

1 Samuel 1:1-28 | “From Barrenness to Birth”
Preached on September 19, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to the book of 1 Samuel, and we will be in chapter 1 today.

This morning I'm starting a brand new sermon series going through the book of 1 Samuel.
[pause]

I'm excited for this book because there are a lot of good stories in it, and in these stories, they are not *just* historical accounts, although they are 100% historical...

...But they are meant to teach us something about ourselves, but more importantly about God, his work and character. *[pauseeeeeee]*

Think of the drastic difference when you go from having nothing to having so much.

I think of those “rags to riches” stories of people not having much money and then becoming a millionaire.

Or you hear of people who were working in a fast food restaurant, and now they are playing on a professional sports team making lots of money.

The change in those sorts of situations is radical, isn't it? *[pause]*

I also think of the big difference between having no children to having a baby.

They say that for parents going from no children to a child is one of the hardest transitions to make because it completely changes your life.

Your house was quiet, you went to sleep on time, you had a sound night of sleep each night, and all of a sudden a baby arrives.

And what happens?

Your life is completely upended.

Your house is no longer quiet, but constantly filled with crying, coos, and the sound of toys.

Your sleep is no longer uninterrupted, but interrupted every couple hours.

And whenever you go somewhere, you don't just take your wallet and keys, you take what feels like a whole car load of stuff to go somewhere.

That's the drastic change that going from no children to a child makes.

It changes your life and your life now revolves around taking care of that baby. *[pause]*

Well in our story this morning, we find a woman who went from nothing to having so much.

It wasn't because of money or a job, but it was because of a baby.

She went from being barren to giving birth, and in this radical change, there were far-reaching results for the nation of Israel. *[pauseee]*

Let's READ THE STORY.

The beginning of 1 Samuel is set in the time period of the Judges.

If you know much about the book of Judges, this is a time of moral decay and chaos.

Everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes, and there is really no central leader.¹

Israel was very disunified, coming together to only fight battles and then return. *[pause]*

So it's in that context that through Samuel's birth we start to see a glimmer of hope shine through as he becomes a major, transitional leader in the history of Israel. *[pauseeee]*

In the story, we are introduced to Samuel's parents.

His father, Elkanah, has two wives - one is Peninnah [pe-nee-nah] and the other, Hannah.

And immediately we are told of an issue: Peninnah [pe-nee-nah] has children, but Hannah has none, and so you know there's going to be tension.

There are problems when you have multiple wives, but it makes it way worse when one of those wives can't conceive.

You see that especially with Sarah and Hagar back in Genesis 16. *[pause]*

And so the story moves on, explaining that Samuel's father yearly goes up to worship and sacrifice to the Lord.

And in this detail we find that his parents are pretty godly people, especially Hannah, as we'll find out later. *[pause]*

But this family isn't peaceful or perfect, for there's tension between the two wives over Hannah's barrenness.

Hannah would receive a double portion from her husband because he loved her so much, and then Peninnah [pe-nee-nah] would provoke Hannah to irritation over her lack of children.

She would somehow get under Hannah's skin by constantly pointing out the fact that she had no children.

¹ See Judges 21:25.

She probably said things like, “Oh, Hi Hannah, my *children* were just talking to me earlier.”
[pauseeee]

You see, back then having children was a huge deal to wives.

To not have children was seen as a curse, and so women felt shame because they desired to produce children for their husband, especially male children, to carry on the family line.

They found fulfillment in having children. [pause]

So here is Hannah greatly loved by her husband, but unable to have children for him.

This hurt her, but then on top of that, her husband’s other wife is having *numerous* children, and on top of that, the rival wife is making fun of her for not having any.

It was simply hurt, upon hurt, upon hurt.

And so, of course, Hannah is upset over all of this, and she would cry and wouldn’t eat. [pause]

Her husband notices this and tries to comfort her, but he’s sort of insensitive in two ways.

First, he asks her why she’s crying and why she won’t eat.

He doesn’t even pick up on what’s going on, as he’s sort of oblivious to the situation.

But secondly, he says something very unhelpful, as he says, “Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

He pretty much says, “Aren’t I good enough? You have *me*, isn’t that enough? I’m the only male you need in your life.”

That really isn’t the most helpful thing to say to someone grieving over not having children.
[pause]

After this, Hannah gets up greatly distressed, and goes to weep and pray.

She makes a vow to God that if He gives her a son, she will give him back to the Lord in dedication.

And Eli, the priest, is sitting there and sees her mouth move, but doesn't hear anything.

So he believes her to be drunk because of this. [pause]

As we will find with Eli later on, he’s not a very good priest, and his discernment isn’t the greatest, as is displayed here. [pause]

So what he does is he confronts her about her drunkenness.

This would be kind of hurtful and embarrassing for Hannah.

First her husband was insensitive to her anguish, and now the priest at the Tabernacle thinks she's drunk. *[pause]*

Here she was genuinely crying out to God in anguished prayer, and the priest pretty much calls her a drunkard.

Yet she politely corrects him, which in itself is a great display of character by Hannah.

And she essentially says, "No, I'm not drunk, but I've been pouring out my soul to the Lord."

She hasn't been pouring out alcohol to drink, but rather, pouring out her soul. *[pause]*

Then Eli responds by giving a priestly blessing to her prayer, and she goes away uplifted because of it.

So Elkanah and the rest of the family leave and return home, and we find that God remembers Hannah and she gives birth to a son. *[pause]*

God 'remembering' in the Old Testament is not saying that he forgot something and finally recalled it.

Rather, it's the idea that He acted in accordance with something that happened in the past. *[pause]*

He truly remembered Hannah, her prayer, and her situation by responding in grace and opening up her womb to conceive Samuel.

And in response to the birth of the child, Hannah names him 'Samuel', for she understood that this child was an answer to her prayer.

She does this because the name 'Samuel' in Hebrew sounds a lot like the word for, 'heard of God.' *[pauseeee]*

The time arrives once again to go up to Shiloh for the annual sacrifice, but Hannah stays behind in order to nurse the child until he is weaned and given over to the Lord forever.

Most commentators believe that by the time Samuel was finally weaned, he was most likely around 3 years old.

So when the time had come, Hannah went up to Shiloh with items for a vow offering.

She goes to give the boy over to the care of Eli, and explains that she was the woman who prayed to the Lord, and God had granted her petition by providing the child. *[pauseeee]*

Can you imagine this?

After desiring and praying for so long for a child, she finally receives a boy, and yet here she is in devotion to the Lord, giving the child back in lifelong service.

Her husband could have actually nullified her vow, but she doesn't ask him to do that, neither does he nullify it, but allows it to take place.²

What great, godly examples that Samuel's parents were - this is the kind of faith that God desires of his people.

And these people's lives shine forth as the sin-filled time of Judges comes to a close, and Samuel, the transitional leader's life begins. *[pauseeee]*

Now that we have briefly gone through the story and highlighted a few interesting details, what I want to do is to look deeper to see what this passage teaches us.

I want to look at this story from two perspectives.

The first perspective is seeing what this story teaches us about our relationship to God.

And the second perspective is seeing what this story teaches us about God and his relationship to His people.

So first, what does this story teach us about our relationship to God, as is displayed especially in Hannah's life?...

I. A person of faith is a God-centered person, even when it's hard.

What's the state of your faith when times get tough?

What happens when your spouse or parent dies?

What happens when you go to the doctor and hear that 'not so good' prognosis?

What happens when you don't get that job that you have prayed and prayed for?

What happens when you are still waiting, waiting, and waiting on that special person to marry or that son or daughter to turn to the Lord, yet you are still *waiting*? *[pause]*

Our mindsets and actions during those hard times reveal the state of our faith.

For someone to become angry or bitter at God in those moments, they're basically saying, "God, you should have done something differently." Or, "God, you are not good."

For someone to become self-dependent in those moments, they're saying, "God's not powerful enough to do or won't do it, so I will."

Do you see what's going on?

Hard situations reveal our view of self and our view of God.

² See Numbers 30:6-8.

And when you become bitter or angry at God, or you become self-dependent, you are bringing God down in your mind and lifting yourself up in His place.

You're saying, "I know better." Or, "I would have done it differently."

That's bold, isn't it?

You are acting like you are God, and He is not.

This is why a correct view of self and a correct view of God is so essential.

We must always remember the Creator-creature distinction and hold it closely.

Because when you remember that God is God and I am not, that's a place to be in that makes faith thrive. *[pause]*

That kind of belief leads to a truly God-centered life because you realize that the Lord is your only hope.

'I am a needy, sinful person and I desperately need His all-powerful, all-loving grace for everything.' *[pauseeee]*

You need a correct view of self and a correct view of God.

This knowledge is clear in Hannah's life.

God is the all-mighty, all-good Creator - she is a dependent creature.

And this made her life God-centered, through and through. *[pause]*

How so? Well look closely.

We see it in her prayer to God.

She calls God, "the Lord of hosts", and she calls herself a "servant." *[pause]*

Hannah knows that God is the Almighty Lord, the great and powerful One.

