

Telescopic Prayer

1 Sam. 2:1-10

(preached 3/11/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

Before we left for seminary, I operated a vending and cleaning business.

The vending part of the business was made up of various vending machines that I was responsible to keep stocked and keep running.

The machines were placed in the 4 different breakrooms of two businesses.

We owned coffee machines, drink machines, and snack machines.

Half of the snack machines were for larger items like sandwiches and biscuits...

While the other snack machines were for smaller items..

Chips, candy bars, gum, cookies, etc.

In order to keep the machines stocked, I had to purchase the items in bulk.

Interestingly enough, the cheapest option at first was to simply go to Sam's and purchase large boxes of chips, gum, cookies that were individually wrapped.

So, at least once a week, if not twice, I would go to Sam's Club, grab a big cart and fill it up.

And if I timed it just right, I could usually eat lunch for free.

Because at Sams and I assume at Costco as well, they place people at the end of the food aisles with samples of items that they sell.

And if you hit it just right, you can end up with 6 or more food samples that will often satisfy your hunger if you make at least two trips to each one.

So, I would grab a sample from each on the way into the store and then grab another on the way to the register to check out.

And what is the point of these samples?

Simple, to get you to buy the product that the store sells.

They give you a little taste and that convinces you to buy the whole item.

That is why some of you ladies get dishwashing soap samples in the mail.

Or laundry detergent samples.

Or you find samples of perfumes in magazines.

The aim of the company is that a small trial will lead you to buy their product and make you a loyal customer.

And it is an obviously successful strategy because this idea is still practiced today.

Well, tonight we come to Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving to God in 1 Samuel 2.

We are only going to look at her prayer tonight that is contained in the first 10 verses.

And in her prayer, we are going to see this idea of how a sample can lead a person to want more.

Because Hannah is going to go from the sample of how God worked in her life to the greater truth of how God works in the world to the greatest truth of how God will prevail in the end.

The little picture that God painted in her little world is a sample of the picture that God is painting in the entire world.

And that is the correct response to seeing God at work in your life.

God's faithfulness to you is not meant to make you look special.

God's faithfulness to you is meant to make God look special.

God's goodness in your life is not meant to show how wonderful you are.

God's goodness to you is meant to show how wonderful God is.

One of the greatest challenges to growth in the Christian life is to get people to move beyond their own little world.

Because of the fall, we have tunnel vision.

And what I mean by that is that our flesh only wants to focus on our life.

Our schedule.

Our needs.

Our jobs.

Our finances.

Our wants.

Even after salvation, we are still tempted to keep ourselves at the center of the universe.

That is why we get upset when someone treats us unfairly.

Or our day is thrown off schedule by some inconvenience.

We want everything in our life to run smoothly according to what we want.

In the center of the universe disease and it affects all of us.

It is obviously worse in the lives of unbelievers, but I see it infect my own life and I see it in the lives of other believers as well.

Even when we experience the blessings of God, our natural tendency is to not to praise God for it...

But to say in the depths of our heart that we somehow deserved His blessing.

Often times, we forget the Who of the blessing and simply enjoy the What of the blessing.

Well, Hannah is going to teach us all something tonight.

Because in her prayer of thanksgiving to God.

She goes from the small sample of God's goodness in her life and makes much of God instead of making much of herself.

She starts her prayer in her own little world, but she quickly leaves that world behind and moves to the God of the entire world.

And she sees His little answer to her little problem in her life and realizes that God has the biggest answer to the world's biggest problems.

And that is a right way to view our situations in life.

Sure, God works in our little lives.

He hears and answers our prayers, but all of his work in our lives is not designed to make much of us, it is designed to make much of him.

And so let's take a closer look at this prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2..

I divided it into 3 parts...

In verses 1-3, we will see How God Worked in Hannah's Life...

In verse 4-8, we will see How God Works in the World..

And then we will finish up in verses 9-10 with How God Will Work in the End...

So, let me read this first section of Hannah's prayer in verses 1-3 of 1 Samuel 2...

This is the story of....

