

“Rejoicing in the Lord”

I Samuel 2:1-11

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

Now turn with me if you would to I Samuel 2. Our reading tonight is going to consist of the first eleven verses, the song of praise and thanksgiving that Hannah sings in the temple at Shiloh. You remember last week we began to look at this great book of I Samuel, were introduced to this little family of Elkanah and Hannah and another woman — another wife in this home by the name of Peninnah. And Peninnah is having children seemingly annually, and rubbing it in to poor Hannah. We watched her last week making the journey to Shiloh and pouring out her heart and soul before the Lord, only to discover that not only did she have a husband who said to her, ‘Why are you not eating and why are you not sleeping, and am I not worth more than ten sons to you?’... she discovers that the priest Eli mistakes her for being drunk.

Well, God has heard her prayer. God has visited Hannah, and a little boy, Samuel, has been born. But Hannah, you remember, made that extraordinary prayer. I mentioned last week that I think this is perhaps one of the most eloquent, moving prayers outside of the prayers of Jesus in the whole of the Scriptures, because she says to the Lord, ‘Lord, if you give to me, I will give him back to You.’ And it’s in fulfillment of that... Samuel is now possibly three or four years old. He has been weaned from his mother, and they’re making the trek from wherever Ramathaim-zophim is in the hill country of Ephraim. Not sure where that is, but wherever that is, they’ve made the trek to Shiloh to leave Samuel there in the care of Eli and his two not-so-likable sons.

Well, tonight we’re going to read and study together this great song. We’ve sung some beautiful hymns tonight... beautiful hymns... one modern and contemporary whose words were just so very appropriate for the context of what Hannah is going through, and Allen and Kristi’s song, too. If you were looking at the title of that song and listening to the words, it’s getting right into the very heart of the trial and pain that Hannah has known. Well, tonight she sings a song of thanksgiving and of praise and of worship. Before we read it together, let’s look to the Lord in prayer. Let’s pray.

Father, it’s a joy and a privilege for us to read the Bible that You have spoken, that You are there and you are not silent, that You have spoken Your word. You’ve spoken through the lips of prophets and through the Prophet, Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. As we read the Scriptures tonight, O Lord, we pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Help us to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, and all for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Now this is God's word:

“And Hannah prayed and said,
‘My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.
‘There is none holy like the Lord;
there is none besides You;
there is no rock like our God.
Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,
and by Him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble bind on strength.
Those who were full have
hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.
The Lord kills and brings to life;
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and he exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
He lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.
For the pillars of the earth are the Lords,
and on them He has set the world.
‘He will guard the feet of His faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.
The adversaries of the Lord shall be
broken to pieces;
against them He will thunder in heaven.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
He will give strength to His king
and exalt the power of His anointed.’
“Then Elkanah went home to Ramah. And the boy ministered to the Lord in the
presence of Eli the priest.”

Thus far God's holy and inerrant word.

You have to try and put yourself now in the shoes of Hannah. It's understandable that she is rejoicing, in one sense. She has borne a son. God has heard her prayers. God has visited her. God has come to her in ways that perhaps she had begun to think would not be possible. But put yourself in her shoes now. She is handing over her four-year-old son to a stranger; a priest, to be sure...someone presumably that she could trust. She is perhaps unaware of what kind of priest Eli is and what kind of family he has. It's hard for me to even conceive what must have been going on in her mind. She'd made a vow, you see, in days when vows were both made and kept. She made a vow to the Lord in the presence of Eli. There was no turning back, even if the thought has crossed her mind — and who would think that it had not crossed her mind in the past two or three, perhaps four years.

