

The Motherhood of God (Isaiah 66:13)

1. Comforting like a mother

In the Bible, Jerusalem is being compared to a mother who feeds and comforts her children. Just as God promised in the Old Testament to be like a mother to Jerusalem, so has He promised to be with us. He will give us peace and will be a comforter to all who love Him. This includes all people of all ages who love God in truth: “As a mother comforts, so will I, your God, comfort you”. These are the words of God to the Israelites who experienced great adversity and so felt abandoned and forgotten by God. God’s response gives a divine assurance not only to them, but also, to any believer, family or local church who are going through tough times. His love for us is greater than our natural affliction of a loving mother. Therefore, it is unthinkable that He would ever forget us, especially in our times of despair and grief (Isaiah 49:15). If a mother feels that her child is sick or insecure, she will stay close to her child to love and comfort the child. God is the One Who gives this ability to a mother, and He has it in abundance for all who call on Him for help. His compassion for us will never fail, regardless of life circumstances. He watches over us with great tenderness and love, and we can rest in the conviction that He will never leave us nor forsake us. He spoke through Isaiah to the children of Israel in their great despair (Isaiah 43:1-3). Here, also, God expressed His love for His people: “The Lord says-- He Who created you, o Jacob, He who formed you, o Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you, and I have summoned you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and when you go through the waters, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the holy one of Israel, your saviour”. The benefits of God’s love are for us, for the blessings mentioned here, apply even more to those who are God’s children through faith in Christ. God has created and redeemed us from the power of darkness to bring us into the marvellous light of His Son. We belong to Him, and He knows everyone of us by name. The evidence of God’s great love is that He has engraved us on the palms of His own hands, so that He can never forget us: The scars in His hands are always before His eyes as a reminder of the great love which He has showered on us, and of His desire to care for us.

2. Paul’s understanding of God’s motherhood

The apostle Paul felt that same great motherhood comfort of love for the Thessalonians believers, and he drew a touching image to communicate his affection. It was the picture of a mother who was nursing an infant (1st Thessalonians 2:7). Most mothers of the first century world nursed their own infants. However, some wealthy women employed a wet nurse who agreed to certain conditions as that they took responsibility not only for feeding the child but also, for raising it until it was weaned, often up to three years of age. Many contracts specified that the wet nurse’s fee had to be returned if the child died. Paul clearly intended to convey a sense of tender affection and responsible loving care for his spiritual children, the Thessalonians. In doing so, he showed a side of spiritual motherhood of a leader and how a mother is in the world of living. Nursing is another word of comforting. And a mother, who comforts or nurses her children, is also an example of the spiritual attitude that all missionaries or Christians should have as we preach the Gospel. As Christian missionaries, we must have a mother’s gentle and caring attitude which under great sacrifice, makes a special effort to nurture, protect and meet the needs of the newborn child. In the same way, those who are in the faith for long time, already, should take care for those who are new converts in Christ. A mother’s gentleness implies that these “nurturing” believers should not act like important or superior persons.

