**HANNAH PRAYS TO THE LORD**

March 09, 2014

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11 / Key Verse: 1:10-11

**“In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, ‘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.’”**

For a few weeks we have studied Galatians which provides solid foundation of Christian doctrine. Today we will have a break from Galatians study and learn about Hannah’s prayer which is one of the most famous passages in the Old Testament especially regarding prayer life. Prayer life is very practical matter in our life of faith and very crucial. One pastor said, “Who is the true Christian? It is the one who really prays to God in Jesus name as an expression of total dependence of God and personally experience God’s answer.” It is really true because prayer is the key barometer that shows how much a person really live by faith. Today, Hannah’s prayer is very exemplary in believers’ prayer life. In Hannah’s prayer we can learn 3 things. First, bring our problem to God in prayer. Second, pour out all our life burdens before God in prayer. Third, prayer is not always about receiving but giving ourselves.

**First, Hannah brought her problem and pain to God in prayer (1:1-11)**

The book of Samuel starts with the story of one family. Around at the end of the Judges time, there was a certain man whose name was Elkanah, a Levite who belonged to a priest family line (1 Chronicles 6:25-27). He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. Probably Hannah was the first wife but due to her barrenness he got the second wife Peninnah who produced children. Look at verse 3. “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.” Elkanah was a devout man who went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord at Shiloh every year not missing his duty of worshipping God. However, though he was faithful in worshipping God each year, his family environment was not good because there was a big struggle in the family due to Elkanah’s marrying two wives. The family situation was like that of Sarah and Hagar, and Leah and Rachel. There were constant struggles between Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah like Leah had many children but did not receive her husband’s love that much. She suffered a lot due to husband’s lack of love. In the meantime, Hannah like Rachel was childless but she was Elkanah’s Valentine. Elkanah favoured Hannah in actions and languages. Verse 5 says, “But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb.” His favouritism created the undesired result in his family. Peninnah, her rival, provoked Hannah to irritate her till she wept and would not eat whenever they went up to the house of the Lord. These kinds of bully and provoking continued to Hannah year after year. Out of jealousy, Peninnah despised Hannah and spoke many nasty words to her. She did this more during the worship time at Shiloh because they were more together than other times. Hannah could not bear the provocation. So she wept and did not eat. Her troubled heart took away her appetite. In this difficult situation, how did Elkanah comfort her? Look at verse 8. “Elkanah her husband 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?” Wow, here we see how deeply Elkanah loved Hannah in spite of her barrenness. According to what he said, he seemed to want to do anything if only he could comfort her. He comforted her by saying that he could be more to her than ten sons. This is really good husband! But did this good husband make her satisfied in her life? No, she had deeper grief that cannot be solved by just husband’s love and comfort. Then in this troubled life, what did she do?

Let’s read verses 9-11 together. “Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord’s temple. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made vow, saying, ‘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.”

It was a turning point in Hannah’s life. In the past she struggled with her rival or her husband or mostly with herself. She was troubled on herself whenever her rival provoked her. This kind of situation went on year after year. It was really a hopeless situation. But this time she decided to bring her problem and pain to God in prayer. She decided to cast all her burdens upon the Lord by prayer. This decision changed her life from the life of sorrow and bitterness to the life of joy and thanks and honour. This is the very important secret that a person can live very different life from the life of misery to the life of joy and victory and honour when he or she prays earnestly. We can learn this from Hannah. Look at verse 10 again. “In the bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord.” Here ‘bitterness’ means grave pain. When people have grave pain, what do they usually do? They usually fight with people, or drink to escape the reality or become fatalistic with self-pity, and so on. However what we learn through Hannah is that the time of trouble is the time of prayer. When we are troubled, we have to bring our trouble to God in prayer. This makes our life upgraded, lifted through personally experiencing God’s answer. As we know the book of Psalm was written by David around in half of the Psalms. All David’s Psalms were written mostly when David was in very distressed situation. In the Psalm, we see how many times David cried out to God for help and how many times he experienced God’s personal answer. Psalm 18:6 is one of them. It says, “In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.” Because of his earnest prayer, he overcame numerous hardships and troubles and experienced victory after victory over his enemies. Let’s look at verse 11 again. In Hannah’s prayer, we see her prayer topic was very specific. It was “Give me a son.” And her prayer topic was very appropriate to God because it met the basic will of God. According to Genesis 1:28, God doesn’t want us to be barren but fruitful. So when we are barren humanly and spiritually, we should cry out to God for his blessing. Also when we pray, we should pray with clear prayer topics. We should not pray aimlessly beating the air. This year my prayer topics are mainly practicing Jesus’ unconditional love. I have had pain for a long time due to my troubled heart for my son David Jr. Through long period of despair and frustration, I learned that I myself cannot change David Jr. and only God can change him when I pray. This year I really want to bring all my life burdens to God in prayer and experience God’s answer especially in making progress in love relationship with David Jr. and in his future preparation such as his study and changing his old habit.

