

Pastor Brian Bell

- I want to begin this message and this series by explaining why I chose the books of 1 and 2 Samuel to be my next sermon series – choosing a new sermon series is never something that I take lightly and it is with much prayer and study that I try to determine what I should be preaching on next – in my personal devotional time I began reading through 1 Samuel and I was captivate by the history of Israel’s first kings and God’s redemptive plan to establish an eternal throne through the line of David – I also began seeing modern applications for the church and God’s people today – as we go through these books, my hope is that we can learn and cherish God’s sovereignty in his plan that we can see unfold in Scripture as well as apply the truths and lessons from history to our own lives
- Most scholars will agree that the theological center of these books is found in 2 Samuel 7, which records God’s covenant promise of an eternal throne through the line of David – in turn, then, we can place the center of 1 Samuel in chapter 16, when the prophet Samuel anoints David as king – everything beforehand is prologue to David’s anointing and everything that follows results from David’s having been set apart as the king “after God’s own heart”
- Despite all the attention on David, we must not forget the other significant figures found in 1 Samuel – most notably are the prophet Samuel, whose significance, according to Richard Phillips’ commentary, “equals that of Joshua” – Phillips points out that it was Samuel whom God used to guide Israel out of the chaos of the period of the judges and to serve the coming of the kingdom in the arrival of David – and then of course there is Saul, who serves as the antithesis to David and Samuel – Saul embodies the idolatry and unbelief that will plague Israel throughout the rest of the Old Testament – as we study through the book of 1 Samuel, we will see this contrast between Saul and Samuel/David present numerous valuable lessons – and we must not forget some of the lesser characters, who although are mentioned less are hardly incidental, such as Eli the corrupted priest, Hannah the tearful believer, and Jonathan the faithful friend
- As we begin our study of the text of 1 Samuel, I want us to think about hope – by definition, hope is a verb that means “to want something to happen or be true and think that it could happen or be true” or “to desire with expectation of obtainment” – I am sure that we can all think of things that we have hoped for in our lifetime – some of them were probably worth hoping for, some may not have been – for me, I hope Alabama wins a National Championship this year – that does not carry as much weight as my hope that my children will grow up to be godly boys and men – there is a great difference in a Christian’s hope and the hope of the world – first of all, there is a hope that we have that is accompanied by certainty – we can be certain about it because God has promised us – we hope in the return of Christ, but this is not a “cross your fingers” hope or a “boy, I sure hope Jesus is coming back” – we can be certain because Jesus promised he would return – second, we have a hope that is only accompanied by the certainty that God is sovereign – at first glance, this might seem like the same type of hope that the world has – we hope for things of which we don’t necessarily know the outcome – I mentioned that I hope that my children will grow up to walk with the Lord – I have no guarantee of that in Scripture – but, again, I am not crossing my fingers in hope or worried that my hopes won’t come true – the difference here lies in the manner

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in which we hope – the world’s hope is full of anxiety – hope outside of Christ gives no comfort – when we are in Christ, we can rest in the fact that God’s will is sovereign and it will always be accomplished

