

Hannah keeps her promise

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[0 : 00] The book of 1 Samuel, so 1 Samuel chapter 1. So 1 Samuel chapter 1, beginning at verse 1.

Now, what I will be covering is all the way up to chapter 2, verse 10. But of course, this is a lengthy reading.

This is one of the reasons why I would encourage you to read through 1 Samuel. In fact, even this afternoon is a time of reading, or even tonight. Why not read through the first chapter and then up to verse 11 of chapter 2, or even verse 10.

Verse 11 is sort of the concluding part before we move into the sons of Eli. But we're going to pick it up here in the verses 1 through to 11.

Now hear God's word. There was a certain man of Ramamathin, Zophin, on the hill of country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah, the sons of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Toa, son of Zufa.

[1 : 47] An Ephraite, he had two wives. The name of one was Hannah, and 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.

[3 : 04] And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad?

Am I not more to you than ten sons? 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, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.

And no razor so touch his head. Well, I'm going to carry on taking you through the passage as we make our way through.

But let's pray for God's blessing upon his reading and upon the message. Father God, we would come before you this day and recognize that your word is that which you have given to speak to us.

[4 : 22] You are speaking to us through your word. And we pray, Father God, this morning that we would have ears to hear. We don't take this for granted, Father God, because we remember the words of Jesus who said, and your prophets of old said, that though they have ears, they just don't hear.

But we, Father God, recognize that we have been given a heart and mind and ears and senses to appreciate you and to bring you glory. So we would ask, Father, this morning that you would bless us in Jesus' name with your word.

Amen. Amen. Well, we must be convinced this morning that the Lord and only the Lord is able to change the course of your life and the conditions of your life.

There is no other way it can change. Your course will take the direction that God will have it take, and you will either be faithful or unfaithful within that direction.

And the conditions that God leads you through, those highs and lows that we have been speaking about in the Bible studies and over the last few sermons, is something that the Lord brings your way.

[5 : 38] And they test your faithfulness before God. And of course, they expose your unfaithfulness before him. He already knows, but before you and others.

We call this providence. This is God's special care for his people. And so when God's people are wondering what on earth the world is coming to, these same people are not recognizing that this is God's will.

That as they look outside their window and as they step outside their front door and they wonder why what is happening the way that it is happening, one of the things that they are to recognize, which they are failing to recognize, is that this is God's will.

So we can have a whole host of God's people seeking God's will and not recognizing it when it's right in front of them. Here in 1 Samuel is the will of God displayed for us.

And you'll notice that it is displayed through Alkanah, through Pinanah, through Hannah, through the son Samuel that will come. This is God's will for us to see and understand.

[6 : 45] And so we can appreciate right at this early stage that the beginning of something looks very different than the end of something. The seed doesn't look like the tree, but the tree can be traced all the way back to the seed.

And this is something that we should never forget. We should never, ever forget that seeds become trees and trees can be traced back to seeds. That God, when he plants and he sows, that we are to believe in faith what that will come to and know that what God has told us that it will come to.

The Lord is the only one who exalts and who brings down. The Lord is the one who changes the course of your life, the conditions of your life. And he is the one who guards you from falling off to the ditch on either side of the road that you're on.

And the Lord does all of this to bring glory to himself. And the Christian struggles with this when they can't understand that why what they are going through is somehow bringing glory to God.

The moment you don't recognize that what you are in and going through is bringing glory to God, you then no longer see any purpose to why you're going through what you are.

[8 : 04] Suddenly, God is not doing anything with my life. Suddenly, this is just a waste of time. If you do not see that the conditions of your life and the direction of your life is for his name's sake and for his glory, then it's very easy for you to turn on God.

It's very easy for you to look at God and say, have you left me behind? I see other women with children. Have you left me behind?

It's very easy to turn on God when you don't understand that everything is for his name's sake. It is for his glory.

And because God cannot be separated from his wisdom, this is really important, one that you need to concentrate on, that God doesn't rely on something external to himself.

