

Hannah

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[0 : 00] So, like us to continue looking at some of the women of faith in the Bible, by looking at the life of Hannah, and maybe particularly an emphasis that she has in one of her prayers or in her prayer.

But I just wanted to go through our story a little bit this evening to remind ourselves that the Bible deals with people's real issues and doesn't ignore them, doesn't pretend they don't happen, doesn't minimise them and think they're insignificant.

And that is important for us. Because Hannah, I know her culture and her situation and her time in the world is very different from ours, but it is a human story with elements to it that we can appreciate as people one way or another.

She had a bitter experience. She was going through a bitter experience in her life. She was in that situation which God never envisaged for his people, that she was one of two wives to the one husband.

And she in the marriage was childless and the other woman in the marriage was able to have and had children.

[1 : 32] And that caused great consternation for her because it was something that brought her great mockery in her life.

And so she was bitter, bitterly sad in her life, taunted, not understood by her husband who was crass in his words of comfort.

But Hannah, you have me, I'm better than ten sons. Husbands is the wrong thing to say.

And that was absolutely the wrong thing to say. She was not understood by him and her identity and her loneliness and her depression and her downcast spirit meant that she almost felt forgotten by God and struggling in her life.

A very ordinary person, a very ordinary person with trials, with difficulties, difficulties that maybe weren't understood by people around or were understood and were made a point of mockery and derision by other people and many times in your life and in my life we can associate maybe not with her specific issue but with trials and with difficulties and with rejection and with fear and with depression and with a sense of being feeling forgotten by God.

[3 : 18] And the turning point for her very much was when she went to the temple and she prayed. She took these concerns, she took her bitterness of soul, her weeping, her struggles, her difficulties, she took them to the Lord in prayer.

And she spoke to Elie, prophet, she spoke to him. She was praying so fervently and so passionately and so emotionally, he thought in chapter 1 verse 13 and 14 that she was drunk and she said, I'm not drunk, I'm pouring out my heart before God.

He explained, she explains to Elie what is the issue and Elie says, go in peace and may the Lord God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.

And at the same time she made a vow to God that if God answered her prayer that this child that she would bear would be given back to the Lord.

She wouldn't keep him in the home, he'd be given back to the Lord and would serve the Lord in the temple all his days and of course that became the case with Samuel.

[4 : 38] And in so doing, making this vow before God, a free will, voluntary act of surrender where she took what she wanted most in life and said, I am willing to give that up to God and I'm willing to give that to God in service, that is where she found her peace.

And that indeed is where she found answers to her prayers, so willingness not to allow that embitterment to continue, not allow that to remain the source of her being, to remain her identity or her lack of identity, but to hand it over to God and to say you have this child.

If I receive this child, you have him. That made a huge difference in her life. That was a vital turning point. Now probably all of us in our lives have different issues, maybe around relationships, maybe around children, maybe around people, maybe around other things, spiritual concerns, but there are always, and it may be that we're embittered by them.

There's always a vital turning point in life, very important, significant vital turning points and I wonder what it will be in yours and what it might be in mine.

Are we going to be those who take these bitternesses and these troubles and turn away from God? Or do we turn like Hannah here? Do we turn towards God?

[6 : 11] And at the same time, do we speak to another believer in a way that she was able to speak to Eli and unburden herself before him?

And are we able to vow in our lives that whatever it may be that is our burden, our unanswered prayer, our greatest longing?

Can we make the same vow to commit our lives to God in Christ and give Him everything and leave these issues with Him? Because Matthew 16, 26 just reminds us of that challenge that we are given by Jesus Christ Himself.

When He says, whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good is it for a person to gain the whole world and lose their soul? So there's that same sense in which we need to vow before God that whatever it is that is embittering us or in which we are finding our identity outside of Christ, we are able to take that and leave it with Him and say, I leave that with you and I give you my life and I die in order to live and I give in order to be given and I leave it there.

That great will of giving it all over to Jesus Christ. And that is a hugely significant important thing.

[7 : 34] As is also, I believe, speaking to other people about that and speaking to people in the body of Christ. As in this very kind of symbolic way, she spoke to Hannah, spoke to this representative of God.

I think we have a responsibility and a privilege of speaking to others and burdening ourselves to others, not just to God about our greatest needs.

Interestingly, Mez McConnell from Nidra Community Church, he writes a blog and he writes prolifically because he sleeps very little because he is so unwell and bears so many physical burdens, but he thinks a lot and is able to write when he's unable to sleep.

And he asked a very provocative question in one of his blogs about the kind of people that come to Christ in his community and he says, is Jesus enough for them? Now, he wasn't meaning for a moment that Jesus is not sufficient.

He wasn't for a moment saying that you're justified by anything other than Jesus, but he was asking the question because some of us feel that all we need is Jesus alone in our lives and we don't need to unburden ourselves, we don't need to be dependent on others and we don't need the body of Christ and the body of Christ doesn't need us.

[8 : 53] But Jesus is the head of his church and the church is his body and he chooses to use his body to enable Christians to be transformed and to grow in grace and to mature.

