

As a Mother Comforts Her Child

(Isaiah 66:9-13)

I. Introduction

- A. In the novel *The Shack*, the main character Mack is invited to meet with God
1. Of course, he doubts it was God who sent the note inviting him to the shack
 - a. But he goes and meets a black woman named Papa (*wife's name for God*)
 - b. Mack soon realizes that Papa can be no one else other than God of Bible
 2. As you can imagine, the novel was criticized for depicting God as a female
 - a. **Point:** Mack desperately needed mothering; that's how God came to Him
 - 1) His daughter was murdered & Mack was depressed ("*Great Sadness*")
 - 2) His father was an abusive alcoholic hiding behind façade of religion
 - b. So Mack needed a mother, and that is how God presented himself
 3. After Mack forgives his father, God appears as old man w/ flowing beard
- B. Does the idea of God as female sound like some kind of New Age feminism?
1. Popular books like *Da Vinci Code* stress "*Goddess*" or "*Sacred Feminine*"
 - a. Suggest that early deities were always male and female (*Baal and Asherah*)
 - b. So Judaism/Christianity systematically suppressed feminine side of God
 - 1) In the conspiracy theories, the Catholic Church removed all reference to the sacred feminine in order to keep its power in the hands of men
 - 2) Many if the same writers see Gnostics as having a truer view of God
 - 3) See if you think the Gnostic "*Gospel of Thomas*" sounds feminist—
Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her [Mary Magdalene] in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven
 2. Few would argue God that God is male in a literal sense (*Y chromosome*)
 - a. God is Spirit without any of the limitations of a physical existence
 - b. But the Bible does consistently refer to God as He— male pronouns
 - 1) God is Warrior (**Isa 42:13**), Husband (**Isa 54:5**), Shepherd (**Isa 40:11**)
 - 2) God is always portrayed as the FATHER; Jesus is always His SON
 - 3) And when God became flesh to live among us, He did so as a MALE
 - c. So to refer to God as being female is to step outside the world of Bible!

- C. But these male images of God are precisely that—they are “**male images**”
1. God made us male and female ([Gen 1:27](#)). Or maybe as “*male or female*”
 - a. God wasn’t created male or female— God creates, He was not created
 - b. But Bible uses symbolic language to help us to understand God
 - 1) **Anthropomorphism**: Human characteristics to a non-human beings
 - 2) God is said to have a head, feet, hands—even though He has no body
 - c. Bible uses this to give us a frame of reference to help us understand
 - d. Without these pictures of God, we would quickly be overwhelmed
 2. OK, all of this is just fascinating, but is there a point in here somewhere?
 - a. And what does all of this (or any of this) have to do with Mother’s Day?
 - b. **Point**: The Bible does portray God as a Father... but also as a Mother
 - c. God is Warrior/Husband/Shepherd, but He is also cast in feminine terms
 - 1) David sees God as Midwife that brought him to life ([Psa 22:9-10](#))
 - 2) God is not only Master of house, He is also Mistress of ([Psa 123:2](#))
 - 3) God portrays himself as one who gives us birth ([Isaiah 42:14](#))
 3. These kinds of feminine images give us another view of the God who loves
 - a. We read [Isaiah 66:12](#) to give us our song theme, “*The River of God*”
 - b. If we read a bit more, focus isn’t a river but a Mother ([Isaiah 66:9-13](#))

II. Our Mothering God

- A. Isaiah is speaking through prophetic eyes about the restoration of Jerusalem
1. He must have prophetic eyes, because as he writes, Jerusalem has fallen
 - a. Much of Isaiah’s writing is warning of a coming destruction
 - b. Isaiah ministry spans the reigns of Uzziah to Hezekiah (strong kings)
 - c. But Isaiah’s message has largely been one of warning (see [Isaiah 1:4-9](#))
 2. But Isaiah is not famous for being the prophetic of doom and gloom
 - a. We know him as “The Messianic Prophetic” because he points to Christ
 - b. Much of the later part of his writing is about restoration and redemption
 - 1) Yes, God would hold his people accountable and bring destruction
 - 2) But he would redeem them and bring about restoration and renewal

- B. The text we just read from **Isaiah 66**, is one of restoration and renewal
1. This restoration would be dramatic—like woman delivering before labor
 - a. Earlier in the book, destruction was portrayed in the reverse (**Isa 37:3**)
 - b. During dark days of invasion, there was labor but no strength to deliver
 - c. God’s restoration would be the opposite—would be birth without labor
 2. In the imagery of Isaiah 66, Zion/Jerusalem is the mother that gives birth
 - a. Zion (Jerusalem) would deliver before she knew she was in labor (**v. 8**)
 - b. Jews would nurse at Jerusalem’s breast, a restoration to homeland (**v. 11**)
 - c. Israel would again be bounced on the knees of the city of David (**v. 12**)
 3. The image changes as God becomes mother who comforts children (**v. 13**)
- C. The words of God drip with emotion as He weeps over Israel (**Hosea 11:1-4**)
1. Don’t these words feel maternal, a mother’s tears for a rebellious child
 - a. God once held Israel’s arms as He taught Israel to walk—want to again
 - b. His tenderness, gentleness and wounded love sounds like that of mother
 2. Later in chapter, God is not mother/father but a roaring lion (**11:10-11**)
 - a. That’s not surprising—my mother was at times a roaring lion too
 - b. God is “*God of all comfort*” (**2 Cor 1**), but he is also a God who roars
- D. Remember, the Bible speaks of God in figures, metaphor, in word images
1. But we must see that God is too big to be contained in any one image
 - a. The 1st commandment was don’t make “*graven images*” of God (**Ex 20:4**)
 - b. God is too great to be contained in or portrayed by any one image
 - c. The point is that this is true of word images as well as graven images
 - 1) God is Father, mother, lion, whirlwind, consuming fire, shepherd, etc
 - 2) God is at the same all of those, but He is never only any one of those
 2. When someone speaks of a mothering God, that should not rattle our cage
 - a. That isn’t some feminist plot to undermine the authority of the Bible
 - b. That is simply to recognize that God is portrayed to us in different ways
 - 1) For some, like Mack at the Shack, image of God as Father is hard
 - 2) Their father is abusive or absent, a source of pain and abandonment
 - c. Sometimes its important to see God as mother **and** father (**Duet 32:18**)

III. Conclusion

- A. Let's face it, sometimes only a mother will do. We know that's right, right?
1. I can remember times when the girls ran right past me to get to Momma
 - a. You run to Daddy when bike chain comes off or you get a flat tire
 - b. But you run to Momma if you fall off the bike and skin your knee!
 - c. There are times when only a Mother will do—that's still true
 - 1) Sometimes the girls still call, "*Ahhh, Dad, let me speak to Mom!*"
 - 2) If they call and ask to speak to me, then I know they need money!
 - d. Sometimes only a mother will do & that's true of our need for God too!
 2. Point in scripture isn't God's gender but His desire for intimacy with us
 - a. Kings seem distant, powerful, wise, benevolent—but not really intimate.
 - b. God loves us so deeply that God Himself becomes vulnerable to us
 - 1) God loves so deeply He stepped into our history so we can know Him
 - 2) God loves so intimately that He is heartbroken when we reject Him
 - 3) God loves us so fully that He made even Himself vulnerable to death
 - c. God loves so deeply, intimately, sacrificially—just like a mother
 3. Obviously, the important thing is not gender but this intimacy of God's love
 - a. God loves like a perfect Father, mother, sibling or friend— loves forever
 - b. There's nothing in the world that can compare to God love ([Eph 3:17b-19](#))
 - c. There's nothing in the world that can separate from His love ([Rom 8:38-39](#))
- B. Bill Cosby complains about Dads who work so hard to teach their a kid a sport
1. They spend endless hours playing catch and giving pointers in the back yard
 - a. They spend money on best equipment and take off work to attend games
 - 1) They make sure the kid goes to the best school and has best coaching
 - 2) The kid makes it to big time and gets on TV... and says, "Hi Mom!"
 - b. Why? Because a father's love is solid, but mother's love is intimate
 2. God wants you to know this morning that He loves you like a mother
 - a. God's love for you is one of intimacy— caring, closeness, kindness
 - b. And that is the way that God wants you to love Him in return
- C. If you have not yet responded to God intimate love—meet him at the river