So when we say God in his wisdom, he is not relying on something like an ability outside of himself or something that he has learned elsewhere that he can then use to order the world.

[9 : 11] When we say God is wisdom, we are not describing God in a way that is inappropriate. God is wisdom because God is not dependent on anything other than himself.

And so when we see the acts of God in a closed womb or an open womb, in sacrifices, gifts, and offerings, whatever form it may take, this is God's wisdom and his glory and his will being displayed for us to see, his power and his justice, his goodness and his mercy.

These are the acts of God. But too often, God's people can miss them. So God guides me, as we saw in the Bible study on Wednesday night, Psalm 23, for his name's sake.

God guards me for his name's sake. God pardons my sin for his name's sake. This is what God does for his name's sake.

In other words, the central character and the central reason for why my sin is pardoned is not because I am deserving of having my sin forgiven, but rather it is to bring glory to God.

[10 : 23] And the moment we forget that what we are going through is bringing glory to God all the time, then we forget to understand, or rather we forget to see, that this is serving the purposes of the Lord.

And then, if we forget that, suddenly it has no purpose at all, and we can turn our back on God very, very quickly. We can become very bitter towards God because life is not turning out the way that I wanted it to.

I can't have children, and now I'm going to blame God. Rather than see that it is for his glory, I'm going to turn on him. And that's what happens when you don't appreciate that everything is for the glory of God.

So that's really our starting point, that when you open your door in the morning, and you go out to work, or wherever it is that you go, and you look out your window, what you are seeing is the will of God.

Now, what you are missing is that that is the will of God that brings glory to him. And just because you can't see it doesn't mean that it isn't happening.

[11:35] And that's what we need to appreciate as we begin 1 Samuel. So 1 Samuel, here's a summary, and we will go through to the end of 2.10, addresses Israel's need for guidance, but it also addresses Israel's responsibility to actually listen to the Lord.

There's one thing to provide guidance, but there is another thing to actually listen to that guidance. We would say that you can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

Well, I will. You know, wouldn't you? If it's in the horse's best interest, if it's in the person's best interest, wouldn't you, if you had the power to do it, make him drink?

Well, God does. And the best illustration that I've ever heard on this is by a guy called Stuart Olliot. And Stuart Olliot, in a book called, I think it was called *Ministering Like the Master*, I think the name of the book.

And in that book, he describes how people can be free and how God's sovereign power can be working at the same time without ever interrupting, distorting, or coercing our free will.

[12:52] So he says, imagine a little insect or an ant on a piece of paper. And the ant is walking, you're holding the paper and the ant is on top. And the ant is walking away from you. But you want the ant to walk towards you.

So what do you do? Well, you either touch the ant, you either pick the ant up and turn him around, or you turn the paper. The ant is still free to walk in the direction whatever he chooses, but if you have the ability to turn the paper beneath him, then you will get the ant to come exactly where you want it to come.

And God, being as powerful and sovereign that he is, doesn't have to interfere with you. Your life can be faithful or unfaithful, but he will change the conditions beneath your feet to get you where you are meant to be.

So you can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. God can. And God does. Because when it is necessary for you to drink, you're going to have to drink.

And this is how God does it. He doesn't interfere with the choices you make, but your choices will determine how long, in many cases, you arrive at the place where God would have you be.

[14:09] Your faithfulness and unfaithfulness will be on display. But too often, like the people of old, Israel of old, we find ourselves in the same position that they're in.

That we want guidance, but then when we get guidance, we don't want to listen to it. So we want it, and then when it comes, we don't want it.

So Israel wanted judges, and they got judges, but that didn't work out for them. At the end of judges, everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes. Well, why have judges then?

Well, now they want kings. Okay? And is that going to work out any better for them? It seems to be the case that whatever you want to guide you doesn't matter if you're not willing to be guided.

Now, several people are mentioned here in the beginning of 1 Samuel, but the focus is really on Hannah and the fact that she is barren. And she is praying, of course, to God that God would give her a child.

[15:18] And she has promised that she would give this child back to the Lord. But we need to ask the question, why she wants a child? Why does she want the child in the first place?

