

### **A WONDERFUL MOTHER-IN-LAW**

The Bible mentions lots of mothers. All kinds of mothers. But here in our text God's Word also mentions a mother-in-law. And why not! The Bible speaks about human relationships of all kinds. It does so from a perspective of human lives needing the saving touch of God. God is able to restore human relationships so that people can love and respect one another and when that happens then God is glorified.

Let's mention a few of these situations where mothers either served God and were a blessing to His church and kingdom, or where they lived only for themselves and did nothing for God's work in His church and in the world.

Eve was the first mother to witness children in the family go their different ways. Cain, after he murdered Abel, left home and the Lord. But Adam and Eve were comforted with the birth of Seth and him being the beginning of a line of believers reaching all the way to Christ. Thousands of mothers and their children would have died in the Great Flood because they and their families were evil and paid no attention to the preaching of Noah. Sarah had to wait many years before she finally became a mother and struggled with doubt while she waited for the Lord to fulfil His promise to her of a child.

Lot's wife was not too concerned about the character of the young men from Sodom with whom her two daughters were associating. When her family fled that place of sin she could not resist the temptation to look back to what she was leaving and became a pillar of salt. But Rebecca was a different mother. She was very much concerned about Esau because of the pagan girls he was going out with. She knew that these girls were not going to help him at all in serving the Lord God. So keen was Rebecca to have the Lord bless Jacob that she resorted to sinful scheming to bring that about.

And what a deep love do we see in Jochebed the mother of Moses, risking her own life in order to protect him from Pharaoh's murderous soldiers. But then you have the worthless mother of Micah who is mentioned in the book of Judges. He built himself a shrine, placed idols in it, appointed his own son as priest and then claimed with all that pagan, self-made religion that the Lord was blessing him. It all started when his mother approved of what her son was doing and supported him with her money. We don't know the name of Samson's mother but she was overjoyed when the angel of the Lord came to tell her that she would conceive and have a son. Yet this mother too had her worries when her strong son allowed himself to be seduced by the worldly girls from the Philistines.

And there is Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who was teased because she wasn't conceiving, and then after pouring out her heart to God, was blessed with the birth of Samuel. She then willingly gave him up to the Lord, whilst he was still a young boy, for full-time service in the temple. Hannah was so keen to have a child and yet so willing to let him go to serve the Lord and His people Israel. There was even the unmarried mother who went to King Solomon for justice after her child was claimed by another unmarried mother who had accidentally killed her own child. Athaliah was probably the worst mother in Old Testament Israel because she encouraged her son in wrong doing while he was king. And when the Lord in His justice killed her son she then proceeded to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah. Only the godly Joash survived this massacre.

And we must mention, of course, Mary the mother of Jesus. She was especially blessed because the Lord chose her to bring the Saviour into the world. When the angel told her that she, a virgin, was going to conceive without the help of a man, she was confused but believingly said, "*I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.*" Sometimes mothers are too proud of their children and we see that in Salome the mother of John and James, both disciples of Jesus. She couldn't stop herself from asking Jesus if her sons could have a special place in His kingdom, one on His left and the other on His right.

And then there was Eunice the mother of Timothy. Even though she was married to an unbelieving husband Eunice had a sincere faith. Her mother Lois had such a faith too. And this mother and grandmother had a wonderful Christian influence on Timothy because he too had a sincere faith and the Lord made him a blessing to the church. But let's now go back to this mother-in-law whom I mentioned at the beginning.

#### **1. Who was she?**

The Bible does not give her name but she was the mother-in-law of Simon Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. That meant that Peter was married, which is confirmed by the Apostle Paul. Paul was writing to the Corinthian church and mentioned that apostles had the right to take their believing wives along with them on their missionary

journeys. And he mentions that the Lord's brothers had wives and also Peter [1 Cor. 9:5]. So Peter was a married man and an apostle. The Roman Catholic Church likes to think of Peter as the first Pope but with Peter being married you wonder why they still insist on popes having to be celibate.

Anyway, Peter had a mother-in-law. Strange how often mother-in-laws are depicted as being difficult, or hard to live with. Mothers-in-law come in great variety, as do all people, and you're bound to run into some terrible ones but there are also many good ones around. Why pick on mothers-in-law? In situations where relationships could be better, it may not be the mother-in-law at all who is the culprit. It might be the daughters-in-law or the sons-in-law. They may be the ones who are making life difficult.

Now it says that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with high fever. The gospels of Matthew and Mark just mention that she was in bed with a fever but Luke says she had a high or a great fever. And he would know, being a medical doctor. He adds that she was suffering from this fever. It was quite serious. The fever had a real grip on her, tormented her, and she was distressed because of it. In short, she was a very sick mother-in-law.

