

Hannah's Prayer: The DNA of God's Kingdom

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[0:00] Well, good morning. It's a real privilege and honor to be here at Christ the King, to be able to preach this morning.

And it's an honor for a number of reasons. One is the people, there have been people in this church who have played a big role in my life and in my wife's life.

So to be here and preach at Christ the King is a privilege for that reason. And it's also a privilege to come and preach here as the head of school of Kenosha Christian Academy.

We are so grateful for Christ the King and your support of us, but also of the people here who are on mission with us.

To be on mission with some of the families here at Christ the King is an honor and a privilege. So I appreciate the opportunity to bring God's word to us this morning.

[1:07] So for the message today, I want to focus on a few stories. From the world's perspective, it's odd that we're still telling these stories because they have little to do with what we would see today as important.

The people aren't rich or famous. They were actually poor. They lived in small towns and lived ordinary lives when we first meet them.

We know little of their personalities. And yet these stories are some of the turning points in God's redemptive work in the world. The story that I'll start with begins in 1 Samuel, where God is establishing his kingdom amongst the people of Israel.

And when the King of the universe wants to break into this sin-cursed world, when he wants to reestablish his kingdom and fight the powers of darkness, what does he do?

Who does he use? What does it look like? These are some of the questions we'll look at today, and here's how we're going to do it. We're going to look at these stories like four acts in a play.

[2:17] So plays have these different acts that move the story along. And so we'll have four of those this morning. In the first act, I'll start by telling the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel, starting in chapter 1 and then chapter 2, which culminates in her prayer of thanksgiving to God.

It's a fascinating prayer because of its beauty and depth, but it's also fascinating because in this prayer is the unifying thread for the rest of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, revealing the DNA of God's kingdom.

So after reading through the prayer, we'll walk through a few of those stories in Samuel to show how the prayer helps us see the meaning of the book as a whole. But the DNA of God's kingdom extends beyond the book of Samuel.

It reveals the very nature of God and his people. And naturally, Hannah's prayer becomes an important passage at another key point in redemptive history. After we walk through Samuel, we'll turn to the act 2 in the play, where there's another turning point in redemptive history that draws from Hannah's prayer.

So we'll find this act 2 in the book of Luke and act 3 in the book of Acts. These books are the continuation, the drawing out of the DNA of Hannah's prayer.

[3:42] And when we look through these passages, here's going to be one repeating thing, one repeating call on our lives. As God's kingdom breaks into the world, humble yourselves before God.

So as God's kingdom breaks into the world, humble yourselves before God. And if we humble ourselves before God and all that that entails, if we trust him to save us and to work through us, then we'll be a part of this eternal kingdom, God's eternal kingdom breaking into the world.

So before we get into 1 Samuel here, let me pray for us. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for how it tells this grand and great story about what you are doing in the world and how you are doing it and how we can be a part of it.

Thank you for this prayer from a young mom that tells us so much about your work and your kingdom and about how we should respond.

We ask for faith and strength to respond to it rightly. In Jesus' name, amen. All right, so you can turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel.

[5:01] So the background of 1 Samuel is we, when we get to 1 Samuel 1, we're still at the end of the period of the judges. And if you remember anything about the period of the judges, it was a pretty dark time in Israel's history.

By the time the book of judges ended, we're at one of the most depressing parts in Israel's story. You have these stories of Israel's incredible brokenness and rebellion against God to the point that these stories are showing that Israel had become worse than Sodom and Gomorrah.

So the end of the judges leaves us with these refrains that there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

And it leaves us longing for someone, for some king to come and lead the people of Israel out of this darkness and under God's good rule. So that's the time we find ourselves in when we hear the opening words of the book of 1 Samuel that tells us about a man named Elkanah, a man who has two wives, one named Peninnah and the other Hannah.

And of these two wives, Peninnah has several children and Hannah has none. Every year they would go up to the temple in Shiloh and they would offer sacrifices to God there.

[6:30] And this was a uniquely hurtful time for Hannah because Peninnah would use this time to rub in that Hannah had no children. And in this day, and even more so in that day, to not be able to have children was a really painful thing.

It could even be a really shameful thing. And so for Hannah not to have any children was deeply hurtful and discouraging. And Peninnah would rub it in that she didn't have any children and that Peninnah did.

And so this happened year after year as they went up to the temple. And one year, Hannah was at the end of herself. She was distraught. And so she goes up to the temple and she pours her heart out to God.

And she cries out to him and she asks God to give her a child. And that if she does get a child, that she will give this child back to the Lord.

