

Message Summary

We are used to hearing about God as our heavenly Father, but what about as mother? Mothers bring the nurture, care, and affection essential to their children's welfare, from pregnancy through adulthood. The effects of mothers on all of our lives, for good or for ill, are hard to overstate. Mothers come in all discernable types: the phantom mother, china doll mother, controlling mother, trophy mother, "still the boss" mother, and "American Express" mother. Though sin often distorts perceptions of motherhood in our fallen world, Christ perfectly exhibits the attributes of loving affection and gentle nurturing toward needy humans.

Jesus aptly named the religious teachers of his day "foxes" (v. 32). They warned Jesus to leave because of the threat on his life from Herod Antipus. It was in reality a cunning plan to shut Jesus up and win back the attention and fervor of the crowds. The Pharisees were insisting on being messiahs themselves. But Jesus was no stranger to death threats. Herod Antipus had recently killed John the Baptist for prophesying against his adultery, following in the footsteps of his father Herod the Great, who had sought to slay Jesus as an infant. Jesus stood with courage in the midst of such threats because he knew God as Father. Because Jesus was secure in God's compassion and affection, nothing could stop Jesus from pursuing and loving those around him with the same compassion. Rather than cower at fear from the Pharisees' warning, Jesus cries out in yearning affection: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem" (v. 34). Jesus wanted, and had labored, to see the city of Jerusalem and the Temple it housed to be a place of worship to the true King, and to hide and protect its inhabitants like a hen under her wing. But they refused. Such a refusal led to their house and life being forsaken, until they repented. The future will bring a time when they cannot repent, and when God's forsaking would be permanent. Jesus urges them to allow him to nurture their needy hearts before it is too late.

Jesus' love for those who still have opportunity to repent drives Jesus to still dine with the Pharisees (14:1-6). At the sight of a man with dropsy, Jesus sees no compassion from the Pharisees. Of all people, the Pharisees should have been among the first to show love toward those in need. Instead, they felt that their erudite studies of Sabbath law excused exhibiting real love to people in need. Jesus points out their hypocrisy by asking what kind of love they would show their own son, or even their own animals, on the Sabbath? Surely they also must care also for the needy around them, even as God in his own compassion cares for them.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

How could Jesus show such boldness and courage in the midst of the Pharisees' warning, and also the nurture, care, and affection toward the very city that would eventually kill Him? How can we cultivate both of these attributes in our own lives?

How could the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, be the very ones whose hearts were too callous to care for a man with dropsy? How can we steadfastly pursue Bible study while ensuring we are both hearers and doers of the Word (see Jm. 1:22-25)?

"But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thes. 2:7-8). How did Paul's "motherly" attributes of affection, gentleness, and nurturing profit his ministry at Thessalonica? How will they profit ours?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

1. Do you have Christ's courage, boldness, and strength in the face of opposition to the kingdom, or do you cower?
2. What "little foxes" (Song of Solomon 2:15) are you allowing into your garden to steal bold obedience to the Lord? How can you protect your garden from them this week?
3. Like the religious teachers of old, do you craftily aim to minimize Jesus' attention in your own life to steal attention and try to be your own "messiah"?
4. Is your heart to go after needy people around you, or are you so detached from people in your day-to-day life that you no longer empathize with perishing people?
5. Is your Bible study and scholarship distracting you from real compassion to those around you, the very heart of God?
6. Like the Pharisees, are you willing to show compassion on your own property but selfishly unwilling to pursue people outside? What can you do this week to show costly love and sacrifice to pursue needy people around you?
7. Is an earthly mother's influence dominating your perspective of God's goodness? How does this text call you to see anew God's nurturing gentleness, care, and affection?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for his affectionate heart of compassion that eventually drove him to courageously and boldly endure the cross for our salvation.
 - Pray that the Lord would fill us with his affectionate heart toward and intentionality to pursue those around us. Pray that our study and knowledge of the Bible would drive us to rather than distract us from loving people well.
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that the Lord would fill his disciples with courage and boldness to go after the needy in this area, and not overlook the spiritual needs so present.
 - Pray that, unlike Jerusalem, Gadsden would heed Christ's call to come to him to receive nurture and care for our souls, and rest from sins in his salvation.
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray for God's grace on the upcoming VBS ("God Always Wins"), that God would provide the needed resources and volunteers, and use the ministry to teach many kids in our community Christ's victory over sin and death in the gospel.
 - Pray for the international dinner at the Holts this Friday (4/28, 6 P.M.), that many international students would see the futility of self-reliance and embrace the supernatural power of the resurrection. Pray that the Lord would bring many Christ-followers to share and build relationships that will last far beyond the dinner itself.