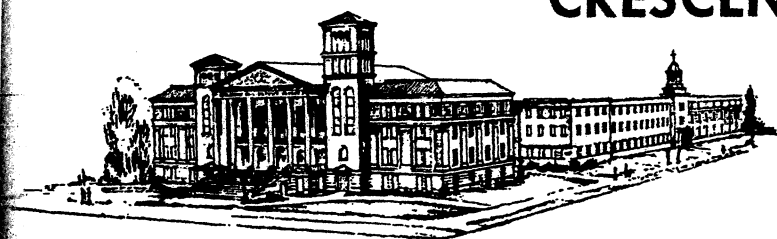


CRESCENT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERMONS



"MOTHERS OF THE BIBLE"

Sunday Morning, May 14, 1961
Crescent Hill Baptist Church
Louisville, Kentucky
John R. Claypool

Scriptural Text: Proverbs 31:10-30

There are many ways to learn from the Biblical evidence. For example, one can take the actual life situations that are recorded and learn directly from these examples. Or, one can approach it from a different angle and derive certain principles that grow out of these particular facts. Both the direct and inductive approaches are valid, and this morning I would like to utilize them in formulating my sermon.

Our attention this morning is quite naturally directed toward motherhood. Since 1914, the celebration of Mother's Day has been a national holiday. At this moment, most of the families of our country are honoring either the person or the memory of the one who brought them into life. As I turned to the Bible with this subject in mind, I found the two kinds of truth I mentioned earlier. There are many specific examples of motherhood, both good and bad, and back of these examples is a basic principle. I would like to call your attention to both of these.

Let us begin by looking at the dominant characteristics of some of the mothers of the Bible. As I moved through its pages, I encountered many types of motherhood, and feel that we can profit from their experience. There are mistakes to be avoided as well as examples to be followed. I could not begin to picture every mother, or everything about each one, but look with me at a selected group.

The first one I would introduce to you is Rebekah, the wife of Isaac. She was the mother of twin sons, Esau and Jacob, and her story is found in the book of Genesis (Chapter 27). The one quality that stands out is deception. She indulged in the fatal practice of showing favoritism between her children, and in her effort to secure an advantage for her beloved Jacob, she was the instigator of a rather sinister plot against her blind husband. It is foreboding to realize that after his involvement in this intrigue, Jacob had tremendous problems in the area of honesty. Having been schooled in the shadows of trickery, he developed a basic pattern of dishonesty.

And I think it is well for all parents to note the power of influence at this point. Many times parents are stunned when their children are caught in outright stealing, only to find that the tendency began in some subtle dishonesty which the parent endorsed. The mother who sends the child to the door to tell a salesman she is not at home, or the mother who trains her child to lie about his age on a bus, may be sowing seeds of later destruction. The first example is an error to be avoided—laying a foundation of dishonesty.

The second mother I want you to meet is a simple woman named Jocabed. You will identify her best as the mother of Moses (Exodus 2). The word to describe her is resourceful. She lived as a slave in a foreign country, and at the time her son was born, all male babies were supposed to be killed. However, she hid the infant for three months, and then made a little float in which the baby could be kept on the nearby river and thus out of the house. As you know, Pharaoh's daughter found the baby, and adopted him as her own son. Through these unusual circumstances God gave Moses his unique preparation for a later task. But the thing that interests me now is the ingenious resourcefulness of this Hebrew slave woman. Faced by an insuperable obstacle, her loving determination had the wit to win.

I can think of no greater need today than for creative, imaginative mothers. The modern problems that face the home are so great that someone's first attention must be given to them. I fear too often we leave home life to the "left-overs" of out time and energy. We think first of other responsibilities and give this relationship only the "tag-ends" of life. Fortunate is the home that has a "full-time" mother; who gives the best of herself to fashioning an effective, harmonious living atmosphere. Of all the creative challenges, this is certainly the highest.

The third mother of the Bible is a rather infamous one. Her name is Herodias, and she lived in the time of Christ (Mark 6). She had a rather checkered marital career, having divorced Philip to marry his brother Herod. When John the Baptist publicly condemned her for this, she developed a burning hatred for him. She looked for the occasion to have him killed, and when it came, she revealed an aspect of her motherhood. The word to describe her is domineering. You know the story of Solome's dance and the offer of the King, and how Herodias used her daughter as a tool in her diabolical plot. She not only had a man killed, she demonstrated a hardened willingness to twist others to serve her purpose.

