

Samuel, the Child Given to God

Disclaimer: Material from this message was adapted in part from messages found on the Sermon Central website.

As if he were not in enough trouble already, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his Cabinet were all dining together in a very posh London restaurant. When the waiter asked the P.M. what he wanted to eat, Boris replied; *"I'll have the roast beef please."* The waiter then asked, *"And what about the vegetables?"* Without looking up Boris replied, *"They will have the same."*

We may complain about our leaders – but good leadership is essential in all areas of life:

- We need good leadership in our homes,
- We need good leadership in our Churches,
- We need good leadership in our nation!

At the close of the book of Judges, the Hebrew nation certainly had no good leaders and everyone was still doing what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25). Yet the LORD was still at work, shaping Israel's destiny according to His plan. David, the *'man after God's own heart'*, who would begin the kingly lineage of Jesus, had not yet been born, but God was setting up his stage (Acts 13:22-23, Ruth 4:17).

It is amazing how God uses ordinary people in ordinary situations to fulfill His purposes. After the story of Ruth and Boaz, we are now introduced to another everyday family who nevertheless has a significant part to play in what God was doing those days.

Here in the opening of the book of 1st Samuel, we meet a man named Elkanah and his two wives, one of whom was childless, and the other prolific. Though not forbidden, it is never a good domestic arrangement for a man to have multiple wives and the few incidents of such recorded in the Bible always point out the pitfalls that occur.

Once upon a time, a Mormon polygamist was arguing with Mark Twain over the issue of having more than one wife. The polygamist declared, *"Nowhere in the Bible does it say a man can't have two wives."* Mark Twain replied, *"Sure it does."* *"Where?"* demanded the polygamist. Twain answered, *"Didn't Jesus say, 'You cannot serve two masters.'"*

His first wife Hannah, though childless, was deeply loved by Elkanah and shown favor over her rival. So, to even the score, the other wife Peninnah would taunt Hannah over her barrenness, especially during their annual visits to the Tabernacle of the Lord, where Hannah would certainly be offering prayers for a child (1 Samuel 1:5,6). Since, the Hebrew people looked upon children as a sign of God's blessing, to be childless was considered to be under the curse of God. In fact childlessness was a valid ground for divorce.

But Elkanah loved Hannah and in his own clumsy way he would try to comfort her. He says, *'Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?'* (1:8). Elkanah is doing what many of us husbands do when our wives are upset. He gets some points at least for noticing her grief, but instead of listening to her pain, he tries to rationalize her problems and feelings away. He's trying to solve when he should be seeking to understand. To add a bit more salt in the wound... He's basically saying, *"Baby, you've got me, what more could you want?"*

Husbands, let's learn a lesson here that I am still working very hard and mastering ... there are times when our problem solving is not what our wife needs... sometimes all she needs is to be held. We don't have to have all the answers, but the fact that we see their pain and empathize with it is enough. Elkanah could better have said, "*Honey, if you want to talk I am here to listen"... if you want to be held, I am here to hold you... if you want me to problem solve, I will try.*"

Instead Hannah gets up from the table and goes to talk with someone who does understand; she presented herself once again to the Lord and begins fervently praying a prayer she may have uttered many times before.

'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head. (1:11)

So strong were her emotions, so intense was her prayer, that the old priest Eli chastises her for being drunk in church, but after she explains herself, he sends her away with a blessing, *Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.* And God did.

Hannah was wonderfully transformed when the old priest 'spoke the peace' over her, adding his prayer to hers, and his blessing to her petition. She was able to rejoin the feast and she was no longer sad (1 Samuel 1:18). The name "Hannah" means "*a woman of grace*," Grace means 'unmerited, undeserved, favor or kindness'. God heard Hannah's prayer and soon after graced her with a son. As his name suggests, Samuel was a child asked for, a gift of God's love (1 Samuel 1:20).

After Samuel's birth, Elkanah and family continued their annual visits to worship at the tabernacle in Shiloh, but Hannah decides to not go again until Samuel was weaned, which would have been at around three-years-old. For those three years she dedicated herself to her child, nursing and nurturing him, knowing that when he is able to eat on his own, she will need to keep her promise, "*that he may appear in the presence of the Lord and remain there forever.*"

Many people make promises to God, only to forget them once the problem passes. Not so with Hannah, she fully intended to keep her promise because she knew that Samuel did not really belong to her anyway. So for the rest of her life, Hannah dedicated herself to her child in the same way as she dedicated her child to the Lord.