**Second, Hannah poured out her soul to the Lord (1:12-18)**

Let’s look at verses 12-14. Eli was now the high priest and judge in Israel. So he sat upon a seat in the temple to see what was going on there. He sat there to receive prayers and give direction and he observed Hannah at her prayers. Because when Hannah was praying, she was praying in her heart and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard, Eli thought that she was drunk and rebuked her by saying, “How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.” This was Eli’s mistaken assumption. But Hannah was so mature and humble a woman that she was not offended by his false charge. She bore Eli’ mistake very graciously and replied to him. Look at verses 15-16. “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.” Although Eli made a big mistake to a woman of prayer, she spoke to him with all due respect viewing him as God’s anointed servant. And finally Eli recognized Hannah’s devotion to God and blessed her saying, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.” (17)

Here, let’s think more about the characteristic of Hannah’s prayer. She said, “…I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.” When we bring our troubled heart to God in prayer, how much do we have to pray to God? Hannah gives a good answer. She said, “… I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.” We must pray until we pour out all our troubles to the LORD and no more darkness caused by trouble remains in our heart. In another word, we must pray until we must empty our heart before the LORD and the peace of God may replace our troubled heart.

There was a man who made a great success in his career. He obtained Ph.D. Degree from Harvard University and was invited to be a professor in US. But he gave up his good opportunity of being a professor in US and instead he went to Mongolia as a missionary and as he lived as a missionary there, based on his personal experience, he wrote a book entitled, “Putting down” with subtitle, “the happiest decision of my life”. The theme of this book entitled, “Putting down” is this: “When you put down all of yourself, God begins to work for you.” He said, “Putting down all of myself before the Lord was the happiest decision of my life because by doing so, I experienced how abundantly God filled my life with fullness of his blessing.”

Hannah experienced exactly the same thing by pouring out all her life burdens and sorrows before the Lord. How can we know this?

Let’s read verse 18 together. “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.” Here, “her face was no longer downcast,” implies that she was relieved from her troubled heart. Her sorrow and bitterness was gone from her heart through prayer and now her heart was ruled by the peace of God with clear assurance that God heard her prayer. She began to smile and her appetite was restored. This is the power and blessing of prayer. 1 John 5:14-15 say, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us-whatever we ask-we know that we have what we asked of him.”

**Third, Hannah made vow to God and kept her vow (19-2:11)**

In verse 11, when Hannah prayed to God for a son, she made a vow saying, “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.” Here we learn that our prayer is not always about receiving but also giving ourselves. Hannah learned that through her suffering from barrenness for a long time having a son was God’s great blessing and only God could give such blessing and God was ultimately the only source of life and joy and no one could give her true joy of life; even her dearly loving husband, either. So she knew that God was worthy to receive all her precious thing; even a son whom God could give her. And this was true love and thanks toward God. True love and thanks are “giving.” When we truly love and thanks to God, we willingly give our small offering, time, our children and our very life to God. In verses 19-20, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I asked the LORD for him.” In verses 21-28, Hannah kept her vow by dedicating Samuel to God. As we know it was not easy for Hannah to keep her vow by giving Samuel back to God since all parents have strong desire to enjoy their children for themselves and we believe Hannah had same heart, too. But Hannah sacrificed her human desire and willingly offered his son to God. In 2:1-11, after dedicating her son Samuel to God, she was even more filled with joy and the song of praise to God. She prayed, “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….” Here we learn that when we give back to God what he gave us, we become even more joyful and can live Spirit-filled life. God blessed Hannah’s decision of faith and gave her 3 sons and 2 daughters.

Today we learned Hannah’s prayer. Through her prayer, we learned that we must bring our life burden to God in prayer and pour them out to God to the point that no more bitterness remains in our heart. This dedicated prayer life changes our life from troubled and miserable life to joyful and honoured life. And when we pray, we should not stop just in asking our own problem-solving but go further to give our life to him to honor him and love him. May God richly bless each of you this year to dedicate your life to earnest and whole-hearted prayer life so that you may experience God’s personal answer and your life may be filled with joy and victory!