

When Leaders Let You Down

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- [0 : 0 0] So the first reading is 1 Samuel 2 verses 1 to 11, which is on page 272 of the Church Bible.
- Then Hannah prayed and said, My heart rejoices in the Lord. In the Lord my horn is lifted. My mouth boasts over my enemies.
- For I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like you, Lord. There is no one besides you. There is no rock like our God.
- Do not keep talking so proudly, or let your mouth speak such arrogance. For the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.
- Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who are hungry are hungry no more. She who is barren has borne seven children, but she who has many sons pines away.
- [1 : 1 0] The Lord brings death and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth.
- He humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. He sits them with princes and has had them inherit a throne of honor.
- For the foundations of the earth are the Lord, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.
- It is not by strength that one prevails, but those who oppose the Lord will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth.
- He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed. Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the Lord under Eli the priest.
- [2 : 1 4] This is the word of the God. Amen. So continuing in 1 Samuel 2, 11 to 12 to 36.
- Eli's sons were scoundrels. They had no regard for the Lord. Now it was a practice of the priests that whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand.
- And while the meat was being boiled and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot, whatever the fork brought up, the priest would take for himself.
- This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. But even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, Give the priest some meat to roast.
- He won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw. If the person said to him, let the fat be burned first and then take whatever you want, the servant would answer, no, hand it over now.
- [3 : 2 4] If you don't, I'll take it by force. This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.

But Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.

Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord.

Then they would go home. And the Lord was gracious to Hannah. She gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.

Now Eli, who was very old, hearing about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of the meeting.

[4 : 25] So he said to them, Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons, the report I hear spreading among the Lord's people is not good.

If one person sins against another, God may mediate for the offender. But if anyone sins against the Lord, who will intercede for them? His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death.

And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and favor with the Lord and with people. Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, This is what the Lord says.

Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestors' family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh? I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an effort in my presence.

I also gave your ancestors' family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites. Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling?

[5 : 39] Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people, Israel? Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares, I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.

But now the Lord declares, Far be it from me. Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house so that no one in it will reach old age and you will see distress in my dwelling.

Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age. Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar, I will spur only to destroy your sight and sap your strength and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

And what happens to your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you. They will both die on the same day. I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and mind.

I will firmly establish his priestly house and they will minister before my anointed one always. Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread and plead.

[7 : 07] Appoint me to some priestly office so I can have food to eat. This is the word of God. Great to see you.

If we've not met before, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here, the guy who doesn't like people to wear shorts up front. Only if they're on staff. That was the thing. If you could keep your Bibles open at page 272 in the church Bibles, that would be a great help as we look at this together.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful. So let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. There is no one holy like the Lord.

There is no one besides you. We praise you, sovereign Lord, that you are in control of this world and of the nations and for the gift of your word.

We pray that you will open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're in this series in Samuel and we just started it last week and it's a book that makes us think about leadership.

[8 : 22] Leadership is a massive topic for us today and all week we've been hearing about leadership in the Scottish Parliament. We've got UK elections this year, American elections this year and we want leaders that we can trust, leaders who have integrity and who serve others.

And often we criticise leaders, don't we? So when people talk about politics in our world or about leadership in the workplace, often they're quite quick to move to criticism.

That's where we tend to go because we have this view of leadership that we're suspicious. We think people who get power, maybe they'll just use it for their own selfish ends and we want to rise up and kind of act for the powerless and act against the powerful.

At the same time, we know that we need good leaders. A good leader makes a really big difference to our lives. And leadership is a huge topic in churches today as well, in Christian communities.

We've seen in our times, we see churches kind of grow big under one particular leader or church movements that get kind of, they start with the vision of one charismatic leader and then they grow and grow and then sometimes there's been a scandal or a fall, things have been exposed, moral failure and it leaves people harmed, devastated, everything just seems to come crashing down.

[9 : 53] And there are these podcast series devoted to kind of picking up the pieces of what went wrong. So what should we think about leadership as Christians?

What should we think about Christian leadership? And when you think about leadership in your life, where does God fit in with that? How does God respond when leaders let people down?

Well, we started the series last week at a dark time in the history of God's people. It's the turn of the 11th century BC. So we're after Abraham when God promised he build a great nation of his people.

We're after Moses when they were rescued, after Joshua in the promised land and the people of God are being led by a succession of leaders called judges. There's no king yet for the people and the heart of the community is a place called Shiloh where the tabernacle was, the presence of God among his people and the people had woven into their calendar religious festivals where they'd head up to Shiloh to worship God and the spiritual leader of the people at this time was a man, Eli.

He was the priest at Shiloh bringing, making the sacrifices on behalf of the people. Without a king, Eli is the leader of the people of God.

