

Mighty to Save

1Samuel 2:1-11

A good amount of the things that Jesus taught to people during His earthly ministry are hard.

Take the Sermon on the Mount, for example.

From beginning to end it is full of things that are hard.

The sermon opens with the B-attitudes.

All of them are hard to live out. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers (have you ever tried to make peace?), the persecuted.

He takes obeying God's commands to a whole new level when he equates sinful thoughts and feelings to the actions themselves.

He says if you get hit in the right side of the face, offer the other side of your face as well.

He tells us to 'love our enemies, to love the things of heaven more than the things of earth, and to put aside worry and trust the LORD in everything.

That is just a taste of the sermon. It is full of things that are hard.

I believe that is one of the reasons why He ends the sermon the way He does.

He ends it with an illustration of two houses.

He says the one that listens to His teaching and does it is like someone who builds their house on a rock.

On the other hand, the one who listens to His teaching and doesn't put them into practice is like someone who builds their house upon the sand.

His point being that it is hard to build a house on the rock, just as it is hard to put His teaching into practice, but it's worth it.

One of the things that really stands out to me in that illustration is when the quality of the building is revealed.

Do you remember? The quality of the building is revealed when the rain comes down, the streams rise, and the wind beats against the house.

It is the storm that reveals whether or not the builder is wise or foolish.

When things are easy everybody looks pretty much the same, but when things are difficult the contrast between those who know, believe, and are seeking to live the bible and those who don't is quite clear.

Jesus' point is to encourage His hearers, including us, to resist taking the easy way, but rather choose the more difficult road because it is worth it.

To do that we must know what is true, we must believe/trust what is true, and we must love what is true.

It is relatively easy to know good theology, it is something entirely different to believe it and trust in it when things are hard.

[Our text this morning **1Samuel 2:1-11** is a tremendous encouragement to us to build our lives on the rock of obedience to the word of Christ (by which I mean the whole Bible). These verses are a hymn of praise to the LORD from the mouth of Samuel's mother Hannah. She had endured years of trial and finally God's deliverance had come. Her prayer is a strong reminder that the One True God is indeed mighty to save. That can be difficult to believe when it doesn't feel like it, but that is precisely when it matters the most. As we listen in on this prayer, I believe the LORD has at least three lessons for us concerning His salvation. Number one...]

Point #1 – When we are saved from trouble we should joyfully worship. (Verses 1-3)

One of God's greatest mercies toward us is to show us clearly that He has delivered us from trouble and if we take that for granted we are beyond foolish.

What Hannah says here in verses 1-3 comes after she had endured years of sorrow over being childless and on top of her sorrow she endured the unrelenting provocation of her rival Peninnah.

After many years God had answered her prayers for a son and this is how she responds **(verses 1-3)**.

She knows down to the core of her being that the reason why she has been delivered from her situation is because of God.

Yes the birth of her son must have given her an enormous amount of joy, but her joy is much bigger than Samuel, her joy is in the God Who caused these things to happen.

She says, "...in the LORD my horn is lifted high."

The horn in the Bible is frequently used as a symbol of strength.

People in those days observed that some animals used their horns to fight with other animals and the one that prevailed obviously had the stronger horns.

When she says, "...in the Lord my horn is lifted high" she is saying that the LORD has given her the capacity to prevail over her trouble/enemies.

This did not come about because of her own will, strength, or desire. She knows Samuel was born solely on account of the power of God.

How easy would it have been to be happy in the way things turned out and forget about God?

That happens with people all of the time.

[Years ago a good friend of mine told me a story about a relative of his. He was a man who lived a godless life thinking that he would turn to the LORD just before he died and then get to go to heaven. Well this man had a severe stroke that left him on death's door for a couple of weeks with significant physical problems. While the doctors didn't give him much of a chance God's people prayed and he survived. He even prayed himself committing to turn to the LORD if he was healed. God answered those prayers and he made a miraculous recovery. After he was well he went right back to being godless. How incredibly sad is that? How offensive to God is that?]

Hannah doesn't turn away from the LORD when she is delivered from her trouble. Instead, she delights herself in Him.

Part of that delight here is boasting over her enemies.

