

Walk in the Spirit—Pray in the Spirit

Sermon #7: Prayer As Praising

Study Text: 1 Samuel 1:1–2:10 (especially 2:1–10)

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Preacher: Erik Hanson

Bible Study Introduction:

We must begin any study on this passage with an acknowledgement that infertility is painful, both then and now. God will not answer all our prayers in the affirmative—it would be a heart rending mistake to say otherwise, or even to say that this passage is primarily about infertility.

Instead, there is a very real affirmation that our prayers do two things at once: First, they offer worship for the way God is acting in the moment, often acting surprisingly in favor of the weak; the goodness of God is to be praised. Second, all God's work points to the promise we see in verse 10 (and one we see in Revelation 5). All God's answers (in the yes and the no) point to the time when God will be finally and fully worshiped. Even as we pray, God is moving in us and around us toward the final culmination, of which we are part.

Opening Questions:

- Share a time when you have been especially lavish in your praise of God. What brought it on, and what was it like?

Read 1 Samuel 2:1–10

- A simple outline of this song might be a double repetition of God's Holy Sovereignty, followed by a reversal of human fortunes, then ending with a foreshadowing of the enduring kingship in verse 10. In your Bible, divide the passage into this outline. How would you expand this outline to be more complete?
- One commentator has written that this prayer of praise speaks to one of our perennial human temptations: "the temptation to believe that we can control our own destiny and, perhaps, history as well."¹ Where do you see this prayer specifically addressing our own idolatry of power and self-determinism?
- In Hannah's prayer, what are the things that God is doing and most interested in? Can you worship and pray to a God like that? What are the implications for our Christian living if we live this praise more intentionally?
- Compare this song to Luke 1:46–56. What parallels do you note that are significant? Where else are those themes?² Critique Christianity's embrace or rejection of the ideas you see in these two songs.

Group or Personal Reflection

- This prayer is grounded in an experience of God's goodness, but looks ahead to the culmination of God's reign. What circumstance in your life needs a prayer that celebrates the goodness of God in the past but will only be resolved finally by the reign of Jesus Christ?
- Consider praying this prayer, sentence by sentence, each day for the following week. Pay special attention to the things God brings to your mind as God receives this praise from you.

¹ Birch, Bruce. The New Interpreter's Bible vol.II.

² For other prayers of praise by women in the Bible see at least Exodus 15 and Judges 5.