- As we begin our study of 1 Samuel, I want us to consider the world that we live in, the need for hope and the church’s responsibility to share that hope with a barren world in need of a Savior
- Before we get into the text, however, I want us to look at a brief background and introduction to the writing of this book – the book begins with the birth of Samuel and the story of his mother – Samuel was born around the year 1050 B.C. and picks up at the end of the period of the Judges – the book of Judges end with chapter 21 and verse 25, *“in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what right in their own eyes”* – this summarizes the condition of the nation at the time of Samuel’s birth – Israel faced a leadership crisis that was accompanied by a spiritual crisis – having entered the Promised Land in victory and strength, the people of God had lost their way spiritually, politically and militarily – Judges 2:10 explains what happened, after Joshua and his generation *“there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord”* – when we survey what is going on in our culture, we can see that our world today is just as much need of hope as Israel was – it seems as if less and less people give heed to the word of God and actively turn their backs against him – forgetting the Lord is the greatest evil that can befall any generation – not having the Lord’s help on their side, Israel failed to drive out the remnants of the Canaanites but instead began to follow in their pagan ways and to worship their unholy idols – in punishment, God gave the Israelites over into the hands of their enemies, periodically showing mercy by raising up judges to deliver them – the book of Judges concludes with a series of stories that depict the decadent setting in which Samuel was born and raised, including the spiritual corruption of the Levites, the idolatry of the people and the moral squalor of the Israelite society
- The birth of Samuel was a sign of a new age – just as God would later prepare Israel for her Messiah by sending John the Baptist, God prepared the way for a king after God’s own heart by sending Samuel, who was the last of Israel’s judges and the first of the great line of prophets who served during Israel’s kingdom – the historical significance of Samuel is evidenced by the birth narrative that begins the two books of the Bible that bear his name – the Scriptures always take care to inform us of the birth and upbringing of its most important figures – we see it with Moses, Samson, John the Baptist and with Jesus and just as they were all born in times of distress to humble, godly parents, so is the case with Samuel - as we read of Samuel’s introduction into history, we are going to look at the parallels from the circumstances surrounding his birth and the setting of the church today – we are going to focus on the hope that was found in Samuel’s mother, Hannah and how it would serve the church well to display that same hope to a lost, dying and barren world

- **Read 1 Samuel 1:1-8**

I. **A cry of hope**

- The opening chapter of 1Samuel begins with a little family history – we are first told who Samuel’s father is – his name was Elkanah and he was described as a “certain man from Ramathaim-zophim from the hill country of Ephraim” – we are told who his father was, and his grandfather and his great-grandfather – then we are told that he had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah – in other words, we aren’t told very much about Samuel’s father – we know that he was a man, we know where he came from, who his family was and who his wives are – there is not much to be said about him because we are not told much about him – now if this were all we knew about him, it wouldn’t be much of a legacy – I don’t imagine you would stir many hearts delivering a eulogy and describing the deceased as “a certain man” – but the one other thing we do learn about Elkanah is that he becomes the father of Samuel – that is his legacy – if I were to be known as nothing more than the father of Ethan and Nathan, two great men of God, that is enough legacy for me
- We are not told that much about Samuel’s father because there is much more to be learned from his mother – as we just saw, Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah – rather than focusing on the polygamy, which was a common practice in those days, we will look at the difference between the two wives, and most likely the reason that Elkanah had two wives – Hannah was unable to bear children – it can be assumed that it was for this reason that Elkanah sought to have another wife – the inability to have children threatened both economic hardship and the cutting off of his name and lineage – like the patriarchs before him, Elkanah took a second wife to bear him children while his affections remained fixed on Hannah
- It is on Hannah’s affliction that the Scriptures turn our focus – Hannah’s barrenness seems to correspond to Israel’s spiritual state – women who suffer this condition often wonder how God is involved, but in Hannah’s case we know, since the text informs us that “*the Lord had closed her womb*” – there are many reasons why God brings trials into the lives of people, often to stimulate our faith, but in the case of the mother of so important a figure as Samuel, the point has to do not with Hannah but with Israel – the Lord closed Hannah’s womb to remind Israel that he had also caused the people to be spiritually barren because of their idolatry and unbelief – Israel was God’s barren wife, having failed to give him the children of faith he desired
- When we look around us today, we might wonder the same thing, “Where are God’s children?” – our society is slipping further and further away from God, embracing sin and idolatry – we are bombarded by constant news stories that remind us of how depraved our world is and how desperately it needs Jesus – sin is celebrated as we are encouraged to glory in ourselves, focus on what makes us happy – if it feels right to you, then you should do it, don’t let anyone else tell you that you’re wrong – even when we’re encouraged to think about others, it’s so that we can feel better about ourselves – and if you’ve ever tried to introduce Christ into the minds and hearts of today’s culture, you may be feeling the same sense of desperation that Hannah was feeling – our attempts to bring salvation and the hope of Christ to a lost world are thrown back in our faces and we are taunted by the ease with which the enemy seems to be attracting new followers – it’s hard enough to not convince someone of truth, but it makes it even

harder when we see those people being convinced of something that is not true and being dragged away to a false hope – this is the feeling that Hannah had as she watched Peninnah provide children for her husband – not only was she not able to have children, Hannah was constantly provoked by her “rival” – her emotional distress over her barren womb would have been grief enough without Peninnah to goad her – William Blaikie makes the observation that “the trial which Hannah had to bear was particularly heavy...to a Hebrew woman. To have no child was not only a disappointment, but seemed to make one out as dishonored by God, as unworthy of any part or lot in the means that were to bring about the fulfillment of the promise, ‘In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’”

