

A Thankful Cry

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[0 : 0 0] So friends, I want you to think about something.

I want you to think about if there's something that you really, really, really want. If there's something you really, really wanted for a long, long time, I want you to think what it would feel like if you got that thing.

I want you to think about how you would react if whatever it was that you had so desperately longed for was finally given to you.

Maybe it's something you had to wait for, for a really, really long time, years maybe. Maybe it's something that seemed like an impossibility, like it would just never happen, that there was no way on this earth it could ever happen.

Maybe time and time again, whatever it was, was just within your grasp. You could almost touch it. You could feel it, and then it was just pulled away from you.

[1 : 0 8] Or maybe it's something that came to you very quickly, that you didn't have to wait a long time for. It was just given to you. Whatever the circumstances are, how we react to things being given to us tells us an awful lot about who we are.

I'm not really a greetings card person. You can ask my wife, it infuriates her to no end. But she is great at it.

She's got a long list of everyone's birthdays, even cousins and aunts and uncles, I haven't spoken to in years, and yet she'll always send them a birthday card or things like that.

I'm pretty sure she's the card factory's number one customer. I'm sure when they go in, they think, yes, we're going to make our sales quota for the month this week. And whenever our children receive a gift, whether it be from birthdays or Christmases or whatever, she takes very special care to write down who has sent what and then to write out thank you cards for them on behalf of our children.

And it's something maybe that isn't really in fashion anymore, is it? Thank you cards or thank you notes. I remember having to write them when I was a child. I was never very good at it even then. You can ask my mother.

[2 : 3 3] But saying thank you is a small thing, really, isn't it? It's a small thing. It's just two little words. Sometimes a bit more if you write a letter or fill in a card.

But it goes an awful, awful long way. When we say thank you, it shows that we do not just care about the gift, whatever it is, but we care about the person who sent it.

We genuinely are thankful. But I want to ask you a question this morning, a question which may seem a bit strange, considering where we are and who most of us are, but I want to ask you it anyway because it's an important one.

I want to ask you this evening if you believe in God. Do you really, do you truly, can you faithfully say tonight that you believe in the Christian God of the Bible?

Can you truly say that you believe in a God who is living, a God who sent his son to die for your sins, a God who is ruling in heaven today, who wants to know you?

[3 : 5 0] Can you truly say that of yourself? I ask you this because if you do, it changes everything.

Your whole outlook on life changes because of this one thing, this belief in God.

How we understand the universe changes because of this belief. How we understand ourselves changes because of this belief in God.

Sometimes we think about our faith, our belief in God, as maybe just a part of our lives. It's just a part of who we are. But really, it should be the central thing of each of our lives.

Everything else that makes up who we are should fall under that umbrella of faith in God. And when God gives us something, whether it's big, whether it's small, how do we respond to the generosity of God?

[5 : 13] Sometimes I think we forget, don't we, that everything we have is a gift from God. We're all breathing here tonight, aren't we, I hope.

The air we breathe is a gift from God. The clothes we wear are a gift from God. Our homes, our families, our loved ones, everything is a gift from God.

The very lives we live are a gift from God. But how we respond to these gifts, how we respond when things go well and things don't go so well, as we said, tells us an awful lot about where our hearts are at.

Last week we looked at Hannah, about how God blessed her in her need. No one could have looked at Hannah and said that her faith wasn't real, that it was just a superficial faith, that it wasn't a true belief.

Last time we saw how when she was filled with despair, she came to God in prayer. And today, we'll see how when she was filled with joy, once again, she turned to God in prayer, in thankfulness.

[6 : 53] Because Hannah believed in God, more than that, she knows him, and she trusts him. Let's look at Hannah's prayer.

Tonight, under three headings. We've got a God who saves, we have a God who rules, and we have a God who wins.

Let's look together, if you've got it in your Bibles, that first time, you'll chapter 2, verses 1 to 3, where it reads, 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. We saw last week, how Hannah's request, Hannah's prayer, was granted to her.

[8 : 13] How she had been given the child that she longed for. We see how she prayed when she was in need, and now we see how she prays when she is in plenty.

I really love Hannah. We don't get much about her, apart from these two chapters, the beginning of 1 Samuel, and yet the way she prays is really stunning.

It's really beautiful. We read Hannah's prayer tonight. It's sometimes called Hannah's song. And here it's well placed, right at the beginning of the book, because it sets the tone for what is about to happen for the rest of the books of Samuel.

It tells us that God is holy, that God helps the weak, that God rules his people, and that his foes will be defeated.

It's a wonderful prayer to God that acknowledges who he is and what he does. Last week, Hannah cried out in despair, and now she cries out in thankfulness.