And she's crying out in her heart to God. And she's visibly moved and distraught. But no words are coming out of her mouth.

[7:37] And Eli, the priest, sees her in this state and he assumes that she's drunk. And so he comes up to her and rebukes her and says, what are you doing?

Put your wine away from you. Enough of this. And Hannah responds, no, no, no, I'm not drunk. You see, I'm crying out to God that he would give me a child.

And Eli responds by saying, may God grant you what you asked for. So Hannah leaves and true to Eli's word, Hannah becomes pregnant.

She gives birth to a child. They name him Samuel. And after Samuel's weaned, true to Hannah's word, they take him back to the temple.

And leave him to be in service to God for the rest of his life. And as they go up to the temple and worship God there, Hannah breaks out into a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

[8:45] And this prayer of thanksgiving to God, as we'll see, sets the trajectory for the rest of the book and actually for the rest of the kingdom of God.

So let's read this prayer together. It starts in chapter 2, and I'll read verses 1 through 11. And Hannah prayed and said, my heart exalts in the Lord.

My horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord, for 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 are full have hired themselves out for bread. But those who are hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.

[9:44] The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down to Sheol and rises up 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. 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 horn of his anointed. Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, and the boy was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest.

So this passage would certainly warrant extended exposition for an entire sermon. But what I want to do here is just draw out a few pieces of this prayer, and then show how they're traced out through the rest of the book of Samuel.

[10:55] So notice one of the main things here is that God is sovereign. This is all over this prayer. He talks about how God is the one who breaks the bows of the mighty.

He binds, the feeble bind on strength. Those who are full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who are hungry have ceased to hunger. So there's, God is the one doing all of this.

Throughout each of these verses, you can see how God's strength, his power, his ability to do any work in the world, that God has that power.

The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces. We'll see this theme throughout, that God is strong and mighty, and he can do as he pleases.

We also see that the God raises up the humble, and he casts down the proud. So you see how there's this reference kind of to Peninnah and Hannah and their situation, that those who are full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who are hungry have ceased to hunger.

[12:07] The barren has born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. So there's this reversal of how things were. Those who had a lot now find themselves with little.

Those who were strong and mighty are brought down. Those who were poor, God makes rich. God brings low when he pleases and he exalts.

And so the proper posture of God's people is to humble ourselves before him. It's to recognize that we bring to God nothing, that we don't go our own way, but submit to God and his words.

And then you see, so you see God is sovereign. You see how he raises up the humble. And then you see how he's going to raise up a king. You see that in verse 10, that he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.

And so through the book of Samuel, we'll see this continuing on, how God is going to raise up a king to rule over his people.

[13:17] So with that, what I want to do now is to take some stops throughout the book of Samuel to show how some of the individual stories and the details of this story are drawing out the threads from this prayer.

So to start, we'll go to 1 Samuel chapter 3. So Samuel is a young boy ministering to the temple. And in the temple, you have Eli the priest and his sons Hophni and Phinehas. And these are some of the most powerful people in the nation of Israel.

This is the priest and his sons ministering in the temple. They have so much authority and responsibility. And we see that the sons in particular, Hophni and Phinehas, are abusing this authority.

They are using it to get rich, to fill their stomachs. They're using it to indulge in sexual immorality.

[14:31] And so, as we saw in Hannah's prayer, that's not what God expects of his people. So we have this story of God bringing a word of judgment

to these powerful people.

Samuel, and who does he use but a little boy? You might know this story. Samuel is sleeping, and he hears this voice of Samuel.

Samuel. So he runs over to Eli, thinking that Eli was calling him. But Eli tells him to go back to sleep. And this happens a few times. And Eli realizes it was probably a message from the Lord. And so Samuel goes back the next time and hears God's voice. And God tells this little boy that he was going to judge Eli and his family. And so Eli ends up getting this message of judgment on him and his family from a little boy.

God raises up the humble, and he casts down the proud. So that's one of those stories. Let's take a stop at another one of these stories. I'll just give an overview of the story of Saul here.

[15:47] So Israel is in a place where they don't yet have a kingdom. They're this large family group of people under Moses' law, but they don't yet have an established kingdom.

And they look out, and they see the world, and they see the world have these impressive kings. These kings who rule over them, who lead them in battle. And Israel sees these other nations, and they say, we want to be like them.

We want kings like them. They think, they're thinking like the world thinks. They think that power and status is what's important.

And so God, to start, gives them what they want. He gives them a strong and good-looking king who can lead the people in battle. And you see, Saul has military victory after victory.

