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1 SAMUEL 1:12-20

1 Samuel Series

Let's come before the Lord and settle our hearts and pray before we open God's word to 1 Samuel 1.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I want to thank you for the progress that Rob's making. We ask that you would continue to heal him of his gull bladder surgery that he had last week. We pray that you'd grow him, strengthen him this week. I pray for those who are traveling this week and can't be here. I pray that you'd bless them as well. Lord, we thank you for the way you're working in people's lives here. For the group that meets on Sunday morning just to anchor themselves in the faith and what that looks like. We thank you for that group and for the small groups that are meeting in the course of the week. Lord, we're here to serve you. We ask that the power of your Holy Spirit fall on this church in a powerful way. We ask that you would revive us, excite us about who you are and not make it something that comes from us on an earthly plain, but something that comes from your Spirit because we see you alive and working in our lives. Lord, I thank you for the grace that you're giving to each person here in their lives and the challenges that they face. As we bring our challenges together today to you, we lay them at your feet and ask that you would do a work inside of our lives. We ask that you would speak to us now as we open your word. Lord, I ask that you'd give us specific things that we can take away this week to take Jesus home and apply to our lives. We just are so grateful that we can come before you and thank you for who you are. We thank you for the way that you actively lead us and direct us. Do that again this morning we ask. In Jesus' name, amen.

Last week we started the book of 1 Samuel. You can look there in your Bible and you can see the story as we continue on starting in verse 12.

Hannah came to an important decision early in her life even before she was pregnant. It's a decision that every parent, I believe, needs to make in their lives. This decision that this child is not mine; I'm just a steward of this child for a time. God answered her prayer and gave her a baby. But it wasn't just a baby because God was preparing something special for this child.

God was bringing to a conclusion in the history of the Jewish people the judges. Samuel would be the last judge and the first prophet, as we will read continuing on in the book of 1 Samuel. The judges had been those who were saviors, so to speak. They would rescue the people from the enemies. Samuel is considered a judge, but his role in that is more like a prophet – someone who would speak spiritual words into the lives of people. He would be God's mouthpiece to the nation of Israel.

God wanted a man, Samuel, to be this person and He wanted this person to grow up with a spiritual legacy in a home there where were godly parents. We learned last week about Elkanah and Hannah and how they loved the Lord.

Young people, I just want to say to you that if you are blessed to be growing up in a home where parents love the Lord then you just need to know that God has something special for you. It can be a tendency to take that faith for granted because you've known it all this time. God has something very special for you and you want to embrace what God has for you so you can run with that beauty of what God has.

I think there's an important lesson in this passage for us as parents that we need to be praying for our kids. We need to be turning them over to the Lord in our own hearts. We can't control them. We can influence them. Certainly we want to do as much as we can to influence those children to understand what it means to trust the Lord and to live with Him and for Him every day of our lives.

Hannah's attitude and her whole response in this passage becomes the basis for the tradition that we have of dedicating children to the Lord. So what we try to do in our dedication is we say that I want to dedicate myself as a parent to the Lord and in so doing, I want to give this child to the Lord because I want the Lord to do an amazing work in this child's life. That baby dedication is really modeled after this story about Hannah.

By the way, it's interesting to note in the next passage that she gets more children. She'll end up with three boys and two daughters in her family.

Now let me bring you back to the setting because maybe you missed last Sunday. I just want to remind you what the setting is like here. They've all come to Shiloh for a time of feasting. So the big feast is taking place where they'll be celebrating and dedicating themselves to the Lord. They're offering a fellowship offering, which means that they're all going to be feasting together. They'll get to eat part of it. Part of the fellowship offering was given to the priest, but the remainder would be shared among the people who came.

They were enjoying that feast, but Hannah was provoked by the other wife of Elkanah, Peninnah, and because of that she felt miserable. She couldn't have children. She was barren. And then she was plagued by this mistreatment of this other person. So she gets up from the meal and she leaves the meal. She just can't feast and enjoy what's going on. She goes to pray.