But she is handing him over now to the Lord, and she's worshipping. She's in the place of worship. She's in the house of God in Shiloh. She's come to the place where God has promised His presence, and she opens up her heart to the Lord and sings. It's a prayer; it's a song. It's a psalm. Perhaps you're asking the question, "Did she actually pray like this? Did these precise words come out of her mouth in this very elaborate poetic form?" Well, perhaps not. Some have conjectured...Arthur Golding, for example, has conjectured that in the temple in Shiloh there were perhaps already some psalms and songs, and even prayers, that she is now accommodating to her own situation. There are general statements here, and then there are very specific statements, and perhaps she is utilizing one of these forms of prayer and she's turning it into her prayer.

You know, you can do that. Some of you here tonight have experienced great deliverances. Some of you this week. Some of you have emailed Ligon and the staff, and I've had occasion to see some of the things that have happened even in the past seven days — acts of deliverance, acts of divine intervention; some of them small and relatively insignificant, but to you and your family they were big things, things you will remember, things you will talk about for weeks and months and years when family will gather at Thanksgiving and Christmas, and when children grow and get married, and you'll be talking about events. These are some of the things that you will remember. You can do what Hannah does here. You can take a Psalm, one of the great Psalms of thanksgiving, and make it your Psalm, make it your prayer, make it your act of adoration and praise.

I want us to see four things in this Psalm, all of them encapsulating the idea which must surely have been dominant in Hannah's mind and heart as she approached this day: namely, the providence of God. The providence of God; the overruling of God; that things happen because God orders them to happen. And they happen because God orders them to happen before they happen, and He orders them to happen in the way that they happen.

I. The providence of God.

In the first place, I want you to see that Hannah learned to read the providence of

God in her own life. I say that because of how she begins: “My heart exults [or rejoices] in the Lord.” Her dominant thought as she begins this song is that she's thankful. That's the dominant thing. You know, you could imagine that perhaps she was regretful, that she might have regretted having made that vow — (‘Whatever possessed me?’)

But the first thing that I want us to see is this thankfulness, this spirit of contentment, this spirit of well-being in Hannah. Now, you can only achieve that, you can only get to that point when you live under the umbrella — the conscious umbrella — of the providence of God. She saw her life, you see, as under the control of God—every part of it, every aspect of it, all the details of it: her family life; her marriage; her children; her little Samuel. She rejoices. It reminds me so very much of Paul in [Philippians 1](#). He's in prison. He's expecting — what? Possibly his death. Now we know that he was released, but as far as he knew he was in a prison in Rome and he was facing possible execution. And you remember he urges his beloved Philippian brothers and sisters to be filled with joy and filled with thanksgiving, because it's through this trial, it's through this peculiar event in his life that the gospel is now being spoken of in Caesar's household. In other words, he'd learned to view his trials, his difficulties, his problems, as part of a larger picture, a larger framework: that God was in charge; that God was working out His plan and His purpose even in dark providences.

Hannah's situation was surely dark. As Anne Duncan said to me after the sermon last week... “...Surrounded by insensitive men,” she said. Elknah...what an oaf! Seeing her miserable and crying and off her food, and saying to her, “Am I not worth to you more than ten sons?” And Eli accuses her of being drunk. What dark days she had been through — the taunting of Peninnah. And even in the dark providences, Hannah has come to a point in her life, in her experience of the Lord's ways in her life, where she has begun to see, I think, that despite the darkness and despite the trials, and despite the difficulties and problems and things that she would wish had never been, there's an over-arching plan and purpose of Almighty God, so that she can rejoice. She's not rejoicing because of the trial; she's not rejoicing because she's a masochist. She's rejoicing because she has seen that she is an instrument in the outworking of the mighty plan and purpose of God. That's why Paul could say, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therefore to be content.” I think you see it here in Hannah. There's a spirit of contentment here in a difficult place, in a difficult task...handing over your little son for the rest of his life as a Nazarite, to serve the Lord in Shiloh.

She would visit him no doubt from time to time. We'll see that in the coming weeks. But the incredible difficulty of what she is facing, and yet she is exulting in the Lord. She is finding her strength in the exaltation of the Lord: “My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.” That's the first thing that I want us to see, that she has learned to read her life in view of the providence of God.

