

Sermon preached by Bishop Hamish Jamieson at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2007. Reading: Ephesians 6:1-4. Mark 7:9-13  
Topic: "Honouring Father and Mother"

## **1. Introduction.**

We live within a self-centred society - tantrums, the uncontrollable, road rage, the two-finger salute; lack of response to left-messages; surprised if we find good manners!

Such behaviour is divisive. It diminishes and rejects, it is cynical and bitter, often a cry from the heart to be loved.

There was a huge contrast between Judaism, together with the early church, and the pagan Roman world within which both Jew and Christian strove to maintain identity. This contrast diminishes as our society slips back into paganism.

The breakdown of the human family reflects this, with the dishonouring of parents, the lack of sexual morality, through which community further disintegrates.

Jesus understood these things, under the parenting of Mary and Joseph - "he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive (or 'lived obediently') to them...his mother treasured up all these things in her heart."<sup>i</sup> Jesus learnt to be a Father-pleaser, growing in wisdom and in stature".<sup>ii</sup>

Such loving, respectful treatment of one another is part of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Many have grown up living out these values. Here is a contrasting example.

A Roman father could, for any or no reason, choose to kill his newborn infant either by cutting the umbilical cord too close or by leaving the baby outside – sound familiar? The Jews were seen to be peculiar because they refused to do this. "The Jews (think)..." wrote the historian Tacitus around A.D. 100. that "It is a deadly sin to kill a born or unborn child...hence their eagerness to have children, and their contempt for death." Herod the Great executed two of his own sons, leading Augustus Caesar to remark, "I'd rather be Herod's pigs than Herod's sons,"<sup>iii</sup> and he thought nothing of killing the under-tuos at the time of Jesus.

The more our society gives God in Christ away,

- the more Christian morality and values become irrelevant;
- the more we give permission to ourselves to be ungodly, unrighteous,<sup>iv</sup> and write our own commandments. Then,
- the more we slide back into paganism, make gods in our own image, and fall into idolatry. Therefore,
- the less we respect and honour one another and parents, undermines Jesus' instruction to "Heal the sick...The kingdom of God has come near to you."<sup>v</sup>

Within the Healing Ministry, we are compelled to pick up this matter, for it contains one of the fundamental building blocks of our lives, a root that produces good or bitter fruit. Paul to the Ephesians writes:

## **2. Honour Father and Mother.**

a) "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."<sup>vi</sup> He quotes the fifth commandment. "Honour your father and your mother..."<sup>vii</sup>

This is the only commandment, of the ten, where there is a specific promise - "that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you",<sup>viii</sup> to which Deuteronomy adds - "and that it may go well with you."<sup>ix</sup> But, and there is a "but".

Malachi adds a word: "I will send you Elijah...he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."<sup>x</sup>

That is a curse. Let's translate. To honour our parents (alive or dead) is good for our total health - it is a blessing. But if we don't honour our parents then it can be a curse. The choice is ours.

Do not take this matter lightly, as many do. The dishonouring of parents is prevalent, seen as normal behaviour, the stuff of dramas and soap operas!

This is foundational stuff, vital for good health and well being. We ignore it at our peril.

There are two ways of maintaining a lawn. Keep mowing the weeds down or dig them out. It is exactly the same when we dishonour our parents. Dig this bitter root out, otherwise it grows deep,

cancerous, dulls the conscience, we slowly die!

The evidence is clear. Of course there are many reasons why we can justify the dishonouring of our parents:

- Abusive, discouraging, de-valuing, ignoring by distant fathers;
- mothers and daughters who haven't talked for years and have no desire to do so.
- The putting down, not being wanted at birth, rejection, the bitterness, the judgements made, and the condemnation - an endless list.

b) Think of a man who, as a boy, would attempt to do something, maybe some wood work, or some gardening, and every time he did so, his father would tell "You are useless, you cannot do that!" or "You'll never be any good."

And the man who could not build relationships - his marriage was a disaster. With ministry and prayer it emerged that, one Christmas, as a young boy, he had received from his father what looked like a wonderful gift, but on opening he found a house brick. His father told him, "that is all you are worth!" The boy, there and then, reacted, inwardly, and made the decision never to trust any person, including his wife, again. He repented of the inner vow had a good marriage.

Or the girl who dresses smartly for the coming party, and her mother says, "Get out of that dress, you look awful!"

Or my mother, when over 100, let it slip that I had not been wanted as a baby. Perfectly understandable - depression time, no money, who wanted an extra child? Many would be deeply hurt. Praise God I accepted it easily

From a Rebus story. The background. Siobhan's parents, hippies in the sixties, and were currently in Edinburgh part of a public demonstration. They were listening to the names of thousands, who had died in Iraq, being read out. Siobhan, a police officer, was having difficulty making real, intimate, contact with them.

