

“Motherhood is a Call to Suffering” – Rather – “Motherhood is a Call to Faith”

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11, 18-21, 26

Today we want to honor Mothers because of the unique place and calling God has given them in the life of the family – their husbands, children and grandchildren. However, what I will say about being a mom applies, in principle, to anyone who would dare love another as God has loved us in Jesus – “To love another is a call to suffering,” but if one loves rightly, “To love another is a call to faith.” To love another with the love of God is to give oneself to the sort of “reckless” and frighteningly vulnerable love with which God loves us – from before the foundations of the world. It is to love another as God has loved us in creation and in redemption. It is to know the inexpressible joy of God, as well as the soul gripping terror of opening ourselves to profound hurt which only God knows perfectly. It is to live lives which profoundly reflect the image of God which is our fundamental identity.

There is nowhere, among human beings, where that is more prevalent than in the heart of a mother. I do not want to minimize other love relationships nor do I want to dramatize a mother’s love for the sake of impact. However, I believe it is true as implied in scripture and as seen in my life experiences.

**Note:** To understand just how important Samuel’s mom Hannah is to the right telling of the story of his life and ministry notice that of the 2 chapters that serve to introduce the main characters which set the background of his life’s story, about 75% are made up of describing the godly character and faith of Hannah.

*Joy And Pain Are Strange Companions In Human Love Relationships In This Fallen World*

**Note:** I want to note that there is a strange, even ominous relationship between joy and pain which exists in any true love relationship in life - but especially in the mother (parent) child relationship.

**\*\*The relationship joy to pain in loving another is reflected God’s experience in creation and redemption – We have considered this many times before in our study. If I understand the Bible correctly – creation is the expression of the love of God which has existed as perfectly and eternally active within the relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit. According to the teaching of the Scripture, the love God which characterizes life of the Triune God expressed itself in the loving creation of human beings – whom He created in His image, for the purpose of living in an intimate relationship of love with Him. He made us able to receive His love and to return that love in such a way as to perpetuate an ever deepening intimacy. *The mystery found the teaching of the Scripture is that He created in the full knowledge that there would be a day when Adam and Eve would reject Him and the joy loving intimacy would be replaced with the pain of rejection and alienation.***

*\*\*In order to restore the joy of intimacy in His relationship with us God would embrace the pain in the most unexpected and inexplicable way – a way which we call redemption and which is the quintessential expression of true love – cf. John 1:1-4, 14-18; 3:16; 1 John 3:16; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:1-7; 5:1-2; Also Romans 5:6-8; Hebrews 12:1-2 – So not only was the vulnerability to pain in the calculus of God’s love in creation, He had already factored in the unspeakable cost of the love which would persevere in patience and redeem in grace.*

**Note:** In this way the love of Hannah for her son Samuel – or any mother for her child or anyone who would risk love – is understood and expressed rightly only as a reflection of gospel love.

*Hannah’s Heart Ached With This Love Before Samuel Was Conceived* – cf. 1:1-16

*\*\*Hannah seems to have had a sense of incompleteness in her love for Elkanah, as his wife, without a child – in her barrenness – cf. 1:1-8 - Her baby (Samuel) would be the consummation of the love she and Elkanah shared. There is a level at which this was cultural and contextual (as seen in the brief account of the resentment of Penninah- 1:4-8). However, this is also the consequence of the design of God for the love relationship between a man and woman in marriage – love consummated in the conception of new life.*

*\*\*Hannah loved Samuel before he was conceived – she was created to love her child in anticipation – cf. 1:1-11 – She longed for Samuel with the longing created by love. It is true that moms love their babies in anticipation. This is incredibly risky in that the fullest joy requires absolute vulnerability. That is the nature of loving like God loves. Some of you have experienced the vulnerability of that level of pre-conception love. You have hoped for, prayed for, longed for a baby and when you finally conceive the joy is unspeakable. It is as if you have a treasure no one else has ever had. You don’t dare tell anyone right away because of the fear you may miscarry. If you are among those who have lost a baby to miscarriage – the pain is huge and you wonder whether you can bear the risk again. Perhaps you do dare to hope – when you conceive again you fear letting your heart enter that vulnerable place again...*

There is the anticipation of joy in childbirth which drives a woman through the anticipation of the discomfort of gestation and the pain of delivery.

*\*\*The union of joy and pain is there from the beginning with Hannah – cf. 1:9-11, 19-28 – Hannah went into this birth having committed her baby boy to the Lord before he was conceived – as a promise to God as a condition in prayer of conception.*

**Note:** This joy/pain relationship is pictured, perhaps anticipated, in the physical pain of childbirth. Theologically we understand that this is part of the fall. Practically, we know that the pain is coming – we call it **labor** and we speak of labor pains. Expectant moms

prepare for it with classes that teach us breathing techniques and give us information about safe pain medications etc.

