

Rizpah As An Example Of Mother Love.

Text: 2 Sam 21:9-10

Suggested Hymns:

587, 584, 164, 293, 437

- 1) Mother Love Tested
- 2) Mother Love Never Stops To Count The Cost
- 3) Mother Love Is Endless
- 4) The Love Of God Is Greater Than Mother Love

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Samuel 21:9–10, *⁹And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill before the LORD. So they fell, all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.*

¹⁰Now Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven. And she did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today is Mother's Day. It reminds us of Marriage. It reminds us of the family, of mother, father, and children. We all know that a mother's love is great, but even greater is God's love as we just sang, *O perfect Love, all human thought transcending.* Who can understand it? If you are married, this hymn probably reminded you of your wedding day.

Today we are going to look at the love of a mother. But first, we need to look at what happened prior to our text.

In the days of David, the king of Israel, a disastrous famine lasting three years swept over Israel. The days of harvest came and went, but there was nothing to harvest. The heavens, like an inverted brass bowl, mercilessly sent down waves of heat and light upon the sweltering people of Israel.

The earth itself became like iron, and the people sought out the wild grasses and weeds, or bargained over the goods which were shipped in from countries which had not experienced such a famine.

And deep within the heart of every Israelite there was the guilty knowledge that the rain was being withheld by a divine plan.

Finally, in desperation, David sought to know the reason for this punishment, and it was revealed to him that it was all because of what Saul, his predecessor, had done when he was king.

Saul had made a treaty with the Gibeonites, but then had ruthlessly massacred them for no reason at all. Thus the whole nation became guilty of this crime, for they had endorsed the actions of their king. Therefore David summoned the remnant of the Gibeonite nation before him and inquired what could be done to atone for the sins of his own people against them.

The answer which the Gibeonites gave sets the stage for the scene depicted in our text. The Gibeonites demanded neither silver nor gold. They did not ask that any of the Hebrew people be delivered to them, but they did request that seven of the sons of Saul be turned over to them as a reprisal for Israel's crimes. These sons they would execute.

David complied with their request. The seven sons of Saul were turned over to the Gibeonite leaders and then taken out and hanged together.

Now, the Gibeonites were not of the Hebrew nation and therefore not subject to the Law of the Hebrews, which decreed that the bodies of those hanged must be cut down before the sunset of the day of execution. Thus the bodies of the seven men were allowed to hang with no provision for their removal. It is a grim and ugly sight, the seven bodies swinging grotesquely in the hot winds.

But now there are eight figures at the site of the execution. One, a woman, watches patiently there. It is the mother of Armoni and Mephibosheth,¹ two of the men who were hanged.

One is easily reminded by this scene of those well-known lines of the poet: *"If I were hanged on the highest hill, I know whose love would follow me still — Mother o' Mine."*²

And on this Mother's Day, Rizpah serves as a shining example from the Old Testament of the love of a mother for her children. May we, then, consider the story of *Rizpah As An Example Of Mother Love*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Mother Love Tested

The touching story of Rizpah suggests that a mother's love is much tried, not often as Rizpah's was, but always in some way or another. It may be the conduct of her children, or, others toward them; it may be their troubles; but whatever the trial may be, we must say that one of the great qualities of mother love is loyalty to her own flesh and blood.

So here Rizpah in her grief was not ashamed to take her place at the site of the execution of her sons. These were her children. She had reared them, laughed and played with them, bound up their wounds and happily watched them grow to manhood only to see them brought to this dishonourable end because of the sins of their father.

How proud the mother is who can watch her children grow up to become the respected leaders of men! How happy the hearts of those mothers who have seen their children honoured and praised by the world! Theirs is a just pride, pride in the accomplishments of their children. And it is not too difficult for such mothers to remain loyal to their children.

But in contrast think of the mothers who have to watch their sons and daughters become enemies of society; who have seen them brought to a miserable end; who have been forced to hear them spoken of as vile and evil because of their actions. Yet even those mothers cannot turn aside from those whom they bore. There is a bond of loyalty so firmly woven between mother and child that it cannot be easily severed.

Mother love is greater than mother pride. Rizpah had to swallow her pride. She couldn't be bothered about what her friends and neighbours might think or say. All she remembered was that on a lonely hill hung her sons, and she was willing to watch by them even after death.

Centuries later another sorrowing and grieving mother stood beneath a cross on Calvary's hill and watched her Son die for the sins of the whole race of mankind. It is one of the unforgettable chapters of the Passion story of our Saviour.

Oh, there are, of course, always exceptions to this loyalty of mother love. There are today, and always have been, not only in the poorer areas of our large cities but also in the best residential districts of Australia, mothers who would die

before they would go through what Rizpah gladly did. They turn their backs upon the children whom they brought into this world.

But let us thank God for our mothers. For I am sure all of us have felt at some time or another that if there was no one left in all the world to whom we could turn, there would be one who would not turn from us, no matter how wretched or bad we had been, and that would be our mother.

2. Mother Love Never Stops To Count The Cost

Because mother love is loyal, it also never stops to count the cost. When death had struck down Rizpah's sons, she journeyed to the place of their death and set up a little tent of sackcloth in order to be with them constantly.

Not until the famine was broken some six months later by the coming of rain, and their bodies were taken down and given a burial, did she leave. As she had guarded and protected them when they were young, so she stood watch over them in death.

