

2 Samuel 21:10

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.

The Silent Strength Of A Mother's Love

The story I'm about to tell you
is one of the most disturbing stories in the Bible...
It is a really big disaster.

It may be a story
That you are not very familiar with.
But as I was thinking about what message to share today,
The Lord led me to this.

Now, we don't have a lot of information about it.
Just 14 short verses
that leaves you with more questions than answers.
And the story begins like this:

2 Samuel 21:1

¹Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year...

In ancient times, famines were devastating events.
When it was difficult, if not impossible,
to carry over the harvest from year to year,
people depended on the crops each year
for their survival.

When famine came, those crops would fail to produce,
and hunger would begin to destroy lives.
Death came first to the weak,

the injured,
the elderly,
the most vulnerable in society.

Friends let me tell you this afternoon
that death is no respecter of persons
and, as the famine stretched on, year after year,
no one was immune from its icy cold fingers.

The thing about a famine is that it is a natural disaster.
It is completely beyond the control
of the people whom it effects
and there is nothing that King David could do,
within his own power, to stop it.

But finally, after three long years,
The Bible tells us that David inquired of the Lord.
The Lord not only hears his cry, but He responds.
The rest of verse 1 says:

2 Samuel 21:1

¹... David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, “It is because of Saul and his ^[a]bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites.”

Instead of providing immediate relief,
or even giving some directions regarding
how the famine can be stopped,

the Lord tells David that the famine is the result
of divine judgment,
and that the judgment is connected
to the bloodguilt of the former king Saul,
in regards to how he dealt treacherously
with the Gibeonites.

You see, the Gibeonites were among
the original residents of the promise land,
And, in the face of the Hebrew conquest of the land,
their ancestors tricked Joshua into promising them protection.

In short, they engaged in a deception
that convinced the Israelites
that they were a persecuted people
who had traveled from a long distance
and were seeking refuge in the promised land.

Under that false pretense
they were looking for a vow of protection
from the mighty Israelites.

The tragedy of the story is that Joshua
was so convinced by their ruse
that he didn't bother to ask counsel from God,
before entering into a covenant with them,
to protect them.

And let me just say right here
that it is a dangerous thing
to make any decision,
much less life-altering decisions,
without first asking for direction from God!

But Joshua acted rashly
and the Israelites became covenant bound
to protect the Gibeonites.
And, now we learn that King Saul
in his zeal for Israel,
had ignored the covenant
and sought to wipe out the Gibeonites.

Now, the incident is not recorded in scripture,
other than the reference to it here, during this story,
but, apparently, it is this attempted genocide
that has incurred the wrath of God.

So David goes to the Gibeonites
in an effort to make atonement
for the offense of Saul
and stop the famine.

But the Gibeonites will not be satisfied
with a simple gesture.
Just as Saul was bloodthirsty in the original offense,
they too are bloodthirsty
and they demand a blood price.

In order to make atonement for Israel,
David must hand over 7 male descendants of Saul
for public execution.

Can you imagine how difficult this is for David?!?
Seven innocent men are to be turned over,
to pay the price for a crime they did not commit.

It is tragedy piled upon tragedy.
On the one hand you have innocent men, women and children,
who are dying merciless deaths
at the hand of this devastating famine
that has lasted three long years.

and on the other hand
you have the sons and grandsons of Saul
who, as far as we know,
had nothing to do
with the horrific actions of King Saul.

And, in the middle, we have the king
who has to weigh the suffering of a nation
against the sacrifice of 7 men.

In that shaky position,
David relents and agrees to the exchange.
Seven male descendants of Saul
are to be rounded up
and turned over to the Gibeonites.

At the end of the day, David chooses two sons,
whom Saul had fathered with one of his concubines
and 5 grandsons that were born to one of Saul's daughters
to bear the wrath of the Gibeonites.

A Tale of Two Mothers

These are the difficult circumstances
of suffering, grief and injustice
that set the stage for one of
the most profound examples
Of a mother's love
and the power of faith
to be found anywhere
in the history of humanity.

Seven men were hung to death
on that sad day in *Gibeah*,
which was the historic birthplace of Saul.

All of Israel must have mourned the death of those boys,
particularly those that remained of the house of Saul.

Now, we don't really know
if the 5 grandsons had wives of their own
or possibly even children, by this time in their lives,

but we can be pretty sure that the 2 sons
most likely had wives and children,
perhaps even grandchildren...

It's easy sometimes, in reading a story like this,
to disregard the personal impact of what has transpired.
Families were devastated that day.
Men were taken from their homes,
Fathers taken from their children,
Husbands taken from their wives,
Sons taken from their mothers
and they were,
without a trial or any semblance of justice,
put to death in an act of vengeance
for the betrayal of Saul.

It would be impossible for me to overstate
the grief and the horror of that day.
I cannot even begin to detail
the number of people that were
immediately and personally impacted
by those seven senseless deaths.