You go through it for the joy – knowing that the pain is worth it – because at the end you will hold your baby. **Mothers choose the pain for the joy and privilege of new life – they love their child before they know their child and choose to endure the pain to give them life (Genesis 3:16; John 16:21)!!**

Just as there is a correlation between the love and joy experienced in the birth of your child and the love and joy that is experienced when your child grows - surely the struggle and pain of bearing children due to the fall hints at the struggle and pain of loving that child throughout life.

*Hannah Was Prepared For The Fullness Of God's Joy In Loving Samuel With A Reckless Abandon, Despite The Anticipation Of Pain, Because She Knew That Her Baby Boy Was A Gift From God* – cf. 1:9-11, 19-27; 2:1-11

*\*\*Hannah had already surrendered Samuel to God before he was conceived* – cf. 1:9-11, 19-20, 21-28 – I want to consider what Hannah must have felt in this process. 1. Imagine the incredibly joy in the news that she was pregnant - joy in the new life growing within her (cf. 1:20). 2. Imagine as Samuel grew within her the mix of the joy of the love she felt for her baby/the bonding that took place and the thorn that stuck in her heart in the knowledge that she had committed him to God – she would leave him with Eli one day. Perhaps Elkanah didn't know about her prayer. 3. Imagine the day of her labor – was the anticipation of the joy of holding the baby she had loved mitigated by the multiplication of her “pain” in the knowledge that she would be separated from him in a short time? How would she tell Elkanah? 4. Imagine the growing love she felt as she nursed her little boy and the growing anticipation of being separated from him when he was weaned.

**Her love didn't end with the day she delivered Samuel to the Lord.**

**How could Hannah face that day – and the days that would inevitably follow – in such a way as to be free to love totally, deeply, increasingly? She could mitigate/moderate her love in anticipation of that day or she could love with vulnerability knowing that day would come.**

**Transition:** She knew that God was both the sovereign “giver” of life and motherhood and that Samuel had been entrusted to her, by God, to love and nurture with no regard for personal risk. There was really no choice for Hannah. I believe she gave her whole heart to Samuel – whatever the cost. There is no choice for you and me in our love relationships.

*\*\*Hannah could love freely because she understood the sovereignty of God over her calling as Samuel's mom and over Samuel himself* – (1 Samuel 1:19-20; 2:1-10) Two things to note

about the “faith” of Hannah which allowed the risk and pain of love to be turned to the freedom joy of giving herself in love. 1. Hannah knew a powerful joy in the assurance that God heard her prayer. God was personally in that moment. That’s the reason for Samuel’s name. 2. Therefore, she was trusting her heart and her son Samuel to a powerful God - but also she to a personal, good and perfectly loving God (cf. 2:1-2, 6-9).

***\*\*She knew that she would return her son to the God who had so graciously entrusted him to her – I imagine the knowledge of that day governed how she spoke to Samuel, the stories she told, the songs she sang to him, the truths she taught. She would’ve been very intentional in preparing him for that day when he would stand before God – **that trust and that charge is given to every parent!!*****

There is little doubt that the truths of her song – which gave her such comfort and cause for confidence – were the very truths she inculcated in the heart of her son in anticipation of that day when she would leave him with Eli.

***\*\*She continued to give herself in love for him – cf. 2:12, 19-21 – There are three things to consider from these verses. 1. Hannah’s love for Samuel grew. She didn’t simply make a contract with God to get on level ground with Penninah or to guard here relationship with Elkanah (cf. 2:21). 2. Hannah visited Samuel every year. She knew he was in the care of God BUT she saw that he was under the influence and perhaps plagued by Eli’s evil sons. 3. She spent the year between visits making a new jacket for him. Those evenings when she labored over that jacket were, no doubt spent in prayer thanking God for her son, lifting him before God and entrusting Samuel to Him for his care. No doubt there were some tears and plenty of joy filled smiles. I’m certain as she spent those times giving her heart to him in a growing love. It was certainly a love which made her more vulnerable to the sadness of leaving him at the end of every visit.***

***It was in trusting God with the vulnerability of her heart that she was enabled to experience His love and care for her in such a way as to enable her to know unspeakable joy in giving her beloved Samuel into His care.*** That is the point of Hannah’s song – she was in resting in the love of God – gospel love. She came to know, as can we, the pleasure of loving freely and fearlessly. It is only that kind of love that could fill every day with the anticipation of seeing him again (cf. Ephesians 3:14-21).

***\*\*It is a gospel love which transforms our hearts - We must not hold our hearts back from those whom God has brought into our lives to love (cf. 1 John 3:1, 14, 16; 4:7-19). It is in the experience and expression of this gospel love that we can know the indomitable and permanent joy of loving as God has loved us BECAUSE His redemptive love has defeated the fear of the pain of loss, rendering it weak and temporary.***