Now Jesus had gone to her home. Presumably she was a widow and lived with her daughter and son-in-law. Mark's gospel adds that James and John had also gone to Peter's home. So there were at least three disciples with Jesus. And all of them asked Jesus to help Peter's mother-in-law. The word used for 'ask' indicates they that they requested Jesus to help her. They beseeched Him. It was not a situation of the Lord Jesus walking into the house and Peter just happened to remember that his mother-in-law was not feeling crash hot, and therefore said to Jesus - 'oh, by the way, now that you're here, would you mind just having a look at mum and see if you can do something for her.' No, the situation was quite different. All three disciples implored Jesus to help her. They were quite concerned about her health. People died of high fevers.

There are two things that we want to say here. Firstly, not only Peter but also for James and John as well, came up to Jesus as He entered the home and to urgently ask Him to help this mother. This must mean that she was someone special. I mean, for the three of them to go up to Jesus and inform Him of her situation can only mean that this mother-in-law was not only respected and loved but also missed for whatever she used to do. She was confined to bed and unable to do what she usually did.

Had she been just another mother-in-law then James and John would have kept themselves out of it. It wasn't their business to get involved in Peter's family affairs. And if this mother-in-law had been just an ordinary woman and nothing special, then even Peter, the son-in-law, could have left this request for Jesus' help to his wife. After all, it was her mother, not Peter's. Unless, of course, Peter's wife was shy and preferred that her hubby ask Jesus on her behalf. But it wasn't just Peter who asked, it were all three disciples.

Therefore, the second thing we want to say here is that this request for Jesus' help was not so much made by Peter, the son-in-law and his two mates, but as disciples of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, God incarnate. Jesus wasn't just anybody. He wasn't just the local medicine man. Look at what Luke tells us Jesus had been doing before coming to Peter's home. The Lord was in the town Capernaum teaching the people. They were amazed at His teaching, because His message had authority. And it was the Sabbath. But that did not stop Jesus from teaching wonderful things from God.

Furthermore, Jesus went into the local synagogue and inside there was a man possessed by a demon who challenged Jesus in a screaming voice, *"Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are - the Holy One of God!"* [vs 34]. *"Be quiet!"* Jesus said sternly. *"Come out of him!"* With that divine command from Him who is God in the flesh and who has power even over devils, the demon could do no other than to come out of the man. *"All the people were amazed and said to each other, 'What is this teaching? With authority and power He gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!' And the new about Him spread throughout the surrounding area"* [vs.36-37].

As we noted, Luke says it was a Sabbath and it was likely that there were Pharisees and scribes in the synagogue and for Jesus to do what He did was against all their rules and regulations. But if they were present, then none dare to protest. What Jesus did was an awesome display of divine power and authority. And a man was healed. A human being, a creature of God, was delivered from a power that controlled him in a terrible way and made his life sheer misery.

Peter, James and John saw all of that. They took it all in. Like everyone else, they too were overwhelmed and amazed. Who is this Jesus? The more they got to know Him, the more they began to see that He was the

Messiah, the Saviour. Yes, God Himself, who was driving back the powers of darkness and bringing in the wonderful things of the Kingdom of God.

Now I tell you, if you were one of these three disciples and walking home with Jesus, then you're not just going to sit Him down in a comfortable chair and offer Him a cup of tea or a cool drink, or whatever they drank in those days. As soon as Jesus decided to go to Peter's house, these three disciples would have immediately thought of Peter's mother-in-law. She too was in a bad shape and sorely missed. Jesus, please, we have just heard your wonderful teaching about God, we saw with our own eyes how you healed that poor man possessed by a demon, look here is someone dear to us, she is a wonderful blessing to many, could you please also help her. We implore you, we beg you. Lord, we don't deserve Your help. We're all sinful people. But You are the Son of God and You showed your mercy and kindness back there in the synagogue. We want You to do it here also, right here in this house.

## **2. What Jesus did.**

Luke is quite brief and to the point. "*So He [Jesus] bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once . . .*" There are a couple of things we should note here.

The first is that Jesus '*rebuked*' the fever. The word means that Jesus reproved the fever, warned it, censured it. To rebuke is something that you normally do to people. You either tell them to stop doing something because you disapprove of what they're doing. Or you warn them to not start doing something because you don't want it to start. But here with Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus rebuked the fever. And instantly the high fever left her. Not only that. She got up at once. After Jesus got rid of the fever, she was not left lying on the bed and needing time to recover and become strong and healthy again. No, the fever left her and straightaway she was on her feet, all fit and well. Luke the doctor would have been amazed. No doctor could ever hope for a patient, when a serious illness was overcome, to be up and about that quickly.

So note the great effect when Jesus rebuked the fever. A number of times when Jesus commanded evil spirits to come out of people, then the Bible says that He rebuked these demons. And at such a rebuke from Jesus, the Son of God, the demons could do nothing else but to come out of whomever they were possessing. [cf. Mat.17:18]. Christ as God incarnate was able to command the dark powers to stop tormenting people and they had but to obey, instantly. Christ is all-powerful. Nothing can resist Him, not even the powers of hell.

