

The Joy and Pain of Motherhood

Genesis 3:13-20

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all the livestock

and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel."

16 To the woman he said,

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;

with pain you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,

and he will rule over you."

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you;

through painful toil you will eat of it

all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,

and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your brow

you will eat your food

until you return to the ground,

since from it you were taken;

for dust you are

and to dust you will return."

20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

An Italian woman consulted her priest about her inability to conceive. Her priest assured her to rest in the comfort that he was going to Rome for ten years and would light a candle for her.

Ten years later the priest returned from Rome and went to visit the woman. As he entered the house, he saw the woman in the midst of eight young screaming children. "God answered our prayer! The candle worked!" the priest exclaimed. "Where is your husband? I wish to congratulate him and rejoice with him!"

The exhausted woman answered, "He is not here; he went to Rome to blow out that stupid candle you lit!"

For those of us who live in modern day God's curse on Adam seems lighter than that on Eve. Nowadays, women have to give birth, while many hold jobs at the same time. Even though all kind of painkillers to reduce the labor's pain, but still, I could not imagine the hassles of each level in child bearing. Think about this: morning sickness, nausea, not counting how many painful check ups, stretch marks, until the final moment where she has to deliver the baby out to the world. The whole process is entirely painful. I can say this because I have seen that moment of pain of labor that my wife endured, and it made me think: "Thank God I am a man!"

During contractions at the time she was in the hospital to deliver our first baby, I kept asking her "Are you okay?" Or, "How do you feel?" And her answer was her frowned eyebrows and her pointer in front of her lips requesting me to be

quiet. We, men, will never know how it feels to go through that kind of pain. I asked her one time after all the pain had gone: How exactly did it feel. She asked me back: Do you know what kind of pain you have when you have diarrhea? I nodded. Now multiply that pain by a hundred!

God said in verse 16, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing." Why did God curse Eve by multiplying the pain in childbearing? Couldn't God find another kind of curse? It is even worse when we combine God's curse on Eve with God's command to "be fruitful and increase in number." What a joy!

Compared to the other curses, the curse to the woman seems the worst. God's curse to Adam was the curse of infertility, the Garden of Eden that was very fruitful and fertile, now forever cursed into the land of thorns and thistles, and unfortunately, this curse also affected the woman. The woman not only has to experience pain during childbearing, but she also experiences the land of thorns and thistles. It is double curse!

Can we say now that God is unfair? Perhaps He seems unfair, but beyond the entire mystery surrounding the curse, there are two things that we can do to interpret the meaning of woman's pain: First, we may understand the pain of the woman from God's action in creating His creation.

Listen to what Eve said after she gave birth to her first son, the first human being who was born from the womb of a woman; Genesis 4:1: "*With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man!*" One interpretation regards this statement as Eve's boast: "*The Lord formed the first human being, and I have formed the second human being.*"

The generative power of course, comes from God. It is part of God's creation of woman. It is God's gracious gift only to women to be God's partner in bringing new life to the Earth. God shares His creative power only to the woman! Of course creation is not a painless process. What we see in childbearing is pain rooted in the love that unites a man and a woman and makes them into one flesh. Creation is an act of total commitment. Choan Seng-Song, a professor in Pacific School of Theology states: *"In the process of childbearing, the woman goes through this pain-love of the creative act with her whole being, just as God commits God's whole being to creation."* Almost in the same way, childbearing is an act of total commitment complete, with its pain, risk, struggle, and joy. And Mother is another name given to a woman who risks her for the birth of another life.

Secondly, to the snake God said: *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head...!"* Thus, we may also understand the pain of the woman during the childbearing through the redemption act that God intends to happen to all humankind. God's saving acts in history can only be understood through the womb of the woman. The woman's offspring will crush the devil's head! It was not an accident when Jesus Christ our Savior was conceived in a woman's womb. Just as we see the pain that women withstand during the labor, we may also see the same pain that God experienced when He had to send His only Son to come for the salvation of the world, to once again bring hope to His creation. This Agape, this unconditional love is so painful! Every woman knows that childbearing is a lot of

pain, but the hope for a new life, of a new joy, is worth much more than the pain that she has to bear. Jesus said *“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.”* John 16:21. God knows how much pain He had to bear to send His Son, but God took that risk in order for new life and new hope to be revealed.

What then, those two points mean to us? This is what we should know: The woman’s pain during childbearing teaches us that God prepares all humankind for the suffering of this world full of thorns and thistles. If our mothers can endure such a pain, why can’t we?

The Bible uses a lot of imagery of the pain of childbearing in describing the terrible pain that humans must suffer:

Isaiah 26:17: *“As a woman with child and about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so were we in your presence, O LORD.”*

Micah 4:9: *“Why do you now cry aloud— have you no king? Has your counselor perished, that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor?”*

We endure these pains because our mothers have taught us how to overcome them.

