

1 Samuel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2013

Preacher: Sam Low

- [0 : 00] If you missed out last week, we did kick off a new series here at church in 1 Samuel. Let me give you the shortest summary I can. Basically, Hannah doesn't have a baby.
- She's not real happy about it. She prays, she gets one. There's a bit more going on there, but hopefully you heard a bit more detail. We're going to look at the second half of Hannah this week, so hopefully you'll get enough of the picture to know where we're going.
- But I'm going to pray and pray that God will help us to concentrate and focus as we get stuck in. Father God, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you've given it to us so that we might know you.
- And God, I want to ask that tonight you'd give us the humility to maybe recognize where we have reduced you or where we've made you fit into the box that we want you to fit in.
- And I pray that instead you might open our eyes to see you in all your majesty and splendor. And God, I pray that having seen you, our lives might be lived in response to that.
- [1 : 03] Amen. Sometimes in our exuberance, we can get a little bit overexcited about things. I don't know if you remember a little while ago, KFC decided an experiment in health food was a good idea.
- And they launched the burger without a bun. It was basically a chicken patty, cheese, bacon, cheese, and then another piece of chicken. It was amazing.
- Hard to eat, but very good. But I repeatedly, when that came out, told people that it was the best thing that has ever been invented. Now, at the time, you know, I kind of meant it.
- But in reality, I may have got a little bit excited. There's probably one or two things that have been invented in the history of humans that are a little bit above the old KFC double down. But sometimes we get overexcited.
- I was trying to think of other examples here, and Tashi sprung to mind, but I couldn't think of one example. Everything that Tashi says is potentially overexuberant. And that's why it's so great to have you around, Tashi.
- [2 : 05] But I wonder if, as we read this prayer from Hannah, as Ali read it out for us, if you begin to feel like it's a little bit overstated. It's a little bit overenthusiastic.
- I mean, without playing down the genuine despair that we saw last week and the pain that Hannah was going through, it's kind of like her whole world has changed. But we know the story, and her whole world hasn't changed.
- You know, she starts getting really excited. She's saying things like, The mighty are broken. Those who stumbled find strength. The barren woman has seven kids.
- The woman with kids has none. The hungry are well fed. The full are hungry. Like, it's like everything is different. If we turn back just one page and a few years to Hannah's first prayer, she's bitterly weeping.
- She's crying out to God to look on her in affliction. And now she's like exploding with joy. It's like she's jumping on the spot because she's so excited about her life.

[3 : 09] Now, again, it's a big deal that she was barren and now she's not. That is significant. But is that a sufficient reason for a prayer like this?

It's not. And that's because it's not the reason for this prayer. It would be understandable to assume that, but Samuel being born is the occasion on which this prayer came out.

But it's not the basis for the prayer. There's more going on for Hannah. And there's a few clues in what we looked at last week. If you remember in Hannah's prayer in chapter one, what she prays for is God to remember her.

She sees her situation in a bigger picture. She sees her situation as part of the whole nation that needs to be remembered by God, a nation that thinks God's love has wandered away.

And so she sees her little situation as part of a bigger work that God is doing. Now, if you look with me in chapter one, just flick back quickly to verse 23.

[4 : 15] Elkanah, this is Hannah's husband, says something quite profound in verse 23. This is when Hannah has had the boy, and then instead of going back up to go to the temple, she says, I'm going to wait a little bit longer until the boy is ready to be handed over.

And he says, Do what seems best to you, Elkanah, her husband, told her. Stay here until you have weaned him. Only may the Lord make good his word.

Now, I don't know if you noticed that when it was read out last week, but up to this point in 1 Samuel, God hasn't spoken at any point. It's been Hannah speaking, and then the other wife, Peninnah, speaking, and Elkanah has spoken, and the priest Eli has spoken, but God has not spoken.

So what does Elkanah mean when he says, establish his word? I mean, Hannah's the one who made a promise. What he's getting at is that there is a bigger word that God has made.

