

May 10 (Mother's Day) [Hannah] "A Mother Keeps Her Promise"



1 Samuel 1:26-28

26 and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord.

27 I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him.

28 So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there.

Opening Music:

A Mother's Promise - Yaakov Shwekey

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLVlp_pOxMY

Special Music:

A Mother's Love - Jim Brickman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgB-JlkI4q8>

Being a woman in biblical times was not easy. When you were young, you often given the most menial of chores. Your fate was somewhat predetermined because you would marry who you were told to marry and your main responsibility in the marriage was to provide your husband with children, male children. The birth of a female child was often considered a disappointment. Female children would never grow into inheritors of the family estate. No matter what else a woman achieved in life, if she could not give her husband a male heir, she was considered a failure and with that failure came humiliation resentment. The fact that it might be the husband that was having difficulty providing the necessary ingredients for a successful male pregnancy was never considered. After all, it was the woman who bore the children so if she failed to conceive then it had to be her fault. And if a woman only bore female children then that had to be their fault as well.

And yes, a woman's duty was to take care of her husband. She did the cooking, cleaning, and other household chores. If the husband was well off enough to have servants or slaves, then the wife was generally in charge of managing the household as well. If a wife did not please her husband by doing all that was required of her, including giving him a male heir, he could divorce her with a simple letter, and being a divorced woman was almost a fate worse than death.

I do not want to leave you with the impression that this was common. Most men and women of the time were thoroughly dedicated to their marriages, even if a woman was thought to be barren. We read of couples like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Zechariah and Elizabeth and there is no hint of divorce as an option. We know that in these cases where women are barren or too old to conceive, that God steps in and gives nature a hand.

Although there is no hard data to support it, scholars estimate that the infant mortality rate in the Roman Empire around the time of the 1st century was around 30% for females and 35% for males during the first year of life. I don't tell you that to sound disheartening. It simply means that times were hard and life was so very, very precious.

The bond between a mother and a child is a wonder and miracle in and of itself no matter when that child is born. Mothers will do anything to protect their children and that is a common theme in nature. The Bible relates to us so many stories of mothers and their children and what they do to protect and care for them, even in the worst of times, the sacrifices that are made, the bond that draws them close.

This desire to protect one's child is exemplified on multiple occasions. One such instance is found in the 1st and 2nd chapter of Exodus. While the Israelites were being struggling as slaves in Egypt, Pharaoh becomes concerned about the

population growth among the Israelites, so he exercises a type of population control. He tells the mid-wives that if a baby boy is born to an Israelite woman, that that baby is to be put to death. But this turns out to be a problem for Pharaoh because, as the midwives state: **“Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”** Realizing that his initial plan was not going to work, Pharaoh then tells an order to all of his people telling them that every Hebrew boy that is born must be thrown into the Nile.

At this time, a Hebrew woman named Jochebed gives birth to a son and, afraid for his life, hides him for three months. That alone is no easy task. Babies have a way of making their need known. So, in an act of desperation and in an ultimate sacrifice of love, Jochebed seals a basket so that it will not leak and put the baby in the basket. She then puts the basket in the waters of Nile in hopes that someone will find the baby, not realize that it is a Hebrew baby, and save its life. Jochebed fights every instinct in her body in order protect her baby. What she does is something most of us could never imagine but she know that it is his only hope.

We all know that the basket finds its way to the reeds around the area where the Pharaoh’s daughter is bathing. I am so often in awe of the way God works. There is just so much happening here. Pharaoh’s daughter spots the basket in the

needs and has one of her attendants fetch it for her. The baby is crying, and she feels sorry for it. She also realizes that it is a Hebrew baby. By all rights, she should take this baby and drown it. But she has feelings for this baby. She doesn't want to see it come to harm, even if her daddy isn't going to be happy with her. It is also a miracle that Miriam is in attendance and how very brave she must be. You see, Miriam is also sticking her neck out by speaking up. She knows that this baby is her brother. She can see that Pharaoh's daughter doesn't want to harm this child. She also knows that even though Pharaoh's daughter doesn't want to hurt the child, she is also not going to care for it. To her, it's almost like finding a puppy. But God's got this and He give a voice and courage to Miriam so that she will speak up and say "Hey, you want to keep this baby? Here's a great idea! Let me go find a Hebrew woman who can nurse and take care of the baby for you." Well, that seems perfectly logical to Pharaoh's daughter and she tells Miriam to go do that. So, Miriam goes and gets her mother, Jochebed and tells her, "Mama, you aren't going to believe this, but Pharaoh's daughter found my brother and wants to keep him. Not only that she sent me to find someone to take care of him. Sweet, sweet mama, God has given you a gift beyond belief. You are going to get the opportunity to raise your son and you are going to get paid to do it. Don't you know, our God is so very good."

Ahhh, the mysterious ways of our Lord. The child became the son of Pharaoh's daughter and it was she that named him Moses because Moses means "I drew him out of the water." But it is the true mother of Moses, Jochebed, that is the

heroine in this story. She was willing to risk everything, even complete separation from ever seeing her son again in order to have the possibility that he might live and prosper.

At Christmas time, we talked about how Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt to protect the baby Jesus from Harod who ordered the deaths of all male children under the age of two, in and around Bethlehem. Imaging leaving everything you know and moving to a foreign country to protect the lives of your children.

But I want to talk about Hannah. I want to talk about Hannah because as exciting as these other stories are, the story of Hannah is unique. It puts a strange twist on the story of the bond between mother and child.

As it goes, there was a man from Ephraim by the name of Elkanah who had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah and Elkanah had several children together. But it seemed that Hannah was unable to have children. Peninnah would mock Hannah and this treatment went on for years and became such an act of bullying that Hannah began to spend much of her time in tears and refused to eat.

Now we have all heard of, or may even know a couple that struggled with being able to have children. It puts a huge strain on a relationship, especially if they really want children. That stress is magnified when there is a rivalry and bullying going on. But the simple truth is that Elkanah loved Hannah and even shows preference for her over Pinannah, which probably didn't help matters. And, it is probably true that Elkanah wasn't as desperate to have children as Hannah simply because he had children with Pinannah. But he could see that the situation had become an unbearable strain for Hannah. He really did his best to reassure her that it didn't really matter to him, that he loved Hannah just as she was. But Hannah felt incomplete. She wanted so desperately to have a child and to be a mother. Doing so would prove that she had value as a woman, that she was a capable wife, that she was not inferior to her rival, that she could give her husband what they needed to complete their union.

You do have to stretch your brain a little bit here. Do not try to throw a 21st century curve at this. Women today do not have to have children to feel complete. That does not mean that I am negating that natural desire that most women have to become mothers. But we do live in a society, at least here in the US, where women are generally not taunted and ridiculed if they can't have or don't want children. I personally believe that there is no greater calling on this planet than motherhood, but not all people believe that and God does not look favorably on us for looking down on woman who cannot or chooses not to have children. But there needs to be an understanding that there is a huge difference in not wanting

children and not being able to have children. If a woman chooses a career or lifestyle over being a mother, that is a decision that she needs to come to terms with. A woman that cannot have children may suffer extreme depression or feelings of abandonment by God and her husband, even though neither is true.

Hannah was in that place mentally. She felt God had abandoned her and, even though Elkanah tried to comfort her, she must have felt someone betrayed by her husband and maybe had feelings of worthlessness and insecurity as well.

As the story goes, the family went to Shiloh to offer sacrifices and Eli was the priest at the temple there. In her anger and depression, Hannah began praying to the silently to God. Her lips were moving but she was not praying out loud. Her prayer went like this: **“Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”**

Because he could see her praying, but couldn’t hear her, Eli assumed that she was drunk, and Hannah has to assure him that that is not the case. She must have made a strong argument because Eli tells her **“Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”**

The next day the family heads home and at some point Elkanah and Hannah have relations and lo and behold, Hannah discovers that she is pregnant. God has answered her prayers and in the course of time, she has a son whom she names Samuel. We talked a little bit about Samuel last week because Samuel was the last Judge of Israel before the reign of Saul.

