

Hope for the Helpless (Summer Bible Exposition 1)

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Preacher: Martin Pakula

[0 : 0 0] Thanks for doing that, long reading. Keep that open, that will help you as you follow along. What we're actually doing this week tonight and Wednesday night is looking at the story of Samuel himself, which is in the first seven chapters of 1 Samuel. So we're looking at chapters 1 to 3 tonight and we'll be looking at chapters 4 to 7 on Wednesday night.

And then Andrew will continue on from chapter 8 next Sunday night with the story of Saul. Let me pray and we'll get into it. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can be here tonight in a free country to meet together, to study your word.

And we pray as we do so that by your spirit you would change and transform us to be more like Jesus. And we ask it in his name. Amen. Slumdog Millionaire was a very massively successful movie about a year and a half ago.

And many of you might know the story. It's a great rags to riches story where a boy from the slums becomes a millionaire. And I presume it has such popularity because if somebody who's that poor, that destitute, that stuck in a helpless situation can rise from that situation to become so wealthy, then there's hope for all of us.

And so it resonates with us. And you might know the irony of the movie is that the two young actors in it, two of them who were eight years old at the time, were actually living in real-life slums themselves in Mumbai in India.

[1 : 3 7] One was a boy, one was a girl. The boy, Azharuddin Ismail, was only a few months ago moved from his home in the slums to live in a new house.

And the thing that particularly struck him and his mother as they moved into the new house was that it had a bathroom. In the slums there was only a public toilet.

The movie made about \$100 million. And the hope is worldwide, and it's been in the newspaper stories and the media, the hope is that the wealthy producers will actually help these two kids from the slums who starred in the movie so that they too might have their own real-life rags-to-riches story.

Now I'll come back to that at the end and there's a slim connection. One Samuel tonight is sort of a rags-to-riches story. What we're going to be looking at is how God raises up a leader for Israel from very humble beginnings in the person of Samuel.

Now before we dive into chapter 1 and look at that story of Samuel, just very briefly I want to set the context. What we've seen in the story of the Old Testament so far is that Israel have been rescued from slavery in Egypt and brought into the Promised Land.

[2 : 5 7] And they're living in the Promised Land before the time of kings ruling Israel. So there are no kings yet. We'll see that for the first time in 1 Samuel. But their leaders have been people called judges who are not like the judges of today that we have in our legal system.

But the judges are leaders or saviours who God raises up to rescue His people from time to time. And the problem was that this period of judges that we're looking at tonight is a period of chaos where Israel have been living in disobedience to God.

And during this chaotic period in the time of the judges, we're introduced here to one particular family in Israel. In chapter 1 verse 1 we read about a man called Elkanah and he's given his pedigree there, who his ancestors were, which might make him seem important, but in fact we don't really know any of those ancestors and in all likelihood he's not actually that important at all.

In fact, he's probably meant to be seen as a regular Joe Blow Israelite. And this man Elkanah, just a regular Joe Blow, had two wives.

Hannah was his first wife and tragically she couldn't have children and that's probably why Elkanah then married a second wife, Peninnah, so that she could have children so that he would have an heir.

[4 : 20] Elkanah is clearly a godly man. Verse 3 tells us he goes up year by year to sacrifice at the temple for the annual festival, which is the Feast of Tabernacles. And at that point in the story we're introduced to the problem that Peninnah, the second wife who had children, kept taunting his first wife Hannah for having no children.

So Hannah is greatly distressed by the fact that she can't have children, which is tragic, but on top of that has to put up with the taunts of her rival Peninnah. But I don't know if you noticed in the reading at the end of verse 5 and at the end of verse 6, it says both times that it was the Lord who had closed her womb.

So it is God who is responsible for her not being able to have children. God is the one who ordains it that people can't have children or ordains it that they can.

Now you and I will face some terrible things as we go through life and no doubt some of you have already. But we need to understand whether things are going well or not, that God is sovereign.

