

High Stakes

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Date: 17 May 2026

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[0 : 00] Well, in here we're going to continue with our kind of new series that we started last week. We're in the book of 1 Samuel.! So if you want to turn to that, it's on page 271. Chapter 1, but we're going to go halfway through the chapter. We're going to go to verse 19.

Okay, we're going to go to verse 19, so you can see it on that second half, and we're going to be reading to the end of chapter 1, which continues over onto the next page. So we're going to read it, pray, and then we'll think about what it means for us. So this is God's Word.

Early the next morning, they arose and worshipped before the Lord, and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her.

So in the course of time, Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, Because I asked the Lord for him.

When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord, and to fulfil his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always.

[1 : 27] Do what seems best to you, her husband Elkanah told her. Stay here until you've weaned him. Only may the Lord make good his word.

So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him. After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, Pardon me, my Lord, as surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord.

I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord.

For his whole life he shall be given over to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there. Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you for your word, the Bible.

[2 : 38] And we thank you that this is the way that you have ordained and decided to speak to us, your people. We thank you that there is an abundance of you speaking to us.

And throughout the ages, this is the word of God that has sustained and edified and built up and corrected and rebuke and challenged and trained for righteousness, all the servants for your good work.

And so we ask today that you would continue and do that for us as a people. We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. Now, last week, we saw Hannah go from this place of despondency and despair.

You might remember she couldn't have children. Penina, her husband's other wife, was so, so cruel to her.

And then Elkanah, her husband, didn't really understand what she was going through. It was like a bag of rocks that she carried of difficulty with each trouble just burdening her, weighing her down that she carried.

[3 : 51] She went from that place of despair, not being able to eat, to a place of peace. And that place of peace, we saw, it was the first answer to her prayer, was this, she was able to eat again.

She was a place of peace. This week, what we see is the second answer to her prayer. We see kind of what else, how else God answers it in her life.

And we see in Hannah an action, a posture that flows from how she understands the living God, how she understands his character and his unwavering faithfulness.

What we see today is Hannah's faith, her trust in God's character. And what we see is that it is off the chart. It is a scale, and what we notice is that the scale of trust and faith that she kind of needs

is big because it is proportional to the stakes that are at play.

And they are high, high stakes. Now, I'm not a betting man anymore in my former days. I occasionally had a flutter, but, you know, tend now to steward, try steward every pound every now and then.

[5 : 13] But, you know, when you used to, back in the day, my stakes would be small. A lottery ticket for a pound, an accumulator for the Saturday, football. And I think the most I ever bet was a fiver.

The stakes were small. So it didn't matter too much, you could say, if I didn't see a return. With Hannah, the stakes are massive.

She is putting all her eggs in one basket. And sometimes, depending on our personality, we can treat life a little bit like a betting game.

There are some of us who are natural risk takers. You know, you might be the type of person to just see a new job and take a punt on it, quit your old one and think, I'm just going to go for it.

And then there are some of us who are more cautious in our approach. Research for three weeks just to buy a toaster. After all, we're different. But the danger is, however, whether we're a risk taker or whether we're overly cautious, is that we take that kind of natural inbent to life, into how we approach living with God in charge.

[6 : 30] The danger with the risk taker is that you could live recklessly and you just kind of expect God to bail you out, like a cosmic safety net. But conversely, the danger with being overly cautious is that you always need 100% certainty before stepping out in kind of radical, costly faith and obedience.

Now, I'm not talking about foolish risk. And neither am I talking about being overly cautious. What we see here is calculated God-honouring risk that is not reliant on chance, but on who the character of the living God is.

And it's what we see in Hannah. That even though the stakes are high, this is not a game of chance for her. It's not a thrill-seeking risk ride.

Anything but. And yet, she isn't paralysed about what she must do. It is incredible faith. This morning, as we see Hannah's faith with high stakes, it presents us with an opportunity for our own walk with the living God.

And to question, actually, and maybe challenge ourselves, where are we at when the stakes are high in our own life?

[7 : 55] The principle, you might say, that runs through this passage is that Hannah is able to trust the living God because of his character and it shines through. She's trusting in his covenant faithfulness, in his promise-keeping.

There is that transformation in Hannah that I've mentioned last week. We saw that even there's so many things that we see that have transformed.

If you look back with me in the first chapter, same chapter, go to verse 3. You see, year after year, this man, Elkanah, her husband, went up from his town to worship.

He goes up year by year to Shiloh to worship. But this year, just before they make the trip home to Ramah, in the verse that we started with, Ramah, a 15 to 20 mile journey, would have taken at least a day to get home.

Look what we read in verse 19. Early the next morning, they arose and worshipped before the Lord. He's not worshipping on his own, but his wife is going with him.

[9 : 06] Nothing has changed, but everything has changed. And remember, at this point in her life, at this point she is still without child, Penina is still cruel, and Elkanah, her husband, still doesn't understand.

But she goes with her husband and worships the Lord, not knowing what the future may bring. And it's then, with her doing that, that in the middle of that, we see God's covenant faithfulness.

Look with me in the rest of that verse, in verse 19, the second half of that verse, we read, Elkanah made love to his wife, Hannah, and the Lord remembered her.

When we use the word remember in everybody's speech, it's normally because we've forgotten something. When the Lord remembers, he isn't recalling something like it slipped his mind.

This is covenant language. It's language that emphasises God as the one who keeps his promises. The covenant keeping God the promise keeping God.

[10:16] His remembrance of Hannah is playing into a deeper picture. Not of faithfulness only to Hannah, but actually, there's a bigger picture going in here in the whole arc of the story of the Bible, but he's actually remembering his covenant faithfulness to the nation of Israel, because it is through this child that Israel will itself return to faithfulness.

You might remember me last week saying, where we're at in Israel's story. At this point, Israel was a spiritual wasteland.

Everyone did as they wanted in their own eyes. It's the last verse of Judges, which is where we're at. And really, what we get is this astonishing picture that the lack of life in Hannah's womb is a picture of the lack of spiritual life in the nation.

And so God responds to Hannah's outrageous faith by bringing life not just to a family, but to a whole nation, and it will come through this child.

God isn't just fixing Hannah's sorrow, but he's setting the stage to save a nation. We do just have to pause at this point, because we could look at this and make the wrong connection.

[11:41] It's all we see. We saw answered prayer last week. You know, Hannah, she's got peace back, and then she gets what she asks for. Because you could look at this and think, well, look at this miracle, and look at the faith of Hannah.

She prays, and God gives her the thing she asks for, a child. What relief after all these years of suffering and torment? And there is an element of that that we can see that in the passage.

But where we could go wrong is if we take that line of thinking into our own prayer life. We could say, well, all I need is the faith of Hannah, right?

If I've got the same faith as Hannah, and if I just pray hard enough for as long as she does, years after year, going up, not seeing anything, then God will give me what I want. That leads to what I'm going to call vending machine theology.

If you put enough currency in, you get what you want out the bottom. If you pray with enough faith, faith currency, out comes what you asked for. That type of thinking is turned on its head by Hannah.

[12:50] Because she doesn't wait until she gets what she has prayed for. She worships the living God when she doesn't know what's going to happen.

She worships the living God when nothing has changed. The stakes could not be higher. She places every ounce of emotion and trust and belief into the living God when she doesn't know the outcome.

Her trust is in the giver, not the gift. It's in the giver. She loves the giver more than the gift.

Now that trust she has right now at the moment, it is going to be tested and the stakes are going to increase.

And if the stakes are going to get higher, then the trust is going to get bigger. I mentioned before, in a former life, when I used to enjoy a bet, I hated losing.

[13:55] Even if it was just a pound. I think I'd be a, you know, people that bet thousands of pounds, I'd be a nervous wreck if I was riding on that kind of a gamble. When the stakes get higher, it pushes us to the edge.

Because we have to. And she, what's she going to do with this vow she makes? In the chapter one. What is she going to do?

You remember the vow she made when she prayed for the baby boy? She said in part of the prayer, she's going to give him back. Now we all make vows when we're in tight spots.

You can see people have done it, do it all over. When, there's a relative of mine, I remember this quite clearly. Not a Christian, but said that at a traumatic moment in the life of her family, was vocal to me about this and said that if, if God saved her daughter, she'd start going to church.

Her daughter got better. Did she start going to church? No. So how do we know if Hannah is going to follow through with her vow?

[15:09] Because this is a massive vow, right? I mean, now we don't know where she's at when she makes the vow, but we know at the very least she comes with great faith in the living God.

These stakes for Hannah, they're huge and to be honest, you'd understand if she backed down. If she said, well, you know, now I've got my son, the one I prayed for for years, you know, actually I think I'd just like to keep him for myself and see him grow up.

We'd understand that and the reason we understand that is because it's in our nature. It's a searching question, isn't it? Why is it hard to follow through on something like this?

Well, I think it comes down with Hannah, it comes down to two things, doesn't it? How much Hannah values her baby and how much she values the living God.

And even as I say that, you might think, well, that's a tough one. Why is that even a choice? But remember, God didn't tell her to make the vow.

[16:16] It's not even a command. She decided to make that all on her own and because of that, you might even expect her to look for loopholes. Like she could easily have convinced herself, you know, I was just emotional.

I didn't know what I was saying. God loves me no matter what. He'll understand. He never asked me for the baby, so of course I can just keep him. And she actually had a legal loophole right in front of her.

Her husband, Elkanah, in the culture, if you look back in the law of the Bible, her husband had the legal right to cancel his wife's vow.

If Elkanah had said to Hannah, no Hannah, you've been praying for this for years and I'm keeping my air, the story ends right then and there.

It finishes. But what we see is not only does Hannah have faith, but so does her husband. The very centre of the story is not actually Hannah.

[17:21] It's Elkanah, verse 23, the very centre of the story. Look what he says when she says, I'm going to wait and wean him and then I'm going to come up. What does she say? She says, he says to his wife, do what seems best to you.

Wait until you've weaned him. And here we have it. Only may the Lord, verse 23, only may the Lord make good his word. Or you might think of establish his word.

Only may the Lord do that. Elkanah refuses to take the legal loophole. Elkanah understands that God's word, his purposes, are bigger than his family's.

He trusts the faithfulness of the living God. Now, if I'm being honest and maybe you might be with me on this one, I'd be tempted to take the loophole.

The reason I know that is because in my own history, I take loopholes even when with things that God has commanded.

[18:32] Never mind things that he doesn't command. We do that all the time. Don't we make kind of agreements? We kind of having a debate with God about, oh yeah, but you know, kind of like there's this thing and like it'll be alright if I do this thing because of this thing that's happened to me.

Like, you know, you think about when we get angry, we're justified in our anger when somebody's wronged us. They wronged me. I've kind of got this loophole because this is how I feel right now.

We take the loopholes even with things we know God clearly commands us not to do and here she is and she has a legal one to take. And does she take it?

Think about how that works out in our own lives. The incredible gifts God has entrusted towards time, finances, homes, families. They're great gifts from the living God.

And the reason we struggle with this is that the thought of holding them with open hands to God can feel terrifying. the stakes can feel too high.

[19:46] Without even realising it the gift can become central to our lives rather than the giver who gave it. And so when God asks us to be generous with our time or open our homes or trust him with our money it's almost natural to look for loopholes.

The loopholes we tell ourselves I'm just being prudent and responsible. I just need to protect my peace and quiet right now. It's not that we want to disobey it's that trusting God with things that are precious just feels like a massive risk.

It's then we come to Hannah's obedience to her own vow. And this passage honestly this is it is dripping with gospel truth.

It is littered with allusions to the good news of Jesus and we see in Hannah a heart impacted by the gospel.

We see a family Elkanah and Hannah who in verse 23 trust the Lord to establish his words and we see in all of their actions first we've got I think we've got like two or three but verse 24 just look with me so this is after he's weaned in those times it's like two to three years after he was weaned she took the boy with her young as he was along with the three year old bull and he put a flower and a skin of wine and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

[21:21] It's massively important to understand what's going on right there. That sacrifice by the way is way more than they needed as a family needed to give away. It is lavish it is extravagant it is

over the top and it was normal that if somebody made a vow to the Lord that should be accompanied by a sacrifice in the temple but also the reason a sacrifice was needed is crucial to understand it's because of this it's because God's perfectly holy and humans in their nature have a sinful condition and a sinful person could not safely stand in God's presence.

It's like trying to mix fire and water. You try and mix fire and water what happens? Whichever is bigger destroys the other one and God is always greater. A mediator is always needed.

The shedding of blood was always needed. The only reason Hannah can approach the tabernacle the temple's not yet built the tabernacle to make her vow is because the blood of the bull covered her sinful condition.

In other words in offering the bull she's saying I only have the right to stand here and keep my vow before the Lord because the life of the bull has been given in my place.

Can you see in bringing an over the top sacrifice she's trusting the good news of the gospel. She's trusting that God will accept her vow because of her death in her place.

[22 : 59] That bull is pointing straight to Jesus. The bull dies so that she can be in the presence of God and that is exactly why Jesus dies so that we can stand before the presence of the Almighty.

