

1 Samuel 1-2v11

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: 24 April 2022

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] And turn to 1 Samuel, which is on page 225 of the Church Bibles. So a couple of things. We're going to kind of break one of the golden rules of preachers.

We're going to do the same series in the morning and the evening for the next few weeks. Partly, I want to try it. My old minister in Wales used to do it. It means that you can get through books quickly.

It's a very unsubtle way of encouraging you to come back on Sunday nights. And if you don't come on Sunday evenings, well, you can catch up. Online. Some of you will know of a commentator called Dale Ralph Davis.

And he has written anything he writes. Commentaries, anything he's put down on paper, his post-it notes are worth reading. And I've decided not to read his commentary on 1 Samuel.

Partly, it's so good that you end up just regurgitating it. So if you're disappointed with my 1 Samuel, do get hold of that book. We can get it on the bookstore. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

[1 : 01] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your life-giving word. And we pray that your Holy Spirit would be our teacher. We pray that these studies in 1 Samuel would change us to be a people who glorify you.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. We're introduced to a woman called Hannah. Right away. And Hannah knows both the sorrow of not being able to have children.

And then the joy that she can have children. In verse 2, can you look with me there? You'll see that Elkanah had two wives. The name of one was Hannah. And the name of the other was Penina. Penina had children. But Hannah had none. Infertility is a grief. Whatever time you live in.

But living under the old covenant, it was particularly grievous. You were the butt of jokes. You carried a great sense of shame. And in this setting, it wasn't as if she could blame the husband and a low sperm count.

[2 : 01] Because he married a second wife. And he had loads of kids. Her pain was her own. And some of you sitting here, listening to me this morning, know that pain.

You are single and you want to get married. And you haven't had the opportunity to do so. And so you haven't got the children that you've longed for. Some of you are married.

And the months have turned into years. And the years have turned into decades. And there's still no children. Others have married and had a child. And expected another would come quickly.

And it never did. And you don't know why. I read an article this week about male infertility. Men who can't have children. There was one man called Tony Tilbury.

And his wife Di. They spent \$150,000 on IVF. And they picked out names for a boy and a girl. Hoping that the child would come. They bought a new family house with three bedrooms.

[3 : 00] And a garden. There were good schools nearby. Tom said he even bought a can of coke that had dad written on it. I don't even like coke he said. And the natural expectation is that the child would come.

But the months have turned into years. Into decades. When he was asked what he would miss most. He said it's the photos. I can't take those little hand photos. You know.

The little hand holding the big finger. Another man said of his grief of possibly not having children. I think there will always be an empty room in my soul.

Always be a bit of a pang. And that saddens me. Well Hannah has that pang in this chapter. She's pouring out that part of her soul.

That is empty. And she's pouring out her soul to the Lord. And interestingly her barren womb. And that is how infertile women in the Bible are described. There's a long pattern isn't there.

[4 : 02] Of godly women. Often big turning points in the Bible. Happen around closed rooms. And that picture of a barren womb.

Was a picture of spiritually dead Israel at this time. So one Samuel just to locate it. It comes after the book of Judges. When God raised up those men and women.

To lead Israel. And they're about to move into the period of the rise of the prophets. And the rise of the kings. And the end of Judges describes what life was like. Really powerfully.

It says in those days Israel had no king. And everybody did as they saw fit. Israel had become the wild west of the Middle East. And they were out of control.

And they were in need of a God given king. That's really the story of one Samuel. We'll see this morning the priests were useless. Eli the priest.

[5 : 03] His sons would actually sleep with the temple groupies. They would take the part of God's sacrifice that they wanted. And eat it themselves. They were godless wretches.

They did as they saw fit. And this book of one Samuel. Is really in search of a king. A king after God's own heart. One who will lead his people.

And before you get there. You discover. That there's a woman after God's own heart. And from her womb will come a prophet. Who will be a king maker. And he will anoint just not one king.

But two kings. And he will anticipate the coming of the king of kings. So Hannah. A barren woman. But with a heart who's alive to God. Every year despite her grief.

She would go with her husband to the place of worship. Where the tabernacle lay. It was in a place called Shiloh. She was still worshipping God. On God's terms.

[6 : 03] As God had planned. And it's worth noticing. Hannah is not using her failure. Nor the failure of her people. And the sins of the priest. To keep her from worshipping God.

Can I say that again? Hannah is not using the failure of her people. And the sins of her priest. To stop her from worshipping God. She worships God.

On God's terms. She's a model of that. She's a woman in grief. And this chapter is littered with her grief. The grief of not having children.

