

1 Samuel 2:1-11

Introduction

Is following Jesus worth it?

We might look around and conclude that it isn't.

We're surrounded by people who are apparently making a great success of life without Jesus.

They seem strong and healthy. They're achieving great things. They're prosperous. They own a whole load of cool stuff. And they're enjoying life.

And they're doing all of that without Jesus.

In fact, many of them seem to be doing all of that while openly mocking Jesus and despising those who belong to him.

So, is following him worth it?

Particularly as we may have deliberately chosen to forego much that others are enjoying to follow him.

Is it worth it?

Hannah's prayer, that we're looking at this morning, addresses that very question.

So, let's look at it together.

But before we do that, I'm going to pray.

Loving Father, the things that we read here, in this prayer of Hannah's, are vitally important, not only for understanding this book of Samuel, but for living our lives well. So please help us to hear what you have to say to us now. Please plant your word deep within our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

So then, let's look at Hannah's prayer - which could also be described as a song.

Hannah's prayer

Please look down again at the first verse.

Then Hannah prayed and said:

**'My heart rejoices in the LORD;
in the LORD my horn is lifted high.**

**My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.'**

Hannah begins by looking back over her own personal experience and it causes her to rejoice in the Lord and his great work of deliverance.

We saw last week that she had been childless. She hadn't been able to bear a child for her husband, Elkanah. In her day, that would have meant suffering great shame in society. And it had given Elkanah's second wife, Peninnah, all the opportunity she needed to bully and persecute her.

Then Hannah had gone to the Lord in prayer. And cried out for him to do something. And God answered her prayer by enabling her to conceive. She gave birth to a boy. Named him Samuel. Weaned him. And then gave him into the Lord's service under Eli the priest at the tabernacle in Shiloh.

That's what she's praying about - and probably singing about - here.

The horn is used in the Bible as a symbol of strength and honour. Think of a Rhino with its head held high and a great big horn on the end of its nose.

Hannah had been utterly humiliated. But God had delivered her from the shame of childlessness and silenced the venomous words of her rival, Peninnah. He had renewed her strength and crowned her with honour.

And that causes Hannah to delight in the Lord and proclaim that there is no other like him.

Verse 2.

**'There is no one holy like the LORD;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.'**

2 Samuel ends with another song. A song of David. And he says the same thing. He says this: **'For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?'** (2 Samuel 22:32).

There's an old story from November 1905, when the Mataafa Storm swept through the Great Lakes, damaging 29 ships and killing 36 seamen. One ship, the *Madeira*, ran aground at the bottom of some cliffs and began to break up.

One of the crew, a man called Fred Benson, grabbed a rope, jumped from the boat to the cliff, and climbed sixty feet to the top - to a place called Gold Rock. From there, he threw one end of the rope down to the boat, enabling eight of his crewmates to climb up and join him. Standing on Gold Rock, they endured the storm, safe from the waves below, and were picked up two days later, and returned home.

A rock is a place of strength and security. And these two songs are telling us that God is a Rock like no other.

Remember that 1 and 2 Samuel were originally not two books but one. So, these two songs are like bookends to the whole book. We need to pay attention to what they're telling us: there is one God and one alone. He is unique. He has no rivals. He is beyond compare. And he is wholly reliable. We can depend on him.

And he has turned Hannah's circumstances around.

In chapter 1, she was downhearted and grieving. She was miserable.

Now, she's rejoicing.

And what God has done for Hannah is a picture of what he will do for all who trust in him.

He is the God of reversals.

That's what Hannah underlines in verses 3 to 5.

She warns us, her hearers, not to exalt ourselves against God.

**'Do not keep talking so proudly
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,
for the LORD is a God who knows,
and by him deeds are weighed,'** she says.

To proudly and arrogantly exalt ourselves - as Peninnah did - is a dangerous business. God knows how we behave and weighs our deeds.

And to emphasise that point, in the next couple of verses, Hannah speaks of numerous reversals.

The bows of warriors are broken, whereas those who are weak are armed with strength.

Those who had full bellies must hire themselves out for food, whereas those who were hungry are hungry no more.

The barren woman has borne seven children, whereas the woman with many sons pines away - perhaps there's an echo of Hannah's own experience in that line.

They're all examples of the proud being humbled and the humble being exalted.

And this is God's doing.

Hannah makes that clear in verses 6 to 8.

‘The LORD brings death and makes alive;

he brings down to the grave and raises up.

The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

he seats them with princes and makes them inherit a throne of honour.’

Verse 7 is a key verse: **The LORD... humbles and he exalts.** He is the God of reversals. He brings down the proud and raises up the humble.

And he’s able to do this because he is the Creator of all.

‘For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’s;

on them he has set the world.’

At creation, God turned darkness into light. He turned emptiness into fullness. He turned chaos into order. And if he can do that, he can certainly bring down the proud and exalt the humble.

He is the God of reversals.

This is nothing new. Hannah’s simply reflecting what God had already revealed of himself in Israel’s history.

Think of Israel’s slavery in Egypt. Remember how Pharaoh exalted himself over God - and how God humbled him with the ten plagues. Remember how the Israelites cried out to God from the misery of slavery, and how he lifted them up.

God humbles the proud and exalts the humble.