And the most important thing is that God, through the pain of the woman during the childbearing teaches us: our suffering in this world is temporary! It is nothing compared to the eternal joy that is waiting for us! As Apostle Paul puts it: *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory*

that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed" (Romans 8:18-19). Again, we all are in this world groaning as in the pain of childbirth before that new hope comes to realization. (Romans 8:22) Once that moment comes when the new life is born, all the pain will be gone and turn into joy. God uses mothers as a source of wise counsel and godly experience in this world full of thorns and thistles, and through mothers, God guides His people to the bright future!

My friends, we all here are united in one commonality; we all came from our mothers' wombs! What should we do to appreciate our mothers after we know all the pain that our mothers endure for us?

Mother often times cannot get her own rest, and that's another kind of pain. A book says: *"If you are a mother with a lot of tension and you get a headache, do what it says on the aspirin bottle: "take two aspirin" and "keep away from children."* Even a mother needs a break. But can we have a break from our mother who brought us to life? I am aware that not every mother is a good mother; some of us may experience bad memories because of our mothers, but despite any weakness that a mother has, would you as her child be forgiving and acknowledge that she risked her life to bring us to this world?

We, here, celebrate Mother's Day every second Sunday of May. May 14, the second Sunday of 1998, was a cloudy day for Indonesia. Thousands of people died because of riot, including hundreds of women who were raped on that day. That day still marks the worst behavior that humans can do to others,

especially men to women. Around the globe today, many women still experience violence. And when we think that we, who live in United States, have never done such a terrible action, think again! Many of us today perhaps never realize that a lot of our women still suffer under oppression. Women and girls are the most frequent victims of violence within the family. For countless women home is not a refuge but rather a place of terror. Every day, in every country in the world, women and girls are beaten and sexually assaulted by husbands, fathers, and other family members. Not every girl, not every woman is a mother. But we can never reject God's intention that women are the child bearers. For me it is so clear, if we are hurting a girl, a woman, we are also hurting a mother. It does not mean that we are allowed to hurt someone as long as this person is not a girl or a woman. It is also clear to me, that if we are hurting our neighbor, a man, a child of his/her mother, we are also hurting a mother. For a good mother always stands up for her child. When we hurt someone, we also hurt mother's heart! As we are celebrating Mother's Day, may we also remember the women around us whom God has given the special role to bring life to this Earth, so that we also celebrate life!

As I close, allow me to share this inspiring story:

The Making Of A Mother

By the time the Lord made mothers, He was into the sixth day working overtime. An Angel appeared and said "Why are you spending so much time on this one?"

And the Lord answered and said, "Have you read the spec sheet on her? She has to be completely washable, but not elastic; have 200 movable parts, all replaceable; run on black coffee and leftovers; have a lap that can hold three children at one time and that disappears when she stands up; have a kiss that can cure anything from a scraped knee to a broken heart; and have six pairs of hands."

The Angel was astounded at the requirements for this one. "Six pairs of hands! No way!", said the Angel.

The Lord replied, "Oh, it's not the hands that are the problem. It's the three pairs of eyes that mothers must have!"

"And that's on the standard model?" the Angel asked.

The Lord nodded in agreement, "Yep, one pair of eyes are to see through the closed door as she asks her children what they are doing even though she already knows. Another pair in the back of her head is to see what she needs to know even though no one thinks she can. And the third pair is here in the front of her head. They are for looking at an errant child and saying that she understands and loves him or her without even saying a single word."

The Angel tried to stop the Lord "This is too much work for one day. Wait until tomorrow to finish."

"But I can't!" The Lord protested, "I am so close to finishing this creation that is so close to my own heart. She already heals herself when she is sick AND can feed a family of six on a pound of hamburger and can get a nine year old to stand in the shower."

The Angel moved closer and touched the woman, "But you have made her so soft, Lord."

"She is soft," the Lord agreed, "but I have also made her tough. You have no idea what she can endure or accomplish."

"Will she be able to think?" asked the Angel.

The Lord replied, "Not only will she be able to think, she will be able to reason, and negotiate."

The Angel then noticed something and reached out and touched the woman's cheek. "Oops, it looks like You have a leak with this model. I told You that You were trying to put too much into this one."

"That's not a leak." the Lord objected. "That's a tear!"

"What's the tear for?" the Angel asked.

The Lord said, "The tear is her way of expressing her joy, her sorrow, her disappointment, her pain, her loneliness, her grief, and her pride."

The Angel was impressed. "You are a genius, Lord. You thought of everything for this one. You even created the tear!"

The Lord looked at the Angel and smiled and said, "I'm afraid you are wrong again. I created the woman, but she created the tear!"

Yes, with tears, our mother carried us in her womb for nine months and ten days, with tears she gave birth to us, with tear she cries whenever we fall, and with the same tears she share the joy of our rise. I haven't answered: What should we do to appreciate our mother after we know all the pain that our mother has gone through? My friends, give our mother tears! Tears of joy, proud tears that we have been her good children; that in the end, all the pain is worth it. Friends, mothers, Happy Mother's Day!