

Looking Back on Mother's Day

There is an interesting scripture found in Isaiah 51. The Israelites have been in exile in Babylon for 70 years and now God is going to bring them back to their own country, back to the city of Jerusalem. But the people are uncertain. They've been gone from Israel for seventy years. Everything is in ruins. Even if they knew what to do, they aren't sure they could do it. And the Lord speaks through the prophet and tells them, "Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah, who gave you birth." Facing this difficult task of trying to re-populate, to re-inhabit the land. It seemed overwhelming to them and God said, "look to Sarah who gave you birth. Remember she was 90 and childless and Abraham was 100. It was physically impossible yet one old woman and one old man became parents of a nation. Don't you think I can do it again? Don't you think I can birth a nation once again?"

God wanted them to look back and remember their heritage, to remember those who gave them birth. Look back and remember the influencers, those who set the course, who pointed them toward their destiny. Today as we honor our mothers on this Mother's Day, I want us to look back and remember. Remember those who gave us birth. Not only a biological mother or the one who raised us, but remember those who influenced us, who helped light a fire in us, who set the course or pointed us toward our destiny. Remember those who imparted faith to us.

I look back with gratitude to my parents and grandparents. Especially on this Mother's Day, I am grateful for my mother and other godly women who influenced my life. I couldn't begin to name all of those who prayed for me, taught me, loved me, inspired me, who faithfully lived a godly life before me and helped point me toward God and ministry. I am indebted to them and I honor them today.

It wasn't Mother's Day in the first century, but the apostle Paul had been thinking about the godly women who had influenced Timothy, a young man who was like a son to Paul. He wanted Timothy to remember the important role grandma and mom had played in Timothy's life and in his faith development. Paul wrote, **"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and I am persuaded, now lives in you also."** 2 Timothy 1:5

We know from Acts 16 that Timothy's mother, Eunice was Jewish and was a follower of Christ but she was married to a Gentile, a Greek the NIV says. From that, we assume that his

father was not a believer in Christ. But Paul tells us that the faith began with Timothy's grandmother, who passed this faith on to her daughter, who in turn passed this faith on to her son, who then is used by God to minister to and pass the faith along to others.

Paul reminded Timothy, “...**how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**” **2 Timothy 3:15** Timothy's mother and grandmother, even before they came to faith in Christ, had been teaching Timothy the Old Testament law of God. Paul says those Scriptures prepared his heart to receive salvation through faith in Christ. The point is, from his earliest memory, Timothy had been instructed in the word of God and the ways of God by his mother and grandmother. It points out an important truth for us.

The family was part of God's original relay system. This is his plan for delivering the faith from one generation to the next. Parents are to teach their children, by word and by action the ways of God. One generation is to impart to the next a vibrant and living faith in God. If you had parents or grandparents that imparted that faith to you, thank God for them! How blessed you are. If not parents, perhaps there was another person who modeled what a Christian life looked like and influenced you. If not, be thankful that in spite of that, you are here today, listening to this message. Somehow God's word and faith was imparted to you, it has influenced you some how to get you to this place today. I commend you for being here and for seeking after the Lord and now you get to be part of God's relay team. Now you get to help impart the faith to the next generation.

Now let me ask a question to those who had a parent or family member that taught you God's word and modeled for you a Christian life. If you are a parent now, **Are you faithfully and consistently imparting to your children the faith that was imparted to you? Are you living the life before your children that your parents lived before you?** Don't you think your children deserve the same example of consistent faith your parents modeled for you? Or even better? I realize it is quite a responsibility, but heaven is counting on you and so are your children.

If you are not a parent, you still have a responsibility. Think again of your own experience. Not all of those people who influenced you in the faith were parents, yet they faithfully and consistently modeled what a Christian life looked like. They were sharing their

faith, shaping the faith of the next generation. Someone is watching your life today!