For years the grief that she had. Of having to share your husband with a second wife. And he probably married the second wife. Because his first wife couldn't have any kids. The second wife. Every time Hannah saw her. Was a reminder that she was infertile. That she had to share her husband. And polygamy in the Old Testament. It seems to be permitted. But it is never promoted.

[7 : 03] And it is always fraught with problems. Like it is in today's passage. It is not the ideal of Genesis 2. Of one man, one woman. Before God. Reflecting Christ in the church.

But here we have a woman in grief. And her husband. Well he favors her. He gives her double portions.

But I am thinking the more that he shows favoritism to her. The more that the second wife is going to get jealous. Who then starts taking it out on Hannah. And so it is a kind of lose-lose situation.

And the fact that the second wife is so fertile. It seems like Elkanah, the husband. Only has to walk past her when she falls pregnant. It rubs Hannah's nose in it. And it adds to the shame again and again and again.

And then there is the provocation. Maybe you can identify it. But the intensity of what she is experiencing. Look at verse 6. The second wife says her rival used to provoke her grievously.

[8 : 07] To irritate her. Because the Lord had closed her womb. She is a nasty piece of work, isn't she? Look at verse 7. So it went on year by year. As often she went up to the house of the Lord.

She used to provoke her. The coming to Shiloh. To praise God. Became the moment of great sorrow.

You can only imagine what the rival wife was saying to her. What is the point of you going to pray and worship God? You are clearly under the judgment of God. You are sinner. The reason why you are infertile is because you have obviously committed some sins.

You deserve it. God is not going to hear your prayers. That is the kind of thing I imagine the second wife unloading on Hannah. And if that is not bad enough.

Hannah has a loving but incredibly insensitive husband. He can't work out why she keeps on getting so upset. So look at verse 8 with me. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Hannah, why do you weep?

[9 : 13] And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons? So men, if you haven't worked out what is wrong with verse 8, you need to come and see me this

week, alright?

Because your marriage is in deep, deep trouble. He is a classic example, isn't he, of how not to comfort your wife. He is saying to her, just get over it, darling.

How long are you going to keep crying? What is wrong with you? Don't you realize you've got me? He thinks, doesn't he, he's God's gift to women.

How come, he says, I'm no substitute for not having children. It is breathtakingly thoughtless. Mr. Insensitive Husband. And if that's not bad enough, she goes on still to worship God in Shiloh, to praise and worship him and offer sacrifices, to pray for her concerns.

And then when she gets to this point, the priest in the tabernacle, he thinks she's drunk, verse 12. 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.

[10:27] Therefore, Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, how long will you go on being drunk? Put away your wine. It's interesting that it probably was the custom that prayers took place out loud.

I remember reading how Augustine, the church father, saw Ambrose in the 4th century reading inwardly. His lips were moving, but he wasn't reading out loud, because it was the custom that you always read out loud, and it was the custom that you pray out loud.

And so, for her to be praying in her heart, just moving her lips, it was deemed to be unusual. She's praying inwardly. It's only the modern world that we do everything in our heads.

For centuries, Christians prayed out loud. Anyway, she's infertile. The second wife is mocking her. She's got a very insensitive husband, and the priest thinks she's drunk.

And then years, not days, not months, not weeks, but years of unanswered prayer. She knows the sovereignty of God. She knows that God is in control, and she knows that God has closed her womb.

[11:43] And so she feels that even God is against her. And with all of this, all of this, absolutely nothing, and no one is going to stop her knocking on God's door, and petitioning, and praying to him, and pleading with him.

And all she has is her tears, and her prayers, and she's coming to God. Now I just want to say, she is not afraid to feel the pain of life in a fallen world.

Some of us don't even get that far. Kind of stiff upper lip thing going on. We stop ourselves from feeling the wounds of life. We medicate ourselves.

We take a little denial trip. We live in a pretend Christian world, but I tell you, Christianity is not Buddhism. Buddhism denies suffering.

Christianity embraces it, not to enjoy it, but it understands that this life is not as it should be. And I need to turn this suffering, and this pain, and I bring it before my God.

[12:54] And that is biblical Christianity that you're seeing played out in 1 Samuel 1. It is real, it is robust, and it is honoring to God. One man who was interviewed in that article I read about men not being able to have children said this, I don't just accept it, but I'm not going to sit home and cry just because of something I haven't experienced.

But that's nothing like Hannah. Hannah is bawling her eyes out, and she's not ashamed of it. She's not afraid to recognize her grief, but to come before God in it, to cast her cares before him.

Look at verse 14 with me, and notice the language she uses to describe her anguish to the priest, to answer the fact that she's not drunk. Verse 14. Put your wine away from me, but Hannah had answered, No, my Lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit.