[9 : 31] Now, I said last week at the start of this short series that I wanted to spend some time looking at some of the moments of Samuel's life with you, and you may think it's strange that I'm now covering Hannah's prayer because Samuel doesn't feature in it.

But there's a reason for this. The reason is that so far the story has been telling us about Samuel, about how his birth came to be, about how God was moving powerfully in Israel to bring about an end to the crisis it faced.

But right at the start of the story, we are being reminded who it is that really is the center of the story. And that is that it is God who is the center of this story.

The books may be called Samuel, but it is God who is the chief character. He is at the center, and indeed he must be. God is the key character in the story.

This is how Hannah's prayer starts, because Hannah recognizes this. And I want us to recognize it too as we look at the life of Samuel.

[10 : 43] So that's why we're looking at it today. Let's look again at how Hannah begins. Hannah tells us how God has made a difference to her whole being.

She begins with her heart. It's a very personal start to a prayer.

It's very personal to Hannah. Verse 1 is chock full of personal pronouns. Pronouns which are such a big thing in our time.

And yet here, they're focusing on Hannah. My heart, she says, my horn, my mouth, I rejoice.

Some have speculated that this prayer or this song is not original to Hannah, but maybe a pre-existing hymn or a pre-existing prayer that was around in Israel in those days.

[11 : 54] And when Hannah was praying, she simply adapted this to fit her own context. However, I think that the very personal nature of this prayer kind of puts away those theories.

I think this suggests that this is original to Hannah. Of course, she was probably being inspired by the Holy Spirit as she prayed and as it was recorded. And yet, still, we're seeing a glimpse into her heart.

We're seeing a glimpse into her very self. We're seeing a glimpse into her mind, her soul. And all of it is giving glory to God.

Whereas before, Elkanah asked his wife why her heart was sad, why her face was downcast, we now see how it is transformed from a bad and a troubled heart to one now filled with worship and glory for God.

What we've witnessed in Hannah is something that many of us have experienced. And that's the transformative power of the gospel in action. We see our hearts being transformed.

[13 : 19] We stop focusing on ourselves and our own circumstances. and we try and find our focus and our worth in God, not in what we've done or the things that we can boast of, but rather what God has done for us.

It's a supernatural transformation, something that only God can bring about in us. Another thing that Hannah says, which is maybe a little bit confusing to us, is she says, my horn is exalted.

This is something that if you understand it, I'm very impressed because I had to go and look it up. It's an odd metaphor for our modern minds. It's something that doesn't fit our 21st century Western context.

Scholars believe that this is referring to the ancient idea that an animal's strength, an animal's glory and its power was found in its horn.

You have these images of big powerful animals with horns, don't you, rhinos and bulls and all these things. There was also an ancient style of dress that existed around the region of Lebanon where women would wear fake horns as part of their headdresses and the way the horns were pointed would change depending upon their status as a woman, as a wife.

[14 : 44] So when they first got married it would kind of point slightly forward and then once they had children the horn would point upwards. It's a very weird thing. I'm glad we don't still do that. It would be a bit strange to see that in our society.

Perhaps these women were trying to emulate this idea of glory themselves in the way they dress. There's no evidence still that this is what Hannah's referring to.

There's no evidence that this style of dress ever took off in Israel. So I think it's probably more to do with the idea of strength of power. Hannah's strength is exalted.

It is lifted high in God. God is the one who strengthens his people. On the other hand though we're also told that God removes the strength of the wicked.

Psalms 75 tells us this in verse 10 it says all the horns of the wicked I will cut off but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up.

[15 : 53] God brings strength to his people. What else does Hannah say? She says my mouth derides my enemies. Hannah no longer fears her enemies.

This isn't talking about her speech. She's not slagging off her enemies here but rather again it's a metaphor. Her mouth is being portrayed like that of a predator open wide to devour its prey and to swallow it up.

It's easy to assume here that Hannah is making a personal attack on Peninnah judging on what we heard about her last week and judging by their past interactions. Remember who it is that we're focusing on here.

we're focusing on God so rather it is God's enemies that Hannah is referring to. His enemies are also hers now because God's enemies what do they do?

How do God's enemies work? They attack our faith. They attack our trust in God. But by God's strength by his lifting Hannah up and his exalting her she can now conquer these enemies.

[17 : 17] Then we have the final clause in verse 1 because I rejoice in your salvation.

Hannah is at peace because of God's salvation. Because there is none holy like him because there is no rock we hear like her God she can rest in him and rest in his salvation knowing that he will lift her up that he will strengthen her that he will defeat her enemies and that he will save her.

God is unique in this fashion amongst all the other faiths and religions in the world that God will save his people. There is no other that can even come close to doing what he does.