Think of the days of the Judges. When the people lived as they pleased, doing what was right in their own eyes, God brought them low. When they repented and cried out to God for mercy, he sent a deliverer to lift them up.

God humbles the proud and exalts the humble.

It’s a truth that we will see illustrated again and again in these books of Samuel.

If we grasped what Hannah is saying here, then we won’t be surprised when Eli’s sons, who act wickedly and show no respect for God, are brought down.

We won’t be surprised when a young lad with no credentials is raised up to oversee their demise and to bring the word of God to Israel.

We won’t be surprised when God chooses a young shepherd boy from an unknown family to be the king of Israel. Or that he sends this young lad with nothing but a sling and a few stones to defeat a boastful warrior called Goliath.

When a proud King David commits adultery and murder, we will expect God to act, which he does.

This prayer of Hannah's is the key to understanding the whole book of Samuel - in fact, the whole of the Bible.

God humbles the proud and exalts the humble.

He is the God of reversals.

And one day he will turn the world upside down.

Look at verse 9.

**'He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,
but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.'**

**'It is not by strength that one prevails;
those who oppose the Lord will be broken.'**

**The Most High will thunder from heaven;
the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.'**

One day the reversals we read of in the Bible will be enacted on a global scale, when the one true God brings the whole world under his judgement.

God's faithful people - those like Hannah, who trust in him - he will guard.

But the wicked - meaning those who exalt themselves before God and trust in their own strength - he will silence.

On that day, what will determine people's fate is not their strength or wealth, their worldly success or moral integrity, but their relationship with God. People will be crowned with either glory or shame depending on how they relate to him.

He will humble the proud and exalt the humble.

And that truth will be exemplified in the coming of God's king, which is our second heading.

The coming of God's King

Look at the end of verse 10.

See what it says.

'He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.'

It's a surprising statement... because at this point Israel has no king.

Hannah's words here anticipate the establishment of the monarchy. She's speaking prophetically at this point. And her prayer tells how kingship should function.

If we've been listening to what Hannah has said, then we should expect God's king to be humble. A man who humbly depends on God... whose strength comes from God rather than from military might or economic success. And we should expect those kings who don't learn that lesson, who exalt themselves and turn away from God, to be brought low.

And that's exactly what we see as we read of the days of the monarchy that follow.

When kings do evil in the eyes of the Lord, they are brought low. And there are lots of them.

In fact, with only a handful of exceptions, the story of Israel's monarchy is one of complete failure.

By the end of the monarchy, we're still left waiting for the coming of one who perfectly fulfils the description of God's king here - a humble king, whose horn will be exalted.

But he does come. He is Jesus of Nazareth.

And if we've understood Hannah's prayer, it shouldn't surprise us that *this* king is born to a young, insignificant girl, from a remote backwater, and raised as an ordinary carpenter.

In fact, when Mary conceived, she too sang a song. And her song deliberately echoes Hannah's song here.

In the opening chapter of Luke's Gospel, Mary glorifies the Lord and rejoices in God her Saviour... who, she says, has been mindful of the humble state of his servant... who extends mercy to those who fear him... who scatters the proud and brings down ruler but lifts up the humble... who fills the hungry with good things but sends the rich away empty.

Do you see? It's the same theology. God's ways have not changed as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

He is still the God who humbles the proud and exalts the humble.

And as a man, Jesus is the model of true humility.

Though he is God's King, he comes among his people as a servant. He lives in complete dependence on God. He acts exactly as Hannah's prayer describes.

Yet, initially, we don't see his life crowned with glory.

He dies the death of a disgraced criminal, on a cross. He's brought down to the grave, accepting shame and humiliation.

But the theology of Hannah's song doesn't fail because God raised him from the grave and seated him on a throne of honour. God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. At the end of time, every knee will bow, and every tongue acknowledge that he is Lord.

And it's this King who calls us to come and follow him. To put away pride and self-reliance. And to live as he lived, in humble dependence on God and all his promises.

That may not result in exaltation now.

Following Jesus might mean losing the respect of friends and family. It might mean being mocked by them, even insulted.

It might mean using our time and money in ways that others don't understand.

Or foregoing a lifestyle that others strive to attain.

It might mean serving others rather than indulging ourselves.

Or prioritising gospel ministry over our careers.

It might mean speaking for Jesus, and accepting disgrace and humiliation as he did.

It might mean all those things.

But the message of Hannah's song is that it's worth it.

Following Jesus may not result in exaltation now, but it will eventually, if only in the life to come.

Hannah says: **'The Lord... humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust... he seats them with princes and makes them inherit a throne of honour.'**

That is our future, in eternity, if we humble ourselves before God and follow his King, Jesus.

Jesus said, **'All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'** (Luke 14:11)

And we know that it's true because he has paved the way. He has gone before us.

And one day he will return. And he will turn this world upside down.

Those who exalt themselves may have everything now, but on that day, they will end up with nothing.

Those who humble themselves may have nothing now, but on that day, they will inherit the earth.

Hannah's prayer - her song - is telling us that following Jesus, in humble dependence on God, is most certainly worth it.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, please forgive our pride and self-exaltation. And please teach us to live each day in humble dependence on you, as we follow Jesus and live with him as our King. Please give us great confidence, not only that it is worth it, but that it's the best way to live. We ask it in his name. Amen.