3. A mother's heart

In 2nd Kings 4:1-7, a mother faced a desperate situation: Her husband died, and she had no source of income, no possible way to meet her and her family's needs. In addition, she was in debt at that same time. This was why her creditors had come to take her sons to slavery as a payment of her debt. If ever anyone needed a miracle of financial breakthrough, this woman did indeed need it. She was already mentally tormented by the loss of her husband, and now, she faced the possibility of losing her two sons, too. In her desperation, she cried out to the prophet Elisha for help. She said: "Your servant, my husband, is dead. And you know, your servant feared the Lord. But the creditors have come to take my two sons to be their slaves". Elisha said to her: "What shall I do for you? Tell me what you have in your house". She answered: "Your hand maid has nothing in the house except a jar of oil". Elisha told her to go and borrow as many vessels as possible from her neighbours. She was not to just get a few, but as many as possible. Then, she was to go into her room with her two sons and shut the door and begin to pour out the oil that she had into the vessels, setting aside each one when it was full. The oil stopped multiplying only when there were no more empty vessels: "When the vessels were all full, she said to her sons: 'Bring me another vessel', and they said to her: 'Mother, there is not one left'. Then, the oil stopped multiplying". The woman received according to the number of vessels which she had gathered. Afterwards, she came back to Elisha and told him what had happened. Then, Elisha told her to go and sell the oil and pay her debts, and she and her sons should live on the rest. The lesson for us present days mothers and parents is that we should not expect God to make sense for us before we obey Him. Because the woman in the story acted on the word of the Lord which had been spoken to her through Elisha the prophet, God did supernaturally meet her needs. God took the little oil what she had and multiplied it so that she did not only have enough to pay her debts, but also could live on it with her two sons. Does this miraculous act not represent spiritual truth in a dramatic action? According to Josephus, a Jewish scribe who became historian after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the woman was a widow of the prophet Obediah, and her debt had occurred when Obediah had taken a hundred prophets into his care to preserve them during the persecution under King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, the "daughter of hell". If this is correct, Elisha's concern for her and her sons is clearly understandable, and the conditions of the miracle that was accomplished can be considered as an act of reward or appreciation for the kindness of her husband. This illustrates the principle of giving which is set forth in receiving (Luke 6:31): "Give and it shall be given unto you".

4. Candidates of miracles

The narrative of the widow and her two sons reveals that God cares for His faithful ones who are in need and troubled. Knowing that God will make a way for our needs to be met, we can trust in Him. And if we do so, we are candidates of miracles, for it is His will to bless and prosper us. Do you believe in God in your situations or circumstances? Do you believe that He will supernaturally provide for you so that all your financial needs will be met? God is willing to multiply and increase us in a way that we will have enough for our needs and also, to promote His kingdom business. The One Who gave us His son to be the saviour of the world is well able to bless us financially to preach about this son. Let us not limit God! Are we ready for God to break the bondage of debt and release financial anointing upon our lives? The first step that we must take towards breaking the bondage of shortage and receiving God's provisions in our financial famine is to bind the spirit of fear from our minds. The mother in the story had financial difficulties, but she did not allow fear to keep her from taking a step of faith. Fear will cause us to withhold from appreciating what God has given to us. We will think that we would not have enough money to meet our needs or to survive if we give money to promote the kingdom of God. And this fear will keep us from being faithful to

God's Word. Even, many of us will say: "I have every right to be fearful. Here I am, I have no income. The money that I receive from the state is not enough to supply for the needs of the family, and I just don't know what to do." Regardless the circumstances which we may face in our world, today, it cannot be a more desperate situation than this widow mother faced. Let us recognize that fear is one of Satan's weapons to keep us living in a circle of financial failure and defeat. But as children of God, fear has absolutely no place in our lives. For as we know, God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love and sound mind (2nd Timothy 1:7). We serve the same God Who supernaturally provided for this mother, and He is the same God Who sent His son to die for us. He is willing to prosper us. Our God is a giving God. Instead of giving us into fear, God intends for us to look to Him for the miracle that we need (Matthew 17:24-27). God prepared a special fish with the exact amount of money in its mouth which was necessary to pay the temple tax. Peter did cast in his hook, expecting to receive what Christ had promised. People of God, let us get our minds and eyes off our circumstances or the bigness of our debts and look into the supernatural provision of our almighty Father God. In this Scripture, Jesus manifested a miracle to teach Peter and us not to rely on human sources of ability, but rather, to draw from God's supernatural resources.