I've drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I've been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I've been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.

Out of my trouble and my grief. She knows that God has closed her womb, says it twice, and so she knows that God is the one that can open wombs. He's done it before, hasn't he, with the great wives of Isaac and Jacob.

[14:21] She's unrelenting in her pleading. She's like a dog with a bone, unrestrained in her emotions. She weeps bitterly in deep anguish and vexation. She pours out her soul.

So what is it telling us? It's telling you and I, this is the active living faith of a covenant keeper. Against a backdrop of faithless Israel.

This godly woman is shining out in a broken world. Crying out to a God who has made promises to her. And she's casting all her cares before the God of Israel.

She makes a vow. Normally the Bible discourages rash vows before God. If you make a promise before God, you better keep it. Her big promise was that if God grants her a child after years of pleading, she will give him back in service.

And so Hannah is committed to giving this child. This is the vow. No razor will ever touch this child's head. It's an illusion, isn't it, to the Nazarite vow. Where certain people within the nation of Israel, they were a holy nation.

[15 : 33] They were holy people, but there were certain people within Israel, like Samson the judge, who had taken on a Nazarite vow. And not one of their hairs would be cut.

Like John the Baptist, no wine would be drunk, but this child, she promises, will be like that. You kind of wonder, don't you, will he be returned?

And she's saying, no, Lord, I will give this child back to you. And God will take this child and use it for your service. So, for from this dead womb will come a faithful prophet.

A faithful prophet who will anoint a king after God's own heart who will anticipate the king of kings. But we're not there yet. We are here. And all we've got is a big promise, and talk is cheap.

When you're desperate, you'll say anything, won't you? Hannah is desperate. But would you really give him up? My friend was telling me last week about when his wife was in labor with their first son.

[16 : 47] My friend had just finished the first year of theological college. And as his son was being born, the umbilical cord was around his neck. And every time his wife pushed, the little fellow was getting strangulated.

So the heart monitor was going berserk. And the nurses were going berserk. And my friend was going berserk. It was his first year of Bible college. Whatever he'd learned that year in theological college and read in the Bible went out the window.

And my friend said he was bargaining with God. He was saying, Lord, let me fail every exam. Just let my son live. He was praying desperately. I'll fail every exam, but let my son live.

I said to my friend, you didn't pray for your own life, just your exams. Pretty hopeless, isn't it?

Anyway, this woman, she makes a vow and you wonder, will she keep it?

Remember, she's been hanging out for a child, hasn't she, for a long time. And she finally gets him. He's born. He's well. She calls him Samuel. And the very name reminds us that this is the result of one who asks God.

[18 : 00] He is the God who asks and you will receive. You knock and the door will be opened. And so year after year passes. And she doesn't come back to Shiloh.

She's back home. She's breastfeeding him. And it takes some time until he's finally weaned.

Weaned years of weaning. And then the moment comes. She's finished.

And she kept her vow. She takes her little boy back to Shiloh, to that priest who thought she was drunk. Back to that place of worship, to the place where she made that vow. And she gave her child in the service of God.

Look at verse 27. For this child I prayed and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord as long as he lives.

He is lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there. Now a side but really important point is that Hannah knows what every parent needs to know.

[19 : 08] That our children ultimately don't belong to us. She's an extreme demonstration of that. But you know that, don't you? Your children do not belong to you.

They are on loan to you. Your children belong to God. He has entrusted you with the privilege of nurturing them and loving them as ones who will have to give an account for the care and nurture of the ones entrusted to us.

But our children are on loan from God. It's very important to remember that, isn't it? Because if their life is cut short you won't become embittered towards God.

Because you will know that they are actually on loan to you. You will grieve and rightly so. Anything less than this is idolatry, isn't it?

There's nothing worse than turning something as good as family into an idol. So God has entrusted in his kindness to every mother here and grandmother children and grandchildren the same for fathers and grandfathers for you to care for.

[20 : 20] But understand your children belong to God. He made them. He judges them. He is the one who gives them life. And so here is Hannah and she worships God when her womb is closed.

And here is Hannah and she worships God when her womb is opened. And here is Hannah and she worships God when she hands back the child that she's waited so long for. She's not like some of us.

We ask God for something whether it's a spouse, a baby, a job, promotion, health, a house, and you get it and you use the very gift that God has given you against God. And against praising God with these people.

Don't do that. Don't after waiting for something and you get it throw it back in his face by ignoring him. Now I want to ask you three questions.

