

**Title: From mess to melody - 1 Samuel 1**

**Purpose:** On the occasion of a child dedication - to consider:

1) the mess; 2) the move; 3) the melody

**INTRODUCTION**

Great Expectations! That is what we all have when we first become aware that we are going to become PARENTS and especially Christian parents.

In the house everything slowly comes together and we purchase that seemingly obligatory PUSH THING which has more brushed aluminium than even your neighbours new BMW across the way!!

So as I say: Great Expectations and that not without some WARRANT in the Scripture because we are encouraged to believe that:

- all things being equal
- all things being in their proper place - then our children in their turn will come to that place of living faith.

This morning

This morning I am taking one of 2 dedications passages in the bible, there is the one with Mary & Joseph bringing Jesus to present him at the temple - and then there is the OT equivalent in Elkanah, Hannah and Samuel and it is this latter story that we are going to look at.

2 Preliminaries

Now before I simply launch right into this opening chapter of 1 Samuel, I really need to point out 2 things which you may well not pick up on but which are quite important in the scheme of things:

- FIRST - when you look at the last word that comes just before 1 Samuel 1 verse 1 it is the word DAVID - and this is very significant. It is the end point of the book of Ruth and it is telling us that from here things are heading towards the great King David.

However we are not yet at the point where Israel has a king, a monarchy and so we have a GAP - and God at this point is looking for someone to fill, to occupy that gap.

Put simply: GOD IS ON THE HUNT for a person. And we should be wondering: Q. Who will that person be?

- SECOND - when you come into chapter 1 you naturally think that there is just one family in view - Elkanah's, however, if you read carefully verse 3 introduces us to another family - Eli's with his two children Hophni and Phinehas.

We are meant to pick up on the fact that there is a great contrast going on here.

God is not pleased with this latter family and we are therefore meant to draw comparisons as to the type of people that please God, those types that He delights to honour.

## The structure

I have a simple structure this morning: - 3 points

#1 - The Mess, #2 - The Move & #3 - The Melody

### **1. The Mess**

Now the Bible is very realistic - it doesn't go into airbrushing away the defects of its various characters or families - and here we are introduced to the family of one man Elkanah and as with any family, as with any set of parents there are going to be both good things and bad things.

#### Good things - the Positive

I'll start with the positives and there are things that have to be definitely said in his favour. It is all too easy for us be over-hard on our parents and to forget the many, many good things that they did actually do for us - for these to be somehow submerged and lost in those other things that were, perhaps, not so great:

- **he's got a good name** - Elkanah - it means literally "God created" and no doubt this name was chosen by his parents as a recognition that God was perhaps, more than usually present in the bringing of him into the world.

And that name could have stood him and his barren wife in good stead perhaps.

- **he's also got a goodly nature** - he does genuinely seem to feel for his first wife Hannah - she would appear to be the true love of his life (despite having another wife).

When Hannah finally gets a child and want to stay at home whilst she is still weaning the child - he doesn't insist rather he lets his wife decide what is best for the wellbeing of the child.

- **And he's also got a generally godly frame** - Verse 3 we read "Year after year this man went up from his town to worship..." evidently his worship of God was not something negotiable in any sense.

Along with this it appears that he showed his real dedication to the LORD because when he went to worship up in Jerusalem he would fulfil his vow - and that would have been something in addition to what was customarily required.

He doesn't appear to be someone who was just getting by giving the basic minimum to God.

Well as we know that is not the whole story and it is the sobering truth for all of us too that when we come to that day of welcoming a child with all of its baby mess into our homes, we also bring it into all of the messiness of our own lives.

So let's look at **some of the messy stuff** that was going on:

#### Messy things - the Negative

- **FIRST OFF there had been a bad decision** - Verse 2 (speaking of Elkanah) tells us "**He had two wives...**".

I guess it would be rather easy to conclude that Scripture, particularly there in the OT, considers polygamy

(having multiple wives), a generally OK thing to do - given that there are quite a lot of examples of this thing taking place.

However what we actually see is that in the various cases where this has any focus, the outcomes are always bad.

