

Session 3

June 16, 2019

“HANNAH: FAITH THAT PRAYS”

1 Samuel 1:1-2, 9-11, 17-18, 26-28; 2:1-3

Prayer is a key ingredient in the Christian life. Protestant Reformer Martin Luther said, “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.” So vital is prayer, that the apostle Paul told the church at Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

The story of Hannah, Samuel’s mother, is a vivid reminder of just how important faith is when offering our petitions to God. It illustrates the principle of praying “with belief” taught by Jesus (Mark 11:24), and the “prayer of faith” mentioned by James (James 5:15). In addition, we see the cyclical nature of faith expressed in prayer, and then prayer resulting in more faith. In our lesson, the relationship between prayer and faith (and faith and prayer!) has four parts.

Pray (vv. 1-2; 9-11). Hannah’s life was somewhat complicated. On the one hand, was her husband Elkanah. He was a righteous man, who saw to it that his family worshipped God on a regular basis (v. 3). Elkanah loved his wife desperately and treated her with great warmth and affection (vv. 5, 8). On the other hand, was Peninnah, Elkanah’s other wife. She was cruel to Hannah and ridiculed her continually because she had born their husband children and Hannah had not. Her failure in this basic familial and societal function (ie: *bearing sons*) had reached a breaking point. The intensity of her prayer is highlighted by terms like “deeply hurt” and “wept with many tears” in verse 10, and “making a vow” and “pleaded” in verse 11. Add to that the promise she made to dedicate her son entirely to the Lord’s service and it’s clear just how serious Hannah was in wanting this child. That tremendous burden took the form of a heartfelt prayer to the all-powerful God she knew as *Yahweh Sabaoth*, the “Lord of the armies of heaven” (vv. 3, 11).

Believe (vv. 17-18). While faith in the Lord led Hannah to prayer, the act of praying led Hannah back to faith. The wise priest Eli was at first mistaken while watching the fervor of Hannah’s prayer (see vv. 12-16). The blessing he offered in verse 17 is no guarantee of God’s favor, but rather part apology and part compassion. Hannah’s obvious sense of relief (v. 18) demonstrated her confidence in both her prayer and the Lord in charge of answering it. My pastor used to say, “Pray and believe, you will receive. Pray and doubt, you’ll do without.”

Surrender (vv. 26-28). The next phase in Hannah’s journey of faith was following through on the vow she had made to God. By this time, Samuel had been conceived, birthed, and weaned. Her infant son was now her little boy. While those milestones could easily have pushed Hannah’s vow out of the picture, she understood the significance of both her request for a son and the significance of God’s gift of a son. Faith is demonstrated throughout the story. The same faith that led her to the temple for prayer led her back with the results of her prayer. Once she trusted the Lord *for* her son. Now she trusted Him *with* her son.

Rejoice (2:1 ff). Chapter 2 is the natural and uninterrupted response to the end of chapter 1. With Samuel securely delivered to Eli the priest, the cycle has but one final segment: Hannah’s prayer of rejoicing. It’s noteworthy that the song of praise Hannah offered is not about herself, her

answered prayer, or her son Samuel. Instead, it's all about the Lord and His sovereign rule over all creation. Again, there is no doubt that Hannah's great faith was not in her ability to pray, but rather in God's ability to answer, and to do so in such a way that His children would be blessed and His name magnified.