

The Story of Jochebed: A Mother's Daring Faith (Mother's Day)

Exodus 2:1-10

ESPN video clip

How many of us have been carried along at one time or another in life by the strength of a faithful woman. Many times those women have been our mothers, women who have demonstrated daring faith as they carried us around the bases helping us complete our journey.

As I prayed over a message for this Mother's Day, I was drawn to this story from the book of Exodus. I believe that Jochebed offers a powerful example of daring faith. One of the great strengths of our world today is mothers with daring faith. One of the great needs of our world today is mothers with daring faith. Let's look deeper into this story to consider the impact of daring faith.

Let's go to Exodus chapter 2 and consider the story of the birth of Moses.

In Vs 1 our story begins with a Levi man, Amram, who was married to a Levite woman, Jochebed. He was a priest. She was the daughter of a priest. He was a Levi man not because of the jeans he wore, but because of his tribe. He was from the tribe of Levi.

In Vs 2, we read that the wife – Jochebed – became pregnant and gave birth to a son – Moses. Jochebed sees that Moses was a fine child so she hid him for three months, presumably in her house. Now the word of God says that Moses was a "fine" child; what does that mean? In the King James Version it refers to Moses as a "goodly" child. This Hebrew adjective is frequently used in the Old Testament. In this context the text is telling us that Moses was a good, pleasant and agreeable baby. The kind of baby that smiled at all the right times and inevitably brought out a smile at those who looked into his face.

But why did Jochebed hide Moses? To answer that question we have to look back at Exodus Ch 1:8-10 (Read).

What did the Egyptians do in their fear? Let's keep reading and look at Vs 11-16 (Read).

How did God protect His people? Let's read Vs 17-21 (Read).

How did Pharaoh react in his desperation? Look with me at Vs 22 (Read).

Not wanting her son Moses to be killed because of the desperate fear and insane insecurity of the Pharaoh, Jochebed made plans to hide her son. In Vs 3 we see that after three months Moses is too big to hide at home. Jochebed puts baby Moses in a papyrus basket coated with tar and pitch so that it would float. She places the basket with baby Moses in the Nile River. The Nile is larger in volume and flow than even our Snake River.

Vs 4 Moses' protective older sister Miriam watches from a distance.

Our plot thickens as we read in Vs 5 that Pharaoh's daughter goes down to the Nile River to bathe. Her attendants walk along the River while she bathes. Pharaoh's daughter sees the basket and sends a slave girl to get it.

In Vs 6 we read that Pharaoh's daughter opens the basket and sees baby Moses for the first time. She looks into the eyes of this "goodly" baby. Moses is crying. She feels sorry for the baby. Pharaoh's daughter acknowledges that this was a Hebrew baby. I wonder if she said this in a matter of fact way simply noting the race and ethnicity of the baby. I also wonder if she said this with the chilling realization that the crying baby she held in her hands was one that her father said should be put to death.

In Vs 7 Moses' sister Miriam bravely, and with a daring faith, approaches the Pharaoh's daughter. She asks, 'Shall I find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for you?'

In Vs 8 Pharaoh's daughter says 'Yes'. Miriam turns and runs home in amazement. She rushes into the house and with breathless excitement updates her mother Jochebed.

In Vs 9 Jochebed is introduced to Pharaoh's daughter – the woman who is calming her trembling baby. Without knowing that Jochebed was the biological mother of Moses, Pharaoh's daughter offers to pay Jochebed to nurse baby Moses. Is this a God story or what?! Jochebed must hide her baby son in the river only to have her son found by the daughter of the insane ruler who has decreed that all male Hebrew children must be killed. The daughter of this Pharaoh takes pity on baby Moses and lo and behold Jochebed is paid to nurse her very own son that she earlier had to hide so that he too would not be killed. Now she is nursing her own son who is being protected from the decree of the Pharaoh by Pharaoh's own daughter. This is better than a Hollywood script!

Weeks pass.

In Vs 10 when Moses was old enough to be weaned from breastfeeding, Jochebed took the child Moses back to Pharaoh's daughter. Imagine the tears of Jochebed as she looks into the face of young Moses. Imagine the words that she might have spoken to him as they walked from their humble home to the palace of Pharaoh's daughter. Their fateful journey ends far too quickly for Jochebed and she soon releases her son back to Pharaoh's daughter, who takes Moses as her "adopted" son. The two women hide Moses' true identity as a Hebrew for as long as they can. Pharaoh's daughter gives him the Hebrew name "Moses", meaning "I drew him out of the water".

