

1 Samuel 2 Sermon

17th September 2017

Reading 1 Samuel 2:1-10

1 Hannah prayed and said,
'My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in my God.[a]
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my[b] victory.
2 'There is no Holy One like the Lord,
no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.
3 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.
4 The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.
5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.
6 The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
8 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 honour.[c]
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
and on them he has set the world.
9 'He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might does one prevail.
10 The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered;
the Most High[d] 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.'

Introduction

Once upon a time there was a rather forgettable man, with a very long and self important name. (A man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite[from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of

Zuph, an Ephraimite.). He had two wives. The first he had married for love, and they could have been happy, but they were unable to have children, and so he married again.

His first wife was heartbroken, and humiliated by his actions. The new wife had children, but knew that she wasn't really loved. And so she became bitter and mocked her rival.

This unhappy situation, helped little by the clumsiness of the husband, showing favouritism towards Hannah, and therefore making her rival more bitter and jealous, and then saying things like v8 "*Hannah, why do you weep? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?*"

What a great start to a story.

Have you ever thought it strange that when God chooses to reveal his truth he does so through story. The vast majority of the Biblical text isn't law, rules, abstract theology, it is narrative.

JR Tolkein believed that Stories have this numinous quality - this capacity to arouse wonder, awe, hope and the possibility of a bigger world.

They communicate truth in a way which breaks our defences, suspends our disbelief, Think of primary school and a small child sitting in a maths lesson, chewing a pencil trying to grasp algebra. Then think again of story time, open to a bigger world. Stories mattered so much to Tolkein that he created a mythology all of his own, to help us understand more of who we are.

So lets follow Hannah's Story

The deal with God

Ch1v11 *'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death'*

Let me have a child and I will dedicate him to you.

She makes a deal with God. Is this a good idea? I'm not sure. It is probably a costly and risky business. But it is a natural human tendency - think of that time before the exam you didn't revise properly for. And lots of people do this and God says no.

1) But in this case the story of the greatest kings of Israel begins with a poor faithful woman.

And that is enormously significant. Not great battles and romantic heroes. but humble, prayerful, and poor. It is not a surprise that Mary, mother of Jesus is directly inspired by Hannah.

But what is notable is that her relationship with God is personal and direct.

In a patriarchal, strictly religious culture, her relationship is first and foremost not with the priest or the temple, but with God himself.

Heroes of faith have a personal relationship with God. Church does not mediate your relationship with God, it serves it.

Then there is a critique of the religious institution.

We get a first glimpse of the corrupt and self interested leadership in Israel at the time here.

v12 As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. 14 So Eli said to her, 'How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.'

The immediate response she gets from the religious authority after making her promise to God is *'Stop making a drunken spectacle of yourself.'*

Judgmental, dismissive. Can you imagine how she must have felt. How easily it would have been to walk away from God at that point. How many of us have had encounters with crass, insensitive clergy and taken that as God rejecting us.

But also it is an implicit critique of the attitude of Men towards women.

Do you get the significance of that. In this ancient text, there is a feminist agenda. The injustices of male society towards women is seen by God and he will hold it accountable.

And it is a mark of her heroic faith that she responds courageously but humbly and truthfully. 1:15 *"No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord."*

She goes home, conceives a son

And she names him Samuel 'God has heard'

2) And she becomes not the mother of the king, but the mother of the prophet who will anoint the king. What matters most in God's kingdom is not the kings or princes, not heroic leaders, but the one who will speak but the word of God. The most gifted leaders are of secondary importance to those who are humble enough to prioritise Gods word.

And in our reading she composes this beautiful, bold and prophetic Psalm about the nature of Gods kingdom. This remarkable, prophetic work of poetry, Ch2v1-10

It is prophetic because it foreshadows the whole of what is to come and because it becomes the inspiration for that other greatest woman of faith, central to the story of God, Mary; The magnificat.

It is rooted in her own experience,

*v8 He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,*
That is her experience

But extrapolating from that what it means if God is true to his promises. If God is really like this, then the implications for the world are enormous.

*9 'He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might does one prevail.*

Despite how it so often seems power and might, wealth and influence will not have the final say.

So you see? If God does raise up the poor and call the powerful to account, that is almost literally earth shattering.

So to the proud and arrogance of the world she says

"v3 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."

God sees, he knows and he will weigh up your actions. So tread very carefully.

So do you see the significance of Hannah?

She is a hero of faith. But she is an ordinary, humble person.

And just like the beatitudes that say blessed are the meek, the poor in spirit and the peacemakers. Not because they will be happy despite everything, but because they will ind themselves on the right side of History.

So the story of the greatest king of Israel begins with God honouring the faithful prayers of a poor, oppressed, humble woman. He begins with the least of people, and raises them up to the place of great honour.

How important is it that we recognise people like Hannah as heroes.

A little bit like the fact that Mary is clearly one on the great heroes of Christianity.

Because it helps us resist mythologising heroes, building them up to the point where they come crashing down. It is bad for them and very bad for us. Humble heroes are the real heroes. And of course real heroes are the ones who can see the truth ht that it is ultimately not our story that matters, but Gods.

As Hannah so rightly says *"There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."*

Oh and just to return to Tolkien. Remember that the true heroes of that story are not men, or elves but Unassuming ordinary humble hobbits.. We need to reclaim the biblical narrative that how God chooses to act in this world is through the ordinary things of this world.

So May you like Hannah be humble heroes of faith. No matter how the powers of this world rage, And for all the failings of institutional religion, may you like Hannah hold on to that direct, intimate personal relationship wth God that you are each called to as his beloved childrne. Hold on firm to the story of God. He 9 'He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail.