

1 Samuel 2:1-11

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[0 : 00] There is none besides you. There is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly. Let not arrogance come from your mouth. For the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.

The barren has born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust. He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail.

[1 : 04] The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces. Against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed.

Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, and the boy ministered to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You may be seated. Well, I don't think that there's any way that most of you could have picked up on the offertory today or its significance, but it is a song that Ben did for us, borrowing from a musical selection that is done nearly weekly in the slums of Nairobi.

And Jim White and myself and three of our sons, Jonah and Jeremy and Silas, next week we won't be here.

We will be in the air and on our way to Nairobi. And so Ben, you've already brought me there, and thank you for that today. Well, one of the great joys of our summer is that we're spending it in a story, the story of 1 Samuel.

[2 : 26] There's just a great simplicity to the reading of a story. I remember, you kids will appreciate this, when my grandma would come to town and evening would roll around and it was finally time to go to bed, she would spin a story.

And she had her favorites. And at the end of the evening and the close of however far she wanted to take it, all the little ones, we'd say, Grandma, tell us some more.

Tell us some more. And she'd send us to bed, and next night we'd pick it up again. Well, this summer we have that great privilege. We're spending week by week, Sunday by Sunday, in the wonderful story known to us as 1 Samuel.

In fact, just the first seven chapters. And our hope is that you'll come back each week wondering how the story moves on. Who wrote the story and what literary sources they had available to them in compiling the story are largely unknown.

It begins, as we saw last week, in these days of the judges with Elkanah and Hannah. By the time 2 Samuel closes, David himself has completed his reign.

[4 : 01] And so the story was written long after these particular events took place. I wonder what literary source material they had at their hands, whoever it was that gave us this wonderful story.

There's an artistry to it. There's a hint as well. Take a look if you have a Bible and want to turn to it. The end of 1 Chronicles. 1 Chronicles 29, verse 29.

Where we read, Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the chronicles of Samuel the seer, and in the chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the chronicles of Gad the seer, with accounts of his rule and his might, and of the circumstances that came upon him and upon Israel and upon all the kingdoms of the countries.

That little verse mentioned at the end of 1 Chronicles is one of the only hints we get that Samuel himself might have been accumulating some of these narratives in written form.

A notebook, as it were, that somebody later would use as source material and bring us the story. There's an artistry to the story that is beautiful.

[5 : 32] I don't know if you're familiar with the contemporary author Amos Oz, but he knows how to tell a story. And he speaks of how he uses his materials.

He says he writes on little bits of paper, and he writes what he calls words, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, bits of dismantled sentences, fragments of expressions, descriptions, and all kinds of tentative combinations.

And every now and again, I pick up one of those particles, those molecules of text, carefully with my tweezers, hold it up to the light, examine it from a number of different directions, lean forward and rub it or polish it, hold it up to the light again, lean forward and fit it into the texture of the cloth I am weaving.

That's like those of us who used to write term papers long ago, before you had the simplicity of computers. We had all of our material on cards, and there were literally hundreds of them, and we'd spread them out on the table before us, and we would take all of that research and determine how to write our story.

The text today, take a look, verses 1 through 11. A wonderful decision that the writer had to determine how to use.

[7 : 04] Hannah's prayer. I almost can imagine the writer writing a draft, getting to chapter 1, verse 21, where Elkanah and all of his house went up to sacrifice or offer to the Lord, and finishing with the verse we saw, chapter 2, verse 11, then Elkanah went home to Ramah, and in the midst of this narrative, asking himself, where do I place Hannah's prayer that has come down to me?

And rubbing it and holding it up to the light, placing it here. When the prayer was written, we don't really know.

It certainly is not beyond the realm of probability that Hannah wrote this prayer somewhere in those first two to three years of young Samuel's life when he was being weaned, and perhaps even before he went up to the temple.

Perhaps she reflected on it and put it down later. We don't know. We do know that the author, the writer, has come to the point where in the narrative, having seen that the promise of God and giving her a gift of a son had been fulfilled, and her promises in giving her son back to God had been kept that she bursts forth in prayer.

I want to give you four takeaways today on Hannah's prayer. First, I want you to notice, prayer was the pattern of Hannah's life.

[8 : 56] There's something there for us, isn't it? Look at chapter 2, verse 1. And Hannah prayed. Now, it's particularly striking if you were here last week.

It's the same word in the Hebrew that we saw in chapter 1, verse 10, and again in chapter 1, verse 12. Chapter 1, verse 10, she was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly.

Verse 12, and she continued praying before the Lord. Last week, Hannah was a woman commended to us as one who prayed.

Here we come back to the story. Tell us some more. Well, the first thing I want to tell you, when God did a great work in her life, Hannah prayed.

Isn't that great? The first two chapters. The opening chapter was a prayer born out of desperate straits. The second chapter, however, there's a prayer that has been fashioned out of this celebratory moment in her life.

