

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Servants of God, Part 2

The Boiler Room

Charles Hadden Spurgeon was known as the *Prince of Preachers*. He was born on June 19, 1834 in the city of Kelvedon in England. At the age of 17 he was brought into the Kingdom of God, and immediately began preaching the gospel. At the age of 19, he was called to New Park Street Chapel in London — a ministry which for him spanned 38 years — he died at the age of 57.

One year at the peak of his success, he was giving a tour of the Metropolitan Tabernacle— a building which seated 6,000 — to a group of pastors. On this tour he began talking about the boiler room, which for him was quite amazing. He recounted how this room heated the tabernacle and so gave it its warmth. Without it, he claimed that their worship and ministry wouldn't occur. In fact, it was the most important part of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Perhaps out of curiosity or perhaps out of pity, the visiting group of preachers indulged Spurgeon as he insisted on showing them the boiler room. He led them down a long hallway in the basement of the Tabernacle to a door. He then stopped for a moment, opened the door, and said, “This... is the boiler room!”

As the preachers looked in they saw a group of men and women on their knees praying. This was Spurgeon's boiler room — an unseen, unthought-of of room which Spurgeon cited when asked about the success of the ministry of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Brothers and sisters, such is the nature of much of the ministry that occurs in the Kingdom of God. It is undervalued. It is unseen. Yet it is crucial!

Along these lines, the text we are looking gives us a description of four types of ministers in the Kingdom of God. Last time we looked at the first type — The Sincere. This time we are going to look at another type of minister — The Unseen! Let's pick up the text with, “Their Service.”

A Little Coat

1 Samuel 2:19, “Moreover his mother made him a little¹ coat², and brought it to him from year to

¹ קטן qatan

year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.”

As amazing as the book of Samuel has been up to this point, what is even more amazing is that this verse is recorded in Scripture at all!

Hannah is quickly fading from this book. In fact, this is the last time she is mentioned in Scripture. And thus the question we ask is, “Why is this even recorded?”

So she made his clothes; big deal! This doesn't further the story at all here.

Brothers and sisters, this would be true if all she was doing was darning his socks. But here we read that she was doing far more! Indeed, she was making Samuel's priestly clothes!

That is the nuance behind “little coat” in this text. The Hebrew is composed of two words which are rendered “coat or robe” and “little, small, or young.” Together we understand that in keeping with the large outer robes worn by priests or men of repute,³ Hannah kept her small but growing son dressed in the cloak or mantle of the priest — which was not an insignificant gesture.

You and I both know that the Old Testament is filled with imagery and nuances which proclaim a multifaceted message revolving around Christ.⁴ Accordingly, the dress of the priest had great significance. From his blue undergarment and the ephod that he wore to his outer robe all of it proclaimed a very loud message of God's greatness, Christ's atonement, and the grace and mercy of God by which He deigned to dwell among men! For example, speaking of the garb of the priest — which included his outer robe, Moses declared:

Exodus 28:2, “And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty.”

According to this verse, the purpose of the priest's dress — which again included the robe referenced here⁵ — was “for glory and for beauty.” In other words, it was to remind the priest and the worshippers of the “weightiness” of God — His Being, His worship, and His sacrifice. And it also was to proclaim that in and through it all, “God is beautiful!”

What an important message that needed to be proclaimed and heard in Samuel's day!

As we have seen and will continue to see throughout the opening chapters of this book, Eli's downfall was that he honored or glorified his sons above God.

1 Samuel 2:29, “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest [literally glorify] thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?”

What a sad day for the people of God! Through the practices and example of Eli, Israel regularly was taught that God is of little importance.

Indeed! If you are going to be concerned for anything, said the actions of Eli, be concerned for YOUR

² מעיל m@'iyil

³ Compare also 1 Samuel 24:5; 28:14; 1 Chronicles. 15:27; Ezra 9:3; Job 1:20; 2 Samuel 13:18

⁴ Compare John 5:39

⁵ Compare Exodus 28:31-35

family, reputation, well-being, stomach, and the many other things of this world. Never mind that in seeking these things, you trample underfoot the Lord!

And yet, God's glory wasn't the only thing dishonored by Eli and his household. Hophni and Phinehas also dishonored His beauty. Recall the words a few verses earlier:

1 Samuel 2:17, "Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD."

Do you remember the nuance behind this verse?

On account of Hophni and Phinehas, when the people of God contemplated the worship of the Lord, His covenantal love, and the peace offering — which is the sacrifice behind the "offering" in this text — they recoiled! Far from God's worship being the blessed means through which Israel fellowshiped with their Lord, on account of Hophni and Phinehas the people of God saw it as burden, and so they rejected it!

Now get this! In the midst of such rebellion and rejection of God, there walked a boy whose activity and dress proclaimed a very important message: God is both beautiful and glorious! In other words, as you looked at Samuel in that day, the message was proclaimed don't reject your Lord; trust Him! He is altogether beautiful! If you seek Him, He will let you find Him! .If you trust Him, He never will let you down!

Unseen Service

What a contrast!

