

“THE POWER OF A PRAYING WOMAN.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Texts for the Sermon: I Samuel 1:1-21

Prayer: Holy Father, we humbly ask that the seed of your Word now sown among us would take deep root, that it not wither or be choked out by the cares of the world or Satan’s lies, but bring forth fruit thirty, sixty and a hundredfold for your glory and our edification. Amen.

Introduction.

Her name was Monica. She was born in northern Africa. As a child she became a Christian. At a young age she was given in marriage to an older pagan official. He was a violent man, abusive and an adulterer. She endured by faith, patience and much prayer.

She gave birth to three sons. One of her sons followed in his father’s footsteps. He was a real prodigal son. He abandoned his mother’s faith and pursued paganism and hedonism. He was notoriously wayward, living a life of immorality, sowing wild oats, fathering a child out of wedlock. This of course deeply grieved Monica but she never gave up hope that God would bring good out of evil. She prayed, fasted, and wept over her son’s wayward ways.

A pastor who knew of Monica’s weeping and prayers comforted her by saying, “It is not possible that the son of so many tears should perish.”

When her son fled to a far city, she followed after him. When he moved again, she kept on his trail. Like any good mother, Monica did not let her child’s stubbornness, stupidity, or blatant sin obscure her love for him. She wasn’t perfect, she had her own battles with alcoholism, but pressed through and had victory through prayer.

Monica died at the age of 56. She died an exceedingly happy woman. Her husband had surrendered his life to Christ a year before he died. And her son, after over 30 years of praying surrendered his life to Christ only a few months before she died, but she lived to see it and die in peace and joy.

Some say her son was the third most influential person in Christianity after Jesus and Paul. His name was Augustine. His conversion was a great triumph of grace over sin and he became the great theologian of grace, his writings would be fuel for the reformation 1,000 years later.

Though he could run, he could never outrun his mother’s prayers. Every child is vulnerable to the prayers of his mother, to the prayers of his parents and grandparents.

The stories of the power of a mother's prayers and spiritual mother's with no children of their own abound in Christian history. The power of prayer is of course a testimony to the power of a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.

Is Hannah's story relevant today? Is it helpful, instructive? What might mothers in particular and all of us in general learn from Hannah's prayer today? Consider with me four things.

Don't despise God's hard providences.

Infertility is a hard enough burden to bear, but to be mocked and shamed and reminded of it constantly is an especially bitter pill to swallow. Any woman who has not been able to have children knows the constant reminders from fertile sisters, sisters-in-law, relatives, friends, church members.

Scripture tells us again and again of such stories. Abraham's wife Sarah, 25 years of waiting. Isaac's wife Rebekah, 20 years, Jacob's wife Rachel, endured the births of 10 sons to her rival wives before she bore a son. Manoah's wife endured the same before the birth of Samson. Elizabeth was old and well beyond childbearing before God opened her womb with John the Baptist.

Each of those painful providences were key instruments in God's plans in the history of redemption. God begins with nothing, God begins with the impossible, and does something. Our helplessness and hopelessness are the fertile soil He delights to plant in.

If we can only remember how God often works, we can find encouragement and courage in our trials. I doubt their stories would have been much comfort to Hannah. Her pain was her pain.

We read of Hannah's trail of tears that leads to earnest, open, honest, humble prayer. She wept, she cried out, she pleaded with God, wondering if He would listen and answer. Pain, heartache, trials are often the tools God uses to lead us on His paths of righteousness.

Hannah is our example. Anguish led this mother to prayer. Anguish is the mother of prayer; it gives birth to prayer in the godly.

Scripture reveals the truth.

II Corinthians 1:9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

Hebrews 12:5-6, 10-11 "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

10 ... [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

II Corinthians 4:17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Don't despise the hard providences of God, don't let them turn your hearts to bitterness, that is never the purpose or intent. The bitter providences of God in the life of a Christian are always moving toward great blessing and glory. We are being trained in righteousness, taken deeper into faith and fellowship with God. They have to, it is His promise.

Should we thank Peninnah for the birth of Samuel? If it wasn't for her cruel mockery and malice toward Hannah, Hannah might not have been crushed with grief and cried out to God. Yet God used her pain to drive her to prayer through which God glorified Himself with a miracle.

How do we handle the hard providences of God? How do we handle the losses, the unmet expectations, the unanswered prayers? Do we see the hand of God in all His hard providences in our lives, even in mundane domestic issues? Do you believe Him when He says it will lead to glory?

God delights in open hearts and open hands.

“O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord.”

She makes her appeal to the Lord of hosts, the ruler of the universe, almighty God who is like no other, sovereign Lord with all power and authority who rules and over rules in all places and in every circumstance. She understands how unfathomably high God is above her. Who are we to dare to presume upon so great a God, and presume He should condescend to listen to us?

She humbly calls herself the Lord's servant three times. She is an obscure woman among countless obscure women in the hill country of Ephraim who thinks the God of the universe will stoop down this low.

Her prayer is simply, “Lord, give me a son and I will give him back to you.”

I hear people comparing their prayers to others, thinking their own prayers are too weak, too small, too inarticulate, too spiritually impoverished. God doesn't grade our prayers or compare

them. He looks at our hearts, are we genuine, honest, real, humble. Are they heartfelt, are we earnestly seeking God, and His grace and mercy?