- Her own grief, magnified by the provoking from her rival, brought her to tears – when they would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice each year, Elkanah, out of sympathy for his wife whom he loved very much, he would give double portion – but this gesture only reminded her of her condition – she was grieved to the point that she wept and would not eat – her heart and her spirit were so afflicted that it brought her to tears
- There is nothing wrong with expressing our grief outwardly – there may be some who say that if Christians really believe that God is in control then you should never express grief or feel sadness – nowhere in Scripture can we find instruction to never be sad – in fact, we can find in Scripture where Jesus himself expressed his grief outwardly as he wept over the death of Lazarus – of course Christians have something to accompany their grief, the hope of Christ – that is why, whenever we speak of someone who has passed who we knew to be a believer, we quote 1 Thessalonians 4, that we do not grieve as “those who have no hope” – grief should be expected in times of great sorrow – if we know of someone who is hurting, we should never approach them, saying “don’t worry, God’s in control” or “There’s no need to cry, just trust God” – while the intentions may be good, and at the right time, it may be what they need to hear, we should let people express their grief – in fact, we should learn from Hannah, as we survey what’s going on around us and see a world that is in a full-on sprint away from God, we should be driven to tears – when is the last time we wept over lost souls – when is the last time we cried because people were dying and going to hell – this is something that we should be saddened by and we should be grieved over people who do not know Christ – but, as I said before, our grief is accompanied by the hope of Christ – our cries should not be ones of hopeless desperation, but ones of desperation that the hope we have experienced would be made known to others – and that hope should drive us to our knees – that is what it did for Hannah – I do not believe that Hannah’s tears were hopeless ones because we can look further in the text and see that her tears led her to pour out her heart to God in prayer

- **Read 1 Samuel 1:9-20**

## II. A prayer of hope

- As much as we can learn from Hannah in her crying, there is much more to learn in her praying – after she had gone back to be with her family and ate with them, she went to

the tabernacle – there was Eli, the high priest, but Hannah was not looking for him, she was seeking the Lord in prayer – there are several lessons for us today as we look at Hannah’s petition to God

- *She turned to the Lord in need* – how many people turn away from God when feeling his hand of affliction? – how many just accept the hand that they’ve been dealt and just try to move on? – yes, we are to be thankful to God for everything, even trials and suffering, but that doesn’t mean we should be resigned to our situation – James gives great advice in his letter, “*Is anyone among you suffering? Then let him pray.*” (**James 5:13**) – of all the things Hannah could have done, becoming angry or bitter, fretting in tears, or reviling the Lord, she did the very best thing – she simply turned to the Lord in prayer for her need
- The second thing she did was pray *knowing who God is* – when she cried out to God, she referred to him as *Yaweh Sabaoth* or “Lord of hosts” – this expression is used in 230 different Old Testament verses – it refers to God’s command of armies, most especially the legions of heaven, and describes his omnipotent power – Hannah honored God by ascribing to him all the power she needed – Hannah knew of the power of God – she knew the story of Exodus, how God had rescued his people who were afflicted – she had probably even heard the words from writings of Exodus that the Lord told Moses, “*I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings*” (**Exodus 3:7**) – know she is praying to the Lord, “*look on the affliction of your maidservant and remember me*” – she knew that God had the power to answer her prayer – do we pray in that same knowledge and understanding of God’s power? – do we truly believe that God could answer every prayer that we ask of him?
- Third, Hannah prayed *knowing who she was* – she referred to herself as God’s servant – she did not approach God demanding or complaining – she didn’t come with her rights but with her humble request – she didn’t ask for vengeance on Peninnah – she identified herself as a servant of the Lord and brought her requests in humble faith
- A fourth note in Hannah’s prayer is *she knew what she wanted* – of course we should be wary of only bringing petitions before God when we pray – we need to worship God in prayer, give thanks for our blessings and confess our sins – but God also invites us to make requests of him – it honors God when we do – James again speaks about the truth of prayer, “*You do not have because you do not ask*” (**James 4:2**) – he does make sure to follow that up with an explanation of why we may not get things that we do ask for, “*You ask and do not receive because you ask with the wrong motives* – Hannah prayed confidently because she knew that God could answer her request, and she knew that her motives were right – this leads to a fifth note of Hannah’s prayer:
- *Hannah prayed with an eye to God’s will* – we see that in her vow to God if he would see fit to answer her prayer – some may see this is as bargaining with God, but if we consider the sacrifice involved we understand what Hannah’s motives were – quoting William Blaikie again, “No doubt she wished the child,