They're probably going to be the same three questions we ask in every sermon on 1 Samuel because I think they'll help us read the Bible and they'll help us ask the right questions. So the three questions are what is it teaching me about God, what is it teaching me about Jesus, and what is it teaching me about myself?

[21 : 26] So what is this section of 1 Samuel, chapter 1 and 2, teaching me about God? Now understanding 1 and 2 Samuel, there are three main human characters. Samuel, he is both a judge and a prophet and a kingmaker.

Then there's Saul, he's a bit of a disaster, we'll meet him in a couple of weeks. And we'll see the rise and the fall of Saul. And then you'll see David is replacement. And David is the king after God's own heart.

And he then implodes. That's the big picture. They are the human characters, the big characters. But God is the main character on every page of the Bible, isn't he?

So the question is, what is this teaching me about God? And it's interesting here, in Hannah's prayer, she uses a title for God that has not been used before, in fact. If you like trivia, there are four women who've written sections of the Bible.

And her psalm in chapter 2 is the longest stretch of words written by a woman in the Bible, if you like trivia. But can you see what she calls God?

[22 : 34] She calls God Lord Almighty. Lord Almighty. In the English, it doesn't stand out.

But it literally means the Lord of hosts. If you're from a Catholic background, it doesn't mean the wafer that you were given at Mass. Basically, the word host means army.

He is the Lord of angelic armies and earthly armies. In other words, Hannah is saying, Lord, you are in total control of heaven and earth. And you see, he closes rooms and he opens rooms.

He is in charge, I'm telling you. And so you can talk all you like about God creating the world and sustaining it by the word of his power, but unless you pray, you don't believe it at all.

You don't believe it. It's just a theoretical idea in your head. The only way that you demonstrate a genuine belief that you actually believe that God ultimately rules the universe is when you get on your knees and speak and pray.

[23 : 48] And Hannah knows that. In her song of praise, she identifies, like Mary will, a thousand years later in her song of praise, she will identify that he is the creator and he is the sustainer and he is the rock on which I build my life.

He is the revealer and he is the judge and he is the one who lifts up the humble, like Hannah in giving her a child. And he brings down the pride, like proud, like he do with Saul.

This is her God and this is your God and this is my God. And that is why we pray to him because he is in charge. Okay, what is it telling us about God?

The second question is what is it telling us about Jesus? A few weeks ago, I was in central London, I got the time of a meeting wrong, I was there about an hour early and there were Muslims handing out tracts at lunchtime.

And I had about an hour to kill so I thought, well, I'll have a conversation with them. And as we talked endlessly and they kind of berated me with questions, I said, guys, for your Quran to be true, the only way that you get to the Quran being true is because you believe the Jews messed up the Old Testament and corrupted it.

[25 : 09] Am I right? They said, yeah. And you also believe that we Christians, we took the New Testament and we messed it up and we corrupted it. Is that right? And what you're telling me is that 600 years after that, Jesus, 600 years after Jesus, the angel Gabriel appears to Muhammad in a cave and over a period of time he rewrites the whole story.

And you want me to believe that? I said, yeah. Rather than accepting God's word as it is revealed, as if God somehow third time got it lucky. That is very different from us as Christians. We do not change the Old Testament. I hope you don't believe that, that we change it. We see Jesus coming in fulfillment of the Old Testament. And so today's passage is a really perfect example of that.

1 Samuel will show us beautifully how Jesus fits in. So it's 1,000 years before Jesus. And what we're going to see now is we see the pattern getting fulfilled.

What you have here is a godly woman called Hannah. And she can't have children and she is in the place of worship and she is praying and she is told that she's going to have a child.

[26 : 28] And she gives birth to a son and he is a Nazarite and he will rise to be a great prophet who will then anoint not one but two kings of Israel. And if we know our Bibles that should ring a bell.

Because you press the fast forward button to 1,000 years and you go to Luke's gospel and in the New Testament in Luke chapter 1 you read that there is Elizabeth who is another righteous godly woman in her old age.

And she's unable to have kids. And the idea of her having children is off the radar. And she is told that she will bear a son. And her son will be a prophet of the Most High who will prepare the way and give men a knowledge of salvation.

And who comes along in the person of John the Baptist. And he is dressed like a Nazarite vow. And he comes along and he says of Jesus the son of David this is the king of kings.

This is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So do you see the pattern that is laid here? A woman infertile at the temple giving birth to a son who is a prophet who points to a king.

[27 : 42] And you think I've been here before haven't I? And so that means take note this baby really is Jesus the king of kings and the lord of lords. Don't you love that?