I'm going to switch here in this story to the next character in this story, and that's Eli, the priest. I think we can learn some important things from him. There's a lesson in this that hits me kind of hard as a pastor. I think there's application for all of us in this passage, but for me it's very important. I think you'll see why as we look at this spiritual leader and what he does. He makes a mistake. It's a little blip in his understanding or in his ministry, or a mistake in his life. He does the wrong thing.

I want to talk to you about what he does that's wrong here because there are some valuable lessons we can learn. But first let me read the verses from 12-18, see what the Bible is saying, and then I'm going to give you some reflection on it.

1 Samuel 1 starting in verse 12 – *As she (Hannah) kept on praying to the Lord, Eli (the priest) observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”*

“Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

We're looking at the book of 1 Samuel and we're going to talk as we go through the whole book how to be on target with life. This is our second week of many weeks through 1 Samuel and we're going to learn what it means to be centered on God and what He has. We're going to learn about Saul, who may have started well but drifted away from that (as we see through the whole book) and ends up taking his own life at the end of the book.

But in this particular passage I want to look at a mistake that Eli made as he was looking at this woman who was in anguish praying to the Lord out of all of her sincerity coming before God, and he misreads the situation.

I especially appreciate the way God in His word tells us stories about real people with real problems and He shares those problems freely. We know about them. And we can learn from the mistakes that people make in the Bible. We can be inspired by the stories of people who were successful, but we can also learn from those mistakes and be warned about them.

For example, when Abraham got into a situation he hadn't been before, he was anxious about this king, so he lies and says about his wife, “This is my sister.” He was anxious about this new situation he was in and so he chose to take matters into his own hands instead of trust the Lord. Can I be confident in God's care of me even in new situations where I haven't before? Abraham made a mistake.

James and John made a mistake of wanting to be great. I don't think a mistake was wanting to be great, but they come to Jesus almost in a greedy way and they say, “Hey, Jesus, other disciples aren't around now. We want to sit on your left and your right when we come into your kingdom.” Jesus rebuked them and said, “I can't tell you who's going to be sitting on the left and right, but I'll tell you this: If you want to be great in my kingdom, learn to be the servant of all.” Can I be a servant in everything that I do and learn from the mistake of James and John?

Elijah, a great man of God, made the great mistake of thinking and believing in his own heart, “I’m the only one left. No one serves God but me.” God revived him in His message. Can I be in a place where I can trust the Lord in every area of my life, take on the mission that He’s given to me without having to be discouraged by what I see around me?

I want to be like David. David was a man after God’s own heart, who’s known by that quality. In the book of Acts it reflects on David and calls him *a man after God’s own heart*.

I want to be like Joseph. Joseph was a guy who was mistreated. Every time Joseph turned around he was being mistreated by someone. But he still stays true to God and allows God to be working in his life.

I want to be like Mary, the mother of Jesus, who chose to allow God to use her in a special way, even though there was public opinion against her. The people were just making comments about her pregnancy and so on. She hung in there and did what God wanted her to do.

I don’t want to be like Eli, who I think made a significant mistake in this passage. He made some assumptions about this woman, assumptions about weakness that weren’t there. I think he made a difficult situation for Hannah even more challenging for her.

Here’s the problem as I see it. We need to give people the benefit of the doubt. I don’t see that happening here in Eli. Eli does something different. Benefit of the doubt is believing the best about people. We need to believe the best about them and when we do that then good things can happen.

Sometimes we can see some people and we say in our mind, “Oh I know that kind of person,” or “he’s doing that again.” This could be in the family that we do this. With a husband and a wife sometimes you can say, “Oh he’s done it again,” or “she did it again,” and so we don’t believe the best. But believing the best is part of what God has designed for us. We need to be thinking in our mind this: God created that person uniquely and special. That person is wrestling with sin in their lives in ways that I might not be able to understand.

People are generally, I would suggest, internally consistent. They might not be consistent with me or consistent with the world, but internally they’re consistent. Everybody has a story. I may be used of God in this situation to touch that person in a way that will bring them to the next level of where God wants to take them.

I think that giving people the benefit of the doubt is very important. Now it is true, there are bad people in the world who are selfish, who are just trying to get for themselves, they’re trying to harm other people. There are those kind of people in the world. But I would suggest that most people want to enjoy life, they want to be happy. The benefit of the doubt is part of what I believe God has called us to give people and that’s part of our theology.

