

**1 Samuel 1:1-28**

**SI:** We had a wonderful vacation in the North Carolina mountains.

Thank you for taking such good care of our family and making it possible.

This morning I’m starting a new sermon series that I’m really excited about. We’re going to study the books of 1 & 2 Samuel.

I don’t know how long it will take. I’m sure I’ll take some breaks along the way for Christmas and Easter and so forth.

But I’m eager to see how the Lord will use these books to encourage us and deepen our walk with him.

1 & 2 Samuel traces some of the most turbulent years of Israel’s history as the nation transitioned to a monarchy.

It tells the story through the lives of three people—

Samuel, the kingmaker,

Saul, the people’s choice for king,

and David, the Lord’s chosen and anointed king.

It’s a great story. In fact, there is nothing at all like this in all the literature of antiquity and all the holy books of other religions. You find nothing at all like the story of David’s life in the Koran, for example, or all the mythical writings of Hinduism.

That’s what’s so unique about the Christian faith.

Our faith is rooted in the mighty acts of God in history.

Not myth or legend but the interaction of God with real men and real women in real times and real places through real manifestations of his power and glory. And God never changes. So as we learn more about his ways with people in 1 & 2 Samuel, we are learning his ways with us, and our eyes are opened to what is really happening in our lives and our church during our time.

\*A Biblical History of Israel

So let’s jump right in.

**INTRO:** Last Sunday, while we were on vacation, we worshipped at a church that has a special place in my heart—Montreat Presbyterian Church. It's not called that anymore.

Recently changed their name to Christ Community Church, tell why in a minute.

That church is special to me for sentimental reasons.

I've worshipped there on vacations since I was a little boy.

I worshipped there with my maternal grandparents, both now with the Lord. When I was a teenager I met Billy Graham there one Sunday and shook his hand.

This was Ruth Graham's home church. It's where she and their children worshipped all the years Billy was evangelizing. Happened to be there Sunday. I've attended the weddings of several cousins there.

A couple years ago we attended a renewal of vows ceremony for some relatives whose marriage the Lord had miraculously restored.

Our own children have worshipped there since they were young.

In fact, on this vacation we found some snapshots of Adrienne and Eliza when they were ages four and two. They are in cute little dresses standing on a bench outside Montreat Pres after a Sunday worship service long ago.

So there are all those sentimental reasons.

But there is a deeper reason I love that church, and that's because it's a church with a big story, and that story inspires me. What is that story?

Well, first it's a story of failure—

the profound failure of men in their worldly wisdom and pride.

Montreat, NC the historic conference grounds of the mainline Presbyterian Church, not the PCA, our little denomination, but the mainline denomination, PCUS(A).

The mainline Presbyterian Church was once a great denomination that produced some of America's finest missionaries and preachers and theologians.

But as you probably know, over many decades it abandoned the Bible and the Christian faith. At this summer's General Assembly of the PCUSA in the opening worship service, prayers were made to Allah—since of course—there are many paths to God besides Jesus and all religions are basically the same.

Because of Montreat Presbyterian Church's location in this historic conference ground where the movers and shakers of the denomination meet, the congregation has had a front row seat to witness the theological disintegration of the PCUSA and the profound failure of its leaders.

But that's not the whole story, it's also a story of faith.

That congregation cherishes the Word of God. They've had just two pastors over

past 53 years, and the one there now is still going strong. We heard him Sunday. I've always sensed in the preaching and worship and prayers in that church a deep dependency on the Lord, probably in part because of where they are, and pressure and even hostility they have faced.

A few years ago the congregation said, we can't be in this denomination any more. When they voted to leave, their former denomination sued them.

Tried to strip them of their name and evict them from place of worship. The congregation gave up its name. No longer Montreat Pres, Christ Community.

But they cried to the Lord to preserve their place of worship and he delivered them. And that's the other part of their story—the power of God.

Of course his power is manifest in the many smaller stories and private lives of individual members, but there is also this grander story of his power. How through the decades the Lord Jesus has preserved them as a church, kept their faith alive and love warm and their theology pure, and preserved their place of worship and witness in that community. All for his glory and the advance of his kingdom.