I realize that second question might elicit a different response from some. You might realize unfortunately, you are living the life before your children that your parents lived before you and you never wanted that. The example you saw was one of anger and dysfunction and you realize that's what you've been modeling, that's how you've been living. The good news is, it doesn't have to be that way. God has a new life, a new way for you to live. With God's help you can start a new life and a new way of parenting today.

Here is what the bible says. Here is God's plan. **“One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty...they will tell of the power of your awesome works...they will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.” Psalm 145**

Look at Deuteronomy 6. **“Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up...Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9.**

What a challenge. Talk about God's word, model God's word, live God's word before your children, before the next generation. Show them what obedience to God looks like, in every aspect, in every facet and event of life.

Parents, it was and is about passing the faith on to the next generation, to our children and grandchildren. Mom, it is your highest calling. What could be more important? That's why Paul warns Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:14 to **“...guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” 2 Timothy 1:14**

Paul speaks of the faith as something that has been deposited in Timothy's life. That faith is beautiful, priceless, life changing. Paul says to guard that faith. The word he used means to watch over, to guard something “so that it is not lost or damaged. It is used of guarding a palace against marauders and possession against thieves (Luke 11:21; Acts 22:20).”

It is sad to think of our faith being lost or stolen. We lose sight of what is truly, eternally important. We didn't start out that way, but life got busy, and hard, and painful, and we stopped

going to church, or we didn't make time for God and faith and then the kids came and the next thing you know, we raised our kids without faith, without the church, without God in their life. He was somewhere on the sidelines watching, but never at the center of our family or our lives. That's why the bible says, "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who is ever present in our lives."

Moms, Dads, grandparents, single folks, teens, young adults, everyone, guard the faith. Don't let anyone destroy your relationship with Christ or steal your faith. It's not only for you and about you but the next generation is dependent upon your faithfulness, your diligence to guard the faith, to preserve it, and to pass it on to them.

Let me tell you a story this morning. Somewhere around 1856 a couple named John and Margaret moved with their two young daughters from Kentucky to Arkansas. They began to farm and raise their young family somewhere around Madison County. While in Arkansas two sons were born and another daughter. When the Civil War found its way to Arkansas John joined the Union Army November 12th 1862, along with his brother-in-law. Only two months later, in January of 1863, he died at the Regimental Hospital in Fayetteville, leaving a young widow with five children. After his death, Margaret felt the best thing, perhaps the only thing to do was to take the kids and go back to Kentucky where her family lived. I can't imagine what that required, but that is what she did.

Margaret raised those children alone, raising them to know the Lord, to love God in spite of the tragedy and the loss they had suffered at such a young age. She was determined to pass on the faith, to not allow the fire of faith to go out in her children. Nothing was more important. Nothing would stop her.

One of those children, in fact the first son to be born in Arkansas, was named Pleasant. They called him Pleas or P.I. He grew up in Kentucky. At the age of 12, the Kentucky Census listed him as a farm hand. Life was hard without a father, but Margaret did the best she could. Pleas acquired a basic education, married when he was 20 and raised his family there. He was a coal miner, a farmer, ran a grist mill, and was a Primitive Baptist preacher. Around the turn of the century the message of Pentecost came to that part of Kentucky and Pleas was one of those who was baptized in the Holy Spirit and was eventually asked to leave his baptist church. He continued to preach and serve the Lord as part of the Church of God Mountain Assembly until

his death at the age of 59.

One of his sons, Melvin married a Kentucky girl named Fannie and in 1914 moved his young family to Indiana where he worked in the coal mines and farmed, like his father. Fifteen years later he moved the family from the farm to the big city, to Indianapolis, hoping for a better life for them. Unfortunately, just a few weeks after moving to the city, he fell ill and died on May 11, 1929, 85 years ago today. He was 48 years old. His wife was only 41 and still had 4 or 5 of their eight children at home to care for, the youngest being seven years old. The next to the youngest of those eight children was my mom, Thelma Cox. She was nine when her father died.

