

## **Mothers Give Us Hope**

**A Message for Mother's Day, 2020**

**Presented to Trinity Evangelical Free Church of Teaneck, NJ**

**On Sunday, May 10, 2020**

### **Introduction**

It's hard to pick up a newspaper that doesn't have bad news on the front page. Every radio program and every television news broadcast has more bad news. More pain. More suffering.

Can we find hope during all this suffering? Well, for followers of Jesus, there's lots of hope in lots of ways. That's one of the reasons that the message of the Gospel is called "The Good News". When Jesus Christ walked out of the tomb almost 2000 years ago, he conquered humankind's worst enemy: Death. Friends, you can't get much more hopeful than to beat death. Someday everyone



who believes in the good news of the Gospel will be rescued from this broken world. We will live in a new creation - a world without pain and suffering. That alone gives us great hope.

For now, we walk on an earthly path. It can be rough. Fortunately, the God we serve is so generous, that he gives us all kinds of hope along that way. We could spend all kinds of time talking about the ways he does that.

Today, we're going to talk about one of the best ways that God gives us hope. God gives hope to all the world through mothers. That's right. Mothers give us hope.

There are two kinds of hope that mothers give. The first is common among all mothers on the earth. The second kind of hope is a greater hope. It happens when God does special things through mothers.

### **I. All Mothers**

Concerning the first: The definition of a mother is a woman who has a child. No getting around that. Every time a child is born, we have hope for the future.

Currently, we're hearing terrible things about people dying from the Coronavirus. At the time I'm speaking the official number of people who have contracted the virus around the world is over 4 million people. Of those, 278,000 have died. That's very sad. We mourn for those people and their families.

Now, almost a million and a half people have recovered. That's good news.

Do you want to hear even better news? From January 1<sup>st</sup> until today, there has been almost 48 million children born. 48 million! That means, for every time that a family mourned the death from the virus, there were many more times that a family rejoiced in the way that a family can only rejoice when a child enters the world. New children always bring us hope.

Bringing babies into the world is not easy. There's discomfort and pain in pregnancy from morning sickness through delivery. Many of you know that I teach comparative religion at a nearby college. Recently, I taught a class on the religion of the native American people, otherwise known as the American Indians. One tribe of Indians



is called the "Sioux". They have an important tradition called the "Sun dance". In the sun dance, young warriors set up poles. They tie ropes to the poles and then tie the talons of large birds to the other end of the ropes. The talons have very sharp claws. The young warriors then proceed to embed the claws into their chest. After they do that, they dance around. Part of the dance involves moving away from the poles so that the ropes get very tense. That makes the sharp claws dig even deeper into their skin. Sometimes, the claws tear loose, taking a lot of flesh with them. The young men do this to prove they can handle great pain. Later they often show off the scars caused by this ritual.

I tell my class that this is a "guy thing". Women don't have to prove how tough they are because they bear children. When I say that, I always get a knowing nod from the ladies in the class.

We don't have time to get into how tough it can be to raise children. For now, we'll just say that all mothers give us hope when they bring new life into the world.

## II. A Mother who was used by God.

As we said, there's even greater hope when a mother is used by God. Let's take a look at one case where that happened. We're going to read about the story surrounding the birth of Moses.

Let's set this up. The story of the Jewish people starts with Abraham. Abraham lived in a comfortable place, but he was told to go to a better one, a land of promise. It will belong to Abraham and his descendants. He goes there. He has a son named Isaac. Isaac has a son named Jacob, whose name is changed to Israel.

Israel has 12 sons. One of Israel's sons, Joseph winds up in Egypt. There, through a chain of miracles, he becomes the Prime minister of Egypt. He is the right-hand man of Pharaoh, the king. A terrible famine hits the region, so Israel and his remaining son all move to Egypt, where there is food. Since Joseph is the Prime Minister, he sets up his family in some of the best real estate Egypt has to offer: the land of Goshen. Eventually, the famine ends.

Let's read now.

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; 3 Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; 4 Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. 5 The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt. (Exodus 1:1-5)

So, the children of Israel start out with 70 people. That's not a terribly big crowd. Let's read on.

6 Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, 7 but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them. (v 6-7)

So, life is good. Northern Egypt was a wonderful place to live. It had great farmland. It had wonderful places to tend sheep and other livestock. It had wonderful weather – sunny and warm. It's like living in Southern California.

There was one little problem: Decades before, the father of the Hebrew people, Abraham, also started out living in a nice place. He lived what is modern day Iraq. He could have stayed there and lived a good life. But, God told him to leave that place and go to the land that is today called "Israel". That's where he and all of his descendants belonged. Not in Egypt. The children of Israel were living a good life in Egypt. A prosperous life. ***So, they let themselves become content to live in a place that was not where they belonged.***

Sometimes, we find ourselves in places where we don't belong. Sometimes, we get away with it. Sometime though, bad things happen.