My friend, until you get to that point you will always be discontent. Until you begin to submit yourself to the providence of God, to the rule of God, to the sovereign overruling of God in your life and your family there will always be a spirit of restlessness

and a spirit of discontentedness. Learn from Hannah.

II. God's providence reflects His character.

The second thing I want us to see is that she learned to trust God's providence because she understood God's character. You notice in the second verse — it's like a mini-systematic theology, it's like a mini-catechism:

“There is none holy like the Lord....” You remember when Isaiah went into the temple, in Isaiah 6:

“In the year when King Uzziah died, [he] saw the Lord high and lifted up...and seated upon a throne...and seraphim crying,
‘Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts;
Heaven and earth is full of Your glory!’”

And what did Isaiah do in response? He was conscious of his sin. He was conscious of the fact that he oughtn't to be in the presence of one so holy. “I'm a man of unclean lips,” he said. Now Isaiah had the cleanest lips in Israel. He was a prophet. But in the face of the holiness of the God who cannot even look upon sin, who is so far removed from us as the Creator of the ends of the earth, all that Isaiah could do was say, “Woe is me! I'm a man of unclean lips!” And here is Hannah, and she's exalting the holy character of God. No wonder God's ways are not our ways. No wonder God's thoughts are not our thoughts, because He is holy.

“There is none besides You...” which I take it to mean a statement of the fact that there is no other god but this God. It's a statement of Jewish monotheism, that there is only one God, and all the gods of the surrounding nations were no gods at all. She knows this God. She loves this God. She worships this God. She has covenant fellowship with this God. She is in a relationship with this God whereby she can speak to Him and commune with Him, and bless Him and thank Him, and revere Him.

“There is no rock like our God.” The solidity of God, the firmness of God, the reliability of God, the protection of God.

“Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth,
For the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by His actions are weighed.”

He knows everything. He's the only God there is, and He's holy and He's our protector, and He's a firm foundation and a bedrock...and He knows everything. You think God doesn't know your trial? You think God doesn't know the details of the anguish and torment and difficulty through which you pass?

“Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should not ever be discouraged;

Take it to the Lord in prayer”
because He's a God who knows.

And do you see what she's doing? She's rehearsing in embryonic fashion what we sometimes call the attributes of God. You know, there are several lessons there. One of the lessons is that the way to peace, true peace, the way to contentment is not by looking at yourself. It's not by finding some inner strength within ourselves that is just bursting to emerge. The way to spiritual contentment and peace is to reflect upon the being and character and attributes of our God.

Now, my friends, how often to you do that? You say you have difficulty praying. Well, stop and think and rehearse some of the attributes of God. Go through them: that God is holy; that God is one; that God knows all things; that God is everywhere present; that all power in heaven and earth is given to Him. Rehearse them. Remind yourself of the greatness of the character of this God, and then certainly remind yourself that this immense God deigns to come and have fellowship with you and commune with you, and speak to you and reassure you by His words; and send His Son for you, to die for you, to rise for you, to ever live for you, to intercede for you.

You think that secularism doesn't affect the church? Whenever we take our eyes off the character of God, whenever our worship isn't God-centered, whenever our living isn't God-centered, we succumb, you and I, to the secularism of our age. That's what's wrong, isn't it? That's the verdict of what is wrong with the church today. What's wrong so very often with our own lives is that we're not reflecting enough upon the character of our God.

She learned to put her trust in God's providence because she knew the character of God. This isn't John Owen here. This isn't John Calvin. This isn't Louis Berkhof. This is Hannah. This is a woman who has given birth to a little son, and is giving her son away to Eli as a Nazarite for the rest of his life in fulfillment of a vow that she has made to the Lord, and this is what she's doing.

III. God's providence covers both good and “bad.”

But thirdly, I want us to see that she learned to put her trust in God's providence even in the darkest of places. Even in the darkest of places. Look at what she says in verses 6, 7, and 8. She's still reflecting on the character of God, and she says,

“The Lord kills and brings to life;
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and He exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
He lifts the needy from the ash heap
And makes them sit with princes
And inherit a seat of honor.”

