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Series: Back to School
Sermon: Not Forgotten

I Samuel 1:19-28

Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. 20 So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."

When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow, 22 Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always."

23 "Do what seems best to you," her husband Elkanah told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the Lord make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

24 After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. 25 When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, 26 and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. 27 I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. 28 So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there.

Sermon

This story is most probably not true, but fun to tell anyway. In a small conservative God-fearing town, construction began on a tavern - the first and only establishment of its kind in this village. As one can imagine, the local church started a campaign to block the bar from opening with petitions and prayers. Prayers and petitions. Oh Lord, stop this travesty from taking place. But the hammering continued. However, the night before the bar was set to open, lightning struck the saloon and it burned to the ground. The church folks were rather smug in their outlook after that, until the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church was ultimately responsible for the demise of his building, either through direct or indirect actions or means. The church vehemently denied all responsibility or any connection to the building's demise in its reply to the court. As the case made its way into court, the judge looked over the paperwork. At the hearing he commented, "I don't know how I'm going to decide this case. But it appears that we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church congregation that does not."

Prayer works! Today, we are continuing our look at Samuel, and we jump in where we left off last week. Hannah had her prayer at the temple in Shiloh, and we know now that this prayer was answered with the birth of Samuel. The danger of course, is to read into this story that prayer works 100% of the time. If you have enough faith, prayers will be answered in the order in which they are received. When Hannah prayed, her problems didn't necessarily change, but she did. She still had to deal with that other lady in their house, Elkanah's other wife. Time spent in prayer changes us too. Prayer doesn't always change our predicament, but it always changes our perspective. Oswald Chambers, in his classic daily devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*, writes in his entry for August 28th, "It is not so true that 'prayer changes things' as prayer changes me and I change things. God has so constituted things that prayer on the basis of redemption alters the way in which a man looks at things. Prayer is not a question of altering things externally, but of working wonders in a man's disposition."

When you have problems, do you pray about them? Do you pray with tearful passion? Do you pray with trusting faith? Do you pray with heartfelt humility? When you pray, sometimes God will fix your problems, but he will always fix you! Listen to this poem titled “DOES PRAYER CHANGE THINGS?” (Author unknown)

They say that prayer changes things, but does it REALLY change anything?

Oh yes! It really does!

Does prayer change your present situation or sudden circumstances?

No, not always, but it does change the way you look at those events.

Does prayer change your financial future?

No, not always, but it does change who you look to for meeting your daily Needs.

Does prayer change shattered hearts or broken bodies?

No, not always, but it will change your source of strength and comfort.

Does prayer change your wants and desires?

No, not always, but it will change your wants into what God desires!

Does prayer change how you view the world?

No, not always, but it will change whose eyes you see the world through.

Does prayer change your regrets from the past?

No, not always, but it will change your hopes for the future!

Does prayer change the people around you?

No, not always, but it will change you – the problem isn't always in others.

Does prayer change your life in ways you can't explain?

Oh, yes, always! And it will change you from the inside out!

So does prayer REALLY change ANYTHING?

Yes! It REALLY does change EVERYTHING!

In Hannah's story, God not only changed her, but he changed at least one of her problems. When she and her husband returned to their hometown, she conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel because that name means “Because I asked the Lord for him.” Over the next few years, Hannah and Samuel did not accompany Elkanah and the rest of the family on their annual journey to Shiloh. Hannah must have known the complications of taking a child on a long road trip. But after three years (the usual duration for breastfeeding in ancient Israel) the boy was weaned and Hannah knew it was time to fulfill her vow to God by dedicating Samuel to His service.

Sometime after Samuel's third birthday, his parents gathered a 3 year old bull for a sacrifice - same age as the kiddo, you might have noticed, and some food for the trip and set off for the temple in Shiloh. When they reached the temple, she kept her extremely difficult vow and turned the boy over to Eli the priest to raise from that point on. Along with the bull, some flour and a skin of wine. Good rule, you give your kid to someone, give them wine. She gave up the very child for which she prayed. For the rest of Samuel's childhood years, Hannah only got to see him once a year when they went to Shiloh for the festival. The bible does say, in a wonderfully cute and motherly way, she always made him a little robe and brought it for him every year. Can you imagine how difficult it would have been for Hannah to give up her son? She was incredibly faithful. God takes our vows seriously and so should we! Whether they are marital vows, religious vows, or some other kind of vows, God expects us to keep them!

