

1 Samuel 1:21-2:11 - Rejoicing in God's Grace

We saw last week the situation with the man Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah was likely his first wife and she was barren. Peninnah was likely married to Elkanah as a result of Hannah's barrenness so that Elkanah would have children who would inherit his estate. It was a tragic situation, but a common one in ancient times especially among those who were well off.

And last we saw Hannah she was crying out to the Lord to give her a child. And she vowed that if God gave her a child she would give him back to the Lord. The child would serve God in the Tabernacle. God showed compassion on Hannah and gave her a son whom she named Samuel. Samuel means "God hears." Almost anytime you have "el" on the end of a Hebrew word it's a compound word with God in it. Samuel is God hears. Michael is "Who is like God?" You remember after Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, the Angel of the Lord renamed Jacob to Israel which means "he strives with God" or "contends with God."

Samuel is heard of God. God heard Hannah's prayer and her vow and answered her in the way she asked. And really what this whole section is about is Hannah's response to God. God has blessed her amazingly, how does she respond?

How do we respond when God blesses us? To be really honest, I think we often respond poorly when God blesses us. Just this week I was riding my motorcycle and lost my backpack off the back rack. And I wasn't sure if it had been stolen or fell off in the middle of traffic. And I'm going through this range of emotions driving back the way I had come and not finding it. And the more I drive to look for it the more my heart is sinking. It had my computer and books and a fair amount of other information and I'm thinking: it's not coming back. So I pulled over to tell my phone to erase the computer remotely and I've got 4 text messages and a couple voicemails saying that it had been found and my wife is picking it up and it all works and everything is in tact. And this wave of relief and thankfulness comes over me.

But I have to be honest with you: it was fairly short lived. All my pleading with God while looking for it and the thankfulness afterward was gone quicker than I'd like to admit. Drowned out by the mundane chores and routine of life. Here God had heard my prayer, saved me a couple thousand dollars and dozens of hours of setting up a new computer, and my thankfulness was over fairly quickly.

Why is that? Well, there's a lot of reasons that could be. Certainly some specific to my own heart. Maybe we feel entitled, feel like it wasn't that big of a deal. Maybe our memories just fade. There's a whole host of reasons thankfulness fades quickly. But I think most of us feel maybe we're not as thankful as we should be especially when God bails us out.

I think that's common when someone comes to faith in Christ. There's this massive relief and gratitude for God saving us from our sin. Not by our effort: he did all the work! But that gratitude often fades. We forget just how amazing God's deliverance was. And maybe we feel a swell of thankfulness when we confess our sin to God - especially those sins we really struggle with and hate - and are reminded that God's mercy is new every morning. But that fades too.

The reality is that sometimes we have to force our hearts to rejoice in God. Our minds know we should. Our brains process the gravity of how God has blessed us in light of what we deserve. But sometimes our hearts fail to get there. Sometimes you have to force your heart to rejoice. That's why psalmists occasionally say, "Awake, O harp" "Awake, my soul." It's like saying: Get up and thank God!

So what does it look like when someone is truly thankful to the Lord and walks that out? I think we see that with Hannah. I think there are a few ways she makes it clear.

1) Thankfulness creates reminders of God's work. **Read 20**

We covered this verse a little last time, but I think it's significant she names the boy after exactly what God has done. God has heard her. So every time she calls his name, every time she's speaking about him, she is reminded that God heard her.

The Hebrews actually did this quite often. They'd do it with names. Abraham and Sarah named their son Isaac which means he laughs because when God told Abraham that Sarah would have a son she laughed at God. And not in a good way. And yet God in his grace took Sarah's mocking laughter and turned it into joyful laughter. Every time she called his name, she was reminded how she disbelieved and God was gracious anyway.

The OT folks would do this with rocks where a covenant was made. They'd pile up a bunch of stones to remember a specific event and tell it to their children. Remember when God parted the Jordan River and the Israelites walked through the river just like they walked through the Red Sea? The head of each tribe grabbed a stone from the middle of the river and they piled them up as a reminder of how God had parted the Jordan that was in the middle of flood stage. That pile was a reminder.

