

“How God’s People Prevail in Dark Times”
1 Samuel 1:1-2:11
May 6, 2018
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
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We’ll be looking at First Samuel this morning.

As I thought about what to look at today, as well as what to look at for the four weeks in June and July when Pastor Rayburn is on vacation, it seemed that it could be helpful to look at the first portion – the first six chapters – of First Samuel.

In the past when I have preached from the Old Testament here, I have restored the covenant name of God, “Yahweh” to the text where the ESV translators, along with most English translators, have replaced the proper name with a title: “The Lord.” You can read about that replacement in the preface to the ESV. Of course, it’s not *wrong* to use “the Lord” – the New Testament often does that. But when reading the Old Testament directly, I think something is lost when we replace a name with a title. So, I’ll continue to read “Yahweh” where it has been replaced with “the LORD.”

With that said, let’s look at our text, 1 Samuel 1:1 through 2:11 ...

1 There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim [Rama-THAY-am ZOW-phim] of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah [El-KAY-nah] the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. **2** He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah [Pa-NIN-ah (“nin” *not* “nine”)]. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

3 Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to Yahweh of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of Yahweh. **4** On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. **5** But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though Yahweh had closed her womb. **6** And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because Yahweh had closed her womb. **7** So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of Yahweh, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. **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? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

9 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 Yahweh. **10** She was deeply distressed and prayed to Yahweh and wept bitterly. **11** And she vowed a vow and said, “O Yahweh 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 Yahweh all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”

12 As she continued praying before Yahweh, Eli observed her mouth. **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. **14** And Eli said to her, “How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you.” **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 Yahweh. **16** Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great

anxiety and vexation.”¹⁷ Then Eli answered, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.”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.

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

²¹ The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to Yahweh the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. ²² But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, “As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of Yahweh and dwell there forever.”²³ Elkanah her husband said to her, “Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may Yahweh establish his word.” So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. 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 Yahweh at Shiloh. And the child was young. ²⁵ Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. 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 Yahweh. ²⁷ For this child I prayed, and Yahweh has granted me my petition that I made to him. ²⁸ Therefore I have lent him to Yahweh. As long as he lives, he is lent to Yahweh.”

And he worshiped Yahweh there.

2 And Hannah prayed and said,

“My heart exults in Yahweh;

my horn is exalted in Yahweh.

My mouth derides my enemies,

because I rejoice in your salvation.

² “There is none holy like Yahweh:

for there is none besides you;

there is no rock like our God.

³ Talk no more so very proudly,

let not arrogance come from your mouth;

for Yahweh is a God of knowledge,

and by him actions are weighed.

⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken,

but the feeble bind on strength.

⁵ Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,

but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.

The barren has borne seven,

but she who has many children is forlorn.

⁶ Yahweh kills and brings to life;

he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

⁷ Yahweh makes poor and makes rich;

he brings low and he exalts.

⁸ He raises up the poor from the dust;

he lifts the needy from the ash heap

to make them sit with princes

and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are Yahweh's,
and on them he has set the world.

⁹“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.

¹⁰The adversaries of Yahweh shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.

Yahweh will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

¹¹ Then Elkanah went home to Ramah. And the boy was ministering to Yahweh in the presence of Eli the priest.

We have here a story – a relatively long passage. But it’s one story that then in turn fits into an even larger story, and if we want to understand it right, we of course need to start at the beginning.

The story opens on Elkanah, who we learn from 1 Chronicles 6 is a Levite living in Ephraim, rather than an Ephraimite by tribe. That will become important later on. [Jordan; Firth, 54]

But as soon as we meet Elkanah, we move on to his wife Hannah. And as the picture of Hannah’s life emerges, we see that it is a life in which darkness has descended. A life in which darkness has descended in more ways than one.

As we look at Hannah’s life, we see that darkness has descended in her personal life, darkness has descended in her relationships, and darkness has fallen upon the people of God.

Let’s consider each of those.

