

Genesis 46-47

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- [0 : 00] We are beginning a series in the book of 1 Samuel, so if you want to look along in a Bible, it's page 225 in the Pew Bibles. And I'm actually going to start by reading the end of our passage. We have a long passage tonight, which we'll look at in a couple sections.
- It begins with a story and ends with a song. So let me begin by reading the song, which is 1 Samuel chapter 2, Hannah's Prayer.
- And then as we go along, we'll go back through the story that leads up to it. So 1 Samuel 2, I'm going to read chapter 2, 1 through 11, and then we'll go back through chapter 1 as we go.
- It says,
- So according to many people, the Christian church in the United States is declining.
- [2 : 21] According to one survey, approximately 80% of all churches in North America have reached a plateau or are decreasing in attendance. Another survey asked people, did you attend a church service in the last seven days?
- And about 40% of people said yes. But then they contacted churches and denominations to get their records, and they added up all the churches' records and only got about 20%.
- So it seems like there's a lot more people who are saying they're going to church than actually are, if the statistics are correct. But if present trends continue, by the year 2050, about 35 years from now, only half as many people, percentage-wise, will still be attending church.
- So, that's a challenge for churches and people who work for churches, right? The future seems bleak or at best uncertain.
- Well, maybe you feel similarly as you look to your own life or your own future. Maybe you worry about finding a job after you graduate, when in some fields, over 50% of PhDs never find a position in their field.
- [3 : 42] Maybe you worry about finding a job, period. The economy has improved somewhat in the last five years, but jobs are still not easy to find. Especially if you're getting older, or if you don't have a college degree, or if you have any kind of criminal record.
- Maybe you're hoping to find someone to marry. But every year, that possibility seems more and more distant. Maybe you worry about the world that your children are growing up in.
- How unstable it seems to be. Well, this evening we're beginning a series in 1 Samuel. And the book of Samuel begins in a time when the outlook for God's people seemed bleak.
- It seemed that their future prospects were dim and the world was falling apart. But it tells a story of God mercifully intervening. To turn the world upside down and inside out.
- To bring down corrupt and proud leaders. And raise up a faithful and humble king. To lead God's people. Now, over the next few months, we're going to be going through this book of 1 Samuel.

[4 : 50] But it's actually part of a larger book. 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one long book. It was split into two halves later on. Probably just because it was so long. And it maybe didn't fit on an ancient scroll.

But in order to understand 1 Samuel, we'll occasionally look to 2 Samuel as well. Because really, they're two volumes of the same book. But before we delve into Samuel, flip a few pages back.

Notice what comes right before Samuel. So there's the small book of Ruth. That tells the story of Ruth and her family. And God's provision and kindness to them. But the last major book recounting the history of Israel is the Judges.

And if you look at the last verse of Judges. Judges 21-25. It says, In those days there was no king in Israel. And everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

And if you read the last five chapters of Judges. It's a pretty dark time. The end of Judges describes political and moral chaos. It begins with a child who stole from his mother.

[5 : 53] And then a crooked priest who only cared about money. Violent gangs who preyed on unsuspecting people. The rape and murder of an innocent woman. Ending in a brutal civil war.

It was a dark time in Israel. The nation was falling apart. The leaders were corrupt or simply non-existent. And the beginning of Samuel also portrays this dark time.

Now if you go to 1 Samuel 1. We're going to start reading the story. That leads up to the prayer we just read. So 1 Samuel 1 begins like this.

We'll go through section by section. At the end as we usually do in our evening service. We'll have time for some Q&A.; So if you have questions as you go along. You can jot those down or note them in your mind. And you'll have a chance to ask them.

And we can talk about them. So 1 Samuel chapter 1. There was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim. Of the hill country of Ephraim. Whose name was Elkanah. The son of Jerohim. The son of Elihu.

[6 : 53] The son of Tohu. The son of Zuth. And Ephrathite. He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah. The name of the other Peninnah. And Peninnah had children. But Hannah had no children.

Now this man used to go up. Year by year from his city. To worship and to sacrifice. To the Lord of hosts at Shiloh. Where the two sons of Eli. Hophni and Phinehas. Were priests of the Lord. On the day when Elkanah sacrificed.

He would give portions to Peninnah his wife. And to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion. Because he loved her. Though the Lord had closed her womb. And her rival.

Used to provoke her. Grievously to irritate her. Because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on. Year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord.