Now, like Margaret that was left a widow in the Civil War with five young children, my grandmother was left to figure out how to live and to impart the faith to her children. This young widow was to make sure that in spite of poverty, in spite of the untimely death of a young husband and father, in spite of the Great Depression and the stock market crash occurring just a few months later, in spite of all the circumstances that seemed to be against them, she would impart to her children a living faith that would keep them throughout their lifetime.

“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”

I cannot begin to imagine what it was like for Margaret Cox in 1863 to take her five children and start back across the United States from Arkansas to Kentucky. But she was determined to take care of her family, to get them back home, to preserve and guard the faith that was entrusted to her. You see, when Jesus is all you've got, you make sure you guard your faith. When you know that your children could be lost if you don't model the way of Christ before them, you do what you must do.

I cannot begin to imagine what it was like for my grandmother in 1929 at the beginning of the depression, no job, no income, no training, to have only been in the city for three weeks when my grandfather died. They barely knew anyone. The funeral director took pity on her and provided funeral services. She promised to pay them back for their kindness and although it took twenty years, Grandma paid her debt, (I believe to the son of the funeral director that had cared for her.) She was totally unprepared to find herself in these circumstances. But my grandmother knew only one thing to do – to pray and look to God for his help. She knew to guard the good deposit that had been entrusted to her - to guard the faith that had been passed to her and to see to

it that it was passed on to her children. She knew it was time, not to drop her guard, but to fan the flame. It was time to look to God. It was the most important thing she could do. Ultimately it was the only thing that mattered!

Thank God for those godly mothers and grandmothers that in spite of all the struggles made sure they passed the faith on to their children, their grandchildren. Thank God for those mothers and grandmothers that may have had to do it all alone, but they made sure they fanned the flame and passed a living and life changing faith to their sons and daughters. Eight children of Melvin and Fannie Cox and in spite of challenges and bumps along the way, she imparted that faith and all eight of them knew Jesus as Savior and Lord of their lives. The last of the eight arrived safely in heaven just last year.

Paul said to guard this faith. Can I ask you, Moms, are you guarding the faith? Are you living a life of faith yourself and are you imparting to your children a faith that will carry them through the struggles they will no doubt face in their lifetime?

I have to tell you, I'm grateful that my great, great grandmother didn't decide that since God allowed her husband to die in the Civil War she would forget about God and just go live her life the way she wanted. Instead, she guarded the faith that had been entrusted to her and passed it on to her children, to her son, my great-grandfather. I'm glad my grandmother didn't decide that life and God had been unfair to her and just tell the kids, "It doesn't matter if you serve God or not, after all, he doesn't care anyway, he let your daddy die. Just live your life the way you want." Instead, my grandmother told them, "Children, stay close to Jesus for if you miss heaven, you've missed it all."

Like Timothy, perhaps you were raised to serve God. Your grandmother, your mother passed that faith on to you. Someone lived the life before you but somewhere along the way perhaps you stopped guarding that deposit of faith. You decided to take a detour and that's a tragedy in and of itself. But there is another tragedy and that is what happens to your children. Who is passing the faith on to them? Paul said, "**For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you...**" You see, we have a responsibility to share the story of Jesus and his grace with the next generation. The eternal destiny of the next generation, our children and grandchildren, it rests with us.

For this reason, for someone here today, I'm telling you, God intended for you to have a

different life than the one you've been pursuing. It's time, for your sake, for your children's sake, for the sake of that grandmother and mother that passed the faith to you - it's time to come back home. Come back to Jesus. It's time to look back and remember and then come back to that sincere faith that was first in your grandmother, and then in your mother, and then in you. It's time. Today is the day. Now.

You can argue about why or why not. Listen once again to what Paul tells Timothy.

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it..” 2 Timothy 3:14

You know those from whom you learned this way of faith. You know they were the real thing. You know they prayed for you. They were counting on you serving God and guarding that faith so that the next generation, their grandchildren or great grandchildren, or great - great, or whatever generation it might be, that they would know God and continue to serve him.

A sincere faith Paul called it. That's what has been imparted to you. What will you do now? Your decision may determine your eternal destination. And that of your children. What will you do?