There is a bigger plan that is unfolding through history, and both Elkanah and Hannah, it's catchy, both Elkanah and Hannah recognize that this little situation in their family is part of something bigger.

[5 : 30] They might not get every part of how significant it is, but they can see that something extra is going on. Because at this point in history, Israel has almost lost sight of who God is.

I mean, it's not that many generations back that they were rescued dramatically out of slavery in Egypt, that the Red Sea parted, and they wandered through on dry land. It's not that many generations ago that they went to the mountain in the desert, and God came down, and the mountain was shaking, and there was lightning and thunder.

I mean, they're still kind of going through the motions of worshiping God. They're still kind of acting like God is important for them as a country. But if you look closely, and we're going to find out next week even more, even the worship that they're doing, even the church services they're holding have become corrupt and dishonest.

They've basically forgotten who God is. They've gone from being people who were scared of Him, who feared Him, to being people who kind of treat Him like He doesn't matter, and there's nothing He can do about it.

Israel's forgotten their God, but in Hannah, we have God pushing His way back in. God is making sure that He is remembered, and He is making sure that Hannah knows, and we know, that God will keep His word.

[6 : 52] God will keep the promises that He has made to His people. Now again, chances are that Hannah had no idea just how significant her son was in God's plan.

But she does seem to understand that this is about more than her little family. She seems to have at least a glimpse. God has revealed Himself to Hannah, and this prayer is not just about Samuel.

This is Hannah having seen God and responding. It's her pouring out her heart, her heart overflowing with excitement, because she has seen God again.

Having started to maybe forget Him a little bit, along with everyone else, she has seen Him again. And the question for us tonight, the thing that I want you to wrestle with, is have you settled for a smaller vision of God?

Have you, like Israel, progressively taken this exciting God that you started following, and just trimmed Him down until it was a little bit more convenient? Until it didn't really impact the bits of your life that it didn't want to impact?

[7 : 59] If you think back to when you chose to follow God, and the joy and fear and absolute commitment you had at that point, have you, like Israel, shrunk God down, so that He doesn't actually make a difference to you?

Well, tonight, Hannah wants to show you in this prayer, and God wants to show you three things about Himself that will change your life. Firstly, God stands alone.

Look again at verse 1 with me. Our God stands alone.

Even the fact that Hannah calls Him our God back then, and we come to church tonight and call Him our God now, says something about His significance. He's not constrained by time.

He didn't exist for one generation of people. He's not limited to one nation. It's not like just one family got really excited about Him and kept teaching their kids. Our God is bigger than that.

[9 : 17] Our God is not like any other God. He's all-consuming and all-encompassing. Now, that might sound like a kind of obvious statement for us in church tonight, the idea that God stands alone.

I mean, in our context, at most, there's probably a small handful of gods that we would acknowledge. We might talk about the God of Muslims, the God of Hindus, the God of...

There's a handful that we would probably acknowledge as gods-ish. But for Israel, every nation had an absolute multitude of gods.

Gods for sun, gods for water, gods for farming, gods for fertility. They would invent gods every other day. And so Israel is surrounded by this catalogue of gods.

And Hannah suddenly gets this picture that her God is not like those other gods. Her God stands alone. He is not to be compared to these other gods. He is not even in the same category.

[10 : 18] And maybe this is more poignant for us than we think. It might not be that we use the language of gods or worship when we look at the things in our world.

But it could be that there are just as many things in our culture today that we worship instead of God. Or that we are convinced are more important than God.

It could be that there are just as many fake gods now as there were then. Israel's trap in Hannah's day wasn't the trap of outright rejecting God.

It was the trap of diluting him. Of rocking up to church and going, Yes, God, you're the most important. God, please help me with this issue. But then turning around and praying to the farming God as well just to cover their bases.

It's not that they'd walk away from God altogether because that's obviously wrong. But they would just grab these extra things and add them in. They'd do what he asked them but then they would dilute him down.