I tell you that because the books of 1 & 2 Samuel are also the big story of a church, the Old Testament church, the congregation of Israel.

And these same themes reverberate through the story of that church too.

We're going to see them over and over again in 1 & 2 Samuel.

1. We're going to see, first, the failure of men.

In these books, people fail over and over again.

That's not to say there aren't brave, good, faithful believers—there are.

But even some of the best fail, sometimes in spectacular ways. The Psalmist says: Put no confidence in princes nor for help on man depend. We'll see why.

2. Second, we're going to see over and over the cry of faith.

We're going to see believers, aware of their need, their helplessness, their faults, their weaknesses, their sins—cry out to the Lord for deliverance and peace.

They may be disappointed in him, even angry with him—but they cry out to him because they know the Lord is the one with whom they have to do.

3. Third, we're going to see, over and over again, the power of God.

The Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Armies steps in over and over and does things big and small for his people and in accordance with his larger plan.

Let's look for these themes in this opening story and apply to our lives.

### **MP#1 The failure of men**

Throughout history there have been times the church has flourished.

Times when believers have enjoyed a kind of golden age.  
Times when a spirit of joy and commitment filled the people of God.  
Times of revival, times of great preaching,  
Times when Christian institutions and ministries are established and flourish.  
Times when the covenant children of the church, young men and young women  
in great numbers, give themselves to missionary service.

And then there have been times when the church has not flourished.  
It has languished. It has regressed.

Churches have emptied, the pastoral office has become corrupt,  
there is no good preaching, covenant children leave the church in droves,  
and the faithful few are reduced to a pitiful number.

I think of Tobi Daum's description of church life in Germany that he shared with  
us when he was here a few months ago—how the majority of ministers don't even  
believe in God and the closest evangelical church to Daums two hours away.

The book of 1 Samuel begins during one of those bad times.  
The spiritual life of Israel was at a very low ebb.  
There were no prophets—God was not speaking to the church.

The priests were weak and corrupt, as we will see.  
And even those who were true believers and who did know the Lord and try  
to follow him, they were few and they were discouraged.

We're introduced right away to a woman named Hannah.  
She was a believer, she was married to a believer.

Her husband Elkanah was a man of standing and of means and he loved Hannah.  
But Hannah was barren.

That's always a deep sorrow for a woman who wants to have children,  
but in Hannah's culture, there was shame attached to barrenness.  
She would have been judged as having failed her husband, his family, and tribe.  
Her barrenness would also have been considered judgment from God.

Elkanah responded to Hannah's barrenness by taking a second wife.

That was socially acceptable. A man had to have heirs.  
As one commentator put it, he married the depressingly fertile Peninnah,  
who had many children and certainly earned Elkanah's respect for that.  
But she knew Elkanah loved Hannah more so she provoked her cruelly.  
There is not a single example in the Bible of happy bigamy.  
It always shows homes full of rivalry, hatred, and sadness.

And this is something important you need to remember about the Old Testament.

It doesn't always tell us something is wrong.

It doesn't always say: This was displeasing to the Lord.

It shows us instead of tells us and expects us to figure it out.

That's very important for understanding 1 & 2 Samuel.

Elkanah's bigamy also shows the sad reality that even believers are men of their times and often follow the customary sinful practices of times.

How could Christian men and women in the South 150 years ago, people who believed in Christ and believed the Bible, how could they own slaves?

They followed the customary sinful practices of that time and culture.

We have our own blind spots that future generations of Christians will judge.

Elkanah tried to comfort Hannah but he was clueless and ineffective

He gave her a double portion food at the feast.

That just made Peninnah provoke her and irritate her more.

He asked her questions that were not helpful, that showed he didn't understand.

Why do you weep? Why sad? Why don't eat?

The best: Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?

Her husband loved her but he failed her.

So she went into the place of worship, deeply distressed, and began to pray silently.

The old priest Eli saw her and thought she was drunk and reprimanded her for it.

Think of that: She went to church and her pastor failed her.