First, darkness has fallen in Hannah’s personal life. Specifically, Hannah has been unable to have children.

Now, childlessness can be a very painful thing for anyone wanting to have children, but we need to realize that this personal loss took on additional dimensions for Hannah in her time and place.

David Firth points out that in addition to the typical pain and loss that would come with childlessness, Hannah is “trapped in vexation and the emptiness of childlessness in a world in which a woman’s worth was largely determined by how many children she had.” [Firth, 56]

Hannah’s culture was one which especially prized children. It was by having children that a woman contributed to the community. It was in motherhood that she found her place in society. It was through having many children that she received her value.

Now it’s easy for modern people to look down on this ... to see it as oppressive and backwards. And of course to the extent that it devalued women unable to have children, it was.

But Tim Keller points out that before we feel too superior to Hannah’s culture we need to take stock and realize that we are really not so different. Yes, women back then found their value in

their sexual fruitfulness – their reproductive prowess. And women lacking such prowess found themselves devalued. And that’s a bad thing. But today in our culture things are not so much better. If Hannah’s culture told women to find their value in their sexual *fruitfulness*, our culture today tells women to find their value in their sexual *allure*. If women *then* found their worth in their *reproductive* prowess, women *today* are told to find their worth in their *seductive* prowess. Keller points out that yes, of course it was a bad thing that women back then struggled with their worth if they were infertile. But he adds that he also bets that none of the women back then struggled with eating disorders. Our culture has its own idolatries, its own ways of unjustly assessing people’s value. And it is far from clear to me that our culture’s tendencies are any better than theirs.

Each culture has its ways it assigns value to some and devalues others – both women and men. In Hannah’s day it was her ability to have children. And lacking that ability she was personally devastated, both because of her own desire for a child, and because of the value her culture put on it.

Her husband loves her – we’re told as much in verse 5. But it’s also clear that he doesn’t understand her pain. [Alter, 4] His attempt to cheer her up in verse 8 makes that clear: “Hannah,” he says, “why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?” In Elkanah’s defense, a couple commentators point out that his words might not be as egocentric as they seem to us – they might be idiomatic or meant to emphasize his love *for* her more than his value *to* her. [Firth, 56; Jordan] But either way, his words communicate that he doesn’t quite understand her pain.

So, in addition to this darkness in her personal life, there is an isolation that comes with it. Her husband loves her, but he does not understand. He has children (because of his second wife), but she does not have children. She seems alone in the darkness she faces.

So ... Hannah faces darkness in her personal life.

But that’s not all. She also faces it in her relationships. Especially because her husband has a second wife. And it seems likely that he took that second wife *because* Hannah was childless [Jordan; Firth, 54]. And the results of that choice to take an additional wife are depicted here (as they always are in Scripture) as a disaster. The household is torn apart in rivalry, as it is in every other case of polygamy found in the Bible.

It’s worth noting that Elkanah is portrayed pretty favorably in our text, even as his polygamous marriage is portrayed unfavorably. Perhaps this polygamous marriage is an anomaly in an otherwise faithful life. Perhaps he even regrets it now – but is stuck with his duty to Peninnah. Either way, both marriages remain, and the situation brings darkness to Hannah’s relationships.

The three are caught in a triangle of conflict – we see it right in the text. Elkanah would express his favor for Hannah openly, for all to see, as he does in verse five. Peninnah would respond by lashing out at Hannah, taunting her for her childlessness. Elkanah then tries to comfort Hannah, expressing his love for her even more. We can only imagine how this made Peninnah feel, and how she responded.

As this goes round and round, darkness descends on Hannah’s relationships and her family life.

So, we see it in her personal life, we see it in her relationships ...

But then in addition to all of this, darkness has fallen on the people of God as well.