Hannah keeps the promise that she made at the temple, the one that she prayed silently and was witnessed by Eli. As soon as her son is weaned, she brings him to the temple in Shiloh and presents him, along with her sacrifices, to the Lord and he enters the service of God under the training of Eli. Our scripture today tells us what happened.

1 Samuel 1:26-28

26 and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord.

27 I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him.

28 So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there.

Eli, who actually accused this woman of being drunk when she offered up her prayers through her despair and agony, drops to his knees right there and

worship the Lord because of the faith this woman has shown and the promise that she has kept. That happens when we find ourselves in the presence of great faith. We can't help but fall to our knees in worship when we find ourselves in the presence of the miracle.

And even though Hannah gives Samuel over to Eli to serve that God that she knows and trusts, just like she promised, she visits Samuel every year and brings him a brand new handmade robe for his service. She continues to be a part of his life and his ministry. Samuel is a delight before God and a treasure to Eli. And Hannah's sacrifice does not go unnoticed, because God graces her with three more sons and two daughters. And I just love what the second half of verse 21 in the second chapter of 1 Samuel says: **“Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.”** What greater accomplishment can you have as a mother, than to proclaim that your child grows up in the presence of the Lord.

Hannah is filled with joy when she gives the boy over to Eli and the Bible tells us that she started a prayer of praise like this:

“My heart rejoices in the LORD;

in the LORD my horn is lifted high.

My mouth boasts over my enemies,

for I delight in your deliverance.

2 “There is no one holy like the LORD;

there is no one besides you;

there is no Rock like our God.”

Here is the extraordinary thing about this story. Unlike our other stories about Moses and Jesus, Samuel is in no danger. Hannah gives Samuel over to Eli and into God's service because of her promise to, and her love for the God who gave her this child. It is obvious that Eli is totally astounded that she would keep this promise. He had probably forgotten all about it. Remember, he thought she was inebriated when she made the promise. If she had broken the promise, there is a good chance no one would have remembered other than herself and God. But she was firm in her conviction that this child was gifted by God, chosen by God and welcomed into the service of God. She found power, encouragement and fortitude and courage in her limitless faith as she embraced God's promise for both her and her child.

We all hold our children dear to our hearts. We would die for our children. Even when they disappoint or disparage us, we know that the bond cannot be broken. Stretched thin at times, frayed at times, loose and free sometimes, but even when our children reach that point in their lives where they need their freedom, that freedom does not come with detachment. Often that bond is strengthened as we

encourage our children to take flight and reach for the stars. We want them to succeed. We want them to be everything that God intends.

I do want to make an observation here. Although Hannah gave Samuel over to Eli, that bond that she had with Samuel was never severed. By remaining a part of his life, even at a distance, she was able to encourage and speak into him as long as she was alive. And after her death, she remained an example to Samuel of a person that put God first and found that God's purpose for her life could not be diminished as long as she held herself accountable to Him.

I know that we all pray for our children. Every day, we place them in God's hands for another day. And yes, they are going to mess up. And yes, they are going to challenge our authority. And yes, that is a part of coming of age. And yes, we are going to mess up as well. We aren't perfect, either. But as a parent of a child of any age or status, our duty before God is to place them each and every day into the hands of God for Him to develop and use.

If you are a mother, I thank you for being an inspiration, protector, teacher, nurturer, caregiver and example to your children. You are a force of nature to be reckoned with and your abilities, grace and mercy are limitless in the eyes of God and your children.

For each of us that might have a mother that is still with us today, take time today to reach out. This is an opportunity to show gratitude and heap praise on the mother that gave you life, held you when you were scared, nursed you when you were sick, fed you when you were hungry, encouraged you when you failed and praised you when you succeeded and protected you when life wanted to bring you harm. God's gracious gift of motherhood should never be diminished, for it is through our mothers that we first learn humility, love, grace and mercy.

AMEN

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