

"THE GOD WHO LIFTS UP THE NEEDY"

I. Introduction

- A. Martin Luther once said that "It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ." [*Heidelberg Disputation*, thesis 18]
1. Hannah utterly despaired over her ability to conceive a child.
 2. But this was not the ultimate despair of hopelessness, like the despair that led Judas to take his life after he betrayed the Lord.
 3. Hannah despaired of her own ability, but she believed in God's ability to lift her up and she put her troubles into his hands.
 4. In the verses that we have just read, we see how Hannah responded when God answered her desperate plea for help.
- B. Hannah's prayer sets forth some of the major themes of 1 and 2 Samuel, especially God's sovereignty and grace.
1. It is interesting that the books of Samuel are bookended by two prayers: this one by Hannah and one that David prays near the end of his life in 2 Samuel 22.
 2. It is also noteworthy that both of these prayers celebrate how God delivers the weak and lowly.
 3. This helps us to see what the books of Samuel are about.
 4. They are not ultimately about Samuel, or Saul, or David.
 5. They are about God.
 6. Hannah's and David's prayers show us that the books of Samuel declare that God is to be praised because he lifts up a people who

know that they have no ability to do so themselves.

II. There Is None like the LORD (1-3)

A. Hannah begins her prayer by responding to her own experience of God's grace.

1. Notice, however, that she does not talk about her experience in the manner that we would expect.
2. It sounds like she is rejoicing in some kind of military victory rather than in the fact that God has brought forth a son from her barren womb.
3. It may be that Hannah was adapting a song that was already in use in the sanctuary worship at Shiloh.
4. Or perhaps she composed the prayer herself.
5. Either way, she is clearly using the larger story of God's dealings with his covenant people to interpret her own experience.
6. This is something that we need to do as well.
7. Instead of going to God's Word and wanting to know how it fits into our lives, our primary concern should be to see how the Bible tells us who we are as God's people.
8. We need to let the Bible interpret us and our experiences.

B. Hannah begins her prayer by saying that her heart exults in God.

1. As she reflects upon what the Lord has done for her, she is overwhelmed with the greatness of God.
2. This is the only response that is fitting when you have been brought to the end of yourself and found a God who graciously delivers you.

3. This is why joy is a characteristic feature of saving faith.
 4. Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit that is produced in the life of every Christian.
 5. Joy is not primarily a matter of our emotions.
 6. Joy has to do with our mind and will before it has to do with our feelings.
 7. The way to be joyful is to allow your thinking to be informed and guided by God's truth and to bring your will under the influence of that truth.
 8. No matter how you feel at a given moment, no matter your circumstances, you can rejoice in the Lord.
- C. We should also note that Hannah rejoices in God's salvation.
1. Biblical joy is founded upon the work that God has accomplished on our behalf.
 2. A Christian's joy is unshakeable because it is grounded upon the objective reality of the salvation that we have in Christ.
 3. The focus of Christian joy is not inward, but outward.
 4. It is not about looking inside of ourselves to see how we are feeling at any given moment.
 5. It is about looking to the Lord in faith and rejoicing in the depths of his love for us.
- D. Hannah also says that her strength is exalted in the Lord.
1. The term that the ESV translates as 'strength' here is literally "horn."

2. This is not referring to the musical instrument but to the horn of an animal.
 3. The Bible often uses this term as a symbol of strength.
 4. As a barren woman in Israel Hannah had no strength, no vitality, no honor.
 5. Yet the Lord acted on her behalf and made her the mother of a child who would play an important role in God's redemptive program.
 6. God's power to save was seen in what he did through Hannah's son.
 7. The birth of Samuel marked the end of the era of the judges, a dark and anchor-less era for the people of Israel.
 8. By faith, Hannah sees that the enemies of the covenant people will be put to rout because God is about to act on their behalf.
- E. After her joyful opening words in verse 1, Hannah continues in verse 2 with a confession of faith that focuses on God's attributes.
1. There is great benefit in meditating upon the attributes of God.
 2. The more we consider his greatness, the more we will be able to be at peace with the fact that our lives are in his hands.
 3. Hannah says that there is no one holy like the Lord.
 4. He is set apart and exalted, transcending all others.
 5. There is none besides the Lord.
 6. He is the only true and living God.
 7. There is no rock like the Lord.

8. He is the strength and protection of his people, the sure foundation upon which our faith rests.
9. All other sources of security are false and unreliable.
10. The Lord is also all-knowing, which means we need to be careful how we speak.
11. The Lord is a God of knowledge.
12. Hannah speaks from personal experience on this.
13. Though she prayed to the Lord in silence, he heard her request.

