

52 STORIES OF THE BIBLE

by

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13. God is King (1 Samuel)

Let's pray: Father, you are truly King, that despite appearances of human strength and human will, we acknowledge before you that you are King and that you are in control of history and you are in control of the people who appear to be making history. Father, there are many things we don't understand, we don't understand how that works out, we don't understand how such evil can exist in a universe governed by a good and all-powerful God and yet we do assert by faith that we do believe you are good all the time, that you are King. We pray that especially as we look at Hannah's song this morning that we will come away convicted or encouraged, whatever the case may be, and understanding that you are sovereign and you are in control of history. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I. Samuel - the Last Judge

Samuel was the last judge in the history of Israel. He was also a prophet and also a priest. And in the book of I Samuel in your Bible, we read about Samuel's life and also about Saul's life as the first major king of Israel and we are introduced to David, who becomes the second major king in the history of Israel. But I Samuel also witnesses to a very, very important transition in the history of Israel because in I Samuel we see the transition from theocracy to monarchy. Israel was designed to be a theocracy, a country that was governed by God. He certainly would have worked through people, judges and prophets, but a theocracy means that God is the head person. And in I Samuel we see the transition from theocracy to monarchy where the children of Israel wanted a king to be over them, they did not want to be under the theocracy of God. So, it's a very important book historically, but also an important book theologically and this is the ongoing drama of God's intervention in history.

A. Birth of Samuel

I Samuel starts with the story of a man names Elkanah who had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Hannah was barren; Hannah was unable to have children. And as you can imagine, being one of two wives and the one that didn't have any children, did not make for a good home life. Elkanah and his family every year went to Shiloh to sacrifice to the Lord and in I Samuel 1, we see them on this journey to Shiloh and we see the story of Hannah's prayer. It's a beautiful prayer, I Samuel 1, starting at verse 9, "After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. And 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." In other words, he will take a Nazirite vow and be dedicated to God all his life. And evidently she was so fervent in her prayer, that the priest thought she was drunk, verse 12. "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 away your wine from you.'" Probably felt pretty good about himself. "And Hannah answered, 'No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor

strong drink, but I've 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.' And then Eli answered, 'go in peace and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.' Hannah couldn't have children and there was no greater curse in the ancient world than being barren. It was interpreted as a sign of God being displeased with you. So, she had no children, she did not get along with her husband's other wife. Good argument for monogamy it seems to me. But she knows who to turn to, doesn't she? She turns to the Lord and she pours out her heart and she does it with such great energy and such great vexation that Eli thinks she's drunk. I wonder if I've ever been so desperate in my prayer before the Lord that somebody would think that I was drunk or out of my mind.

Hannah leaves Shiloh, she goes home, and Eli's words are true. Samuel was born and when Samuel is old enough to live on his own without his mom, they go back to Shiloh and Hannah goes looking for Eli, and she finds him. In Chapter 1, verse 26, we read, "And she said, (and this is to Eli), 'O my Lord, as you live my Lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence praying to the Lord.'" In other words, remember the woman you thought was drunk? It's me! "For this child I prayed and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore, I have lent him to the Lord. For as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord." It's a great story, of a woman who's desperate before her God, and he answers her prayer and she keeps her vow. Probably wasn't an easy thing to do, would it have been? To have wanted a son so desperately and then when you receive him to keep your vow and to give him back into the service of the Lord. But that's what she did and Samuel stayed and grew up with Eli in the temple.

B. Hannah's Song of Praise

Chapter 2 is, I think, the most important chapter in all of I Samuel and probably all of I and II Samuel because in I Samuel 2, we have Hannah's prayer. It's really a song of praise to God that in light of her situation and in light of everything that God has done for her, she breaks forth in praise, and as we look at these verses, we can see what Hannah learned. And that's the question I want to keep going through your mind: what did Hannah learn? What were the experiences of life in God's intervention that caused her to learn things about herself, and learn things about God? And so, in Chapter 2, verse 1, she starts by declaring that she is going to praise God with absolutely everything that she has. And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord. My strength is exulted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation." Hannah is saying, "I'm going to praise God and I'm going to praise him with everything I have, with my heart, with my strength, and with my mouth." And then in good Biblical fashion, she actually praises God. Saying, "Praise God" is not praise, right? Praising God is the declaration of who he is and then of what he has done. That's what praise is. So, verse 1 is the call to praise. She says, "I am going to praise him with everything I have.