The sacrifice far outweighs what was expected yet Jesus is the sacrifice far outweighing anything we could have dreamt.

bull but that's the easy part. Giving the bull was way easiest to what she's going to give away next. Just imagine just imagine what was going through Hannah's mind after all those years two or three years of winning the one thing she wanted more than anything in the world.

and yet they both husband and wife come forward together Hannah and Elkanah holding to her vow she steps forward she steps forward not him to speak in verse 25 when the bull had been sacrificed they brought the boy to Eli and she said to him pardon me my lord as surely as you live I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the lord I prayed for this child and the lord has granted me what I asked of him so now I give him to the lord for his whole life he will be given over to the lord her heart knows that she can trust the god who keeps covenant she trusted him before the baby arrived that's why she worships him before the prayers answered and she can trust him now by placing little toddler Samuel into the lord's care what we see in this whole scene with Hannah serves as a picture of

God's faithfulness to us you think of Hannah's only son she gives over her only son to the lord for all the days of his life but the living god gives over his only son for all the days of our lives and there is a staggering difference Hannah gives over Samuel trusting that he'll be looked after he's going to be cared for and raised in the house of the lord but the lord hands over Jesus knowing that he'll be beaten whipped and crucified the stakes for the living god could not be any higher this is the maximum there could be and yet it's not a gamble for him in any way there is no risk there was this wasn't when the living god gave away his only son this wasn't a chance decision there's no tense way to see whether the stakes are going to pay out the odds were always 100% in the lord's favour and with the winnings not for himself but when he wins victory through his son over death sin and evil and in doing so who does he give the winnings to he gives the winnings over to his people he again is the giver and we the recipients of the gift of eternal life the living god is indeed faithful to his word he's faithful to his covenant promise and so how do we live in light of

[26 : 35] Hannah's trust and her belief in the covenant keeping faithfulness of god well it leads us to a worshipful life you'll notice with me perhaps how the passage starts and ends with worship verse 19 they went up and worshipped before the lord verse 28 last sentence and he worshipped the lord there that is the heartbeat of her life it will be the heartbeat of her son's life her walk is characterised as worship in response to the character of the living god and that worship is not just it's all the way through she begins with worship she faithfully stays to wean her son she brings a lavish sacrifice she takes the initiative to speak with eli you see worship is more than just singing songs or coming to a service but it's every decision we make in life that puts him first and now just as she worshipped god so what we see her son continues and he worshipped the lord there the stakes could not be higher but it's not a risk it's not a gamble there's always a bigger return guaranteed the life of worship is what we're called to and called to it with the highest of stakes and I how might we reflect on that what might that look like for each of us where it flows out of the covenant faithfulness of god because god has given the highest stakes his only son because of that we get to give back to god it is the highest stakes is radical love and obedience you can imagine at this time you wonder what

Penina thought of this she must have thought it looked she'd had all these children she'd had no children and yet Hannah gives the one child it must have seemed crazy it must have seemed like you know love and radical love and obedience that when you know she you imagine she may have even been mocked again by her and I suppose the question is can you be can you be over the top in your love for Jesus can you be over the top in your love for Jesus you know is that a thing people might say when you do something crazy for the lord and say wow that's kind of a bit nuts a bit OTT it's a bit too radical can you be that it also changes how we see answered prayer not because it's wrong to be pleased or maybe even happy with gifts from god he's a good father who wants to bless his children but the gospel freezes from needing those gifts to sustain us when the living god the giver of life is our ultimate prize the gift doesn't function as a post substitute saviour we get to enjoy the blessing for what it is without being terrified of losing it because our true peace is in Jesus Christ alone and so as we come in for landing and we see Hannah following the living God when it comes to following Jesus ourselves the truth is the stakes are always high but it's never a gamble the house does always win but that's okay because God's house is where you live and he shares every bit of his winnings with you it's not a gamble because the biggest chip highest stake imaginable was played at the cross not as a gamble not as a risk but as a guaranteed good news strategy to buy us out of our own sin and death future to give us life and hope this morning if you're debating maybe the particular area of your life or maybe you're considering whether you can put your trust in him maybe even for the first time look at

Hannah and how she trusted look at the stakes the living God was ready to play for you to put your trust in him is not a risk it is not a gamble but it will mean that your future is secure he is the house does always win but you belong to that house let me pray almighty god we come to you knowing that in many ways we would like to would love to grow to be people like Hannah and yet we know there's so many times we make mistakes in those areas of life where we ourselves have made loopholes not just with vows but with even commands from you that we should be doing and we know that it feels like sometimes like the stakes are high to give away things for you feels like a challenge and it is hard and we're terrified of having open hands with the things that belong to us we know that we can't change without the spirit of the living god but we thank you that at the cross you paid for our sin you gave a new life in yourself but also you made us new and every day you're changing us from one degree of glory to another and so I pray Lord and I pray that you would give us a radical over the top love for you a love that may even make other people stop and stare the truth is we can't be over the top love for you you deserve all love and affection even when it costs us help us no matter what the stakes are to always be ready to know that you the giver of life are the one who sustains and that nothing else can and so we praise you we thank you you're a good God who gave the ultimate stake your own son to pay for our new life we ask for this in the name of Christ Amen