I don't have a record of wives, children or even
grandchildren
who were shocked and devastated that day.
But one thing I do know
is that there were two mothers present that day
who watched their sons die,
and were forbidden to lay their bodies to rest.

Two mothers who faced the same horrific tragedy,
two mothers who suffered the same devastating loss,
two mothers who bore the guilt
of an entire kingdom upon their shoulders...

But one of them did something extraordinary.
One of them acted in a way
no one could ever have anticipated.

One of them demonstrated the sheer force of will
and protective love
that only a mother can possess...
Her name was Rizpah.

Before I tell her story, though,
Let me point out another tragic development.
All of this transpired at the beginning of the barley harvest.
Of course, with a devastating famine in the land,
there was no barley to harvest,
but that gives us a timeline...
Rizpah's sons were put to death sometime in April.

And despite David's best effort to stop the famine,
the death of those 7 sons
did not immediately stop the famine.
The dreadful devastation and hunger

would maintain its grip on Israel
for many months to come.

So... on top of the grief of having lost her sons
to a tragic act of vengeance,
Rizpah's grief would be compounded
by the fact that it seemed pointless...
for all intents and purposes,
It seemed like those boys died for nothing.

It seemed to be yet another hopeless tragedy
compounded by three years of heartache and pain.
Yet, in the face of such meaningless sacrifice,
a mother's love rose up
and refused to accept her circumstances.

What Rizpah did was extraordinary.

In an act of judgment and humiliation,
it was forbidden for the boys to be cut down
from the places where they hung.

They were left there, in those trees,
at the mercy of wild beasts and birds,
to be further desecrated
beyond their already senseless deaths.

But for Rizpah, enough was enough.
She was powerless to spare her boys
from the judgment that had been administered against them,
and she could not defy the order
to leave them on public display as an added insult.

But there was one thing she could control,
as long as there was breath in her body,
she would protect those boys
from the wild beasts and fowls of the air.

So Rizpah, armed with nothing but a piece of
sackcloth,
made her dwelling right there on the rocks
under those trees
and fiercely defended the bodies of her boys.

Not just for a night or two...
not just for a week or two...
not even for a month or two...
for somewhere around eight long months,
Rizpah stood guard over her boys
with nothing but her sackcloth...

Her and that flimsy piece of burlap,
stood vigil, night and day,
driving away the wild beasts,
chasing away the carrion birds...
protecting that which was beyond saving.

I mean, think about it,
hers was the epitome of lost causes...
Those boys up in that tree were already dead!
But she would not rest
until they got a proper burial.

She would not be defied in her pursuit
of that last shred of human dignity.
Those boys may be reduced to bones,
but they would not be scattered
by the birds and beasts...
there was something in the heart of that mother
that just couldn't allow it.

Here's the thing...
there were 7 sons hanging in those trees,
and there were two mothers
who could lay claim to them,
but only one of those mothers
displayed such tremendous devotion to her children.

I submit to you, this afternoon,
that this is more than just a story of Rizpah...
this is a tale of two kinds of mothers...
one who, for whatever reason,
did not choose to stand vigilant guard over her children,
regardless of what had happened to them,

and one who would not relent
in her pursuit of some final measure
of justice for her boys!

It is Mother's Day today,
and I want to do more
than just tell the horrific story of Rizpah,
**I want to charge you, as mothers,
to take up her mantle
and fight for your children!**

Think about it...
her situation was hopeless...
those boys were gone forever...
but it didn't stop her from taking her little apron
and standing guard over their dead bodies.

When the wolves came,
that wild woman
with nothing but a shred of burlap
chased them away...

when the ravens tried to land on those corpses,
that crazy woman with her little piece of cloth,
said not today...
not my boys...
not my family...
not my home...

Somewhere in Israel, there was a grieving mother,
a daughter of the former king,
who slept in a soft bed
and cried her silent tears
in the comfort of her home...

But not Rizpah... she forsakes everything,
leaves behind all comfort,
and pays the ultimate price...

She gave her all, selflessly,
to the lost cause of defending her boys
against the tragedy that had already destroyed them!

Church, you gotta get this!
It doesn't get any more hopeless
than dead bodies hanging from trees!

I'm making an appeal to some mother right now
to become the champion of lost causes...
don't ever give up on your kids...
don't ever surrender to the circumstance...
No matter what the world says...
no matter what the situation dictates...
don't ever stop praying for them...
don't ever stop guarding them...
even when it seems as if all hope is lost...

I want to encourage our mothers this afternoon...
it may seem like your best efforts are wasted,
it may seem like you are powerless to change things,
it may seem as if you aren't making a difference at all...
but remember Rizpah...
and her little piece of sackcloth!
Keep guarding your family.

The King Hears

Here's the thing...
Eventually the king hears about what Rizpah is doing.
It took 8 long months...
8 months where nothing good happened...
8 months where the situation got worse and worse...
8 long exhausting emotionally draining months...
but finally the king heard...