Now let me praise God for who he is," verses 2 and 3. "There is none holy like the Lord. There is none beside you. There is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly. Let not arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is the God of knowledge and by him actions are weighed." What a beautiful reaffirmation of the first commandment. A

beautiful reaffirmation that there is only one God and that in Hannah's life she is not going to make him compete with other so-called gods. There is no pantheon of gods in Hannah's life. There's not a collection of gods with maybe Yahweh at the top and then all these other gods that she also worships. There's only one God. "There is none holy like the Lord. There is none beside you." And then she moves into using the beautiful metaphor of the rock, a metaphor that goes all the way through especially the Old Testament. And when she declares that there's no Rock like our God, what she's declaring that it is in God that I have found my protection. It is in God that I have found security and strength and stability and refuge. That God is my Rock; he is my salvation and he will not be moved. Wonderful declarations of who God is, that there's only one and that he is the Rock for his children.

But in verse 3, she also asserts that God is a just God and that he is the ultimate judge and that ultimately he will judge by what he knows to be true. It's very important especially as the theology of the song unfolds itself. That God the judge will not be swayed by arrogance and as we find as we look at the life of Saul, God's judgment will not be swayed by human achievements, but God knows what is true and he will judge based on what he knows is true. A wonderful statement of praise for who God is. But having done that, she moves to the next stage of praise and that is praising God for what he has done in verse 4 and following. And what Hannah is going to declare is that in God's grace, in his sovereignty, he chooses to bless some and curse others. Now the language of cursing and blessing doesn't actually occur in Hannah's song, although it has been all the way through the Bible. There's a point in time in which the Israelites conquered the land and they went to two mountains and half the tribes were on one mountain stating the blessings of God, and the other half of the tribes were on the other mountain declaring the cursings of God on people who would be disobedient. The theme of blessing and cursing has been all the way through the Old Testament up until this point. She doesn't use the actual words but that's what she is talking about. Because she's talking about the reversal of fortunes and that God in his grace and in his sovereignty, is powerful and is free to reverse people's fortunes. And what she is going to do is set up seven sets of contrasts. The first one is strong and weak and the idea is that God has taken the strong and made them weak and God has taken the weak and made them strong. He is able to reverse the fortunes of people. And so, the contrasts are strong and weak, full and hungry, barren and fertile, dead and alive, sick and healthy, poor and rich, humble and exalted. Let's look at the verses. "The bows of the mighty are broken but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread but those who are hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down to Sheol (or hell) and he raises up." That's the sick and the well contrast. "The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and he exalts." And then she emphasizes the point on richness. "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." I need to quickly add parenthetically that not everyone who is sick or hungry is necessarily wicked. That is not what is being taught here. But what is being taught is that God is in control and he can do (good theological term here) jolly well whatever he wants to do. And if that means reverse the fortunes of people, it is within his sovereignty and within his graciousness to do so.

Now you may be thinking, “How? How does he think he can do this? Why does God think he can get away reversing the fortunes of people?” Well, the answer is in the second half of verse 8, “For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s and on them he has set the world.” The reason God can reverse the fortunes of anyone he jolly well chooses is that everything is his. The earth is his; even the foundations upon which the earth sits are his. And everyone and everything that lives on the earth is his. And he is sovereign and he is free to do whatever he wishes. He is king, he is in control.