At a time when God's beauty had been marred and His glory taken for granted, the little boy Samuel proclaimed a bold and powerful message! And yet just how did he proclaim it? Was it in what he said?

No! According to Exodus 28:2, it was from what he wore.

And how is it that he wore a dress that proclaimed such an important message?

It wasn't on account of Eli, his attendants, or the temple offering at Shiloh. No, if it was up to these resources, it is clear from the opening chapters of this book that Samuel would have gone unclothed! Rather, Samuel continued to wear a dress that proclaimed the beauty and glory of the Lord on account of his mother!

From this I hope you see the second type of Servant found in the Kingdom of God! Though unseen and disrespected by her peers, Hannah was directly responsible for the message being proclaimed through her son. Because she kept him clothed in his priestly garments, the message of God's glory and beauty was heralded at a dark time in the history of God's people!

And such is the ministry for many in the Kingdom of God — unseen, unappreciated, and undervalued!

Yet family of God, may I make the suggestion?

That is the majority of the gifts, callings, and ministries to which God has called us. Indeed some know the ministry of joy — as you have been given people who love you and whom you love. Others know the

ministry of sorrow — as you daily drink the bitter cup of suffering, sadness, and sickness. Yet I dare say that ALL OF US — whether you realize it or not — have been called to the Ministry of Ignominy!

We are called to the ministry of serving countless hours and never being recognized. We are called to sacrifice much without even a “Thank you!” We are called to pour our life out for that which the world deems to be unseemly! We are called to work countless hours without any indication that what you have done mattered! Indeed this is the man of John 9.

John 9:1-3, “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

Here we read of a man, blind from birth. We do not know his tribe, his city, or even his name. But this we do know that life for this individual would not have been easy. Immediately we think of the shame his parents must have felt as they — in keeping with the poor theology of their day — suffered under the “punishment of God” in the form of a blind son.

Consider his friendless childhood. Consider the abuse he no doubt would have known. Consider the abandonment even from his family that lead him to being a public beggar. Consider the continued ridicule, scorn, and suffering that would have been his as an adult, begging for bread.

And yet we learn here that all of this was a ministry ordained by God.

John 9:3, “Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

Do you see? He and his family were not being punished. They were honored vessels in God's kingdom chosen for the sole purpose of demonstrating the glory and beauty of the Lord!

Brothers and sisters let us become familiar with this man's ministry. The truth is while we may remember Paul, Peter, Luke, and John the norm for ministry in the kingdom of God is not that of the disciples whom we remember, but that of this man — a faceless, nameless, unknown whose service glorified God and yet has faded into oblivion.

Herein is the second type of servant in the kingdom of God — The Unseen!

The Reformation

In fact toward that end, I challenge you to name just ten men or women from the sixteenth century who didn't necessarily do great things, but simply professed faith in Christ. Include in your list the famous like Martin Luther, and his wife Katharine von Bora; John Calvin and his wife Idelette De Bure; Zwingli; Bucer; Knox; and Bullinger. I have given you eight names; can you give me just two more? I doubt it!

Amazing! And yet how many congregations like ours existed during the Reformation? How many congregations which included hundreds upon hundreds of men, women, and children who loved the Lord? And yet, you cannot name ten souls from that era who loved Jesus!

Do you understand what that means?

More than we know, as Christians we live in obscurity. The work of Angus and his wife during the sixteenth century to share Christ with their community has long been forgotten. Elizabeth who worshipped alongside John Calvin and who was known as a woman of great piety and grace... gone! Thomas and his suffering with ill-health- gone! Jane and her difficult marriage! Jacques and his dramatic conversion!

ALL GONE! And yet without these faceless and nameless individuals, there would have been no people with which to have the Reformation of the sixteenth century!

Listen! The Kingdom of God has advanced with little fanfare. It has most often advanced in obscurity. It has been advanced by people whom you and I do not know. This brothers and sisters is the historical norm.

Biblical Norm

And from 1 Samuel we see that this also is the Biblical Norm!

Do you understand that if it wasn't for God's choice to record Hannah's labor in this text, her ministry for the glory and beauty of the Lord would have perished along with her?

And yet, where would Samuel's ministry have been without Hannah? What would have happened to God's glory had she died after Samuel's birth?

I say to you: Samuel would not have been able to minister if it wasn't for Hannah and many like her. Ministry is enabled by men and women whose work has long since been forgotten, and yet who paved the way for the working of God's Kingdom.

I love how Pastor Don McCullough put it, in an article published years ago in Christianity Today:

My father recently retired after 36 years as pastor of Bethany Community Church in Seattle. Most readers of this column will have never heard of him: he wrote no books or articles, he had no television ministry, he offered no seminars on effective church leadership, and he rarely spoke in other congregations.

What John McCullough did was faithfully care for those entrusted to him... he loved [his congregation], praying and laughing and crying with them; my adolescence was embarrassed by his frequent public tears, but my middle age now sees them as watery witnesses to a compassionate heart.

He had his detractors, as any pastor does... But he kept his head down and his pace steady, staying true to his gifts and sphere of responsibility.