She used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept. And would not eat. And Elkanah her husband said to her. Hannah. Why do you weep? And why do you not eat?

[7 : 48] And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons? Now what's surprising. About the beginning of Samuel. Is that Samuel is a book about. God raising up great leaders.

For the nation of Israel. But it begins by focusing in. On this obscure family. From the middle of nowhere. The hill country of Ephraim. Right?

The most rural part. And first Samuel as a whole. Focuses on three powerful men. Samuel. Saul. And David. But the book begins.

By focusing in. On a relatively powerless woman. Hannah. Verses one and two set the stage. By introducing the family. But gradually the focus shifts.

To Hannah. Whose name means. Favored one. Now the problem is. Hannah's life. Didn't seem. Very favored.

[8 : 47] Verse two tells us. Hannah had no children. Because the Lord had closed her womb. Now in the ancient world. A woman's identity. Normally revolved around. Marriage and children.

Far more than today. But in ancient Israel. There was even more. At stake. Because God had promised. In Deuteronomy 28. That if the people of Israel. Were faithful.

And obedient. In the promised land. That he would bless them. With fruitful wombs. With many children. And back in Genesis three. God had promised. That the seed of the woman.

A child. Born to a woman. Would one day. Crush. The serpent's head. Would crush the evil one. And defeat. Evil. In the world. So Hannah must have wondered.

If I am favored. By God. Why is God treating me. As if I am cursed. Why am I being prevented. From participating. In God's plan.

[9 : 46] And of course. It only got worse. Because it wasn't just Hannah. Wandering. Inside herself. It was. Peninnah. Her rival. Who was rubbing it in. All the time. It says her rival.

Used to provoke her. Grievously. To irritate her. And it went on. Year by year. As often as she went up. To the house of the Lord. It wasn't just a one time again. Event. These verses are talking about.

An ongoing. Never stopping. Pattern. I mean. Just think. If every time. You came to church. Someone else. Intentionally.

Made comments. To irritate. And provoke you. To the point. Of you. Bursting into tears. Every single time. You came here. Eventually. You just wouldn't want to come.

Maybe pretty quickly. You wouldn't want to come. Maybe you can identify. With Hannah's. Feeling. You might wonder inside.

[10 : 42] If God. Really loves me. If he has extended his favor. And grace to me. In Jesus Christ. Why is my life so hard? Why does it seem to be heading toward a dead end?

Of meaninglessness? Why do other people. Who. Perhaps don't really care about God at all. Seem so much more successful than I am.

Maybe there's even someone who sort of rubs it in your face. And it just seems to go on and on. Well in verse 9. We see Hannah's response.

So let's read. Starting at verse 9. After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh. Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest. Was sitting on the seat.

Beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed. And prayed to the Lord. And wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow. And said. O Lord of hosts.

[11 : 40] If you will indeed look upon the affliction of your servant. And remember me. And not forget your servant. But will give to your servant a son. Then I will give him to the Lord.

All the days of his life. And no razor shall touch his head. As she continued praying before the Lord. Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart.

Only her lips moved. And her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her. To be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her. How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you.

But Hannah answered. No my Lord. I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink. But I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.

Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman. For all along I have been speaking. Out of my great anxiety and vexation. Then Eli answered. Go in peace.

[12 : 36] And the God of Israel. Grant your petition that you have made to him. And she said. Let your servant find favor in your eyes. Then the woman went her way and ate. And her face was no longer sad.

Now verse 9. Where it says. After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh. Hannah rose. Verse 9 is a turning point. In this story. Because verses 1 and 2 set the stage.

And give us the cast of characters. Verses 3 through 9. Show us the habitual pattern. That's going on year by year. On and on. But in verse 9. Hannah speaks.

And acts. For the first time. In the story. Now so far. Hannah's been passive. She's only responded to Peninnah. Provoking her.

By weeping and refusing to eat. She's been silent. And suffering. She hasn't been able to do anything. But here in verse 9.

[13 : 32] It says Hannah rose. She stood up. She didn't simply remain passive. But her first action. Was not to. Sock Peninnah in the face.

But to come before God in prayer. Before she spoke to anyone else. She spoke to God. And she brought all her distress. All her longings.

All her hopes. All her pain and misery to God. In prayer. One scholar wrote. Her prayer was direct. And artless.

Not poetic. Or symmetrical. It was an anxious. Desperate plea. Of a simple. Sincere. Country. Woman. Lord of hosts.

