood. This is a message not only for moms, but for dads, teachers, coaches, aunts, uncles and next-door neighbors of children. Men, you don't have the morning off! I want to share with **all** of you a lesson that wise moms and other influential people can teach the next generation.

Our text for today is Proverbs 31. Many of you recognize this passage as the one that talks about the qualities of an *"excellent wife."* That passage starts in v.10. But I don't want to talk about the excellent wife. I want to talk about the "other woman" of Proverbs 31. She is often ignored because she stands in the shadow of the woman in verses 10–31 who gets all the press. But this woman has something important to say as well.

"The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him:

What, O my son?

And what, O son of my womb?

And what, O son of my vows?

Do not give your strength to women,

Or your ways to that which destroys kings.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel,

It is not for kings to drink wine,

Or for rulers to desire strong drink,

For they will drink and forget what is decreed,

And pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Give strong drink to him who is perishing,

And wine to him whose life is bitter.

Let him drink and forget his poverty

And remember his trouble no more.

Open your mouth for the mute,

For the rights of all the unfortunate.

Open your mouth, judge righteously,

And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy" (Proverbs 31:1–9).

A mom has a unique ability to influence her children

According to v.1 this lady is a mom. She's actually a queen whose son becomes a king. Scholars really don't know who King Lemuel was. There is no record of a King Lemuel of Israel so he and his mom very well might have been from another nation. Whoever he was, he wants to share with us some of the things he learned from his mom.

The word "oracle" means "burden" or something heavy, weighty. That's why she speaks to him with a kind of urgency. In v.2 she says three times *"What, O my son?"* It's like she's trying to get his attention, "Listen to me. What are you doing?" Nothing has changed, right? And then just to drive the nail in a little deeper she reminds him of what he means to her. She calls him *"the son of my womb."* It's like, no one loves you like I do. Then she calls

him *"son of my vows."* She's talking about a vow made to God in prayer. I can't help but think of another mom named Hannah who struggled with infertility for many years. She came to God and said, *"O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life..."* (1 Sam. 1:11). Hannah made a vow to offer her son Samuel to the Lord. He was the *"son of her vows."* Perhaps something similar happened with Lemuel's mother. His name means "belonging to God." Whoever this queen mother was, she'd prayed for her son; she gave him over to God.

Moms know what it is to have a heavy burden to see their kids walk with God. Moms have a unique ability to influence their sons and daughters not only through their words but through their prayers; their vows. And God hears those prayers; he answers them.

A mom will teach her children not to use their power to serve self

Don't give your strength to women

But this Proverbs 31 mother had something to say as well. At first her advice looks very predictable. She tells him what **not** to do. She warns him of two traps he might fall into. The first has to do with women. She says, *"Do not give your strength to women, or your ways to that which destroys kings."* One of her concerns is that Lemuel will build a large harem like kings were prone to do back then. Two of Israel's greatest kings fell prey to this very sin and paid for it dearly. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and spent the rest of his life cleaning up the mess. Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. The Bible says *"his wives turned his heart away" from the Lord (1 Kings 11:3-4)*. This wise mom understood these things and warned her son that this could destroy him.

Shaun Alexander was an All-Pro running back in the NFL. In college, he was a magnet for all kinds of women. But his mother had taught him to treat women with respect and that sex was meant only for marriage. He knew where to draw the line and how easily he could fall. One time he almost did. In the first year of college he went home for a visit. One night he was alone with a girl in his room while his mom was gone. They were kissing. He was tempted to have sex with her and she egged him on. But something in him kept whispering, This isn't right.

Just then the phone rang. It was his mother, and she asked, "Is everything good, Shaun?"

"Uh...yeah, Mom," he said. "It's good."

"What's going on?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing. My girlfriend is here and we're going to go out to eat and probably go to a movie."

"Okay, that's fine," his mom said. "I'm going to stay with your grandma, so I'll call you tomorrow."

As he hung up, thoughts raced through his mind. What am I doing here? Something isn't right about this. This is so easy and nobody else will know. But I'll know, and God will know. He writes, "It was more than wrestling with my thoughts. I was in a full-out fight. I had to decide who my body would serve. My thoughts were racing. Mainly I was thinking, am I one of those rotten guys who says he loves Jesus but folds when it's easy or when he won't get caught?"

He turned to his girlfriend and said, "We can't do this."

"Why not?" she asked.

"We're not supposed to."

"What does that mean?" She asked.

He then jumped up and said. "It means we're going out."

He hurried her out to the car, and they drove to the mall. He writes, "That was the closest I ever got to having sex before marriage. Mom's phone call had kept me from making a big mistake. Many times I've been grateful to my mother for calling exactly when she did." Mothers do have amazing timing, don't they?

Do not impair your faculties through alcohol

The second thing she tells him not to do has to do with the abuse of alcohol. In v.4 she mentions wine and something else called *"strong drink"* which was more like beer. In the Bible, wine can be a source of joy. Psalm 104:14-15 says God *"causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine which makes man's heart glad, so that he may make his face glisten with oil..."* The Bible doesn't forbid the use of alcohol but it does warn about its misuse. Proverbs 20:1 says, *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise."*

No doubt in the back of this mom's mind is the fact that as king he'll have plenty of opportunity to drink. The cocktail parties will be endless. He'll also be tempted to use it as a way to cope with all the pressures of the job. As king he would have plenty of excuses. But she warns him that overdrinking will impair his abilities to rule well. Verse 5 says overdrinking will cause him to forget what is decreed. The Bible is full of examples of how alcohol impairs our judgment. The story of Esther is told against the backdrop of an alcoholic king named Ahasuerus. And then there was Elah, king of Israel, who was drunk when one of his officials assassinated him.