Let’s look at 1 Corinthians, the love chapter. I’m going to read to you 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Listen to the benefit of the doubt that’s embedded in the idea of love as Paul shares it. *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor*

others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

The benefit of the doubt. That's what we give to others. It's just part of who we are as Christians. We step in and we do that. On the other hand, there's a different word I want to talk about, and I think this is Eli's problem. Maybe I'm reading into this situation. But it seems to me that he's not giving her the benefit of the doubt, so what is he doing? I think he's cynical. "Oh I've seen that kind of a person before. Look at her mumbling over there. She's probably just drunk." He doesn't give her the benefit of the doubt, just is cynical.

The person who is cynical believes the worst in someone. Cynicism happens in our own personal lives when we experience pain over and over and over again from someone. It's certainly true in a family where a young person can be cynical of parents who they perceive to be giving them negative information or treatment regularly. Or from parents as they look at their teens. They become cynical about their teens. "The teen is going to do the wrong thing again." "Oh there he is again, doing the wrong thing." Cynicism grows in relationships and it comes from pain that we experience over and over again, so we start expecting it at every turn.

Christians are not cynics by definition because theologically we are people who give the benefit of the doubt. We recognize that God is involved in the pain. God makes miracles out of impossibilities. So we don't judge people and say, "Wow, that person is impossible. That person is stuck where they are." We recognize that God can make some changes. God's grace changes people. We are people of hope. We know that God is good. Goodness doesn't always mean comfort, but God is good. If you sense that cynicism is growing inside of you, you want to go back and check your theology.

Cynicism happens in family life. In a family when someone starts offending you over and over again, you can start assuming they're going to offend you again and it develops this cynical attitude inside that damages relationships in a home. Our beliefs about people can sometimes become a self-fulfilling prophecy. You can expect a person to be a certain way so you treat them as if they were that way and pretty soon it just perpetuates that sense of who they are.

For example, if you believe someone is selfish and you position yourself toward their selfishness because you know they're going to be selfish, then you perceive whatever they're doing to be selfish and you treat them that way. There's this perceived selfishness that starts to dominate their relationship and that person can't win because you have this perception because you become cynical. Cynicism destroys relationships. And then of course you say, "You see, that person is selfish." So we kind of believe these things and develop these conclusions that are dangerous.

As I started pondering this this week, I realized there are some people and sometimes when we have to be, can I say, cynical or we have to be very guarded at least. If you're going to buy or sell anything on Craigslist, I got to tell you, you better be very guarded because as soon as you post something on Craigslist, my experience is that you immediately get these people who want to take your money.

I was thinking my son has been trained as a Marine security guard. He's in the Marines and he was guarding an embassy in Kenya. These guards are trained to see everyone as a suspect. Everyone, you got to watch out for them. So they immediately, I think, believe the worst. And probably that's good. We need people who are going to stand guard and they're going to be looking out to see what's going on.

Mike, a lieutenant in the police force, and I were talking about this before the service. He's saying this is a challenge. This is a challenge in public safety, in law enforcement because a police officer must be able to turn it on and turn it off. If you turn it on and it's on all the time, you need it on to do your job, but if you take that home and it's on with your wife, your husband, then you know you've got a problem.

I think it's important for us to recognize that there are times when we need to be very guarded about our lives and about the safety of other people. But we also need to be able, especially when we come back into our families, especially when we come to those people that we know and we want to build relationships with, or especially when we're trying to do evangelism, we want to move into this thinking the best of people. We'll be surprised, when our beliefs change about people, how that opens the doors in opportunities. Because cynicism creates a negative filter that exists and we start seeing the world in this negative way. It's dangerous. I think that's the mistake that Eli is making. He starts for whatever reason seeing her and he's got a negative impression of her that's growing inside of him. If we do that, it distorts our reality and creates some problems.

I think we need to ask these kinds of questions: If I was in this person's shoes, might I act the same way that they're acting? What factors have influenced this person to be the person that they are to respond that way? Might I have done that same thing being in that situation? Would most people behave this way if they were experiencing life the way that person is experiencing it? Those questions help us to develop a little bit different response, I think, to life situations.

