

Sermon preached by Rev. Scott Blackwell at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 25th October 2006. Reading 1 Samuel 2:1-10
Topic: "The God Who Overthrows"

Introduction.

When it seems that God does not care....

Hebrews 11:1 Tells us that :*To have faith is to be sure of the things that we hope for and certain of the things that we cannot see.*

To have faith is to be certain that God is there, even though we do not and can not see him. It is to be certain that he raised Christ from the dead, even though we were not there to see it actually happen.

To have faith is to be sure that God is steadfast and true - it is to know that God is loving and that he is *for* us, he is on our side.

To have faith - is to hold on to these things, and keep them dear, even when the circumstances appear to suggest that the opposite is true.

To have faith, is to believe that God has the very best in mind for you -

even when money is tight and the future seems bleak,

even when friends are far away and life is lonely,

even when illness and distress come,

even when precious relatives die,

even when children are taken from our arms by disease and deformity and death.

To have faith , is to be able to hold onto the truth that God is the sovereign king - and that he is working in all things for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28).

Even though everything around you seems to shout that God does not care for you. That he is not there with you in your pain. That he is long resigned from involvement in anything on this planet.

To have faith is to be able to stand firm in the truth, even though everything around you is crumbling.

The character of Hannah's faith. (2:1-3)

Last week, we met a woman who had that kind of faith. Her name was Hannah.

We met a woman who, in the midst of isolation and grief, persecution and torment, turned to God and called on him. She asked him for aid. She asked him for blessing. She asked him to allow her to honour him with her most precious possession - her one and only son, Samuel - and God heard her. Yahweh answered her prayer and brought her from weeping, to rejoicing. She is a remarkable woman, and her story is a remarkable story.

In the passage before us tonight, Hannah responds to her remarkable God. And she opens her heart in the form of a song. She sings a hymn of praise to her Lord, and the song that comes from her is one of the most beautiful, and one of the most stirring pieces of literature in the whole of the Old Testament.

It is a song of joy that she sings, it is a song of gratitude and love. But it is also a testimony.

In the words of her song, Hannah testifies to the true nature and character of the God that she worships. This is the God that she knows personally, the God who is king over all creation!

Confidence

The first thing I want to draw your attention to in this song is how we gain an insight into the character of Hannah's faith. Because she knows Yahweh, because she knows his touch on her life, and because she knows what he is capable of - her faith takes a particular form - and its first characteristic is confidence.

In verse one, her words are all rejoicing and strength. She says that her horn is lifted high - and the image is one of a great antelope or deer - which walks brandishing the strength of its natural armour.

In the Lord, she has cause to stand over her enemies and tell out loud the story of their downfall and destruction. She has become a mighty warrior - because it is the Lord God who fights for her. He is her strength and he is her joy.

He is the one who is apart from all others (v.2), there is no one holy (righteous & separate) like the Lord. In fact she goes on to say that there is actually no-one besides God. No one worth bowing down to. No one worth worshipping. There is only one who claims the title of Almighty God - and that is Yahweh. He is the one who is always steadfast, he is the one who is always reliable - he is the ROCK upon which Hannah stands - and any hope, any joy or any comfort she has rests on him. She is fully confident that her faith is correctly placed - because she knows God. Her confidence issues from her personal knowledge of God's power, and love and trustworthiness.

What do you know about God? Does what you know lead you to confidence?

Humility

And yet, as confident as she is - she is cautious not to let her confidence become arrogance or pride. For while she does know that God is all-powerful, she knows too that he is all-knowing. Every thought is known by him. Every action is seen and every word is heard.

Hannah's God is not an ignorant God, he knows his creation, he knows us backwards. He knows our nature and he knows our tendencies.

Hannah has been raised high by God - but she does not forget for a moment exactly who is doing the lifting and who is being lifted. Until God acted, she was helpless and her future was pain - she has done nothing - God has done it all.

This is exactly how it is with us - we could not save ourselves.

Look at who you are to God, in Christ. What did you do that made you worth saving?

Where is your cause for arrogance and pride? Before God had mercy on you, you were just a corpse.

