

## **May 12<sup>th</sup> 2013: Mother's Day: Genesis 16:1-12: God Cares For Mums**

On this Mother's Day I want to share with you three stories from the Bible that show how much God cares for mums, and the connecting point in each story is hardship. Each one of these mums was facing hardship of one sought or other when they realized just how much God cared for them.

**The first woman's life was always going to be hard** for she was a slave. Far from the land of her birth and her gods she now belonged totally to a woman called Sarai, the wife of Abram. Sarai owned Hagar, for that was the slaves name, and Hagar had no rights whatsoever. She had no one that she could turn to, complain to, or seek protection from.

Consequently when Sarai realized that despite the promise given to Abram by the Lord some years previously regarding the birth of an heir, she still was unable to conceive she ordered Hagar to sleep with the old man Abram.

And Hagar became pregnant and she knew that the child would never belong to her. It would become the property of her mistress—the child of Abram and Sarai. Yet in conceiving, she had her small moment of victory over Sarai, and she pushed that as far as she dared. But even that backfired upon her, for a furious Sarai gained permission from Abram to treat her maid as harshly as she wished and eventually Hagar could take no more.

Abused, mistreated, alone and desperate, this heavily pregnant women fled into the desert with no real hope of survival.

The amazing thing is that God saw this Egyptian slave as she trembled beside a spring on a lonely desert road and said to her through His messenger (v8)

***"Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.***

Did you notice that He knew her name and used it!

And did you notice also that she could tell Him where she came from but she had no idea where she was going! That's total hopelessness

Then the Lord gave her His directions for her life and they were not easy to follow. He told her to go back and to submit herself to her mistress. But with such directions He also gave her two life changing promises.

The first she discovered for herself, and verbalized it in the name she called God. (v13)

***13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."***

When God calls you by name, and you sense that in your inner being, then you know that whatever you face in the future you will never face it alone. The God who sees you will be with you.

The other promise was given her by God and contained in the name she was to give her son, so that she would never forget it. For in v11 we read

***"You are now pregnant  
and you will give birth to a son.  
You shall name him Ishmael,  
for the LORD has heard of your misery.***

The name Ishmael means, God Hears. Whatever life threw at her from that point on, and it became really nasty some 13 years later when she was kicked out of Abram's camp, she knew that God always saw her and she only had to look at Ishmael to be reassured that God had promised to always hear her cries for help.

Today there are plenty of women in our world who live out daily Hagar's story. And there are people in our society whose situation may not be quite as bad as hers, but who feel just as hopeless as she must have felt. And maybe there are women you know, who are going through or have been through some of the horrors that Hagar endured—maybe you yourself.

Whatever your situation this morning, and especially if you are feeling alone, hopeless, battered and bruised emotionally, remember that the God who cares sees you, knows your name, and hears your cries for help.

**We read about the second woman in chapter 1 of first Samuel.** Her name was Hannah and she was the first of two wives married to a man called Elkanah. We visualize her as an older woman than Hagar and living in

a home where her husband loved her greatly. But she was barren and consequently her husband had taken a second wife Pekinah, who had given him sons and daughters.

So in a society where having children meant so much, Hannah lived daily with the shame of her own inadequacy. She never felt quite good enough. Never could believe that she was really wanted. A fact that was deliberately emphasized in a cruel way by the other wife, on those yearly occasions when Elkanah would take his family to Shiloh to offer sacrifices for them to the Lord. We read about this in 1 Sam 1:4-8

***<sup>4</sup> Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup> But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>6</sup> Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. <sup>7</sup> This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. <sup>8</sup> Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"***

It's a terrible thing to have, that feeling of inadequacy, and it caused Hannah to have so much anguish and grief that she even began to question the Lord. To wonder whether He had forgotten her. Whether He cared for her. Some of you may empathize with her more than others, because of the times you have been tempted to feel that way.