God is completely in control of all the good things that happen to you and me and also all the bad things. He is completely responsible and in control. And I don't know how that makes you feel.

[5 : 44] For some people they want to blame God when things go badly. For other people perhaps they want to sit back and throw their hands in the air and say, well there's nothing I can do, it's up to God, it doesn't matter. Hannah doesn't do either of those things, she avoids those extremes.

And in her childlessness she turns to her sovereign God and prays. And here's her prayer in verse 11. She says, O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazarite until the day of his death.

So she asks God there to look on her misery, to remember her and to give her a son and promises that if God answers her prayer affirmatively, positively, then she will give this son to God to serve him all of his life.

Well, as we read before, God answers her prayer. In verse 19 it says, at the end of that verse, that God indeed remembered her and he gave her a son who she named Samuel.

And after she'd weaned him, perhaps after two or three years, she took him to the temple where he served God for the rest of his life. Why did God answer Hannah's prayer?

[7 : 09] It might seem like a strange question, you might think, well of course he answered her prayer but no doubt there would have been many Israelite women who couldn't have children, who would have prayed to God about it and for whom God did not answer their prayer in the affirmative.

So I don't think this is a passage of scripture which is teaching that God will answer your prayers if you aren't able to have children in the affirmative. He might do so.

It is tragic if you can't have children but why does God answer Hannah's prayer in particular? Well, I think the reason why is that she is actually unique or at least the child she has is unique.

It is not that God would always answer our prayers as we would hope in the affirmative but here God is answering her prayers to raise up a leader for his people, uniquely the person Samuel who will save Israel, who will be their leader and saviour.

And there is a little hint in her prayer in verse 11. She asks God to look on the misery of her servant and the word is literally, she asks God to look on her affliction and her affliction is the same word that's used for Israel's slavery in Egypt.

[8 : 22] And so there's a hint there that Hannah's affliction that she hopes God will look on is her childlessness. Israel's affliction at this time is the chaos they're undergoing under ungodly leaders in the time of the judges.

And God answers Hannah's prayer and has mercy on her affliction but not just for her sake but to have mercy on the affliction of Israel, to raise up a leader who will save them.

But in any case, of course, it's great news for Hannah. It's going to be great news for Israel as God raises up a leader and saviour for them. And Hannah's response comes in chapter 2 verses 1 to 10 where she praises God for answering her prayer.

And chapter 2 verses 1 to 10, it's a very important passage. They're said to be key verses in 1 Samuel, that they give the theme not only for tonight's section of 1 Samuel but really for the whole book.

God has answered Hannah's prayer. He's reversed her bitterness and her affliction and she is overjoyed. In verse 1, she expresses her joy at what God has done. Her heart exalts in the Lord.

[9 : 31] And in verse 2, she makes a very important statement about God. She says, There is no holy one like the Lord, no one besides you. There is no rock like our God.

There is no one comparable to God, no one holy like Him, no one who is a rock of protection and security for us like God. There's no point then in putting our trust in anything or anyone except this God.

He alone can protect us. He alone is sovereign. He alone can reverse our situation as He reversed Hannah's. God alone is holy.

God alone is our rock of protection. An interesting verse 3 that God, she says, is a God of knowledge. God knows. He's all-seeing, all-knowing.

He knows what we do. He knows what we say. He knew what Penina was saying and doing to Hannah and He knows what we say and do. All actions and words are weighed by God and those who defy God will pay for it as no doubt Penina did.

[10 : 41] But the theme of Hannah's prayer comes in verses 4 to 8 in particular and the theme is the theme of reversal, that God can change circumstances. He can make a slum dog into a millionaire.

He can take the poor and make them rich. He can take the barren woman, verse 5 says, and give her a bunch of children. And so it doesn't matter if in the world's eyes you are mighty or wealthy or powerful.