He's conquering Israel's enemies. He's doing everything that a world might want in a king, except he's doing it for himself. He's doing it to grow his own power, to grow his own kingdom.

[17:00] And God, even though Saul was so powerful and strong, he was no match for God. That God is sovereign, and so God decides that he's going to cast Saul down.

He gives a word of judgment to him because Saul was proud, and so God casts him down and said that he's going to reject Saul and his family. And that leaves them in need of another king, and that takes us to the story of Samuel going to Bethlehem to find a new king.

Bethlehem wasn't the first place that you would think that he would go to find a king, but he does. He knocks on the door of Jesse. Jesse has eight sons, and he goes into Jesse's house, and Jesse brings before him his oldest son, and the oldest son is what you would think of as a king.

He was good-looking. He was tall and strong, and Samuel thinks, surely this man should be the next king of Israel, and God tells, do you remember what God tells him? Like, man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

And so, Jesse brings out his next son and his next one, and God says, no, no, no, and he says no to all seven of his sons, and Samuel says, is there any more?

[18:24] And Jesse says, well, there's one more, but we didn't invite him because he's the youngest, and he's out watching the sheep.

So they bring in David, the youngest son, smaller than any of his brothers, still young, and God tells him, this is the one.

Like, this is who I want to be king of Israel. You see, God raises up the humble, and he casts down the proud, because we see David's heart for the Lord, that he didn't have, at that time, the outward appearance that would have marked him as a king, but his heart was devoted to God, and that's what God wanted.

That's what God cared about in a king. And so, in the next story, we get the story of David and Goliath. And if you read the details of this story, you see that throughout this story, there's this heightening of the different power dynamics, of status and significance, of showing Goliath on one hand, the mighty and strong Goliath, and the details of the text show his strength and his size. And then we see how Israel cowers before Goliath as he issues this challenge to the army of Israel. Israel. So as they're out waiting across from the Philistines, David's brothers were part of the Israelite army.

[20:06] And so one day, David's father tells David to come in from watching the sheep and to go out and give his brothers some food.

And as he sends his brothers out with food, notice he also sends them, he sends David out with some cheese for the commander of their thousand.

So again, these details show he wants to schmooze the important people in the army. So you have the commander of the thousands, you have Saul, you have David's strapping brothers, and then you have David, this boy, coming in and he starts to hear these rumblings of what's going on of this mighty Goliath defying the living God and he gets upset.

He gets worked up and he says, well, I can take him. And his brother, do you remember his brother's response of saying, what are you doing here?

Like, who's watching those few sheep? Just doing everything he can to contrast the status and power of themselves and of Goliath with David.

[21:24] But David is insistent that he knew God, he knew him so well, and he also knew God's promise to him. Because remember, Samuel anointed David as the next king of Israel, and David knew that God would keep his promise.

So David works his way up to the king, Saul, and says that he wants to fight Goliath. So Saul, at first, sends him out with his armor, which David can barely move in.

So David says, I'm just going to, no, I'm just going to go out with my sling and these rocks. And David does. He goes out to the battlefield, this boy with no armor, a sling in his hand against this giant warrior with this incredible armor, and he gives this speech to Goliath that you come to me with a spear and a sword, but I come to you in the name of the Lord.

Do you remember that line from Hannah for not by might, not in might does the Lord raise up? That God is the one who doesn't need might to win a battle.

So David takes out his sling with a rock, he slings it around, throws the rock through the air, and strikes Goliath in the forehead and kills the mighty Goliath.

[22:47] God raises up the humble and he casts down the proud. So do you see this? How Hannah's prayer operates as this thread that's woven through the book of Samuel?

How it's becoming the DNA of God's kingdom and what God's people should be? Hannah gives us the keys to understand these stories.

And if you read through from 1 Samuel 1 through the end of the book, you'll see how it goes through the entire book. You'll see how God rejects Saul and casts him down because of his pride and he raises up the humble David who trusts in him.

And as you read on though, you'll see that David becomes proud too. He ends up committing adultery and murder. He issues the census and God casts down even David.

But God made this promise that he would use David's house, that he would use the house of David to restore his kingdom and his world in the world.

[23:59] So act, this first act comes to an end. We get to the end of Samuel and see the kingdom being passed on. We see that David wasn't the savior that they had hoped for and neither were his children.

We're left longing for one of David's sons to restore his throne and to restore God's proper rule which brings us to Acts 2. Around a thousand years later, Israel was languishing.

