

“Momma Loves Me”

(Family Matters, part 2)

I Samuel 1:1-28, Psalm 113

[59] Good morning. I want to start by thanking Jeff Paulson for preaching during the two Sundays I was gone. We didn’t plan our messages together, and I was pleasantly surprised by the encouragement he gave you all and me. Literally, some of the same expressions and thoughts Jeff spoke were echoed in my sermon last week. It was such a great affirmation to listen to his messages. And, yes, thank you for announcing my re-appointment to Houghton and Painesdale on July 1st. It is good not to take those blessings for granted.

I am so glad you are here. Please, turn to your neighbor and tell them, “You’re not alone.” It’s true. We are in this together. Would you please pray with me?

All-knowing God, the one who knows our deepest needs before we even speak them, illuminate our hearts and minds in this place, so that through your Word, we can discover how to trust you more completely with our lives and the lives of our children. Through your Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, our Comfort, Amen.

[60] Last week we began a series I’m calling “Family Matters”, because families do matter. The Bible tells us how to strengthen our families. Last week, we focused on using encouraging words, like the ones the Apostle Paul spoke to Timothy. We talked about how one insult has the same power as seven affirmations. If we want to lift up our families, we must commit to using positive, uplifting words. And we noted that God does not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of love, power, and discipline. An encouraging word from God is like 7,000 affirmations in our lives.

Since a father figure dominated last week’s discussion, this week, I want to highlight a mother in the Bible. So first, how many of you can sing this Paul Simon song with me?

When I was a little boy

I’d say, “Now who do . . .

And the Devil would call my name

Who do you think you’re fooling?”

I'm a consecrated boy

Oh, my mama loves me, she loves me

Singer in a Sunday choir

She get down on her knees and hug me

Oh, she loves me like a rock

She rocked me like the rock of ages

And she loves me

She loves me, loves me, loves me, loves me

[61] How did your momma love you? Maybe that's an easy question for you to answer. Maybe your momma was a great encourager, a great comfort. A great cook, too, I'll bet. Or maybe she wasn't the best mom for you. Maybe you disagreed; maybe your relationship with her was rocky. Or maybe she's listening right now, and you're scared to answer that question. Fair enough. Maybe there was another maternal figure in your life who fed, comforted, and nourished you.

Today, we are going to look into the life of one particular mother in the Bible who loved her son so much, she gave him over completely to God. If you want to answer one question, “How can I pray for my children?” then listen closely, because Hannah has something to tell us from her life.

We turn in our Bibles to 1st Samuel 1 for our story this morning. I encourage you to pick up those pew Bibles and open them with me. (I'll even give you a hint. Turn to page 244.)

[62] The first thing we notice is in verse 5: “The Lord had closed Hannah's womb.” The understanding in Old Testament times was that it was the Lord's decision whether or not a woman got pregnant. From Hannah's perspective, her one purpose in life—to provide an heir for her family—was unmet because God had chosen to ignore her. It was bad enough that her life was unfulfilled, but her rival, Peninnah, had children. Have you ever had a sibling rivalry? This goes way beyond that. Peninnah was provoking Hannah, pestering her. “Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah. I've got kids, and you don't!”

Life was hard for Hannah. She wanted to have children but was not able. Imagine having your greatest desire in life denied. Imagine feeling like you had no purpose. For some of us, that may describe our own hearts. Hannah was in great emotional pain, and I would guess many of you can empathize to some degree.

[63] There’s terrible irony going on here. The festival they were celebrating at Shiloh was probably the feast of Tabernacles.¹ It was a time when people celebrated God’s care for them in the desert wanderings, as well as providing a good harvest. This was a Thanksgiving festival. Yet in the midst of this great feast, Hannah was so despondent, she stopped eating and just wept. Elkanah tried to comfort his wife, to lift up her spirits. “Doesn’t my love mean more to you than ten sons?” he asked.

[64] We get a sense of the depth of Hannah’s anguish, and that leads us to Hannah’s prayer. I’m overwhelmed by her fervor and passion. She was so deep in pain, so deep into communion with God, she was paralyzed, except for her lips. Look at verse 13. “She was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard.” That’s crying out to God. That’s the equivalent of “spilling out your guts” to God.

[65] Not only the emotion of her prayer, but the content is convicting, too. In verse 11 we read that Hannah made a vow, that if she bore a son, she would dedicate him to service to God. She promised that her son would become a Nazirite: never cut his hair, never touch alcohol or anything that would make him unclean. You might recall that Samson’s parents made the same vow in the book of Judges, as did John the Baptizer’s parents in Luke. Hannah promised to give her son fully over to God.

Contrast Hannah’s request with ours. What do we pray for? Say, for example, we wish to be healed from an illness. That’s a common prayer we make, and a good one. Do we simply say, “God, please heal me. Amen!”? If God grants our request, do we say, “Okeedokee, God, thanks a bunch!”? Shouldn’t we pray more like Hannah? “God, please heal me so that I can continue to serve you. Heal my brother or sister, so that they can continue to be a bold witness to your glory. Lord, whether or not you heal them, we give you all the honor and glory,

¹ NIV Study Bible notes.

and take no credit for ourselves.” I’m just asking, how do we pray? We’re not trying to bribe God. We’re not saying, “Do this God, and I’ll read my bible ten minutes a day for the next year.” We need to fully give ourselves to our prayers with the intention of glorifying God like Hannah did.