Evangelicals love their stars, lifting high on pedestals best-selling authors, conference speakers, television evangelists, and mega-church CEOs. But we would do well to remember that the church, for the most part, is nourished by unknown pastors who stay at it, day by day, in ordinary congregations of sinners who, by grace and prodding, are being slowly cajoled into sainthood.

This is why my father and those like him should be celebrated. At the heavenly awards banquet,

some who have enjoyed public recognition will no doubt be seated at the edges of the party, while the unheralded servants- the Army of the Anonymous, as Dad calls them- will be invited to places of honor.

As we stood together on the Acropolis in Athens, my father pointed to the Erechtheion, a beautiful structure near the Parthenon. The roof of the south portico rests on six statues. He said, 'Look, Don, the whole thing is held up by some nameless, unknown figures. A lot like the church, isn't it?' Indeed."⁶

Brothers and Sisters, this can and, I trust, will be written about each and every one of us here — for we are more like Hannah than Samuel. Let us be content to keep our head down and our pace steady. Let us stay true to our gifts and sphere of responsibility. Let us be found faithfully caring for those entrusted to us. Let us be found loving each other. Let us pray for each other. Let us laugh and cry together. And may we do so without presuming that our names will be remembered beyond this generation.

And yet, herein is the most amazing thing! While someday we will be forgotten. Everything we do will fade into insignificance to a world in love with its superstars. Nevertheless, as Hannah's name has been recorded in this book and so has not been forgotten so also our names have been recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life and so will never be forgotten.

And what that means is that while our ministry in the Kingdom of God is Unseen. We must never conclude that it is insignificant nor is it forgotten by the Lord. Indeed what we do today can impact eternity!

Accordingly, I ask you with what will you concern yourself this day? Pleasure? Possessions? The business deal? The worries of tomorrow? All of these are destined to be burned and forgotten! Or will you concern yourself with that which only will endure — the beauty and the glory of the Lord?

John 6:27, “**Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life**, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.”

Brothers and sisters this describes Hannah. And this is the work of the church- the Army of the Anonymous. It must be our heart beat!

Now from all of this you might be tempted to conclude that service in the Kingdom of God is bleak. After all we labor 70 years only to have it all be forgotten. While I'm thankful God will remember it, that is not much consolation today when I am tired, weary, worn out, and feel so alone! Yet nothing could be farther from the truth.

Visited by the Lord

1 Samuel 2:21, “**And the LORD visited⁷ Hannah**, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD.”

The focus of this verse is NOT the birth of many children — though in a Jewish culture that would have been seen as a great blessing. Rather, the focus is on the fact that Hannah was “visited” by the Lord!

⁶ Christianity Today, November 8, 1993

⁷ פָּקַד paqad

The word used here for *visited* references an oversight that shows concern. It speaks of the intimacy of pastoral care in which a person is “visited” by another and so is encouraged in their walks. It is an exhortation unto service. It is comfort. It is lifting up. It is support. In fact in the New Testament this concept is reflected in the exhortation that James gives:

James 1:27, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, **To visit**⁸ the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Do you understand the incredible result of Hannah's Unseen Service?

She was “visited by the Lord” such that what she needed to fulfill her call — which here included more children — was granted.

Again we must distance ourselves from any nuance of merit here. Hannah did not earn the circumstances that surrounded her, and thus she did not earn more children! Rather they simply accompanied her service in the Kingdom of God. It is like when we enjoy health on account of eating our vegetables.

Hannah’s children were the consequences simply of living in Christ. **INDEED, THE FOCUS AND PRIZE OF THIS VERSE IS NOT HER CHILDREN, BUT THE FACT THAT SHE WAS “VISITED BY THE LORD!”**

And so also is the promise that attends every Unseen Servant in the Kingdom today. You may NOT have children, or enjoy the length of days, or have a spouse and a home with a white picket fence. BUT if you live to proclaim and enjoy the beauty and glory of the Lord, you ever and always will be visited by Christ! And thus will you know the fellowship, presence, discipline, love, pruning, and joy of Christ.

Accordingly let me ask you, “Is there any better place than to be visited by the Lord?”

Oh what are honors? What are the ministries to which we attach our names? What are the positions to which we might aspire? And the many other worldly prizes after which we lust and long for?

They are NOTHING if they are without the shepherding hand — and thus the Presence — of the Lord!

And yet to be visited by God is to be rich, even though we are poor! I love how Samuel Rutherford put it:

“Whether God come to His children with a rod or a crown, if He come Himself with it, it is well. Welcome, welcome, Jesus, what way soever Thou come, if we can get a sight of Thee! And sure I am, it is better to be sick, providing Christ come to the bedside and draw by the curtains, and say, ‘Courage, I am Thy salvation,’ then to enjoy health, being lusty and strong, and never to be visited of God.”⁹

Such is the promise that attends the Ministry of Ignominy!

If we are content to be unknown, unseen, and forgotten but live only to proclaim and enjoy the beauty and

⁸ επισκεπτομαι episkeptomai

⁹ Letters of Samuel Rutherford, Letter #11, Page 52

glory of the Lord then God will grant us the greatest treasure of all... Himself!

And in the end, our work will transcend the grave and impact eternity!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 24, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.