Have you ever poured out your heart to God, your sobs, tears, questions, turmoil, pain, anger?

Take her example to heart. Notice her earnestness, her boldness, her honesty. Notice her freedom to hold nothing back. Notice there is nothing formal or ritual or fancy about her prayer. She lays hold of the throne of grace and doesn't let go. And notice the selflessness of her request, if God will give her this one thing, she will give it back to him, with a full heart.

In the midst of our trial God may not be beginning some great work in history, but He is doing a great work in our hearts and faith. It is great to us, it matters to us and it will in eternity.

This much we can say with certainty. God delights in the honest, humble prayers of this children, He delights in open hearts and open hands. And He will hear and answer.

The Power of a woman's prayers.

Never for a moment underestimate the power of prayer, a mother's prayers, a woman's prayers, any Christian's prayer. God has ordained in His sovereign providence to make prayer one of His means for directing and changing the world.

Hannah's prayer changes the world. This prayer and its answer are more far reaching than for just one mother and her son. With this answer God sets in motion His next step in His redemptive plan for the world. Hannah has no clue what she is a part of.

Out of her suffering God makes her the source of the salvation and hope for a nation. Samuel was destined to be God's chosen instrument to lead God's people through a major critical time in Israel's history. Samuel marks the beginning of the prophetic age, the next step in preparing the way for the Messiah.

Hannah's son would deliver Israel from its oppressors and establish a kingdom that one day would cover the earth. Hannah had simply prayed for a son but in return, God answered far more than she could ask or imagine.

The glory of God was about to be revealed with the birth of Samael. As it was with the birth of Augustine. Monica had no clue who her son would become.

Hannah is no super woman, no super saint. She was not perfect, not particularly strong, she didn't have her life all together, she was an ordinary woman carrying the burdens of life in her heart. But she prayed, and it was prayer that made her strong.

She was one more in a long line of the seed of Eve, the seed of woman who would crush the head of the serpent. And that is the destiny of every mother who prays, of every spiritual mother who prays, of every woman who prays, of every Christian who prays.

God has given us a Bible filled with stories of men and women enduring great trials. And when they were in the middle of them, they felt just as we feel in the middle of our trials. But with those stories we can see all the way to the end of them, how God answers.

These are given to us to strengthen our faith and give us confidence God is sovereign and good and we can be sure He is with us and for us and has good promised for us. We have to learn patiently to wait for the end of the story when God brings to completion the work He began.

Dedicate your children to the Lord, they are gifts from the Lord.

In one sense, Samuel's place in history is special and unique, set apart from all the rest of us. But in another sense all parents share some common ground with Elkanah and Hannah. We should all give the gift of our children back to God.

We should pray for God's will for them, God's highest and best for them. We should not shrink back from asking God to use them in His redemptive purposes. We can ask God to make them warriors of the faith, defenders of the truth, seekers of justice, light in the darkness, servants of Christ and His church.

Pray for their salvation, pray for their conviction of their sin, pray that when they sin that they would be caught quickly and be humbled to repent quickly. Pray they see their need for a Savior, that they grow in grace. Pray that the trials and troubles of life won't discourage them, but strengthen their faith, that they will learn to cling to the Gospel.

Pray that they might desire to serve and glorify God with their lives. Pray that God might draw them into the service of His church, as pastors, as missionaries, as a witness for Jesus, as an ambassador of the faith.

Pray that they exceed and excel you in every way in spiritual matters.

III John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

While we may not be called to do what Hannah did with her son, in a more general sense we are.

Every godly parent who knows and loves and fears the covenant making God should pray constantly for our children that they be given over to the Lord. Dedicate them over and over to the Lord, pray that their baptism would take, would stick, would bear fruit. Pray that they would become covenant keepers and not covenant breakers.

Conclusion and application.

Let me conclude acknowledging the realities of God's mysterious providence. Many mothers have prayed similar prayers and have not received a child. Many mothers have prayed for prodigal sons who have yet to return home. God knows our hearts and our needs. God has His ways and His reasons.

Let me offer a final word to mothers of prodigals. Few trials are more heartbreaking, and you are not alone in history and you are not alone in this church today. Don't fall into the temptation to minimize your child's sin or excuse it or dismiss it as a small thing. Sin is serious and the great enemy of our souls. Pray with all your heart. Being the parent of a prodigal requires much prayer and much prayer support from your family, friends, your church, your elders and pastors. Hang onto the truth that God loves your children more than we do and He knows how to rescue the godly from trials (II Peter 2:9).

Pray and wait with quiet and believing hearts.

Be women of prayer so the power of the Holy Spirit will be at work in you, so that the power of faith and holiness will come down from heaven upon you, so that your spiritual influence would increase at home, at church and in the world.

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Prayer: Father, grant us the eyes of faith to see your hand in all our lives. Father, grant us the faith to walk by faith, trusting in your sovereign goodness. Father, grant us the faith that grows out of a personal relationship with you through which your gracious providence works in our choices, decisions, and responsibilities. Father, grant us the faith to see you are most glorified through our weaknesses, trials, inadequacies and shortcomings. Father, grant us faith to see beyond the present, beyond current failures and setbacks to your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.