

With God You Can Make A Difference

The Song of Hannah

This portion of our Scripture is often called the Song of Hannah. Like many of the Psalms it gives thanks to God for blessings received and praise to God for remembering the downtrodden. It is similar to the Song of Mary found in the Gospel of Luke (1:46-55; the Magnificat) in which Mary sings her praise of God who has shown favor to her to be the mother of Jesus. The background is this (1 Samuel 1:4-20): Hannah was barren; that is she could not conceive, though her husband loved her greatly. Because of this she was mocked by the other women. Her husband Elkanah and the priest Eli were unable to help her to deal with her affliction. Hannah came to the temple of the Lord to pray and when Eli finally understood the reason for her praying and weeping he blessed her. Her affliction ended as she conceived and bore a son. Do you know who that son was? He was Samuel who would become a great prophet and religious leader in Israelite. It was Samuel who would identify and anoint David as king of Israel. With God Hannah made a difference.

Remaining Faithful

Hannah suffered for years, yet in faith she was not disappointed, for God finally gave her a son. Hannah had a significant role to play in God's plan, in God's time. We are part of a greater plan and purpose and our action or inaction carries far into the future, even if we cannot see the results. This is why it is so important to keep the faith, even in times when it seems God is far away.

In a book titled *Disappointment With God* there's the story about a man named Douglas who gave up a profitable business to start a downtown ministry in a large city for street people. But shortly after the ministry began, Douglas' wife developed breast cancer and had to have surgery. After the surgery she required chemotherapy which devastated her physical health.

In the middle of that crisis, a drunken driver hit Douglas' car and he suffered severe brain injury. The injury left him with chronic headaches and double vision so that he could no longer work full-time to support his wife and daughter.

If anyone had a right to be angry with God, if anyone had a right to question God's steadfast love and mercy, then Douglas did. But instead, remarkably, Douglas was not disappointed with God. Douglas said "I have learned not to confuse God with life." He put it this way: "I feel free to curse the unfairness of life, and to express all my grief and anger to God, because I believe God feels the same way (I do) about what has happened in my life--God is grieved and angry too. We tend to think, 'Life should be fair because God is fair.' But God isn't life. God is God."¹

It is essential to keep the faith so that God can count on us even when we need to lean on God. God can use faithful people in mighty ways. I know that there are people right here today who need to lean on God. I know that we, as a congregation, need to lean on God more than ever, with so much before us. Faithfulness paves the way for God's action.

Faithfulness: it's the stuff most mothers are made of when their little ones get sick; and missionaries who lose themselves in their labor even though it yields but little fruit for a long time. It reveals itself in workers who show up on time, roll up their sleeves and commit

¹Contributed by Rev. Curtis Fussell, Richlands Presbyterian Church, Richlands, VA.

themselves more to doing the job than watching the clock. Diligence is its brother - dependability, its partner - discipline, its parent. Faithfulness does not just mean going through the motions, keeping the pew warm. It means keeping your spirit warm by practicing the way of Christ in all weather. "The tendency is to look for the marvelous in our experience; we mistake the sense of the heroic for being heroes. It is one thing to go through a crisis grandly, but another thing to go through every day glorifying God when there is no witness, no limelight, no one paying the remotest attention to us."

There is a side benefit to faithfulness: it builds a life of character. Character is "the ability to carry out a good resolution long after the mood in which it was made is past." It means sticking with Christ and his way through tough times, uncertain times, and boring times. Character is of greater value than convenience. Convenience does what's easiest, while character does what is right. Convenience says, "When I feel good, then I'll do it." But character says, "When I do it, I'll feel good."

Faithfulness builds character and forms us into the kinds of persons God intends us to be; like His Son who is steadfast and trustworthy. Underlying all the activities, plans, and vision for this congregation, is our purpose (see the bulletin), "To bring people to the transforming power of Jesus Christ through membership in his family and to equip the members for ministry in the church and the world." Part of the vision here is to grow mature Christians, people who exhibit Christ-like character. It's all about being steadfast, committed and united in Christ as one's savior and Lord.

Author Chuck Swindoll wrote, "There is an enormous difference between growing old in the Lord and growing up in Him. One is automatic and requires no effort at all . . . just aging. But the other is never automatic or easy." Faithfulness and solid Christian character is the way to grow up in the Lord. It calls for personal discipline, continual determination, and spiritual desire. It requires us to follow He who is the Living Word of God, and in turn, carefully adhering to the word as given through the Bible.

Partnering With God

Now Hannah did not simply wait passively for the Lord to see her affliction. She went to God in prayer. We do not know how long she prayed - it might have been years - but she was steadfast in her prayer. When we work we work. When we pray, God works. It is when we partner with God that we make the greatest difference. I can imagine there are many areas of your life in which prayer would make a difference. You may say, "Well, I prayed about such and such and God never answered my prayer." I too have prayed for some things and it seems as though my prayer has gone unanswered. Yet my faith in God tells me otherwise. Didn't Jesus advise us to pray continually? He told the story of a persistent widow who nagged the judge until he settled her lawsuit. Jesus said, "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?... I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"²

So often we pray no miracles result. There's no suspension of the laws of nature, things and people don't change one bit. Of course we live in the microwave and computer age; instant messaging and text at any time. Our expectations prevent us from comprehending God's eternal outlook. I believe that God answers prayers, in God's own time. Often, the answer to

²Luke 18:7-8, NIV.

our prayer emerges as we are transformed by that relationship with God which is nurtured in prayer.

For this reason alone we must all be praying regularly. Yet we need to pray in order to partner with God; to ensure that God's purposes among us and with us are fulfilled. Now is the time when your prayer and our prayer together for ourselves, for those in need, and for this congregation as the body of Christ, is needed. That is why your pledge card asks not simply about your financial commitment to God's work, but also your prayer commitment. With God you can make a difference.

Jesus reminds us that apart from him we can do nothing (John 15). Jesus said, "Everything is possible for him who believes." And again he said, "...all things are possible with God" (Luke 9:23; 10:27). With God everything is possible. If this was not so, why would we ever call Him God?

Do you ever feel like things are going badly? Do you ever have days when your hope dims? Do you have times when it seems hard to face the future? It's easy to find evidence of the bad things around us, reasons to lose hope. (When we fill our minds with fear, the world will appear frightening). And yes, faithfulness is tested by the daily-ness, the monotony of life. The Christian life is not always easy and there are times when it seems futile. Still, our Lord tells us to endure and he assures us that life will be ours. One of the things we do in church is remind ourselves that God is in control and that God hears our cries. We replay past victories of God in our life in order to find hope to pre-play future triumphs.

A Sure Guide

Nations and leaders will come and go... Buildings may stand for a long time, but they too can easily be destroyed... But the word of our God stands forever. That is why the Bible is so important, for it reminds us of the Word of God; it carries the truth about the Word of God. As the Bible itself testifies, Jesus is the Word of God. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). It is important to know the Word of God, because we need a sure guide into the uncharted future.

Lady Margaret Thatcher (former Prime Minister of Great Britain) once said, "Commentators seem to regard one as something of a phenomenon because one set out in politics with conviction. . . I say, if you're embarking on a great voyage across the ocean, you have to have some stars to steer by. And the stars have to be constant. It's no good steering by a shooting star."

The Lord is the everlasting God; His word stands forever. With God we can surely make the difference: in our families, in our church, in our community, in our world. Our prayers, our persistence, our efforts, our faith... our God, will bring us the victory.