5. Faith works by love

Elisha's travelling did next lead him to Shunem, and there, he became a guest of a prosperous and remarkable hospitable woman. This woman's faith did work by love. She recognized the up and downs of the prophet, and she suggested it with her husband to do something good for this man of God. This marriage couple was not self-centred nor care only for their own needs, but they cared for others. The woman and her husband laboured hard to have an extra room build on top of their house to provide a place of rest for the man of God. And God rewarded them by performing a healing of the woman's barrenness through Elisha, and she did become pregnant with a son. God blessed their faithfulness and kindness which they showed to His servant. In later years, when this child of promise had become a growing boy, he was with his father on the field at the harvest time. But probably, he had a sun stroke and started saying to his father: "My head, my head!" His father told a servant to bring the boy to his mother. The boy sat on her lap until noon, and then, he died. The mother was full of faith. She went up to the room which they had built for the prophet and laid the boy on the prophet's bed. Then, she shut the door and went out. She asked her husband to send her with one of the servants on a donkey so that she could go to the man of God, quickly, and return. Her husband asked her: "Why are you going to him, today?" Even though this man knew that he had sent the sick boy to the mother, it looks like he did not have enough courage to ask what had happened to the boy. But the mother of faith replied: "It is all well." Then, she told her servant not to slow down for her on their way to the man of God unless she would tell him to do so. On their way to Mountain Carmel, the man of God saw her from a distance. And therefore, he said to his servant Gehazi: "Look, there is the Shunamite woman. Run to meet her and ask her: 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is it all right with your son?'" The mother of faith answered: "Everything is all right." How can one give such a response when she had a promise being taken away, her only child as a dead boy in her house?! Could it be that she knew where to get the answer to her situation? And therefore, she was fully persuaded not to give up until the answer would come. When she reached Elisha, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi was told to leave her alone. Elisha said: "She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why". After Elisha was told by the woman what had happened to the boy, Elisha sent his servant Gehazi, but the servant was unable to restore the young boy. Then, Elisha came and prayed over the lad and stretched himself upon the body of the child until life came into the body, once again. The mother of faith responded with great rejoicing of her heart. The same God can resurrect any dead thing in our homes or in our local churches if we trust in His miracles and believe that faith works by love. We should also notice that no mira-

cle was wrought by Elisha's staff, but only by faith and personal intervention of the man of God. The truth is that God's choice of channels for the exercise of His divine power is always people and not, physical objects (2nd Kings 4:8-37).

6. A mother's influence

If you are a mother of a child growing up in our today's world, you may sometimes wonder how much of an impact you have on your child's life. At times, the influence of a teacher, the community, television, video games and even, the government, may seem to outweigh your own influence. But consider the example of Jochebed, the mother of Moses. She lived in extremely difficult times and had a limited say to what would happen to her son. Yet, she used what opportunity she did have, to affect his growth and development. At first, she exercised bold faith by refusing to put the son to death (Exodus 1:15.16; 2:2-4). God honoured her faith not only by preserving her baby's life, but also, by arranging circumstances that allowed her to serve as his nurse and also, as his mother (Chapter 2:5-10). The history of Moses' life makes it apparent that his mother Jochebed helped to shape his life and character. The fact that as an adult, Moses was not ashamed to identify himself with the suppressed Hebrews and their God of Israel, even though he was connected to the royal court and throne, is a testimony to Jochebed's influence during his formative years. As a mother, you do probably have much more opportunities to influence your child than this mother had. My question of thought to you is: Are you taking advantage of these short few years of your young one's childhood to make a positive, lasting contribution to the glory of God? Or are you allowing the prevailing secular environment to dominate with their impact on your child's development?

7. Every man or woman was once a baby!

One is not a baby until he or she is born. And the gateway to this earth is the womb of a woman. God is right from this womb, creatively and actively involved in the development of human life (Psalm 139:13). He personally cares for a baby from the moment of its conception. His regard for a foetus extends to a plan for his her life. And God does not bring us into life without a purpose. The statement about the days ordained for us, probably refers to our time on earth. And the time mentioned in this psalm, refers not only to days, but also to God's plan and purpose for our lives as a whole. In His plan, He does not want anyone to perish, but everybody come to repentance. God intended for us to accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and fulfil His will in a life of service to Him. This all began when Jesus entered into this earth through the womb of a woman. In Psalm 115:16, the Scripture says: "The heavens, even the heavens are the Lord's, but earth He has given to the children of men". Therefore, it could have been against the natural law if Jesus came to the earth without passing the law of nature which He and His Father had established from the foundation of creation through the power of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus, Himself, had once been a baby, and He enjoyed the motherhood comfort of His mother Mary. And the same God Who's mind and power fashioned the stars, the seas, the animals and all human beings, has carefully, intentionally and individually created you to be a mother and the gateway which He can bring children through to this earth. This means, as a mother you are unique, and no-one else has been given an exactly make up of taking care of children like you have. May God bless you as you take your responsibility with joy unspeakable!

