

# Hannah's faith

ODCC 10/05/09 (Hannahs faith.doc)

**Text:** D

## Introduction

1. We have here an amazing story of a woman who experienced bitter circumstances in her life but who never allowed it to embitter her heart.

## The present situation

1. She was married to Elkanah who had married 2 wives – polygamy was never God's intention but in Israel's early history it was not uncommon.
  - a. Hannah's situation was aggravated by the 2nd wife, Peninnah – here referred to as "her rival" – who could produce children and who provoked her to irritation.
  - b. The very thing that could have exalted Peninnah is the thing that she used to bring discord so that it seems as if she drove Elkanah to prefer Hannah although he did not neglect Peninnah or the children born to her.
  - c. It's a sad thing that sometimes we do not rightfully appreciate what we have. GK Chesterton wrote in his book, "Orthodoxy", "We should thank God for beer and show our appreciation by not drinking too much". When you drink too much it's an abuse of the gift and destroys rationality, peace and harmony, relationships, etc.
  - d. I'm not talking about whether it's right for Christians to drink or not, I'm simply using Chesterton's example. I want to quote him a little later.
2. Hannah sorely felt her plight – the fact that she was unable to bear children (which was a shame in Middle Eastern culture) – but she never allowed that to harm her relationships with the family or with God
  - a. Our text today tells us that it was God who had shut Hannah's womb so that she could not bear children. And obviously because Peninnah was having children the problem did not lie with Elkanah.
  - b. Our situations should always drive us to God – something I'm still learning at this stage of my life.
  - c. It seems to me that if we cry out to God, He will give us one of two things:
    - i. He might give us what we ask for as He did in Hannah's case. He gave her the desire of her heart, or
    - ii. He might not give us what we ask for but He'll give us grace to sustain us as He did Paul the apostle. And if he gives grace then it will turn out to be of far greater value than the thing we wanted at first.

## Hannah's response

1. Hannah's response was to pray earnestly – she petitioned God. A woman who's not a mother but desperately wants to become a mother.
  - a. She comes to God with confidence. As Hebrews 11:6 says, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him*".
  - b. Her prayer is unusual because she promises God that if He gives her what she asks for she will give the child back to Him and we see that that is exactly what happened.
  - c. Again, it demonstrates what we saw earlier on – an appreciation of what we have. In giving her son to God, God took what she gave and Samuel became one of the most powerful judges and prophets in the history of the nation.
  - d. So unlike Peninnah who used her gift as a kind of a weapon to get at Hannah, Hannah sanctified her gift
2. Prayer is a magnificent vocation where here, according to one dictionary, vocation means "doing something worthy and requiring great dedication".
  - a. If you dedicate your life to praying, I believe that in all of Christian activity, praying will bring you into the closest relationship with God because it is in prayer that you are searching to know the heart and the mind of God.
  - b. Prayer requires faith – an unshakeable confidence that God hears us. It requires lips to form and utter the words (although they may also be formed internally as with Hannah), but that requires time. Earnest prayer is time-consuming – is it worth the time!? Prayer requires the ability to listen, not with the natural ear but with the ability to hear God inside because it's a spiritual exercise.

3. We need to develop such a relationship with God so that daily, we are conscious of His presence. This is what it means to *walk in the Spirit*. Nothing takes us by surprise. Nothing overwhelms us. Nothing should destroy us. Nothing robs us of confidence, etc.
  - a. Let me quote GK Chesterton again. I like the way he puts it. He explains how he grew up with a nanny who used to tell him fairy tales. He loved fairy tales because in a fairy tale, laws could be broken, or they could be changed. The unexpected happened and you expected it to happen. There was such thing as magic which intervened powerfully; it made things appear or disappear, or it changed one thing into another, etc.
  - b. But then when he grew up he found that the world was not like a fairy tale. That people used to talk about the rigidness of the way things are: they called them laws – laws that governed our lives and laws that governed the universe, etc. But Chesterton found that life was not like that. The unexpected did happen and often the unexpected broke the laws and then people would try and force the unexpected back under a law.
  - c. In Chesterton's mind life was more like a fairy tale than a laboratory but most people wanted it to be like a laboratory. We wish that our lives were ordered, we wish they'd go the way we planned, we wish there were no unpleasant surprises (the kind of things that only happen to other people), etc., but that is not how life is for most people.
  - d. When Chesterton became a Christian he discovered there was magic or, at least, a power. It wasn't the magic of the fairy tale but it was God. Life is meant to be enjoyed and if we believe that it can only be enjoyed when our plans come together but not enjoyed when our plans, our dreams, our wishes crumble, then our lives are lived under law and not under God.
  - e. We are not meant to live our lives as the world lives theirs. They are in a prison. They act and behave and live with such confinement. The Christian is seated in heavenly places in Christ. The Christian sets their minds on things above and not on things below. The Christian has God as a constant companion so that, as Paul says, we are in Him.