There are dark things here. God brings down...God brings low...God destroys...God kills...God brings death. Oh, I know that it's part of accepted Christian belief today at a funeral where there's been a great tragedy to say some sentimental mish-mash that God isn't here; God wasn't in this; God doesn't have a part in this tragedy, in this problem, this evil, this catastrophe. How different the perspective of Job when he lost all ten of his children and went through an economic crisis much worse than anything that you have been through in recent days. Some of you know the pain and difficulty of that. And what did Job say? "The Lord gave, and the Lord takes away." God is in this. The sovereignty of God in life and in death: He exalts and He also brings low. Hannah knew that. She had been there.

I remember reading...twenty years ago I was sent a copy of Calvin's sermons on the book of Job, 159 preached in 1554 and 1555, translated in 1572 by an Englishman by the name of Arthur Golding. I remember thinking about that...how in the world did anyone read this? The old Elizabethan English text...small, small print. On the very first page...I had just opened it. It had come in the mail as a gift from The Banner of Truth to me, and on that very first page I spied these words, "It is a great thing to be subject to the majesty of God." Hannah has subjected herself even in the dark places. Do you remember what Mrs. Job said? And you remember what Job's response to her was after she had said "Curse God and die"? "Shall we not accept good at the hands of God and not evil?"

Good and evil. Yes, in the dark places.

And maybe that's where you are tonight. Life is dark; dark in your family, dark in your marriage, dark in your relationship with your children, dark in your job — or perhaps you don't have one. Things have happened in recent weeks that you could not have foreseen. No one would ever have wished them. Will you learn tonight with Hannah to trust in the providence of God in dark places?

You know, if it hadn't been for the dark places, Hannah would never have been here. She would never have made that prayer. Samuel would never have been born if there hadn't been the dark places, if there hadn't been a Peninnah in her life. I think Hannah came to the point where she saw a glimpse of why God had allowed a Peninnah in her life, because she caught a glimpse of what it means to live in subjection to the majesty of God even in dark places.

IV. God's ultimate purpose in His providence.

But there's a fourth thing I want us to see. And perhaps it's the most important, because she learned to trust in God's providences...because she glimpsed something of God's ultimate purpose.

Do you notice how the song begins? "I rejoice in Your salvation." Do you notice how it

ends? There's talk about a king. Now there are no kings in Israel yet, but she's talking about a king — an expectation perhaps because in Deuteronomy 18 there had been talk, a prophetic disclosure that a king would be born. And do you notice how it ends? With mention of “an anointed one.” Now you've run ahead. You know that this song is cited elsewhere in Scripture — much of it. The bringing low and exalting, it's the language of Mary in *The Magnificat* in Luke 1. It's exactly how she had felt! And Hannah? Oh, I don't know how much Hannah understood of what she was saying here, but she caught a glimpse that part of the strategy of God in the personal affairs of her own life was that there was something far greater at work. It was salvation...that her small little experience of pain followed by deliverance was part of a picture that would grow and grow to be a picture of how God would ultimately work through a king, through an anointed one.

And from our perspective (if not Hannah's)...from our perspective we can turn the pages of the Old Testament and from Malachi and into Matthew behold something of the fulfillment of what Hannah was really trying to say: that through Hannah's pain **God was working out a plan and a purpose in which He would send His own Son, the anointed One, a King to rule over His and our enemies.** Hannah glimpsed a little salvation in her own life, but it was just a shadow of a far greater work that God was doing.

My friends, can you view what's happening in your life in that larger picture? That this is just part of God's way of fulfilling His purpose: “I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” May God give us grace to do that.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for the Scriptures. Thank You for this song of Hannah. We pray now, Lord, for one another. Give us a peace that passes all understanding as we bow in acknowledgement of Your overruling providence. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please stand; receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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