

Heavy rocks

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[0 : 00] We're starting a new series this week in 1st Samuel. So if you want to turn with me to page 271, I'm going to read it, read the Bible first, and then I'm going to pray, and then we'll just think about what this passage means for us.

It's a great book that we're going to do. We're just going to look through the first seven verses up to the middle of the summer. I'm excited about what God's going to teach us. But this is God's Word, and we're just going to be reading to the first 18 verses of chapter 1 on page 271.

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zophite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah, son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zoph, and Ephraimite. He had two wives. One was called Hannah and the other Penina. Penina had children, but Hannah had none. Year after year, this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Penina, and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah, he gave a double portion, because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb.

[1 : 21] Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.

Her husband Elkanah would say to her, Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish, Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly.

And she made a vow saying, Lord Almighty, if you will only look on 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.

As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk, and said to her, How long are you going to stay drunk?

[2 : 47] Put away your wine. Not so, my lord, Hannah replied. I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer. I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman.

I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief. Eli answered, Go in peace. And may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him. She said, May your servant find favour in your eyes.

Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. This is God's word. Let me pray.

Almighty God, we come to your word this morning. We come and we want to sit under it. We want you to teach us. We want you to speak to us. We want our hearts to be enlivened by what it is you have to say.

And so help us to fixate our attention onto the living word of God. And pray that you'd teach our hearts. Give us eyes to see.

[3 : 49] Give us hearts to understand. We pray for your blessing now in Jesus' name. Amen. We all know what it's like to have to move something that's really heavy.

Perhaps carrying a bag that is too full. You know that feeling when you've perhaps put too much in. I used to have that, to Annabelle's dismay, sometimes when I'd come back from college and I'd

packed my bag too full of books.

The straps digging into your shoulders. And you know that feeling. It affects your posture and every step takes twice as much effort as normal. I've even had it this last week.

Over the last few weeks, I've been moving some garden flags in the garden. And they were heavier than they looked. Craig is a testament to that when we had to move a few together.

I had 19 of them to shift. Every flag seemed by the end of it. By number 19, I tell you, my arms and my legs were more jelly-like than they were at the beginning.

[5 : 00] Now that is hard work on our physical bodies, right? And we might even feel we do anything hard graft. You feel perhaps sore a few days later. But the heaviest things we carry are never physical.

The heaviest bags we walk around with, they do change our posture. They do change our energy levels. But the weight of them is the burdens of life that weighs down.

And sometimes, maybe this has happened to you, sometimes you have moments, seasons in your life, don't you, where it can feel like it's just one thing after another.

It can feel like it's just one thing after another and there's no reprieve. Each burden adds another weight, like carrying a bag, not of things we need or want, it's like carrying a bag of rocks that we just can't take off.

With every new rock that seems to be added, our energy to walk another step just feels harder. We all know that feeling. Seasons when we wonder, whatever next?

[6 : 12] Now, I don't know everything that's going on in all of our lives and maybe you're in a season like that at the moment. Maybe it feels like, whatever next?

But even if you're not, the truth is, unfortunately, there will be some point in all of our lives when we will go through one of those seasons again.

When we open up our Bibles to this chapter, we meet Hannah in that kind of a place. For her, it feels like just one thing after another.

She's in a season of deep pain that just never seems to end and she's burdened carrying a bag of heavy rocks of enduring, extensive suffering.

And I want us to, and my prayer really throughout this week is, if I mentioned, if you do feel like that today or if you've ever felt like that or maybe even recently or maybe if you know a friend who does, there is something here, if you can believe it, there is something here that God wants for us this morning.

[7 : 32] He wants us to move or be able to move from the overwhelming weight of burden that can leave us feeling in despair and despondency. He wants us to move us from that place to a place of peace.

And often when you might hear someone at the front say something like that, it can feel a bit trite.

And I'm not saying it in any way tritely. Because I know that if you're in that place and I've been in it myself, it can be hard to believe.

How am I supposed to go from this place to a place of peace just because the guy at the front is telling me I should? But the living God really does want to lift the countenance of your face.

And he really does want you to know his peace in your life. And as we read this passage, we see that he can do it. Let's go to the problem then.

The problem, Hannah has been carrying a heavy bag of weighty, burden-filled rocks for some time. We read in verse 2 that she, we know that she doesn't have any children.

[8 : 48] We read the same thing kind of in verse 5. We read that her womb is closed and that is a hard thing for any woman to experience. But if that's not bad enough, that's not, that's a big rock, isn't it?

That's a huge rock. But if that's not bad enough, she has other rocks. Penina, the other wife of her husband, Elkanah, is exceptionally cruel. Verse 6 describes her as a rival to Hannah who is continually provoking her.

She's having a go, irritating, just having a go. It's not a one-off, this either. It's not just like she's, you know, kind of, it's bullying. And it's going on year after year until Hannah reaches a point where she is beside herself.

She is weeping. She's unable to eat. Elkanah, her husband, tries his best to help. You know, he gives her this double portion of food because he loves her and because of her predicament.

But in verse 8, we realise that he's kind of just another rock to add to it as well. He doesn't fully understand. Look with me what he says to her. Verse 8, her husband Elkanah would say to her, Hannah, why are you weeping?

[10:06] Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons? Just think of the weight of it all. She can't have children.

She's mocked and laughed at. And her husband doesn't understand. More than that, he feels slighted that he's not enough for her. Why am I not enough?

In verse 10, we reach the place where we get to understand how she's feeling. We read, she's in deep anguish, weeping bitterly.

It is profound grief and it is torturing this poor woman. And she can't cope, it's too much. Now, these set of rocks are particular and unique to her.

But as we see this, we all know and have moments where life will get on top of us. And I wonder, what real life rocks are we carrying that weigh us down?

[11:16] Could it be the heavy rock of an illness for a loved one? The heavy rock of our own mental health struggles, perhaps?

The heavy rock of stress at work? The heavy rock of worrying about finances or a relationship breakdown? Or sometimes, we can't put our finger on it, but it just feels like life's going nowhere. Each of those things is enough of a rock in its own right. But then there are times like Hannah's when it's just one after another and we think, when will this let up?

It's just too much. The most agonising part of it all when these moments in our life happen of carrying the weight of these rocks is when the realisation dawns on us that we're completely powerless to do anything about it when they become too heavy to lift and there's nothing we can do. In those moments, there are places where we naturally run. People, naturally, it's kind of a generalisation, but there's, I think there's three. The first one is you blame God.

[12:33] It's his fault. The second is try to accept it, but turn elsewhere to anaesthetise the pain. Sex, drink, drugs. Or spending money to make yourself feel better.

But then, there is the third option which is what Hannah does. She turns to the living God. The first thing I want us to notice is why she turns to him.

And it is her call to him that tells us everything. she calls him, notice with me, she calls him Lord Almighty. The actual phrase that we come up is actually, it comes across in other translations or in Hebrew is the Lord of hosts.

what that name signifies is the Lord, Yahweh, the living God has unlimited resources to meet the needs of anyone who's despondent.

What's surprising is that this chapter in the Bible is the first time this particular name for the Lord is used. We see it in verse 3, you notice, I think it's, she's called, it's called, it's in verse 3 or earlier on, the Lord Almighty or the Lord of hosts.

[13:56] We see it again in verse 9 when she prays. That name, the Lord of hosts in the original, the word for hosts is a word called Sabaoth, means Lord of hosts, but you've got to ask yourself, when we hear that, I mean it's not kind of a word we use, is it hosts?

What on earth does it mean to be the Lord of hosts? Host is actually, it's kind of an old English word that kind of means multitudes. Think of the phrase, he had a whole host of problems.

It means you've got a lot of problems. So when we say the Lord of hosts, it means the Lord has a multitude, a whole multitude. What is it, a multitude of?

Well, specifically, it is an innumerable organised army that he can call upon. Instead of the Lord of hosts, it could be translated as the Lord of multitudes or the Lord of armies, the heavenly hosts, the angels.