In the same way it's good that we have things or ways to remember the grace of God in our lives. I'll be honest, I'm bad at this. And while there's no command to do this, we see it all over Scripture. And I don't think we don't have to remember every single thing that God has ever done - although that wouldn't be a bad thing. I do think it would be good for us to have ways to remember how God has blessed us.

That's why God created the Passover meal, the feast of Booths, the feast of Weeks, and Purim. These were annual reminders of God's grace. It's why we have baptism and the Lord's Supper and the cross. We need reminders of God's grace because we are prone to forget.

2) Thankfulness means making good on vows. **Read 21-23**

Vows are quite a serious thing to God. When you are vowing something, you are basically making a contract with God. If you do this, then I'll do this. Hannah made a vow to God for Samuel. **Read 11**

So she vowed. God, if you give me a son, I'll give you that son right back. That's what a vow is. It's basically a contract promise with God.

And there are vows all over the Bible. Jacob made an interesting vow in Genesis: "God you protect me and I'll worship you and give you 10% of my goods." That's a little unorthodox, and he seriously overplayed his hand. But that sounds like Jacob. And you know what? God honored it. (**Gen 28:20-22; Gen. 31:13**) It seems Jonah made a vow to God when he was drowning in the middle of the Sea and God rescued him by sending a fish (**Jonah 2:19**). Once the fish vomitted him on the shore, Jonah went and preached

There were all kinds of laws that regulated vows in the OT Law - what sacrifice to bring, when to do it, how it should be done. Even the psalms talk quite often about vows and the seriousness the person performs them.

Psa. 56:12: I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you.

Psalms 76:11: Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them; let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared.

Look over at **Psalm 61**. This is a psalm of David and it's basically a psalm - a song - about vowing to God. Vows and prayers to God go basically hand in hand. Someone vows to God when the stakes are high. When you really want deliverance, when you really desire with all your heart for God to intervene. **Read**

So David twice mentions vows and this is all in the context of prayer to God. The first is that God has heard the vows of David - he has heard his prayer. Just like fasting is an earnest plea to God for something, so too are vows. It's an act of prayer.

The second thing that's interesting is in **Vs. 8. Read**

What does it mean that David will perform his vows day after day? Remember when you vow something to God you're making a deal. "God answer my request, and I'll do this." The reality is that God fulfilling his end of

the vow is a lot more pleasurable than just fulfilling our portion of the vow. And here David reminds us that vow fulfillment is a day after day process.

So let me get really practical with you because we don't take many vows. Really, what's the only vow most people take? Marriage vows. What's the vow? God unite me to this person - make us one flesh - and I'll fulfill my part of honoring, cherishing, loving, sacrificing for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others as long as we both shall live.

Well that's great on your wedding day when everyone's happy and there's excitement and a party. It's a little more tough 20 years in, with kids, a mortgage, a routine, and 20 years of sinfulness grinding on each other. But vow fulfillment is day after day.

We don't usually make many other vows though. Which is interesting because it's all over the Bible: 92 times vows are mentioned. Paul takes a vow in **Acts 18:18**. We see four other guys under a vow in **21:23**. So this isn't just an OT thing. And it's also not just a "let your yes be yes and no be no" thing.

Why don't we take vows? Maybe we don't know that God works with vows, or don't think of it. But I wonder if we're not just scared to make a vow. Vows are serious. If you make an offer to God as a vow, you better fulfill your vow.

Prov. 20:25: It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy," and to reflect only after making vows.

Solomon is saying that a lot of people will make vows and then only later realize what they've done is serious business. It's like taking out a car loan only later to realize you can't really afford the payments and insurance. Except it's not a bank, it's God.

Ecc. 5:4-5: When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

So what do we do with that? Just never take vows? No, I think vows to God are a good thing just like fasting and prayer to God is a good thing. If the circumstances are dire, make a vow to God. Just remember, if he answers your prayer, you better hold up your end of the bargain. It's easy to let our end slip, to rationalize the circumstances of God's provision, to think that since time has gone by God no longer cares about the deal.

