

Mother's Day Sermon
Honoring Mother

Exodus 2:1-10; Numbers 26:59; Hebrews 11:23

One of the most difficult and stressful occupations is the job of mothering. And at some time or another every woman will be one - either biologically and/or spiritually. Actress Sarah Drew writes, "This mom thing is crazy hard, and it's okay if you feel like tearing your hair out sometimes. So do I!" There is no end to what mothers struggle with: anywhere from the endless cries of a child with colic to a rebellious teenager who runs away to what they believe is a promising future, but in reality is little more than a disaster. On Mother's Day we are all reminded to be good to our mothers and appreciate them more. But today's message is about a mother who knew all about the pains of motherhood and who had to make some very hard choices for the welfare of her son. She had learned that being a mother isn't for the faint of heart. It requires tough decisions - decisions that are risky and heart wrenching, decisions that require great faith.

Today's story is about a woman who is only mentioned three times in Scripture, and only once is her name given. She is even nameless in faith's "Hall of Fame (Hebrews 11:23)." But she is a great example of a godly woman, a woman of great faith, in the most trying of circumstances.

As her story begins, Egypt's Pharaoh has launched three successive plans to reduce what he believed to be a threat - a sizable Hebrew population that was larger and stronger than the Egyptian ruling class. Plan A was to wear out and crush the spirit of the Israelites through extremely hard manual labor as they built the great cities of Pithom and Ramses. Plan B was to order the Egyptian midwives to kill all the male Hebrew babies at birth. When neither of these plans worked, Plan C was Pharaoh's order to everyone in his kingdom to throw every newly born Hebrew boy into the Nile River and watch them drown. Imagine then what Jochebed was thinking when she birthed her baby boy - Moses. This child would be fair game for any patriotic Egyptian in

a bad mood. I cannot imagine how one could live in the face of such fear. Nor can I imagine what many Christian mothers are faced with in the Middle East as they see their sons and daughters beheaded, sold as sex slaves, or beaten and starved to death. *With this in mind, we discover three things about this godly mother.*

I. She had faith in the face of imminent danger! (Exodus 2:1-2; Hebrews 11:23)

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman.² The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.

²³ *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.*

Into an ordinary family has been born no ordinary child. It appears to be that the child was so exceptionally beautiful or perhaps well pleasing that his mother believed that God had some special plan for him. Stephen, in Acts 7:20, says that not only Moses' parents, but also God himself, had a special affection for this child. "He was lovely in the sight of God"

1. She believed God even when the times were extraordinarily tough. Instead of pouting or doubting, Aram and Jochebed stood firm in their faith. When God could have seemed uncaring or unfair by allowing the Israelite people to be placed under bondage and even allowing their male sons to be killed, this godly mother was still committed to doing God's will no matter what.

2. She confronted hostility with extraordinary obedience. When Egyptian law required disobeying God's will, she considered God's will more important than obedience to the state. Jochebed understood the sacredness of her child's life to God, and that her faith called her to do a very risky thing. To disobey Pharaoh's edict would most certainly mean death or imprisonment if she was caught. But she and her husband hid Moses for three months. She put the baby's life ahead of even her own life. That took incredible courage! Can you imagine how hard it would have been to hide an infant for three months?

Many mothers today have the faith to do risky things. I think of mothers who have been unable to conceive but take the risk of adopting a child knowing that raising this child will bring with it some very difficult circumstances. I think of mothers who are married to unbelieving husbands and take their children to church risking his disappointment or anger. I think of mothers who stand up to a teenage son or daughter saying no to something when other mothers are saying yes. There are mothers who choose to give up a lucrative career so they can stay home with their children when everyone around them thinks they are crazy for doing so. What gives the mothers the courage to do this is their deep love and desire to please God more than they want to please their friends or their children or even their husbands. They trust that as they obey God in the face of threatening circumstances, he'll take care of them and their child.

Dr. Benjamin Carson, for many years the director of pediatric neurosurgery at John Hopkins Children's Center, speaks often of the influence of his mother on his life. "Over the years my mother's steadfast faith in God has inspired me, particularly when I had to perform extremely difficult surgical procedures or when I found myself faced with my own medical scare. A few years ago I discovered I had a very aggressive form of prostate cancer; I was told it might have spread to my spine. My mother, in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances, was steadfast in her faith in God. She never worried. She said that God was not through with me yet; there was no way that this was going to be a major problem. The abnormality in my spine turned out to be benign; I was able to have surgery and am cured. My story is really my mother's story - a woman with little formal education or worldly goods who used her position as a parent to change the lives of many people around the globe." His mother had faith in the face of what seemed to be imminent danger.

II. She had faith to let him go. (Exodus 2:3-4)

³ *When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.* ⁴ *And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.*

When the time came that she could hide him no longer, she made a little wicker basket, covered it with tar and pitch to make it float, and put it in the reeds on the banks of the Nile.