They had returned from exile, but God was silent. Israel was under Roman rule. A king from David's line was nowhere to be found. People of all different kinds were speculating about how God would intervene, how God would restore his people.

So how would the great living God return to establish his kingdom? C.S. Lewis describes the moment this way. The whole thing narrows and narrows until at last it comes down to a little point, small as the point of a spear, a Jewish girl at her prayers.

That's right. The grand story of redemption zooms in on an engaged Jewish girl from no special family. An angel appears to her and tells her that she will give birth to the king who will sit on David's throne forever.

[25:26] The story continues with Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth, a previously barren older woman, remember Hannah, who is also expecting.

Mary greets her cousin and then sings a song of praise to God. Here are a few lines from that, from Luke 1, 51 through 53. He has shown strength with his arms.

He has scattered the proud in their thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty.

Does that sound familiar? It's almost a, part of that, it's almost a quotation from Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2. This new work happening in God's kingdom is following the same storyline at the beginning of Israel's kingdom in the book of Samuel.

A barren woman giving birth. God raising up the most unlikely people. A song of praise from the mother singing about God's work to raise the humble. The establishment of a new king.

[26:34] The weaving of these things throughout the rest of the book. It's just like before. It seems as though God had picked the least likely people to be a part of this new turn in his redemptive work.

But if you know the DNA of God's kingdom from Hannah's prayer, then it's not that all unlikely. God had been working this way all along. Using the humble, the people no one else expected.

Those who trusted in him and not in themselves. This DNA, as we see it worked out in the rest of the book of Luke, shows up most clearly in the Davidic king, Jesus himself.

So as Israel is charged with, in that time, Israel has so many expectations of a Messiah.

Of what this person will look like. And as that's happening, the Messiah slips in without almost anyone noticing. He's born in a barn laid to sleep in a feeding trough.

[27:39] He grows up in the backwoods town of Nazareth. And as the book of Luke unfolds, we see the resemblance, we see the resemblance to Samuel continue.

Just like Hannah's prayer presents the theme of the rest of the book of Samuel, Mary's prayer sets the theme, the major themes of Luke and Acts. So this theme introduced by Hannah, that God raises up the humble and casts down the proud, shows up everywhere in the book of Luke.

Jesus ministers to the poor, the sinners, the blind, the outcast. He proclaims good news to them, that God's reign is coming.

Characters like Zacchaeus, Lazarus, and the rich man, the publican, and the Pharisee who pray in the temple, the prodigal son, those stories show up only in the book of Luke.

And in Luke's gospel, more than any other, we hear Jesus calling his followers to minister to the poor, the blind, and the outcasts. It's continuing the same message, the same unfolding DNA from Hannah's prayer.

[28:49] And these stories and these characters are remarkable. But it's nothing compared to how this second act closes. While most kings are coronated in a palace with a lavish ceremony, King Jesus is crowned by dying naked on a cross, being tortured and killed to save his people from their sins.

You couldn't imagine a more humble and humiliating way to die. Jesus embodies the message, the cry of Hannah's song from so long before.

But the story doesn't end there. because Jesus is raised up by God from the dead. And this brings us to Act 3 in the story.

The risen King Jesus ascends into heaven and he sends his spirit to empower the church to continue his work. I know you went through the book of Acts last year, so you probably remember the many ways that the church reflects the practices of Jesus.

They carry the same DNA as him, humble, trusting in the sovereign God to bring people to himself and to build up his kingdom. And so the cast of the early church isn't Caiaphas or Herod or Nero.

[30:13] It's fishermen, slaves, jailers. God's people aren't marked by a hunger to pursue fame or influence on the world's term. They're marked by humility, care for the poor, submission to God's word, preaching of the gospel just like Hannah described, just like Jesus described.

And as Act 3 continues or as we move into application, Act 3 isn't over. We don't move on from Act 3 as we come to today because as Christ the King Church, this is your part of the story.

This is your act. The DNA of God's kingdom found in Hannah's prayer is your DNA. You're trusting in a sovereign God who will rescue the world through his King Jesus.

The risen Jesus' spirit lives among you working to make you humble and godly people like Hannah, like Mary, like Jesus, like Peter. And as we close, I want to draw out a few ways that that looks for us today, both as individuals and as Christ the King Church.

So for us as individuals, as we are surrounded by pictures of another kingdom, maybe you're a high school student or a middle school student, and when you're at school, you feel the need to fit in.

[31:47] And you feel the need to fit in by being funny or pretty or by dressing in a certain way. You want to fit in with the cool kids, and that's not anything new.