Don't play games with God. God takes vows very seriously. If you make a vow to God, you keep it. That doesn't mean don't ever vow, just make sure what you vow you can do and then make sure you do it.

That's what Hannah did back in **1 Sam. 1**. Look back there. **Read 23**

This is pretty amazing. Imagine her situation: She's been barren all these years, God gives her the child she asked for through the vow. But now comes the time for her to deliver on her side. To actually give the child up. Yes, it's for a noble purpose. Yes, she will see him every year - and it's only a day's journey to visit him. But it's still giving your child away. And what does she do?

She wants to wait until the child is weaned. Is she dragging her feet? Is she stalling for time? No, just the opposite. She wants to make sure the child is old enough and stable enough that when she does finally take him to the Tabernacle he can stay there permanently. She's not waiting to bide time, she's waiting so that she can fully fulfill her vow without any interruption because Samuel might not be old enough. She wants to make sure she delivers completely on her end.

That's true thankfulness. That's true selflessness. Planning and preparing to give to God what God deserves.

3) True thankfulness responds in generosity to God. **Read 24-25**

So Hannah doesn't just bring Samuel to Shiloh to give him to the Lord, she also brings a very generous offering with her: a sacrifice and some offerings. Now, there's some discussion here about just what exactly she

brought, and most of our Bible address that issue in the footnotes. If you have the NET, NKJV, KJV it says 3 bulls. If you have ESV, NASB, NIV it says a 3-year old bull. Well which is it? The Hebrew is a little confusing here, so the translators are divided. Literally it says bulls: 3.

Here's why that is confusing; offerings 3 bulls as a sacrifice is an extremely lavish gift from a private citizen; someone who is not a king or royalty of some kind. And in **Vs. 25** it says they slaughtered the bull, singular. Well that seems to lend to a three year old bull.

Here's where it gets interesting. We can already make an educated guess that Elkanah is a fairly well off man. He's got 2 wives and apparently enough to provide for everyone. So 3 bulls, while still very lavish, is not a stretch.

Second, in the OT Law, when you brought a sacrifice to fulfill your vow usually you brought one bull and 1/3 of an ephah of flour. Well, Hannah brings 3 times the amount of flour that's required: she brings a whole ephah. A ephah is a little more than 5 gallons. It's basically a 25lb. Costco sized bag of flour. To us that sounds like \$8, but back in ancient times before modern farming and grinding techniques that was a lot of flour. But more importantly, it was 3 times the amount of flour required, which would correspond with the 3 bulls she's offering.

And she brings 6 gallons of wine. You didn't have to bring any wine at all to fulfill a vow. But here she brings somewhere in the neighborhood of 6 gallons of it.

And even though it says in **Vs. 25** they slaughtered the bull - singular - it's pretty common in Hebrew to take a group of things in the plural and then treat them as a singular. It'd be sort of like saying, "I brought 5lbs of hamburger and then I cooked it." Five pounds, plural; cooked it, singular.

In any case the most likely understanding of all of this is that Hannah has been so blessed and so overjoyed by God's grace in giving her a little one that she in turn gives generously to the Lord. He's the one who delivered on the promise, and she wants to show her thankfulness in turn.

Now, I just want to be clear here: I'm not saying that if you vow a vow to God and he gives you what you ask for that you should give a whole bunch of money to the church. You could do that. Hannah brought this to the Tabernacle. But Hannah also brought her child, and as much as I like kids I'm not taking your child. So I don't think this is necessarily apples to apples.

So what do we do here? I think the point that one way of expressing thanks to God is simply be generous in return. Be generous to the people of God. If God has blessed you, go find a brother or sister in the Lord who is in need and bless their socks off. Go bless a missionary. Go bless the kids working at camp. Bless others in the same way that God has blessed you. And maybe tell them why you're blessing them. **Read 26-28**

This would be Samuel's home from here on out.