It's helpful if we begin by remembering the point in redemptive history that we find ourselves in as 1 Samuel opens up. 1 Samuel overlaps chronologically with the book of Judges. If you've read the book of Judges, you know it does not depict a particularly happy time for Israel. Things are dark in Judges. There are threats to Israel from without, as foreign forces attack and seek to dominate Israel. There are threats from within, as even among the people of God many do what is right in their own eyes, and the people descend into idolatry and terrible abuse. It is in that same time period that 1 Samuel begins, and that spiritual state is reflected in what we see. In terms of the threats from without, 1 Samuel begins with the early stages of the Philistine oppression. In terms of threats from within, we quickly see the moral collapse of the priesthood that Judges describes. While 1 Samuel 2:12-25 picks up on this more, our passage this morning gives us enough of a picture to see that something is wrong.

The first hint we get, which we easily miss in the English, is in verse three, where we learn that the names of the two sons of Eli are Hophni and Phinehas. Hophni and Phinehas are Egyptian names. Now, that doesn't mean anything conclusive in itself ... but in light of Israel's history with Egypt, this should start to raise some red flags. [Jordan; Gordon, 73]

But the red flags really go up when we encounter Eli. Hannah runs to the tabernacle in verse 9. Once there she prays fervently to Yahweh. And when Eli sees this, he assumes that she is drunk. What's going on with that?

Peter Leithart puts it like this, he says "Apparently, prayer at the Shiloh sanctuary was so rare that Eli could not recognize it when he saw it." He goes on: "Eli's inability to identify what Hannah was doing, however, points to the apostasy of the priests and the Levites during this period [as well]. The book of Judges comes to a climax with stories about corrupt Levites [...], and 1 Samuel fills out that portrait. [...] A priest incapable of distinguishing prayer from drunkenness was hardly a suitable gatekeeper at Yahweh's 'house of prayer'" [Leithart, 40; Cf. Firth, 57]

The tabernacle stands, but its spiritual health seems to be in crisis. The people and the priests apparently pray so rarely that the high priest himself cannot recognize prayer when it's right before him. Our text confirms what we see in Judges – darkness has fallen on the people of God.

Darkness has descended on Hannah's personal life, on her relationships, and on the people of God as a whole.

Of course, in some ways the situation we find in our text is unique. But in many ways it's not so extraordinary.

We can face darkness in some similar ways, can't we?

We see it in our personal lives: when hopes are crushed, or when we experience loss, or when we face confusion about the future, or financial struggle, or depression, or any host of personal struggles. Darkness falls in our lives.

We see it in our relationships: when there is strife where there should be peace, when we are betrayed by those we should be able to rely on, when we receive coldness from those who should give us warmth, and more. Darkness falls on our relationships.

And we see it among the people of God as well – both in our individual congregation and in the larger church in our country and in the world. Threats from without press upon us. Temptations, or uncertainty, or struggles within threaten our peace and purity. There is pain or fear or suspicion where they should be love and solidarity. And darkness falls among us.

Hannah faced it. We face it. What do we do with it? What do we do when darkness falls?

And maybe it's better to first ask what *do* we do, before we consider what *should* we do. What do we actually tend to do when darkness falls?

I think, if we're honest, that more often than not, when darkness descends, we rely on our own might to prevail.

Our tendency, when darkness falls, is to rely on our own might (our strength, our cunning, our skill) to prevail.

When darkness or disappointment falls in our personal life we are tempted to try to grasp control of the situation – to compromise our ethics or manipulate others or sacrifice things we should not ... all in order to get the thing we want.

When darkness falls on our relationships, we are tempted to lash out in slander and sinful words, or to use deceit to bring down the one who has hurt us.

When darkness falls on our churches or on our culture as a whole, we are tempted to react just as the world does – to attack those in power, to grasp at power ourselves – to fight for access to the levers of power by whatever means necessary.

In a variety of ways, when darkness falls in our lives, our temptation is to try to grasp at control, to prevail by our own might.

Which is why it is so striking in our text this morning that Hannah does *none* of those things.