To best understand our story in its full context we should note that Moses later reclaimed his rightful heritage, in yet another example of daring faith. In Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, we read: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26) I wonder if Moses learned such daring faith from his two mothers – one who gave him life and the other who spared his life.

Jochebed, the mother of Moses, was a woman of daring faith. But first perhaps we need to simply ask, 'What is faith?'. It reminds me of a story:

"A man fell off a cliff, but managed to grab a tree limb on the way down. The following conversation ensued:

"Is anyone up there?"

"I am here. I am the Lord. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, Lord, I believe. I really believe, but I can't hang on much longer."

"That's all right, if you really believe you have nothing to worry about. I will save you. Just let go of the branch."

A moment of pause, then: "Is anyone else up there?"

For many, faith is understood in a religious sense. It speaks of a spiritual belief or trust. But for many in our world who do not know Jesus and His love, faith is simply a synonym for "trust", "belief" or "hope" with no real spiritual meaning at all. Someone buys a lottery ticket and walks away telling themselves that they have "faith" that these are the right numbers and this will be their lucky ticket. Or another person sneaks back to the darkness of their secret sin and tries to rationalize by saying that they have faith – faith that this will be the last time, and faith that no one will find out any way. Is this faith? Friends, I want you to know that this is not faith. There is a deeper and life changing faith that is available to each of us.

Let's change our question to ask, 'What is God's definition of faith?'. To answer that question I think we have to begin with Hebrews 11:1 – "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see – this is biblical faith. If your car breaks down and you have the money in the bank it does not require faith to take your car to the garage for the needed repair. But if your car breaks down and you know already that there isn't enough money to buy groceries and pay the rent but if you can't get the car fixed you won't even be able to continue working for the pay check that is already far too small. To take your car to the garage in that circumstance requires faith.

Ellen and I remember such moments when I was a private in the Army and we had two little children. Some weeks we would get my paycheck and pay the bills and have \$10 left for groceries. And then we would get to the last week of the month and not have enough money left to buy gas for the car and it would set in the drive way as we would ask friends for rides to work and elsewhere. But we were taught to have faith – a trust that God would provide. And God always seemed to find a way to provide. In the monthly bills that we made sure we paid was our tithe – our financial gift to our church. Our contribution was pretty small compared to some of the others that we sat next to each week but we trusted God and as an expression of faith and of our worship we gave God ten percent of what little we had. And God took care of us.

You have heard it said that it is better to give than to receive ... well it is sometimes also easier to give than to receive. If I have extra and you are in need, it is often much easier for me to give to you than it

is for me to experience the opposite. It takes a learned grace to be in need and to allow others to help you out of their extra. But that is the nature of a growing faith.

God provided. In those days our young family had very little extra. But God provided. And if you talk to our children they would tell you that some of our best memories as a family come out of those days. How is that? We were learning faith. Our faith was growing. And over time we learned principles of biblical stewardship. We learned to take better care of what God was later to entrust to us financially.

Faith – sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Consider this story: *“The following letter was found in a baking-powder can wired to the handle of an old pump that offered the only hope of drinking water on a very long and seldom-used trail across Nevada's Amargosa Desert: “This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer into it and it ought to last five years. But the washer dries out and the pump has got to be primed. Under the white rock I buried a bottle of water, out of the sun and cork end up. There's enough water in it to prime the pump, but not if you drink some first. Pour about one-fourth and let her soak to wet the leather. Then pour in the rest medium fast and pump like crazy. You'll git water. The well has never run dry. Have faith. When you git watered up, fill the bottle and put it back like you found it for the next feller. (signed) Desert Pete. P.S. Don't go drinking the water first. Prime the pump with it and you'll git all you can hold.”*

Faith. Who needs faith? Life is not about if we will need to exercise faith. No, life is all about when we will have to exercise faith. And be sure that the faith tests that we will all face in life are not just a one-time exam. We are frequently challenged by situations and moments that test our faith. Who needs faith? We all do. If you are down and out or if you are up and out – we all need faith. If you are enjoying the comforts of home or if you are a stranger in another land – we all need faith.