We're going to see it over and over and over again so much so that we're not going to have the time to look into it fully. So what is it saying about God? What is it saying about Jesus? And then lastly what is it saying to me and to you?

What is it saying a lot? I want to pick up on one thing that's impacted me. And I've said it to you before and I'm going to say it again that if you worship Jesus Christ let's be clear we don't pretend about our pain.

You can play that game if you want you can do that but it is not Christian. your inner world matters to God and he wants you to love him with your inner fallen world.

He wants you to take your inner world your inner brokenness your grief your frustration and he wants you to take them into prayer. So come with me to 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 7.

[28 : 52] Can you do that? Wake up the person next to you. It's on page 1017. So can you do it? And if you've got your own Bible I don't want you to write in a church Bible but if you've got your own Bible you can underline one word.

Alright? 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 7 it's on page 1017. Can you see this verse? It says, doesn't it? Casting all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Cast all your anxiety on him. Why? Why should you do that? Because he cares for you. The sovereign God who did not withhold his one and only son cares for you and if he did not withhold his one and only son will he not also graciously give you all things?

Of course he cares for you. But the way that you demonstrate that is what you do with your inner world and your brokenness. You see that with Hannah she in her brokenness she weeps bitterly. She pours out her soul. She really believes that God is both good and in control. Those are two powerful characteristics aren't they? He is good and he's in control. We see it in the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

[30 : 11] The great covenant keeper pours out his soul. He pours out his inner life as he faces the shame and scandal and scorn of the cross. He weeps blood such that is the stress that was on him.

He says, Father, let this cup pass from me but your will be done. There's no pretending. And so if God who becomes flesh won't pretend may it never be said of us that we pretend.

Leave the pretending of the other religions. And so whatever personality you've got wherever you come from this needs to be part of your Christian life. I'm not saying that every day you pray and you're in tears but when those things come upon you and they are grievous to you, whatever the issue, whether you're in the car or on the tube, whether you're kneeling at the side of your bed,

whether you're in the middle of a sermon or you're in school, cast your cares upon him because he cares for you.

Now just notice for me in chapter 5 and verse 7 if you're still there, how many cares? How many cares? How many cares? How many anxieties are you to cast upon him?

Verse 7, anyone? How many? Anyone? Pardon? I can't hear you. That's right, isn't it? Cast all your cares.

[31 : 36] Even the teeny weeny ones that no one else is interested in. Do you remember Claire Corcoran? She was great, wasn't she?

Claire Corcoran in this church. She used to ask me to pray that the Lord would help her to book a flight. She'd ask me week after week after week and I would get so frustrated.

I'd want to say to her, for goodness sake, just book the flight yourself. Don't waste God's time with flights. Just get on with it. But that corrects me, doesn't it, verse 7, isn't it?

What about the teeny weeny cares that nobody else is interested, that you don't come to your minister about because he'll tell you, get on with it yourself. God is interested in them. And that is a living, active faith.

So when the sickness comes and the marriage is hard and the singleness is grieving you and the infertility is overwhelming you and the guilt is battering you and the addictions feel overwhelming and the unemployment is discouraging you and the depression feels like it's killing you, the jealousy is eating you and the dead are destroying your life and you think your kids have gone off the rails, your co-workers are making life difficult, you've got a neighbor who's bullying you, whatever the story, your inner world has got to play itself out in prayer.

[32 : 52] And Halloween is telling us how it's done. And so wonderfully, before you get to a king after God's own heart, you get to a woman after God's own heart. Let me finish with this.

Don't wait for God to give you what you want before you praise him. And don't let the failures or the guilt or the failures and guilt of us as a church stop you from gathering and praising him.

He deserves it. Don't stop praising him once you get what you ask for. That happens too often, doesn't it? Hannah certainly didn't think about it.

Waiting for all that time for a child, finally she gets him and she keeps her word and she hands her young son, Eli the priest, to serve and be a servant of Israel. And in that moment of handing over, there's this beautiful song of praise and her response is just like Mary a thousand years later.

Her heart rejoices in the Lord. She's just handed over her son. And so she says this, at the start of chapter two, she says, my heart rejoices in the Lord.

[33 : 57] My horn, that's her strength, is exalted in the Lord and my mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation. Or to use a paraphrase, the message, I don't often recommend it, but here's what it says.

It says this, I'm bursting with God news, I'm walking on air, I'm laughing at my rivals, I'm dancing my salvation, nothing and no one is holy like God, no rock mountain like our God.

Don't dare talk pretentiously, not a word of boasting ever, for God knows what's going on. He takes the measure of everything that happens. Let the words of praise and the words of lament come from you.

And that is what it means to be in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.