

The King we want or the King we need? (1)

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[0 : 00] Today's reading comes from 1 Samuel chapter 2 verses 1 to 11. 1 Samuel 1.

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Lamp to our path and a light to our feet. And we confess that by nature we are in darkness, blind. And so we pray that you would shed light in our hearts and lives through your word this morning.

[2 : 25] And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we are setting ourselves the task this term of going all the way through the book of 1 Samuel.

Now, usually we would try to do this passage by passage. But I think if we tried that, we might be here for a few years. So what we're going to do instead is we are going to be sort of whistle-stop touring.

I'm hopefully stopping at the most important parts of the narrative. And the preachers are going to be working hard to make sure we're in the whole book and understanding the whole of 1 Samuel.

And by the way, if you would like to, if you're struggling for inspiration as to what to do in your quiet times, perhaps one great thing to do could be to read through 1 Samuel this term.

So there's going to be lots of gold in this book that we're not going to be able to unearth on a Sunday. But hopefully lots that we will.

[3 : 34] I want to start just by introducing what I think is the big truth. And I hope we will hear the big truth of 1 Samuel. What is the big message that God has for us today in this book of the Bible?

That is a question we should be asking of every book of the Bible. Well, 1 and 2 Samuel, in fact, they're two books that hang together. In 1 and 2 Samuel, I suggest that God announces that he is going to raise up a king for himself who will rule forever.

And as the story progresses, we see how that is going to happen. And more importantly, we see what kind of king he is going to be. It is a big moment in the Bible story.

These two books, at the point at which God does that, he announces, I have a king. I'm going to raise him up. He's going to rule forever. And the whole thing, the whole of these two books, point to us and prepare us for the arrival of Jesus.

And to see why he is the king that we really need. So that's just a brief where we're going, I hope, over the next few weeks.

[4 : 51] But the story of 1 and 2 Samuel starts, as you can see, with Hannah's story. Chapters 1 and 2. Now, I don't know how familiar you are with this character Hannah.

She pops up. She doesn't come back in the rest of the story. Why? Well, Hannah's story is the introduction to both of these books, 1 and 2 Samuel.

It sets the agenda. Who then is Hannah? Well, just come back with me to chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. Because we see there that Hannah was a nobody from nowhere.

Hannah was a nobody from nowhere. Chapter 1, verse 1. There was a certain man of Ramathim Zophim, nowhere, of the hill country of Ephraim.

Well, within Israel, but nowhere in particular. Whose name was Elkanah. No one. We don't know who he is or doesn't come up again.

[5 : 55] Son of Jehoram. Don't know who he is. Son of Elihu. No idea. Son of Tohu. Son of Zuth. And an Ephrathite. That is Bethlehem.

Ephratha is Bethlehem. But at that point in the Bible, Bethlehem is nowhere. Hannah was a nobody from nowhere.

She also knew what it was to suffer. To suffer with childlessness. Verse 6. The Lord had closed her womb. Verse 10.

She was deeply distressed and wept bitterly. All the cultural shame that went with that. So not only not having the joy of children, but also the cultural shame and the mocking of Elkanah's other wife.

But she calls out to the Lord. She calls out to the Lord. She doesn't try to fix it herself. She calls out to the Lord.

[6 : 58] Remember me. Verse 11. Forget not your servants. And the Lord answers her prayer. He gives her a child. Verse 20.

In due course, Hannah conceived and bore a son. She called his name Samuel. For she said, I have asked for him from the Lord.

And what we have in chapter 2 is her song in response to God. And that is where we're going to be focusing. Just look down at verse 1 of chapter 2.

Hannah prayed and said, My heart exalts in the Lord. A nobody from nowhere, suffering in this broken world, finds her hope and joy in the Lord.

That word exalts means my heart rejoices. Rejoices in the Lord and in his salvation. End of verse 1.

[8 : 03] God has become the greatest joy of Hannah's life. All her hope is invested in him. Perhaps you can relate to that this morning.

Perhaps you can't. And maybe people here, and I hope there are people here, looking into the Christian faith. Or perhaps we are Christians and we're weary, struggling.

Perhaps you think, why or how could anyone see God as the greatest joy of his or her life?