Consider how she responds to her childlessness. A careless reading of Hannah's vow can misinterpret her as bargaining with God, with trying to manipulate God into giving her what she wants. But if we read her more carefully, we see that her vow is actually the opposite of bargaining.

She doesn't ask for a child and promise to give God something else in exchange. She promises to give him the very child himself.

She doesn't ask for a child and promise to give that child back to God for *some portion* of his life. She promises to give him to God for *all* the days of his life.

She doesn't ask for two children and promise God one of them. She asks for one and commits that one fully to God.

She isn't asking for the child to bless her, but she's asking for the child so she can give the child into God's service. John Chrysostom summarizes her prayer like this – she is saying: “I give back to you the very gift itself entirely, my firstborn, the son of my prayer.” “Truly here,” Chrysostom goes on, “was a daughter of Abraham. He gave when it was demanded of him. She offers even before it is demanded.” [Chrysostom in Franke, 197]

Hannah does not resort to manipulation or idolatry to get what she wants in her personal life. She doesn't try to prevail by her might.

She also doesn't strike back in her relationships. Even when provoked and even though Elkanah's love gives her ample ammunition, Hannah does not strike back against Peninnah. She doesn't utter a word against her.

And we see the same thing when she's confronted by the state of the priesthood. Even though she is falsely accused by him of being drunk, note Hannah's deference to Eli, even when he displays how questionable his spiritual wisdom is.

In each area, when darkness falls, Hannah does not try to prevail by her own might. She lives the reality she sings of in her song.

So, if we are not to prevail over the darkness by our own might, what are we to do instead?

How are God's people to respond when darkness falls?

What we see in our text this morning is that God uses the humble obedience of his people to prevail over the darkness.

God uses the humble obedience of his people to prevail over the darkness, and so humble obedience is what we are called to pursue.

Because that's exactly the pattern we see in our text.

When we look at Hannah in our text we see humble obedience in her life, we see her confidence that God will prevail over the darkness through her obedience, and we see God do exactly that.

First we see that humble obedience is the norm in Hannah's life.

It comes up in lots of details in the text.

We see it in the family's practice in verse 3 of worshiping at the tabernacle once a year, a practice that seems to be in addition to the required feasts, and a display of their devotion and worship. [Firth, 54-55]

We see it in Hannah's decision in the face of grief to go to the tabernacle, in verse 9 and 10, and to express her heart there before God.

We see it in the interaction between Elkanah and Hannah in verse 23, a conversation about Hannah's vow that we might look at and wonder why it was included in the story, until we realize that the author is likely showing us how Elkanah and Hannah are following the laws about a wife's vow set down in Numbers 30. [Jordan]

We see it in the sacrificial details included in verse 24. Why does the author specify that it was a three-year-old bull, and why do they bring *that* as an offering? Well ... we don't know for sure, but as one commentator points out, children were normally weaned at three years of age, so Samuel was likely brought to the tabernacle at the age of three ... and though Hannah had vowed Samuel to Yahweh *all* the days of his life, she of course had to hold him back until he was weaned. But even so, it seems that she brought a representative sacrifice to make up for every year that she had to hold him back. She is diligent to keep her vow down to the details – offering atonement for the lost time she had pledged to God. [Jordan; Cf. Firth, 58]

We see the same humble obedience to the law in the triple grain offering specified in verse 24, an offering of three tenths of an ephah for each year, and then a little beyond that. [Jordan]

Why does the author include all these details in our text? Perhaps it is to show us how concerned Hannah was with humbly obeying the law in every detail. She would uphold God's law to the best of her ability. As darkness fell all around her, her focus was on humble obedience to God. She stands out as one keeping the letter *and* the spirit of the law, in stark contrast to the priests of her day.

In these details we see that Hannah's life is characterized by humble obedience – even in the small details of life.

But then we also see, in the vow she makes, how her humble obedience can take on a much bigger endeavor.