That's what was happening in Hannah's day. It's what was happening in Mary's day. Or maybe you're at a job where all the time you're watching as people are jockeying for attention, for a raise, for a new title.

They're schmoozing the boss, misrepresenting their own work and yours in order to get ahead. Well, you see, first, that doesn't work. To try and gain the approval of others and get satisfaction from others, it doesn't work.

To try and raise yourself up like that doesn't work because once you become popular or rich, you realize that it offers no fulfillment at all. That you're left emptier than when you started.

Do you remember those stories of Eli and his sons, of Saul, of the Pharisees? God casts them down. It doesn't work out. God isn't impressed with their power or with their looks or with their strength.

[32:58] But know also how God's ways lead to life. Instead of working to puff up your own image or to fit in with the crowd, remember that you're a part of a kingdom that follows a crucified Savior.

One that looks to serve people in his interactions rather than to be served. And remember that following Jesus means looking different from other people. It means often being unpopular because we care about different things.

And remember that on the other side of the cross is resurrection and life, eternal life with Jesus. That's a word to individuals.

Now, a word to the church as the whole. We looked at the DNA found in Hannah's prayer and how it shouldn't just mark individuals.

It should mark the people of God as a whole. First, the nation of Israel and now in the church. The first thing I want to point to you, point out to you, and point you to, as Christ the King Church, is the glory of being part of Hannah's story, of Jesus' story.

[34:07] The living God has chosen the church as the primary way to display his redemptive work in the world. As the world looks to politics and money, you know that God's redemptive work is continuing and breaking in as you love the poor.

Study and submit to God's word, deny yourselves, and gather regularly around Jesus' table to remember his broken body and spilled blood. It breaks in as you choose to be humble before God, as you seek to love God and neighbor, and if you have eyes to see, you'll realize that's what's going on in these things.

And that is far better, far more important than what's going on in Washington or Madison or Hollywood. God's work was through a dejected, barren woman, a shepherd boy, a teenage girl, a crucified Messiah.

It can break in here in this place if you seek his kingdom above earthly values. But there is still a draw for us, even as God's people, to live by the rules of other kingdoms.

We can be tempted by money and influence, things that aren't bad in themselves, but become the things we trust in. We can be tempted to place or we can be tempted for our conversations to be surrounded or centered around values that more reflect values of the world than of God's kingdom, where we're trying more to impress other people and show others how important we are, where we look at outward appearance more than the posture of the heart.

[35:44] But God calls us to something different, to not look on the outward appearance, but to look on the heart. So when someone comes into Christ the King, are they judged more by their job or social status, or are they judged more by their sensed need for a savior?

One other note here of application for us as a church. There is a draw in the world to think that politics is the most important thing, that that is the most important activity of the church.

But I think a clear point from Samuel and Luke is that what's going on here in the church, in the local church, is far more important than politics.

There's an interesting passage in Luke chapter 3 where Luke mentions the most important people in the world. Remember, politics were really important in Jesus' day too.

They were really important. It was what people were talking about. And so in Luke chapter 3, it mentions them all. Or the most important, Caesar. It mentions Herod and Pilate.

[36:56] But it mentions them almost in order to forget them. It mentions them and then goes on to talk about the Simeons and the shepherds and the fishermen and John the Baptist.

It says, yeah, there's Caesar and, by the way, there's Caesar and Herod and Pilate. Let's get to the real story. Let's get to the most important part of the story. And it's the part of the story that's talking about these humble people who God is using to establish His kingdom in the world.

And that's for us too. That though politics can be an important way to love our neighbor and to do good, it is not more important. It is not preeminent over what is going on in the life of the local church as we love each other and submit to God's word, as we preach the gospel, as we do acts of love in our city.

That is more important. That's where God is most glorified. Christ the King, we're a part of God's kingdom, God's story.

And in a world dominated by appearance, status, money, and power, we're a people pursuing humility, submitting to God's word. And as the church in 2023, we're still living in this third act of the story.

[38:21] There's a fourth act to come. One day, the trumpet will sound and Jesus will return to establish His kingdom once and for all. Hannah's prayer says that God will exalt the horn of His anointed.

And on that day, with the world made right again, with death defeated, with every tear wiped away, every knee will bow and worship the King who became obedient to death, even the death on a cross.

Let's pray together. Father, we are so grateful to You for how You are working in the world. You don't want what we bring to the table, but You want us to humble ourselves before You.

So may we do that. May we live and dwell this story of Hannah's prayer, of David, of Mary, of Jesus.

And may we long for the day when You will come and establish Your kingdom in full. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[39:29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.