1. It was time to let go and trust God to do what might have seemed to be the impossible. Placing him in this basket was highly dangerous because the Nile River was known for crocodiles. Moses would be completely helpless in a river filled with crocodiles. As children were being murdered around her every day, she simply says, “God, I don’t understand why you are allowing this or what you have planned in all of this, but I trust you. Here is my son. I entrust him to you.” What is interesting is that the same word here for “wicker basket” is the very word that is translated “ark” in Genesis 6:14.

How often mothers have come to the end of their rope when they have done all that they could possibly do, and now it is time to put their child in the hands of God and let them go. They will continue to pray; they will continue to be there for them. But the situation is such that only God can resolve the problem. How often I have seen this courage even as mom’s heart is breaking into little pieces: in the case of a child with cancer, a son or daughter enslaved by an addiction, or a grandchild running with the wrong crowd, a child abused by a spouse, an employer, etc.

One of the hardest things for mom to do is to let go. A mother’s love never changes, but parenthood is a constant process of letting go: letting your child make mistakes; letting your teenager learn some things the hard way; letting your adult child follow God’s call to the mission field, even if it means he or she will be a 1000 miles away.

2. Such faith is not passive but active. It is important to note that Jochebed’s faith was not a reckless faith, but a sensible faith. Yes there were crocodiles in the river, but she did not send Moses floating down the river, she placed him among the reeds along the banks of the Nile. She knew this was a place where women would often congregate. Further, it was not uncommon for Pharaohs and other Egyptians to bathe ceremonially in the sacred Nile River. The Egyptians believed that the waters of the Nile possessed the ability to impart fruitfulness and to prolong life. What Moses’ mother did was much like what a woman

might do today by placing a baby on the steps of a hospital. And she did not simply wave goodbye, but had his older sister stand watch at a distance so that she would know what happened to him. When She had done all she could do for him, she let him go.

III. She had a faith that was rewarded (Exodus 2:5-10)

⁵ Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” ⁸ And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹ And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

1. Sometimes our faith is immediately rewarded. This is the case in our story. Jochebed gave up what she could not keep and received back much more than what she gave. The daughter of Pharaoh arrived at the Nile River with her maidens. She saw the basket and had it brought to her. She opened it and saw the child crying. And God filled her with compassion for this Hebrew child so that she took pity on him. Further, it was standard procedure for a wealthy woman to hire a wetnurse to feed a child until he was weaned. The wetnurse would be the legal guardian during those first years. So, at just the right time, the sister moved in and made an offer to help fulfill that custom. Moses’ mother would not only get to raise her child, but she will get paid for her work! How amazing God is in all of this. Pharaoh’s chosen instrument of death, the Nile River, becomes the instrument through which Moses is saved. His mother even follows Pharaoh’s orders in placing him there. Moses will spend his youth in Pharaoh’s court, where he’ll earn law, rhetoric, mathematics, hieroglyphics, and even the art of war. And one day God will use all of that knowledge as Moses leads 2 million people

through a desert, putting all of this education and training to work. Just as God used an ark to save Noah, God used an ark to save Moses - Israel's lawgiver and deliverer. He who was "drawn out of the water" (the meaning of his name) would be the means of drawing the Israelite nation out of the water of the Red Sea.

2. Sometimes we will not see our faith rewarded in this life. But God will reward it in some way and somehow in the new heaven and new earth. To you moms today, may I remind you of the words of Winston Churchill: "Never give up! Never, never, never!" God will reward your faith. He may not do exactly what you want him to do, but God will reward a faithful life.

Conclusion

The fact that Moses later chose to identify with the Israelites rather than the Egyptians is remarkable in view of his Egyptian privileges and background. His mom and dad's faith clearly had a strong influence on him beginning very early in his life.

Mary Thomas was a single mom of nine children living in Chicago's rough West Side neighborhood. Seven of Mary's nine kids were boys, young men constantly stretching the boundaries of their tired mother's authority and patience. One day in 1966, Mary opened her front door to find 25 street thugs on her stoop. The men, members of the notorious Vice Lords gang, had come to recruit her seven sons. Mary, hearing their intentions, dropped her gaze, said "Oh, okay. Hold on just a second," and closed the door. When the door opened again, the first thing the Vice Lords saw was the barrel of a loaded shotgun. "There's only one gang around here, and that's the Thomas gang." With that same fortitude, Mary Thomas ushered each of her nine "gang members" to their high school graduation. You may have heard of her youngest son—pro basketball player and Hall of Famer Isaiah Thomas.

Dr. John Stott's last bit of advice to his assistant before he died in 2011 was simply this: "Do the hard thing." Stott believed that choosing the easy trail, the road most taken, and the path of least resistance can only end in mediocrity—even if it comes with praise. How I thank God for those many moms who daily take up the challenge of the hardest occupation in the world - motherhood. Today, we honor you!