

June 13, 2021

1 Samuel 1:21-28 and 2:1-10

She did what? She gave up her child, took him to church and left him there.

It's not all that unusual to see parents give up their children, is it? We see parents put their children off so they can go do their own thing - their work thing, their career thing, their own fun thing. We could talk about abortion and abortion pills, child abuse and child neglect. But it's not all so gruesome or vile, is it? Even more children are put off and given over to the god of fun - modern technology and old-fashioned balls. Parents set themselves - or the other way around, they set their children - in front of the TV or computer, video game or phone, and they pretend their children don't exist. Or they sacrifice their children to the ball gods, pretending that chasing balls, kicking balls, hitting balls should come before time, real time, committed time with Jesus, pretending that balls can do more for their child than Jesus can. It's not unusual to see parents give up their children, is it?

And yet when we hear our lesson with Hannah, what question comes to mind? "She did what?"

She did what? She prayerfully, carefully, lovingly raised her baby, the baby she had prayed and prayed and prayed for. She lovingly, carefully raised Samuel from baby to toddler to what we might call pre-school age, maybe as old as kindergarten age.

What kind of mom was she? We aren't told a lot, but based on what we are told of Hannah, we can imagine a bit. I imagine Hannah, and Elkanah too, not just feeding Samuel's belly, but feeding his heart and mind. Like Moses taught his people: "Teach this, talk about this, when you get up in the morning, when you go to bed at night, when you're out for a walk, when you're sitting together at home - impress this on your children: "Shema, Israel! **Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one! Love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength.**" And when Samuel would ask, "Who is God?" They would answer: "**The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.**" And they would tell Samuel the greatness and grace of the LORD: "He saved us out of Egypt, even better, he saves us from our sin and forgives." When they would rock him to sleep, they would sing "I am Jesus' little lamb" in an Old Testament Hebrew kind

of way. When they would tuck him in, they would sing “Jesus loves me this I know” in their Old Testament Hebrew kind of way. When it was time to eat they would pray and thank God. When it was time of trouble, they would pray and beg God. Then, when Dad would go to church, I imagine Mom teaching little Samuel: “God’s people get together; God’s people go to God’s house; it’s what we do!” And when Dad took a bull or lamb or goat, when Dad took grain from the harvest, when Dad put money in his offering envelope, they would teach Samuel - “God has been so good to us. So what do we do? We say ‘thank you.’ We give God our first and we give God our best.”

And then what? After all that. After so carefully raising Samuel with God, what did Hannah do? She gave him back to the LORD. She took her little Samuel, as young as he was, took him from her house to the house of the LORD and left him there with the LORD.

I can’t imagine it was easy. Samuel probably still reached out his hand to hold Mom’s hand, still wrapped his arms around Mom’s leg, still stuck close. But what did Hannah do? She gave; she left her son with the LORD.

Why would she? To thank God. We don’t just thank God with tokens and leftovers; we thank God with our first and our best. But what about the bull and the grain and the wine that Elkanah and Hannah gave? Wouldn’t that bull in the prime of his life, wouldn’t the grain and the wine have been thanks enough? No. Hannah had made a promise, a promise she couldn’t go back on, a promise she wouldn’t go back on. We didn’t talk about it in our sermon last week, but we heard it in our lesson. As Hannah was pouring out her heart to the LORD, she promised with a vow: **“O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”** After what God had done for her, she couldn’t go back on her promise; she wouldn’t go back on her promise.

But how could she? How could she give up her child like that? She didn’t just focus on her cost, her child, what she would miss. She focused on her gain, her God, the way God works, and what God was giving her. In the next chapter, Hannah prays a prayer of praise - We have a God who saves; we have a God who blesses and gives us all we need; we have the God who makes life right. Hannah wasn’t just thinking of what she was giving up, what she would miss. Hannah’s heart was filled with the LORD!

When you hear of Hannah's commitment, Hannah keeping her promise, what comes to mind? Perhaps promises, promises you made to God. Promises to stop. Promises to do. Promises to give. "God, if you do for me, I'll do for you." When God did for you, when God does for you, did you, do you ever find yourself re-thinking your promise to God? "Perhaps I was too quick to promise. Perhaps I promised too much. God will understand, won't he?" What if God went back on his promises as easily as we go back on our promises? Where would we be? Where would you be?

But today we see someone even more dedicated, even more generous than Hannah. We see Hannah's God, Samuel's God, our God. We get to see him the same way Hannah saw him, the same way Samuel learned to see him.

We get to see God as God - the One who puts to death and makes alive, the One who makes some poor and others rich, the One who takes some down and raises others up. If that's who God is, if that's what God does - and it is! - we need to be, we want to be right by him, don't we? Otherwise, on the wrong side of the God who judges and destroys, what could we expect?

But Hannah wasn't living a life of doom and dread. On the one hand, Hannah didn't see God as angry and judging, and on the other hand, Hannah didn't see God as a cold, controlling, disinterested or merely self-interested. Hannah and Samuel saw God looking out for the poor and downtrodden. They saw God looking out to pick up the stepped on, to give peace to the crushed, to heal the hurting and heartbroken, to give hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless. They saw and we get to see God as a God looking out for us.

And like Hannah, we get to see God as a God with a plan. He doesn't just throw us into the mix - "Let's see how they do." He doesn't just toss good or bad into our lives - "Let's see what they do with that." No, Hannah saw God working with a plan. Before Israel had a king, Hannah saw God giving strength to his king. Before anyone else in the Bible used the word Messiah, Hannah saw God raising up the Messiah. Why? To judge the world and make life right for his people. Hannah saw God working his plan in her life, and we get to see God working his plan in our lives.

In fact, we get to see even better than Hannah, don't we? We get to see God's King in Jesus. We get to see Jesus as God's Messiah, God's Anointed One taking on God's work with God's power, his promise, his purpose. We get to see

God in Jesus looking out for the poor and stepped on. We get to see God in Jesus giving help to the helpless and hope to the hopeless. Even better, we get to see God in Jesus taking the guilt of the guilty, you and me included, taking our guilt to the cross and paying the price. What does that mean for us? Instead of having to live a life with God against us, bouncing back and forth between fear and denial, with Jesus, we get to hear God say: "Peace; you're forgiven." When things go wrong, when it seems that life and the world are ganged up against us, instead of living a life of doom and dread, on the edge of helpless and hopeless, with Jesus, we get to hear God say: "Don't worry. I've got you." When the worst of the world has us thinking: "I've had enough," when the best of the world flickers and sours so that we wonder: "Is this all there is? I need more; I need better," with Jesus, God says to you: "I have a place for you with me in heaven where life will be right forever."

Yes, like Hannah, we get to see God as the God who has so much more to offer than what the world has for us. And the same is true for our children! We get to see God as the God who has so much more and so much better for our children than what the world has for them. Yes, more and better than balls and screens and fluid genders. So much better than a life of questions: "Who am I? Why am I?" we have the God who offers us and our children a plan, a promise, and a purpose in life bigger than our questions and more real than our feelings. We have the God who offers us and our children a plan, a promise, a purpose in life that will survive and shine through the darkness of this world into eternity.

That's why Hannah could give as she gave. She knew what God is giving!
Amen.