Yes, Hannah's faith is confident - but it is not arrogant or proud. She knows what was done for her - and she knows who did it. And she knows who was powerless.

The character of Hannah's God. (2:4-11)

The great reverser

From verse 4, she moves from voicing her understanding of herself, to voicing her understanding of her God. And as we work through the things that she has to say about God, a pattern of overturning and reversing comes to the fore. For you see, God is the all powerful one. He is the sovereign God who controls all things. He is the one who can do all things. Indeed, the destiny of every being sits within his hands.

And so, whatever God wills to happen, he can bring make it so.

He is the one who has the power to make the mightiest warrior helpless. He can break the archers bow.

But not only can he bring the mighty down - he is the one who has the power to raise up the lowly - he can make the weak full of strength! At his merest whim, he can take away the plenty of the rich and bring them low - and he can provide for the poor and hungry.

Nothing is beyond his hand - he is the one who can grant children in abundance to the most hopelessly barren woman - and take away the largest of families.

In his hands, is the power of life and the power of death - he can do it all - Hannah's God is a BIG GOD all powerful, and yet personal. No problem too big for him - no person too small for him.

He is the great reverser - history is his to command - and command it he does. And all these things that Hannah speaks about, we will see God do during the course of this book. In fact, Hannah's prayer is programmatic for the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel. This prayer gives us a preview of everything that is about to come.

God will overthrow the might of the Philistine army within the pages of 1 Samuel. He will humble the impressive king Saul - and raise up to a throne the lowly shepherd boy named David - and in so doing, he will lift Israel from the ash-heap of Judges where she struggles - to become the most powerful political and economic force in the then known world **see v.8.**

The mighty vindicator (4-8)

God will also reveal himself as the mighty vindicator of the righteous and the weak - those who have a heart after his own, those who are his saints, he will stand beside and fight for **see v.9-10** (wait until David meets Goliath), while those who rebel and are wicked, he will strike without mercy (See the madness and troubled spirit of Saul).

The sovereign judge and warrior (9-10)

But all the while, as we see these things come to pass, we will be reminded, just as Hannah has reminded us now - that it is not Israel who does these things on her own - it is God who fights for her. It is God who views the nations and judges them - it is God who acts for their punishment where punishment is due and God who moves to justify, where justification is required. Israel has not made herself great - God alone has done that. The themes of confidence and humility return again.

Conclusion***Her God and ours...***

God can do all this, because he is the one who is true ruler. The earth and all creation is his, it belongs to him - he alone has the power to and the right to judge it.

This then is the nature and character of Hannah's God. Here is his awesome power, clearly outlined.

But he is not just Hannah's God, he is our God too!

The truths that she announces in this song, are true for us as well - for though, in the short term, Hannah prophesied of a king whom God would anoint and exalt and that was seen to be fulfilled in David - its ultimate fulfilment would be seen generations later in the exaltation of Christ Jesus.

I wonder have you ever noticed the similarities between the song that Hannah sings, and the song that Mary sings in **Luke 1:46ff**

And don't the words that Jesus speaks to his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel: '*All authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me.*' speak of Jesus himself being the strengthened, honoured and exalted king, lifted up to the place that is above all. For now it is Christ who is the mighty judge, and it is Christ who rules over all the earth as God's true king.

This is the object of our faith. Jesus is the one upon whom we lean, and hope and rejoice. For everything we are, he has made us. As Hannah was to Yahweh - so we are to Christ, for in truth, they are one and the same.

All that Hannah says of Yahweh, we declare of Christ - for all authority and power now sits in his hands.

To have faith is to be sure that God is steadfast and true - it is to know that God is loving and that he is *for* us, he is on our side.

To have faith - is to hold on to these things, and keep them dear, even when the circumstances appear to suggest that the opposite is true.

In times of trial, you can lean on him. In times of despair, you can hope on him

When everything in your life seems like it is falling apart and fragile you can trust in him

Matthew 11:27-30 **As it was for Hannah so it is for us - for her God and ours are one and the same.**