God can bring down the proud and the arrogant but He can also exalt those who are humble and trust Him. And so He says in verse 4 that God can break the bows of the mighty.

He can take away wealth. He can, verse 6, take away life even. But for those who trust in God, verse 4, He can give strength to the feeble.

He can, verse 5, feed the hungry. Or verse 6, raise even to life. Verse 7, He can make the poor rich. And finally, verse 7, He humbles the great but exalts the lowly.

[11 : 48] God can reverse our situation. He humbles and He exalts. And so, verse 9, for those who trust in God, He guards the feet of those who trust Him.

But for those who refuse to trust God, the verses say in verse 9 and 10, they will be cut off in darkness and shattered. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

And verse 10, God, at the top of the page, it says, He will judge the ends of the earth. He will judge all people. And then at the end of this prayer, this praise of Hannah, it starts to turn almost into prophecy.

Before there has even been a king of Israel, she says that God will give strength to the future king and exalt His anointed. God will exalt His king. He will take a lowly shepherd boy in David and exalt the humble David to be king of all Israel.

God humbles the proud but He exalts those who trust in Him. Do you trust in God? Do you trust in God alone?

[13 : 03] Well, the problem as we go on for the rest of chapter 2, verses 11 to 36, is that the present day leaders of Israel are far from humble but are utterly wicked and corrupt.

And there's a contrast as we go backwards and forwards in these verses from the wicked leaders of Israel to the humble servant Samuel. And God will raise up in Samuel a godly leader for His people but He will bring down the wicked leaders of Israel.

In verse 11, Samuel, we're told, is ministering before the Lord at the temple. But by contrast, in verse 12, we're introduced to the two wicked leaders of Israel in the priests serving at the temple.

Eli, their father, is the high priest of Israel serving at the temple. Although it's not really the temple as such yet, it's the tabernacle which is sort of a semi-permanent place at this stage at a town called Shiloh in Israel.

And there at Shiloh, at the tabernacle, Eli, the priest, is serving. But he's old and so his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are serving as the priests at the tabernacle.

[14 : 13] And verses 12 to 16 tell us what they're doing wrong. They are wicked men, it says, scoundrels. They had no regard for the Lord. Literally, they don't know the Lord.

And you can almost miss it as you read over it, but it's meant to be a shocking thing to read. Here are the leaders of God's people and they are wicked and don't know God, which is a disaster.

Verse 17 says that they are treating the offerings of the Lord with contempt. They're abusing the sacrifices that the Israelites brought at the tabernacle. God had ordained in His law that the priests could have certain portions of the sacrifices at the tabernacle to eat for their food.

But these priests were just in their greed taking whatever they wanted and treating the sacrifices with contempt. But verses 18 to 21, we come back again to Samuel by contrast.

In verse 18, we read that Samuel continued to minister before the Lord. And it's a great little section, those verses, that it says that God greatly blessed Hannah.

[15 : 24] He exalted the humble. In place of Samuel, who she'd given to serve God for all of his life, God gave her five more children to replace him. But we come back again in verses 22 to 25 to Eli's wicked sons and to Eli himself.

Eli the high priest knows what his sons have been doing. He says in verse 22, it says he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel. Eli knows full well what they're doing.

He tells them, verse 23, that he'd heard what was going on. And he warns them then of the consequences of their actions. In verse 25, he says to them, if one person sins against another, someone can intercede for the sinner with the Lord.

But if someone sins against the Lord, who can make intercession? See, if they sin against other people, God might forgive them. They can still make sacrifices to atone for their sins.

But if they sin against God, there's no one to intercede for them. In fact, what they're doing is treating the sacrifices with contempt. The sacrifices are the way in which their sins can be forgiven.

[16 : 36] So they're actually rejecting and treating with contempt the very thing that could bring them forgiveness. And it's the same, really, for you and me. There's only one way in which we can be forgiven our sins, which is through Jesus' death on the cross.