And **Elkanah's** multiple marriage is just one more example of how disastrous it is and how it does not fit with God's perfect design of marriage as one man for one woman for life.

Q. Do we know why he did it?

Well the Scripture does *\*not\** specifically tell us the answer - but I think we can take an educated guess.

### PRESSURE POINTS

\*\*\* And in looking at this we will start to see certain **PRESSURE POINTS** in our home situations that, put together, tend to make them **THE MESSES** that they are. \*\*\*

#### Hannah 1<sup>st</sup> Wife

Given **Hannah** is named first before **Peninnah** that would seem to suggest that she was **Elkanah's** first wife - his first and no doubt true love.

#### Not producing any children

But then **Hannah** does not seem to be producing any children to keep up the family name and to be able to later on support them in their old age and so he feels under pressure. Perhaps **Hannah** is starting to show the signs of age and so now **he seeks out a younger version to fix his practical problems.**

**The Holman Bible Dictionary** says that the name **Peninnah** can mean **"woman with rich hair"** - perhaps she was something of a stunner.

So perhaps **Elkanah** said: **"Needs must!"** and this brings us to the first of 3 "CARDS" that we tend to play that will bring pressure and ultimately mess into our lives.

#### **Pressure Point #1 - THE PRAGMATISM CARD**

And so he took himself another wife thinking that this will surely fix things.

And early on, maybe he was thinking to himself:

"Well this hasn't turned out too bad - after all:

-> I've got a wife I love

-> I've got a wife who looks pretty good AND

-> I've now got the children I need to secure my future."

So what you have before you is a man whose "got it all" - BUT, I would suggest, at a price!!

\*\*\* You see the problem with playing **the PRAGMATISM CARD** is that

**it short-circuits PRINCIPLES** and instead **gives way to PRACTICALITY** to that which seems pragmatic \*\*\*.

- **THE SECOND THING** is *\*not so much\** a bad decision BUT **a bad division** - Verse 4&5 "Whenever the day came

for **Elkanah** to sacrifice, he would give portions of the 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."

It is after this that **Peninnah** is hereafter described as **Hannah's RIVAL**.

**ONCE AGAIN, Elkanah is playing the PRAGMATISM CARD** - if one of his wives seems to be down on her luck - well, **make her a special case** -> **let everyone know that she is different!!**

\*\*\* So I think we can see that **PURE PRAGMATISM** is one of those **PRESSURE POINTS** that works very effectively in contributing to **THE MESS** that can so easily be descriptive of each of our lives. \*\*\*

### **Pressure point #2 - CULTURE CARD**

Let me throw into the mix a **second PRESSURE POINT** and that is when we are **edged into playing the CULTURE CARD** - and this is exemplified somewhat by **Peninnah**.

You see every culture tends to put different things in front of us and say that unless you have these things you are not complete, in fact you are not really worth anything.

The culture here was one that centered around the family and children. There was no social security system and your future was totally wrapped up in the family and in the children you had. Many children would die in their early years and so women and their fruitfulness was paramount - if you had lots of children then you would have a real hero status because you were securing the future, you were providing those that could work for the family good, those who could contribute to the nation as soldiers.

And so the **CULTURE CARD** was another **PRESSURE POINT** that was playing into the **MESS** that was that family.

Q. I wonder whether you are seeing traces of yourself here?

You want at all costs to fit in. You buy in to everything that the culture says you need to have or to be.

So we can easily be:

- a slave to PRAGMATICS
- a slave to the reigning CULTURE

### **Pressure point #3 - EMOTIONS CARD**

Let me point out **one more PRESSURE POINT** and that is **the EMOTIONS CARD**:

Once again this is played by **Elkanah** and it comes where he tells her that there is a solution for all her deep and consistent sadness - and **that is his love for her**.

**IF ONLY she can find her emotional fulfilment and worth in her husbands love**  
**THEN she will be complete AND she will not be overly troubled by her childless situation.**

The **EMOTIONS CARD** comes, of course, in different shapes and sizes, but at heart it is where we pin our hopes, we look for our sense of completion **in connection with having SOMEONE ELSE**.

