

The Faithfulness of God

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This morning, I would encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Samuel 1 in the Old Testament and whether you've joined us today as a guest for a visitor, whether you're a long-term attender or you've been a member at First Baptist for decades, I want to welcome one and all to a new journey, to a new portion of scripture, the book of 1 Samuel. And as we go into the Old Testament, I think oftentimes there is, obviously, there's a chronological gap or distance but I think sometimes, particularly when we go back and read about these characters of thousands of years ago, that there is this unconscious thought that somehow the world they lived in is dramatically different than ours, and I understand they don't have the technology that we have access to, they don't have the innovation that we're so privy to in our world today, but one of the things that we discover is whether we're walking in the 21st century or we're going back 3,000 years in time, is that the problems of humanity have not changed over the years and who God is has most definitively not changed as well.

Today, as we begin a journey through 1 Samuel, we're going to over the course of the next weeks and months, be introduced to some of the most famous stories and characters in all of the Bible. After all, this is the book of the Bible where David with the slingshot and the small stones, defeats the giant known as Goliath. This is the book of the Bible where we discover what happens when that famous ark of the covenant is placed, shall we say, in the wrong hands. We're introduced to King Saul and David, there is a Samuel, there is Hannah. There's a host of famous characters but today we begin our journey in chapter 1. Those individuals have not arrived on the scene but what we discover is that the Israelites, the people of God, found themselves in a very perilous day, very similar to ours as well, and we discover that there was tension in the air, there was chaos that was all around them, but what did they discover, what do we desperately need to discover, is no matter what the environment we find ourselves and no matter how chaotic the situation or the scenario, that God has been, will be, and continues to be faithful in the midst of every season of life.

So as we turn to 1 Samuel 1, I want to actually pick up the story in verse 10, but let me give you a little back story. There's a man by the name of Elkanah, according to Deuteronomy 16, he's making a pilgrimage to the place of Shiloh to worship and to offer sacrifice. He has two wives, one by the name of Peninnah, one by the name of Hannah.

Penninah has a multitude of children, boys and girls, and Hannah is barren in the womb, and even though he claims that he treats her better than 10 sons would, she is not satisfied, she is not content with her place and her position in life. And so as we pick up the story in verse 10, she has gone into that place of worship, that house of God in Shiloh. There's a priest by the name of Eli who has two sons by the name of Hophni, and Phineas, who is watching her "worship experience." So as we pick up the story in verse 10, I want you to see her pour out her heart to God. I want you to see the tension, the chaos that is in the air. It says,

10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. 11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. 12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. 13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. 14 And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. 15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. 16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. 17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. 18 And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. 19 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. 20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD. 21 And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. 22 But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever. 23 And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him. 24 And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young. 25 And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. 26 And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD. 27 For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: 28 Therefore

also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

It's one of the most famous stories of the Bible but if we pull the layers apart, one of the things that we discover is that the situation that Hannah found herself in, though it was her story and it was personal, this barrenness, this promise of God, this child that was brought into her life, it is really a microcosm of a larger story that is taking place and it sets the tone for the rest of the stories of 1 Samuel. So today, I just want to walk through a series of basic questions whose themes we're going to see throughout the entirety of this study of this incredible book of the Bible, and the first aspect or concept is this: when does this story take place? We know when it happens in Hannah's life in relationship to her husband, but let's pull back for just a moment. Let's look at this historically. Samuel, the young man who was born in chapter 1, is going to be the last of the judges. He's going to be the last one whom the Lord has ordained to rule the people by way of a judge. Pretty soon they're going to become a people ruled by a king. Saul will be the first one, then David who we know well, eventually Solomon, then the kingdom will divide. Kind of one of the critical passages of 1 Samuel is found in chapter 8, verse 6. Samuel has grown, he's become a priest, he's become a representative on behalf of these very people, and they say, "Give us a king to judge us." The reason the time frame is important is because we see a culture, we see a community, we see a humanity that from a macro perspective is navigating themselves from being governed by God to being governed by the will of man, no longer desiring, "Thus saith the Lord," but saying, "We want to be just like the other people, we want to be just like the other nations." You can imagine the chaos and just as a brief commentary notice it says that Elkanah went up once a year, and lest we applaud him for his faithfulness, in Deuteronomy 16, he was actually supposed to go up three times a year. They had become a people and a culture that had become so watered down in their reliance and their trust in God that meeting one-third of the obligation was actually considered overtly faithful in their culture. So again, we're going from the judges into the kings.