Is it a case of she just wants to be a mother, or is it more than that? Well, it would be tempted to think about this purely in earthly emotional terms if you detach yourself from the grand scheme of God's plan and purposes.

That if you see yourself as an individual whom God just interacts on a personal basis and do not see your life as part of God's people, then it's very easy to see that your troubles are your own and

you're not concerned about the bigger troubles of a nation, like Israel here.

So 1 Samuel begins by introducing Elkanah. Elkanah has two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none, verse 2.

Hannah had no children because the Lord had closed her womb, verse 5. But the Lord gives Hannah a child, and this is where we actually begin to see the big differences between Hannah and Peninnah.

[16:36] Peninnah would grievously irritate Hannah and irritate her because she doesn't have children, because the Lord had closed her womb.

There is nothing that Hannah could do. Hannah's in the position where it doesn't matter how hard she tried with her husband, if the Lord had closed her womb, she cannot overturn through her actions, will, ability, or desire, something which the Lord has already determined.

And Hannah, in light of this, wept, verse 7, and she would not eat. She was so deeply distressed with her condition, or at least with the sort of grievous irritation that she gets from Peninnah, that she brings herself before the Lord, verse 10, and prays for a son.

Eli, the priest, which the bit that we didn't read, is troubling to me because he doesn't seem to be able to tell the difference between a drunken woman and a woman praying, verse 13.

Eli looks at her and understands that this is a woman. The doorpost of the temple, which, by the way, is not really a temple. It's sort of like a permanent dwelling of the tent of meeting.

[17:59] We can understand that a bit later on, if you like. But there's Hannah praying, and what does this speak to? Does this speak to the state that Hannah is in, that she is so overwhelmed she is acting like a drunken woman?

I don't think so. Or does this speak to the condition that Eli is as a priest, that he cannot tell the difference between a woman praying and a woman who is drunk?

Does it speak to Eli's judgment rather than Hannah's state, verse 12? In the end, Eli recognizes his mistake and gives Hannah the benediction, verse 17.

And he says to her, Go in peace, and for God to grant to her her petition. Elkanah, verse 19, knew his wife.

He probably knew his wife before this, but this time he knew his wife, and years later the child is weaned. The child is, Hannah is pregnant, the child is then born, and then the child is weaned, and she keeps her promise by giving her son Samuel to the Lord, verses 27 and 28.

[19:14] Now Hannah's prayer in chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, explains to us why she wanted a child. And it is not because that she could turn around to Peninnah and say, See, now I'm just like you.

Now you can't tease me anymore. Now you cannot irritate me anymore. That doesn't seem to be the reason at all why she wanted a child.

She is not asking for a child simply to deal with a personal attack that she is receiving from Peninnah. No, Hannah understands, if that was the case, why didn't she keep her child?

She doesn't keep her child, she gives her child straight back to the Lord. She wants a child because she understands that any gift that you receive is something that is to be given to the Lord in service. Anything that you receive from the Lord, anything that you receive is to be given thanks for. When you sit down at your table and give thanks for your food, you are recognizing, you are recognizing, or you ought to be recognizing, that this didn't come from money out of my pocket, that this didn't come from my hard work.

[20:30] It is tempting, it is so tempting to believe, isn't it, that when you eat a piece of food and that food satisfies your hunger, it is so easy then to trust food rather than God.

Because food is solving the problem. But food isn't solving the problem, God is solving the problem of hunger. And if you don't take the steps back far enough, it becomes easy to understand why food and money and housing can become idols.

Because you're not recognizing the God who is giving all of those things and what you are to do in return with those things that you have received.

Well, Samuel is being given back to the Lord. Peninnah should have given her children to the Lord, but she doesn't. And here we see a marginal difference.

And that is in a time where everybody is doing what is right in their own eyes, Hannah, Hannah is making sure that she will do what is right in God's eyes.