[10 : 10] The first prayer in chapter 1 was born out of the provocation of a rival. It was, according to the language of the text, at a time in her life when she was in deep distress.

Let me give you another one of her words. Affliction. Sadness. Weeping. Troubled in spirit. Great anxiety. And vexation.

In that circumstance of life, Hannah prayed. And in this circumstance of life, Hannah prayed.

I was thinking today of the wonderful selection of our singing where you turn my mourning into dancing with joy or something of that nature.

You have the words in front of you if you have one of the handouts. All the sorrows were turned and the voice of praise went forward. That's the takeaway for today.

[11 : 15] Hannah was a woman who was known by the pattern of life as a person who prayed. Whether it was in desperate situations or in moments of celebration.

Think about it. When do you normally pray? When we're in trouble? When we have needs? What about when something of incredible magnitude, graciousness, and goodness has happened in your life?

That's a moment when Hannah actually sat down and penned a prayer of celebration. Prayer as the pattern of life.

Secondly, look at her prayer. Hannah's prayer was first personal, but it also just kind of swelled into what I would call prophetic praise.

Look at how it begins. My heart exalts in the Lord. My strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation.

[12 : 27] It's personal. This is not abstract. This is not disconnected from life. This is a soul that has been affected by the goodness of God who says my heart, my mouth, my strength.

Isn't that wonderful? It's personal. Look at the word strength. Literally, my horn. Since I'm going to Nairobi, I'll give you a Nairobi illustration.

I was almost run over last time in Nairobi in the Nairobi game park by a rhinoceros. Noah and I were in a car and we got charged by a rhino and it scared us to death.

We had our windows down and foolishly we were like, roll the windows up, roll the windows up, as if that would have helped this oncoming charge. And when he came within about six or seven feet of the car, finally his horn went down and then was raised and then he lumbered off to the side.

Thank God. The horn is the symbol of strength, power, glory.

[13 : 49] It's used that way among other ways in the Old Testament. So what Hannah is saying is my horn, my strength, my glory, my womb is made strong by the Lord and is praising him.

It's that personal. It's that personal. He's filled me with something worthy of expressing praise. But notice how she ends.

Verse 10, we lose a bit in the translation, but this word horn comes back, but this time, not in regard to what God has done for her personally, but with this swelling praise of a prophetic note.

Verse 10, the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces. Against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. And notice this, it moves from her person to his king.

He will give strength to his king and exalt literally the horn of his anointed. There's the bookends of her prayer. It's personal, what he's done for me, but it's connected to this prophetic praise of what he will do for his own king.

[15 : 07] She finds her story within God's overarching story. You know, we're always wondering, how do you get from Samuel to Jesus?

It's interesting, there's a great connection between this particular prayer and the prayer that Luke gives us at the time of the Magnificat or at the time of Mary's celebratory note on her praise for what God has done.

The language overlap between the two women's prayers in early Luke and early Samuel are amazing. And there is one way forward that this prayer is a prayer that is already speaking about the strength of what God will do for his king, that he will exalt, he will lift up the glory, the power, the honor, the strength of his anointed one, his Messiah, the Christ.

What he's done for me is amazing, but what God is doing for the world is in him. That's the way the prayer begins and ends. So what's the takeaway for you?

How are your prayers fashioned? Do they move from what God is doing in your life to what God is doing in all the world through his anointed? Do they move from your situation to his rule?

[16 : 30] Or in this case from her to him to what he has done for me to what he is doing in all the world? That ought to inform our prayer.

This movement, this splendid movement that moves from the personal to that prophetic praise. It's interesting, isn't it, that the word king is there?

Fascinating, really, because we don't have a king yet. So if she's penned this prior to the anointing of Saul and then David, then she must be drawing on the biblical record, even of Deuteronomy, where God says, when you come into the land and you have a king in these days.

She's either prophetically filled here, or she's writing in retrospect, and the writer is placing it here. Either way, this is a woman that knows that what God has done for her is somehow embedded in the story of what God is doing in all the world.

And as her glory rises, well, it pales in comparison to the glory that God is bringing upon His anointed. First, prayer is the pattern for her life.

[17 : 45] Second, her prayer is both personal, and yet it moves through this swelling prophetic praise. Third, the content of the prayer speaks of both God's power and His protection.

Do your prayers follow that pattern of His power and His protection? Look at His power, verses 2 through 7.

There is none holy like the Lord, none beside you. There is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly. Let not arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed.

Do you remember the situation she had found herself in last week under the provocation of her rival? What's God done for you lately? She heard these words of provocation year in and year out.

And now she says, your mouths are stopped because God is a God of knowledge. He knows things. He weighs things. He's powerful to change things.

[18 : 48] And look at how things change. There's this great reversal in play that accentuates the power of God, verses 4 through 7. The bows of the mighty are broken, and then here's the reversal, but the feeble bind on strength.

