**Week Two – August 30/31 – I Samuel 2**

**Introduction -** You all likely know what an oxymoron is, something that places apparently contradictory terms side by side, like “humble brag”. **Anyone have a favorite oxymoron?** The last sections of this chapter gives us painful realities smack dab next to hope multiple times. Our God does not gloss over difficulties and he never gives us false hope. He loves us enough to honestly let us know that we will have troubles, and that He is is a trustworthy God who gives us hope that is reliable, true, and rock solid.

**Read I Samuel 2:1-10 -** This section has such joy and praise that one might think it is Hannah’s prayer when she gives birth to Samuel, but it is actually her prayer as she is saying goodbye to him and leaving him with Eli. **What does the timing of this prayer of praise say about her faith?** (Not once in her prayer does Hannah even mention her son; she simply praises the Lord. With this being the time where she is saying goodbye to Samuel, not mentioning him in this prayer is powerful. Her heart is solely focused on worshiping the Lord, rather than lamenting about the difficult moment coming as she has to leave him.)

**What are the truths that Hannah declares about God in this prayer? Which of them would you like to witness and experience more deeply? Is gratitude something that is well built into your life or is it an area in which you need a good amount of growth? Why? If you right now poured out a prayer of gratitude to God, what are some of the attributes/actions of God that you would thank him for?**

One more thought about her prayer - that it is amazingly prophetic:

* In verse 10, “The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.” When Hannah prayed this, Israel had no king; she lived in the time of the judges. **What are the implications of this verse and who would become the ultimate anointed one?**
* Hannah’s prayer alludes to the arrogant (v.3), the mighty (v.4), and the wicked (v.9), which foreshadows the coming problems with Hophni and Phinehas.

**Read I Samuel 2:11-26**

This section is an interesting club sandwich - two big hunks of “hard hearted religious leaders” separated by three slices of hope. As painful as verses 12-17 and 22-25 are to read, verses 11, 18-21, and 26 give us hope of the fresh work God is doing in and will do through Samuel (and Hannah).

There are no nuanced ideas here about whether or not Eli’s sons were decent guys. Verse 12 is direct and clear - “wicked men” and “had no regard for the Lord.” They were greedy. They were dismissive of God. They were bullies. **As we consider their greed, what are areas in your life where greed may creep in? How do you guard against it? As we consider their propensity to be bullies, note that many of you may have positions with some degree of authority in your future careers. How can you prepare your heart and your path so that you don’t succumb to using your authority for your own gain? How have you seen other leaders in your life handle this well?**

With all the slimy choices of Hophni and Phinehas, this section is hard to read. However, the last verse (26) stands in contrast by offering hope despite. **What are your tendencies when faced with a series of problems AND a glimmer of hope? Are you more likely to focus on the stack of challenges or the glimmer of hope?**

**Read I Samuel 2:27-36 -** In this section the Lord (through the man of God) asks Eli rhetorical questions to make him recall all that God has done for him, and how God chose Eli’s tribe out of all of Israel to be priests. After this, Eli is rebuked because of what he has done with all of the responsibility he received. Uncle Ben was right - “With great power comes great responsibility.” *Editor’s note to Spiderman fans - Uncle Ben stole that from Jesus, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.” (Luke 12:48)* :)

We know nothing about this “man of God” who appears in v. 27, but he is a great reminder that God can always drop “unexpected characters” in our story! **Does anyone have a story of an encounter in life where someone you barely knew had a spiritual impact on your life?** It is beautiful the ways God can surprise us in the ways He can bring us hope, encouragement, and even correction.

There is so much language here pointing to God being personal and active around Eli - “clearly reveal” (v. 27), “I chose” and “I also gave” (v. 28), “I prescribed” and “my people Israel” (v. 29). **In your life now, are you more likely to view God as very distant and detached, as very personal and active, or somewhere in between? What has led to that tendency?**

Eli is asked at the end of verse 29, “Why do you honor your sons more than me…?” **What are you personally tempted to honor more than God? (approval of others, performance in grades and other standards, comfort and my own gain, other?)**

It is tragic to watch Eli be completely aware of the problem in front of him yet do nothing about it. **What do you think is the primary reason that Eli, who walks as an upright, godly leader in other places, winds up being the guy who honors his sons above God?**

* **This is just the easier path.**
* **He has established a pattern of not involving himself with the actions of his sons and he can’t break out of that pattern.**
* **He does not want them to have to give up their only known livelihood.**
* **A mix of these? Or other?**

God once again follows painful news (v. 27-36) with a glimmer of developing hope in (v. 35). **As you look at verse 35, what are some of the most hopeful words that you find there? As you look at 34-36, how much do you see of punishment and how much do you see of promise? How do these verses impact your view of God?**

**Conclusion and Application**

**Read Matthew 8:23-27 -** In tonight’s sections about Eli’s sons, it is easy to feel the weight of oppression and pain that they caused and miss the hope to come. As the disciples were tossed around, it was easier to see the storm than realize that Hope was with them in the boat. **Do you feel that you are growing in the faith it takes to shed off worst case scenarios (“We are going to drown!”) and embrace the hope of Jesus being right there with you? How so? What are the biggest obstacles to you consistently believing and living the truth that Jesus our hope never leaves us or forsakes us (Deut 31:8, Mt 28:20)?**

Spend time praying for each other - (Here you can possibly ask people to pick one of the following that they need particular prayer for right now.)

* That each of us would grow in gratitude and faith like Hannah
* That we would listen to God’s voice on dealing with blind spots, repenting from places where we have refused to change, and trusting Him to transform us
* That each of us would cling to hope and look to Jesus more than at the storm

**Challenge: What can you do this week to grow in embracing the hope Jesus offers you?**

**Additional Notes**

I Samuel 2:26 is amazingly similar to Luke 2:52, which brings up two ideas to consider:

* This is an example of how the Old Testament is abundantly full of allusions and shadows of the Christ who is to come.
* Samuel is a model to us who seems to often “get it right”, but it is also evident later that he is not sinless. Every believer can “grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people,” but this growth does not save us. It is only Jesus the perfect Redeemer that can restore our relationship with the Father.