The Commander of the hosts of heaven, and she is merely a servant of the great High King. *[pause]*

Imagine if we each had this view of God and ourselves in relation to God.

'He is the Lord of hosts, I am a *servant* of the Lord of hosts.'

'I submit to Him and His will, not the other way around.'

That's such an important thing to remember as you approach God in prayer. *[pause]*

This understanding led her to acknowledge her plight.

She was needy and desperate for the Lord's aid.

Her prayer was essentially, "I need You, Lord!" *[pauseeee]*

So also, we must acknowledge our desperate, needy plight.

We are dependent, sinful people.

We need God for life and breath and everything.

And our needy, desperate plight should fling us into the arms of our Lord. *[pauseeee]*

Hannah recognized her needy situation.

She and her husband could only do so much, for only God opens the womb and gives life, so she was at the mercy of the Lord.

It was out of her control, and she came to the Lord of hosts with the knowledge that, "MY NEED CAN ONLY BE ANSWERED IN GOD."

And so she went to Him in prayer.

She was filled with anxiety and vexation, and she didn't turn those troubled feelings against the Lord, but she cast her cares on the Lord.³

And once she heard the reassurance from the priest of God, she trusted that God heard and that God cared.

She went away, ate, and was no longer sad. *[pauseeeee]*

In prayer, we go to God with all of our anxieties, troubles, and heartache.

We cast them on the Lord in humble dependence, knowing that we are servants lifting up requests to the Lord of hosts.

But then once we do so, once we cast them on God, we trust His Word.

We trust that He hears, that He knows, that He cares, and we cling to His promises - and we go eat and rest in His providential care.

That is, we get out of bed, we go eat, we go to work, we play with our kids, we talk to our spouse, and we live.

This is not to downplay your emotions or to smooth it over.

³ Allusion to 1 Peter 5:7.

This is not to say that you won't feel anything anymore.

But it's simply to say that God knows your emotions, He heard your emotions, you went to Him with those emotions, and so now it's time to trust that He is truly the Lord, who has it in His hands. *[pause]*

And you see that with Hannah, she went from being in misery and not eating at all, to eating and no longer being sad.

The difference was that she knew that she just went and casted her cares on the Lord, she gave them over to Him.

And she trusted His power, his care, his promises. *[pauseeee]*

What do you do when you don't get something that you want?

What do you do when you are overwhelmed with anxiety, anguish, or grief?

Do you go to the Lord of hosts in prayer?

Do you call out to Him in need and desperation?

Do you speak your heart to Him? Do you cast all of your cares on Him and trust Him with it? *[pause]*

There are some of you praying and praying for a job.

There may be some praying for a baby.

There are some of you praying over that family member to receive Christ, or for that spouse to change.

There are some waiting and waiting for *something*. *[pause]*

What will you do with your grief? What will you do with your anguish and affliction?

Will you use them to turn *away* from the Lord, or *to* Him?

Will you go to the Lord of hosts? Will you pour out your soul before the Lord? *[pauseeee]*

We see Hannah's faith in her prayer, but we also see her faith and God-centered life when she receives an answer to her prayer.

She gives birth to Samuel, and notice what she does.

In her naming of Samuel, she acknowledges that God heard her prayer and answered.

She acknowledges that she received this child from God. *[pause]*

It was not a coincidence, it was not done through her own strength, but it was all of God.

The Lord had granted her petition. *[pause]*

This makes me think about how *we* respond when we receive something that we prayed for?

Do we truly acknowledge that it was from God alone?

Or do we think, “Well, maybe it was just a coincidence.”

Or do we think, “Man am I good. Look at what I did.”

We need to respond in a way like Hannah, where we acknowledge that this *is* God’s work.

This is God hearing and responding. This is an answer to prayer. *[pauseeeee]*

Hannah’s faith is also seen even after Samuel is born.

She could have easily thought, ‘I went to the Lord in prayer and he answered, so now I’m good, I’ll move on with life enjoying my long-awaited baby.’

But she doesn’t, for she follows through and dedicates him to the Lord.

She gave Samuel back to the Lord. *[pause]*

This must have been hard to do, especially after praying so much for his birth, but this shows Hannah’s love for the Lord.

She understands that all that she has is actually God’s.

Nothing is purely our own, but it is God’s, and we are merely stewards of it. *[pause]*

You see, our faith in God shows itself not just in how we handle need, but also, how we handle abundance.

It’s not just seen in what you do when you are in the storm, but it’s seen when life is sunny and bright.

Really, everything we receive from God should be given back to Him.

My money or possessions? I give them back to the Lord by using them in ways that advance His kingdom.