She prayed. If you will indeed. Look upon. The affliction of your servant. And remember me. And not forget your servant. But will give to your servant a son. Then I will give him to the Lord.

[14 : 34] All the days of his life. And no razor shall touch his head. You might wonder about that last phrase. Why is she promising never to give him a haircut. Or a shave. Well Hannah was referring to an ancient Israelite custom.

Called the Nazarite vow. Described in number six. Where someone would be dedicated. And set apart. For. Special service to God.

God. And for as long as you were a Nazarite. You would grow your hair long. And back then. Long hair. Especially. When you got old. Gray hair.

Was seen as a crown of glory. And when you completed the time. Of your Nazarite vow. You would go to the temple. And you'd cut off all your hair.

And then you'd throw it on. You'd put it on the altar. Along with a sacrifice. And it would be burned up. In a symbolic way. It would represent. Throwing down.

[15 : 31] Your crown of glory. Before the Lord of hosts. And giving him your most precious. Treasure. That's what. Being a Nazarite.

Represented in the first place. Wholehearted. Unreserved dedication to God. There are only three people. In the Bible.

Who were Nazarites. Their whole life long. One was Samson. The judge. One was Samuel. Hannah's son. And a third was John the Baptist. And they all.

Were born. To women. Who were previously. Barren. And they all. Arose. And brought. Hope. And deliverance. To Israel. In particularly dark. Times.

You see. What we'll see here. In this story. And as we go through. The book of Samuel. Is that. Hannah's. Desperate plea. Her anxious prayer.

[16 : 28] Became a crucial turning point. Not just for her own life. But for the entire. Nation of Israel. That God began. A great. History.

Making work. With this one. Obscure. Woman. From the countryside. Who was despised. And neglected. Now we see three results.

To Hannah's prayer. In verse 11. Now the most immediate result. Was that Eli. The priest. Misunderstood her. This is. We see this in verses 12 through 17.

Apparently. Now Eli. Was the main priest. In charge of the temple. Or the tabernacle. It was called the temple. But it's actually the. The tent. The temporary. Tabernacle.

At Shiloh. But apparently. Eli wasn't really used to seeing people. Actually come in. And praying. It seems like it was more common. For him to deal with. People coming in.

[17 : 27] Having had a few. Too many drinks. And so he thinks. Hannah's just another one of these people. And so he rebukes her. Harshly.

You can just imagine. How you feel. If you're Hannah. Your. Greatest longing. Has not been fulfilled.

This other woman. Who lives in your house. Rubs it in all the time. You come before. God. In the temple. Hopefully. A safe space. To pray.

And you get. Harshly rebuked. By the priest in charge. But Hannah. Wasn't deterred. Hannah was a strong. Woman.

She didn't run away. She didn't apologize. For something that she hadn't done. She respectfully. But firmly. Corrected Eli's misunderstanding. And informed him.

[18 : 23] Of what was really going on. Now Eli's misunderstanding. Was an indication. Of the blindness. Of Israel's spiritual leaders. At the time. Later on in chapter 2.

We'll see that Eli's sons. Were even worse. But you know. God was not dependent. On Eli the priest. The priest in Israel. Had a noble calling.

They were called. To teach God's word. To pray for the people. To lead in worship. But you know. God heard. And God answered. Hannah's prayer. Without Eli.

Having any part of it. Eli wasn't. A necessary. Part. Of God hearing. And answering. Hannah's prayer. He was a witness to it.

But he wasn't a mediator. And God hears us. When we cry out to him. Even if other people. Misunderstand us. Even if you've been wrongly rebuked.

[19 : 23] By a church leader. For something that. In fact. You never did. God hears. And God is not.

Blocked. By Eli's misunderstanding. And God answers the prayers of those who cry out to him. And that's good news. So that's the first result. To Hannah's prayer.

Eli misunderstood her. At first. She prays. And things seem to get worse. Instead of better. But the second result. Is that. Verse 18 says. Hannah wasn't sad anymore. You see.

The habitual pattern. That had gone on and on. Was that. Peninnah provoked. And irritated Hannah. And Hannah responded by. Receding into her shell. Weeping. Refusing to eat.

She was distraught. And she couldn't be comforted. It happened over and over. Because more than anything else. Hannah wanted. A child. And she didn't have one. She didn't have the thing.

[20 : 20] That she most. Wanted. And whenever she was. Cruelly reminded of that fact. She fell apart. Now Hannah had a loving.