There is great irony in Hannah’s prayer. There was no guarantee God would grant her a son, and if God did, Hannah would lose him, in a way. This was a net gain of zero children. And yet, Hannah was not deterred. In fact, she was bold. She did not simply pray, “Well, if not a son, a daughter, or just help me adopt. That’d would be OK.” No! Hannah was bold and specific. As personal as her prayer was, she prayed through all these things for God’s will and to God’s glory. Wow.

[66] Hannah had all the grace, in contrast to the priest, Eli. Despite his rather insensitive comment, “What, are you drunk?”, Hannah responded with a gracious reply. “No, sir, I’m spilling my guts out to God.” Now notice how Hannah reacted when Eli blessed her. Her countenance was lifted. Her spirit was restored. She went home with her family, and yet, at that point, her prayer hadn’t been answered yet. Hannah, with encouragement from Eli, believed in faith her prayer had been heard. Astounding.

Friends, what is your deepest desire for the children of our church? Is it not that they would also serve God? That is what I would hope for. We could pray that they would get good grades, find a nice job, and live happy, quiet lives.

[67] That’s not what Hannah prayed for. Her prayer was a dangerous prayer. Eli, the priest, lost his job by blessing Hannah. Samuel eventually replaced Eli. Samuel became the priest, judge, and prophet of all of Israel. That was not an easy job. Samuel had to deal with wars, rejection by his country, and King Saul, a belligerent and somewhat crazy king. Samuel did not inherit a cushy, corner office job. When Hannah prayed that Samuel would serve God, it was dangerous.

[68] We do need to pray that our children would serve God. But like Hannah, we need to be prepared for the price when God answers our prayers. There is a financial cost. An emotional cost. A spiritual cost. We want to see young people with hearts on fire for Jesus Christ. This is our fervent prayer. Are we, the church, ready to back that up? With nursery attendants? Sunday School

teachers? Camp scholarships? Mission trips? Would you be willing, as many parents have, to not see your own children because they became missionaries?

[69] We should desire to pray for our children as fervently as Hannah did. We should pray for our children, knowing God hears and answers our prayers. We are not praying that they will have an easy life. Far from it. Samuel’s life was not easy. But we are praying that our children will trust God absolutely, and that we will be able to show them what it means to follow Christ. We can do this with God’s help.

The great news is that our prayer are heard by Jesus, our high priest, our intercessor. When Hannah was praying, Eli heard and responded by blessing her. When we pray, Jesus is closer than our own heartbeat, and intercedes to God on our behalf.

Hannah loved Samuel enough to let him go, and she loved the Lord enough to trust Samuel’s life to God. Samuel’s name means, “God hears.” We need to pray like Hannah did, trusting that God is always listening and responding to us.

[70] There are two things we can do for our children, right now. First, show them what it means to live by faith and serve God, and second, be fervent in our prayers for them. Today, we can respond to both callings. First, I invite you all to join with me in a simple statement of faith, the Apostle’s Creed. This is what we believe, what we want to model for our children. Afterwards, we will enter a time of prayer. I want to remind you that the prayer rail is open. God is here to meet you, to bless you. It might be dangerous, but it is worth it. Come forward and kneel, here or at home, and spend time praying for our families and our children. Let the Holy Spirit fill us all. Our families need our example and they need our prayers. So let us pray like Hannah prayed: boldly and sincerely.

[71-74] Apostle’s Creed

[75] Ministry Opportunities (aka Announcements, but better.)

[76] Part of the mission in the church is to go into the world, so in two weeks we will hold our annual outdoor worship service at Kestner Park in Houghton, also known as Chutes and Ladders. Feel free to bring your own comfy lawn chair, or sit at the tables provided. You are strongly encouraged to invite a friend or

neighbor to the worship service. There is no potluck, but all are welcome to bring a picnic lunch. Please be aware that July 31st will not be streamed online.

[77] Samuel's life was dedicated to God. There are many ways for us to follow his example. One of them is participating in an Emmaus Weekend. Mary Erva is going to explain to us how we can do that....

[78] Hannah made a great sacrifice when she turned Samuel over to the care of the priest, Eli. Because she believed in the providence of God, she gave what she had. While we are not asking you to give us your children and grandchildren this morning, we do ask that you join us in supporting the ministry of this church with your giving. Just as Hannah supported Samuel as he ministered before the Lord, your support helps our church minister to others through our mission and witness. You are encouraged to place your gifts before God this morning in the offering plates by the doors, through mail-in and online giving at houghtongrace.org. Thank you for your generosity.

[79-82] Prayers of the People

MEMORY VERSE:

1 John 5:14 "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Who has prayed for you in your life? Whom have you prayed for?
2. Have you ever "spilled your guts" to God? What were you praying for?
3. When Hannah gave Samuel over to serve the Lord, how do you think she felt?
4. What is one way you can commit yourself to serve the Lord?
5. What is one way you can commit to giving "your children" (literally or figuratively) over to God?