I. How God Worked in Hannah's Life (2:1-3)

Before I read this, let me just remind us of the context of 1 Samuel 2...

The nation of Israel is in the land.

They are being ruled by judges at this point in their history.

It is a time of sin and rebellion in the land.

Israel sins. God judges. Israel repents and God sends judges to deliver the nation from judgment.

And then the story repeats.

Sin – Judgment – Repentance – Deliverance.

And when we looked at 1 Samuel 1 last week, we met Elkanah, who was a Jewish man who lived during the time of judges in Israel's history.

His family situation was not according to God's design for marriage because Elkanah had two wives.

One was named Peninnah and the other was named Hannah.

Elkanah loved Hannah more but unlike Peninnah, Hannah was unable to have kids.

So, in chapter 1, Hannah prayed for a child and God answered her prayer and gave her a son named Samuel.

Hannah then gave Samuel back to the Lord to serve him in the tabernacle at Shiloh.

And when we get to chapter 2, Hannah is going to offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for answering her prayer.

And before we even get to the text, maybe the lesson for many of us is that we simply need to be reminded to thank the Lord for his blessings to us.

The reality is that today, March 11, is thanksgiving day for each and every one of us.

Because there is plenty to be thankful for today.

And I know we would all acknowledge that to one another..

But do we say that to God every day?

Do we offer our thanks to Him every day?

Is that a part of your regular prayer life with the Lord?

Are you offering as many thanks to Him as you are offering needs to Him?

My grandmother was constantly reminding me to say thank you to people when I was growing up.

And why did she constantly have to remind me?

Because “Thank you” does not come naturally.

We like to think of ourselves as people who can take care of our problems without any help.

We handle our problems.

In fact, people brag about the fact that no one helped them get where they are in life.

You heard people say it, “I made my own way in life.”

The simple truth is no you didn’t.

If not for God, you would last another second on this earth.

But that independent attitude causes us to forget to say thanks.

Because when you say “Thank you,” it is an admission of dependence.

It is an indication of gratitude to someone else other than you.

And Hannah was quick to offer her thanks to God.

And she begins her prayer in verse 1 like this....

2 Then Hannah prayed and said,

***“My heart exults in the LORD;
My ^[a]horn is exalted in the LORD,
My mouth ^[b]speaks boldly against my enemies,
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.***

² “There is no one holy like the LORD,

*Indeed, there is no one besides You,
 Nor is there any rock like our God.
³ “^[c]Boast no more so very proudly,
 Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth;
 For the LORD is a God of knowledge,
 And with Him actions are weighed.*

In these first few words of her prayer, Hannah is offering thanks for her situation in particular.

MY heart exults, which simply means my heart rejoices...

MY horn is exalted...

Horn is a reference to her strength.

Horns and antlers are symbols of pride in the animal world.

And Hannah's reference to her horn is saying that all her strength to endure was from the Lord.

Remember, she has been ridiculed by Peninnah and others because she cannot have children.

And her strength not to strike back at them has come from the Lord.

In other words, her ability to endure came from her God.

Then we see MY mouth speaks boldly.

Hannah can now boast in her ability to have a son,
but her boasting is not sinful...

Because it is not boasting about her own ability, it is
boasting about God's ability to give her a son...

***Let him who boasts, boasts in the Lord. (2 Cor
10:17)***

Boasting is not sinful as long it is boasting in the
Lord.

And Hannah begins her prayer about herself...

You see MY, MY, MY, I...

And even though she is talking about her situation,
she is using it to draw attention to the Lord.

She then describes God in verse 2...

As one of a kind.

There is no one like God.

No one is holy like God.

No other god is a Rock like God.

He is dependable.

He is trustworthy.

He is sure.

And then after her boasting in God, she warns others of not boasting in themselves in verse 3...

Listen to this simple sentence.

Bob was HAPPY.

Now listen to it again..

Bob WAS happy.

I said the same thing and I meant two different things.

One stressed the emotion and the other stressed when Bob was happy.

Now listen to these two sentences.

God has blessed me with a wonderful home.

God has blessed me with a wonderful home.

Is it possible for two different people to say that sentence, and one of them be filled with boasting and the other be filled with thanksgiving?

Sure, but how would you know?

Well, you couldn't know for sure because only God is able to look into the heart and see the motivation behind the statement.

But that is what Hannah is saying here about her situation.

God is a God of knowledge.

He knows the motivation behind the words we speak.

In Hannah's situation, he knew the evil behind Peninnah's constant insulting of Hannah.

And he also knew the motivation of Hannah's prayer for a son.

Could Hannah have went to God and prayed for a son with selfish reasons?

Oh sure, she could have asked for a son just to shut up Peninah, but God knew the heart behind her prayer.

And he answered it because she asked with the right motivation.

God is a God of knowledge and he knows the heart behind all of our actions.

That should be a scary thought if you are motivated by the wrong reasons.

But it should be a comforting thought if you are motivated by the right reasons.

People often worry about praying in public.

They are scared that what they say will be judged by everyone there.

My counsel has always been to speak to the Lord from your heart in those situations.

God honors that prayer even if you mispronounce words or pause or stutter or even lose your train of thought.

However, the prayer that dishonors the Lord is the prayer of someone who wants others to hear how eloquent his speech is...

Or wants to boast in his knowledge of the Bible...

Or wants people oohing and ahhhhing over his prayer...

The Pharisees were masters at that and so are some people in churches today.

They pray from a prideful heart, and the Lord cares nothing for what they say.

The principle of verse 3 is that God KNOWS your heart, so make sure your actions are motivated by a heart that desires to please Him and not yourself.

That brings us to verse 4 and Hannah's prayer gets a little wider scope...

She has started her prayer by talking about God had worked in her life...

And now she moves to...

II. How God Is Working in the World (2:4-8)

Verse 4 and 5...

⁴ *“The bows of the mighty are shattered,
But the feeble gird on strength.*

⁵ *“Those who were full hire themselves out for
bread,
But those who were hungry cease to hunger.
Even the barren gives birth to seven,
But she who has many children languishes.*

Hannah’s prayer becomes a list of opposing forces in the world..

The mighty are defeated and the weak are strong in verse 4.

Those with plenty become those in need, and those who are hungry are filled in verse 5.

And the childless get children, while those with children find misery.

And in that short section of her prayer, Hannah unlocks an incredible mystery of how God works in the world.

He doesn’t use the strong; he uses the weak.

He doesn’t use those who rest in their abundance; he gives an abundance to those with nothing.

The Bible is full of this truth.

Moses can't talk without stuttering so God made him a preacher.

Joseph is the most despised of his brothers so God set him over all of them.

David was the runt of the litter, so God made him a king.

And the point of all that is not to hope that we are defective...

But is it to point to the need for humility and dependence upon God.

God opposes the proud...

You think you got it all under control in your own wisdom and strength and power?

God has no use for the person who has confidence in themselves.

But God gives grace to the humble.

You want to be blessed by God?

Come to the point where you realize and admit that He is all you have.

That He is all that you have ever had.

That everything that you own has come from his hand.

That every honor that you have received is a result of what HE has done.

Then you will find the humility that God requires of you to be used by Him.

And then Hannah's prayer to God is a praise of His sovereignty in the world.

God is not just in control the events in Hannah's life, he is sovereign, or in control, of all the events in the world.

After 9/11 and other natural disasters, there was a common answer to the question of "Where was God on 9/11?"

The common response from pastors on most new shows was this...

Well, God was caught by surprise of the events of 9/11.

God had no idea that it was coming.

Or even this...

"God is a gentleman, he wouldn't interfere in the events of that day.."

IT was like pastors almost felt the need to apologize for God.

As a way of preventing people from being angry at God over what happened at 9/11 or whenever disaster strikes.

I got the felling that pastors were almost apologizing on God's behalf.

Two things I say about this...

First, unbelievers are already angry at God, so don't misrepresent who God is hoping that they will now like Him.

The truth of any disaster or tragedy is that God had full knowledge of it before it ever occurred.