It's very tempting for me as a Christian. I love Jesus. I love Jesus wholeheartedly. I am totally committed to Jesus. It can be very tempting for me to look at someone and say, "They don't love Jesus as much as I do. That's why they have that problem." So it's very important, I believe, for me and for other people to not fall into the trap that Eli had who's saying she's just drunk. It's just a serious mistake. He misreads the situation.

I believe that's why Jesus was so successful on earth and people were impressed with Him so much is because when He came to people, He wasn't a cynic. He crossed boundaries that the other people who were cynical wouldn't cross. That's because He had this concept, this one thing that characterized Him (and I would call it compassion) that really drives Him. The Bible says often that Jesus had compassion on the crowds. Jesus had compassion on the blind man.

When Jesus came before under the tree where Zacchaeus was, He said to Zacchaeus, "Come on down, Zacchaeus, I'm going to go to your house today to have lunch." The others said, "Look at him. He's eating with tax collectors and sinners," as if they'll never change. They were cynics, you see. Jesus was determined to cross that boundary. His compassion allowed Him to do so.

When Jesus came to the woman at the well, she herself was surprised. I believe the woman at the well was a cynic. The Bible says Jesus asked her, “Where’s your husband?” “Well I don’t have a husband.” Jesus answered, “Well you answered honestly. You have five husbands and the one you’re with now isn’t even your husband.” I think she was cynical about marriage. Why did she even get married to the last guy? “The first five disappointed me.” She was cynical about marriage, but I think she was surprised that Jesus would even talk to her. Because you know those Samaritans, those half-breeds, we don’t talk to the Samaritans.

When we develop this cynical attitude, we end up with problems like Eli. I think it’s so dangerous and painful because it damages relationships. We need compassion. We need to imagine the best in people. “Oh what’s wrong? Is there something I can help you with there, Hannah?” But he doesn’t do that.

If we go back to verse 9 in the passage you’ll see where he’s introduced there. It says – *Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord’s house.* What was he doing sitting here on his chair? Was he reading his Facebook? Was he imagining the movie he watched last night? Was he contemplating the World Series coming up? I don’t know. But it says he was sitting there.

When you are a leader, certainly when you are a Christian leader in God’s church or a leader of people, but even a leader in a family, what you say is really important. People are listening to what you say and how you say it. Certainly in ministry people are listening to the words that you say because they want to hear God. Sometimes God speaks through a Christian leader and the other person can hear that. So what we say as leaders is really important. So how we make assumptions about people and their problems is very important how we handle that.

I just think Eli made a significant mistake. Obviously I’m taking off on this mistake because it hit me this week that there’s a problem here in his perception in his life. Maybe the application is more for me than for you, but as I’m going through the passage I’m studying it and trying to learn what God has for all of us. I just was touched by this particular passage.

But he recovers. Do you see he recovers? Look at the verse there because now he’s going to bless her. He recognizes the mistake that he misread her and now he’s going to bless her. What he does in the next moment is very important because God is going to use a word from the Lord for Hannah. God is going to speak through Eli to give her what she needs in this passage. It’s very important. Look at verse 17. *Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.” She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.*

So she went back to the feast. She was able to go back and eat. She got what she needed in the situation because the Lord had a word for her and gave the privilege of an imperfect priest to be the person to deliver the message. I like that. We all need words from the Lord at times.

There are New Testament gifts. There’s a word of knowledge, a word of wisdom. Those are New Testament gifts in the Spirit. We believe that all the gifts of the Spirit are valuable for today.

Tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing – all those are gifts. They're all valuable and available today.

So it may be that God has given you a gift of a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge. Maybe you have that ability to speak into someone else's life in a way that just touches them or gives them what they need at that moment. A vehicle through whom God speaks. You don't have to have the spiritual gift to do that. I think that God allows us all to speak to each other like that in ways that are helpful.