III. The LORD Brings Low and Exalts (4-8)

- A. In the next part of Hannah's prayer, she lists various ways in which God reverses human fortunes.
 1. God breaks the bows of the mighty, and he provides strength to the feeble.
 2. He turns those who are accustomed to eating their fill into beggars and he satisfies the hungry.
 3. He gives the barren woman children, and he makes the mother of many forlorn.
 4. This theme of reversal is also found in Mary's Magnificat, which was patterned after Hannah's prayer.
 5. Hannah describes many of the things in which people put their trust: power, riches, children, a legacy.
 6. This stands as a warning against putting your confidence in any form of material prosperity.
 7. Nothing in this life is stable.

8. But when we trust in the God who rules over every facet of life in this world, we need never worry.
- B. Hannah's prayer also acknowledges that God is the one who brings dark and difficult things into people's lives.
1. God kills.
 2. He makes people poor.
 3. He brings people low.
 4. Some people argue that God is not responsible for the pain and suffering that we experience in this world.
 5. Such people seem to think that this would somehow be a source of comfort to us.
 6. The exact opposite is the case.
 7. If God is not sovereign over suffering, then our lives are at the mercy of some force that God has chosen to place beyond his control.
 8. What a terrifying thought!
 9. Thankfully, the Scriptures repeatedly assure us that the Lord is indeed sovereign over suffering.
 10. We even saw this back in chapter 1, where it was emphasized that God was the one who closed Hannah's womb for all those years.
 11. As Christians, we have the assurance from God himself that he will use the difficult things that he ordains in our lives for our ultimate good.
 12. This is why Job said that we need to accept both good and evil from God's hand.

13. We can truly be at peace when we know that our times are in the hand of the One of whom it is said, “the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and on them he has set the world.”

IV. The LORD Preserves and Cuts Off (9-11)

- A. The last part of Hannah’s prayer moves from her specific experience of God’s salvation to God’s grand plan of redemption.
 1. Hannah’s was a small scale experience of the way God works in lifting up the needy.
 2. The same is true of our experiences of God’s saving grace.
 3. Every instance of God’s deliverance in your life is a preview of the deliverance that will come at the end of the age.
 4. God will always guard the feet of his faithful ones.
 5. He will preserve us.
 6. He will ensure that we obtain the inheritance that is laid up for us.
 7. We will not overcome by our own might, but by the strength of the God who is our rock.
 8. Those who trust in their own ability will be broken to pieces.
- B. Hannah concludes her prayer by focusing upon the One through whom the Lord will bring about this great victory for his people.
 1. She says that the Lord “will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed.”
 2. Israel did not have a king when Hannah first prayed these words.
 3. This was the era of Israel’s judges, the era that is summed up in these words: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone

did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25)

4. Hannah is saying that God will not leave his people without a ruler to govern and protect them.
 5. In fact, God is about to work through Hannah's son Samuel to bring forth a king for his people.
 6. There was nothing inherently wrong with Israel wanting a king.
 7. It was prophesied in Deuteronomy 17.
 8. The reason why God was displeased with the Israelites when they first asked for a king was because they asked for the wrong reasons.
 9. They wanted to be "like all the nations," forgetting that God had called them to be a holy nation.
 10. They looked to the office of king for security rather than trusting in the Lord.
 11. The Lord gave them what they wanted when he set Saul over them, and events quickly proved that they had made a disastrous choice.
- C. But then the Lord raised up another king, David, a man after God's own heart.
1. This is the king that Hannah is referring to in her prayer.
 2. Though David himself was certainly a flawed and tragic figure, he was a foreshadowing of the true King of God's people: Jesus Christ.
 3. We even see this in verse 10 of our text, where Hannah refers to the king as the Lord's "anointed."
 4. "Anointed" is the Hebrew word *Messiah*, the word that the Greek New Testament translates as "Christ."

5. Israel's kings were anointed in order to signify that God had called them and would empower them for their assigned task.
6. As the one true Messiah, Jesus has been anointed beyond all others.
7. Here is a king who is fully equipped to redeem his people.

V. Conclusion

- A. Though we may not always feel like it, we are every bit as helpless as Hannah.
- B. We too need to despair of our own ability.
- C. But this does not mean that we should wallow in despair.
- D. On the contrary, we can rejoice.
- E. We are needy and weak, but Jesus is mighty to save.