[11 : 16] And we were introduced last week to Hannah. She is an overlooked, childless woman who is humble and godly and she entrusts herself to the Lord and she prays and she asks God for a child and she says, if you'll give me a child, I'll give him back to you, to God.

And she becomes pregnant with Samuel and she brings Samuel to serve God at Shiloh under Eli. And then she wrote her song. It's a great song.

We had it read earlier and it's a song with themes that unlock the whole book. It's such a good song. There's a cover version of the song later in the Bible. Mary gets pregnant and she sings her version of Hannah's song in Luke chapter 1.

So we're going to look first at this song because it has these keys to unlock the rest of the book, let alone this chapter. And we see in the song that Hannah's God is a big God.

She starts with praising God with great joy. Verse 1, my heart rejoices in the Lord. And then she says in verse 2, there is no one holy like the Lord. There is no one besides you.

[12 : 22] There is no rock like our God. So she's praising God's holiness that he has set apart from everything else that he's made. His onliness, there is no one besides you.

And his dependability that you can rest on him. Everything else you might build your life on is like vapor compared to the rock that is God. So she urges us to be conscious of God.

And the spirit of God urges us this morning through Hannah's prayer. Verse 3, do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance for the Lord is a God who knows and by him deeds are weighed.

So Hannah exhorts us and models for us that our response to God should be humble, obedient, trust. trust. And we see that he is a transforming God. Today we might see the arrogant prosper and people who have strength, if they use it for their own selfish means, we might see them succeed in that.

And it leaves us thinking this isn't right. But the tables will be turned over by this God. And it's promised here in a series of great reversals in her song in chapter 2.

[13 : 33] If you look at verse 5, those who were full now hire themselves out for food. But those who were hungry are hungry no more.

It doesn't get much more transforming than verse 6. The Lord brings death and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and raises up.

And then we hear about people's economic prospects being overturned. In verse 7, he sends poverty and wealth. He humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.

So how can God turn everything around like this? Well it's because he is this almighty God. So at the end of verse 8 it says, For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's.

On them he has set the world. So Hannah sees God as a big God, a transforming God. We might think of God today in a much smaller way.

[14 : 32] A bit like a kind of booster pack for life. So our kids play Mario Kart on the Switch and at Christmas one of them got as a present the booster pack.

And the booster pack adds some courses to Super Mario Kart. So you can still play the game without it but if you have the booster pack it livens things up. You can race in Paris and Tokyo.

Now we might think of God a bit like that and our life a bit like that. I've got my life I've got the people I know the stuff I do and get on with and one of those things in my life is I've got a God bit in my life.

But if he wasn't there life would still go on I'd just be missing some stuff. I find peace when I think of him. He enhances my life.

It's as though I've got all these plates spinning in my life and one of them is the God plate. Hannah urges us to see God much bigger than that. God isn't there just to enhance your life he gives you your life and he's effortlessly orchestrating every moment of your existence.

[15 : 39] The reason your heart is beating right now is because of him. He determines where you live the time you live in the people that you know and thanks to that absolute control his almightyess he can establish his righteousness which is what he promises here he will do.

How will he do it? Well Hannah has this prophecy at the end of her song in verse 10 he will do it through his Messiah and that's her word the anointed which just means the Christ or the Messiah.

So in verse 10 he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed. Spoken by Hannah remarkably when there is no king yet but she sees that one is coming.

Now these are our keys from Hannah's song that make us ask do we see God like Hannah did? For in the rest of the chapter we see that God at work and we're going to look at it in three points this story of the house of Eli and the first point is the scandal of Eli's sons.

So they then come on stage like pantomime villains in verse 12 Eli's sons were scoundrels they had no regard for the Lord.

[16 : 53] And we get this tale of corruption. Sometimes when people mess up today we say you had one job you only had one job and if you were going to say that about the priests at Shiloh their one job was get the sacrifices right.

This is key to people being right with God that you do the sacrifices of the animals in accordance with the word of God. But instead of waiting as they were meant to for their share of the meat later as the priests they sent their servant in verse 13 to go and plunge his great pitchfork and it looks like almost a production line of there's a cauldron and a kettle and a pot and he's going in playing kind of lucky dip plunging his pitchfork in and whatever meat comes out he takes away for Hophni and Phinehas to feast on.

Then it gets worse in verse 15 because they get bored of the flavor of boiled meat so instead of waiting for the animal to actually be sacrificed on the altar where the fat would be burned away in keeping with the law of God the kind of best bits of the animal were burned away on the altar instead the priest's servant would arrive and demand some of the meat to take away to roast.