To drive home her point against the abuse of alcohol, she says in verses 6-7: *"Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter; let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more."* She's not recommending

that all poor people ought to spend more time getting drunk. She's saying: "There are those whose life circumstances are such that a little alcohol can be a helpful remedy." Remember that in those days this was about the only form of anesthesia available for those in physical or emotional pain.

So that's what she tells him **not** to do. Her advice actually looks fairly predictable: Don't chase women, and don't drink beer! Moms, you can relate to that, right? But if you think that's what this lesson is about, you're wrong. The question that's being answered is, "How will you use your power when life presents you with great opportunities? What will you do with success?" Our kids or nephews or nieces or students won't be kings or queens. But they might become doctors, teachers, senators, coaches or heads of corporations. They might get a college scholarship. They might make more money than you make. But how will they use the power and privilege that comes with these opportunities?

A mom will teach her children to use power to serve others in need

What this mom says is, "Don't use your power and privilege to serve yourself, use it serve others who are in need." In v.5 she said alcohol will cause you to *"pervert the rights of the afflicted."* In verses 8-9 he says, "Speak up for those who can't speak for themselves. Use your position and influence to defend the rights of the afflicted and needy." Throughout Israel's history, this was the responsibility of kings and those in power; to look out for those who couldn't look out for themselves.

In 2 Samuel 9 King David of Israel provides us with an excellent example of this. He's at the peak of his political success. Saul is gone and he's overcome all rivals. But one of the first things he does is ask, *"Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathon's sake?" (2 Sam. 9:1).* David learned Saul had a grandson who was still alive. His name was Mephibosheth. Crippled years earlier, Mephibosheth had been living out his tragic fate in quiet obscurity in a town called Lo-debar. David sends for him and brings him to Jerusalem where he provides for him. He restored to him all of the land that had belonged to his family. He honored him by giving him an open invitation to sit at his own table.

That's what King Lemuel's mom is trying to get across to her son: don't use your power and privilege to serve yourself, use it to serve others in need. There are all kinds of opportunities to teach the next generation this principle. You can talk about this when you sit down for dinner, when you put your child to bed, and when you're driving them to soccer practice. As a mom you can remind your kids to look out for the welfare of the kids who are despised or ignored by others. You can say to them as they head off to school, "Be kind to that boy that everyone else is picking on. Reach out to that girl who is laughed at because she doesn't have the right clothes."

The most powerful way we teach this lesson is through example. I think of parents in this church who have taken their kids on mission trips to serve the poor and needy. Most of those kids will tell you that's the best vacation they ever had. I think of Lillian Carter, mother of former president Jimmy Carter. Lillian was a nurse. She taught him compassion for the poor and marginalized. In Plains, Georgia, racial segregation was the rule of the day. But Lillian fought it. She nursed their black neighbors even when they had no money. It's no wonder that Jimmy Carter has championed the cause of Habitat for Humanity for many years.

Jesus was the kind of king Lemuel's mother wanted him to be

When I read the words of King Lemuel's mom, I think about the greatest king who ever lived; a king who used his power to serve others rather than himself. At the beginning of his ministry—his reign as king—he stood in a synagogue in his hometown and read words from Isaiah the prophet which he applied to himself. He said, *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* King Jesus was the kind of man Lemuel's mother wanted him to be. In fact, Jesus calls all who call him their king to live as he lived. Once, while at a dinner banquet, he said to his host, *"When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed" (Lk 14:13).* It's no surprise that one of his followers wrote, *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (Jms 1:27).*

But how can we teach our kids to do this, and how can we actually do it when we're so selfish, so enamored with the idea of using our strength to satisfy ourselves? It's through the power of the gospel! Scripture says, *"we love because he first loved us."* He saw us in our spiritual need. We were helpless but he reached out to us and even gave his life for us so we could know forgiveness and eternal life. When we have that love in our hearts, the love that reached out to us when we couldn't help ourselves, we will want to do the same for others.

Conclusion

Have you ever wondered when Americans started celebrating Mother's Day? The holiday was born out of one woman's desire to honor her mother's life of sacrifice. Born in 1864 in Grafton, West Virginia, Anna Jarvis witnessed the aftermath of the Civil War through a child's eyes. Her mother, Anna Maria, had spent the war organizing women to nurse wounded soldiers from both the North and South. After the war, Anna Maria started "Mothers' Friendship Days" to reconcile families that had been divided by the conflict. Throughout her life, Anna Maria modeled

the ideals of motherhood. She gave up her dreams of college to tend to an older husband and four children. She bore the loss of seven other children with grace. She taught Sunday school for 20 years and stayed active in benevolent work. Anna Maria's death in 1905 devastated her daughter. Two years later, her daughter got the idea to found a holiday remembering her mother, and all mothers, whom she felt could never be thanked enough. Mother's Day was first celebrated in 1908 in Grafton (where Anna grew up) and Philadelphia (where she lived as an adult). Later, in a resolution passed May 8, 1914, the U.S. Congress officially established the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day.

I think Mother's Day is a good idea. It's a good time to remember the sacrifices that moms make every day of the year. But it's also a good day for moms and all those who have the opportunity to influence others to recall that you don't have to be perfect. You don't have to be super moms to your kids. Just teach them what really matters. Point them to Jesus, the one who was rich, yet for our sake became poor. Then teach them to follow Jesus' example, to use their strength and power not to serve themselves but to serve people in need.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1347FC