That's the power of God. That's what God does in the world. Look at the next one. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.

The barren or the ones who had not have born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down to Sheol and He raises up.

You can just feel this canticle of turning in her prayer. Everything is moving. That which had been exalted in the world is being brought low and everything that was low is being brought full circle and up high.

That's what she wants you to know. God is that powerful. He did it for me, she says. I was destitute and He reversed my fortunes.

[19 : 59] Well, may you be ready on that day when you move from desperation to celebration to actually give praise to God for His power. His power.

All grace. But you need Him to reverse the fortunes of life. But not only His power, but His protection.

verses 9 and 10. He guards the feet of faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in the darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail.

You're not going to prevail on your own strength, your own power, your own might. God is the protector of His people. This was brought home to me clearly in the first part of 1996 when we were living in the east end of London, back when Sinn Féin was still trying to find its way, in its Irish way, into the political system, rather than being viewed as a terrorist organization.

And I was there with my young family, four kids under the age of seven, and locking the little door at night, and then the latch at night, and then another latch at night, to make sure that I was doing everything in my might to protect my family.

[21 : 11] family. And then we were putting in the bed one night, and there was the unmistakable rattling of the windows, and the shaking of the house, and the sound, the rolling sound, of what was nothing less than a bomb exploding in the Docklands a mile from where we live.

Me, a Midwesterner, hearing a bomb go off. And I looked at Lisa, and she looked at me, and we were reading to the children, and I said, I think I said, I've never heard a bomb before, but that was a bomb.

Well, that was the first night, to be honest with you, that I actually felt secure in London. I thought, what am I doing? Locking my little latches, making sure my key is covered in the right place.

I could be blown up here in like two minutes if God does not protect me. Well, Hannah says, look, do what you got to do, but at the end of the day, He will guard the feet of His faithful ones.

Do you acknowledge that? And it's Him. It's not only His power, it's His protection. Fourth and final takeaway on this hot afternoon, and therefore we'll keep it brief, but notice her prayer was public.

[22 : 33] She wrote this down. She's published. Now, today, there's this strange dichotomy in the language of prayer.

Of course, Jesus says, when you're going to pray, don't do it outside, don't do it on the public street corner, go into your closet, and that's all true. But there is a rightful place for public prayer.

She made it known. It was supposed to be broadcast, proclaimed, extra, extra, read all about it. Public.

You've got to know what God did in my life. You've got to know what God's doing in the life of the whole world. Public prayer. In this sense, her prayer, this kind of thing, is evidenced throughout the Bible.

Think of Miriam and Moses when they got through the Red Sea. Exodus 15. What happens when God does a great work of deliverance? What happens is they write a song, which is a prayer of praise.

[23 : 43] And they record it for the generations to see. Think of David at the latter half of our own narrative, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel.

The 1 Samuel 2.1 begins with Hannah's prayer, but the end of this narrative, 2 Samuel 22, there is David's final prayer. Why?

At the conclusion of his life, it's the celebration of what God has done, and he wanted it made known publicly. Think of Solomon in 1 Kings 8 at the dedication of the temple.

We have the prayer. Think of Nebuchadnezzar and the words with which he rolls off the pages of scripture in Daniel 4. He is giving praise, public praise, to God for his sovereign work in all the world, and in particular in his own life.

Think of the entire book of the Psalms. They are public prayers. Now, think of your life and these four characteristics. Are you known as a man or a woman where prayer is the pattern of your life?

[24 : 50] Or is it just in times of chapter 1 desperation, but not in times of chapter 2 celebration? the pattern of the life that is pleasing to God is unceasing prayer.

Second, is your prayer personal? Do you really personally speak with God?

What are the pronouns with which you speak? and does it always end to the praise of his name and his anointed? Third, do your prayers demonstrate, testify to the power and protection of God?

They should. And fourth, are they ever public? Is there ever reason for you to stand in the midst of the assembly and to raise your voice to the creator of the heavens and the earth that those in the assembly might know what he has done for you?

For indeed, have you not been strengthened through her prayer? And so we ought to be strengthened through the prayers of one another.

[26 : 18] What are the takeaways then? Some of you this week need to write a prayer of thanksgiving. You write it.

If you do nothing more than send it to your family that doesn't live near you anymore or read it if you have children to those at the table around you to write a prayer of public thanksgiving and give it to God.

Say, I'm going to do this. I'm going to bear testimony to God. I'm going to follow the pattern of Hannah. I'm actually going to give you the unique opportunity now to implement the sermon.

Well, it would be the fastest application of a sermon we've ever had at Holy Trinity, wouldn't it? Don't even ask you to implement it before you leave the doors, but to implement it now. As we close, I will close in prayer in a few minutes.

If you would like to stand where you are and offer a prayer of praise loud enough for us to hear, for what God has done in your life, then please do so, and we will join you in celebration.

[27 : 22] Let us close our time in prayer. Thank you.