So who is it that is involved and throughout the entirety of 1 Samuel there are a host of names that can easily come off of our tongues, whether it be Hannah, Eli, his two sons, Hophni, Phineas, Samuel, Saul, David, all these individuals and that is important and here's why: because the story of 1 Samuel is about a culture, it's about a people, it's about humanity drifting away from the person of God and into the things of the world. But these individuals, we see their story, we hear their story, we're a part of this story because in the midst of a faithless generation we see that God is always faithful to those who place their faith and trust in him. And so no matter what happens "on the outside," no matter what the environment, no matter what the culture may be propagating, promoting and celebrating, we see that God is always faithful to those who prioritize him in their respective lives. So there's these individual stories that are woven in the midst of this "bigger story."

The next question is where? Where does all the action take place? Well, in this passage it says they went to the house of the Lord. There is a sacrifice that is offered. There is a priest that is a part of, in fact, later, we're introduced to the activities of what we know as

the ark of the covenant, and here is the critical piece: that where God's faithfulness is found is where his presence is to be discovered. In other words, when we're in the "presence of the Lord," when we're walking with the Lord, when we're trusting in the Lord, then we discover that's where his faithfulness is always discovered whether the house of the Lord are on a battlefield with a young man by the name of David against Goliath. It doesn't matter where we "geographically" find ourselves, wherever the Lord is where he's directing, where he's guiding, where he's leading, his presence is where we find his faithfulness even in the midst, according to 1 Samuel, of a perverse and perishing generation.

So what is it about Hannah's story? What is it about chapter 1 that is so important for us to understand? Well, the first is a very particular aspect is that we discover that the plan of God is going to prevail. Remember, this was a woman who was distraught. She was heartbroken. She was bitterness of soul. In fact, her countenance was such that even Eli thought something was contrary, and one of the things that we need to desperately trust in today is no matter what we observe, no matter what we hear, there is a God who is in control and whatever his plan that has been established is going to come to fruition. In other words, in Genesis 12, he said Abraham and Sarah, he said the child of promise, whom we know is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is going to come from you. And even though there were some side stories and some back stories and some issues and people that came and people that went, what did we discover on a hill far away called Mount Calvary? There was one, Jesus Christ, who offered his life, who shed his blood as an extension of, as a continuation of that plan that got initiated all the way back in Genesis 12.

On the other side, if we can flip the proverbial script, the Bible says in the last days there will be mockers who say that he's not going to return. Can I share with you God's plan? God's plan is he is going to return. God's plan is he is coming back. God's plan is one day he will judge humanity based on a certain criteria, it's called his Son. That's his plan and his plan will prevail.

We see that in Hannah's story. We see that in the birth of Samuel. But we also see a picture of what godliness really is and what it is not. Let me call your attention to verse 13 through 16 of chapter 1. Hannah is going to pray. It's a prayer that I'm sure many of us who've either desired children, raised children, or had teenagers or even adult children have prayed at some point. Your heart is so heavy, your heart is so burdened that you can't even speak. Your lips move because your heart aches but no words come out. Do you find it interesting that according to the standards of the culture, this was a woman who most assuredly was out of fellowship with God? I mean, after all she has no children. She has not been blessed. Her womb has not been opened. Surely, she must somehow be on the outskirts and in Eli, I mean, he's the priest, this is a man who he wears the garments, he shows up to the right place at the right time every day, he says the right words, he's respected, he is revered, after all, all people come unto him. You see, on the outward appearance everything looks in favor of Eli but what do we discover? Who is the one who misdiagnoses in the story? It's Eli. Think about this. The "priests of God" could not discern the spirit of one who was praying in the house of God. We're going to

find out later in chapter 16 that Samuel, the one who's born in chapter 1, is going to be commissioned by God. He's going to go to anoint the king. Saul has rebelled against God, so the new king is going to rise up. He is sent to Jesse's house and Jesse has a basically has an entire farm league of ballplayers in his backyard. He's got a whole slew of guys and what does Samuel do? Begins with the oldest. Begins with the strongest. He goes to each and every one of them, finally he says, "I have not found the son." He says, "Jesse, the Lord said it would come from your family. Do you have any other children?" And can I paraphrase what the Bible says? "Well yeah, there's the runt out in the backfield with the sheep, but surely you don't want him." He says, "Bring him to me." And there is David. He places his hand upon him and the Lord says, "That is the one." He says, "For I am not like man who looks on the outside but I look upon the heart and the inner man." We discover in 1 Samuel you cannot always judge one's walk and/or relationship with the Lord based on how they present it on social media. Just because you quote Bible verses on social media does not mean that you are faithful to the Lord. Oftentimes it is those who just quietly and solemnly pour their heart out to God and navigate this thing called life.