8 Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. 9 “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. 10 Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

You’ve all heard the phrase “Times change”. They certainly did here. The previous king of Egypt had given total trust to Joseph. He was rewarded with an increase in power and wealth that we can’t even estimate today. Sadly, he neglected to tell any of this to the son who would take over some day. Maybe he thought he had more time? Maybe he had a period of mental decline? We don’t know. We only know that the new king didn’t care about Joseph or his family. In fact, he began to see the Hebrews as a threat. If they continued to increase in numbers, and an enemy attacked Egypt, maybe these Hebrews would fight for the other side?

We don’t have time to go into this. It was totally irrational thinking on the part of the new king. However, kings are kings. Sometimes, kings become evil and irrational.

Here’s how the new king handled the problem:

11 So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. (Exodus 1:11)

I want us to think about this. One day, the children of Israel were free, prosperous, and happy. That word, “free”, means a lot to people in America. It’s one of our core values. Many say they’d be willing to die for it.

Back to our story: Suddenly, troops came in with weapons. They came fast – nobody knew what to do. Overnight, the Hebrew people lost their freedom and became slaves. People who previously led quiet lives as farmers and shepherds were now handed heavy bricks and tools and told to build cities that others would live in.

But once again, those little beings called “children” kept coming along. The Egyptians ran into a problem. These weren’t just any people - They were the children of Israel, the chosen people of God.

12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread;

Children bring hope. But sometimes, hope is a long-term thing.

...so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites 13 and worked them ruthlessly. 14 They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly. (v 13-14)

Oppressors don't much like hope. The Egyptians worked hard to take away any hope the Israelites had. But oppression just made the children of Israel stronger. The more they were oppressed, the more God blessed them with children.

This sadly, was a long battle. The Egyptians responded to more hope with more oppression. We're told they were "ruthless" towards the Israelites. That means if anyone complained, they were mercilessly beaten – or worse.

Things were getting dark for the children of Israel. Could anything be more hopeless? Sadly, where there is evil, it can continue to grow until those who fall to it are consumed.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 16 "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live."

This is a combination of utter evil and utter stupidity. If you want to procure for yourself one of the lowest places in history, you can do it by killing innocent children. There is nothing more evil than this.

Fortunately for the world, the actions of the king couldn't be more stupid. Let's say that the king was successful in getting these midwives to murder all the male children they were hired to deliver. If they did it one time, would anyone invite them back? I think word would get out.

And more fortunate for the world, these were very brave women.

17 The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. (Exodus 1:17)

This took a lot of courage. Before moving on, let me mention that even if you're not a mother, you can be a helper to mothers. That's what these women did. They didn't have any children of their own at the time, but they risked their lives to help bring children into the world. Children who would otherwise have been murdered. The world is thankful for their bravery.

Sometimes, it's not God's plan to give the gift of children to a woman. That can be disappointing, but there's still plenty of room to help mothers. Being a mother is rough. You can be a spiritual mother by helping. Lots of women (and men) do that. And we're all thankful for those people, so they get a shout out on Mother's Day.

Standing for good in the face of evil won't go unnoticed.

18 Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" 19 The midwives answered

Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.” (v 18-19)

Apparently, there was no IQ test required to be king of Egypt. This wasn’t the best excuse, but the king fell for it. In this case, God blessed these women.

20 So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. (v 20-21)

Sadly, the more God blessed the Hebrew nation, the more the madness of the king grew.

22 Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

The king failed to make his plan work with just the midwives, so he decided he needed more help. Now, the entire nation of Egypt was called into the act.

Could things get more hopeless? Children bring hope, but now the entire nation of Egypt had been called to take away all hope for the Hebrew people.

Fortunately for the people of all time, there is yet one more very special woman in this story. Let’s read on in Exodus 2.

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, 2 and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. 4 His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. (Exodus 2:1-4)

This story must have a lot more details, but there’s not room. We may need to look around for some of the details. Imagine the scene. We have two people who get married and they have a child. We learn in Exodus 6 that the father is Amron and the mother Jochebed. The child is a boy. This is not their first child. In verse 4 we learn that there is an older sister.

There has been a decree from the king that any Egyptian who finds a male baby among the Hebrews is to throw it into the river. You couldn’t walk out the door with a male child, so the mother hides it. The father isn’t mentioned any time past the first sentence, so he may not have been involved. Mom may not be getting any help here.

Hiding a child isn’t easy, especially when you’re a poor slave living in the kind of tiny abodes available in that day. Were the Egyptians checking from door to door? Did one of the neighbors blurt out that their neighbor had a boy? We don’t know. We only know that this woman

became desperate. The command was for the child to be thrown into the river. The woman decides: *If the child is to go into the river, he will go safely.* So, with great care, she creates a little boat and places the child in it. Then, she does the only thing she can do – she leaves the child in the hands of her God.