[21:39] And this is the striking difference between Hannah and Peninnah. It's not really about the child. It's really about the nation and the problems in the nation and Hannah personally

understanding that she is not disconnected from God or the rest of God's people.

That she is not willing to do what is right in her own eyes. So let's deal with Hannah being barren.

The Lord is the one who closed her womb.

And he does this because it brings glory to him. Hannah, in time, would give birth to a son because the Lord would open her womb.

That son would be called Samuel. He would then become a prophet. And what do prophets do?

Well, in a time where everybody is doing what is right in their own eyes, God provides someone who will speak his word to his people.

Samuel was a prophet. Samuel will speak God's word to God's people. The question is, will they listen? Hannah understands what this means, as you see from her prayer.

[22 : 47] She understands that Samuel is for the good of the nation. Why do you think Mary copies Hannah's prayer in her magnificat, in her song, in the beginning of Matthew?

Why do you think she does that? Why do you think that is there? Well, Hannah, being barren, understands that God who overturns this is God who has done this type of thing before.

Remember Abraham's wife, Sarah? Wasn't she barren? What about Isaac's wife, Rebecca?

Barren. What about Jacob's wife, Rachel? Barren.

And God seems to take the impossible and then does what is possible for him so that we would understand over and over and over again that the turning points of life are directed by the Lord and not directed by us.

But if you have no trouble having children, if you have no trouble in earning money, and if you have no trouble in buying food and eating food, then it doesn't take long for you to forget the Lord.

[23 : 53] It doesn't take long for you to forget the Lord at all. And we see this over and over again, especially with Israel. Why do you think God had to send bread from heaven? Because over time, God's people believed it came up from the ground.

And God says, right, I'd send it a different way so that you really understand where it comes from.

Now, generally speaking, bread does come from grain. It comes up from the ground.

But behind that is God who ordains it to. And so when God sends it from heaven, he is telling his people, no, I'm the provider.

He's removing a step so that God's people would recognize who really is the provider. But it is tempting. When money can solve a lot of problems and food can solve hunger, it is tempting to trust in these things as saviors.

That these are the things that are really saving me. And they're not saving you at all. And so sometimes, God has to make you barren. He has to get you into the position where you can't do anything to change the course of life that you're in or to change the conditions that you have.

[25 : 10] You really are and have to see and call out to God to make those changes. This is why Hannah gives her son back to the Lord.

It would seem that Hannah wants a child because she does not want to do what is right in her own eyes. Pinna seems to be doing that very thing. The enemies of the Lord are Hannah's enemies as well.

Pinna just happens to be one of those agitators, one of those enemies. Hannah recognizes that the open womb and the closed womb is given to her and God has ordained it.

But Hannah also recognizes that this is a blessing that we are to give thanks to God for. So the question is, with this open and closed womb, is are you trusting in God or are you trusting in yourself?

It is tempting, especially when people who are capable to then forget God that somehow that they think they are brilliant and that they've made it.

[26 : 19] Why is it that the rich businessman thinks that he has made it somehow without God's grace, whether that be common or particular grace in particular situations? Well, it is because he forgets God.

And why is it that the poor man who doesn't seem to have much seems to think that it's his fault alone that he's in this condition? It is true that certain activities in life brings you to poverty, but at the same time, God could ordain it for you despite all your hard work to bring glory to him.

You say, well, this doesn't seem fair. However, this is what the will of God looks like. This is what the will of God looks like. And the trouble is, is no one seems to see it.

So why do you want what you want? That's the question. Why does Hannah want a child? What do you want children for? So Hannah has a child.

She wants him to be qualified, but qualified for what? Qualified for the Lord's service. Service. Now, too often in this world, we are so fixated on this world that the qualifications we want for our children are qualifications for worldly jobs.

[27 : 37] And service to the Lord is not even thought of until they're in their 30s and they've got the job and they've got the house and now I can concentrate on the church. This seems to be the wrong way around.

It seems to be that we're not loving the Lord God first. We seem to be training young people how to trust in things rather than in the Lord.

Who's afraid to say that young people don't know how to make right decisions all the time? But that's not a fair thing to say anymore. No. We need to let them make their own decision.