Side: God continued to bless Hannah. **Read 2:21**

In the end, she had 6 kids. She God blessed her, she blessed God, God blessed her. Around and around it went.

4) True thankfulness publicly praises God.

We're going to go through this song of Hannah's rather quickly. There's a lot we could say about it. But a few things I think we should keep in mind.

First, how is it that her song of thankfulness was recorded for us to read? Apparently it had become well known enough that it was recorded. It became a song for Israel to sing. Her thankfulness to God became known to all in Israel. She didn't hide what God had done for her. How could she?

The song itself has several themes that cycle themselves over and over. One is God's sovereignty. God reigns supreme over all his creation, and especially the affairs of people. Ultimately he is the one in charge of all things.

Another theme is God's judgment. Because God is holy and there is no one like God, it is he who stands in judgment over all people. He calls the wicked wicked and he sees the work of the righteous and will guard them.

The third theme is the righting of wrongs. The rich are made poor, the arrogant are brought low, those who are needy are given more than enough.

Maybe we could say that the theme is that God will sovereignly judge all people and make all things right. So sovereignty, judgment and setting things right. **Read 1-10**

It's an amazing song. Her song begins by praising God and deriding her enemies because God has given her salvation. Not salvation like what we think of in the NT. But salvation as in deliverance. He has raised her up from her difficult situation.

In **Vs. 2-3** she praises the holiness of God. **Read**

I was reading through a commentary and they mentioned that praising the holiness of God is something that really only true believers do. False people don't praise the holiness of God because they don't want God to be all that holy. They don't want God to be that much purer than them. Yeah, maybe he's a little better. But if God is too holy then it makes them look really, really bad. True believers love the holiness of God because we know the wretchedness of our own hearts. We know God has saved us from the wretchedness of our own hearts through Jesus, and we long to one day be made holy like God is holy. It also means that God will finally hold all those who are wicked to account. All those who mock God for his holiness will stand in fearful awe of the holiness of God. That's what Hannah praises in **Vss. 2-3**.

Vss. 4-6 are where the wrongs are made right. **Read**

What do we do with these verses? We know that not every sinful act is punished here in this life. Sadly, many people get away with many evil things. Is there some justice in this life? Sure, sometimes. And we can and should rejoice in that justice.

Prov. 11:10: When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness.

It's okay to be glad when the wicked get what they deserve. Would we rather they repent? Sure. But God has built into us a desire for justice. **Read 10**

We don't see that on a lot of greeting cards, but it's something the people of God look forward to. We want justice. We want God to judge. Maybe that's a little fearful, but that's what we long for.

It's a beautiful song of worship to God. And it's fitting that the end of the section is the close of this story as Elkanah and his family head back home leaving Samuel in the Tabernacle to worship. **Read 11**

We have these 2 people who are as far apart morally as could be. Corrupt Eli, and faithful Samuel who worships the Lord.

This song of Hannah's is well known because it's a beautiful song. But it's also well known because it is essentially repeated elsewhere in the Bible. Most famously it is repeated by a young girl who was also unexpectedly pregnant. And she was pregnant with a child who would also be used by God in amazing ways. You know sang it? Mary, mother of Jesus.

Turn to Luke 1:46-56. Most scholars believe that not only was Mary a godly woman, but the fact that she borrows themes from Hannah and then modifies them for her own situation indicate she was an amazingly godly young woman. She was likely half the age of Hannah, yet had probably committed Hannah's song to memory. And understood it's significance. **Read**

Themes: salvation / holiness / wrongs being righted / summary of her actions. It's almost parallel.

You know what God wants in response to showing us lavish grace? He wants praise. He wants his name to be known. God saves us and gives us good things because he wants us to delight in him and rejoice in his glory! He wants our hearts to be so transformed the unlimited bounty of grace that we in turn show other grace.

And he does that ultimately for us in Christ. **Read 54-55**

He saves Israel, and he saves all the offspring of Abraham. That's us. Through faith in Christ. Whose name we praise.

Pray