God is unique. Remember who it is who's speaking. for a moment. These may seem like strangely strong words from a regular person like you or I.

Yeah, I think Hannah is being poetic here. Her words are so forceful I think because she recognizes the supernatural and the dramatic experience that she has just undergone.

[18 : 56] Hannah knows that God has delivered her from her crisis. That is the God who saves. But little does she know, I suspect, at this point, just the role that her son would play in God's plan for his people.

So we have a God who saves and secondly then we have a God who rules. We read in verses 4, 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 is born seven but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life.

He brings down to Sheol and rises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and Hannah now moves on from her personal experience to more general truths about who God is.

She begins to expand on what she's already said and what she's already prayed that God has raised her up from despair because that's just how God is. That's just what he does.

[20 : 15] He is a God who raises up the down hearted a God who gives strength to the weak and gives rest and refreshment to the weary and the tired and the heavy laden. This is what Hannah is talking about here.

She knows she was ready to fall that she had nothing left of herself and the Lord picked her up. I was without child and the Lord gave me a son.

I was poor in spirit and yet he has made me rich in spirit. This is who our God is. He is the maker of heaven and earth and yet he cares about you and me.

When John Calvin lost his wife Idolet he wrote a letter to his friend William Farrell in which he said may the Lord Jesus strengthen you by his spirit and may he support me also under this heavy affliction which would certainly have overcome me had not he who raises up the prostrate strengthens the weak refreshes the weary stretched forth his hand from heaven to me.

Calvin knew that if he did not know God his grief would have utterly shattered him and if he did not know God there was no hope for him for him but he did he knew that God raises up the fallen that he strengthens the weak that he refreshes the weary and this is what Hannah also recognizes here in her prayer that if she did not know God she would have been crushed by her despair but God gave her strength but God raised her up God made her fruitful because it is God ultimately who rules the Lord kills and brings life the Lord makes poor and makes rich he raises up the poor from the dust for the pillars of the earth are the

[22 : 38] Lord's and on him he has set the world the Lord is the one who rules Hannah's experience is really just a small taste it's just an appetizer of the salvation that God has planned for his people one commentator called it a scale model a way of showing us how God works and what to expect when he does in a way we can see and understand when I was here a couple of weeks ago we looked at Psalm 130 together whenever God rises you out of those depths whenever he pulls you out of whatever quicksand you found yourself stuck in and when he places you on solid rock this is just a small taste of what is to come when God's kingdom comes in its fullness how we await that glorious day how we long for it how we treasure the knowledge and the promise of it how we desire it how we look forward to that day when there will be no chance of us ever falling down into those depths again how we look forward to that day when nothing will ever trip us up when nothing will ever harm us when nothing will ever break us how we look forward to that day these verses tell us just how much Hannah knew her

God and how he did what he did for her not for any special thing that she had done but just because that's who he is because he has total authority authority over everything we've read in these verses we see how he has authority over life and death itself we see how God has authority over our wealth our social status all these things we also see how God reverses fortunes when he wills it because we need to remember that it's God who rules not you not me but God alone one of the great things of the day is we're told how we are in command of our own destiny how you chase your dreams and be all you can be and all these things that sound really great except they're forgetting

I'm not in charge you're not in charge God is in control we have no more control really over our own lives than the train does when it comes to a turning if the tracks turn left the train must turn left it cannot go forward it cannot go right it must go left it can only go left there's nowhere else for it to go those wonderful words for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and on them he has set the world God rules because the world is his because he made it because he owns it because he upholds it he protects it and he protects us his people his creation his children again God is at the center when God is truly at the center of our lives then even

I think the toughest battles we face in our life we can get through them with God by our side this is hard this is hard I know it's hard we all go through horrible times some of us more than others and yet it's what God promises us he is with us through them all often when we find ourselves in the very heat of trials and temptations we cannot see a way out we cannot see that anything good can ever come of this but if you are a child of God then there is a way out even if you cannot see it even if you cannot imagine it even if you cannot fathom it it's there because God rules and he loves his people

Isaiah 40 verse 11 reminds us of this he tells us he will tend his flock like a shepherd he will gather the lambs in his arms he will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young we have a God who saves we have a God who rules and we also have a God who wins verses 9 and 10 read 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 among them he will thunder in heaven the Lord will judge the ends of the earth and he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed we've seen a lot in this prayer it's only 10 verses and yet it's so deep could have covered this in a lot more depth if I had the time we've seen