While she does not name her enemies, it is almost certain that she means Peninnah who had tormented her for many years.

On the surface that doesn't seem very nice does it. It comes across as an in your face moment.

We need to see something deeper here though. This is more than an "I win you lose kind of moment". This is a celebration of the victory that God has delivered.

This is a proclamation that no earthly enemy has ultimate sway over the people of God, because God is the One Who has the final say over everything.

2 Corinthians 10:17 says, "Let him who boasts boast in the LORD."

At times it is very appropriate to look godless people in the eye and say, "You have no power over me, you will not carry the day, and God will be victorious over you."

It is most appropriate for the Christian to say to our greatest enemies of sin, death, demons, and the devil himself, "You will not prevail for God in Christ has defeated you."

More often then we realize God is delivering us from trouble.

More often then we appreciate God clearly acts in the world for our good.

How foolish it is to miss out on joyful worship in response to all that He does?

[Why do people miss that? Romans 1 tells us that the default setting of human thinking is to deny the clear reality of an unseen God in favour of the things that we can see. We would rather turn to people and things to help us because we perceive them as tangible. How many times in the history of the scriptures, in the history of the world, or in the history of our own experience do people turn to created things when what we really need to do is turn to the

LORD? Hannah here has turned to the LORD, has been saved from her trouble, and in her joyful praise gives us this second lesson this morning, which is that...]

Point #2 – God alone has the power to save. (Verse 4-8)

Living with our hope in created things is a delusion that leads to destruction. The LORD alone has final authority over life and death.

In verses 4-5 Hannah gives three examples of the positions of people being reversed, listen (verses 4-5).

First there is the illustration of warfare.

The image of a warrior is someone who has both trained for and been proven in battle.

A bow in the ancient world was one of the common weapons found on the battlefield and in the hands of a well-trained warrior could be a significant part of victory.

A broken bow, however, does not shoot arrows. There is nothing to fear from a broken bow.

On the other hand someone who “stumbles” on the battlefield is not threat to his enemy. We are likely to have a picture of an uncoordinated weakling here.

So the mighty warrior has become weak and the weakling has become the warrior.

Next is the illustration of food.

People who have an abundance lose it all and are desperate for food.

Those who were hungry are now full (Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus).

That brings her to her main point. The barren woman has seven children.

Seven being the number of perfection or completion meaning the barren woman is now satisfied.

She who had many sons “pines away”.

All that Peninnah had over Hannah was the fact that she had children and now that advantage has been wiped away.

Their roles have been completely reversed.

Why? (Verses 6-8)

God alone holds the power of life and death and the power to humble and exalt.

He holds that power because He owns everything in the World because He created everything in the world.

There are a number of examples of this in the Scriptures.

[Job comes to mind. He went from the height of prosperity to the utter depths in every aspect of his life and then back to prosperity. Someone might say, the devil did all the bad stuff to Job and you would be right but not apart from God permitting it. Everything that happens to Job is

under God's control and God never explains the situation to Job, He simply declares to Job His sovereign right to do run the universe. Or think of Hezekiah, one of the good kings of Israel. He falls ill and the prophet Isaiah goes to him and tells him he is a dead man. Hezekiah pleads with the LORD and God gives Him fifteen more years of life. Or when Jesus dies, He is not at the mercy of His enemies He is submitting Himself to the power of God and by that power He is raised from the dead to reign over all things forever. By that power we are saved if we turn from our sin and trust in Christ alone to be made right with God.]

No one but God can help you in a final sense.

One of the worst things that can ever happen to anybody is for them to put their hope in people or things.

Do you think you are secure because you have tonnes of money in the bank or because we live in a land of enormous abundance?

That can be taken away in a heartbeat.

Do you think you are safe because you eat healthy food and exercise? Those are good things, they can be God honouring things, but they can't save anybody in kind of lasting way.

There is no such thing as being secure in the things of this world.

God can easily turn everything on its head.

He owns it all and it is His right to do with it what He wants.

Thankfully, what God wants, because of His nature, is always what is right and just.

The LORD does not govern all things in an erratic way. His standards do not change.