And so if we don't put our trust in Jesus and don't accept what He's done, then we're rejecting the only way that God can forgive us. And so if people, you, me, or anyone we know rejects Jesus, they're not forgiven because they're rejecting the only way they can be forgiven.

Of course, we mustn't do that and we must accept what Jesus has done. And the sad thing here in verse 25 is it says that Eli's two sons wouldn't listen to their father.

They'd already gone too far in their sin and so God had determined to put them to death. But we're reminded again by contrast in verse 26 of Samuel.

Samuel, it says there, continued to grow in stature and favour with the Lord and with the people. God is raising up a godly leader for His people in Samuel but He is bringing down the wicked leaders of Israel in Hophni and Phinehas.

[17 : 55] And so to end the chapter in verses 27 to 36 it tells us that a man of God, a prophet, comes to Eli and pronounces judgment upon him and his wicked sons.

And the message starts from God in verses 27 to 28 by God reminding Eli of the great things that he had done for him. It says in verse 27 that God had revealed himself to Eli's ancestor in Egypt which is referring to Moses' brother Aaron who was the first priest of Israel.

God had given Eli's tribe of Levi the privilege of serving God at the tabernacle and for some of them the privilege of priesthood. They were chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to approach God and offer the sacrifices of atonement for the sins of Israel.

But, verse 29, Eli's sons had treated the sacrifices with contempt and Eli hadn't stopped them. We saw in verses 23 to 25 just a moment ago that he didn't rebuke them.

He told them he knew what they were doing. He warned them of the consequences but he didn't stop them. He didn't restrain them. And so, the prophet says in verse 29 that Eli has honoured his sons more than he has honoured God.

[19 : 10] He's put his children first instead of God first. And by doing so it means he hasn't honoured God but has honoured his sons more than God.

And of course that's got to be a warning for all of us here who are parents that we mustn't put our family before God. Of course, the best thing for our family is to put God first and we must honour God before we honour anyone in our family whether that be children, parents, husband, wife or anybody else.

Eli hasn't done that and so God here takes away the priesthood from Eli and his family. Have a look at verse 30. It's an important verse. It says there, Therefore the Lord the God of Israel declares, I promise that your family and the family of your ancestors should go in and out before me forever.

But now the Lord declares, Far be it from me for those who honour me I will honour and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt.

It's referring there to a covenant that God made with Aaron and his descendants that they would be priests of God to make the sacrifices before him to atone for the sins of Israel and it's not here that God is taking back those promises.

[20 : 31] What he's saying is that for Eli and his family they will no longer benefit from those promises. They will no longer be priests of God and other descendants in the family line of Aaron will be priests instead of them.

And in the second half of that verse there's an important theme there that God honours those who honour him but that those who treat him with contempt like Eli's sons will themselves be treated with contempt which might sound harsh perhaps but it's the punishment fitting the crime.

but those who honour God will be honoured. So I should ask do you honour God? Do you put God first?

Do you honour God with your life? If somebody is looking at your life from the outside would they be able to tell that you honour God and put him first and that you're living for God rather than living for yourself?

If someone looked at your life from the outside would it look to them like you were living for your pleasures or entertainment or career or would it be obvious to them that you live for God and honour him?

[21 : 44] Now I know that we're all sinful and obviously we don't all honour God as we should but in our sin we also must repent and we need to honour God and the promise here is that if we honour God, God will honour us, he will honour you which is an amazing promise.

Eli's sons sadly have not honoured God and they've treated him with contempt and they will lose the priesthood but not only will they lose the priesthood but judgment is now pronounced upon them because God will not allow wicked leaders to rule over his people.

In verses 31 to 34 it pronounces God's judgment upon them and verse 34 says that Eli's two sons will die on the same day.

Verse 31 says that Eli's house will be cut off and verse 33 says there will be only one survivor left from his whole extended family and that one survivor will see what happens and themselves will then lose the priesthood and it's exactly what happens.