And this is what it means when we call him the Lord of hosts, what we're saying is that every angelic messenger and every part of the cosmos is under the command of the living God.

[15:05] That's what she's saying when she calls him that. And she's the first person in the whole of the Bible to ever call him that. The Lord of hosts is the Lord of ultimate and total sovereign, power and might with unlimited reserves.

It's a pivotal opening moment to the whole book of 1 Samuel. To help unpack why, we need to do a little bit more historical digging. Just to let you know, you know, we're in 1 Samuel.

Chronologically, this book happens in the history of Israel. It happens after the book of Judges. And the nation of Israel after Judges is in a complete mess. It's in a total mess.

In fact, the end of Judges, you could, if you want, you can actually turn with me back a few pages. I could just, I think it's just before Ruth.

You can turn with me to the very, very, very, very last verse of Judges. It's on page, I'll flick there myself, 266.

[16:11] Can you see what it says in the very last verse of Judges? It says, in those days, Israel had no king and everyone did as they saw fit. That's the situation that 1 Samuel starts in.

There's no king and everyone is doing what they want. There's no leader. So you can see what that means when she says this. They didn't have a human leader, but neither at this point in Israel's history did they recognize God as their king.

As a nation, they were all doing their own thing, living however they wanted, and it's into that dark, chaotic reality that Hannah now calls them the living God as the Lord of unlimited resources, the Lord of hosts, the God of heavenly armies.

Hannah is acknowledging the God of the Bible as her king, acknowledging when no one else does. And the thread that runs throughout the whole of this book, really, 1 Samuel, is how Israel relates to God as their king, how they understand that and perhaps their need, their desire for a human king. But right now, we've got this poor woman and she gets it. She gets it. She bypasses earthly resources and appeals directly to the true king of heaven's armies with everything at his disposal, total in power.

[17:38] While the nation looks horizontally for someone to fix their problems, Hannah is the only one who's looking up. She's the only one who's looking up. Why is she looking up?

It's because the living God is this type of a king. The Lord of hosts, Yahweh, Sabbath oath, that Hannah approaches him. It's because he's this type of king that she approaches him as she does. And we see Hannah's response as we look at how she approaches him with everything, all the heavy rocks that she's carrying, what it teaches is that we as a people of God get to approach God in exactly the same way.

When we feel like Hannah, when we feel despondent, when the rocks we carry, the burdens on our backs and we can't lift them anymore, we get to pray to a God whose resources can handle the despair and the despondency.

Just look how she comes to the living God. In a deep anguish she prays to the Lord weeping bitterly. You can, perhaps you can picture she's uncontrollably sobbing, shaking as she pours out her heart.

[18:54] It is distressing to think of anyone in that much emotional turmoil and pain. But what it tells us is this, that it reminds us that we get to come to God.

We get to come to the living God with all the raw emotion that we feel. we can speak to him with unfiltered speech knowing that there is no judgment.

We get to weep without feeling awkward or embarrassed. We get to come to God like this and pour out our hearts to him. And notice, look, there's nothing complicated about a prayer.

It's not overly pious. It's not trying, it's not showy or trying to impress anyone. It's just a simple petition of a woman who is done who can't continue with these rocks anymore.

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

[20:05] Can I encourage you today that if this is you right now, if you feel overwhelmed and it's taken its toll, you can bring your rocks to the living God. He's still the Lord of hosts for you and he has unlimited resources.

He's the God of heavenly armies. You don't have to blame God. You don't have to turn to sex, drink or drugs or anything else in an attempt to anaesthetise what you're going through but you get to turn to the Lord of unlimited resources today.

However, maybe you're sitting here and you're thinking well I've done that. What do I do if I pour out my heart to God and he stays silent?

What do I do? What if I come to God with all this? What if I open up to him and nothing changes? Maybe you hear me and think and even right now as you're listening there's still that instant kind of hesitation.

Well at first it doesn't look for Hannah like things get any better does it? I mean to me this would be the thing that would break the camel's back.

[21 : 28] You ever notice that when you're going through you go through a load of hard stuff and then for me it's like I smash a glass and I like blow up because it's like that tiny thing that's like I've had enough.