and asked in fulfillment of her own vehement desire. But beyond and above that desire there arose in her soul the sense of God’s claim and glory, and to these high considerations she desired to subordinate every feeling of her own. If God should give her the child, he would not be hers, but God’s.” – if God were to grant her a child, Hannah vowed to raise the child as a Nazarite – Hannah was probably very familiar with another Nazarite, Samson, as she was most likely born during his judgeship – Samson was born to the barren wife of Manoah, which Hannah would have identified with and she vowed that the first son that God gives her will be similarly devoted to Israel’s cause in this desperate time of need – in this we find a prayer that all Christian parents should pray, a chief desire that our children be fully committed to the Lord and useful to the kingdom

- And a sixth and final thing to note about Hannah’s prayer is that *she fervently opened her heart to the Lord* – this was not some fleeting prayer that she threw in quickly before a meal or bedtime – this was a request that she was passionate about and she was emptying her emotions before God – now on the one hand, we need to realize that emotional passion does not make our prayers any better or more effective, as if we have to push our hearts onto the Lord – but on the other hand, the passions that are in our hearts, our frustration, our grief, even our anger and doubt, can and should be brought to God in prayer
- As we contemplate the manner in which Hannah prayed, we must also go back to our parallel application – does our response to a world in need of Christ mirror Hannah’s response to her affliction – first of all, are we praying – are we praying for lost people to be saved – do we pray for lost people by name – do we care enough about an individual to bring their name before the throne of grace and ask God to show them mercy and lead them to the salvation that only he can offer – if we are praying, are we doing it with the same attitude as Hannah – do we pray knowing that God does hear us and can answer our prayers – do we come before him humbly, yet with passion for seeing people changed – do we pray that God’s will be done – if we are not praying, it would do us well to look at the benefits of prayer that played out in Hannah’s life – first, we see that prayer changes us – we can see that in the dramatic change in Hannah’s demeanor – Hannah entered into prayer shattered and depressed, but as she rose from prayer, she “*went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad*” – Hannah did not know how God would answer her prayer, but the time spent with him was rewarding, as it always is – to focus our hearts on God is to remember that the Lord who reigns is also the God of grace who invites us into his presence – and if prayer only changed us, it would be worthwhile – but the second thing that happened was that God answered Hannah’s prayer – not only does prayer change us, but *prayer changes things* – God is pleased to act in response to our prayers – some people would argue that if we believe in the sovereignty of God then there is no point in people praying since God has determined everything that will happen – we should never think that our prayers are pointless and thankfully, Hannah didn’t think that either – she understood that God’s sovereign will is achieved through the acts of men and women, especially our prayers – not all our prayers will be answered the way that Hannah’s was – sometimes God may remain

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silent – that doesn't mean that he doesn't hear us or that he will remain forever silent – we should always pray, trusting that God is sovereign, and knowing that we are blessed by being in the presence of God – we know that not every lost soul that we pray for will repent – that shouldn't keep us from praying – we should be diligent in our prayers, that if the Lord should come today, he would find us on our knees, and let our cry be as Spurgeon's, "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for."