[28 : 48] Hannah's personal experience of God's work we've seen a description of how God rules and now we come to what will happen when God's work is finished that small taste of salvation that we've looked at that we've maybe experienced ourselves that scale model that shows us about who God is and what he's done will be replaced by the real deal it will be given to us in its fullness often times to be a Christian in 2022 in Scotland can feel like we're on the losing side if the church was a football team then right now it looks like we're being thrashed looks like the other team just keeps scoring and scoring and there's also a good number of own goals too there just doesn't seem like any chance of victory our players keep getting sent off or they keep collapsing from exhaustion whereas the opposition seem to have an unlimited supply of fresh players and they're all very talented doesn't look good it looks like we're losing there was a recent study that was published just after the General

Assembly that showed in just 18 years we could see the potential extinction of several major denominations of churches in the UK from the outside it looks like we're losing and sometimes it can feel that way too but the truth is we're not in fact we're on the winning side we're told here the winners will not be the strong the rich or the powerful ultimately it doesn't matter how many goals they score against us because God will bring us the victory remember it's God who rules even the enemy cannot do anything without God and one day he will pull out the rug from under their feet God put the rug there in the first place and God can remove it and indeed he will remove it when the time comes these last verses are a promise they're a promise of victory you can give any football team a reassurance of victory you can tell them the odds are high that statistically they're better than the other side so maybe you're 70% likely to win but there's no 100% guarantee and even the best team can lose against the worst team now and again but God can give us that 100% guarantee of victory and that's what he does therefore tonight it's a good idea to make sure that you're on the right team that you're not on the team that puts itself against

God the church may seem weak and many places many ways it is its members may seem flawed and we are it may look like we're on the back foot that we're retreating there's no possibility of winning but we know differently we know ultimately God will give us the victory not through our own strength or our own clever tactics or our own fancy initiatives but simply by God's works alone this is a warning then for us to make sure that today right here and right now that when we hear that question I asked at the beginning do you believe in God you can answer yes and I am one of his children and I am on his team because those who set themselves against God will ultimately fail so turn to him now turn to Jesus now before it's too late those of us who are on

God's team we are given a wonderful promise that God will guard the feet of his faithful ones we're told that God will protect us that he'll make sure we're walking in the right way that he will guard us like a bodyguard watches someone of great importance because to God you are important you are irreplaceable because you are his child God loved you so much that he sent his son to die for you I love that idea of guarding it crops up again in the New Testament in Paul's letter to Philippians where as we're said in chapter four do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

Jesus this verse the apostle Paul stands out because this is exactly what Hannah did all those years before she was anxious so she prayed she told God her worries and asked for his help and she found the peace of God she walked away from that first prayer contented without promise without gift with nothing but because she prayed God guarded her heart and God can guard your heart today the prayer ends by talking about a king the Lord will judge the ends of the earth he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed right at the end here we have a little bit of a prophecy we have here a prophecy of a king the king who will be the

[35 : 39] Messiah it was Hannah's son Samuel who will be instrumental into making this happen it's possible and probable that the king is really referring to David as a more immediate fulfillment of Hannah's prophecy but of course we have to see that he's pointing us to the son of David and yet the one who was also David's Lord is pointing us to Jesus Christ the son of God the anointed one the Messiah he who would be Israel's eternal king he who would be their savior he who would be their Messiah and he who is yours when Hannah prayed this prayer all those years ago the Messiah had not come there was no king in Israel everyone did what was right in their own eyes but her prayer promises a wonderful a great king one who would come and save his people to lift them up but also who would come to judge the world so we leave here tonight friends make sure today right here right now that you're on his team and that you pray to him often and you give thanks to

God with a cry for all of his goodness and that you come to God in prayer weeping when times are hard knowing that he will lift you up he will give you strength make sure you're on the team of Jesus Christ he is the one who will bring the victory amen heavenly father we thank you for these wonderful words this wonderful prayer of Hannah's these encouraging words these challenging words that remind us of your goodness of your mercy of just who you are how you help the weak how you lift us up when we have fallen how you give us strength when we have none how you rule the world in goodness how our enemies will be defeated because they are your enemies and you will bring the victory and yet we know

Lord that we struggle in this life with many different things some of them really hard and so our prayer tonight Lord is that our heart would exalt in you that our horn our strength would glorify you that our mouth would deride your enemies that you would be holy holy to us a holy God that you would help us to recognize that and to embrace that to know there is none like you there is none like you you are our rock our salvation our life our strength you are our center help us to keep you there at the center of our lives because it changes everything and if you're not there

Lord if we look at ourselves and if we evaluate our hearts today and we realize you're not our center that Christ isn't our Lord that we're not on his team that today would be the day that changes convict us Lord with your spirit of your goodness of our sinfulness of our need for you help us and make us on the right team the winning team your team bless us each of us oh Lord and strengthen us in Jesus Christ holy good and precious name we pray amen now I know we are you