My job? I give it to the Lord, using it as a way to serve Him.

My children? I dedicate them to the Lord, not making my wants and desires for their lives number 1, but making God’s wants and desires for their lives the only priority. *[pause]*

What do you do with your answered prayers?

Do you just thank God and move on, or do you give it back to Him in grateful worship? *[pause]*

So what do you do with your body that God has healed from that sickness? Do you determine to go and help someone in need?

What do you do with that new job that you finally got as an answer to prayer? Do you use it as an opportunity to talk to others about Christ?

What do you do with that new house or car that you prayed for and finally God opened the door to get it?

Do you use it simply for yourself? Or do you give it back to God by opening your home to minister to others in hospitality?

Do you use your car to give people rides to the store or church? *[pause]*

What do you do with your answered prayers?

Oh, may we each have that posture of thinking, “God has what I need. God gives me what I need, and I will give this back to God in grateful worship.” *[pause]*

I love this one quote by Abraham Kuyper (Ki-Per) that says...

“There is not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘MINE!’”

And so in response we should say, “There’s not one square inch of me, there is not one square inch of what I have that is not yours.”

We give everything we have back to him in dedication.

Because a person of faith is a God-centered person, even when it’s hard. *[pauseeee]*

What an example in Hannah!

Here was a barren woman. Here was a woman deemed cursed by others and ridiculed by someone.

Here was a woman not that high in her social standing, for she couldn’t even bear children, the top thing that a wife was supposed to do in that time.

But God didn’t need someone of high social standing to impact Israel.

God didn’t need a spectacular Israelite seen as spectacular in the world’s eyes.

He determined to use a woman who acknowledged who her God was, and acknowledged her desperate, needy plight.

He determined to use a woman of faith, and this woman gave birth to Samuel, who God would use to transition Israel from the dark period of the Judges to the time of the kings. *[pause]*

Hannah's simple, God-dependent, God-centered faith led to great things in Israel.

That's the impact of simple faith in a great God.

Think of what God can do through simple people like us with simple faith in Him. *[pause]*

That's from one side of the story, our relation to God, but the Bible isn't simply about us, it's about Him, so what does this story show us about God?...

II. God works in loving, amazing, and providential ways for His people.

As you go through life, you learn lessons, don't you?

We learn lessons by experience sometimes, for when you are little you learn, "Don't touch the hot stove."

We also learn lessons by lectures and teaching in school as one person directly communicates with us to help us learn.

But we also learn lessons when we read stories. *[pause]*

Often in a story, the author is trying to convey an idea or truth that he or she wants you to know and be changed by.

Well when we get to this story here in this chapter 1 of 1st Samuel, it's not all just about Hannah and her faith, although that is a big part of it.

This story is teaching us about God.

So we must come to Scripture and think, "What is God teaching me here about Himself?"

And when we use that question as a grid to put over this story, what do we find?

We discover that He is loving. *[pause]*

So basic, right?

We all know that "God is love,"⁴ so this isn't something groundbreaking.

But just because we know something doesn't mean that we need to just move on and not be changed by it.

Let's take joy in it, and celebrate it, for this is our God - God is love. *[pause]*

⁴ 1 John 4:16.

We see it so vividly in this story.

He cares about Hannah, and even if she never was able to have children, he cared for her.

He heard her prayers. *[pause]*

Although maybe your friend may be too busy to listen to you, God is never too busy to listen.

Although that person that you're sharing your heart with seems distracted by other important things, He's not a God who is too distracted by more important things.

Although your earthly father was distant and never seemed to be around, your Heavenly Father is never distant or absent.

He is a God who is there, and who is present.

He hears your prayers, he listens, he knows, he cares.

Every single prayer of yours is heard by the Lord of hosts. *[pauseeee]*

Hannah's own husband didn't understand the depth of her sorrow and anguish and wasn't sensitive to her feelings.

Eli the priest didn't recognize her desperate prayer, but thought she was a drunk, and yet God understood, he knew.

And let me tell you today, though your fellow church member, your friend, or family member doesn't understand the depth of what you are going through, God does. *[pauseeee]*

God showed his love for Hannah by "remembering" her and providing a child, after she calls out to him in longing.

This is not to say that God will always provide a baby for someone who calls out to him, for he has plans and purposes far above our understanding.

But "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good."⁵ *[pause]*

What great love of God!

We don't know exactly what all of his plans and purposes are, but we know that He will love us in them, whatever they are. *[pause]*

So in this story, we discover that God is loving and works in loving ways, but we also learn that he works in amazing ways.

⁵ Romans 8:28.

