What Makes for a Good Prayer?

Last week we discussed “collective prayer,” i.e. prayer done by a group of people and often for a specific purpose. We looked at four specific examples from Acts (2:24; 4:23-32; 6:4; and 12: 12-13). In none of those instances do we actually have a record of the prayer. We know only generally the subject of the prayers.

This week we will consider what makes an effective prayer by looking at a transcript of a prayer made by Hannah in I Samuel 2:1-10 (reprinted below). Before reading the prayer recall the circumstances leading to it by reading I Samuel 1. Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, was childless (1:2) because the “Lord had closed her womb.” (1:5). Elkanah loved her and gave her a “double portion” whenever annually went to Shiloh to worship (1:5). The other wives of Elkanah used to “provoke her [Hannah] grievously to irritate her.” (1:7).

The first recorded instance of Hannah praying is in I Samuel 1:10. It is in this prayer she vows to devote to God any child born to her. (1:11). This is the thing for which Hannah is best known. Eli, the priest, informs Hannah that God would “grant her petition.” (1:17). Ultimately, Hannah becomes pregnant and gives birth to Samuel (1:20). Hannah recognizes that Samuel was born because “I have asked for him from the Lord.” (1:20). See also 1:27 (“for this child I prayed, and the Lord granted me my petition that I made to him.”).

Chapter 1 makes it clear that God affirmatively responded to Hannah’s prayer. He gave her exactly what she had prayed for. Why did God grant her prayer? What is it about Hannah’s prayer that caused God to respond as He did? Maybe we can get some clues when we look at the attitude and spirit in which Hannah prayed to God. **Read Chapter 2:1-10 carefully. Highlight things in Hannah’s prayer you think important.** Eli was so impressed with the prayer that he blessed Elkanah and Hannah and said “may the Lord give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the Lord.” (1:20). Ultimately, Hannah’s petition/prayer was so well received that God blessed her not only with Samuel, but with “three sons and two daughters.” (1:21).

We’ll discuss what we can learn from Hannah about the effectiveness of prayer and how we can incorporate that into our prayer life.

**I Samuel 2:1-10:**

And Hannah prayed and said,

“My heart exults in the Lord;  
    my horn is exalted in the Lord.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
    because I rejoice in your salvation.

**2**“There is none holy like the Lord:  
    for there is none besides you;  
    there is no rock like our God.  
**3**Talk no more so very proudly,  
    let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
    and by him actions are weighed.  
**4**The bows of the mighty are broken,  
    but the feeble bind on strength.  
**5**Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,  
    but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.  
The barren has borne seven,  
    but she who has many children is forlorn.  
**6**The Lord kills and brings to life;  
    he brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
**7**The Lord makes poor and makes rich;  
    he brings low and he exalts.  
**8**He raises up the poor from the dust;  
    he lifts the needy from the ash heap  
to make them sit with princes  
    and inherit a seat of honor.  
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,  
    and on them he has set the world.

**9**“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,  
    but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,  
    for not by might shall a man prevail.  
**10**The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;  
    against them he will thunder in heaven.  
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;  
    he will give strength to his king  
    and exalt the horn of his anointed.”