There are even some Christians who I've heard, which I think is disastrous, who believe that their children need to grow up and spend some time in the world and then come back to the Lord so that they would appreciate it more.

That's wickedness. That's utter wickedness. Those who believe such a thing it's wicked to believe that, to encourage people, to experience the sins so that you'd appreciate God more.

[28 : 40] God ordains all things. Hannah gives her son to the Lord because she recognizes like everything, these are gifts and you don't cast those pearls before swine.

You don't have what God has given you and then waste it in areas that doesn't bring glory and praise and honor to God. Samuel is the mother, sorry, Samuel is the son of Hannah, the mother, who keeps her promise and she recognizes that the course of her life and the course of her son's life will be determined by the Lord.

The question, as always, will be a question of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. That if it is the case that whatever is is the will of God, then your responsibility within that is either am I faithful or am I unfaithful?

That's it. And it's really not difficult to understand how God doesn't abuse your freedom in any way whatsoever but ordains all things.

Are you a person who will do what is right in your own eyes or are you one who will seek the Lord to do what you're going to do next? Well, faithfulness recognizes and this is what Hannah's faithfulness recognizes.

[30 : 07] She recognizes that her faithfulness to God and her problems are not independent from Israel. She understands that she belongs to God as a person but she is not independent from the rest of God's people.

That she needs guidance and the best way to have guidance is to have God speak to her. She will not do what is right in her own eyes but she lives in a time where everybody is doing what is right in their own eyes.

Judges didn't solve the problems and so do we think kings are? Doesn't Hannah know that kings are coming? Doesn't she actually say here in verse 10 the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken into pieces and against them he will thunder in heaven the Lord will judge the ends of the earth he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed.

What do you think Hannah is focused on here? She knows what's coming she seems to understand fully that the time of kings is coming but the question will always be will God's people do what is right in their own eyes or will they listen to God's spokesman Samuel?

Well here's the exhortation as we close. We pray because we don't know what the future is and we pray because we do not know the future in the way that God knows the future.

[31 : 33] We commit our plans to the Lord because to us the future is largely unknown. God gives us gifts but he doesn't give us them in a way where we can do as we please with them.

As we look at our window and as we look at our doors we ought to recognize that this is the Lord's will and the moment you seem to be saying to yourself I don't seem to understand what's going on. What on earth is the world coming to? That is the will of God. That is the will of God. The difference is you're just not recognizing it. So why do Christians have what they have in the course of their life?

It is for his name's sake. It is to bring glory to God. So why do these questions happen? Why is my womb closed? Why didn't I get that job?

Why don't I have money? Why do I have pain? Why do I have loss? Why do I have hard providences? Well the Lord knows and the Lord has ordained them so that you would be faithful in them and bring glory to him.

[32 : 44] So learn from Hannah this morning and learn from Hannah really clearly that if you really want something that you don't have if you really want something that you don't have understand why you want it.

Do you want it so that you can just be like Pinanah? Give me a child Lord so that I can be like Pinanah? Or do you want it so that you can give the gift back to the Lord?

Because you see your life and what happens in your life is not disconnected by what is happening around you. Everything is for the glory of God.

She understands that the issues that she had were part of bigger issues in Israel. She understands that the problems that she has are not disconnected from the problems of Israel as a nation.

And she understands also that her problems are overshadowed in many ways by other problems within a nation. All things have to be committed to the Lord.

[33 : 46] And so while it is true that God gives you the desires of your heart, while it is true that you in your barren state can cry out to God to change what you cannot change, and God will give you the desires of your heart, it really does matter why you want it.

So if you want to calibrate, if you want to make sure you're asking for the right thing in the right way, love the Lord first. Love him first, and none of your questions or repetitions or petitions to God can ever be wrong.

Never. You can never ask in a wrong way. Love God first. Amen. As we come to the table this morning, we're going to stand first and sing verse 1 and 2 of In Christ Alone, and then we'll come up to the table as normal.

Thank you.