[11 : 20] And I wonder if we do something similar. When we say we're following God, when we say we treasure Jesus, have we reduced down our infinite creator to the point where in actual fact in our lives he's just one of the choices among a whole bunch of valid options for us to go after, for us to obey, for us to treasure and value.

When it comes to religion, one of the ongoing conversations is always comparison. Which religion is best? Which one is most helpful?

Most right? Which God is most impressive? Most powerful? And as Christians, we get in on these conversations. We say our God is best because... But even in our need to defend him in those conversations, I wonder if that says that we have a slightly small view of him.

We actually do look at our God next to these other gods and feel the need to compare statistics. But to even think of comparing our God to anyone or anything else, you need to reduce him so much that he no longer resembles God as he has revealed himself in Scripture.

Now, it's not to say there's not a place for those sorts of conversations, for religious debate, but you've got to realize that you're not comparing apples with apples, so to speak.

[12 : 56] You're not even comparing apples with oranges. It's almost like comparing apples with people. And that doesn't even do it justice. The gods that we compare our God to are not even in the same category.

Hannah finally grasps, surrounded by an infinite number of gods, promising an infinite number of things, that there is no one like our God.

There is no one who compares. And Hannah celebrates three things specifically that make him unique. Firstly, his holiness. It's there in verse 2.

There is no one holy like the Lord, none who is so pure and perfect and just. God is set apart from everything else that exists. These other gods are within creation.

They're limited by the amount of time that creation stays around, but God is set apart from it because he is too pure and perfect. And there is nothing that rightfully sits next to God.

[13 : 57] He is holy and set apart. Second thing, he is a rock. Again, verse 2, there is no rock like our God. He is a mighty fortress, a secure, immovable, unchanging foundation, and in him people find refuge.

There is no storm too powerful for God. There is no trial, no opposition, which he does not have complete control over. He is stronger and more powerful than anything else because he made everything else.

Because every power that exists is from him, from his power. He is holy. He is a rock like no other. And thirdly, he is a deliverer.

There in verse 1. For I delight in your deliverance. Our God is the God who saves people. He is the rescuing God.

He is the God who rescued Joseph from his brothers. He is the God who rescued Isaac and his whole family from famine. The God who rescued Israel from Egypt.

[15 : 06] And the God who rescued Hannah from her barrenness. And even though we haven't seen it yet, God is the God who will use Samuel to continue his plan to rescue people for himself.

No other God can claim this. No other God has delivered on his promises. No other God has rescued like the God of Israel, like the God of Scripture, like our God.

No other God answers prayer like our God. No other God looks down on Hannah's situation and cares like our God. And because Hannah gets this, because she sees her holy, secure, mighty, delivering God, standing alone and without equal, everything changes.

This prayer is not a response to her life being completely different. This prayer is a response to her vision of God being clear. Look with me at verse 3.

Do not keep talking so proudly, or let your mouth speak such arrogance. For the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

[16 : 26] Those who are full hire themselves out for food, but those who are hungry hunger no more. She who is barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away.

The Lord brings death and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth. He humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.

He seats them with princes, and he has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's. Upon them he has set the world.

Having seen God, her world and her situation are redefined. Having seen God, Israel's situation is suddenly brought into sharp focus.

She no longer fears the taunts of her enemies. She no longer fears the woman who teases her for not having children. She now defiantly reminds them, you will answer to my God.

[17 : 29] You will answer to the God who knows all things, the God who is ever-present, the God who is the rightful judge of all creation, because it's his.

Suddenly, Hannah's perspective is unrecognizable. From a bitter, weeping woman, she now sees hope.

She is no longer limited by what's possible, what she is capable of. The bows of the mighty are broken.

The weak and feeble are given strength. Israel's situation is suddenly less hopeless. The armies queuing up around them to take over, suddenly not so scary.

Not because they're not mighty. Not because they're not more powerful than Israel. But in the face of her mighty rock God.

[18 : 34] Look again at the picture she paints. The mighty are broken. The feeble are strengthened. The full are hungry. The hungry are full. The barren woman has kids. The woman with kids has none.