But Hannah never lost her trust in God, and so it was that after a torrid time of weeping that she went into the Tabernacle and poured out her heart to God, and so intense were her prayers that the old priest thought she must be drunk. But she was far from drunk, and she courageously asked God for the one thing that would transform her life forever. She asked for a son. V11

***"LORD Almighty, if you will only look on 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, and no razor will ever be used on his head."***

It sounds a little like a bargain, and I suppose in some way it was, but it was never at the expense of her faith. It was not, Lord do this or I will stop following you and trusting in you. It was for the Lord to give to her an opportunity that would both change her life and enable her to give back to God in ministry for Him.

Then we read in v19-20

***Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah. And the LORD showed concern for her. <sup>20</sup> After some time, Hannah became pregnant. She had a baby boy. She said, "I asked the LORD for him." So she named him Samuel.***

The Lord showed how much He cared for this mother by answering her deepest prayer. And what better way could He care for her than in doing that, for in answering that prayer He gave her a task that she, and only she could do.

Now we may look at that story and think that God gave her exactly what she asked for, but in fact God gave her what he knew was best for her and what fitted into His bigger picture for His people. And there are many times when believers pray as passionately as Hannah prayed for something, in as specific a way as she did and the answer is no, but that doesn't mean that God doesn't hear. He always hears because He cares, and when the answer is not the one we want, we are called to trust Him still, for He has always shown Himself worthy of trust.

Don't give up on God ever. Not when you feel less than worthwhile. Neither when you feel that your prayers are not answered. He has heard you because He cares for you, and in His mighty Grace He will keep you and bless you even at the times when His answer is different to your desires. Because He has a special place for you and He loves you.

**This is most evident in the final story about a mother.** A mother who was older, a widow, and whose children were adults. A mother who may well have wondered whether God was listening to her prayers, and how He could ever help her bear with life and loneliness, as she stood at the foot of a cross upon which her son was being crucified.

For Mary never stopped being a mother. I'm sure she knew that her son was the Son of God, but she still was the only mother He had. And even at the height of His agony, after the nails had been hammered through His flesh, Jesus thought about Mary. About her pain. Her uncertainty. Her needs.

John 19:25-27 says

***<sup>26</sup> Jesus saw his mother there. He also saw the disciple he loved standing nearby. Jesus said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son." <sup>27</sup> He said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, the disciple took her into his home.***

Bible scholars have at times questioned why this act on the part of Jesus was necessary seeing Mary had other children who surely would have cared for her. But then we also know that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him at this time and its quite likely that they had rejected Mary who obviously did.

But even more than that is the title Jesus used for Mary. It was not 'Mother' but 'dear woman'.

Jesus looked beyond Mary to the plight of so many women then and since. Mothers who lose cherished ones. Mothers who feel great pain. Mothers who have been rejected. Mothers who face loneliness in their advancing years. Mothers on their own.

And as God the Son I believe, He cared for Mary and all such mothers in a similar position, And by putting the responsibility for Mary into the hands of His beloved disciple, He was, in some sense, entrusting His church on earth with caring for the widows, the hurting, and the grieving mothers that are part of every faith community.

That's a huge responsibility and we see the early church taking it very seriously, and we must as well. On the top of our Particpaper you will see the words, "God Cares For People Through People". That applies especially to the hurting, and today we need to be aware of mothers who are hurting. We need to ask ourselves often during our prayer times—who would the Lord have me care for in a specific way.

It may well be someone like Hagar. Rejected and despised because of who she was and had begun, but seen and heard by God. Or someone like Hannah, who on the outside comes across as settled and happy and accepting of her lot in life, but on the inside feeling worthless and unfulfilled. Or someone like Mary whose grief and loneliness is so great that the future seems unbearable.

We give thanks to God for Mothers today, and that is a good thing to do. But we must also as a fellowship be alert for all in our midst, and in particular Mothers, who need to know that God cares for them so much. And who need to receive God's care through us.