That is, God works in breathtaking, powerful, stunning, astonishing, and in ways that cause wonder. *[pause]*

Really, this is the way that God often works.

This birth narrative reminds you of the many other Old Testament women who were barren like: Sarah, Rachel, and Samson's mother.

In each, God was doing something amazing.

He went on to fulfill his promise, carry on the line of the eventual Deliverer⁶, or begin a new stage of history.

And in each story, God was using what seemed impossible to do the amazing.

He would take women who seemed to be barren for life and produced life in them.

That's because you need to understand this truth, and if you miss everything else in this sermon, don't miss this...

God loves to work with *nothing* to show that he is *everything*. *[pause]*

He doesn't choose people based on their social standing or amazing gifts.

He uses someone who humbly gives their life to Him, and his power is then seen in their weakness. *[pause]*

Like he created the world out of nothing, so he uses people who are considered 'nobodies' in the world's eyes to do amazing things.

This is because it shows off his power for all to see and marvel. *[pause]*

In this story, God used someone whose womb seemed like it would never produce children to produce Samuel!

The other wife may have had many children, but Hannah had Samuel.

So God accomplishes his purposes, even when it looks unlikely. *[pause]*

How will God use you and your simple faith to display His glory?

Don't be saddened by what looks impossible, for God makes the impossible possible.

Don't be discouraged by your weaknesses, but boast in your weaknesses, so that his power is made perfect in your weakness.⁷ *[pause]*

⁶ I'm referring to Genesis 3:15 here and how God promised the seed of Eve to crush the head of the serpent.

⁷ See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

How will God use your weakness to show his power and do the amazing? *[pauseeee]*

According to this passage, we also see that God works in providential ways.

What is God's providence?

The Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology defines it this way,

"Providence...is the sovereign, divine superintendence of all things, guiding them toward their divinely predetermined end."⁸

So it's the idea that God is working out his purposes and plans according to His timetable and power.

And you see that perfectly in this story.

God is the one who closes Hannah's womb. *[pause]*

What's with that? Why would he do that to Hannah when she seems like such a godly woman?

It was for a purpose, and everything is in His timing. *[pause]*

Think about this because this was mind blowing for me when I thought about it.

If Hannah didn't go through her waiting period, there would be no Samuel dedicated to the Lord. *[pause]*

It was actually *BECAUSE* God closed Hannah's womb that led her cry out in prayer and to determine to dedicate him to the Lord! *[pause]*

Brother or sister in Christ, God is doing something in your waiting.

God is doing something in the trials you face.

As time went on and Hannah saw what God did through Samuel, she could look back on her waiting period and rejoice.

For in his providence, HER WAITING WAS NOT A WASTE! *[pause]*

So in God's providence, don't see your waiting or trials as useless.

But rejoice in His providential ways.

Rest in His timing.

And rely upon His purposes and plans. *[pause]*

⁸ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/providence-of-god/>

May we all live by the attitude of, “not my timing, but yours”, “not my will, but yours, be done.”⁹ *[pause]*

In Hannah’s story and throughout all of history, God lovingly, amazingly, and providentially provides for his people in his time and in his way...

...And it’s always best, and it always shows off His glory. *[pauseeee]*

So when you take all that we learned this morning, the main point is this....

God takes our humble cries of desperation and inability and He does the amazing!

That’s parallel to what happens in the Gospel, too, isn’t it? *[pause]*

The Bible shows us that we are in a needy and desperate plight, for we have sinned against a holy God, deserve condemnation, and we can’t save ourselves.

No amount of good works or doing enough can save us, but it’s only by the grace of God as we place our faith in what Jesus did for us on the Cross. *[pause]*

So we must get to the point of acknowledging our inability and in desperation call out to Christ to save us.

And he does the amazing. *[pause]*

In grace, he takes a poor, miserable, wretched sinner and forgives them.

He takes them and gives them eternal life, adopts them, and makes them a new creation.

Now that’s amazing, and that shows our weakness, but his power.

That shows our sinfulness, but his grace.

And like Hannah, we go from feeling shame to having no shame as we stand justified, having Christ’s righteousness credited to our account.

We go from no life to life, from no joy to joy, from no hope to unfailing hope.

Have you repented of your sins and turned in faith to what Jesus did on the Cross for you?

Respond in faith today and experience the amazing of what God can do in forgiveness and life. *[pause]*

For those who trust in Christ, let’s never forget that God takes our humble cries of desperation and inability and He does the amazing.

Keep going to him in trust-filled prayer, recognizing that you need Him every day.

⁹ Luke 22:42.

And trust His power, trust His timing, and trust His providential ways.