Why? Because it's the Lord who gives life. It's the Lord who kills. It's the Lord who gives everything. Nothing exists except by his will.

And suddenly Hannah realizes that the injustice within Israel and the oppression from outside will not go unanswered before a sovereign God.

She sees that God has not left. God will keep his promise and he will bring justice. He's the one who spoke the earth into existence.

And he is the one who will hold it accountable. For Hannah, this new picture of God redefines everything that she sees.

[19 : 36] There's this fantastic quote from C.S. Lewis where he says, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

Without God, at best we see silhouettes. We are fumbling around in a dark room. But when we see him, the world is illuminated.

Because he is the power that created and the power that sustains, he is the defining reality for all that exists. We need to wrestle with what that means for us today.

Because it made Hannah weird. Hannah's perspective in this passage isn't normal. We don't look at the world and go, you know what, the rich people, I feel sorry for them.

The people who are healthy, who are unlucky. Or the woman who's got lots of kids, that must be terrible. Although we might sometimes say that. Hannah's perspective isn't normal, is it? It's weird.

[20 : 40] She has seen God and suddenly she sees the whole world in a way that no one else does. She's not seeing what most people see.

I had an interesting conversation with my brother. It was about a week ago. He was staying with me just for a night. My brother used to be really involved in church. I don't know if he's a Christian. That's between him and God.

But I would say if he is, he doesn't take it very seriously. But there was a time when church was really high on his priority list. When ministry was really important. And we were just chatting about an old Bible study group that he used to be in when he was about 20 or 21.

And he was reflecting to me how that group was full of full-on Christians. The extreme kind. And he wasn't being particularly rude about them or anything like that.

But these were guys who had become missionaries and gone overseas. Guys who had gone into ministry. He didn't say that I was one of those. But I feel like it might have been in brackets. Just a subtle.

[21 : 44] But we were having this conversation. And in my head I was going, I understand what you're saying. They've kind of just basically thrown their whole life up in the air having met Jesus.

But here's the thing. That's not extreme. That's what a Christian is. Hannah's position feels weird. It feels full-on.

It feels like it's at the extreme end. But it's not like she's had some unique revelation of God. It's not like some angel appeared and told her a secret that no one else knows.

She just reflected on God who had been revealed in history. God as he was revealed in Scripture. And that is sufficient to change her perception of everything in her life.

Change her perception of what success is, of what matters, of how her relationships work. And so again, I come back to the question. How does your view of God shape the decisions that you make?

[22 : 50] How does your view of God and his power and his significance change the way that you see possibilities in your life or limitations in your life? How much of an impact does it have on the ambitions that you have?

The things you want to achieve? The desires you have? If our God is incomparably great and powerful, if he is all-consuming and the source of everything that exists, if our God will come to judge everything, then it must affect every part of our life.

It must shape even the little decisions, even the seemingly mundane. And so again, I ask you, do you look at the world any different to the people who don't know God?

Or are you pretty much the same as everyone else? One of the fun parts of my job is teaching scripture. And this year, so this week, I was teaching year six and year three.

And we're doing roughly the same lesson, slightly different. And we opened the lesson this week with a question. It was a what would you do if scenario. And the scenarios went something like, you've got a sports final this weekend, and your coach has told you that training's on tonight, and if you don't go, you won't be playing.

[24 : 17] And you're at home ready to go, and mum says, I've got a headache. Do you, A, tell her tough, drive me to training, otherwise I don't get to play my final.

Or B, let her rest, so that her headache can get better. It's amazing how much more selfish year six got. But the other thing that I noticed is, year three were maybe naive, or just really, really selfless.

They were all like, oh, mum looks after me so much, I'll do the right thing, and I'll let her rest. I wonder if that would be true in the actual situation, but they all knew which answer they were supposed to give. But year six was really interesting.

They knew which answer they were supposed to give. They knew there was something not quite right about saying, I just want to look after myself. So what they did was invented every possible other scenario where they could do both.