In verse eleven Hannah prays for a child and vows him to the Lord. As others have noted, there is a beautiful simplicity to this prayer. No flourishes. No ornamentation. A direct request and a direct promise. [Alter, 5]

And it was a promise and request characterized by humility. Leithart notes that “Hannah's prayer was an admission of [total powerlessness], an acknowledgment that she could do nothing to open the closed door of her womb. Her prayer was an acknowledgment that only Yahweh can open such doors. Every prayer,” he goes on, “is like the prayer of Hannah: powerless creatures confessing their powerlessness by turning to the Lord and Giver of all life and all good. Israel's renewal began with prayer because it began with Yahweh.” [Leithart, 41]

Hannah prays in humility. But she also prays with her eyes set on the Lord's priorities, and not her own. Hannah does not ask for a child that would benefit her, but one who would benefit God's kingdom.

She vows that he will be a Nazarite all the days of her life. A Nazarite was one who was set aside to a special service to God, usually for a set period of time, but in rare cases for life. They were marked by a number of practices, including not cutting their hair during the vow, which is why Hannah talks about a razor not touching his head. It's worth noting that the Nazirite vow had elements that alluded to the priesthood – but the Nazirite lived (and ministered) largely outside of the sanctuary. This makes his ministry resemble a kind of holy war. [Leithart, 42] One commentator describes the Nazarite as a sort of “warrior priest.” [Jordan]

It would seem that Hannah pledged her prayed-for son as a Nazarite, as a warrior priest, dedicated to God, because she knew that that was what God's people needed. [Jordan] And so, in humble reliance on God and in obedient prioritization of God's people, she asked for a son, that he might serve God's kingdom.

In all of this, Hannah was living out what she would sing about in chapter two. She was *living it* before she would declare it in song. She was rejecting any attempt to prevail by her own might. She was trusting that God would lift up the faithful – those who were humbly obedient – and she directed her way of life so that she would be counted among them. Hannah then offered her son to the Lord as an instrument to bring down the wicked and prideful – the enemies of God.

This is what she believed. And she acted in line with it.

Hannah pursued humble obedience, because she believed that that was what God would work through, and that that was how God's people would prevail.

And if we zoom out and think of Hannah's place in 1 Samuel as a whole, we begin to realize that Hannah's appearance at the beginning of the book tells us that she was right. God did exactly as she expected.

We can tend to take Hannah's place at the beginning of 1 Samuel for granted ... but we really shouldn't. We should step back and see how odd it is that we start with her.

The book begins with the introduction of and genealogy for Elkanah. David Firth notes that it is “a thoroughly ordinary genealogy, mentioning no one who is prominent elsewhere.” Firth points out that “The one through whom the monarchy begins is one of the humble who will be raised just as Hannah's Song indicates” [Firth, 54]

Then we move on to Hannah herself, which Leithart notes is even more odd. He writes: “First and Second Samuel record a history of political struggle and intrigue, of major shifts in the religious and political life of ancient Israel, of world-historical, epoch-making events. Its major events take place at the sanctuaries of Shiloh and Zion, on the battlefields of Aphek and Gilboa, in the royal homes of Saul and David, in the cities of Ramah and Jerusalem. Yet, at the beginning the writer calls our attention to a humble woman – a humble *woman* – living in the backwaters of the hill country of Ephraim, weeping over her [closed] womb. Why did the writer choose to begin the

story here? What has Hannah to do with high politics? What has Ramathaim-zophim to do with Jerusalem?” [Leithart, 39]

The answer to that question, of course, is given in Hannah’s song: when darkness falls, God uses the humble obedience of his people to prevail over it.

“Monarchy does not begin with Saul,” Firth notes, “but with this son of a woman whose womb Yahweh had closed; so the power of God is shown through one who was powerless.” [Firth, 59]

God uses the humble obedience of his people to prevail over the darkness.

What does that mean for our lives?

Well, for one thing, it means that when we face dark times, our calling is to humble obedience. By the humble obedience of his people God has brought down the proud and raised up people like Hannah. Surely he can work in our lives in the same way.