What happens in the world is not the result of impersonal forces, but rather it is the result of the purposeful action of the LORD Who is completely Holy.

It is because of the holiness of His absolute rule that every human being is accountable to Him.

God doesn't tell us about His power and authority so that we will throw up our hands and do nothing.

He tells us about it so that no matter where we may find ourselves in life we will turn to Him realizing that He is the only One who can help us.

[That brings us to our third lesson this morning. This one is absolutely critical because it is possible to get to a place of despair in this life when things seem like they are against us. In chapter one that is where we find Hannah. What God has done for her has shown her, or at least reminded her of one of life's most important lessons. Here is the lesson...]

Point #3 – God will prevail and all of His people will be saved.

In the end the LORD will conquer all of His enemies and on that day everyone who has put their trust in Him will be rescued from every trouble.

Listen to how this hymn of praise ends in verses 9-11.

When we think of our lives and individuals and when we think of the big picture of life on earth, there are many times where the wicked seem to be prevailing.

When I was driving the other day and listening to the radio I heard Bob Beasley from the Bible League of Canada say that more than 200 Christians are killed every day for their faith in Jesus.

Can you imagine sitting in a prison waiting to die for your faith?

Can you imagine being in church and having people break in to harm us and burn down the building?

When those sorts of things happen it looks like in that moment evil wins.

When the doctor tells you there is no hope, it looks in that moment like God is letting you down.

When you feel all alone and it feels like everything is against you in that moment it may appear as though the LORD has abandoned you.

The Bible never promises the people of God that their lives will be free to trouble, in fact, it promises the opposite.

What the Bible promises is that evil will not prevail forever.

The Bible promises that in the end God wins.

His victory will extend throughout all of creation.

Every square inch of the earth and every person on it is subject to the inescapable rule of the LORD.

Notice Hannah's prayer which declares God's victory over evil points us to a king at the end of verse 11.

It says, "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

That is a strange thing to be part of her prayer considering up to this point Israel had no king.

Some commentators think this so out of place that the question the authenticity of the prayer.

There is a better answer though. If you go back to Genesis 49:10-12 you will find a king over the nation of Israel is predicted to come from the tribe of Judah.

That begins with David, but what is said here is not completed in David, it is completed in one of David's descendants named Jesus.

We call Jesus, "Jesus Christ", the word "Christ" means anointed one.

God exercised His power in Christ in unparalleled ways.

God the Son taking on humanity only happens because God, by His power, can do what is beyond our understanding.

Jesus had the strength to resist every temptation throughout His life.

Jesus endured the fullness of the punishment for all our sins to the point of death which required strength beyond what we can imagine.

Talk about a moment where it seemed like evil had prevailed.

The disciples certainly thought that. Jesus' enemies certainly thought that.

But again God displayed His power and raised our LORD from the dead.

In addition to raising Him from the dead, by the power of God Jesus has ascended into heaven and is seated in a place of majesty that is exalted above all things according to Philippians 2.

It is in the certainty of Jesus' exaltation that everyone who belongs to him can have great confidence in the fact that God will prevail in the end.

While Hannah would probably not have known exactly how this would all work out, she was able to say with great confidence that God will win the day and in so doing would save His people.

It was in this confidence that she was able to leave her young son at the tabernacle with Eli the high priest.

This is not a matter of abandoning Samuel or her not loving him.

It is a matter of her entrusting her son, whom she clearly treasured, to God.

What a tremendous reminder for us this morning.

God will prevail and all His people will be saved.

Do you believe that? As I said earlier it is relatively easy to know good theology, it is something entirely different to believe it and trust in it when things are hard.

Thankfully God does not leave us to ourselves in this regard.

He shows His kindness to us on a daily basis. If only we could realize how many times He saves us from trouble and joyfully worship Him for it, we would be encouraged.

If only we could realize that only God can save us in an ultimate sense we could get away from the disappointment of trusting in things and people.

If only we could know in the depths of our hearts that God wins, then we would have great confidence that one day soon He will save us from all our trouble.

So, upon what kind of foundation are our lives built? Upon the rock of trusting Jesus, or the sand failing to believe Him?

May God be merciful and give us this kind of faith that truly believes that He alone is mighty to save.