We all do – we all need faith. Even God's people need faith. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 we read that “we live by faith, not by sight.” Did you know that: *“The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall. Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us.”*

If we all need faith, how do we get faith? Where does faith come from? In Romans 10:17 the Bible says that “... Faith comes from hearing the message, and that message is heard through the word of Christ.” Each week we try to remember to thank you for your generosity as you leave an offering in the box as you are leaving this family room where we worship together. It is not that we are desperate for your money. All that you give is focused on the Heart of this Deer Flat family – to be like Jesus and to help others be like Jesus. And one of the priorities in how we use the funds you entrust to us in behalf of the Lord, is to help share God's message of faith, hope and love. Faith comes from hearing the message, and that message is heard through the word of Christ. And we are constantly looking for creative ways to share the message of faith. Each week we celebrate as we are able to light the candles indicating that

someone has either committed or recommitted their life to Jesus in the past week. In Romans 3:22 the Bible says that “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

It is a faith that we all need and it is available to all who believe in Jesus by faith. I want to take a moment to underscore again that even good people need faith. Even God’s people need faith. Consider Hebrews 11:6 with me, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” The word of God says that without faith it is impossible to please God. When we come to God we must have faith first that God exists and second that God will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Very quickly, what do you think it means to earnestly seek God? If I take an interest in God every Sunday morning does that qualify as “earnestly seeking Him”? No, that doesn’t impress God any more than giving mother’s just one day a year to let them know that we love and honor and respect and value and appreciate them. Mothers’ Day has the most meaning when our moms know that we have loved and honored and respected and valued and appreciated them all through the year.

Faith is something that even good people and God’s people are in need of. Consider our story of Jochebed and the birth of baby Moses. Both Jochebed and her husband were from priestly families. Her husband was a priest and she was the daughter of a priest. My friends, bad things happen to good people. Just because we are good people and even more God’s people, we are not immune from the bad things that can happen in life. Cancer can strike our homes, loss of work can strike our homes, strained or broken relationships can strike our homes. But regardless of the bad that happens we have faith. And it is a faith that God exists and a faith that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Which leads me to my last question: ‘When does faith become daring?’. Jochebed, the mother of Moses, had a daring faith. It has been said that “*A little faith will bring your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul.*”

Perhaps we can think of someone in our life that has lived life before us with great faith. They have dared to have faith when faced with life’s greatest challenges. *A teacher was assigned to a class of mentally impaired teenagers. Looking at his students' capabilities rather than their limitations, this teacher got them to play chess, restore furniture and repair electrical appliances. Most important, this teacher taught them to believe in themselves. One young student soon proved how well he had learned that last lesson. One day he brought in a broken toaster to repair. He carried the toaster tucked under one arm, and a half-loaf of bread under the other.*”

Daring faith. Faith that says I believe that God exists. I believe that God loves me. I believe that God will bless me with His presence when I need Him the most. Daring faith. For many of us, those personal stories of daring faith involve the women in our lives.

When Thomas Edison was a young lad his teacher sent him home with a note which said, 'Your child is dumb. We can't do anything for him.' Mrs. Edison wrote back, 'You do not understand my boy. I will teach him myself'. And she did, with results that are well known.”

We are about to celebrate our 100th anniversary as the Deer Flat family. Here is a poem honoring our pioneering mothers:

“Grandma, on a winter's day, milked the cows and fed them hay, hitched the mule, drove kids to school...did a washing, mopped the floors, washed the windows and did some chores...Cooked a dish of home-dried fruit, pressed her husband's Sunday suit...swept the parlor, made the bed, baked a dozen loaves of bread...split some firewood and lugged it in, enough to fill the kitchen bin...Cleaned the lamps and put in oil, stewed some apples before they spoiled...churned the butter, baked a cake, then exclaimed, "For goodness sake!" when the calves ran from the pen, and chased them all back in again...Gathered eggs and locked the stable, back to the house and set the table...cooked a supper that was delicious, then washed and dried all dirty dishes...fed the cat and sprinkled clothes, mended a basketful of hose...then opened the organ and began to play: "When You Come to the End of a Perfect Day..."

Some of the mothers here share the responsibility of family with your husband actively engaged with you. Some of the mothers here are blending two families into one home. Some of the mothers here are single yet valiantly caring for your family. And some of the mothers here have released your children to make their own way through life. And some of the mothers here have not only long ago released your children but are now widowed as you reminisce of days gone by full of joyful laughter and warm embraces. Mothers – we love you. We honor you. We respect you. We value you. We appreciate you. You continue to teach us what faith is. You often demonstrate daring faith by the way you face life. Thank you. I would like to pray for you.

Invite mothers to present to stand, honored with applause, followed by prayer for them.