But it's also very prophetic, and 1 Samuel is not just about going from the judges to the kings, it's not just about eventually this one known as David who will become so prominent in the story of scripture. In fact, I want you to fast forward into chapter 2. I know I didn't read it for the sake of time, but Hannah is going to offer a prayer. She's going to pray for Samuel. She's going to pray for the Israelites. And I just want to read verses 8 and 10 and to the best of your ability just kind of forget that it's 3,000 years ago. Just forget that Samuel is a young child, forget that you're quoting the Old Testament just for one moment. Verse 8 of chapter 2, it says.

8 He [the Lord] raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them... 10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

If I were not in 1 Samuel 2, I would think I was in the book of Revelation. That is a passage about the plan of God that one day how he's going to "wrap everything up." So as we walk through 1 Samuel, it's not just this navigation from the judges to the kings, it's not just a picture of what righteousness really looks like, not necessarily the outside but the inside, but we're going to see some very prophetic elements. We're going to see not only the coming Messiah in Jesus Christ, but we're going to see actually the end of the story woven in the midst of the story of 1 Samuel.

So why, why is 1 Samuel, why is Hannah, why is chapter 1, why is the birth of Samuel, why is it so critical for you and I? Sure, we can talk about the greater picture, we can even speak of its prophetic elements, but why, why is this something that needs to navigate us in the days ahead? Because it's very particular. One thing we need to make

note is this: that there is nothing that you or I can do to thwart the plan of God in our lives. I did not read the verses earlier, feel free to go back into the early part of chapter 1, but let me share with you what Hannah was subjected to. She had an adversary. She had another woman in her life who ridiculed her, made fun of her, mocked her, harassed her. The Bible says it was her adversary and, ladies, you know that when there's another woman who is your adversary, it is a cat-fight. It is. There is no peace. There is no love. You know, we made a show a couple years ago called "Sister Wives," why anybody would want to do what they did is beyond me. But, nonetheless, adversary. She's got a husband who, guys, can I just go ahead and admit this on behalf of all of us: we're not the brightest bulb in the chandelier. She comes to her husband and says, "Oh, that other woman is provoking me. She is driving me up the wall." He says, "Oh, why are you so upset? Well, obviously, yes,. Am I not better to you than 10 sons?" He just didn't get it, guys. She had an adversary that was against her. She had a husband that did not understand her and she had a priest who couldn't diagnose holiness if it was at the altar of the sanctuary. Guess what? It doesn't matter what others say. It doesn't matter what the world says, they can go out and promote it and celebrate it all they want. It does not change what God has put forth as his way, his will, and his word.

So we celebrate that even in a world that is chaotic, tumultuous and perilous at best, there is nothing that anybody can say that will change what God has declared and what he has advocated and what he says is going to take place. But it's also important for the picture that it gives us. In fact, you go back into verse 10 and we see Hannah began to pour out her heart before the Lord. I want you to notice, though, what it says at the end of verse 11, "If you will give unto thy handmaiden a man child, I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life." If you'll fast forward down to verse 28, she says, "Therefore also I've lent him to the LORD." One of the reasons that Hannah's story in 1 Samuel 1 is so critical for us is it shows us the difference between commitment and surrender. You see, when you commit to something, you sign up for it.

Now, let me give you a real-life example that has probably taken place in recent days in your life. You have gotten an e-mail, you've gotten an app request, you may have even gotten an old-fashioned piece of paper, mom and dad, for you to sign up to help with something at the school. And you commit to it until something more important comes up. You don't believe me? Ask any teacher that's in the room. You sign up, but you don't show up because more important things occur, more important matters come. You say it's not that big a deal because you are in control "of your schedule" and your time, but when you surrender to something or somebody, you're placing all control in their hands. In wartime when somebody surrenders, it's called unconditional for a reason. They don't get to negotiate the terms.