And understanding husband. But even he couldn't change the pattern. Verse 5 said he loved her. Even gave her a double portion. Verse 8 says he gently spoke to her.

And reassured her. But nothing seemed to change. Until Hannah stood up. And poured out her heart. Before the Lord. She laid out her desire. Before God.

And earnestly asked for God. To grant her deepest longing. But you know. She also released. Her deepest longing. Into God's hands.

She said. God if you give me a son. If you give me what I most deeply long for. More than anything else. I'll give him back to you. And he'll be yours.

[21 : 20] Forever. And you know. Only after she did that. Poured out her deepest longing. And prayer before God. And released it into his hands.

Only after she did that. Did she find peace. She was able to eat. Her face wasn't sad anymore. What do you long for? What do you long for?

More than anything else in this world. Maybe it's to get married. Maybe it's to have kids. Maybe it's to have the career.

That you're training for. Are you torn up. By envy. Or self-loathing.

Or vexation. Frustration. When you see people who have what you want. And you don't. Can you pour out.

[22 : 21] Your deepest longing. Before God. Can you say. Lord. I long. To find. A husband. I long. To find a wife. I long.

To have kids. I long. To have a great career. But if you give me a husband. I will come alongside him. To help him be faithful.

And loyal to you. And he will be yours. Forever. If you give me a wife. I will love her. Sacrificially. As Christ loved the church.

So that she might be holy. And devoted to you. Forever. If you give me kids. I will daily pray for them. And entrust them into your hands.

If you give me a great career. I will consecrate my work to you. And seek to be a blessing. To others. Through it. You see.

[23 : 18] It's only when we. Pour out our deepest. Longings. Before God. And ask him to grant them. But also.

Release them into his hands. That he. Then gives us peace. And joy. It's interesting. Hannah was able to eat.

And her face was no longer sad. But her problem hadn't yet been solved. She wasn't pregnant yet. She hadn't had the kid yet. But she was able to eat.

And her face wasn't sad anymore. Because she had prayed. The third result. Of her prayer. Was that God gave her. What she asked for.

Verse 19. They rose early in the morning. And worshiped before the Lord. Then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife. And the Lord remembered her.

[24 : 14] And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. And she called his name Samuel. For she said. I have asked for him from the Lord. The man Elkanah and all his house. Went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice.

And to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up. For she said to her husband. As soon as the child is weaned. I will bring him. So that he may appear in the presence of the Lord. And dwell there forever.

Elkanah her husband said to her. Do what seems best to you. Wait until you have weaned him. Only may the Lord establish his word. So the woman remained and nursed her son. Until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him. She took him up with her.

Along with a three-year-old bull. An ephah of flour. And a skin of wine. And she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull. And they brought the child to Eli.

And she said oh my Lord. As you live my Lord. I am the woman who is standing here in your presence. Praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed. And the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him.

[25 : 10] Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives. He is lent to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord. There. You see what we see here is that God accomplished.

What no one else could. There was nothing that Hannah could do. To open her closed womb. She could try as hard as she wanted.

But there was nothing she could do. To. Make sure. Things changed. And in the same way the people of Israel.

In this dark time of the judges. When everything was going down and down. On a downward spiral. They were powerless. To bring new life.

And create lasting spiritual renewal. In the midst of their dark and decaying world. But the message here is that God did what no human being could do.

[26 : 11] God gave Hannah a son. Because he heard her cry. Hannah went from fasting. To feasting. From emptiness. To fullness. And her response.

And we'll see that. In the book of Samuel. That God brings Israel from. Emptiness. To fullness. From chaos. To order. From corruption.

In the tabernacle at Shiloh. To the last thing that happens. At the end of 2 Samuel. Is King David. Buys the land. For the temple in Jerusalem. For a house.

Where God and his people can dwell together. So they go from being far from God. To a place where they can come near. To God.

That's the big picture. Of Samuel. And we see that. In miniature here. In the life of Hannah. Now Hannah's response.

[27 : 16] To God's merciful intervention. Was to follow through on her word. Right. She brought Samuel back. To Eli the priest. She offered a. Quite a generous sacrifice. It was more than.

Was required. She publicly affirmed to Eli. That God had answered her prayer. And she entrusted her beloved child. To the care. Of the Lord himself.

And finally she. Launched into this prayer. This prayer that's been preserved for us. In chapter 2. Which we read in the beginning. And Hannah's prayer.

