

This morning we are beginning a new series in the book of 1 Samuel. And the book takes place right after the Judges. Some of you who have been here for awhile may remember that we preached through the book of Judges about five years ago. Israel has been in deep spiritual decline. The country is in chaos descending into sin. And 1 & 2 Samuel, which are really one book, is the story of the coming of the King. It is the story of the rise of Samuel the prophet who will establish kings. It is the story of the rise and fall of King Saul. And it is the story of the rise and fall of King David. As we go through the book we will read some of the most well known Bible stories. And we will try to see how the whole book is leading to Jesus. Our story this morning begins not with a king. Our story begins not with a prophet. Our story begins with a woman. It begins with someone who is completely overlooked.

I. God hears the overlooked (v. 1-15).

The book begins not by introducing us to a king but to a prophet. It begins by telling us about a certain man.. He has a long name and impressive lineage. But the story is not about him. We hear that he has two wives named Peninnah and Hannah. The Bible tells us he has two wives, but it does not approve of it. Remember, this is a time when the whole country is in spiritual decline. And we will see in the story that has polygamy leads to problems. The primary issue in this passage is that Hannah is barren. She has no children.

Verse three, **"Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD."**

We find out every year he leaves to go and worship and make sacrifices to God.

He gives part of the sacrifice to his first wife and her sons.

Hannah has no sons, but he gives her extra.

Verse 5, **"But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb."**

He does it because he loves her, but the important thing is the Lord has closed her womb.

It is just going to repeat this fact in the next verse as well.

God is sovereign over children and over wombs.

She does not have children because she is infertile.

She does not have children because God has not allowed it.

And this should make our ears prick up.

Not just because we should be sympathetic for her suffering.

But we should know God must be about to do something.

Barren women in the Bible are almost always used mightily.

This is the first time you've read the story that should be your clue that

Hannah is the main character.

Verse six, **"And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. 7 So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat."**

This shows us her suffering.

Every single year she tries and tries and tries to conceive.

Every single cycle she tries again to have children.

But the years keep ticking by and time keeps running out.

And this other wife married to her husband, continues to have children.

And she continues to provoke Hannah.

She makes snide comments.

Think of every hurtful thing someone said to you when you were trying to get pregnant.

Those just keep piling up one after another.
And these jabs are intentional and cruel.
They drive Hannah to tears and the deepest of depression where she can't even bother to eat.
The sadness is too overwhelming. It's hard to get out of bed.

She is the one on our story who is overlooked.
And her husband who we should already know is not great makes it worse
Verse 8, **"And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? hAm I not more to you than ten sons?"**

He wants to know why she's being so depressed
So don't you love me?
I like that. He says he's better than 10 sons yet she's not better than two wives.
His love should be enough for her, but hers isn't enough for him.
We get this interaction here to see that her own husband does not care for her suffering.
He does not really hear her tears and understand them and the way that God does.

So everybody eats, but Hannah goes to the Tabernacle.
"After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD."

There Eli the high priest is sitting outside the temple in his chair.
Learned more about him and his sons in the weeks to come, but for now he's supposed to be acting as the high priest in this moment.

But Hannah goes and she prays.
I love the way her prayers described in verse 10.
"She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly."

She is deeply distressed. She is deeply depressed.

She is at the very bottom of her rope.
And when she is there, she can't eat, but she can get herself to God.
And she goes to him and she prays and she weeps.
They are good tears. They are bitter ones.
They are tears are mixed with anger and frustration and grief.
She brings her tears to God.
She takes her tears to the one person who can handle them.

Verse 11 gives us her prayer.

"And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

She vows a vow.

Hebrew often does this where it repeats a verb and a noun to stress the significance of it.

It is not just that she makes a vow. She vows a vow.

She is making a promise to God.

But it's in the form of a prayer, saying God, if you will look on me.

She asked that God would hear her and see her.

She asked that God would hear her prayer.

She asked that God would remember her.

She asked that he would not forget his servant.

And she makes a promise that if God will give her a son, she will give him back to the Lord for all the days of his life.

And that he will be set apart for the Lord.

What I want you to understand is that she's not negotiating with God.

She's not making a deal or trying to twist His arm or manipulate God.

The Hebrew here is her saying I'll give him to the Lord.

It has this kind of performative force that doesn't come across in english.

She's actually saying it in faith.

She's not making a deal, but she says Lord when you remember me, this is what I will do.

And it's as good as done because she believes that God will hear her. Nobody else has heard, but she knows that God will.

Verse 12, **"As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth."**

She's praying in this moment and now the high priest now begins to pay attention to her.

And he looks at her mouth, but he sees that her voice is not heard.

This is an important detail we get in verse 13, **"Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman."**

Because this is not just telling us that she was praying silently.

God's word I think is telling us that nobody is hearing her, but God.

Her husband is not hearing her.

Her sister wife surely is not hearing her.

In the high priest himself can't hear her cries.

No one is listening.

And no one understands.

"And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you."

