WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT WEEK OF FEBRUARY 28, 2022

February 28

Happy Monday, everyone!

Today we will continue our walk through the books of the Bible as we leave the Book of Ruth and look at the book of 1 Samuel. This is a continuation of a series of books in the Old Testament known in the Jewish tradition as “the historical books” because they attempt to record not necessarily the political history of Israel, but the history of its relationship with God.

1 and 2 Samuel are named after the last judge of Israel, Samuel. Samuel’s mother was a woman named Hannah. Hannah was married to a righteous man named Elkanah, who also had a second wife whose name was Peninnah. With Peninnah, Elkanah had many sons and daughters, but the Lord had “closed Hannah’s womb” (1:5) and thus she was unable to bear children.

In ancient Israel, the inability to bear children produced great shame for a woman, and this doubled for Hannah since Peninnah, described as her “rival,” “provoked [Hannah] until she wept and would not eat” (1:7). Nonetheless, Hannah prayed ceaselessly, telling Eli the priest that “I was pouring out my soul to the Lord…praying here out of my great anguish and grief” (1:15-16). Scripture then records that “the Lord remembered her…so in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son…and named him Samuel” (1:19-20). The Hebrew word translated here as “remembered” also means “called to mind” or “was on His mind.”

When Hannah dedicates Samuel in the temple, she prays a long prayer called “Hannah’s song.” These are the first two verses:

“My heart rejoices in the Lord;
in the Lord my horn is lifted high.
My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.

There is no one holy like the Lord;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God” (2:1-2).

How many of us, like Hannah, have “poured our soul out to the Lord?” How many of us, like Hannah, have prayed out of “great anguish and grief?” Perhaps our prayers get answered like Hannah’s, and perhaps not. Or perhaps they get answered in a way we didn’t expect. Whatever the outcome, rest assured that when we pour out our soul to the Lord, when we pray out in anguish and grief, the same mind of God that created the cosmos cares…and He remembers.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
March 1

Happy March and the end of meteorological winter!

As we mentioned yesterday, Samuel was the last judge of Israel. Among all the known nations at the time, only Israel had judges. All the other nations had powerful kings with all-encompassing authority. This was by design, because God intended that He would be the King of Israel, and they would be obedient to Him, not some earthly King. This is how He intended to announce Himself to the world.

However, jealousy and envy are powerful human emotions, and after a time, the nation of Israel wanted to be like all the other nations. They wanted a king. Remember when you were a kid and you wanted to do something the other kids were doing but your mom or dad said “no?” And you said something like, “but all the other kids are doing it?” And your mom said something like, “if all the other kids jumped off a cliff would you jump, too?” That’s how the nation of Israel was behaving. Except, unlike our mom or dad, God allowed it. Here’s how it happened:

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel’s leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.” But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights” (8:1-9).

The people rebel against God, and He allows it. I’ve often wondered about this. Why doesn’t God just change the hearts and minds of His people? It would be so much easier. Or would it? In fact, I think the lesson for today is this: the easier way is to simply obey out of our own free will. To submit joyously and willingly. Conversely, every single time we see disobedience in the Bible, life turns out to be much, much harder. I’m reminded here of the old Sunday school song: “Trust and obey, there’s no other way…”

Tomorrow: Here comes Saul.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
March 2

Grace and peace to you this day.

Continuing today with our brief look at the book of 1 Samuel, recall that yesterday we saw that the people of Israel went to Samuel (the last judge of Israel) to express their desire to have a king in order that they could be like all the other nations. This is directly against God’s will since He desired that He be their King. Nonetheless, God allows them to have a king, and chooses and anoints a man named Saul as the first king of Israel. Saul was 30 years old when he became king, and he ruled for 42 years.

Saul started out strong. He had God’s favor. He defeated his enemies in battle. The people followed him and were loyal to him. Following his defeat of the Philistines, Saul was told to by Samuel to wait for him, (Samuel), who was also a priest, to offer the sacrifices to the Lord. This was not only the Lord’s will, but in accordance with Jewish law regarding the offering of burnt sacrifices.

However, it took Samuel seven days to arrive, and Saul got impatient. So, he offered the sacrifices himself. As so often happens, success had gone to his head. He thought he knew better. He thought the rules didn’t apply to him. He thought no one would notice. But someone did notice. That someone was God. Here’s what happened next:

Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. “What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.” “You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command” (13:10-14).

Whether or not Saul meant well is beside the point. He thought he was above obedience to the Lord, and the consequences were immediate and serious. His kingdom would not endure. In time, he would be replaced by King David and Saul would die by his own hand.

Obedience and faithfulness lead to abundant and rich blessings. Conversely, operating disobediently outside the Lord’s will leads to tragedy, even if you are hand-picked by the Lord, as was Saul. As we have seen here, obedience always involves sacrifice, but sacrifice does not always involve obedience.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
March 3

Greetings to you today in the name of Jesus.

As we finish our brief look at the book of 1 Samuel, I want to conclude with a final look at the life of Saul, the first king. I will admit, some of the historical books, as we are seeing, are a tough read. Not much humor is to be found in there. So, thanks for hanging in there.

We saw yesterday that Saul’s disobedience to the Lord ended in tragedy. Because of it, the Lord withdrew His blessing and favor, even though He had hand-picked Saul for the job and had anointed him. As we saw, a distraught, alone, and dismayed former king takes his own life.

Prior to this tragic ending, the judge and priest Samuel gives Saul, and us, a lesson about the meaning and importance of obedience. Remember that Saul had taken matters into his own hands by making the burnt offerings himself rather than wait for Samuel as instructed and in accordance with the Law. This is what Samuel tells him:

> "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king" (15:22-23).

It is a lesson worth repeating. As we see time and time and time again, the Lord is not interested in our worship, the Lord is not interested in our sacrifice, the Lord is not interested in our offerings, if our heart is in a disobedient, willful place. As we have said many times, God is not interested in our false piety. God does not want us to write the church a check if we are holding a grudge against our brother or sister. God’s ear is deaf to our singing if we are not seeking justice, mercy, and grace, and doing it in his name.

Whew! Serious stuff this week. Next week, the book of 2 Samuel and a look at the life and reign of King David.

Tomorrow: Another great bluegrass song of praise.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
March 5

Happy Friday, everyone!

Here’s your musical devotional for this week. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSif77IVQdY

IHS,

Pastor Lou