After Hannah gave Samuel to Eli, she worshiped the Lord by singing one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible. I Samuel 2:1-11 records Hannah's Song, where she praises the Lord for who he is and what he had done for her. Throughout the song, the lyrics express various aspects of God's character—his holiness, uniqueness, omniscience, sovereignty, creativity, protection, etc. She also praises him for delivering her from her problems and giving her strength. Praise was the appropriate expression of gratitude for the Lord hearing Hannah's prayers and transforming her from a desperate housewife into a devout housewife. I wonder how often we forget to praise God for who he is and what he has done for us? Especially when we think about how he

understands our problems, hears our prayers, and transforms us. He deserves praise for all of these things, but most of all for allowing Jesus to die and rise again to delivering us from our greatest problem: sin.

In Hannah's story, there is a clear pattern that goes from problems to prayer to praise! Problems. Prayer. Praise. The 3 p's. Do you see it? Will you live it? Problems. Prayers. Praise. Problems. Prayers. Praise. Will you say it with me? Problems. Prayers. Praise. Problems. Prayers. Praise. . . .

It wasn't read this morning, but I want us to read Hannah's praise. In re-reading it this week, I was amazed at how many different songs use it's lyrics. "There is No one Like our God," "He has made me glad, he has made me glad, I will . . .", "And now, let the weak say I am strong, let the poor say I am rich". Even many scholars believe that the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise found in Luke, was lifted and plagiarized from poor old Hannah. See if you can catch other songs or phrases out of Hannah's praise. There's about 10-12 verses of this, so lets do it like this: We'll split it up by birth month. Everyone's got a part to say. When you're month comes up, that's your phrase to say this morning.

"How I rejoice in the Lord! How he has blessed me!

Now I have an answer for my enemies, For the Lord has solved my problem.
How I rejoice!

No one is as holy as the Lord! There is no other God, Nor any Rock like our God.

Quit acting so proud and arrogant! The Lord knows what you have done, And he will judge your deeds.

Those who were mighty are mighty no more! Those who were weak are now strong.

Those who were well are now starving; Those who were starving are fed.

The barren woman now has seven children; She with many children has no more! The Lord kills, The Lord gives life.

Some he causes to be poor, And others to be rich.
He cuts one down and lifts another up.

He lifts the poor from the dust— Yes, from a pile of ashes—And treats them as princes
Sitting in the seats of honor.

For all the earth is the Lord's And he has set the world in order. He will protect his godly ones,
But the wicked shall be silenced in darkness.

No one shall succeed by strength alone. Those who fight against the Lord shall be broken;
He thunders against them from heaven.

He judges throughout the earth. He gives mighty strength to his king, And gives great glory to his anointed one."

As I read Hannah's story, I was struck by how her story began and ended with prayer. The first, just barely audible. And the second, singing throughout the land. The Christian author Anne Lamott claims the two best prayers she knows are: "Help me, help me, help me" and "Thank you, thank you, thank you." She wrote another book several years later that clarified her little prayers, came out around 6 years ago - the title is "Help. Thanks. Wow." In the story we just heard about Hannah, it is clear that Hannah knew how to pray all three of these prayers. Problems. Prayers. Praise. Help. Thanks. Wow.

What a difference we find in Hannah from chapter one to chapter two. Back in chapter one Hannah wept and prayed to the Lord in the bitterness of her soul. Now in chapter two she sings a song of thanksgiving, "My heart rejoices in the Lord." What was the difference? Hannah had learned that there is no one like our God. God is the one who humbles and exalts. God rules over everything in the world. God is in control; therefore, rejoice! My heart rejoices in God! Problems. Prayers. Praise. Help. Thanks. Wow. And the family of God said . . .