Here's what Hannah did, she said, "Lord, if you will allow this blessing in my life, he's yours." No parameters, no stipulations. How does this apply to our lives today? Can you imagine your walk with the Lord, can you imagine the faithfulness that God would have in your life if you say, "God, it doesn't matter what comes up that may appear more important, you're more important than that thing. It doesn't matter what opportunity comes on my schedule, being and celebrating and worshiping you is more critical than

that thing," whatever it may be. You see, we are great at commitments, we're horrific at surrender.

What do we see here? It's a picture. Hannah shows us how God is so faithful to us if we'll just entrust him with everything and not try to fit it in our schedule, into our conformity. And last but not least, it is prophetic. I mentioned chapter 8, verse 6 earlier. If you're able, if you'll fast forward a few pages and I want you to see what happens. The Lord has established judges but in verse 6 of chapter 8, the statement is made, "But we would have a king to rule over us." Why is this important? Because as an entity, as a family of faith, even as an individual, one of the greatest temptations in a perilous, chaotic, carnal, secular world is to cave to the idea that we need to look like the world, sound like the world, and act like the world. Why did they want a king? Because they wanted to be just like everybody else. What does the Lord say? He goes, "You realize if you do this, listen, they'll take your children and they'll take your money." Is that not what has happened? Every time we the people of God decide to put our trust in something other than God, what does it take? It takes our children and it takes our money. Today standing before you was a group of parents saying, "World, you can't have our kids. You can't have them. We will raise them as God has desired." May that be our declaration because it is so tempting to say, "Do you know what? It's hard doing it God's way. Let's just do it the world's way. I mean, after all it's being promoted, it's being celebrated, it's easier and financially it's more beneficial."

Do you see the bigger picture here? The struggle of our lives is do we do it God's way and trust his faithfulness when we cannot see his hand, hence, Hannah, or do we cave to the world like Eli did in chapter 1, and like the rest of them will do in the remainder of the story? At the end of the day, we have a very important and yet difficult choice to make, is will we do it "God's way" or will we do it the world's way? Let me remind you chapter 14 of the gospel of John, Jesus made this very declarative, very politically incorrect statement, he said, "I am the way, I'm the truth and I'm the life, and there is nobody who comes to the Father but by me."

Let's pray with their heads bowed, our eyes closed. Maybe today as we gather in this place, whether in person, online, or even listening on the radio, and maybe you're that individual who realized when the Spirit of God took the word of God today that your faith, your trust has been in anything but the Lord himself. Maybe today is the day where the Lord got ahold of your heart like he got ahold of Hannah's heart, and maybe today's the day where you pour out unto him. The Bible says in Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It doesn't say whoever joins a church, it doesn't say whoever takes a course or passes a test or jumps through a hoop, it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. Maybe today much like Hannah here in 1 Samuel 1, there may not be any sound come off of your lips but maybe your heart needs to cry out unto the Lord. Again, a heart's cry, it's not about a certain series of word, it's not about a prescriptive declaration, it's about your heart pouring out like Hannah did unto the Lord. Maybe today, maybe your heart's cry would be something like this. "God, today I recognize that, God, I've done it every way, but your way. God, you have been faithful to me in spite of all but God, I have sinned, God, I have been places I had no business being. I've done

things I had no business doing. I have said things that should have never come out of my mouth. And Lord, you know I have thought things that should have never been between my ears. And God, I recognize your word says the wages of sin is death, but it also says that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Today, I believe that. I believe, Jesus, that you loved me so much that you were willing to come on my behalf. God, I believe, Jesus, that you loved me so much you lived a sinless life on my behalf, you were willing to die a sacrificial death on my behalf, you were willing to raise from the dead so that my sins could be forgiven and my soul could be saved. God, today my heart's cry is that you would forgive me and you would save me. God, I don't know how to fix all the problems of this world, all the chaos of this world, but I know that Jesus Christ alone can fix my sin problem. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With your head still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe you're that individual today who cried out unto the Lord. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us, we're going to stand and sing and I want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We've got a team of individuals who want to hear your story, pray with you, pray for you, and maybe today it's about that initial heart's cry, and maybe today it's about other issues that have come up or wanting to be a part of this incredible family of faith, whatever it may be, we just want the privilege of hearing your story and praying with and for you.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, God thank you, thank you that in the midst of an evil and perverse, perilous and chaotic world, we have stories like Hannah's. We see that you are still faithful to those who cry out to you, that you're still hearing those who pour their hearts out to you. God, today whatever the decision may be, whether it requires us to step out and step forward, or simply walk in obedience when we leave, today may we be more interested and more concerned with what you have spoken to us than what the world is promoting all around us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.