Well, given the fact that God can do what he wants and given the fact that he is going to bless some and he is going to curse others, the natural question is, “How do you get on his good side?” Who is it that he will bless? I mean, God’s not capricious. He just doesn’t go off and do whatever he wants, in a sense. But who is he going to bless, and who are the wicked that he’s going to punish. Well, the answer is in verse 9 and 10. “He will guard the feet of his faithful ones.” They are the ones he’s going to bless. “But the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man or a woman prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces. Against them he will thunder in heaven.” It’s a great metaphor, isn’t it? Occurs all the way through the Old Testament that God will thunder against the wicked and will punish them. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth, he will give strength to his kings and exalt the power of his anointed.” Whose good fortunes does God reverse? Against whom does God thunder? The wicked. Whom does he bless with strength and food and life and health? His faithful ones. I need to make a minute out and spend some time with what that word means. It’s one of the most important words in the entire OT. We’ve already learned one Hebrew word, God’s personal name is “Yahweh.” Okay, here is your second Hebrew term, you’ve got to swallow your spit, “hesed” is a word that is central to the theology of the OT and it has absolutely no corresponding term in English or in any of the languages as far as I know. “Hesed” basically denotes faithfulness or loyalty. But what’s difficult to translate in the phrase is that it refers to a faithfulness or a loyalty that exists within a relationship. It’s just not faithfulness or loyalty in general, but it’s a word that says that God has entered into a relationship with his people. We call it a covenant. And within the context of that covenant God has said, “I will be your God and all that that entails. That means I will be your rock, I will be your deliverer, I will be your sanctifier, I will be your savior, I will be your protector. These are all the things that I commit myself to do within the context of the covenantal relationship.” There are a lot more times the Bible talks about God being “hesed” than you and I being “hesed.” And yet you and I are also called to be “hesed.” But you and I are called to be faithful and loyal to God within the context of our relationship, within the context of our covenant. That’s what the word ‘hesed’ means and that’s why there’s no English word to translate it. It is steadfast loyalty, faithfulness because there’s a relationship that’s been established between God who will be our God, and us who will be his people. That’s what the word “hesed” is. So, when Hannah says, “He will guard the feet of his faithful ones”, she is asserting that the covenantal God will be faithful to his part of the covenant to those people who are faithful to their part of the covenant. This is not a promise to people in general. This is not the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and that kind of gibberish. This is God’s covenantal commitment to his people and Hannah’s commitment back to her covenantal God that he will be faithful and she will be faithful.

We earlier said that God will judge by what is true. We now know what is true. The standard by which God judges is the covenant. The standard by which God judges people is his faithfulness to his covenantal people and those people who are in relationship with him, how they have been faithful back to their covenantal God. And if you and I live outside that covenantal relationship, if we break the covenantal relationship, then Hannah says God will thunder against you. God will curse you. But if you live within the context of the covenant, if you respond to God by loving him with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your might, if you respond in believing that God is who he says he is and that he will do what he says he will do and that flows out into joyful obedience, then those are the people he will bless. Those are the people whose feet he will guard. That's what "hesed" means.

Hannah's song is a cry of faith. It's one of the greatest cries of faith in the entire Bible. I've often said that one of the fundamental questions, if not the fundamental question, is do you and I really believe that God is all good all the time? I mean, that is the fundamental question of life as far as I can tell. And Hannah's cry of faith is, "yes that's exactly what I believe." Let me read Hannah's song again. You'll hear it this time if you didn't hear it before. "My heart exalts in the Lord, my strength is exalted in the Lord, my mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation." Regardless of everything else in life, this is Hannah's cry of faith. "There is none holy like the Lord. There is none besides you. There is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is the God is knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. Let me praise God for what he has done. The bowls of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who are full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who are hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down to Sheol and he raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and He exalts. 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." How can he do this? "For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and on them he has set the world." There are two kinds of people in this world. "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. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces. Against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed." Now if that's not faith, I don't know what is. That's Hannah's cry in light of what she sees and what she has learned.

And Hannah has learned several things, hasn't she? Hannah has learned that the battles of life are not won through human strength. There's a neat phrase in verse 9, "For not by might shall one prevail." It is not by our might that we win the battle but the battle belongs to our Lord. He was the warrior in Judges, was he not? And he still is the warrior. There are many passages that pick up this theme. One of my favorites is Jeremiah 9 starting at verse 23, "Thus says the Lord, 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this: that he understands and knows me (meaning God), that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love,' (there's your "hesed"), "justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight," says the Lord. It is God who makes the strong weak and makes the weak strong. It is God who turns winners into losers and losers into winners. He is the warrior who has done this. Hannah has learned