Instead of comforting her he wrongly judged her. I've done that to people.

Don't be surprised if people fail you.

Even people who love you, like Elkanah, who are totally sincere and want to help. Even believers, even pastors and churches who are also serious but who don't understand and who increase your pain.

By God's grace you don't always experience failures all the time.

A great many of the interactions and relationships you have do help.

But Hannah's experience is a sober reminder from God's word—people fail.

And sometimes there are times and seasons in families or even in the life of the church where those failures are more pronounced and painful.

We need this biblical realism. But you can't stop here.

This leads us to the second theme.

## **MP#2 The cry of faith**

Hannah prayed. She asked the Lord for a son.

People ask God for things all the time, but not like Hannah.

Her prayer was remarkable.

She prayed silently except for her weeping.

Her lips were moving but her voice was not heard.

That shows she really believed God could see inside her and that he was listening to her so she did not need any rituals or ceremonies to get his attention.

She addressed him: O LORD Almighty.

LORD in all caps is English translation way of telling us this is the name Yahweh.

She used the personal, covenant-keeping name for God.

It would be like us praying—O Jesus. She's calling out to her Savior.

She calls him Lord Almighty, Yahweh Sabaoth—means Lord of hosts, armies.

It's a reference to his command over all the ranks of angels,

and his authority to send them out to do his bidding.

First time in the Old Testament where someone addresses God this way.

Verse 5 says the Lord had closed her womb and Hannah believed that.

She believed that the Lord had caused her to face this terrible trial.

And she believed the Lord was the only one who could reverse it.

She believed in the sovereignty of God over everything, the good and the bad.

Now put all this together.

Here was a woman who whispered to God the deepest longings of her heart,

a God she addressed as the Lord of Hosts, commander of the armies of heaven.

And she had complete confidence that he could hear her and that he would listen

to her without rituals, without ceremonies—

and that he had both the power and the goodness to answer if he so chose.

And on top of all that, as she spoke to her God, she unleashed her emotions

and wept bitter tears and expressed her great anxiety and vexation.

There are some Christians who have a low view of the spirituality of the OT.

They say: Back in the Old Testament, people didn't have a personal relationship

with God like we do now. Their worship was formal and ritualistic.

We have Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit.

So that changes things and makes it possible for New Testament era believers to

have a closer walk with the Lord and more personal experience with God.

You ever heard anything like that? Low view of the spirituality and faith of OT?

You haven't here, not from me. But I know some of you have, you've told me.

That you grew up mostly reading the OT for moral lessons—

be brave like David, face your giants, that sort of thing.

No, the Old Testament where we see what it means to walk by faith,

and to have a personal relationship with the Lord.  
And to believe in the sovereignty of God so much that we know he is our only hope. If things are going to change, if we going to be delivered, he must act.

And look again at exactly what it was Hannah asked the Lord for.

Not just for a son.

She said: Lord, if you give me a son, I'll give him back to you.

Business of no razor touching head—Nazarite vow, priesthood.

One preacher said this:

It's a prayer of utter selflessness. It's a prayer of unimaginable consecration and devotion to the purposes of the Lord. 'Will you do this one thing for me? Give me a son, and I'll give him back to You.' I'm not sure there's a prayer quite like that in all the Bible.

How many times have you prayed that God would give you something so you could give it away?

Faith, trusting God, believing from the bottom of your heart that the Lord alone is in command of the hosts of heaven and that he directs all things.

Faith, trusting God, believing from the bottom of your heart that he hears you and that he responds to the cries and tears of his people.

Do you have that kind of faith? Not just believing God exists.

Even the demons believe God exists and tremble.

But believing he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him.

Either you do or you don't. Either you are a believer or your aren't.

And if you aren't you're lost, no matter how good and decent you might be.

This is going to be a huge theme in 1 & 2 Samuel.

Over and over again the contrast will be made between those who cry out in faith, and those who don't.

Hannah and Peninnah, Samuel and the sons of Eli, David and Saul.

I hope we grow in dependence on the Lord through our study.

That brings us to the third theme . . .

