

Dedicated to God

Do you remember when Roy Castle hosted Record Breakers? If you do can you remember the catch phrase coined by the programme?

“Dedications what you need if you want to be a record breaker”

If I could adapt it slightly I think what we will see this morning is

“Dedication what’s you need if you want to be a 21st follower of Jesus”

Let’s retrace our steps in 1 Samuel slightly. What is happening in this latest episode. I am speculating slightly but could it be that up till now Hannah had not really been growing in her faith. They had a comfortable existence. Elkanah had done well, they had all the latest mod con’s. Everything was hunky-dory. Well nearly everything.

Everything else was perfect but this one thing. And it had begun to unsettle her. Not helped by the antagonising of Peninnah.

Was it the case that she could have easily lived her life knowing that God was out there somewhere hopefully looking after her but not really impacting her life. Was it this thorn in her flesh that led her to

shake of her complacency toward God and think a bit more about him?

I think Hannah’s story is not uncommon. I know my Aunt came to faith as a result of a difficult situation. She lived in Bridge of Don Aberdeen, occasionally went to church. The local Baptist minister lived a couple of door down and when he heard of their situation he began to come offering support. His kindness and Christian example led to both she and her husband starting going along to church and their eyes were opened to the reality of God revealed through Jesus Christ his son. God was no longer something out there but much more a part of their daily existence and life. Not just up here (pointing to head) but in here (pointing to heart).

That is not of course everyone’s experience. But personal trial is sometimes the door through which people enter into renewed or new faith in the Lord Jesus.

She may not have been aware of it. It probably seemed all perfectly normal to her but her trust in the Lord was growing as she looked to him. She paid more attention in the worship services. She found the stories of God’s dealings with his people more interesting and relevant. It led her to the point of finding refuge in him, laying bare her soul that night in the temple in Shiloh.

She knew now that God could handle her tears. They did not make him nervous.

These sentiments are echoed by the psalmist

“I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way.”

Psalm 142:1-3

This is a slight aside but it is common to ask why does God not answer my prayers? Hannah may well have prayed many times before for a child. Maybe you have asked that question yourself. There has been something you have prayed for and you did not get it.

God always answers prayer in one of three ways:

1. *Yes*
2. *No*
3. *Not yet*

Now this is an over simplification but it is helpful to know.

The next question might be, ‘Why then did he answer no?’

Sometimes it is obvious straight away eg we are being greedy or selfish, other times we may see later why eg if it was a disappointment about say a job or life decision, he had something else for you to do, another path for you to go down. Sometimes we will not know in this life why he answered no, it is hid in the mystery of God and in time we have to content ourselves with the knowledge that he knew why he allowed it to happen and that good can come out of even the hardest circumstances if we are his people.

As Paul reminds us

“God work in all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his good purpose”

Romans 8:28

Though, to be realistic, that may take some time to come to terms with.

Back to the story.

Open your bibles with me if you have not already done so to p. 271 1 Samuel 1.

In the story there are actually three dedications despite the title being about the dedication of just Samuel.

The first is obviously the dedication of the child Samuel to God. The second is the dedication of Hannah. She made a promise to God that the child would be given back to Him.

Vs 11 "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head"

The place this kind of thing is mentioned in the bible before is of course Samson. When his hair was not cut he had strength. We will see that Samuel too will have strength but it will be spiritual strength. He will be instrument God will use to replace Eli as judge of the nation and be the one to appoint David as King who was of course the forefather of Jesus.

This whole thing might seem strange to us. One can only imagine the pain Hannah would feel when the time was approaching for the child to be weaned, usually at three in those days. But God had plans for this child, he would be something special and he would more than make up for her loss. The nearest equivalents might be missionaries who send their children back home to boarding school so that they can be educated. They might go three years at a time without seeing their parents.

Hannah's faith was ruling her head and her heart. It did not mean that she was an automaton, feeling nothing. I am sure she felt a great deal but she was maturing in the faith. She knew, if not then, certainly in time, that those who honour God, God would honour. Words that would issue from the lips of her own son (1 Sam 2:30). Hannah was learning that in being prepared to make sacrifices in her life for God, God would more than make up for them in other ways. She was learning what it meant to be dedicated to God. That when God moved her out of her comfort zone there was a whole new world of life with him she would never have known.

It was a test of faith for Hannah but as she stepped out in faith, not knowing what the Lord would do, simply keeping her promise to God and God more than blessed her.

2:21 "And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters."

I sense God moving amongst us and moving us on in our faith, to greater maturity, to greater faith, to deeper dedication. Don't you? I feel it in myself.

Like Hannah we too have made promises to him.

Not least our vows or promises of membership....

Promises to join Sunday by Sunday with fellow believers in Christ, to be faithful in bible reading and prayer, give a fitting proportion of time, talents and money, to witness to the faith to others and live out our Christian lives consistently in every sphere of life.

Promises made at baptism to teach our children the truths and duties of the faith and by prayer and example to bring them up in the life of the church.

Hannah was unfaltering in her commitment to her promise. What about us? How unfaltering are we in our promises to them? It is a thought isn't?

We may forget the day we made our promises but God does not. He wants to help us cf Elkanah 1:23 'May God make good his word'. In other words may God help you to fulfil his word to you. We may feel failures in fulfilling our promises but the lord wants to help you in them. Let him do it.

Our promises in regard to our children are particularly important. The tide of secularism is ever rising and more and more of our young people are being drawn away from the church. The one place we can help stop that is with our own family. It is not always easy with older children they are beginning to make up their own minds. But we need to be praying for our young folks. That they will form a peer group of good influence and Christian faith. That they will invite their friends to church and to church events.

We need to supply them with resources to help their faith. For example, for younger kids Bible story books for bed time, for old and young children good quality Christian music tapes and cd's for the car that go alongside whatever else they are listening to, there are good DVD and videos that can be added to their collection, events that are aimed at their age group and so on. In the future we may try and have such materials available for purchase at reduced prices so do please look out for that. We all know the influences that are out there, for many of us it was a strong church connection that helped us through our younger years let's give our own children and grandchildren that opportunity. Let's be dedicated to God, and the promises we made to him and be dedicated to bringing up our kids in the faith.

But there is one other dedication behind all this. It is of course God's dedication to us. It was because of his loving dedication that to his people in Hannah's day that he raised up Samuel as a kind of saviour figure leading the people back to loving and worshipping God. It is his dedication the he sent his son to die for us on cross so we receive the very thing we don't deserve – his love and take away from us the thing we do – his displeasure and judgement.

God in his love and dedication to us (and I mean us, you and me) gave up the thing that meant most him. His greatest joy, his delight, the apple of his eye. His only son. Gave him into the hands of sinful men who

murdered him on a cross. Why did he allow it?
Because in living Jesus was able to reveal the full extent of the Father's love for us. In dying he was able to remove the barrier between us and God, our sin. In rising he was able to show us that God can change our lives round, raise our deadened souls to life and one day raise us up to be with him in heaven. Now that is what I call dedication.

How can we not respond like Hannah to the one who is dedicated to us especially as we remember that this morning as we take the bread and wine.

Dedication IS what we need.