So the high priest rebukes her prayer and tells her to stop being so drunk. Something we should note here is that the high priest of all people should be used to seeing people pray to God in this way.

And the fact that he doesn't one points out the spiritual climate of how people people pray this way.

But it also points out that the high priest can't tell when somebody's praying to God.

He thinks it's more likely that they've been drinking too much.

It seems it is more likely for being to be drunk in the holy place than praying.

Verse 15, **"But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord."**

Remind her no I'm not drunk, but I have been pouring out my soul to God. I love Hannah so much.

Would you to also note she says she is doing this not to God,
but before God.

She knows that her prayers are heard by God because she is in his presence.

She is before the throne of God

"Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation."

And she is taking all of her worry and all of her anxiety to the throne of grace.

When she doesn't want him to think that she is worthless.

The beginning of the story gives us so many of these details and I think it's trying to show us again again that nobody is hearing Hannah.

Nobody is listening to her prayer. Nobody is acknowledging the depth of her hurt.

Nobody cares about her suffering.

And the times that she's supposed to go before the Lord to pray, just bring even more pain because of how she's being treated.

And then she comes to the temple of the house of God to pray, and the people who should know better than anything or the ones who hurt her even more.

Hannah is very overlooked.

But not by God.

He hears her voice and he hears her prayer.

He knows what nobody else does.

He cares and loves her in a way that nobody else does.

When I want you to know is that God loves you and God hears you in the same way that he hears Hannah.

There is a uniqueness to her story, but there's also who our God is.

That the people who are overlooked the people who are spit at the people who are persecuted the people who are forgotten, are heard by their creator.

When you find yourself filled with anxiety.

When you are having a panic attack.

When you are so depressed that you cannot eat, and you cannot get out of bed and the only prayers you can bring our tears.

God hears you.

Even if you might be suffering for something, God is allowing like Hannah's case and she does not understand.

God is not distant.

And so when we find ourselves in places like Hannah, we should do what she does and go before the Lord.

Go before him and cast your cares upon him.

Cry to him.

Scream to him.

Be honest with him.

Bring him all of your troubles and know that he hears.

II. God remembers the overlooked (v. 17-20).

God does not only hear us when we cry.

He does not just listen to our prayers in that ignore them.

God remembers those who were overlooked.

We see God remember Hannah.

Verse 17, **"Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him."**

Eli hears her prayer, recognizes his mistake.

And here he does, one of the few things in the entire book that he does right.

He tells her to go in peace.

That is a priestly benediction.

It is the blessing of the priest of God to his people.

And this is actually the only place in the Old Testament, where a priest blesses a single individual.

Hannah gets one because God remembers her.

It's one of the reasons I end every service with that same blessing to go in peace.

He does not want her just to go in peace but he says may God answer your request.

He hasn't heard her request. He doesn't know what it is, but he does know and recognizes her faith in the way that she prays.

He could see if she has a godly woman who deeply cares and throws herself at the feet of God and he says may he give you what you ask.

And she gives one of the great responses in verse 18, **"And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad."**

It's a similar response that Mary the mother of God gives in the gospels. And she leaves and eats and is no longer sad.

We need to recognize that this is a great moment of her faith.

She is not pregnant yet.

She has not done anything to become pregnant yet.

But her fasting is done.

And her face is glad in faith.

She believes that God will keep his promise.

She trust in the priest.

Trust that God will hear her prayer.

This is wonderful faith.

This is taking a step off the boat into the water.

This is the disciples passing out the baskets of fish have no idea whether there's gonna be enough for everybody.

This is the paralyzed man beginning to move to get up before he knows that he can.

The bleeding woman reaching out to touch Christ's robe.

Verse 19, **"They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her."**

They all rise up early and they worship the next morning.

Our worship is no longer filled with tears or worship is filled with joy.

And then God remembers her.

Again in the Bible, when it talks about, God's remembrance were using human language to describe how God works.

We have to remember we cannot fully comprehend God.

He is so beyond our understanding.

So, we use human language to try and describe who God is.

And what God does.

It does not mean that God forgot about her.

In the same way that you and I might forget somebody's name or forget that we had somewhere we were supposed to be today.

When God remembers, it means he thinks upon somebody and he acts.

Verse 20, **"And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the Lord."**

Because of her remembrance, God gives her not just a child.

God gives her not just a pregnancy or conception.

God gives her a son who lives.

And she names him Samuel acknowledging that she asked God and he remembered.

What is so wonderful about the story and the reason we are drawn to it is not just because we can relate to Hannah's struggle.

Not just because we can relate to her prayer or her faith.

But because it reminds us that our God remembers people like her.

That our God remembers.

He cares.

We might never understand.

We may never get all of the answers.

God does not fill us in on his plan and his ways are not our ways.

But our God does care about us, and he remembers us.

And he acts when we pray.

And when we beg, and we throw himself at his feet, he hears.

Now this does not mean that if you pray in the way Hannah does that you will conceive and have a son.