In other words, if there's someone with deep social and psychological and spiritual needs and they come to faith in Jesus Christ, do we say, well, that's fine, that's them done, but God's healed them and do we not bear our own recognition of the responsibility of loving and embracing and bringing them into the family and working through some of their deep-seated spiritual issues because God has given us that responsibility.

He says that is ours. Of course, Jesus Christ is enough, but he chooses to use his people and the churches where people don't care and where there isn't genuine love that stems from an understanding of the holiness and grace of God, then those who are in great need will not stay in a place like that.

They'll move on because it's too self-interested, it's too self-absorbed, it's too uncaring, too many issues, too many burdens, too many needs and yet we find here this great example that the turning point was her relationship with the Lord in prayer, her unburning herself before Eli and the vow that she made.

She surrenders to God and her running stops. She stops running and she finds her peace as she leaves. She went and ate something and her face was no longer downcast, we're told, at the end of chapter 1.

[10 : 46] She's gifted the great child Samuel. The name meaning God has listened and this prayer that we look at is the prayer of rejoicing in her giving him over to God.

Very often we grudge, don't we, giving our lives to God, giving our all to God. We do so sometimes grudgingly, sometimes unconvincingly and don't you think it must have been difficult for her to do this?

Having longed for a child for so long, but yet she hands him over with delight, my heart rejoices in the Lord, a great attitude, a great recognition of the perspective of her life and a great act of faith.

And rejoicing is so important and significant when we understand who our God is. It is easy to drag our feet, it is easy to struggle and it is easy to do everything with a grimace, but he wants us to do even the hardest things, even the 100% committed things, even the giving our life and soul over to him wholeheartedly with joy, recognizing that we put ourselves in the hand of the great God.

So very briefly, her confession of faith and her testimony in prayer speaks of in verse 2, there is no one holy like the Lord, there is no one beside you, there is no rock like our God.

[12 : 26] And I just want to think for a few minutes of this statement, there is no rock like our God, because we can take that and we can, her testimony, her experience from her life and we can recognize it and apply it in our own lives, particularly as we sit, I hope as we sit in the peace and quiet of the evening at the Lord's Supper, the Lord's table, that we can just meditate on God being your rock and if God is not your rock through Jesus Christ then I would ask him, plow are you to consider him this evening.

And one or two qualities of rock, four, very briefly, one is it's solid, solid rock, there is no rock like our God and in verse 4 she talks about his protection or his strength and in verse 9 she talks about his protection and verse 1 she speaks about his, him being the deliverer and there is this great solidity and this great strength, he is a fortress to her and that's important and that's significant and he is the foundation of our life.

Prayer brings her into that place where she is able to acknowledge God as a rock. If we are not praying we will not be able to come to this testimony because we will not be founding our lives on him and relying on his safety and his goodness.

So you see if we have this foundation in our life, you know the story that Jesus gives of the wise and the foolish builders, you know sand and rock, a great difference when a building is hewn out of the rock it's really solid and secure and we were in, I was really hopeful I could get his illustration at one point, we were up in Dornock for a few days in the summer we were in a caravan, myself and Katrina and Ross and we were right beside the beach and of course we went wholeheartedly one of the nice days into building a sand castle.

Ross was vaguely interested in the sideline, Katrina and I were hovering and we were really making a detailed and it was beautiful and Ross would be hungry and oh yeah you'll get your food in him and wait till I do this next layer of the castle.

[14 : 39] So we were really engaged and involved and we built a big moat around it and we eventually put that moat in a channel that would reach right out to the sea and it was great and it looked fantastic and we were proud and of course very obviously about the sea comes in and it comes in the channel and it just so quickly undermines the sand and we stood there I think Ross was probably by this stage utterly bored, in fact he'd given up in a rage and gone up to the caravan but maybe two hours later we stood watching the whole thing completely disappear as the tide came in and it's just such a powerful reminder of what Jesus was speaking about in terms of the foundation we make in our life and God is this great solid, this eternal rock so that when the storms of death, when the storms of trouble, when the storms of what we regard as unanswered prayer, when the storms of bitter experience hit us, we've got this rock on which we have founded our lives, my rock.

It's a great prayer and a great illustration, a solid rock. Also this great permanent rock Isaiah 26 says, trust the Lord forever for the Lord, the Lord he repeats is the rock eternal.

It's great that it becomes a very strong name that's given to God in the Bible, the rock, he's the rock eternal. It really is, like this morning as we were speaking about the preeminence of Jesus Christ, there's this gravitas, there's this reliability, there's solidity about the permanence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives.