The thought of the pork crackling and the gravy in the roasting dish is too sumptuous for Hophni and Phinehas to resist and horribly in verse 16 we see the abuse of power that when a person objects that they want things done in accordance with God's word the servant says if you don't hand it over now I'll take it by force.

So this is the worst kind of abuse of power and verse 17 sums it up that it greatly displeases the Lord for verse 17 they treated the Lord's offering with contempt they've turned the house of God into their own private carvery with Sunday roast on the menu every day for them and we find later in the chapter verse 22 the carvery is also a brothel that they slept with the women who were there to serve at the tent of meeting it's scandalous it's as though they think God doesn't know whereas what did Hannah tell us in verse 3 of her song the Lord is a God who knows he sees everything by him deeds are weighed and that's crucially I think people make the error of forgetting today and it leads to moral failure so when the Christian leader Tim Keller who died last year was being asked about certain scandals there'd been in Christian circles in America with big leaders falling and they were saying what can be done to kind of minimize these kind of tragic situations and Tim Keller talked about the importance of accountability for leaders but then he said ultimately the biggest safeguard against moral failure is communion with God if you know

[19 : 56] God if you've experienced in your life walking with God then it safeguards you from moral failure when you remember what he would think of that and you will wreck that relationship if you fail him morally so Hophni and Phinehas clearly they'd forgotten God so they dishonor him and it leaves the people of God suffering and we are left thinking well what is Eli doing about this and the answer is he's being weak he's old but he hears about the scandal going on with his sons at Shiloh everyone knows about it so look at verse 23 he asks them why do you do such things I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours but then all he says is he still calls them my sons verse 24 and says the report is not good and he urges them who's going to intercede for you if you sin against the Lord what he needs to do is step them down he has the power to dismiss them from their role but he won't do it he keeps them in their positions of power he didn't do enough and sadly that is something that we see in our times as well among

Christian movements and churches where you have a charismatic leader and concerns get raised about their behavior and there are people who could have stepped in you know trustees of the organization or denominations or fellow elders and they don't do enough because the ministry just looks too successful to lose or the person is too difficult to challenge or people get worried that if we expose this it will be a scandal we don't want a scandal and so people don't do enough well here in Hannah's time Eli and his sons leave the people of God's suffering under corrupt spiritual leadership what will God do about it well that brings us to our second point the collision with God's word in verse 27 we hear that a man of God came to Eli so a prophet comes the word of God is coming to Eli and first he tells Eli everything God has done for Eli

God's grace to him God appointed his family God appointed Eli as his priest and the reason why the prophet goes through this record of God's grace to him is because God expects that in the lives of his people his grace will change us in Titus chapter 2 it says the grace of our Lord Jesus has appeared it teaches us the grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives we should be moved by God's grace into a life changer response so the prophet asks Eli in verse 29 why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribe for my dwelling why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel so this is why Eli was weak he is benefiting himself he's compromised from the corruption of his sons and the prophet says now the game is up in verse 30 the Lord declares

I promise that members of your family would minister before me forever far be it from me those who honor me I will honor but those who despise me will be disdained and then he promises judgment he promises that the house of Eli will come to an end and his descendants will die young and we see that happening in the coming chapters and in verse 32 God assures him he will be good to Israel his people but Eli's family will be cut off he gives him a sign of the coming judgment in verse 34 that both his sons Hophni and Phinehas will die on the same day and then one of the great reversals that Hannah promised in her song will come about so these men who would become full in their greed will end up by verse 36 begging for food from the priests God puts in their place it's horrible to read about but this is good news that God sees corruption among leaders and he cares deeply about people being abused by others using their wealth their influence their authority selfishly bit like in the movie gladiator if you've seen that there's a moment where

Maximus stands before Caesar in all his strength and power and he says to him the time for honouring yourself will soon be passed well God assures us that where people in leadership are self serving without repentance they're on an unavoidable collision course with his holy judgment but for the people of God in Samuel's time they could be asking well what will happen for us now we're left leaderless and all through the chapter we start to get that question being answered quietly so that's our third point the rise of Samuel the chapter is carefully written to give us little glimpses throughout of Samuel quietly at work in the temple he's there in verse 11 at the beginning you notice that it says the boy ministered before the Lord under Eli the priest and then in chapter 3 verse 1 at the end of Hophni and Phinehas just look at the end you see almost the same sentence but just slightly changed the boy

[25 : 45] Samuel so now we get his name ministered before the Lord under Eli so Eli isn't the priest anymore and there is Samuel under him in the middle in verse 18 of chapter 2 we read Samuel was ministering before the Lord a boy wearing a linen ephod is what priests wear so in the midst of all of that corruption going on here is a boy who looks like a priest who's faithful as a priest should be and he's doing the kind of things a priest should do he's ministering before the Lord and it looks as though it's happening in the background but the message of the chapter is keep your eye on that lad so we're kind of seeing all this chaos of these bullies Hophni and Phinehas and Eli in his weakness doing nothing and it looks like that's in the foreground and in the background the camera keeps shifting to this boy