In only two chapters time, chapter 4 we'll look at on Wednesday night, Eli's two sons are both killed on the same day and Eli himself dies as well. And then in chapter 22 that we'll look at in a few weeks, the rest of Eli's extended family are killed.

[23 : 07] Only one survives, just as it says here, which is the priest Abiathar. And then in the time of Solomon in 1 Kings chapter 2, Abiathar is deposed from the priesthood.

So what God says here comes true. And instead God says he will raise up a godly priest to take their place. Verse 35, God says I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind.

I will build him a sure house and he shall go in and out before my anointed one forever. Now in some respects that refers to Samuel but really it's referring to a priest that comes later on called Zadok.

And in Solomon's time Zadok the priest is the one who will replace Eli's last descendant Abiathar as the high priest of Israel from that time on. Finally the last verse here, verse 36, shows again that the punishment fits the crime.

Eli's sons were so greedy that they just took whatever they wanted from the sacrifices, treating them with contempt and now it says the priests who are left in Eli's family line will have no food and in fact will beg for a morsel of bread.

[24 : 22] And if you're really listening carefully it reminds us from the reading of what Hannah said in verse 5 in her song that those who were full have hired themselves out for bread.

And again we see that God humbles those who are against him, who are proud but exalts those who are humble. And that's what we see finally in chapter 3, that God exalts his servant Samuel.

Verse 1 again in chapter 3 returns us to Samuel this time. Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli and it tells us there in verse 1 that the word of the Lord was rare in those days, a terrible thing to have a famine of the word of God and not surprising really because the leaders of Israel were wicked.

So why would God speak through them? But now at last the word of God will come as God speaks through Samuel. And chapter 3 here is the story of God raising up Samuel as a prophet for Israel.

And you get this fascinating story in verses 4 to 7 where twice God calls Samuel and it seems to be an audible voice that he hears his name called Samuel, Samuel.

[25 : 37] And he runs to Eli, it's at night in the temple, he runs off to Eli and says, yes you rang. And Eli says, no I didn't, go back and lie down. And both times this happens and Samuel and Eli, both of them don't realise that it's God who is calling Samuel.

But the third time God calls Samuel and he goes and runs to Eli and Eli this time realises that it's God calling Samuel. And so in verses 8 and 9 he tells him what to do if God calls him again.

And finally in verse 10 a fourth time God calls Samuel and this time Samuel is ready to hear the word of the Lord. And God's message to him comes in verses 11 to 14 and it's a terrible message because it's a message of judgement.

Although it's no different to what the prophet said at the end of chapter 2. God says to him in verse 13 that he will punish, literally the word is judge, the house of Eli because of the sin of his two sons Hophni and Phinehas and because it says Eli did not restrain them.

Well the next morning Eli pressed Samuel hard to tell him what God had said. And verse 15 is interesting, it says Samuel was afraid to tell Eli what God had said but finally verse 18 he told him the whole thing nevertheless.

[26 : 58] And I think it's interesting because it's not like Samuel or any other prophet in the Old Testament wants to announce a message of judgement. I'm sure they don't but they have to.

And again I think it reminds us that we're in a similar position. It's not like you or I would want to tell our friends or family that they are standing under God's wrath and judgement but we must tell them.

And Samuel does so and he tells Eli God's word of judgement. And finally the passage finishes in verses 19 to 21 that the word of God continued to be revealed to Israel through Samuel and that all of Israel from north to south, Dan to Beersheba recognised that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

Well what have we learnt tonight from this story? Well they're in a time of chaos in Israel during the time of Judges God has taken an obscure family and a childless woman and raised up from her the saviour and leader of his people Israel in Samuel.

He's raised up Samuel from obscurity to be the saviour of his people. In the Old Testament there's basically three major officers of leadership, priest, prophet and king.