8. A mother of great character and faith

Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman could raise some troubling questions about radical and ethnic attitudes. Jesus' treatment of the woman seems to be a contradiction of His image as the international Christ and the Saviour of the whole world. In Mark 7:24-30 we read this story, and the same story is also written in Matthew 15:21-28. According to Mark's view, the conversation of Jesus and this mother began when the mother sought out Jesus. Je-

Jesus tried to hide from her because He was probably tired or wanted to communicate with His Father. The women begged Jesus to have mercy for her demon-possessed daughter. She worshipped Jesus and called Him the Son of David. But Jesus ignored her cries and did not give her any answer. Then, the disciples wanted to stop the woman who seemed to bother their master. So they told Jesus to send her away. But instead, Jesus started to talk to the woman by saying: "I am sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, and it is not good to give the bread of the children unto dogs". But this mother of a great character did not object to be called a "dog". Jesus' statement implied that because the woman was not a Jew, she was not a child of God and could not be helped. But the woman knew that the Jews did always call the gentiles "dogs", so she didn't take it too hard. Instead, she said to the master that the dogs enjoyed the leftovers of the children. Then, Jesus came to His point of conclusion: "Woman, you have a great faith. Your request is being granted". And her daughter was healed from that very hour. Often, the reason why our miracles tarry is because we don't have the character to bring our miracles through. The major lesson we can learn from this woman, is, that knowledge or talent or even our social backgrounds can get us into a place, but if we don't have character, we cannot keep that place. Up to this time, the disciples who had followed Jesus had been asked by Him: "Why is it that you don't have faith?" The church, today, needs mothers and grandmothers who will persist in their faith and have a character to back what they believe. But are we to conclude of Jesus' treatment of this woman? She came in utter sincerity and great respect. Yet, Jesus rebuffed her with hard words. Why could He do that? Does God want us to relate to people from other races and ethnic groups like that? Perhaps, the key is to consider that Jesus' words were intended less for the woman's ears than for His disciples. Maybe it was to them, and not, to the woman, when Jesus said that He was not sent to anyone but to the lost house of Israel. They wanted Him to send her away, but He refused by applying to their own national pride of racial interest. Jesus may have turned this incident into a living parable to show His disciples how hardened they were in their attitudes against gentiles. History through studies helps us to know that Tyre was the setting for this story, and it was only fifty miles from the Galilee region where most of the twelve had grown up. But it was an entirely different culture, dominated by Greek influences and populated almost exclusively by gentiles. Many of these people had already come South to learn more about Jesus (Mark 3:8). Now, Jesus was taking His disciples North on the crash course in cross-cultural awareness. So during the encounter with the woman, it could be that Jesus treated her the way His disciples would have treated her. Perhaps, the master teacher wanted to illustrate in a way they would never forget their despise and rejection of gentiles. Gentiles like this woman did deeply hunger for God's grace and power. How would Jesus have to treat someone, today, to illustrate prejudice among His followers? Don't we have the same ethnic blocks in the city Berlin, today, for example? And how is our response to them as Christians? Racism and ethnic hatred have never been God's desire. And Jesus repudiated such sin wherever He found it. May God strengthen and bless us as we copy Jesus to do the same!

9. Once a mother, always a mother

Onto you, mothers, God has replaced a kind word, a warm smile, and a caring heart for the whole household. God has graced you with a willing heart to listen and a ready spirit of understanding for the home environment. As a mother you are blessed by God to be dependable, steadfast and trustworthy for your family. And fathers and children are ever thankful to God and you for your compassion, forgiveness, mercy and love which enable us to become what God wants us to be under the sun. May God increase you more and more in these qualities as you hold unto Him to share this motherhood love!