God as the one who holds all of their hope. God's salvation as not just something to acknowledge, but to rejoice in. God as the one who holds all of his or her life.

Well, the purpose of the rest of Hannah's song, and I take it, the rest of the whole books of 1 and 2 Samuel, is that we too may come to share Hannah's joy in God and her faith.

[9 : 04] And be able to say, verse 2, as we prayed earlier, There is none holy like the Lord. There is none besides you.

There is no rock like our God. Well, there I think we have is the purpose of the whole of 1 and 2 Samuel, to bring us back to Hannah's prayer. To be able with her to pray like she does.

Now, Hannah sees three things about God, and that's where we're going to pause just for a few minutes this morning. Three things about God and his plan for the world, that mean that she can rejoice in him.

And they may be surprising. Number one, judgment. Hannah sees judgment day. That one day, God will reestablish his rule.

Just have a look at where it ends in verse 10. Her conclusion. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. And so you might say, Hannah sees where everything is going in the end.

[10:10] At this early point in the Bible story, Hannah sees, is given to see by God, where everything is going in the end. She is enabled to see where it all ends. She acts therefore, and this is really important, Hannah acts like a prophet.

Through this prayer. Now, I think we can make a mistake. One mistake we could make with this prayer. It is not just a thank you for the baby prayer. It's not, in fact, primarily, a thank you for the baby prayer.

There's almost nothing in it. Explicitly about the baby. Hannah is talking about the destination of all things. It's global. And so I take it that as she celebrates the birth of her son, Samuel, she is enabled by God to see the bigger picture in which her son will play a significant part.

Samuel will anoint David, whose son will rule forever. and she sees that everything is going to be put right in the end that God will re-establish his rule he will not let the world go on forever like this I wonder if you ever wonder if that's the case perhaps many of us in the workplace or in schools wherever we are our colleagues or friends you ask them what where do you think the world's going and most people I think would say something like well you know indefinitely perhaps we'll colonize the universe no God will not let the world go on forever like this he will bring his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven verse 10 there will be a great judgment and at that point God's rule will be re-established he is after all the owner so that's what Hannah sees in verse 8 at the end of verse 8 just look down with me for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and on them he has set the world he is the creator and so of course he's going to re-establish his rule he owns the shop and though he's patient and gracious and merciful he will in the end Hannah says verse 10 judge the ends of the earth and we immediately think to ourselves as we read verse 10 but it's been so long is it ever really going to happen I mean Hannah was writing this 3,000 years ago well 3,000 years is three days in God's economy in God's timings it's been three days since Hannah prayed this the eternal God he's patient not wanting anyone to perish wanting all to find life in Jesus

Christ but it will come it's been three days the Lord will judge the ends of the earth and that is why Hannah turns to address all of humanity in verse 3 and I love this it's great isn't it to hear the voice of a true woman of God it's not soft and cuddly is it verse 3 she turns to address all of humanity 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 let not arrogance come from your mouth what does she mean by arrogance is she just talking about Cristiano Ronaldo and that's unfair on him but what what does she mean by arrogance it's the kind of spiritual arrogance that later in this book Goliath shows that's the arrogance she's talking about it is the arrogance that thinks very little of God if he exists at all so do you see what she's talking about it's the arrogance that to speak or to act as if God is not really God we're going to see a lot of that as we read on in 1 and 2 Samuel it's it's to speak or to act as if he did not really form the pillars of the earth he did not really create all people as if he can't or won't do anything as if he won't judge as if he can't see or hear as if the God of the Bible doesn't matter that is the arrogance that is the spiritual arrogance that Hannah is talking about I was listening to a podcast with the well-known comedian Jimmy Carr I don't listen to loads of these kind of podcasts but it was a late night drive going to collect a table from Sutton and I couldn't think of anything better to do it was actually very interesting at one point Jimmy got onto it got onto the topic of religion and Jimmy I didn't realize this comes from a Catholic background and he said this he said of course we're not made in the image of God of course we're not made in the image of God we make things in our image but we're not made in the image of God and as he said that I thought well that is a brilliant sort of in nutshell form expressing the prevailing view of our culture we're not made in the image of God of course the God of the Bible is made up