[28 : 18] And there are two characters in the Old Testament who hold all three officers which are Moses and Samuel. Here Samuel is a priest we've seen, he's ministering before the Lord at the temple, he's wearing a linen ephod, the clothing of a priest.

We see in chapter 3 that we just looked at that he's raised up to be a prophet of Israel and we'll see on Wednesday night that he's raised up to be the last judge before the kings and the judge is the equivalent of the leader and saviour of the people.

So God has raised up Samuel from obscurity to hold all three offices like Moses of prophet, priest and king and to be the saviour and leader of his people. And you're seeing here God exalting the humble, honouring those who honour him and also using Samuel of course to save his people as we'll see from their affliction.

So that God is acting here not only to save Hannah from her affliction of childlessness but we'll see on Wednesday night that he's raising up Samuel to save Israel from their affliction as well.

Well it's not very hard to move from there to Jesus which is what we need to do. Jesus is the third person in the Bible like Moses and Samuel who holds the offices of prophet, priest and king but of course he's far greater than Moses and Samuel.

[29 : 41] And Luke's gospel is the one that makes all the connections for us with Jesus and this section of 1 Samuel. Elizabeth the wife of Zechariah is childless but God reverses her childlessness as he did with Hannah and she gives birth to John the Baptist.

Mary also is childless and a virgin but the Holy Spirit comes upon her and she gives birth to a son who saves his people Israel. And Mary at the end of Luke chapter 1 says something that sounds familiar I hope to us.

She says God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. Does that sound familiar?

It's just like what Hannah said after the birth of Samuel. Mary is recognising that God is raising up a saviour to save his people from their affliction.

And at the end of Luke chapter 2 it says that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men echoing 1 Samuel 2 verse 26.

[30 : 48] God is sending Jesus to save his people from our affliction. And that's what he's done. You and I were standing under God's judgement and rightly so but God sent Jesus to save us from our affliction by taking on himself the punishment your sins and mine deserve and saving us through his death on the cross.

And now if we trust in Jesus we're forgiven. If we humble ourselves we are exalted. If we honour God he honours us.

If we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord he will raise us up. I spoke at the beginning of this sermon about that slum dog millionaire story, a rags to riches story.

And it makes me think I guess that we all want to be happy and wealthy. And people love the story because somebody so poor ends up being so rich and having it all.

I wonder though if in a first world country like Australia that what we're more inclined to do rather than perhaps gamble on the lottery though so many people do, that we rather pour our time and energy into our career to make sure that we have the money so that we're happy and healthy and wealthy.

[32 : 11] Because we can do that in Australia. It doesn't have to be a fluke. But the true path to happiness, wealth and health is to humble ourselves before God, to honour God.

The path to happiness and wealth is the path of the cross, to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus which will mean saying no to me which is what deny myself means and it may well mean saying no then to my happiness or health or wealth.

Now God exalts the humble. So it may mean in this life that God does give you wealth or health or happiness and that would be great. But it may mean that he might not.

But God has promised to forgive us our sins completely. God has promised to raise us from death to eternal life. God has promised to bless us with all the health, wealth and happiness that we could imagine in the new heavens and the new earth.

Do you believe that? That that will happen for you? God has raised up a saviour for us in Jesus. He has looked upon our affliction and remembered us and reversed our situation from one of condemnation and judgment to one of salvation and forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

[33 : 37] God loves you and has given Jesus to die for you. So will you honour God with your life? Don't chase wealth, health and happiness.

Chase God and he will exalt you. Honour God and he will honour you. Let's pray that God will help us to do that.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you have looked on our affliction and on our misery and raised up the Lord Jesus to save us from our sins. Help us, we pray, to trust in him, to trust you, to focus on you, to honour you, to give you thanks, to give our lives to you.

We pray that you would help us to do this and that you would honour and exalt us as we humble ourselves before you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

End. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[34 : 53] Amen. I'm not a teachers anymore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.