### Read 1 Samuel 1:21-28

#### III. An offering of hope

- Prayer is an incredible tool that Christians have at our disposal – we should have an attitude and a lifestyle of prayer – but we must also remember that God calls us to do more than pray – at times, prayer may be all he asks us to do, but the majority of examples found in Scripture of God calling his people, he is calling them to action – it is vital that we pray for this fallen world, that unbelievers be reconciled to God, but if Christians aren't following up their prayers with preaching, the harvest is going to be slight – after our prayer of hope, we must extend an offering of hope – Hannah knew there was more to her commitment than just praying – once God answered her prayer, she knew that her responsibility was to then offer her son back to God – Hannah's responsibility to action does carry a great deal of weight, more than most of us would ever be required because it involved a vow to God – vows are never something to be taken lightly – vows made to God, including marriage vows, ordination vows, church membership vows, and oaths of office, should be made soberly and with mature judgment – the book of Ecclesiastes speaks of the importance of vow-keeping, "*When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay*" (**Ecclesiastes 5:4-5**) – Hannah's actions suggest that she was mature and that she made her vow to God in sober judgment and honest intent – we see that what she prayed, she is now following up with action in offering her son to the Lord – Hannah might not have realized the full impact of her offering – she had no way of knowing the part in history that her son was going to play – she was trusting God that this offering could be used to bring hope to a hopeless world – just as we were given lessons from Hannah's tears and her prayer, we can also learn about our responsibility to offer hope to others
  - o In Hannah's offering we learn of her *gratitude to the Lord* – because she had been given much, she was grateful and recognized her responsibility to give back to God – if we have been given the gospel message of hope, been shown God's grace and mercy, should we not be grateful and shouldn't we be sharing what we've been given with others? – if he understand the horrible fate from which we have been spared and the glorious present and future that is now ours, we

wouldn't be able to wake in the morning without expressing gratitude to Almighty God – and one of the ways that gratitude is manifested is sharing that same message with others who so desperately need it

- Another thing we learn from Hannah is that *she was faithful in her offering* – Hannah waited until the right time to bring her son to the tabernacle – this wasn't some ploy to put off what she had promised – in fact, it was quite the opposite – she was waiting until the child had been weaned, understanding that it would be a much easier transition for the child and she did not want to go to the tabernacle before then because she wanted the next time that she go there be the time when she would fulfill her vow – she was not going to show up at the house of the Lord without her offering – she didn't want to go there and leave with her son – when we make our offering to God, presenting ourselves for service to the gospel, do we go with the intent of giving all of ourselves and taking nothing back – are we willing to sacrifice of ourselves, our comfort, our safety, our reputation, so that the name of God will be made great?
- Third, we see Hannah's *generosity* – when Hannah took Samuel to the tabernacle she also took with her a sacrifice – only she went above and beyond what was required – the translation I read mentions a three-year-old bull but the KJV and the original text suggest that it was three bulls – some may have translated at one bull because verse 25 mentions bull in the singular but when looking at the original text and the rest of her offering (a whole ephah of flour rather than the three tenths of an ephah that the law required with a bull offering) it would make sense that this was an offering of 3 bulls – now economically it did not make sense, because this would have been a huge offering for someone to make, but I believe this shows the generosity of a woman who was completely grateful and committed to serving her God – our lesson here is very similar to the one we just mentioned – are we willing to give more than is required? – this goes beyond what we give financially to God, although we should be generous there too, but we should be giving everything that we have to God to further his kingdom
- After we have prayed, are we looking for ways to act – does the fact that the world, and in some cases, the church, seems to be forgetting God, drive us to want to do something – are we sharing the truth of the gospel with our lost friends and family – are we giving of our time and resources so that others may know of God's saving grace
- As we conclude this first lesson in our study of new book, I know that there is much to be gleaned from these verses – when we understand the majesty of God and his sacrifice that we might have salvation, do we weep for those who have never experienced it – are we living a life of prayer, constantly bending God's ear that he might restore those around us – and are we extending that offer of hope to those who have never known hope – I pray that we would not simply take this as a “call to consider” message – I pray that we would see it as a “call to action” – that when we step out of the doors of the church, as we leave our friendly, comfortable confines of our family and fellowship that we would be grieved with what is going on around us – but



grieved with a sense of hope – a hope that understands that God is still in control, a hope that recognizes that God is still at work and can turn the hardest heart into a relationship with Him – let us take that message of hope into a hopeless, barren world, shining our light in the darkest places so that others may see