[15 : 53] Jimmy said we're not really created by him and there will no be no accountability to him the prevailing view of our culture to which Hannah says and the word of God says talk no more so very proudly let not arrogance come from your mouth verse 3 God is a God of knowledge do you see that in other words don't make the foolish mistake of thinking that because we can't see him he can't see us it's like the you've played hide and seek with a toddler they go and hide in the corner they can't see you you think they think you can't see them well that is the spiritual reality around us but Hannah says God is a God of knowledge

God is unseen by us but make no mistake he is a God of knowledge he knows everything that everyone has ever thought or done and by him actions will be weighed there is a judgment day God will re-establish his rule first Hannah sees judgment day one day God will re-establish his rule secondly Hannah sees what is going to happen on that day and that is reversal on judgment day there will be reversal it will be good news for God's people it will be terrible news for those who aren't just look down and this is verses 4 to 9 verse 4 the bows of the mighty are broken but the feeble bind on strength reversal you see those who were full have hired themselves out for bread but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger reversal the baron has born seven reversal but he who has many children is now forlorn reversal the Lord kills one group and brings to life another group the Lord brings down to Sheol one group he raises up another group the Lord makes poor one group and makes rich another he brings low and he exalts reversal reversal reversal and then verse 8 he raises up the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor but this raises a question what is going on here is this just an arbitrary reversal of fortunes you know as if you lot have had your time and now it's their time well no this is really important this is not about simply you know those who have not much money now will be rich then and those who have lots of riches now will be poor then that is to misunderstand what is going on because of why because of verse 9 verse 9 clarifies who these two groups are he will guard the feet of his faithful ones but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness so what Hannah means throughout verses 4 to 8 is it is the bow of the arrogant mighty will be broken verse 4 the wicked who were full will be hungry verse 5 the enemies of God who were rich will be brought low while God's people the faithful ones who were weak who were hungry who were needy they will in the end be filled and strengthened on that day verse 9 controls our understanding of who these two groups are it is that kind of reversal and so when God reestablishes his rule it will be wonderful news for his people and it will be terrible news for the spiritually arrogant who have refused to treat him as God refused to respond to his call to come and find forgiveness in his son Jesus Christ we might well ask why is reversal needed at all well it seems

that God allows for a time those who reject him to prevail in the language of verse 9 many will have success and wealth without reference to God for a time we are surrounded by that in London very few of the rich and powerful in the world today will be those who humbly surrender their lives to God and his king Jesus we see that all around us it's the same today as it was then and so God allows humanity in rebellion against him to enjoy his blessings and flourish for a time in this age while at the same time he allows his faithful ones verse 9 his people to suffer briefly now to be marginalized ignored badly treated beaten down but Hannah says that will not go on forever when God brings his rule he will bring permanent reversal and so I think the question that Hannah raises is this who will be life's winners in the end who will be life's winners in the end and the answer is not the people we might think verse 9 this I think is the conclusion for not by might shall a man prevail it will not be the people who we might think that might it's not by might will a man prevail whether military might think of China and Russia

I saw the most probably one of the most terrifying images I've seen in a long time in a newspaper the other day a picture of the Chinese women's military section passing in a sort of military procession these hundreds of women armed with machine guns the might of China the might of Russia well not by might will a man prevail whether it's political power or technological progress not by might will man prevail whether by sheer wealth my attention was brought recently to this guy Stephen Bartlett you may have heard of him Dragon's Den fame it was his life's ambition to be a happy sexy millionaire and he says he achieved that by the age of 30 and so now he's gone on to other things whatever they may be but where will Stephen Bartlett be on the day that God re-establishes his rule on the day of reversal verse 9 cut off in darkness verse 10 broken to pieces oh we hope not may he repent before it's too late who will win at the game of life not who we think verse 9 not by might will a man prevail there is no hope in human strength

God says but there is hope in God and there is hope in his promises and that is what Hannah realized hope for nobodies like Hannah who have put their trust in the Lord and his coming kingdom hope for nobodies who have lined up with God and what he's doing hope for nobodies who are prepared to wait for the day when God re-establishes his rule I think and I hope some of this is sounding familiar to those of us who know the gospel what kind of hope is there for his people and I just want us to pause on this for a second because Hannah was hoping in God for a resurrection life do you see verse 8 he raises up the poor from the dust that same word dust is used in Genesis 3 dust to dust he lifts up the needy from the ash heap