Sometimes, we become desperate. We do the best we can. We think things through as completely as we can. We exhaust every possibility. Once we've done that, we can only trust God. That's what Jochebed did.

What must she have been feeling as she was forced to leave the child and walk away? What kind of torment did she feel? We don't know.

The story continues: The older sister stays to see what would happen.

5 Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. (v 5)

At first, this would seem like a horror. Someone finds the basket. Who? The daughter of Pharaoh, the king who just commanded the death of such children. Are we about to be sucker-punched into a tragic ending for this story?

6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. (Exodus 2:6)

There are some thing in life that you could never predict. They can only be the hand of God. Egypt at this time was ruled by a king so cruel he commanded that children be thrown into the river. However, his daughter was a woman with a soft heart. She melted at the sound of a lonely, crying baby.

7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" (v 7)

Add to the story another very special young woman: The sister here had as much courage as any of the other women we meet in this story. She also has great ability to read people. She knows the daughter of Pharaoh has strong feelings for this child, so the sister takes a great chance. She is a common slave, and such slaves have nothing to do with royalty. Yet she approaches this member of the royal family and offers to help.

How does the daughter or Pharaoh respond?

8 "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. 10 When the child grew

older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water." (v 8-10)

So, on top of having a soft heart, Pharaoh's daughter was a bit of a renegade. Any other Egyptian would have been duty-bound to kill this child. Pharaoh's daughter takes him in and adopts him.

Jochebed, the mother who let the child go into the hands of her God received the child back. In any other situation, they would have lived in poverty. But now she is payed handsomely to be just what she always wanted to be: a mother.

In the end, she's called though to let her child go one more time. Jochebed raises her boy, and then releases him into the hands of Pharaoh's daughter, who adopts him as her son.

## **Conclusion**

As we said, mother's give us hope. They do so by being well, mothers. They bring children into the world. And though the world is deeply flawed, every time a child comes along, there is hope.

We appreciate that mothers go through the discomfort and pain of pregnancy, and we appreciate the dedication of mothers all over the world who guide their children into adulthood.

But as we said, the hope grows even more when mothers are used by God.

We've just read about a tragic story. A free people are crushed on day and turned into slaves. They find out that staying in the wrong place for too long can have terrible consequences. But God gives hope, even to those who suffer under the weight of their bad decisions. Every time the Egyptians tried to oppress the Hebrew people, God gave them more hope.

In the story we just read, God gave that hope through some very special women. Women who are showed great courage, determination, and wisdom. The midwives feared God. So, they stood against an evil king and refused to murder children. The mother of Moses, faced with a desperate situation, when she could do nothing more, left her child into the hands of her God. The daughter of Pharaoh, a woman born to an uncaring and evil man, let her heart be moved by the sound of a crying, lonely child. The sister acted with great courage and approached a member of the royal family.

A mother and some helpers of mothers all stood together and listened to the voice of God. Their bravery and faith resulted in one of the greatest acts of hope given to a nation. The child who had been left on the river Nile, a poor slave, was taken into the courts of the most powerful kingdom on earth and raised as royalty. One day, he too listened to the voice of his

God. If he had only been content to forget his people, he could have lived a storybook life in riches and luxury. Instead, he allowed himself to leave the halls of royalty and serve his people. Because of all this, the name “Moses” is a household word to this day. He led his people to freedom through mighty miracles from the hands of the God of Israel.

And because of all this, the Hebrew people could be used to produce the greatest of all gifts ever given to the human race: The Messiah - The great king, Jesus Christ, who would one day defeat the forces of death and hell. He did that so we could all have hope.

Now, not all children grow up to be spiritual giants. But I believe all children are valuable to God. Moms, when you get to heaven, I don't know exactly what will happen, but I think there will be two questions asked of you. The first will be, “Did you choose to follow Jesus Christ?” I hope your answer will be yes, because then you can enter into his kingdom for eternity. I don't know for certain what the second question will be, but it might be something like this: “What else did you do in your life?” Imagine that you answer by saying, “Well, I was a mother”. Imagine that when you say that, you are met with thunderous applause and cheers.

I'm not certain, but maybe. I only know that all children are special to God. That means that all mothers are special, too.

The world can be a terrible place. It is broken beyond belief. We hear about all kinds of terrible things happening. Sometimes, they happen to us and the people we love.

But, don't let anyone tell you there is no hope. The people of Israel were free one day, and the next they were slaves. God gave them hope.

The greatest hope we have is Jesus, because he invites us into his kingdom, and that will last for eternity. But, until the day his kingdom comes, we have other sources of hope. One is our mothers. God gives us mothers. And Mothers give us hope.

Happy Mother's Day.