"She studied her parents from behind. They were holding hands, her mother leaning her head against her father's shoulder. Tears threatened to well up in Siobhan's eyes, but she forced them back down. She remembered (her mother) running from the room; and (herself) doing the self-same thing. Both of them scared of life itself. In her teens, Siobhan had run from plenty of rooms, rooms her parents had been in. Tantrums, bust-ups, battles of wits, power-plays. And all she wanted now was to be standing right there between them. Wanted it, but couldn't do it. Instead she stood fifty feet behind them, willing them to turn their heads. Instead of which, they listened to the names...the names of people they'd never known."<sup>xii</sup> Distant, remote, unconnected, not wanting to be hurt.

What did Jesus say about it? "Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'"<sup>xiii</sup> He gives an example of dishonouring.

"If a man tells his father or his mother, 'Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God) - then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down."<sup>xiii</sup>

"Corban" is Hebrew for a "gift offered to God". So this son was getting out of a responsibility towards his parents because he had vowed his property and income as Corban, which allowed him to avoid any obligation to, or support of, his parents. It was a cop out, a manoeuvre which devalued and dishonoured. God is appalled.

"To honour" means to place high value, price, upon the other, to make the other more glorious. To "honour" demands humility, proper, not servile, submission, cheerful obedience, having respect and esteem for parents. Parents, as well, are to be loving and responsible. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger...bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."<sup>xiv</sup>

c) I want to make something very clear: There is no question that hurts are given and received. This is a fact of life. We are dealing with an imperfect world. There isn't a parent who hasn't said and done things that they have later regretted. And then there are children....I don't need to say more.

- Our perception of what happened isn't always what actually did happen. We often misinterpret both words and actions and therefore ascribe motives to people, which they did not have, and did not intend to have. As children grow into adults they often distort stories.
- Terrible things are done and said, and in doing them we mostly justify our behaviour. But there is no "good reason" for behaving badly. Self-justification is an excuse, and God isn't interested in "excuses"! He wants us to deal with the matter His way.
- "Emotions" play a huge part. We must recognise, and overcome them. Many people say, "I cannot

forgive my parents”, which translated means “I do not feel like forgiving them”, which is probably true, but not the point.

- Forgiveness is an essential to healing, and forgiveness is always a decision, and not a matter of feeling like it.

It is at this point that people get stuck. They honestly believe that they cannot forgive, but that is a deception. Forgiveness is a matter of the will and not of the emotions, just as love, facing a danger, dealing with a crisis, are emotions demanding a decision. We have to override our feelings and do what is necessary.

Differences, break downs in families happen, but the real question is “how do we handle these hurts whether they are real or perceived?” - sulk and be filled with self-pity? Is it to be healing or disorder, blessing or curse, life or death?

### **3. Application.**

a) "Honour your father and mother".

To honour our parents is a commandment with promise - and what a promise it is: Live long on earth and may it go well with you. This is not a cast iron guarantee to good health and longevity of living, but it is certainly one of the ingredients!

Therefore we honour our parents, despite those things that have happened, despite the way our parents did or did not treat us. The way that we react to, and deal with, the things that are done to us, whether we forgive or withhold forgiveness is the primary way we too grow in “wisdom and stature”, into mature godliness and good health.

It is easy to hang on to hurts and grudges, real or perceived. They destroy us, eat us up.

One of the comments that Michelangelo would make when he was carving a piece of marble was, “I have to let the angel come out of the rock” and that can be an ugly and dirty business, but it has to happen.

b) Let us do it.

- 1: The primary factor was our response to our parent’s mistakes or sins at the time. Did we judge or did we honour?
2. Recognise the sinful reactions and decide that you will deal with them.
3. Make decisions of the will to forgive them, to honour them. Repent of that sin, renounce previous bad decisions and make new ones.
4. We pray for our hearts to be healed, that the sins of the parents may be covered by the shed blood of Jesus, and brought to death on the cross any controlling power of sin, so that we may experience resurrection life.

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<sup>i</sup> Luke 2:51 (ESV)

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 2:52 (ESV)

<sup>iii</sup> From the web.

<sup>iv</sup> Idea from Lloyd-Jones, Martin, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work*, Banner of Truth, 1985, p 139

<sup>v</sup> Luke 10:9 (ESV)

<sup>vi</sup> Ephesians 6:1 (ESV)

<sup>vii</sup> Exodus 20:12a (ESV)

<sup>viii</sup> Exodus 20:12b (ESV)

<sup>ix</sup> Deuteronomy 5:16 (ESV)

<sup>x</sup> Malachi 4:5-6 (ESV)

<sup>xi</sup> Rankin, Ian, *The Naming of the Dead*, Orion, London, 2006, p 114

<sup>xii</sup> Mark 7:10 (ESV)

<sup>xiii</sup> Mark 7:11-13 (ESV)

<sup>xiv</sup> Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)