### **MP#3 The power of God**

Let's go back to the conflict and tension that starts this chapter.

"Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none."

Hannah's barrenness, her infertility as we would say today,

is the beginning of 1 & 2 Samuel and that's because it is a kind of illustration or metaphor for the condition of the church at the time.

As I've said, this was a time of spiritual barrenness when the prophets were silent, the Word was not being preached, priest and pastors were corrupt and weak, the faithful were few and often discouraged.

It's not just that Hannah was barren, Israel was barren spiritually.

As you look through the Bible,

you see barrenness is a theme in the history of redemption.

Sarah, wife of Abraham thought she would never have a child, in spite of God's promise to give them a son—but she did, at age 90 she had Isaac—and through that promised son, plan of salvation continued.

The Lord himself intervened and opened her womb and enabled Sarah to conceive when all human hopes were exhausted.

And in so doing, he continued the line of Abraham and the promise to bless all the nations through his descendants.

The other key story is in the New Testament, Luke 1, Elizabeth and Zechariah.

They had no children, they were up in years.

Then the angel appeared and announced that Elizabeth would have a son.

That son was John the Baptist.

The parallels are remarkable.

Just as Hannah's son Samuel announced and anointed God's chosen one, King David.

So Elizabeth's son John announced and baptized God's chosen one, the greater son of David, King Jesus.

And both women had children out of their barrenness so that no one could doubt that it was the Lord who had intervened for the salvation of his people.

And from both women God raised up men to lead the church in a dark time by pointing the people to the king and savior God had chosen.

This shows us that often when God manifests his power to deliver his people and to preserve the witness and life of his church for generations to come, he does so by raising up leaders.

Here's how one preacher put it:

God uses men. He raises up men to do his work and at the great junctures of kingdom history, there are invariably great men prepared to do the heavy lifting. The story of the Bible is the story of her great men, by and large. Abraham through Joseph and Judah. Then, when Israel must be delivered from bondage in Egypt, Moses is raised up and prepared to be the instrument of God's deliverance. And so it would continue. Joshua for the conquest. Samuel for the transition to the kings of Israel. Certain prophets and certain kings would appear to



awaken Israel to spiritual life. Then John the Baptist. The Lord Christ spent the largest part of his time and effort in the preparation of a few men to lead the gospel's advance into the world. Think of Paul, the true hero of apostolic Christianity. And so it would continue and has continued. From Athanasius to Augustine to Luther . . . You cannot read the Bible or church history without this becoming clear: God uses men and at times of great importance he prepares great men. Samuel was such a man, and the next two chapters will complete the story of his preparation for the great work God would assign him. I can virtually guarantee you that when the Lord returns to the Western church to renew, reform, and revitalize her faith and life, there will be a great man or two who are raised up to accomplish the work. Every Christian will have his work to do, but the Lord believes in leadership, in men of superior gifts and graces, to make possible what the host of his people, by themselves, could not do.

So God's power is seen in this, that at crucial times, when things are barren spiritually and seemingly hopeless, in his power he raises up those great men who lead the church and point her back to Christ.

We need to remember that and pray for it. We need a great man in our day.

But there is another way his power is shown that touches us more closely.

That's the way his power and his love in us enables us to keep our commitments to him.

How does this chapter end? Hannah keeps her promise and gives her son to Lord.

Here is a woman with many sad years of barrenness, tormented by a co-wife who constantly paraded her many children before Hannah's tearful eyes.

And then, after years, God granted her a son. Now, after holding baby in arms, nursing him, watching him grow to age four or five, she gave him away to be raised by someone else.

This was the commitment she made—and by the power of God, she kept it.

If she hadn't, the book of Samuel would have begun another way, and we would never have heard of a woman name Hannah.

No one knew, no one appreciated the heart-wrenching sorrow of what she had to do better than the Lord himself. He knows what is to give up an only Son.

No one was more pleased or honored by her obedience than he, no one more proud.

He made her son one of the greatest men church of God has ever seen.

That same power to obey the Lord and keep your promises to him, and in so doing honor him and please him and advance his kingdom—that power is available to you through his Holy Spirit.