When I was in my training going to seminary, I came across a man whose name was Giff. Now Giff came from a different persuasion than me. He's more Pentecostal. I felt like then (and I still feel to a certain extent) that I'm a little bit more intellectual, cerebral, analytical, strategic. That part of my brain is active a lot. So you hear me when I talk, that's how I do a lot of talking and ministry. But there's a whole part of this experiential side that the Pentecostal church is strong in. They allow you to experience God's grace in this great way. I just love that.

I latched onto Giff. I went to his church several times. I sat in ministry and watched him minister. I'm a minister in training, so he would allow me to minister with him. At one point he says, "Let's talk about these gifts of word of knowledge and word of wisdom because God gives them to you. You have something you know that person needs. You can see it. Here, let's practice." There was someone there. He said, "Go ahead. Share something that this person needs." I remember that I shared something that was negative. He said, "Okay, that may be true, but there's a lot of affirming things you can also say. Because you look at this person and know that they need Jesus. You know that God wants to do a great thing in their life."

In that moment I realized that God often can speak through me with the very words of God, with the word of knowledge, a word of wisdom to someone else in their life because they need the message. You can do that too. You see someone who's hurting and you can just go up to them and say, "I want to encourage you in the Lord today," and you share with them something that just touches them in a special way and amazing things can happen.

Some people are just particularly gifted at this. You just love to be with them because when they speak, God is speaking to you and you're just like, "Ah, this is so great." But it's something that we grow in. Word of wisdom, word of knowledge are not just negative things, gift of discernment. There are ways that we come and we share God's grace with others.

Eli does it and I like it. I like what he does as he comes. He spoke peace over her. He added his prayer to her prayer. He added his blessing to her petition. Hannah was able to leave the situation, getting what she needed from God in that moment. She came to pray at the house of the Lord. She came to pray there and in her prayer she received the answer, and the priest was part of that. It's just a beautiful thing.

I sense that often happens in our ministry time. In fact the ministry time that we have was birthed in my heart years ago in my time with Giff because after every Sunday School class, after every worship service there was a ministry time. Why? Because that's a time when we can even hear God speak more fully in our lives. More recently it was ignited in my own heart through a

church leadership meeting where it was talked about we got to do that more here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope.

So in a few minutes we're going to have a ministry time and allow you to come forward, if you like, and pray with counselors. Those counselors will pray for you, just as Eli prayed with Hannah and they got what they needed in order to leave satisfied. Beautiful.

Verse 18 – *She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.* She got what she needed.

Let me finish up through verse 20. It says – *Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I asked the Lord for him.”*

The name Samuel means “God has heard.” The name Hannah means “grace.” What we see is a picture of God’s grace here where God does something miraculous. He does something miraculous because Hannah’s heart was ready and she was dedicating herself to the Lord.

God does something miraculous and uses a man, an imperfect leader, who made a mistake but then recovered and God spoke through him. God used Hannah who said, “I’m going to go and pray for a little bit. Even though I’m upset, I need to get something from the Lord.” And God did something great in their lives. He gave them a baby. Wow. That’s big. If you haven’t had a baby and you want a baby and you’re praying for one and God gives you one, that’s really big. God blessed her in that special way.

I believe God wants to bless every one of us. He wants to give us what we need. We come here to church because we want to fellowship, we want to give, we want to share, we want to do all those things, but we want to leave here satisfied. Today if you’ve come with a burden on your heart, I just want to encourage you to do what Hannah did. Come before the Lord and pray with diligence. “God, please bless me in this.” Maybe that will involve someone else around you, someone else that can talk to you, or coming up for prayer. Maybe God will speak into your heart in a new way, in a special way in your life. We believe in a God who cares about each one of us intimately, He carries our sorrows and our burdens, and He provides for us the grace that we need to meet the challenges that we face every day of our lives.

Let’s pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, make us ministers of your grace today. Provide for us words of wisdom and words of knowledge that we can share with others. Lord, we ask that you’d empower us with the faith to speak boldly. We pray that you would give us all sensitivity and transparency in our own hearts so that we can ask for your grace and receive it in our times of need. Lord, bless each of us today. We’re grateful for the privilege of being in your house here. We honor you as we sing, Lord, and we ask you to continue to minister in our hearts. In Jesus’ name, amen.