We may think it absurd that a parent who had so fervently prayed for a child would now leave that three-year-old child in another's care. But while she left Samuel under the care of Eli, she never gave up her parental responsibility. The story records that, *his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.* (1 Samuel 2:19).

That this child was indeed special is hinted at by several verses.

Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod.... and [he] continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people. 1 Samuel 2:18-26

Even as young as three-years-old, Samuel was able to worship. How do you think he learned how to do this? Hannah no doubt took the exhortation of Deuteronomy 6:6-7 seriously:

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

It's one thing to say that our children are dedicated to the Lord; it's another thing altogether to give them to the Lord. That's the kind of love that Hannah had for Samuel.

Having presented Samuel to the Lord, placing him in the care of Eli, Hannah then offers a lengthy prayer of praise and thanksgiving. We don't have time today to plumb the depths of Hannah's psalm of praise, but let me point out that there is no element of sadness here at all.

- Having just dropped off Samuel at the Tabernacle, Hannah breaks out in praise.
- She was thrilled to be able to parent a priest little knowing that one day he would also grow to God's next prophet following Moses.

Listen to the opening of her prayer:

My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. "There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. (1 Samuel 2:1-2)

Here is the heart of a woman of faith who saw the power of God work in her life. He took away her barrenness and gave her a son. Instead of being sad about the circumstance of leaving her son behind at the Tabernacle...she lifts up her head and her heart and rejoices in the greatness of God

Hannah is an example of a woman of faith.

- She endures years of silent suffering because of her barrenness and the cruel harassment at the hand of her rival, Penninah.
- She still goes regularly to the house of worship, knowing how painful it will be.
- She faithfully worships, pouring out her tears and petitions.
- And when God answers her prayers, she not only keeps her promise, she explodes with praise.

Ladies, you are of great worth in God's sight whether or not you have a child. Lift up your head and realize that God loves you for who you are, not for what you do. He understands your sorrow and your pain and He'll meet you right where you are.

Mothers, make it your mission to give your children to the Lord and then raise them to live a lifetime of dedicated service. There's no greater purpose and no higher honor, than to have your children give their lives in surrendered service to the Lord of Hosts.

And concluding her part in the story, after Hannah left Samuel in the care of Eli, the Lord blessed her with three more sons and two daughters (2:21).

Now, as you continue reading through the book of 1 Samuel, you will discover that Eli had two adult sons, Hophni and Phineas, who were also serving as priests for the Tabernacle, yet they were evil and did some perverse and detestable things.

It's very interesting that their mother is never mentioned anywhere. We don't know if she died or if she was just not engaged as a parent. And while Eli warned his son of the graveness of their sins, yet he was unable to control them. Samuel, on the other hand, was greatly impacted by his mother, and went on to become one of the most significant individuals in God's redemptive history.

Both parents realize that you matter greatly to your kids and to the very future of our nation! If you want your children to learn about God and to grow up loving Him with all they possess, they must first see this devotion demonstrated in your life. It's got to be real in your life.

As we continue on in the story of Samuel, we can watch him grow in faith and power of the Lord as well as honor before the people. Scripture records...

As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. ` (I Samuel 3:19-21).

Sadly at the same time, because of the sins of his sons, we will watch the downfall not only of Eli, but the rest of the family related to him as well. Sin does have such destructive power in the life of a family. But this is a story for another day.

So in closing, what lessons can we take home from this story of Hannah and Samuel?

First, realize that even as dedicated believers, we will encounter real life problems; these problems can actually be gifts from God. Hannah was at first barren because God had intentionally closed her womb so that He may open it at just the right time; first with the birth of Samuel and then with five more children. (1:6, 2:21).

And Realize the power of intense prayer... turn to God in times of trouble and distress and pray... pray till something happens. Take a lesson from the postage stamp; it sticks to one thing till it gets there. In both your victories and trials, be a person of faithful prayer.

Also, be a person of your word. Honor your vows the Lord. Be faithful regardless of the problems in your life, knowing that God is walking with you even through the darkest valleys.

And finally, whatever your circumstances, be a person of praise. Praise sets the attitude of your heart. Choose to praise in spite of what's happening in your life.

These are things we should pray about and faithfully practice for the rest of our lives.