Now, of course, this is an extreme example, but it reflects a widespread difficulty. The shores of life are littered with personalities that have been wrecked by strong-willed, domineering parents. It is quite hard to do sometimes, but one must strive always to treat a child as a person and not a thing, and never let the "I-Thou" relation degenerate into an "I-It" relation. There is a fine line of distinction between wanting to guide a child and wanting to live life for the child. Loving interest can often be the disguise for a kind of "soul imperialism." The case of Herodias is a warning to every overly-dominant mother.

The fourth mother is one of the most admirable in the Bible. Her name is Hannah, and her son, Samuel, was one of the great men in Hebrew history (I Samuel:1). The word to describe her motherhood was dedication. She had been childless for many years, and this was a source of great sorrow to her. She made this an object of special prayer, and promised to give the child to the service of the Lord. Her wish was granted, and she fulfilled her vow by offering Samuel for temple service at an early age.

The thing that impresses me here is the spiritual context in which the whole process of motherhood was set. She remembered from the first the part that God played, and took the whole matter as a responsibility to Him. If more of our mothers would think of it in this fashion, it would transform some homes. The realization that God has entrusted to you His highest of all values, and wants you to introduce this one to life with all the wisdom and love and care this entails,

is a tremendous thought. Yet this is the only attitude in which the task of motherhood can be fully understood. Hannah's deep spiritual dedication will continue to be an inspiration through the ages.

The fifth mother has no name in the Biblical record. She is known only by her relation to her two sons, James and John, the disciples of our Lord. Her dominant characteristic is obvious: she was overly ambitious (Matthew 20:20-24). Her request to Jesus was quite natural; she wanted the places of honor to be given to her sons. It is admirable that she asked nothing for herself, yet this trait of motherhood can often produce unhealthy results in the children.

Quite often such a mother gives the child an unrealistic sense of superiority. By always driving for extra advantage, the mother may make it more difficult for the child to arrive at a true estimate of himself. Or, on the other hand, an unbridled ambition can demoralize a child if he cannot live up to it. I had a roommate once who lived under constant pressure from a prestige-conscious mother. When he failed to make "Who's Who" in college, she called him up and "dressed him down." Actually this pressure kept him from fulfilling all his capacities. Just as in the case of domineering, a parent has to strive to let the child "be himself," and support his freedom to achieve in life what he can. Too much ambition exerted in the wrong way can be quite harmful.

The last mother is again unnamed, but her attitude symbolizes the best of this great tradition. She appeared before King Solomon in a most unusual dispute. - (I Kings 13:16-28). She and another woman shared a house, and each had a child. One night one of the babies died, and both women claimed the dead child belonged to the other and the live child was hers. Solomon displayed his wisdom by offering to cut the living child half in two. To this suggestion the real mother reacted negatively, while the pretender agreed. Here the basic quality of motherhood emerged: sacrificial love. She wanted her child, but if the choice was her desire and the child's welfare, the child came first. And after all is said and done, this characteristic is basic to our ideal of motherhood. A mother is one who willingly suffers to bring life into existence, and then gives herself in costly love and devotion. We have come to think of a mother's love as the most enduring of all qualities. To paraphrase Paul's words, motherhood at its best "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; love never fails."

These, then, are but a few of the particular examples of the Bible. You can find many more, and from them glean a number of particular truths to help you in your task. We can learn from the experience of others, and thus both be positively inspired and negatively warned.

But what general principle stands behind these particular facts? Simply this: there is nothing automatically good about the physical fact of motherhood. It is a tremendous opportunity, both for good and for bad. We have seen this morning that some women have used this as the occasion to rise to the heights while others used it to tragic failure. Therefore, we must look on this as a grand possibility, and see in it as high a challenge as God can give. Sometimes we have grown overly sentimental, and deluded ourselves into thinking that having a baby automatically transformed a woman into a saint. Sadly enough, this is not true. Motherhood, as everything else in life, is determined by what you bring to it and what you make of it. Through it one can achieve the highest success or the deepest failure. The decisive factor is not in motherhood, but in the individual mother herself.

Thus, on this Mother's Day, 1961, I point you to the Bible. Here is a wealth of examples from which we can learn directly, and the abiding challenge that one can make of this grand possibility whatever one will.