It's the tiny thing that tips you over the edge. She's pouring out her heart in secret. Eli the priest spots her and he thinks she's drunk. Like for goodness sake how long are you going to stay a drink?

Put away your wine he tells her. Isn't this just another rock to wear down even more? Not even now even the priest is having a go. Can't she just catch a break?

This might even resonate maybe you've been open with someone in church and they've completely misunderstood they don't get you. Hannah tries to put quickly puts things right.

Not so I'm a woman I'm deeply troubled I've not been drinking I'm praying pouring out my soul to the living God I'm not a wicked woman here I am in my anguish and grief.

[22 : 30] She gets the answer from the priest that she kind of wanted go in peace and may that God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him. And here we get a glimpse of what it means to receive a blessing from a priest.

because look at what happens look what happens second half of verse 18 then she went her way and ate something she's not been eating she's that distressed but she gets a blessing from the priest then she went and ate something and her face is no longer downcast.

something has changed she's eating again and even if just a little bit the anguish and despair has lifted. What we see is Hannah's prayer is actually answered twice.

We're going to see the second part of the answer next week. This is the first answer. It's not what she expects but it is immediate. he sees her misery he remembers her and through the prayer and blessing of priest Eli God works to lift her from despondency to a sense of peace she can eat again. At this point let's not forget the rocks the weight of them is still there nothing has changed in one respect but in another everything has changed and it's something we can't really explain.

[24 : 13] Hannah experienced the shift she is somehow her countenance her attitude her perspective on things changed despite all the heavy burden she carries and it has come through God's appointed priest.

This is where the gospel meets Hannah and it's how God meets with us. Hannah is blessed through Eli but we are blessed eternally through our great high priest Jesus because when we go to Jesus we go to a priest that supersedes everything that Eli is.

Eli is a sinner Jesus never sinned his whole life Eli gives Hannah a blessing of peace Jesus gives us himself Jesus himself is despondent and full of despair on the cross Jesus takes our burdens he takes the curse so that he could bless us with his peace and if Hannah can cry out to God and walk away with peace because of the blessing of Eli how much more is God able to bless us with peace in the middle of those moments in our life when it all feels too much at this moment Hannah she still doesn't have a child Penina still cruel and Elkanah still doesn't understand our situations in life might not change but come with everything in you every emotion every burden every rock every bit of pain that you carry and the living God the Lord of hosts out of his unlimited resources can give you what you need can give you the peace you desire because he's the true high priest who offered himself as we draw to a close this morning

I want you to think about how you might have answered that question from earlier what bag of rocks are you carrying and the truth is when some of you walk out of church honestly those rocks are still going to be there the circumstances might not have magically disappeared but here's the profound difference because of Jesus you're no longer carrying that bag alone and you no longer have to carry it in despair you're walking out of here deeply loved by your true high priest who died for you to walk with you and take your heavy load hear the words of the Lord Jesus whose words it would seem Hannah already understood before he said them come to me come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light the Lord of hosts has the infinite resources to meet your needs and mine come and bring your raw unfiltered heart and words to him every day and even when the rocks are heavy he promises to give you the peace you need for the very next step let's pray

Lord of hosts we come to you we want to acknowledge you as the one who has everything at his disposal and Lord you know our lives you know the rocks that we have carried that we are carrying and that we will carry you know the ones that you know the times when it feels too much you know

the times when it feels like it's one after another and so we come to you and ask you that you would consider us your children your servants when we feel that that you would remember us that you wouldn't forget us and that you would take our burdens we thank you that we have an assurance of that because of the cross of Christ that when we're despondent and in despair you have been in that place so that you can give us what we need to take the very next step and so we love you Jesus because we don't walk this life alone but with you by our side we praise you and we thank you

[29 : 05] I just pray for anyone now who's feeling that I pray that they would know your nearness and your presence and your mercy and your grace and that they would know you walking with them in those in these trying moments of life that you would lift the bag of rocks from them and carry it I ask for that in the name of Jesus Amen