Of course *how* that triumph plays out looks different in every case. Hannah would be blessed with a son. Samuel would see the downfall of the corrupted priesthood before his very eyes. And eventually things do play out that way. Again and again in history God brings down the wicked.

But there are of course other kinds of triumph. The martyrs surely triumphed over the wickedness of this world, but their moment of being raised up will not come in fullness until the resurrection.

So, we’re called to humble obedience now, that triumph over the darkness might come – either in this life or in the next one.

Of course, as we focus on the need for humble obedience, some might object that we need to be shrewd as we face opposition. I agree. Jesus said we are to be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Many parts of the Bible remind us of the call to wisdom. But what is prominent in our text this morning is the call to be as innocent as doves – the call to be a people characterized by humble obedience now, so that God will triumph over the darkness through us.

And so, we are called to trust God’s sovereign will if he takes from us what we so strongly desire in our personal lives. And in the midst of that personal loss, we are called to humbly serve him – even to the point of being willing to give back the very thing we desire if we receive it ... just like Hannah did.

In our relationships, we are to bless when cursed, and love when scorned.

In our church, we are to humbly love one another when dark times descend. And we are to be faithful to Christ and love our enemies even when the world around us rages against us and our Lord.

We are to humbly obey our God – for he is the one who will prevail over the darkness.

Now, that is all well and good, and true. But one more thing needs to be said. Because so far we have God's directions for us when we face struggle and darkness, and that's good and important – it's essential, actually.

But it's not sufficient.

And our text points us to something more.

Because as we hear this story, we should be struck by something more. Because this text points us to not just what God would have us *do* when we face darkness of various kinds – but to the reality that *he himself* shows up in the midst of that darkness.

Because the days of Hannah were not the only time God's people would face such darkness.

And the days of Hannah are not the only time that God would respond by sending an unexpected baby.

The name "Hannah," interestingly, means "favored one." [Jordan] And Hannah would not be the only "favored one" whom God would send a baby to – a baby dedicated to confronting the darkness of God's people.

When we read the story of the annunciation, of the miraculous conception of Christ in the Virgin Mary, it's hard not to see a greater fulfillment of what we read in our text from 1 Samuel this morning. There, in Luke, God's people are in darkness. There an angel shows up before the Virgin Mary and says "Greetings, favored one." "Greetings 'Hannah' ... the Lord is with you." There, through the humble obedience of a greater Hannah, God becomes incarnate, in order to confront our darkness himself.

And Mary seems to recognize this connection, because her song, her Magnificat, is rooted so deeply in Hannah's song. [Gordon, 78; Firth, 63; Jordan].

As Hannah's story points forward to Mary and the incarnation, we are reminded that our God does not just *direct* us when we face the darkness, he *enters into* the darkness with us.

When *Mary* follows in Hannah's footprints of humble obedience, Christ enters this dark world in the incarnation.

And when *we* follow Hannah's footprints of humble obedience, Christ enters *our* dark lives by his Spirit.

Christ *wants* to enter into our struggles with us. He wants to suffer with us, and he wants to prevail through our humble reliance on him. Christ wants to be present in the mess of our lives.

The question is whether we will allow him to be. The question is whether we will humbly obey, relying on him, and inviting him to enter in to our struggles ... or whether we will decide to try to prevail by our own might instead.

We can go it alone when darkness descends. But why would we do that? Christ knocks at the door. *He* can handle the darkness. Our calling is, like Hannah, to humbly obey, and by so doing to welcome him in.

Hannah's place in the Scriptures stands as a reminder that inviting God into our struggles by faith and humble obedience can change our personal lives, it can change our relationships, it can change our church, and it can topple whole world orders.

For:

⁸ [Yahweh] raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.
For the pillars of the earth are Yahweh's,
and on them he has set the world.
⁹ "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.
¹⁰ The adversaries of Yahweh shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.
Yahweh will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

- Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.
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