that God blesses his faithful ones. (Space at end of tape). Out of that faith flows faithful obedience. Believing that God is our rock, that God is our refuge, of living a radically God-centered, monotheistic life. We're not forcing God to compete for our affections. Of not having a pantheon of gods with all these things we love and we worship, and perhaps we think God is at the top, but he probably isn't if we have a pantheon. But Hannah has learned that either he is Lord of all, or he's not Lord at all. And she is an intense monotheist. She is refusing to compartmentalize God. More and more I'm liking to think in those terms. There is a tendency in many of us to compartmentalize God, to think that, okay, I'll give him Sunday mornings, but I'm going to keep everything else for myself. And Hannah knows nothing of that. Neither does Jesus. There is no compartmentalization; there is either one God or we worship many gods. There's no gray area in between. That's Hannah's cry of faith and that's what she has learned. Now why am I spending so much time on I Samuel 2? Well, I like it. But there's more to it than that. The theology that Hannah is expressing in her song provides the theological structure and the theological emphases for all of I Samuel and actually II Samuel. And, in fact, if you go to the end of II Samuel, you'll hear David singing his song of praise that Steve read this morning. And it's remarkably like Hannah's, isn't it? And so, what they have done is that they have put Hannah's song of praise at the beginning. They've put David's praise at the end and they are theological bookends for all of I and II Samuel and they help us understand theologically what is going on as we read about the kings and the transition from theocracy to monarchy. As we read through those chapters, we keep seeing the same things. God is King and for our part we are called to "hesed", we in fact are called to become "the hesedim". Same word in ancient Hebrew as in modern Hebrew.

II. Saul

So, with those as the theological bookends and the themes of I and II Samuel set, we move out of Hannah's song and we start reading about Samuel and eventually we get to the story of Saul. And I'm going to jump up to I Samuel Chapter 8 because this is a pivotal time. Because at this point, the children of Israel want to change. In essence what they want is to get out of the covenant. They look at Samuel's children, they are wicked, wicked children, and they realize there's not going to be any succession like with kings and to their minds, they are fed up and they want to be like everyone else. They want a king who will go out and fight the battles for them. And so, in I Samuel 8, starting at verse 4, "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, 'Behold you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.' But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you.'" Why? "For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being King over them." It's very important to see what's going on. God created the nation Israel. He brought them out of Egypt. He fought for them. He gave them a Promised Land so that they would become a theocracy. So, that they would become a nation whose God ruled over them. And as far back as Exodus 19, the chapter before we got the Ten Commandments, God tells the children of Israel, "You are to be different from everyone else. You are to be a kingdom of priests and it is going to be through you that the blessing will come that I promised Abraham, this blessing that's going to go out to all the world. You are supposed to be different. God is your King and you are to be a

kingdom of priests mediating God's blessing to the nations around you." And the children of Israel said, "Nah, don't want it." And that's why what they were doing is so wrong. It is so sinful. They are rejecting God; they're wanting out of the covenant. God says, "Okay, Samuel, warn them. Tell them what it's like to have a king; it's not a pretty picture. And then give them what they want. Give them Saul." And that's how the story unfolds. Well, please hear this very clearly. Even when Israel shifts from a theocracy to a monarchy, God has not abdicated his throne. If you're going to read I and II Samuel, you have to hear this going all the way through these two books. Just because there's a king doesn't mean that God has ceased being The King. He is still The King. He is still in absolute control, and the king of Israel (small k) is God's vice regent. He's answerable to the King and is ruling in his place. God has not abdicated his rule and his authority and his control to Saul or David or Solomon. He is still King.