I would let mum rest and hitchhike. I would catch a taxi. I would ring my friend. I would do all this, and I said, no, it's not an option. You need to choose to do one or the other. And it just went round and round, and circles, and it became really obvious that, you know, they didn't want to admit that ultimately, they cared about themselves more, but their refusal to agree to a scenario that meant them missing out was quite telling.

[25 : 32] Now, I'm not having a crack at my year six class because I'm sure I'm the same. But the reality is, we live in a world that is inherently self-obsessed.

The unspoken mantra of our culture is, if I don't look after me, then who will? We've got this sense of what we've earned, this sense of entitlement. It's ours.

It's mine. So I should be able to do with it what I want. But I wonder how that fits with Hannah's vision of God. Have a look again at verse six.

It's God who provides.

It's God who blesses. He's the God of knowledge. He's intimately involved in every situation that you face. He knows your fears, your concerns, your desires.

[26 : 46] Just like he heard and responded to Hannah's cry, his ears are attentive to you in your life. And in response, Hannah warns us, not by might shall a man prevail.

It's God who gives. You can work as hard as you want. Unless God gives it, you will get nothing. Hannah sees God and recognizes that everything comes from his generous hand.

And everything that he has given her exists for a specific purpose. His purpose. His glory.

And ultimately, everything that exists will return to him one day for judgment. Last week, I was sharing with you that there was something about this story that annoyed me.

How could Hannah be so upset about not having a child, have a child, and then hand him over? It still messed with me, but I was looking at it again this week.

[27 : 49] But I think this prayer answers it for us. Hannah knew that everything that she had, including this gift of a son, was a gift from God for God's glory.

Even her family was something that God had given her for his purposes. She rejoices. She rejoices in the gift of Samuel. But this prayer is not about that.

This prayer is her rejoicing in the chance to use that gift in the right way in service of her worthy and unmatched God. And I wonder if that is how you view the things in your life that are precious to you.

I wonder if that is how I view my son. Does my son exist for me? Or for God?

The time that you have free on a weekend after a hard week of work or study, is that yours? Or is it God's? If you are not sure, it's really just a question of ownership.

[29 : 04] I do have a responsibility for my son and for the money God's given me and for the time and energy that I use in whatever direction, but do I use it as mine? So do I view it as mine to use however I want?

Or do I view it as God's? Is the starting point for everything in my life Him? Do I wake up each day and say I have this many hours, this much energy, this much money, these individuals, these relationships and say God, how can I use all of it for you?

Or do I say God, I've got a couple of hours here, couple of hours there, you can have this relationship, you can have this much of my money. What does it say about our view of God?

Hannah recognizes that everything comes from God. You and I exist to glorify God. That's why we are breathing right now.

To know God, to treasure Him, to represent Him, the goal is and will always be His glory. And everything else in your life exists to that end.

[30 : 15] Holidays, your job, your school marks, whatever's in your life right now. That is just an opportunity that God has given you to glorify Him.

That is the purpose there. Ask yourself this question. If Jesus came back right now, would I be happy about it or would I be disappointed?

Would you feel like you'd missed out on the chance to enjoy something that you'd earned? Maybe a holiday you've been looking forward to? Maybe some money that you've been saving up to spend in a particular way?

Or would you just rejoice that God was being glorified? God changes everything. Following Him is not a hobby.

It's not a choice among other things. It's all-consuming. It's the central reality. It defines everything. And if God doesn't shape the way we view everything, then we've either settled for a dodgy version or we're just going through the motions to keep someone else happy.

[31 : 27] God is the defining reality and change in us comes not from trying harder to make Him the defining reality, but it comes like it did for Hannah when we see Him clearly.

And thankfully, Hannah gives us the answer on where to look. Look at verse 9 and 10. Hannah's prayer finishes at the only logical place.

having begun with her incomparable holy God, she finishes with Him bringing justice and judgment in His creation. Judgment for the wicked and vindication for the faithful.