So that someone else:

- could be **our partner**

- it could be **our best friend** - you know that super-special "significant other" in our life
- it could be **our child**

And really, although it could sound sort of nice, that you sink yourself into someone else, actually we are not meant to make someone else our centre of gravity we start to become crushing to them. No one is designed to bear the weight of having all of someone else's EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING tied around their necks.

Imagine a child growing up becoming aware that the mother totally dotes on them and sucks all her EMOTIONAL fulfilment from them. It would be very smothering and as time goes on the child would begin to resent that it would end up driving that child away.

OK - thus far we've seen **THE MESS** that is the **Elkanah** family.

3 "broken ways" that have acted as PRESSURE POINTS within the home and which have been offered to Hannah for her to take, for her to solve her problems.

Well let's see where things go from here - and I want to move on from "**The Mess**" to #2:

## 2. The Way

Now the great thing about stories - and this is why so much of the Bible is given to us in this form - is that they have MOVEMENT - they take us through different stages and so we have some sort of scene setting, the introduction of the characters, there a middle section where a lot of the action takes place and then there is the end and here the author wraps things up.

But it is of course somewhat more than just a beginning, a middle and an end - there is this whole idea of the PLOTLINE.

Typically a good plot will involve some sort of TWIST, perhaps a COMPLICATION, something UNEXPECTED that takes us into UNCHARTED TERRITORY - where people wonder "how are they going to get themselves out of this one". Maybe there is an element of mystery that cries out for some revelation, maybe some massive problem that needs to find a turning point, something that will provide the much needed resolution.

And this is what we find here in this story of Hannah and her rather messy and dysfunctional family situation - there are forces at work to get her to FIT IN, to FOLLOW SUIT or to simply DISSOLVE HERSELF INTO ANOTHER.

AND WE ALL WANT TO KNOW - Q. Is there another way?

The turning point

Well the way to answer that is to see where the plot turns - the turning point - and this is there at Verse 9:

(Verse 9) " Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, **Hannah stood up.**"

It doesn't sound like much but the particular Hebrew form of the verb tells us that it is part of a sequence of action - the New Revised Standard Version tries to make sense of that and it is translated:

(NRSV Verse 9) "After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD."

One commentator writes (Tim Keller):

"By arising and going in to pray to God, she set behind herself, she rejected, the idols that were offered to her.

Real spirituality always starts there: Recognizing not just your bad things and saying, "I'm sorry for my sins," but recognizing the good things that are being offered to you as ultimate things, recognizing the cultural idol systems that are being thrust upon you. She realized what they were. They were meaning well. There's nothing wrong with having children. There's certainly nothing wrong with having a loving husband. But she arose and she went to God. She realized these idols were traps. They were forms of slavery, and she arose and rejected them."

Her tears, her not eating, had been a regular feature over the years and time and again solutions were offered - maybe deep down she was tempted, she was tired of feeling this way.

**In the end it is her tears and her misery and I would suggest also the very chronic nature of her situation** (the fact that it has gone on year after year) **which ultimately help her find the way** -> she resolves now, once and for all, to find the answer from God - reading from Verse 10ff:

(Verse 10&11&12a) "In **bitterness of soul** Hannah wept much and **prayed to the LORD**.

And **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** (multiplied praying D-R & YLT) to the LORD..."

#### Suffering as a barrier?

I was having a conversation just recently with someone for whom suffering had become an effective stumbling block in regard to their belief in God - and maybe we can identify with that - after all which of us hasn't faced suffering or at least seen suffering in someone else.

BUT notice here:

- that it was suffering that surely brought Hannah to her knees
- AND that it was that same suffering that brought Hannah just as surely TO HER KNEES BEFORE GOD

#### The prayer - Just determination? Simply a bargain?

Long term suffering gives time for us to think things through and it does seem that Hannah comes to God with more than just determination to get her prayer heard.

Verse 11 says that "she made a vow" and this is considerably more than some sort of New Year's Resolution. For the Israelites, they knew from the Law of Moses that vows were very binding and serious things - God's word told them there in Ecclesiastes 5 verse 5 that "It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfil it."