Jesus also rebuked the forces of nature. At one time He was in a boat with His disciples on the Sea of Galilee and a ferocious storm threatened to sink the boat and drown them all. The disciples were afraid. Jesus was asleep. They woke Him up and cried out, "*Lord, save us! We're going to drown!*" Jesus first reprimanded the disciples for their little faith. He was with them. His heavenly Father was going to have His Son take away the sins of the world by Him dying on the cross. That was still future and so Jesus could not die in this storm. And that's why the disciples did not need to fear that they were all going to drown. Then it says that Jesus got up and He '*rebuked*' the winds and the waves. The Lord of heaven and earth looked at the raging storm and the wild sea and said, 'Be still!' And the forces of nature obeyed. God who created nature and the laws of nature now tells the wind to stop raging and the waters to stop heaving and tossing. And immediately it was completely calm [Mat. 8:26]. Not calm gradually but instantly. The same with Peter's mother-in-law, not gradually recovering from the fever but instantly when Jesus rebuked it.

There is no mention that her fever was caused by a demon, in as much as the storm was not caused by a demon. But the Lord Jesus was perfectly able to rebuke a fever, as He was perfectly able to rebuke demons and evil spirits and storms at sea. He simply commanded all of these to stop whatever they were doing. The fever was making this mother-in-law very ill. And whatever force brings about fevers, Jesus told it to stop and instantly it left her.

We're looking at the power and authority of Christ who is God and who is able to bring everything and anything under His control, for the glory of His name, for the advancement of His kingdom, and in order to bless His people. One day God's kingdom will come in full and then with Jesus' power and authority all things will be made new and there will be nothing in nature that threatens, nothing in our new bodies that will make us ill, nothing from the spirit world that will possess us. But until Jesus' coming we will still have to live with these troublesome things yet none of them have the power to separate us from God's love to us in Christ Jesus. So, have faith in God and trust in Christ, for He has shown us that He has the power to rebuke and whatever He rebukes will stop immediately. Yes, one day, when He comes, He will make all things new, instantly.

## **3. Why Peter's mother-in-law was wonderful.**

After she was instantly healed and got up at once, Peter's mother-in-law began "*to wait on them*" it says. That word '*wait*' is the same word that we use to describe a diaconal activity. The task of deacons in the church is to serve people those who have needs. It is to minister to them. But you don't have to be in the office of deacon to do this work. Every church member is called on by the Lord to serve others. It's part of our Christian duty. When we become aware of someone else's needs then we minister to him or her. Christ's love in us drives us to do that for others. We love others, see their need and reach out to help them.

So this mother in Peter's house wasn't just waiting on others like waitresses do in restaurants. She made herself useful for the benefit of others. It was something that she used to do before the high fever made her sick and confined her to bed. When the Lord healed her she immediately got up and continued what she normally did. She didn't run out of the house to the neighbours to tell them and everyone else who wanted to listen, that the Lord had just done a mighty miracle in her life, and in so doing drawing plenty of attention to herself. No, she got up and began to minister again to others.

For her to serve others, to minister to them, cannot mean that she did this work with sighing and moaning. You know how sometimes we do things for others but we rather be somewhere else and do other things. We might complain and try to do it as quickly as possible so that we can get out of there. But when our serving others is like that then it is not ministering to them. When you minister to someone then you serve others with love and kindness. And when a Christian does it like this then it's done out of love for God. We know that God commands us to love one another. That kind of love has the wellbeing of others in mind. That's how God loves us. He has our wellbeing in mind. And we are to love and serve others like that.

So Peter's mother-in-law was not the slave in Peter's house. Others in that home didn't just dump stuff on her, for her to do and fix up, that nobody else could be bothered doing. If that had been the case then the disciples would not have implored Jesus to help her. Then they would have just complained and told her to get better quick so that she cook dinner and make their beds again.

Neither was she one of those mothers-in-law that want to control everything and boss everyone around and lets you know in no uncertain terms when you have crossed one of her many boundaries. No, this mother-in-law to Peter and mother to Peter's wife, was a wonderful blessing to all of them. She was the deaconess in that home and others loved her.

Not that her work was so very special. After all, what things need to be done in an ordinary home? It are the ordinary every day things, the mundane things, like preparing meals, mending clothes, washing, cleaning the house. Keep the daily routine going. Things that most mothers are so very familiar with. And this mother-in-law wasn't so young anymore either, not when your daughter is married to a husband who had been a fisherman for a number of years.

But she did it all as a child of God, serving the Lord and those whom the Lord had placed on her path. She was a believing, pious woman. The text does not say that with so many words but that's what became obvious when, after she got up from her sickbed, she immediately made herself useful again.

Such mothers-in-law are wonderful to have around. They don't put a strain on the family. Such mothers-in-law are not just tolerated but loved, by sons-in-law, by daughters and daughters-in-law, by grandchildren, and by visitors to the home. One does not mind in the least to have such mothers-in-law around and they are very welcome in the church too. Because the good things they do at home they do in the church as well. Amen.

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