



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## The Mother Whom God Remembered

1 Samuel 1.1-2.11

David Anguish

I'll confess that, in preparing and delivering this sermon, I feel a little like the man who wrote an article in which he offered advice on shopping for one's wife. He confessed that he still did not know what to buy, but he had some definite suggestions on what *not* to buy. Among them were these:

- Don't buy anything that plugs in. Anything that requires electricity is seen as utilitarian.
- Don't buy clothing that involves sizes. The chances are one in seven thousand that you will get her size right, and your wife will be offended the other 6,999 times. "Do I look like a size 16?" she'll say. Too small a size doesn't cut it either: "I haven't worn a size 8 in 20 years!"
- Avoid all things useful. The new silver polish advertised to save hundreds of hours is not going to win you any brownie points.
- Don't buy anything that involves weight loss or self-improvement. She'll perceive a six-month membership to a diet center as a suggestion that she's overweight.
- Don't buy jewelry. The jewelry your wife wants, you can't afford. And the jewelry you can afford, she doesn't want.
- Finally, don't spend too much. "How do you think we're going to afford that?" she'll ask. But don't spend too little. She won't say anything, but she'll think, "Is that all I'm worth?"<sup>1</sup>

Like that man, I'm in a quandary. Exactly how does one go about preparing an original sermon on motherhood in a world and church community that have revisited the theme so often? Do I prepare a tribute to mothers? Which tribute statements are best? Which ones should be avoided? There are plenty of choices.

- There are tributes to their mothers by famous men. Men like Winston Churchill, who reportedly chastised a London editor who was going to publish a list of Churchill's teachers for omitting "the greatest of my teachers—my mother."<sup>2</sup>
- There are reminders of just how much our mothers do, like that attributed to author Susan Lang, who reported that women who never have children enjoy the equivalent of an extra three months a year in leisure time. She came to that conclusion based on a study that showed that the average mother spends 3.5 more hours a week doing housework, plus 11 hours a week on child-related activities. All this adds up to 754 hours of work every year, equal to three months of 12-hour, 5-day work weeks.
- There are also stories that are humorous, like that of the second-grade teacher who asked this test question about the magnet and what it does: "My full name has six letters. The first one is M. I pick up things. What am I?" When the test papers were turned in, the teacher

was astonished to find that almost 50 percent of the students answered the question with the word Mother.

Yes, if a tribute is to be the focus, the choices for direction are many. But my dilemma doesn't really involve which kind of tribute to do. You see, there are some for whom the idea of any tribute poses a problem. They are like a friend who, in response to my comment about what a great addition to a Mother's Day lesson the lyrics of Dolly Parton's song, "Eagle When She Flies," would be, brought me up short by telling me that not everyone had such fond memories of their mothers. Or the woman who once told me that the tributes that were intended to encourage and honor mothers had the reverse effect on her, serving to remind her of how imperfect she often felt.<sup>3</sup>

Then there is the question of whether a tribute to mothers is what we ought to be doing here anyway. After all, we have come here to worship God. While it is certainly possible to do that while preaching a lesson on motherhood, we should take note of how easy it is to be so focused on our theme that the adoration that should go to God is in effect absent.

So, there's my dilemma. How do I present a lesson on motherhood that gives glory to God, reflects the importance of His word, tries to steer clear of the feelings of hurt some have, and doesn't contribute to the stress and guilt in moms who know only too well that they are far from perfect?

Or, to put it another way, how do I develop a sermon that can help us all remain or grow closer to God, whether my mother, who is in her seventies, my wife, who is not, my future daughter-in-law who one day wants to be a mother, or the young ladies and little girls whose ideas of motherhood are still in the formative stages? And what can I say that will allow us dads and sons to do more than eavesdrop?

I believe the answer to these questions is to set aside the idea of a tribute per se and approach this lesson as an opportunity for all of us to be challenged to be more of who God would have us to be, drawing lessons from a Bible text that relates the story of an outstanding mother. To that end, I have selected a text where the idea of motherhood is secondary to the quality of her character.

### **Hannah's Story Reviewed**

Consider the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 and 2. Like others in the Bible, Hannah does not appear long on the stage of God's story. Yet, her appearance is a bright one.

You probably remember it. How Hannah was one of the two wives of Elkanah. How, unlike Peninnah, the other wife, Hannah had no children. How her barrenness was a stigma in Jewish culture, a shame made worse by pointed reminders from her rival. And how Elkanah, despite what were apparently good intentions, failed to understand her pain or offer any relief from it. "And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?'" (1 Samuel 1:8 ESV).

You probably also remember how she approached the Lord in prayer, one so fervent that Eli the priest mistook her emotions and actions for something else. And how her answer to his challenge resulted in the promise of the blessing she so desperately wanted.

<sup>12</sup> As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. <sup>13</sup> Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. <sup>14</sup> And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put away your wine from you." <sup>15</sup> But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before

the Lord. <sup>16</sup> Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.” <sup>17</sup> Then Eli answered, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him” (1 Samuel 1:12-17).

Hannah’s prayer was answered with a “Yes.” She gave birth to Samuel. Once he was weaned, she kept her promise and gave him to the Lord, trusting him to Eli’s care and guidance.

<sup>24</sup> And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. And the child was young. <sup>25</sup> Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. <sup>26</sup> And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. <sup>27</sup> For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. <sup>28</sup> Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:24-28b).

Because she kept her promise to God, Hannah was blessed with five more children, three boys and two girls (1 Samuel 2:21). Samuel was raised by Eli, growing up to be the greatest of Israel’s judges and the man who anointed the nation’s first two kings. He would one day be included in “the hall of faith” (Hebrews 11:32).

All this happened because Hannah demonstrated three important traits of character.

### Character Traits To Emulate

*The Right Priority.* Chapter 1:11 tells us that, in her urgent prayer for a son, Hannah “vowed a vow and said, ‘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 all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.’” It’s hard to imagine how a knowledgeable Bible student can read this verse and not think of the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Hannah’s words confirm what reading her story makes plain, that her life revolved around the Lord and His ways. There was no priority above Him. Nor did any priority compete with Him.

Hannah’s focus made it natural for her to think of her children in terms of their relationship with God, no matter what else they might do or be. The reference to the fact that “no razor shall touch his head” recalls the Nazirite vow about which we learn in Numbers 6, the point of which was to separate oneself to service to the Lord in a special way. The point is one of consecration, of being set apart for service to the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

We learn two important lessons from this. First, true success in motherhood—as in life generally—is found in complete submission to God. His reign in our lives must be first.

Second, we must make the effort to nurture our children to also submit to Him. This point is especially important in our world where so much emphasis is placed on getting ahead and being a success. It is possible for us to want our kids to be successful more than we want them to be faithful. The point is not that all of our children should be or marry a preacher—though I do wish more of God’s people would encourage their kids to pursue that noble calling—but that faithfulness and service to Him is more important than upward mobility and all that goes with it.<sup>5</sup> Hannah reminds us of the importance of trying to instill a concern for the right priority in our children.

*Sustained Commitment.* In light of her priority, we are not surprised to find Hannah in fervent prayer over her distress and desire for a child. It is only to be expected that she would tell Eli that he

was mistaken in assuming she was drunk, that, in fact, she had “been pouring out [her] soul before the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:15). Nor do we find her willingness to follow through on her vow the least bit surprising (1 Samuel 1:22-28). Because she thought first of the Lord, she made sure her relationship with Him took precedence. Because she nurtured that relationship, she naturally followed through on the commitment she had made to surrender Samuel to the Lord’s work.

Commitment is, of course, the acid test of whether our priority is what we say it is. It’s one thing to say that God is our priority; it’s another to show that He is really the focus of our lives. More than anyone, our kids will know the truth. If they see that the things we say are less important take precedence over what we say is most important, they will conclude that our walk does not match our talk. The question is not whether we are perfect, but whether there is a consistency in practice that confirms our claims.

This commitment must extend to our efforts to train (versus indoctrinate) our children. It will be evident in the way we treat them. Though our specific stories will be different, our commitment to God should lead our children to experience events like that described in the story of the little boy whose knowledge of fractions was questioned because of his mother’s love. His teacher asked him, “Suppose your mother baked a pie and there were seven of you—your parents and five children. What part of the pie would you get?” “A sixth,” replied the boy. The teacher said, “You don’t know your fractions; remember, there are seven of you.” The boy disagreed. “But you don’t know my mother,” he said. “She would say she didn’t want any pie.” Clearly, that mother had demonstrated a level of commitment that had not gone unnoticed.