He is not caught by surprise.

He is not acting like a gentleman by not interfering.

God is never responsible for evil, but he is never helpless against it either.

Evil is the result of a fallen world, but God uses it for His purposes.

Look at Hannah's view of God's sovereignty in verses 6-8...

***⁶ "The Lord kills and makes alive;
He brings down to ^[d]Sheol and raises up.***

***⁷ "The Lord makes poor and rich;
He brings low, He also exalts.***

***⁸ "He raises the poor from the dust,
He lifts the needy from the ash heap
To make them sit with nobles,
And inherit a seat of honor;
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
And He set the world on them.***

God is in control over life and death.

He is in control of wealth and poverty.

He is in control of fame and no fame.

He raises the needy and lowers the one who thinks they have no need.

There was a basketball player in the 1980s and 90s by the name of Manute Bol.

He was 7'6" and he could actually dunk the basketball without jumping.

He could simply stretch his arm up and put the ball in the goal without leaving the ground.

And that is a picture of God's reach in this world.

He never has to leave his throne, yet everything in the world is under his sovereignty.

And Hannah has reasoned in her heart...

If God can fill my womb with a baby, what is beyond his control?

And her answer is this...Nothing!

And she is right..

God is sovereign over all the events in this world from the worst to the best...

From the small to the large.

From the greatest to the least.

And Hannah admits that incredible truth in her prayer by describing how God currently works in the world...

And that leaves one final part of her prayer..

Hannah looked at How God Worked in Her Life..

Then she described How God Works in the World.

And that brings us to the final part of her prayer....

III. How God Will Work in the End (9-10)

Verse 9...

*⁹ “He keeps the feet of His godly ones,
But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness;
For not by might shall a man prevail.*

*¹⁰ “Those who contend with the Lord will be
shattered;
Against them He will thunder in the heavens,
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
And He will give strength to His king,
And will exalt the ^[e]horn of His anointed.”*

Growing up, I was always the smallest boy in my class...

And that meant that all of my friends were bigger than me...

And we all picked at one another regularly as boys do..

But one day, I remember that my jabs went a little too far, and one of my bigger friends grabbed me in a head lock...

And told me to hush.

It was a friendly reminder that he was much bigger than me and could really do me harm since I was so small.

Well, there are two options in that situation...

Fight back or beg for mercy.

Hannah reaches the ultimate conclusion when she sees God's sovereignty and power...

God is going to win in the end...

Fighting back and contending against such power in hopeless...

And that is what she says in verse 10...

Those who contend with the Lord will be defeated.

While those who trust in the Lord will be kept from destruction.

That is the story of the end.

God prevails over evil and he shatters everyone who has fought against Him.

And God will then set his king over all things.

And what is her prayer a prophecy of?

It is a prediction of God's great white throne judgment and a preview of Jesus setting up his throne forever and ever.

And can I tell you something?

Hannah hit it right on the head.

That is where the world is headed.

The wicked are on a collision course with God with the righteous will be preserved to the very end.

And how did Hannah reach this conclusion?

Because she saw the power of God to hear and answer her prayer by giving her a son.

You don't need this incredible sign from God in the sky to understand that HE is real and powerful and sovereign in this world.

You simply need to look at the events in your own life.

Acknowledge God's hand in them.

And fall on your face and beg for mercy from him.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, we live in a world and even see churches that depend so much on miraculous signs to know that God is real.

People want experiences.

They want the hair on the back of their neck to stand on end.

They want goosebumps.

They want incredible stories so that they can prove that God is real.

Every once in a while, someone will show a piece of toast with Jesus' face on it and they will claim that it is a sign that God is real.

No, it is a sign that you need a new toaster that won't burn your bread.

You don't need the unexplainable to prove God's existence..

You simply need to see His grace in your life from the very beginning.

Hannah went from barren to pregnant and she realized that a God who was that powerful must be real....

Must be sovereign....

And must win in the end..

And she was right...

We will be well-advised to see God in the everyday events of life...

Rather than wish for him to prove himself in the extraordinary events in life....