Really tells us. The meaning of this whole story. That we've gone through. Step by step. The main point. Is that God brings down the proud. And raises up the humble.

Right at the beginning of the story. We saw proud Peninnah. Who dominated the scene. At the beginning of the story. She was outwardly prospering. She had many children. And she rubbed it. And she had what Hannah didn't.

[28 : 15] And she rubbed it in Hannah's face. All the time. And she was arrogant. And dismissive of Hannah. You know by the end of the story. Peninnah just disappears.

From the narrative. She doesn't reappear again. She wasn't ultimately that important. In God's great plan.

Because God brings down the proud. But we also see God raising up the humble. Hannah who was despised. Who had no future prospects.

Who humbled herself in prayer before the Lord. And God heard her. And God raised her up. To become an honored mother. In Israel. The mother of Samuel.

Who would take the place of Eli. And his wicked sons in the tabernacle. Who would hear the word of the Lord. And be a faithful prophet. And who would one day anoint King David.

[29 : 15] Whom God had chosen to lead his people. Hannah was exalted. And brought up. From a place of obscurity and scorn. To a place of honor. And dignity. And God's saving plan.

That's the pattern we see. We'll see the pattern throughout. The book of Samuel. God bringing down the proud. And raising up the humble. You see it's.

The story is about God. Intervening. To give hope and meaning to Hannah. But also to give hope. And meaning to the people of Israel. And to replace a corrupt.

And dying social order. With a new king. Who would judge. With righteousness. And who would bring peace. Hannah's song ends.

By talking about this king. In verse 10. Of chapter 2. He says. She says the Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king. And exalt the horn of his anointed.

[30 : 17] The symbol of a horn. Was. When an animal. Was. Was in a fight.

And had. It was. It was a symbol of victory. An animal raising its horns. In victory. It was also interestingly. A horn of oil. That was used to anoint. A king.

Later on. In the book. So it's a sign of strength. And victory. The horn. Of God's anointed. It will exalt the victory. And strength. Of the king. So what we see here.

Is that the birth of Samuel. Was a sign of resurrection hope. God bringing new life. To his. By his grace. Breaking into. And reshaping. A dying world.

And you know. That's. Ultimately. That's what God did. Through Samuel. And David. And ultimately. That's what God did. Through his son. Jesus Christ. Because a thousand years later.

[31 : 18] There was another. Barren woman. And her husband. Who were longing for a child. And their names were Zachariah. And Elizabeth. And God came to them.

And said. I will give you a son. And he'll be a prophet. Of the most high. And he'll prepare the way. For the Lord himself. Luke chapter one.

Tells the story. Of the birth of John the Baptist. Who prepared the way. For Jesus. And then the birth of Jesus. The king himself. So that's the good news.

Of what God has done. And in Jesus Christ. And Jesus said. Everyone who exalts himself. Will be humbled. And everyone who humbles himself. Will be exalted. And Jesus.

Did that himself. He humbled himself. To the point of death. On a cross. To pay the price. For our sins. And he's now exalted. To the highest place.

[32 : 18] As the king overall. He's our great. And victorious king. The Lord's anointed one. Now let me conclude.

With this quote. It says. If an incident. Speaking about. Hannah and Samuel. And how. Hannah's life was the beginning.

Of God's great. Work. For his people. It says. If an incident. In a woman's ordinary. Family life. Could be such a significant step. In the eternal plan. Of a saving God.

Each day. Can be no less significant. To a believer. For God's plan. And purpose. You see. God. Starts. His great work.

Of salvation. In the world. With humble. And unrecognized people. It all began. With Hannah.

[33 : 14] In the book of Samuel. Maybe you're discouraged. Tonight. Maybe you're. Discouraged. About your own life. And you feel. As Hannah did. That the future.

Seems dim. And bleak. Maybe you're discouraged. About the church. And where it's going. Maybe you. Feel.

At best. Uncertain. About the future. But come before God. As Hannah did. Pour out your heart. Before him. And when we do that. Let's see what he does.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. A reflection.

A reflection. of your goodness and your wisdom and your love and your power in this world.

[34 : 37] Lord, we pray that you would do what we cannot. That you would bring new life to us where we are dead, where we are dying.

Come by your Holy Spirit. Lord, revive us. Individually and corporately, we pray. We pray that you would give us humility.

Lord, save us from our pride. Bring us to humble ourselves before you so that you may lift us up. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.