Let me tell you something right now...
if you'll do your part,
if you maintain your vigil over your family,
sooner or later the king is going to show up!
Even when you can't see it...
even when you can't feel it...
even when it seems like all hope is lost...
The king is coming!

When the king finally hears
what is going on under that tree in Gibeah,
he is stirred up to do something
He should have done, a long time ago.

He goes and gets the bones of Saul,
and his son Jonathan.
Then he comes to Gibeah
and takes down those seven carcasses.
And he gives them all a proper burial
in Saul's family tomb...

Watch this

2 Samuel 21:11-14

¹¹And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. ¹²Then David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabesh Gilead who had stolen them from the street of ^[d]Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, after the Philistines had struck down Saul in Gilboa. ¹³So he brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from there; and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged. ¹⁴They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the tomb of Kish his father. So they performed all that the king commanded. **And after that God heeded the prayer for the land.**

And after that God stopped the famine!
After that, the rains came.
After that...
I don't believe for a minute
that Rizpah is an unimportant part of this story...

I believe the whole thing hinges,
not just on David's prayer,
but on the faithfulness of a mother
who refused to give up
in spite of the circumstance!

After that...

After the supreme display of a mother's protection...
after the extreme relentlessness of a mother's love...
after the profound sacrifice of a mother's devotion...

I can't tell you **where** it ends
and I can't tell you **how** it ends...
I can't tell you what happens between now and then...
But, I can promise you this:
If you'll keep doing that...
if you'll keep standing guard over your family,
If you keep lifting them up in prayer,
If you keep sacrificing yourself for them,
If you keep waving your apron
to chase off the birds and beasts...

If you will keep doing "that..."
There will always be an "after that..."

It's Mother's Day and we are here to celebrate...
But I think it's important...
To give a message to our moms today.

There are two moms in that story...
choose to be the Rizpah for your family...
don't ever forsake that role,
even when it seems as if all hope is lost.

What Rizpah teaches us
is that, as long as there is breath in her body,
there is still hope...
She just won't give up!

Be that mother!
Gather up your little apron of sackcloth...
and stand vigilant guard over your family.
Be the protector...
drive away the wild beasts,
chase away the birds of prey...

I commission you, today,
to take up the mantle of Rizpah...
It is here for the taking...

The real tragedy of 2 Samuel 21
is that there seven sons
and two mothers...
but only one Rizpah!

Make up your mind here, and now, to be that one!!!
The one who keeps doing "that..."
Until you find your "After that..."

The sackcloth is here...
Rizpah's mantle is in this place....
I just wonder who will take it up this afternoon
and speak Jesus over your family?!?

CLOSING

As we come to a close today, let us reflect on the story of Rizpah, a mother whose love and devotion serve as a powerful example for all of us.

Rizpah experienced profound loss. Her two sons were taken from her and sacrificed to appease the Gibeonites. Despite her grief, Rizpah showed extraordinary courage and faithfulness. She held a vigil over her sons' bodies, protecting them from the birds of the air and the wild animals by night. Her vigil is a testament to her unwavering love and devotion.

On this Mother's Day, let us remember Rizpah and mothers like her who have loved deeply, grieved deeply, and yet remained steadfast in their devotion. Their strength and resilience remind us of the power of a mother's love.

May we honor them today and every day, carrying their lessons of love, sacrifice, and resilience with us. May we strive to show the same kind of unconditional love and unwavering devotion in our own lives.

Let us remember the love and sacrifice of all mothers, both here with us and those who are no longer with us. Their strength, wisdom, and unconditional love have shaped us and made us who we are today.

Let's take a moment to reflect on the lessons we've learned from them, the comfort they've provided, and the love they've showered upon us. Let's carry these lessons forward in our lives, spreading love and kindness in the same way they have done for us.

May we honor them not just today, but every day, by living out the values they've instilled in us. Let's continue to cherish and appreciate them, for they are the pillars of our lives.

As we step out into the world, let's carry their love in our hearts, their wisdom in our minds, and their strength in our spirits. May God bless all mothers, for they are truly the embodiment of divine love and sacrifice.

Dear Heavenly Father,

On this special day, we come before You with hearts full of gratitude for the gift of mothers. We thank You for the love, strength, and comfort that they provide.

We remember all mothers today - those who are with us, those who have passed on, and those who have borne spiritual or emotional burdens as mothers. We honor their sacrifices and celebrate their courage.

We pray for the mothers who are grieving, that they may find comfort and peace in You. We pray for new mothers navigating the challenges of parenthood, that they may feel Your guidance and grace. We pray for expectant mothers, that they may experience a safe delivery and the joy of welcoming new life.

We ask for Your blessings upon all mothers, that they may continue to shine Your light of love and compassion in their families and communities.

May we honor them not just today, but every day, by living out the values they've instilled in us. Let's continue to cherish and appreciate them, for they are the pillars of our lives.

In Your holy name, we pray. Amen.