Because there are some of you who have dealt with infertility, which is such a cold way to describe the struggle and the suffering.

And you have prayed like Hannah many times maybe you've read it and you've asked in her own words and God says no.

God's word tells us in Matthew 7 our God is a good father.

If we ask for bread, he does not give us a snake.

What it means is that God will remember us.

He may not give us exactly what we ask for, but he will give us something good.

Romans 8:28 reminds us He will take what has been bad into our lives and use it for good for those who love him.

What do you need to know that God will remember you when you pray.

And we can pray, and we can go to him and pour out our souls to him.

Because our God, especially cares and especially listens to those who are overlooked and who are desperate.

God does not just hear the prayers of the wealthy and the well off and those who have it all together.

He does not just answer the prayers of those people, but he answers the prayers of the forgotten.

He answers the prayers of Hannah and he will answer yours.

God will remember you.

He rarely gives us what we thought, but He always gives us something better than we imagined.

III. God uses the overlooked to bring redemption (v. 21-28).

This is one of the themes of the entire Bible.

The primary people that God uses in the kingdom of God are the overlooked.

He uses the broken in the rejected.

He uses the sick, the lame the blind.

He uses the uneducated and the fools.

The leftovers, the discarded, and the overlooked.

God delights to use the unlikely to do the miraculous.

If God was having a draft for who is going to be on his team, he would pick all the worst people first.

And the story of Hannah is at the very beginning to set the stage for the entire book of 1 & 2 Samuel.

God is not gonna use the kind of king that we expect.

He's going to use the unexpected.

He has been given the child and now some time goes by.

So the question is if Hannah will keep her promise.

It's been a year so at most the child is three months old.

And Hannah said she will wait.

She will go and take her child to the presence of God to stay there forever after he's been weaned.

Around this time somewhere between 2 to 5.

But she seems willing to keep her promise.

To give up her child to the presence of God.

To allow him to live far from her serving God every day of his life.

That takes even more faith than she's already shown up before.

Verse 23, **"Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the Lord establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him."**

Hannah's husband says do what you think is best.

He is willing to let her decide.

But he does encourage her that she should keep her words so that God will establish us or finish.

Verse 24, **"And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. And the child was young."**

She does exactly what she says, and she comes with another sacrifice.

We would all probably say that giving up your child to serve the Lord is enough of a sacrifice.

But she brings a bull, flour, and wine.

Well, we need to understand about these sacrifices is that they are over and above what they would normally give.

It actually could either be a three-year-old bull or three bulls.

She is going above and beyond in giving sacrificially.

Verse 26, **"And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord."**

She brings him to the high priest and reminds him of her prayer.

Verse 28, **"For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. ²⁸ Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord."**

And she says that she gives him to the Lord as long as he lives, he is God's.

Her faith is incredible.

Her sacrifice is beyond what anyone has given.

"And he worshiped the Lord there."

When you get this little thing at the end of Samuel worship God.

He is very very young.

He has five of the oldest.

And he is already worshiping the Lord in his temple.

Because of Hannah's faith God uses her.

And because of her faith, God will use her son.

Samuel will be one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history.

He will certainly be one of the most significant.

He will be a prophet who will not just lead Israel, but will appoint kings.

And he will not just be a priest, but be a prophet who is faithful whenever everyone else else's faith faithless.

God is going to use her son in an incredible way.

Because God loves to use the overlooked.

We may ask earlier why God would close her womb and we don't know.

But part of how God used that is that she came in her faith and prayed, and was willing to give her son to God.

Because she did that her son will be one of the most significant men in her peoples entire history.

For thousands of years, people will know her faith and her son's faith.

Because of our God is gonna use them.

We don't know the names of her son's other children, but we know Samuel's.

We don't know we're understanding God's plan but he does.

And God loves to use the overlooked.

It is precisely these people that God uses to usher in his kingdom.

When I read this story I also cannot help but think of Jesus.

Jesus who himself was a king who was overlooked.

Jesus who himself came to a mother who should not have been able to have children, but did miraculously.

And I think of God, the father, who is willing to not just to give up his son to serve in the temple as a priest.

But God, who is willing to give his only son to die.

Not briefly for a certain amount of time for his son to give his life to save us.

Part of the story mirrors the gospel.

And the gospel also reminds us that God loves using the overlooked.

As we go into the rest of the story, we'll see how God uses Samuel.

We'll see that the people that we think should be used. The most are not the best.

But I don't want you to know is that God can and does use you.

You may feel very insignificant in the grand scheme of God's plans for the cosmos.

And you may be.

Hannah certainly did not feel like one of the greatest women of faith.

She did not think she was that important but forgotten.

And yet God used her.

And God wants to use you.

I don't know how and I don't know what his plans involve.

And we may never know the full extent of them.

But if we were willing to walk after Jesus and faith, and if we are full of the Holy Spirit, and if we are obedient and faithful, God will use us as part of his plan to bring the kingdom of God into the world.

We worship the God of the overlooked.