So, the story goes on and is so often the case, Saul starts strong and ends weak. We used this phrase in connection with Judges. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." That is still the case. And so, things start really good, really good. They go out and they defeat the Ammonites in I Samuel 11. In verse 13, Saul says "The Lord has worked salvation in Israel." See, he's still giving glory to God. He is the king, small k; he understands that God is still the King, large K, that God is still the warrior and his is the victory to give. He still understands that. That's good. Times are still good. Chapter 14, his son Jonathan goes out and defeats the Philistines and Jonathan says, "For nothing can hinder the Lord from saving." Both the father and his son understand that God is still the warrior and it's God who still gives the victory. But then as is so often the case, things start to go downhill and go downhill fast. Saul is not a priest; he doesn't have the authority to sacrifice. He's waiting for Samuel. Samuel doesn't get there and so Saul goes ahead and sacrifices. Big no-no. Unless you're a priest, you don't sacrifice. He gets in trouble for that. God calls for Saul to kill all the Amalekites. Saul refuses to do that. And so finally in Chapter 15, God tells Samuel to go talk to Saul and tell him that God has rejected him. But please notice why God rejects Saul as king. I Samuel 15, verse 26, Samuel said to Saul, "For you have rejected the Word of the Lord and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." The standard of success and the standard of failure is not something that's external. It's not how many wars you win. It's not how big your church is. The standard of success is: are you and I and Saul faithful to our covenantal God? That is the standard by which God's success is measured. And Saul rejected the Word of the Lord. He was not faithful to the Word of the Lord and therefore, God deems him a failure and tells him he no longer will be king over Israel. That standard of God's judgment, see Hannah knew this, is faithfulness to our covenantal God. It's not all the external trappings of life, it's 'am I faithful?' Do I love the Lord with all my heart, and all my soul, and all my might, and has that love for God and that faith in him overflowed in joyful obedience as is defined by the covenant? That's God standard by which he judges. That's the standard that is true, and that's what Hannah understood and that's what Saul didn't understand. And so, Saul is told that he's no longer king and as you read on in the story, life just goes straight down for Saul. He repeatedly tries to kill David and it appears that he almost goes insane. After Samuel dies, he needs information so he goes to the witch at Endor and gets her to conjure up Samuel. Really big no-no. And eventually he's killed by the Philistines, beheaded, and his body is stuck on the wall of the city. So much for the king of Israel. What did Hannah know that Saul didn't know? Hannah understood that God is King. Hannah understood that God is in control. Hannah understood that God is the Rock

and in him alone is salvation, in him alone is protection and refuge and all the things that we so desperately crave. And Hannah understood that what matters for us is not externally, worldly defined success. But what matters for us is that we be faithful. That we live a radically God-centered life. That we don't force God to compete with the gods of this age, and they are many, are they not? We are radical monotheists and there's only one God and it's Yahweh. And it's him and him alone that we serve with every ounce of passion that we have in our bodies. That's what Hannah knew and Saul didn't. You know, the OT is pretty much a witness to the fact that for the most part, people just don't get it. Have you noticed that? Someone came up to me after the first service and said to me, "I'm so glad you said that because I've read the OT over and over and I keep asking myself, "Are these people ever going to get it?" And the answer is no. They never get it. I don't know if I've shared this with you or not, but I'm not the one picking these OT stories. I wanted someone who knows the OT much better than I do to pick them. His name's Gary Pratico. He teaches Old Testament at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary where I used to teach. PhD Old Testament; taught it all his life. And it's been agonizing for Gary to cut it down to 25 or 30 stories. "You can't leave out that story!" "You know, Gary, 30, no more, bud, that's it." So, he's been picking these stories. I called him on Thursday or Friday because I was frustrated with the sermon, and I said, "Gary, the problem with the stories that you're giving me is that while the names of the players are different, it's the same thing over and over and over again. Yahweh is God. He is in control. He is in charge. We're called to love and we're called to be faithful to him and have that faith overflowing into joyful obedience. Gary, it's the same thing over and over and I can't keep preaching the same thing over and over again. Why are you giving me all this?" And in a very Harvard PhD way Gary said, "Duuhhh!! That's the whole point, Bill. That's the whole point of the Old Testament that people don't get it. You tell them over and over and over and over. You send them judges; they don't get it. You send them kings; they don't get it. You send them prophets; they don't get it. They don't get it. And in fact, Bill, the point is that they never will get it." There may be some unusual people like David and Hannah, Joshua, very unusual people who get more than the rest. But for the most part, the people in the Old Testament don't get it. In fact, they can't get it, and that's one of the major points of the Old Testament.