Samuel but really it's the other way around he is the one that God is at work through and as we saw last week with Hannah this is a pattern for how God works in the world in the midst of chaos where do you look for God at work you look for where his people are humbly serving him and depending on him it gets overlooked by the world it seems to be insignificant that's where God is pleased to work we see it today if you think about the news this week what's the big news going on this week well you could read about big banks making big profits you could find out what Elon Musk was up to what Taylor Swift is up to you could fill your mind with all kinds of things that the world would say these are the big things that are happening but what is the really big thing happening in our world today Jesus is building his church he's calling people to follow him he's giving them eternal life as new people day by day by his spirit come to see who he is and they turn to him and he gives them forgiveness of sins as news of his death and resurrection are shared by unimpressive people all around us it happens in overlooked places as just ordinary people who know

God pray to him and serve him faithfully and that's the pattern here in Samuel with Samuel it's how God delights to work and as we keep our eyes on Samuel we see the kindness of God to his faithful servants so we hear about Hannah in verse 19 his mum going to see him once a year as her and Elkanah faithfully go once a year to the festival and she makes him a little robe each time you can imagine each year she makes one a little bit bigger because Samuel is growing year by year and in verse 21 just as we heard that God's will for Eli's sons was to put them to death in God's kindness to Hannah he gives life to her family and so she has five kids not a specific promise to any of us but a picture of the thoughtful kindness of God to his faithful servants who humble themselves before him to raise them up and through

Samuel God is showing us here both sides of Hannah's prayer as we're seeing we saw Hannah last week being blessed and we see her being blessed but we're seeing Hophni and Finneas in their pride being brought down so that the message for us as we see those models is that where we have positions of strength of influence in our lives will we humbly entrust ourselves to God and see that he is the one who gives all things he is the big God the transforming God and we want to serve him for the good of others and to honour his name but we also see through Samuel that God is showing us that we can trust him to provide the leader that his people need so have a look with me again at verse 35 at the end of the chapter as God promises judgment on the house of Eli he says in verse 35 I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and mind

I will firmly establish his priestly house and they will minister before my anointed one or my Messiah always as God takes away these corrupt leaders he provides a new one in their place and there are different ways this promise gets fulfilled so in our chapter today it looks like it's Samuel who will stand in the gap and be the faithful priest later in the book we get another priest raised up Zadok but then something strange happens which is that when God actually raises up his future king king David he wears a linen ephod and we start to see him doing the kind of things that priests should do then David himself writes Psalm 110 about his descendant who will be the ultimate Messiah the Christ and he says he is a priest forever and then we get to Luke's gospel and he tells us about another boy born to faithful Hebrew parents who like

[31 : 36] Hannah every year go up to the house of God at the festivals and let's just see the connections so if you just look at verse 26 here about Samuel it says the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the Lord and with people well let's just turn together to Luke chapter 2 it's on in the Bible's on page 1028 1028 I'll just give you a moment to turn there page 1028 in Samuel we had a pattern for how God works and who God will raise up and just have a look at how Luke wants us to spot this with Jesus verse 41 every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival Jesus is 12 years old here and they lose him and verse 45 when they don't find him they go back to Jerusalem after three days they find him in the temple among the teachers listening to them asking them questions everyone's amazed by him and then his mother asks him why have you treated us like this and in verse 49 he says didn't you know I had to be in my father's house and in case we hadn't already seen the connections with Samuel look at verse 52 and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man in other words even in Eli's time God was already at work bringing about this pattern leading us to Jesus who is the priest that we need forever and the leader that we need so however however much leaders let us down however much you might have been let down by Christian leaders in your life here is a man that you can put your trust in planned before the dawn of time foreshadowed in

Samuel and now he has come to fulfil what God said in verse 35 back there in chapter 2 there will be one who will always serve me because he will do what is in my heart and mind so because of him we can approach God with confidence and we can rejoice in God's faithful leader let's pray together almighty God we praise you that there is no other rock no one holy like you thank you for giving us the Lord Jesus the leader we need the leader who will never let us down help us to keep our eyes fixed on him and the big things he is doing in your world today we praise you for your plan for righteousness and justice we long for the day when you will establish that righteousness taking down the proud and giving your grace to the humble and we ask that your spirit will be at work in our lives that we will turn from self-serving ways that we will use the power you've given us whether it's strength influence leadership wealth help us to use these things selflessly and offer all of it to you to serve your purposes in Jesus name amen