Jesus in our lives that we think are permanent are important aren't we, as children we like the permanence of our parents, they're always there, they're going to come home from school and it's why it's so difficult for us when that isn't the case, when they're not there for us, we lose parents at an early age or there's dysfunction within the family or there's separation in the world, it's difficult for us because we are hardwired just to see them and to know they're there and to know they're part of our lives and yet here we have this wonderful God who is a permanent fixture as we put our trust in him who we make our life, it no rock like our God, we're mooring, I think I mentioned this before, you're mooring a boat, you want to moor it, not to another boat of the same size, when the storms come they'll both be battered, you moor it to something solid that's on the land that's always going to be there, it's permanent when you're struggling, it's difficult, consider him this evening at the Lord's Table, but the third thing about rock and a good thing about rock that we're reminded of in Job 28 is that it's full of surprises, Hannah had found that out already,

God is an amazing God, God is full of surprises, man assaults the flinty rock and lays bare the roots of the mountains, he tunnels through the rock, his eyes see all its treasures, he searches the sources of the rivers and brings hidden things to light, so we find as we hew into that rock that is God, that we find great fellowship and great spiritual surprises in his come, but it comes, the jewels only come when we dig deep, they don't lie in the surface and so in a relationship with God we recognize that, we recognize grace, we recognize the power and the beauty and grace in the darkness very often of our experiences, when in the darkness these hidden things are brought to light, we understand his patience, we understand his purposes, it might not be what we had expected, he takes us a different road but we recognize that his ways are full of good surprises, you can't always stay in the shallows my friend is a Christian, you can't always wing it, it's good to dig deep in your relationship with him, it's good to be in darkness sometimes because it throws you into the company of the one who is the light of life and we find the precious resources of his grace, he's solid, he's permanent, he's full of surprises and the last thing I want to mention really is that he is also dangerous, he's dangerous, Habakkuk chapter 1, 12 and 30 says, Rock you have ordained them to punish your eyes are too pure to look on evil and we have that picture of Paul that's given in Romans 9 of a rock that causes people to stumble and also in Matthew 21 that speaks of the rock that will break people in repentance or will crush them in judgment, it's kind of a mixed picture of the sovereignty and the glory and the goodness and the righteousness of this God and that same day that we were playing in the shore we did lots of exploring in the rocks, rocks are great fun to explore and it's one of my favourite pastimes is walking barefoot on rocks at the sea shore but you need to respect them, you can't run the 100 metres sprint on them, you can't just look all over the place while you're on the rocks, you need to really watch where you walk, you need to be careful, they're great but they'll break your ankle very quickly and we need to respect the living God, of course he's the God of grace, of permanence, of surprises, of solidity, of love, of shone's body, also he's the God that we need to worship and respect and acknowledge as Lord in our lives because he is the great sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords and we will face him, we do face him, we will face him one day, we will face him either as those who are covered in the righteousness of Jesus which is the only validation for taking part in the Lord's Supper this evening, the Lord's Supper we will celebrate shortly is for the Lord's people as those who have taken Jesus Christ to be their saviour who

[21 : 59] are covered in his perfect righteousness recognising that he has had as it were the rock of God's judgement, he has borne that on the cross in the forsakenness that he experienced and he has done that for our sins, so as we take him as Lord and Saviour we have every right to sit at the Lord's table this evening and it is not the free church table it is the Lord's table it is an open table for all those who know, have professed and have taken the Lord Jesus Christ as their own and if you are vesting this evening and you belong to Jesus Christ, you trust him as your saviour and you are a member of another Christian church then you are very welcome to participate, if you are not then please don't take part, don't be embarrassed by that, pass on the bread and the wine when it comes but until you have made your peace with God the Lord's table is not for you to participate in and we would encourage you to be challenged by and to consider the message of the Gospel which is freely offered to you this evening. So let us rejoice in this confession of faith by this very ordinary woman with very ordinary but very real desires but in her putting God first it was filled with a sense of fulfilment and belonging and testified with great joy and may be that we will rise from the table tonight and testify with great joy of being a Christian. It is so often a burden isn't it? We are so often struggling but may be that we rise with joy and share our faith. You know Murdo and Kate were talking about

Porta Brooke and how we can share our faith as we learn more and as we live with a greater knowledge of Christ and grow in confidence with sharing our faith. I think it is one of our greatest needs throughout the church. We are not relying on ministers to transform churches. We are a people of the book and we are a people of Christ and we recognize the opportunities and the privileges we have to share the Gospel with other people who don't know Jesus outside of here. When was it that we last wrestled in order to do that?

We wrestled with God. When did we take our bitterness to Him and leave them with Him in faith and in trust? When were we in the darkness hewing out grace and seeing answers that we could never have dreamed of? May it be that we can give over all that burdens us into the hands of the great God who we serve and we will receive more back than we could ever dream of. However, He chooses to answer that prayer. Amen. Let's pray briefly.

Lord God bless us as we consider Your Word and as we consider also now the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary for us. We thank You Lord God that that historical and historic act in time and space reverberated throughout eternity and His cry on the cross of it is finished. It is a cry that we can rejoice in and take comfort from this evening. As we sit at the Lord's table together and as we share the bread and the wine, it may we do so reminding ourselves that this is Your gift, that You have given the sacrament to us and it is for our good and for our blessing. We thank You for the bread and the wine that have become symbols of Your body shared and Your blood poured out on our behalf and we ask that we would recognise that in Your giving of life we receive life and in Your death we receive the forgiveness and the sting of death removed and may that be important as often as we remember it until Your return. So help us God and bless us in

Jesus name. Amen.