III. 1000 years later - Mary

A thousand years after the time of Hannah and Samuel and Saul there was another woman who had never had children. And God gave life to her womb. And Mary responded to God's gift of life in a way that is remarkably similar to how Hannah responded. And I'm going to read the Magnificat later on. It's in Luke Chapter 1. But it's interesting if you'll go home and look at Hannah's song, look at David's song, and then look at Mary's song of rejoicing. And you're going to see that they're all going to say the same basic thing. And Mary's son was born, he lived and he died, and in the process Jesus did what no one else could do. He perfectly loved God with all of his heart and all of his soul and all of his might. And when Jesus died on the cross, he not only paid the penalty for sins. Sin is committed by people who like God some of the time. But his death also brought in what was called the New Covenant. And the New Covenant is much like the Old where God is still King and we are still called to faith. But what is really new in the New Covenant and in answer to the prophecies in Jeremiah is that with the New Covenant comes the power to love God in a way that

without the Holy Spirit simply weren't able to. And when he died on the cross, remember he told his disciples in the Upper Room Discourse, "It's a good thing that I go away because when I leave, THEN the comforter can come. And he will lead you into all truth and he will convict the world of sin." And by his death on the cross, Christ ushered in the New Covenant, a covenant that empowers the people who are part of the covenant to obey the covenant. To love God with all their heart and all their soul and all their might. And it is by this power that comes through the Holy Spirit that we can know fully that without faith it is impossible to please God and that true faith always overflows into faithful and joyful obedience. It is through the power of this Holy Spirit that we understand perhaps in a way more deeply than is possible without that we cannot ask God to compete with the gods of this world. That the Holy Spirit when he convicts us of sin, is convicting us that there is only one God, and human sinful tendency is to worship other gods, small g. And yet the Holy Spirit says that there is only one who is God and either you will love him and hate the world, or you will love the world and you will hate him. There's no gray, there's no in between. I John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eye, and pride in possessions is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God, whoever are the "hesedim", whoever is faithful, abides forever.

This is the challenge of a pluralistic world. A world that says there are many gods and you can pick the one you want to serve. And Hannah and David, and through the work of the Holy Spirit I pray, and you and me, understand that that's not acceptable. That we are called and in the words of Hannah back in Chapter 2 to cry out, "There is none holy like the Lord. There is none besides you. There is no Rock like our God." And it is through the power of this Holy Spirit that at the end of the day we understand that it's not the pleasures of this world that are important. It's not a half-hearted commitment to God like Saul had. At the end of the day the Holy Spirit tells us that it's not an issue of human achievement; that's not the basis of judgment. But the basis of judgment is the covenant and God saying, "This is what matters to me. What matters to me is a soft and gentle heart." A heart that is molded by the hand of God, empowered by his Spirit, ready to do his bidding, sold out entirely to God, radical monotheist, radically committed to a God-centered life. All of this is possible because in the New Covenant God sent his Spirit to empower us to fulfill our part of the covenant.

Celebrate the victory of our King (I Cor. 11:23ff)

I'd like this morning to invite you to celebrate the victory of our King, and that's a capital K. When Jesus ushered in the New Covenant, he did so by his death. And in his death, He won victory over the greatest of the enemies, and that is death. And Satan fell. And it is through Jesus' reinterpretation of the Jewish festival called Passover that we are called to proclaim that it was Jesus' death that paid the penalty for sins. It was Jesus' death that ushered in the Covenant in which we can now, empowered by his Spirit, love God with all our soul and all our might, with everything that we have. In I Corinthians 11 Paul tells us how Jesus reinterpreted this Jewish festival and he says, "For I receive from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, MY body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, also he took the cup after supper saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant

in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." I invite you to join in the celebration that our King was victorious overall and it is through the New Covenant that he brought in by his death, that we can now become the "hesedim". That we could become faithful to him, as he has always been faithful to us. We're going to share the bread. I ask that you hold it and that we can take it together.

There is none holy like the Lord. There is none beside you. There is no Rock like our God. And this is the God who created all things and wants a relationship with you to be your God and for you to be his people, made possible because his Son died for your sins and for mine. May we proclaim that death together now.

I know these are solemn times, but they are also joyful times. Hear Mary's cry of faith in the Magnificat. And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him (the "hesedim"). From generation to generation he has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud and the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. With smiles from ear to ear, let us rejoice together in the gift of our God. May you go as people who have a victorious God who is King. And even when we can't see it, that just gives us an opportunity to affirm by faith even more so that God was in control of history in I and II Samuel. Guess what? He's still in control today. May you go in peace.