Suffering had been, over time, making her deeper as a person - and it is as though she suddenly breaks through to knowing what is BOTH good and ALSO Godly and therefore what should MAKE UP her prayer request.

Now on the surface the conditional nature of this prayer does make it look like she is striking a bargain with God:

- **IF YOU** will see my misery, resolve it by giving me a son

- **THEN**, and only then, **WILL I DO MY PART** and he, my son to be, he will serve you

But what Hannah is proposing isn't exactly going to solve her emotional, her social, her family needs - because after a few all too short weaning years, he will be gone and gone for good.

It seems that:

- Hannah is no longer clinging on for dear life to the kinds of hopes she has formerly entertained
- She is no longer planning to cling on to the child she sees in the future

She feels release

Q. Do you notice something quite interesting about what happens when she is finally done praying?

- THE FIRST THING is that she gets it in the neck from the High Priest Eli.

Of course Eli is really only revealing how spiritually dull he has become - the fact that he can't tell the difference between a drunkard and a distraught woman.

If you think that Elkanah's family setup is a pretty big mess -well as the next couple of chapters will reveal that is nothing to how low Eli's own family has sunk - so the fact that you may have some leadership position in a church is no guarantee that your home is squeaky clean and that your kids will grow up loving God.

- THE REMARKABLE THING is that she simply brushes it off and **Verse 18** says: "Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast."

Apparently there was nothing that **Elkanah** could do or say, there was no cruelty that **Peninnah** could afflict her with that would bring about in **Hannah** a "sea change" - her demeanour was altered.

It seems that this prayer was indeed TWO-WAY.  
Hannah did not go out the way she came in.

Young preacher story

The story is told of a young preacher and one day feeling **pretty confident**, when it was time for him to come forward and preach, **he fairly leapt up the steps to the pulpit.**

Unfortunately his sermon bombed and hid his face as he slowly came down the steps.

Following the service he confided his severe disappointment to an older man in the congregation who, out of the wisdom of the years, summed things up in a single sentence:

"Young man, if you'd gone up the way you came down, you'd have come down the way you went up!!"

And Hannah certainly had the order of approach right:

- she came in with tears - she went out with triumph
- she came in with the feelings of a victim - she went out with the sense of one who has overcome

We've seen THE MESS and the PRESSURE POINTS that create it

We've seen THE WAY whereby HANNAH finds RELEASE  
And now lastly by way of wrapping things up #3

### 3. The Song

Both of the dedications in the Bible - that of Jesus (Mary's child) and that of Samuel (Hannah's child) are closely attended with song and although the songs are not identical Mary's Song - what we call the Magnificat, is somewhat modelled on Hannah's song - it starts in the same place and picks up similar themes.

- THE STARTING POINT - of the song is informative:

**Chapter 2 verse 1** "My heart rejoices **in the LORD; in the LORD** my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, **for I delight in your deliverance.**"

There is a secret here - Hannah came to be able to articulate it - the apostle Paul in the NT knew it as well:

it is revealed in the innocent words **"in the LORD"**

Remember how **the apostle Paul** says **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again rejoice!"** - the only way that we can fulfil this command is by possession of that VITAL CONNECTION to the Lord - He is the only One that we are to make the centre of our universe.

He alone is not crushed by us placing all of our hopes on Him. Hannah experiences delight and deliverance arising from this VITAL CONNECTION.

- THE THEME - of the song is also very instructive:

**Verse 9** "It is not by strength that one prevails..."

It is while we are filled with ourselves and our own pride and all of our self-reliance that God has no place - we only gain His power by relegating, by relinquishing our own.

### Conclusion

So what then should we conclude from all this:

#1 - God is on the lookout for those that we bring up who will shine like stars in the Kingdom of God - for those who will fulfil His purposes.

And such like ones - do not require families that are perfect YET they are those who do not settle for the mess, they make their move towards God and discover that God alone can put a new Melody in their hearts for He helps those who come to Him knowing that they are weak and He makes them strong.

AMEN - let us pray.