

Prayers Answered pt.1: Request Granted
1 Samuel 1:9-20
Rev. Jonathan Cornell
10-6-13

After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. 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. And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." 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.

They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the Lord."

God invites us to come to him with the things of our heart which we long for, which we cannot overcome or change, or that for which we hope so desperately, and God invites us to ask. The Apostle Paul in Philippians 4 says, "Let your requests be known to God." Now this can look one of two ways, both of which I will illustrate with a story.

The first way we can treat requests to God is like the grocery list. Tony Campolo tells a story about his grandson who was spending the night with he and his wife, and round about bedtime he comes downstairs announcing himself to them and saying, "I'm going upstairs now and I'm going to be praying to God, does anybody need anything?"

This is one way we can come before God with a request, and can't say that God will always honor this kind of request 'cause I'm not sure this is how God operates. Too many of us, myself included, sometimes approach God like our heavenly ATM machine. We do it because we're too busy to stop and be quiet and alone with God, so we rattle off a list of things we're hoping God will do for us, followed by a simple, "Thanks, God."

On the other hand, petitions can be the most touching and heart rendering cries of our souls. There is something we want, something we need, and the only place to turn is God.

Amy and I know a couple, we are very close friends with each other and these two, we'll call them the Kennedys, have a son and are absolutely terrific parents. They love and nurture their son, try to provide him with a strong, stable, Christ-centered home, and in their son's few years of life they have done this wonderfully. But for the past few years, this couple has felt God place on their hearts the desire for more children. However, for many years, they have been unable to conceive and bear another child. And it breaks this couple; their hearts yearn so deeply for more children that they cried out to God, saying as Hannah did, "God, we believe you've given us so much more love to offer, we believe this hope is not a selfish one, we want another child, and we don't have one, please give us a baby."

As they struggled, they began to wonder if God wasn't inviting them to recognize the many, many children without loving homes and explore adoption as an alternative. And what became clear to all who knew them was that their deeply seated hopes were not self-serving and for their own glory. But they wanted to be able to share the life transforming love of the gospel with more children—however that took place. And over the months of preparation for adoption, we could see that their obedience was being strengthened, but the longing for another child of their own remained. Around them were countless people lifting prayers of petition and supplication.

You want a family and you don't have one, you may struggle with an illness that robs you of the peace in your life, you wrestle with an addiction, or something from your past that you just can't conquer – ask God. God listens.

Now, can I safely say that anytime a person – and especially a Christian person – prays, that God listens AND answers prayers the way they want them to be? No, I can't say that, and next week, we will look at the other side of this coin, the answered prayer in the form of a request denied. But I *can* say that there are times and it is possible that God can and does allow our prayers to affect the course of history.

Hannah prayed, year in and year out. She wanted a child. But the remarkable thing that gives this story an entirely different tenor is what she says in verse 11: **“O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and, will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.** Hannah asks for what she wants, but trusts that God's will is perfect and loving. Hannah loves and trusts God more than she longs for her need to be met. And I believe that it is precisely at this intersection where God allows the prayers of his people to impact the course of history.

God uses us. God has not fixed reality on a deterministic path, but God has set up history in such a way that you and I with our prayers can have an impact on the direction of history.

Think of it this way: if you choose to be happy and treat people with pride and dignity at work, the world will be a better place right? If you choose to get up each morning and do your absolute best at your job or with your family, things can be better right? God allows us to be his instruments in the world to help God unfold history.

This is true in the Bible as well, in Deuteronomy when Moses pleaded with God not to destroy Israel after they worshipped the golden calf. Moses prayed; God changed his mind. Elijah prayed that no rain would fall upon the earth and for 3 years and 6 months it didn't, then Elijah prayed for rain and it came back. And, of course, the great news of our text this morning is that Hannah eventually has a child.

The Book of James says this in chapter 5: “The prayers of a righteous person has great power as it is working,” or as it says in the old King James, **The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**

And let me tell you this, it is not just old biblical characters that God listens to, but God is ready and willing to listen to our prayers, as well. When things are troubling and you are looking for direction, go to God and ask and I believe God is ready, especially when the requests of our lives are lifted for and surrounding God's mission. Look with me in closing at the end of Hannah's story. Hannah loves God so much and is so eager to see God's mission advanced that she was willing to offer her child back to God.

When our requests are made to advance our own agenda, I can't say that God listens as closely, but when our requests serve to advance God's Kingdom Mission, I believe that God is more willing to grant them.

I want to close by going back to the story of our friends. This family, day after day, year after year, doctor visit after doctor visit poured out their hearts in prayer for this longing they had, saying, “God give us another child, we desperately want one. Give a brother or sister to our son, one who we can raise to be one of your own.” And then came the news. God was calling them to serve him with a start up company in Ghana, West Africa—not exactly the answer they were looking for, but ok. And do you know what? They willingly and obediently accepted God's answer and call. Oh, and because God is such an extravagant and abundantly generous God, God listened to their cries, their prayers, and this family is now expecting their second child, and moving to Africa to boot.

Our Father is willing and eager to hear and respond to our prayers.

In the very last words of our text today, Hannah says, “I have asked for him from the Lord,” and the son she conceives is Samuel, who will play a very important role in the lives of the people of God all throughout history. It was her faith that led God to grant her request, it was her faith that gave that longed for prayer back to God, and it was her faith and her prayer that gave him wisdom to anoint a shepherd boy king. And that shepherd boy was the ancestor of the man who is the good shepherd, Jesus Christ, who invites us to join him at the table of prayer and remembrance. Whatever God has placed on your heart, bring your prayers to the Lord's table, because it is big enough to satisfy the deepest longings.

And now let us pray. ***Father, like Hannah, give us the words with which we can pour out our longings and desires to you. May our prayers rise to you like incense and may***

your all sufficient presence nourish and feed us wherever we find ourselves. Let these gifts sustain our prayer, and renew us to continue if following and trusting that you are the God who answers our deepest yearning and satisfies all our desires. This we pray, not in our own strength, for we know that it is fleeting, but we pray in the strong name of Jesus the Christ, our savior and Lord Amen.