

1 Samuel Chapter 1 v 1-20

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0:00] 1 Samuel and chapter 1. Most of you who come on a Sunday morning regularly know that we're looking in the book of Exodus and going through the journey of Exodus. We're in the plagues at the moment in Egypt. We're going to be looking at them tonight, so there's been a slight switch. So usually in the morning we're in Exodus, but tonight we're going to be in Exodus.

So if you want to know what happens next, next plague, you need to be here tonight. But because it's Mother's Sunday, I want us to think particularly about one mother and how her experience relates to us. And that woman is Hannah. And so we're going to read from 1 Samuel chapter 1, the first 20 verses. First 20 verses of 1 Samuel.

Now there was a certain man from Ramath, a Zulfite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah, son of Jehoram, the son of Eluhu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zulf, an Ephraimite. He had two wives. One was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. Year after year, this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord.

Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. And because the Lord had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Elkanah, her husband, would say to her, Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons? Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up.

Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord's temple. In bitterness of soul, Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord. She made a vow saying, 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. As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli 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 will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine. Not so, my Lord, Hannah replied.

[3:01] I'm a woman who's deeply troubled. I've 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've been praying here out of my great anguish grief. Eli answered, go in peace. 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 away and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. Early the next morning they arose and worshipped before the Lord, and then they went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah, his wife, and the Lord remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, because I asked the Lord for him. And may the Lord help us in that.

So 1 Samuel chapter 1, it'd be helpful for you to have that open if you've got a Bible to hand as we think about what's going on here and how this applies to us. Because again, we come to the Bible, we are looking and thinking about the living God, the unchanging God, the God who is always forever the same. And therefore the truths that we learn about God here are truths about him today as every day. On the 28th of August 1963, Martin Luther King gave his most famous speech, which has now become known as the I Have a Dream speech, because of his repeated use of that phrase through his talking. King referred to several hopes and aspirations that he had in the future, but they all came down to the same thing, which he summed up in his desires for his own children. He said this,

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. It was a very big dream at the time, a dream that went way beyond his own family, embracing a whole continent. And so this morning I want to begin by asking you, what do you dream for? What is your I Have a Dream about? What is it that you desire and long for more than anything else? Every one of us has aspirations? Every one of us has hopes, dreams?

They may be very big dreams. They may cover a continent like Martin Luther King's, or they may be seemingly to others very small, very personal. You may be thinking, well, I don't have a dream, an aspiration. I don't think I feel or think in that way. But if you're a Christian, then really I'd ask you this, what is it that you pray for most? What is it that you pray for daily and long for daily?

[6 : 21] And for all of us, what is the one thing that we think would bring to us the greatest joy, contentment, or peace? What is it that we feel that we lack in our lives and would long to have?

But do not have as yet. And so as it's Mother's Day, we're going to think about this morning, a woman who had a very deep desire, a great longing, a wonderful dream. Her dream was simply this, she dreamt of being a mother. It's Hannah. Here's her words in verse 11. She made a vow saying, O Lord Almighty, if you'll only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant, but give her a son. That was her dream. It was her longing. It was very personal for her. It's a very common desire amongst many millions of women around the world that they might have this sense of fulfillment, this sense of parenthood. But for Hannah, it was far from just a common everyday dream, a sort of a longing and a hope for the future. It was something that she wished for with all of her being. It was something that she longed for more than anything else. It was something that was on her thoughts and upon her lips and upon her heart every moment, it seems, of almost every day. Because it seems, as you look here, that Hannah had this dream of motherhood for several years, possibly even a decade or more. For here we read in verses 6 and 7, because the Lord had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. So throughout that time of waiting, throughout that time of longing, the pain became all the more unbearable. The sense of her dreams being quashed and frustrated became all the more painful for her, so much so that she just was a broken woman, a weeping woman.

Verse 10, in bitterness of soul, Hannah wept much. What made it all the more harder, of course, was that her husband had taken a second wife, Peninnah, who was by any account a rather unpleasant sort of a woman.

But she had several sons and daughters, and every time she had opportunity, she would rub Hannah's face in it, that she had no children and that she had plenty. Year after year after grinding year.

What about your dream? What about your longing? What about your hope? How long have you been holding on to it? How long has it been burning in your heart? How long has it been there?