Of course, it’s not all about giving children what they want. Our children—and others we meet, for that matter—ought to also know that we stand for something, even if standing for it makes us (and them) uncomfortable at times.

*A Grateful Spirit.* In light of her priority and commitment, Hannah’s prayer is only to be expected (1 Samuel 2:1-11). It reminds us of the importance of gratitude when our prayers are answered with a “yes.”

Hannah knew all too well that her blessings had nothing to do with her and everything to do with God. She knew that He is Lord in fact as well as in name, that “the Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. 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 honor” (1 Samuel 2:6-8b). So, “[her] heart exult[ed] in the Lord” (2:1).

Hannah remembered what we are tempted to forget: that commitment to God is just as important in times of plenty as in times of despair and temptation.

## Conclusion

Not long ago, *Glad Tidings of Good Things* related the story of a south Florida boy who decided to go for a swim in the lake behind his house. He swam toward the center of the lake, not realizing that an alligator was swimming toward the shore to meet him. His mother noticed, however, and rushed outside, yelling for him to turn around.

The boy turned but was not fast enough. Just as he reached the dock, where his mother grabbed his arms, the alligator grabbed his legs. Strength was on the side of the gator, but a passionate love consumed the mother who refused to let go. Finally, a farmer happened to drive by, heard the screams, raced from his truck, and shot the gator.

The little boy survived, though with some terrible scars. Some were on his legs, where the alligator had tried so hard to devour him. But some were on his arms. They were the ones he wanted others to see. As he told one reporter, "I have great scars on my arms, too. I have them because my mom wouldn't let go."<sup>6</sup>

In light of our lesson today, I submit that Hannah fought a similar battle for her boy, one that she won before it really began because she first committed herself to God. It is a battle that leaves far more lasting scars than those inflicted by the bite of an alligator, a battle won only when we, like Hannah, submit to the Lord, allowing Him to sit alone on the throne of our heart.

Fortunately, that's a commitment we can make for as long as we have breath and opportunity. It's one we can renew, even when we have failed to live up to the ideals we see in Hannah. No matter what we have done, we can go on from this point forward with the determination to make God our priority, follow through with a sustained commitment to Him, and remember how much we need and owe Him.

Do you need to make that commitment?

May 11, 2003  
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*As noted above, this sermon, which I recently came across in my computer files, was presented May 11, 2003 at the Southwind church of Christ in Memphis. Several personal and timing details are obviously dated, but except for some stylistic and typographical corrections, I chose to not update it from the final edit in 2003. ~ David Anguish, April 2020*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Herb Forst, Cross River, NY, cited from an undated *Reader's Digest* at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)'s illustrations page (under "Mother's Day"). Unless otherwise noted, all illustrations were taken from this site.

<sup>2</sup> From Michael Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, 251.

<sup>3</sup> After presenting this lesson, I was given two additional examples. One sister told me that, since her mother passed away, she dreaded Mother's Day and especially Mother's Day sermons because they made her feel so sad. Another told me of reading an organization's web site message board where several single women whose own mothers have passed on find the holiday to be incredibly lonely. "I hate Mother's Day" was the way one put it.

<sup>4</sup> Keil and Delitzsch observed that "the Nazirite ... was neither bound to perform a lifelong service nor to remain consistently at the sanctuary, but was simply consecrated for a certain time, whilst the sacrifice offered at his release from the vow shadowed forth a complete surrender to the Lord" (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, Volume II: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel [Two Volumes in One], 24).

<sup>5</sup> As I write this, I think of a high school classmate whose husband is now an elder in a church. Since their dating days, the lives of that couple have revolved around the Lord and His will. They have sought opportunities for involvement in mission trips and other special service events and have chosen where they will live and work based on opportunities for kingdom advancement, despite the fact that this has necessitated living several hundred miles away from their families. Their servant attitude has not gone unnoticed at home. Their children also seek to serve. They too look for opportunities to live for the Lord, be involved in special activities of service, and encourage others who do not yet know Him to learn of Him.

<sup>6</sup> "A Mother's Tug-of-War," as reprinted from *Glad Tidings of Good Things* (Vol. 8, March 8, 2003) in the bulletin of the 61 N. Bypass Church of Christ in Vicksburg, MS, April 6, 2003.