Hannah's Commitment

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1 Samuel 1:19-28

They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the LORD; then they went
back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and
the LORD remembered her. [20]In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son.
She named him Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked him of the LORD.'
21 The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the LORD 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, that he may
appear in the presence of the LORD, and remain there forever; I will offer him as
a Nazirite for all time.' [23]Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Do what seems best
to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the LORD establish his
word.' So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned
him. [24]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. She brought him to the
house of the LORD 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 the LORD. [27]For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition
that I made to him. [28]Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives,
he is given to the LORD.' She left him there for the LORD.

1. Am I Going in the Right Direction?

One day when we lived in Kansas City, MO, Christine and I went to a shopping center in Overland Park, KS. After we finished shopping, we were coming back home. I was driving my car on a highway, but I was not quite sure whether I was driving in the right direction. I took an exit and asked someone how to go to Kansas City, MO. He told me to turn around and go to the opposite direction. When I was driving, I thought I was going south, but I was going north.

The 2018 Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday, February 14th. Lent is a time for self-examination and reflection. It is a season to focus on our relationship with God and give up something or volunteer and give of ourselves for others. It is a time for us to check whether we need to change our direction in life.

A question came into my mind soon after Joanie Cahoon's memorial service. The question that came to me is about how to live the rest of my life. I do not want to regret at the end of my life. I want to make sure that I go in the right direction. If necessary, I would like to turn around and go in a better direction. How do we know whether we are going in the right direction or not?

2. Hannah's Promise

In 1 Samuel 1, we find a woman who teaches us how to live our lives. Her name is Hannah. She was the wife of Elkanah. The meaning of her name is "favored." But it does not seem to be the case because Hannah had no children. Verse 5 says that "the Lord had shut the womb of Hannah." Elkanah had another wife and her name was Peninnah. She had children. Peninnah often provoked and irritated Hannah because of her barrenness. Although Elkanah loved Hannah and gave her a double portion of food and drink, Hannah reached the point where she couldn't stand her situation any longer.

When Elkanah takes his two wives and Peninnah's children to the house of the Lord, Hannah goes to the entrance of the temple and prays. She says, "***If only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head***."

Hannah pours her heart out to the Lord and asks for God's favor. She makes a vow that if the Lord would grant her request, she would give the child in service to the Lord. She is willing to offer the Lord the one thing she desires most in life.

A "Nazirite" is one who voluntarily takes a vow described in Numbers 6. "Nazirite" means "consecrated" or "separated" for the service of God in Hebrew. Those who make vows are required to abstain from wine and intoxicating liquors and to refrain from cutting the hair on their head, and to avoid contact with the dead. The vow has a specific time frame. It could be for a month or permanent. Hannah makes a vow for her future child to be a permanent Nazirite.

3. Samuel Was Dedicated

Verses 19-28 tell us what happened after Hannah makes her vow. God grants her request and her son Samuel is born. Samuel means "God heard." Hannah wants to remind her that her son was born because of God's intervention. Although the author does not say anything about God, today's scripture tells us that God acted behind the scenes. When Samuel is about 3 years old, Hannah brings him to Eli the priest at the house of the Lord. Samuel lives with Eli and serves the Lord there.

Was it easy for Hannah to dedicate her son to the Lord? Of course not. Samuel is the son that she has been praying for, wishing for, and longing for. As the mother, Hannah would want to keep Samuel at home and take care of him until he would be married. She does not have to bring him when he is 3 years old. She could have delayed until he became 13 or even later. But Hannah does not hesitate to bring Samuel to Eli at all. More surprisingly, Hannah's husband could have nullified her vow. But we know from the story that he does not.

Numbers 30:8 says, ***"But if, at the time that her husband hears of it, he expresses disapproval to her, then he shall nullify the vow by which she was obligated, or the thoughtless utterance of her lips, by which she bound herself; and the Lord will forgive her***." According to this verse, Elkanah could have overruled Hannah's vow. But instead of doing so, he supports her vow and dedicates their son to the Lord.

4. Who is Samuel?

What does Hannah's story tell us? God hears our prayers. God knew the best timing for the birth of Samuel. As we know, he is an important figure in the history of Israel. Eli, the high priest had several sons, but his sons were wicked. When Eli died, Samuel succeeded him and served Israel as judge, prophet, and priest.

Samuel was the link between the period of the judges and the beginning of the monarchy. Samuel trained David, who became Israel's second king. Hannah's commitment to the Lord had a big impact on the history of Israel. Her dedication became a blessing to the people of Israel.

5. Mother's Love

It was Christmas Eve in 1952 in Korea. A woman walked through the snow to the home of a missionary. The night was cold when her birth pains started. On her way to the missionary's house there was a bridge. She realized that she could go no further. The woman crawled under the bridge. There alone between the trestles, she gave birth to a baby boy. Worried about her newborn son, she took off her clothes, wrapped them around the baby and held him close in the warm circle of her arms.

The next morning, the missionary walked the road to deliver Christmas packages to someone in the village. As he walked along, he heard the cry of a baby. He followed the sound to a bridge and found a young mother frozen to death and a new born baby in her arms. The missionary took the baby home and cared for him. As the boy grew, he often asked his adoptive father to tell him the story of how he had found him. On Christmas Day, his 12th birthday, his adoptive father told him the story of his mother's death on Christmas Eve.

The next morning the missionary found the boy's bed empty. Seeing a set of small footprints in the snow, he followed the trail. It led back to the bridge where the young mother had died. As the missionary approached the bridge, he was stunned. The boy stripped himself of everything and knelt shivering in the snow. Moving closer to the boy, the missionary heard him cry out to the mother he never met: "Mom, were you this cold for me?" And he wept bitterly. Through his mother's sacrifice he learned what it means that Jesus died on the cross for him.

6. Conclusion

The stories of Hannah and of this boy's mother illustrate to us how much parents are willing to sacrifice for their children. Hannah would have been overjoyed at the birth of Samuel. Perhaps it was the happiest moment in her life. Hannah would have been full of thankfulness to the Lord when Samuel was born.

Yet in that situation, Hannah remembers that Samuel is from the Lord. She knew that God had a plan for Samuel. That's why she would bring him to Eli. She believes that it would be better for Samuel to stay with Eli instead of staying with her home. Samuel would become one of key persons in the history of Israel. Samuel would become the bridge between God and the people of Israel, a spokesperson for the Lord.

7. Application

Do you know what happens to Hannah after she gave Samuel to the Lord.? 1 Samuel 2:21 says, "***The Lord took note of Hannah; she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord***." When Hannah gave her first son to God, the Lord did not just let her leave with nothing. The Lord gave Hannah more children in addition to Samuel. She didn't expect to have many children. But we see in this that God gives us more than what we could ever expect when we trust in Him and make a commitment to the Lord.

One thing we have to remember in Hannah's story is that Hannah doesn't dedicate Samuel to the Lord because she feels a sense of obligation. Hannah doesn't feel forced or pressured to dedicate Samuel. She does it out of love and thankfulness to the Lord. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, "***Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver***." I am so grateful to those who give their time, money, talents and offer rides and food to our church families. I am sure God would be happy and bless them.

For many of us, the most important gift that we have received from the Lord is our children. Do we dedicate our children to be used for God's purpose? Some of us know of children who become missionaries or pastors and serve the Lord professionally. But regardless of what our children do for work, we are reminded that our lives and the lives of our children belong to God. When we make a commitment to the Lord following God's purpose and plans, we will be blessed.

I pray that you and I make sure that the Lord is our first priority in every decision of our lives. May we remain in God and renew our commitment to the Lord so that because of us our church and our community would be transformed. Amen.