We are told that she "*did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.*" That was no easy task. For where death had come, there followed the scavengers. Day and night she kept her vigil. She fought off the vultures from picking clean the bones of her sons by day, and in the long night watches she stood her ground to drive off the night raiders.

These were her two sons. She did not care about the cost! There are mothers who, like Rizpah, do not permit any consideration of self to stand in the way of making great sacrifices for their children, fearing neither shame nor pain, giving even their life.

That famous statue of the *Pioneer Mother* has caught the spirit of the mother who does not count the cost of her love. In her hand there is a Bible, indicative of her faith; and clutching her skirts, a child walks beside her, confident that Mother will not allow any danger to harm him no matter what the cost.

During the reign of Queen Victoria her own daughter, Princess Alice, was a victim of diphtheria, which was fatal to so many people in England. The death of the princess was announced in Parliament by Gladstone. With trembling voice he recited the reason she had died.

Her own little boy was ill with the dread disease. The physician had cautioned her not to inhale his poisoned breath as the child tossed about in the delirium of a raging fever. But Princess Alice was a true mother. She could wait no longer. She took the little fellow into her arms and tenderly stroked his fevered brow.

The boy threw his arms about her neck and whispered, "*Kiss me, mum.*" The mother's love was stronger than the physician's caution; she pressed her lips to the child's and lost her life. It is wondrous mother love that does not count the cost!

3. Mother Love Is Endless

Mother love, exemplified by Rizpah, knows no end. Death had taken her boys from her. They could no longer know her love, her tenderness, and her care. And yet, though she could easily have forgone the painful duty of watching over them even in death, she without hesitation went out to keep her lonely vigil.

Is this not true of all genuine mother love? It knows no ending. As long as Mother lives, she is eager to hear of our successes and rejoices with us because of them. Her heart weeps with ours when sorrow and tribulation sweep over us or our families.

If there is need and she learns of it, her love will find and devise a way of satisfying and supplying that need. She will gladly deny herself in order to help her children.

Rizpah, in her never-ending love, remained with her boys until the rains came and she knew that they had been properly buried. They were taken down from the gallows and laid to rest with their father Saul and the most famous of Saul's sons, Jonathan.

Others might curse and condemn them. She could only love them. Mother love is like that, and let us thank God for it.

Those of you who have long since lost your mothers in death, you know that even today you remember and cherish her deep love. And this is particularly true of such as those people who have been blessed with a devout Christian mother.

We find ourselves repeating little phrases which she herself used. Words of encouragement she gave to us when we felt that all the world had turned against us rise up to strengthen us in the days that are dark and foreboding.

And we are surely mindful of her devotion to the Saviour. We still use the little prayers she taught us. Her faith is ever before us, and we pray to the Lord for such a faith as hers. One thing, above all, she hoped and prayed for: that we might always be the Lord's. That was the last thing she told us.

The one great joy of mother love shall be her being able to present her children to the Saviour on that great Day when He shall come again to judge all mankind and to stand with them to receive from His scarred hands the crown of eternal life.

4. The Love Of God Is Greater Than Mother Love

So we pay tribute to those whom we call Mother on this day. But there is something deeper to our observance than mere celebration and tribute.

Surely, we must see that if human love can be so strong and so deep as exemplified in Rizpah, then what must be the love of God from whom it springs and of which it gives proof?

We very well marvel at Rizpah's devotion to her own children, but let us marvel even more at the love of God toward all fallen mankind in sending us the Saviour to redeem us from all iniquity and sin and give us eternal life through faith in His redeeming blood.

We marvel at the self-denial of mother love. Let us marvel all the more at the love of God, who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all that through Him we might be made the sons of God.

Mother love, as all human love if it be pure and genuine, is but the reflection of the deathless love of God. Let us love Him, for He first loved us. While we were sinners, He died for us and gave Himself for us.

Let us also find in the story of Rizpah an exhortation to all Christian mothers to be as devoted and loyal in watching over the children with whom the Lord has blessed them, as Rizpah was devoted and loyal in watching over her dead sons.

If she was concerned — as indeed she was — about protecting their lifeless bodies from the assaults of the birds of prey and the night creatures, then surely

Christian mothers will be alert at all times to ward off from their children the enemies of the soul and guide their children's feet in the pathways of righteousness which lead to God and heaven.

It is, to say the least, disturbing to every Christian pastor today to see the half-hearted efforts being made by some mothers to give their children a sound Christian training. Rizpah may have mourned over the physical death of her sons, but how much greater the mourning of those mothers whose children die spiritually!

Let us also pray that our love for our mothers, and our fathers, too, be strong and constant. As they grow older, let us not be unmindful of the sacrifices which they made for us and, if need be, make similar sacrifices for them without grumbling.

Let us not overlook that they loved us in our frailty and weakness, so that we shall, as Christians, be ready to show an equal love for them when they have grown frail and weak.

This Australian observance of the second Sunday in May must not become a mere commemoration of something that once was. If it is to serve any good purpose, then may it become for us Christians a day on which we come to an ever deeper appreciation of the qualities of that love so beautifully exemplified in the mother love of Rizpah.

But much more than this, let it be the reflection of that divine love which sought and found us and which rests not until we sinners come with all our guilt and stain to the cross on which the holy Christ poured out His lifeblood that we might be forgiven and there find pardon, peace, and heaven. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Samuel 21:8

² Rudyard Kipling