- [9 : 46] Months? Years? Decades? You wish it would go away, perhaps. You wish you'd never thought of it to begin with.
- But like Hannah, it won't go away. You can't forget it. You can't move on. It's something which is constantly brought up to your face. And perhaps, like Hannah, there have been times where you have wept.
- Bitterly. Because that longing and desire has not been met. Because that longing and that prayer has been left unfulfilled.
- And there have been times, I'm sure, when Hannah has thought to just put it out of her mind. Just thought, well, if I can just forget about it, if I can just leave it to one side, then it won't upset me anymore.
- But then, of course, it's not long before a pen in our pops up and digs in the knife, reminding us what we're missing.
- [10 : 51] It doesn't need to be somebody like that. It doesn't need to be a pen in our mocking us. It doesn't need to be somebody ridiculing us. It can just be simply a sight of what somebody else has that you don't have.
- Or even a smell. Or a sound. Or just a thought that pops into your head. And again, that deep yearning, that deep longing is brought to the surface.
- And the pain of it is real. Now, for all of us, those longings and desires will be very different.
- Because it's personal. It's to do with who we are, where we've come from, what we have experienced. The particular dreams and longings that we have are individual, just as the circumstances of our lives are individual.
- For Hannah, it was because she was barren that she might have a child. But for others, it would be a different desire. So for a young child in an orphanage, it would be the dream of a loving family to be part of.
- [11 : 56] For a young girl or young woman, the dream would be a husband to care for her, to love her, to take her in his arms.
- For someone who is very hard-pressed in their workplace, the dream is retirement or early redundancy. For somebody who is suffering with cancer or some terminal illness.
- So the longing is a clean bill of health. Freedom from the medication and the pain. And for a Christian parent, that longing and that prayer and that desire is for their unconverted child.
- Or for a converted spouse, that their spouse may enter into the salvation and the joy that they have in Christ.
- For each one of us, that longing, that dream is going to be different. Hannah wanted to be a mother. Yes, she wanted to be a mother so she could shut Peninnar up.
- [12 : 59] I'm sure that was one of the things. But also for Hannah, not having a child was to her a mark that God's blessing was absent in her life.
- She understood that God was the giver of life and God was the one who gave children. And so in her mind, God withholding a child from her was a sign that God was displeased with her.
- Rightly or wrongly, that's how her thought process worked. And perhaps that may be too how we have come to a conclusion that our failure to achieve our dream, our failure to have our prayer answered in this area, is our fault.
- It's because God is displeased with us. It's because of our sin and our failures and our shortcomings that God has removed the blessing of giving to us this great desire.

And even though that may not be true and is almost certainly not likely to be true, we have an adversary. We have one who is the devil, who delights to put doubts into our minds, who wants us to doubt the love of God and the care of God for us and will use every excuse to highlight his lies in our minds.

[14 : 21] But I don't believe that we should put our dreams to one side. I don't believe that we should accept doubts and fears over why those dreams have not been fulfilled.

I don't believe that we should give them up.

And the reason why I say that is because here in the events and life of Hannah, we have a truth, a principle, which is found in other parts of the Bible about God's dealings with us.

A truth which we need to understand and accept. A truth we need to grasp. And it's a truth which we find particularly in one of the Psalms, the Psalm of David.

Psalm 37 and verse 4. Don't need to turn to it. But this is what it writes. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your hearts.

[15 : 30] I'll say that again. Read it again. This is what God has said. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. It's clear that God knows the desires of our hearts.

And that verse in the Bible positively encourages us to pursue those dreams, to pursue those desires, to seek them out. But it's not just in one verse in the Psalms, but through the experience of God's people like Hannah, we find again and again that God has placed in people's hearts desires and dreams and longings which he fulfills ultimately after a great deal of time.

So we go back to that young boy, Joseph, that teenager who dreamt that he would have his brothers bow down before him and honor him.

Over 20 years later, through imprisonment, slavery, those dreams were fulfilled. Or the hopes and the dreams that God gave to Abraham to have a son when he was 75 years old, not realized for 25 years' time.

Even the hopes of David himself who wrote that psalm, hopes placed in his heart by Samuel the prophet that he would be the king of all of Israel. And through becoming an outcast with a death warrant from the king against him, it did not come fully into fruition until 40 years or so later.

[17 : 17] Throughout the Bible, God has given to his people dreams, hopes, desires for things that they did not yet possess and would not possess for many years to come.

But there's something very significant, something very important that we have to understand in all of those cases and in the case here and particularly from that psalm 37 where we saw, delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

There's a proviso on us receiving the desires of our hearts. It's not that God says to us, when you've done A, B and C, I'll give you the desires of your heart.

Or when you've said so many prayers. Or when you've done so many acts of religious ritual. Or when you've been to church so many times. Or when you've kept a clean slate and not sinned for so many days.

No. But there is a proviso which is simply this, delight yourselves in the Lord. and he will give you the desires of your heart. What does that mean? Well it's the same principle that Jesus himself taught on the Sermon on the Mount.