[25 : 09] I can't see why she would use those images if she's not talking about being raised from the dead verse 6 he brings to life verse 6 he raises up her hope therefore was in resurrection life to be rich one day to be honoured to have the seat of honour to sit with princes and to be full resurrection life raised rich honoured full she is speaking of resurrection life for God's people oh there is a future for God's people Bob Dylan in his song the times are a changing says this the slow one now will later be fast the order is rapidly fading the first one now will later be last for the times they are a changing well I don't think he was talking about this but on the grandest scale that is exactly what Hannah is saying there will be reversal and verse 10 sorry verse 9 he will guard the feet of his faithful ones do you see that he will guard your feet that is through this life he will guard your journey and then he will bring you safely into his eternity no wonder

Hannah said I rejoice in God and I rejoice in his salvation so firstly she saw judgment secondly she saw reversal and thirdly she saw a king and that is in verse 10 the end of verse 10 he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed the conclusion of her song as she speaks as a prophet Hannah sees that somehow connected to all of this as God restores his rule he will establish and raise up an anointed king and notice that it is his king his anointed this then becomes the theme of the rest of 1 and 2

Samuel who is this person but did you know that Hannah is the first person in the Bible to mention the word Messiah anointed this is a massive moment as Hannah declares and proclaims that God has a Messiah an anointed king who will reign forever and notice too she might as well have said that God will raise him up from the dust he will give strength to his king he will exalt the horn both language that's been used of what God will do generally for his people on the day when God restores his rule Hannah says there will be a king God's king raised up to rule forever can you see what Hannah sees Hannah sees the gospel and proclaims it a thousand years before

Christ came well I just want to pause finally on a couple of implications the main implication I think is just to see or two implications one is firstly to see that when Jesus came can you see that he did not invent a new story but he saw himself as part of the same story can you see that that is why when Jesus came he came proclaiming that the kingdom of God is near the promised rule of God that rule of God that Hannah had spoken of Jesus came and said oh that that is near now very close he declared himself to be the king of that kingdom the son of man who will reign forever and he was raised from the dead just as Hannah prophesied it's the same story isn't it that is why when

Jesus was born Mary his mother sang Hannah's song take two right a song about reversal many of us will know it Mary said he has filled the hungry with good things the rich he sent away empty he's brought down the mighty from their throne and exalted those of humble estate why because she could see that the great reversal that Hannah had promised prophesied that God had promised through her is now here with the arrival of the king and of course Jesus himself spoke of this reversal blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted blessed are the meek for they shall one day inherit the earth and the new testament speaks of a day to come the day of Christ when he will return and reestablish

[31 : 03] God's rule finally and that that is now the next date in the diary verse 10 the Lord will judge the ends of the earth and so what we see in Hannah's prayer is the same story it is the gospel but I think where this song leaves us is with this conclusion who will be life's winners in the end verse 9 not by might shall a man prevail but by humbly waiting for God and his promises as Hannah did I just think this is a great place to be at the beginning of the year for us will this year for us be a year of seeking to prevail by might to have success in all of these various ways that we can use our human strength or will this year be a year of simply waiting for God and for his promises and rejoicing in him as

Hannah did well he will guard the feet of his faithful ones and then he will give them a glorious eternity I think what we'll do now is just take a moment to pause on our own and respond in prayer perhaps to freshly rejoice in God and his salvation just a few moments to respond personally to these verses ourselves and then I'll draw us together father we thank you that though there is no hope that can be found in human strength there is eternal hope that can be found in you and in your son Jesus Christ we want to rejoice in you this morning we praise you and we want to rejoice in your salvation which we hope in thank you for reversal that has already begun forgiven sinners children of

God spiritually thank you for reversal that will one day be complete on that day when the Lord Jesus returns and we his children his people can inherit this eternity and father how we pray for Dulwich and the areas around here for these people who live in this area and for the whole of London that many many more would come to find their hope and joy in you and in your son before it's too late we pray for our friends we pray for our colleagues we pray for our families we cry out to you father patient gracious God that this year would mark many coming and humbling themselves before you as Hannah did and we ask it in Jesus name Amen