When God judges, He weighs the actions of all people. He won't look at what's on the outside. He won't look at how strong you are, how rich you are, how influential you are.

He will look at your heart. He will look at whether your heart recognizes Him as the giver of every good gift. Hannah looks forward to the victories that God will win on behalf of His people and we're going to see a couple of them in the next few chapters, but she looks past the short term.

[33 : 02] She is looking at the final and ultimate victory that God will work for His people. She is looking forward to the time when all these things that she's talked about, where the poor are made rich, where the hungry are filled up, will be fully realized.

She is praying for God's eternal King, God's chosen one to come. Israel's about to get some kings. They're about to get Saul, they're about to get David and that's all important, but she's looking beyond that.

There's a good chance she didn't know exactly what she was praying for, she didn't understand the full significance of it, but ultimately her prayer points to Jesus.

There in verse 10, He will give strength to His King and exalt the horn of His anointed. His anointed is His Saviour, His Christ.

Thousands of years before Jesus came into the world, Hannah knew that her God would save her. She didn't understand fully how, but she knew that God would send someone to save because her God is the delivering God.

[34 : 23] Let me read to you very briefly the prayer of another woman in the New Testament. This comes out of Luke's Gospel in chapter 1. And Mary said, My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him. From generation to generation He has performed mighty deeds with His arm.

He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped His servant Israel remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever even as He said to our fathers. what changes in this story in 1 Samuel for Hannah?

What's different for her between chapter 1 and chapter 2? Answer is not a lot. She was praying to God when she was barren and she's praying to God afterwards.

[35 : 39] She has the same husband. She still has to share that husband with a woman who she doesn't get on with very well and at this point Israel continues to ignore God and we're going to see it in really vivid detail in two weeks time.

Her circumstances don't shift enough to warrant a prayer like this do they? A child is an amazing gift but a prayer like this says something more significant has gone on.

What shifts for her is her view of God and that should challenge us. She had but a vague idea that Jesus would come and when you hear about how her whole life was redefined it probably should intimidate you a little bit because I think it would be fair to say that for most of us our view of God is pretty small in comparison to hers.

We still fear the things that the world tells us to fear we still feel the limitations of our own strength or capacity our view of God doesn't look very impressive next to her view let alone next to God himself but the great encouragement of Hannah and of Mary's prayer from Luke's gospel is that we live in light of what Jesus has already done.

Jesus came to earth for people who have a small view of God. he came to earth for people like you and me who had this vague idea but had kind of domesticated it.

[37 : 17] He came to forgive self-dependent people to forgive self-focused selfish people like you and me. He came to reveal God so that we would see him clearly just like Hannah did.

In Jesus we have certain hope we have an anchor which will withstand whatever life throws at us and if you're feeling guilty right now because your life doesn't reflect the God of the universe I want to say that that is God's gift to you right now because he will use that to drive you back to the one place where you will find salvation in the incomparable God who delivers.

if you're feeling a weight tonight the goal is not to walk out of here and try harder the goal is to look to Jesus and like Hannah rejoice.

Let's pray. Father God we want to acknowledge that so often we do trim down just how impressive and majestic and glorious you are in so many areas of our life we act like you don't matter in so many things we are more consumed with our own capacity than with your power at work in us and God we want to ask that you would open our eyes to see you clearly we want to thank you that you sent your son that we might know you that we might know your love and your justice and your power over sin and death father we want to ask that you would show us areas in our life where we're living as if you have no power lord and as we confess those things please consume the desires of our hearts with a desire to glorify you father god if there are people in this room tonight who don't even know you yet who still think that this idea of living a whole life because of who you are is weird and extreme i pray that you would show them your majesty that they would look to jesus crucified and risen and understand that you are worth that and so much more god and for those of us who do know you give us great joy as we seek to sacrifice our lives for the sake of your purpose and your call father thank you for your love even when we don't deserve it thank you for your son in whom is our hope amen