[18 : 29] Where he said to those who are gathered there, seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you. It means simply this, putting the Lord God first in our lives.

It means delighting in him. It means seeking to please him before pleasing ourselves or anyone else.

Making his will, the chief desire, the number one thing in my life. It means making God number one.

As he should be. As is his rightful place as our creator and our provider. Particularly those of us who are Christians as our saviour and our deliverer.

It's the most natural thing in the world that God should be number one and the one who we delight in and are pleased in. And isn't that a wonderful thing? You know, people think about Christianity and they think about relationship with God.

[19 : 36] And the last word that might come to their minds is a sense of delighting in God. Well, fearing God because he's awesome and terrifying and a God of judgment.

Well, he truly is. And obeying God and keeping his rules and keeping his commandments. Well, that's what we think Christianity is. But delighting in God.

Rejoicing in God. Enjoying God. But. That seems a million miles away from my experience of what God is like.

But that is the experience of the Christian. That is the experience that God wants us to have. He wants us to enjoy him. Not just the things he does for us and he does many.

Not just the things he gives us and he gives us many. But him himself personally. Isn't that the very experience or shouldn't that be the very experience of a husband and a wife in a relationship together?

[20 : 37] Isn't it that they should enjoy one another? In fact, isn't that the great sorrow and sadness of married marriages? It's that the joy has gone out of them. They just do the same old things.

They go through the routine. But there's no joy in one another. There's no enjoying being together. No enjoying pleasing one another, surprising one another. That's how it should be with God.

That's how it must be with God. enjoying him, delighting in him. And all the other things come out of that. The obedience comes out of that.

Because it's a joy, not a pressure. The living for him comes out of that. Because it's not keeping rules, but it's showing love to the one who loved us.

Now here in the life of Hannah we see the evidence in her prayer that her desire was first of all God's will, not her own. Look at that in verse 11 in her prayer.

[21 : 39] She says, O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, not forget your servant, but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for the days of his life and no razor will ever be used on his head.

I'll come to what that means in a moment, but what I want us to understand is this, as we've seen year after year after year, this burden was upon the heart of Hannah and surely year after year after year she prayed for a son.

Every time she went up to the temple to offer sacrifices, surely she prayed for her son. Surely when she was at home and Peninah provoked her and upset her, her heart would cry out to God, God, give me a son.

However, it seems very clear from this passage, from these events, that this prayer that she brings is different to all the prayers she's prayed before.

Because in it we see a heart of someone who puts God's pleasure and joy and glory before herself and her own deepest longing. we see this because we hear her saying I will give him back to you.

[22 : 57] I will give him to serve you, to live for you, to love you. That reference to no razor being used on his head is a reference to what God had told them in Numbers in chapter 6.

If somebody wanted to be dedicated to God completely they could take what was called the Nazarite vow. And the Nazarite vow was that they wouldn't shave their head or cut their hair. Samson was one of those people.

And so she's saying Lord if you give me this son I'm going to give him back to you to live for you and consecrate him to you I'm going to make him make your will first before mine.

And so we see for the first time in her heart of hearts she is delighting in God before herself. Before it was to shut up Peninnah before it was that she might be free from the sense of guilt before it was so that she could hold her head up high with her friends with all their children but now it's something else now she's saying Lord I'm at that point where I really just want what you want I'm delighting in you Lord and putting you first.

You see how her promise is not one of those empty promises that we do make all of us when we're in a bit of a jam or in trouble or when we want something you've seen people make that prayer haven't you you've done it yourself I'm sure you've said to me Lord if you'll do this for me oh well then I'll do that for you if you'll make the problem that I'm in at the moment this financial problem go away then I'll promise not to be so bad and I'll promise that I'll go to church occasionally and I promise that I'll try and be a good person you see there's these are just the prayers and the bargains of people who don't know God God can't be bargained with he can't be sort of his arm twisted he can't do a deal with God you've got to take him on his terms and the sad truth is that when we pray those prayers they're just for a moment to get us out of trouble and we really have as much intention of keeping them as we do of those new year's resolutions to lose weight it's a good intention at the time but really it doesn't really matter if we don't do it now here dear friends in the life of this lady

[25 : 28] Hannah we have a woman who's so overwhelmed with the burden of her heart that she prays in a way which is not only genuine and passionate but a way in which she puts God first before everything else so let me ask you again about your dream your hope let me ask you again about that burning desire of your heart are you willing for it to take second place before God are you willing to submit it to him and say Lord what you want is more important than what I want see when we're doing that then of course we're following in the greatest example of all aren't we of the Lord Jesus that garden of Gethsemane with the knowledge and anticipation of what was before him in the cross when he prays father if it's possible take this cup away this cup this cup of judgment this cup of wrath this cup which is so bitter which is the suffering and death I'll endure if it's possible take it away surely the burning desire and longing of his heart was that he should not have to go to the cross who would want to and yet ultimately his delight was in the

God who is his father and so he prays not my will but yours be done you see it's only when we delight ourselves in him it's only when he becomes number one and everything else even the greatest longing of our hearts becomes number two that we have an ease in our burden didn't we do that with Hannah look there what happens in verse 18 she's prayed her prayer she's had this sort of a bit of a disagreement with Eli the priest who's misunderstood and then we're told at the end of verse 18 she went her way and ate something and her face was no longer downcast did she had she stopped wanting to have a son of course she hadn't stopped wanting to have a son has the desire and the burden left and no it hadn't but you see there is a such a transformation as there is the replacement in her heart from doing what she wanted longing for what she wanted to longing what God wanted and you see the wonderful truth is this that when we do that when we genuinely and sincerely take the

Lord God as number one and say Lord you are my delight and I want to please you more than anything else more than even this then we can be confident that two things will take place one of two things will take place the first is this that the Lord will either give us what we long for as in Hannah's case she went home she had relationship with her husband verse 20 so in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son how did she come about this son and what did she say she named him Samuel because I asked the Lord for him she knew it was the Lord who had given it to her and not of anything else it wasn't chance fate luck either the Lord will give us what we desire and long in our hearts and often he will often he will when we make him the delight and desire of our hearts firstly or else something else will happen and that is this that the deep longing and desire and burden of our hearts will be exchanged for something else something else which is in fact

God's will something else which is what he wants for us which is better for us than even that we dreamt and longed for ourselves we see that in many different situations in the Bible one of the most striking really is in the life of a man called Saul Saul in who later became known as the Apostle Paul was a man who had a burning desire which he believed was from God he had a burning longing and desire which he believed was pleasing to God and that was that all those who are Christians should be imprisoned or put to death Acts chapter 9 Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples he went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that if he found any there who belonged to the way whether men or women he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem he was a man who was convinced he knew what God wanted he was a man who was convinced that his desire and longing to see these people these what he thought were blasphemers and evil people imprisoned was what God wanted now your dreams and mine may not be so bloodthirsty but they may be as far away from the will of God as Saul's was that dream and passion and longing that we have in our hearts may not be what God wants for us may not be what's good for us may not be at all what's pleasing to him but when Saul was met with the Lord

Jesus Christ and when Saul's heart was changed and so that Jesus Christ became the delight and the desire of his heart there was a transformation so that later on he writes about what is now the passion of his heart he says this I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord I consider everything rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which is through faith in Christ I want to know Christ there was a change wasn't there in his heart what he first thought was so important and so pleasing to God was in fact not what God wanted and so God changed his heart and put with him in another passion another desire another dream which was pleasing to him so God will do one of those two things he will either give us that which our hearts desire because it is his will and because we long to please him or he will take away that burning painful desire and replace it with something else so let me ask you again what is it that you most earnestly long for from God what is it that you long for more than anything else do you long to be right with God and know him as your loving heavenly father do you long to know freedom from your past from the guilt from the shame do you long to know the assurance that you are heavenly heaven is your home and you're going there then make the Lord

[32 : 48] Jesus Christ your delight and desire come and put your faith in him and he will give to you what you long because that is his will for each of us maybe your desire and longing is that as a Christian you might live a more godly life for him that you might not be so cold and half-hearted and lukewarm in your walk with him perhaps it may be that you might have mastery over that sin which continues to afflict you and enslave you that nobody else knows about it that online pornography that desire for alcohol those other lusts those other binding holding sins is your longing and desire the salvation of someone who you love more than your own life whatever it is dear friends let us come to God as Hannah came to him let us come with sacrificial prayer let us come to him as the one who himself closed her womb that she might be drawn into a right relationship with him that thing which God is withholding from you at this time may well be for that purpose that you might seek him and know him the very reason that he has burdened your heart is so that you might find in him the delight and the joy that you are seeking after elsewhere let us come to him let us have honest open dealings with him want us to take just a few moments now in silent prayer as we respond to what God has said to us to do to his ouró b are and

Thank you.

Thank you.

So I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. I'd rather be his than have riches untold. The world will tell us that money makes you happy, but it's not true.

Only Christ can satisfy the longing of our hearts. So let's stand and sing. 6-4-6. 7-4-6. 7-4-6. 7-4-6.

[36 : 19] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. And now to our God, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or dream, according to his power that is at work within us.

To him be glory in his church and in Christ Jesus throughout every generation, today and forever and ever. Amen.