



Judges 21:25 1 Samuel 1:1-11 & 19-22

TITLE SLIDE

A few weeks ago I looked at the subject of hope, because central to the Christian faith is hope. I thought of this passage from 1 Samuel this morning knowing that we had a dedication, only to find myself going back to what I last preached on four weeks ago - hope. I think you'll see what I mean as we go along.

One programme on TV Michael watches is called
SECONDS FROM DISASTER

This looks at stories of disasters, what happened and why they happened.

CONCORDE

Here's one of the stories that they covered – the crash of the Air France Concorde near Paris in 2001. The horrifying thing about this picture is that it is seconds before the plane crashed into a hotel killing 109 people.

TENERIFE

Even worse is this graphic from the show showing the Tenerife air disaster of 1977 where 583 people died when a Jumbo Jet taking off hit another taxiing across the runway. Remarkably, some people survived, but most died. With a collision like that, few people have any hope at all.

NO HOPE SLIDE

It's like those old cowboy films isn't it. There are the lost cowboys in the desert, miles from the nearest water, and the vultures are circling around waiting for lunch! The world sometimes seems like that doesn't it?

PAKISTAN FLOODS Take the Pakistan floods recently. Here was a situation that was out of control. And it led to seemingly hopeless situations like this one.

Whether you are a Christian or not, sometimes life seems out of control doesn't it? There are situations where there seem no hope of change; no hope of anything being different in our lives. And where is God? Somehow we can't see Him. Or perhaps that's because we have pushed Him out or never invited Him in? Here's a video clip.

OUT OF CONTROL

TITLE SLIDE

The story we read this morning was against the backdrop of a land in crisis. Society was collapsing as people did whatever they saw fit. JUDGES SLIDE Even though Israel had been specially blessed by God, people were no longer faithful to Him. Even the religious leaders were corrupt, particularly Hophni and Phineas who were very dodgy. Eli their father was more weak than corrupt, allowing his sons to do things that under the law, the Torah, they should not have been allowed to do.

The story may be thousands of years ago but it is so fresh because human existence is such that we do the same thing over and over again, never learning from past experience.

We live in a world where we do our own thing. But does that make us better people for it? Does it make our society better for it? And whether we are believer or not, as the clip showed, other things can push God out. He's pushed out to the edge of our live – or perhaps all together. And when things go wrong, then rather than

pointing the finger at ourselves, we blame God. And it seems that there is no hope.

But into our story comes a glimmer of hope in the form of Elkanah and his family. Amidst all the chaos, they remained faithful to God and continued to worship God in the temple at Shiloh regularly, even though the priests Hophni and Phineas were as dodgy as a three pound note. This was in the period before the building of the Temple at Jerusalem, when the Ark of the Covenant was probably still in a tent-like structure – certainly not a stone building.

But before you think that Elkanah and family were super-blessed for their faithfulness, we read of Hannah's struggle with childlessness. Rhiannon and I know of her experience just as David and Faith do. The trip to Shiloh should have been a happy family occasion but to her it was a horror. It was an opportunity for the family to thank God for His goodness to them, but for her it was just a reminder that she hadn't been blessed with children.

Elkanah had two wives – this was a time when having more than one wife was permitted. Elkanah was therefore a polygamist – a sucker for punishment! Perhaps he had acquired the spiteful Penninah because Hannah had not produced a child – but we don't know that from the story. What is clear from the story is that Penninah looked down on her and belittled her for being childless. It's awful but there are people who do that. Make out childless people that they are less than a woman or less than a man.

Of course, most people are not like that. They are like Elkanah who tried to comfort her but I think she would have found him a bit patronising, particularly if she had been replaced with Penninah as a more productive model. That's the other annoying thing about childlessness. People try to tell you how much better life will be for not having children. That's what we were told. Think of all the holidays we could go on. Think about all the money we would have. And children only bring you pain after all. It's funny how people who speak like that are parents themselves! Not very helpful. That said, some people don't mind about being childless, some even choose it. That wasn't true for us.

So here was Hannah, a woman in personal and spiritual pain; deeply sad in the place where she should be finding help and comfort. Is that where you are this morning? Your issue may not be childlessness. It may be health problems, money problems, family problems, marriage problems, loss of a loved one, or the fact that you just feel far from God. And you struggle with it and find it difficult to cope. That happens to Christians as much as it does to people who aren't or not even religious.

Then let me put the first frame up from the clip earlier
GOD HAS A VISION FOR YOUR LIFE
because this story is a message of hope.

The interesting words used here was that *the LORD had kept her from having children*. It seems a harsh thing for God to have done but we do know that his story has a happy ending. But actually, if we do understand that God has a vision for our lives, then we know that whatever situation we find ourselves caught up in, God can turn it for His good if we recognise that God can and will actually do that.

TITLE SLIDE

I kept putting up this picture. It's from an air show where a military aircraft went out of control. Everything looked doomed, but the pilot knew that he had an ejection seat which could save his life if he pressed the eject button. He did and sharp eyed people can just see the the ejection seat and the pilot and his parachute flying through the air.

HANNAH PRAYED

Hanna recognised that there was an eject button in this situation and pressed it – she prayed.

... AND GOD BLESSED HER WITH A SON. Now when we pray we don't always get precisely what we want when we want it, even though Hannah also tried to cut a deal with God. *"Almighty Lord, look at me, your servant! See my trouble and remember me! Don't forget me! If you give me a son, I promise that I will dedicate him to you for his whole life and that he will never have his hair cut."* Actually, one thing that comes through the whole of the Bible is that God is a God of grace. He favours people without merit on their part. If that wasn't true then how could anyone explain why God favoured Abraham, or Jacob, or Moses, or David. All men favoured by God but so flawed in many ways. The Bible is also full of stories of flawed people who made promises to God

and never kept them, or others who made rash promises they were then forced to keep.

HANNAH DEDICATED HER SON TO THE LORD But Hannah was good to her word and dedicated her son to the Lord as she said she would. We have witnessed a dedication this morning. We have not asked David and Faith or the church to make promises quite as dramatic as Hannah's, but dedication is a recognition that God has given a child to our care and we must respond back by dedicating ourselves not to just be nice to them, but to use the old phrase – to bring Olivia-Grace up in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

HANNAH DEDICATED SAMUEL TO THE LORD For Hannah it was far more dramatic as her promise was to offer Samuel back to the Lord to be brought up at Shiloh and to encourage him into a special commitment to God known as the Nazirite vow which involved amongst other things not cutting his hair – well, it saved on hairdressers' bills and razor blades! But it seems amazing after so longing for a child, that Hannah gave Samuel up and only visited him once a year after she handed him over to Eli to be brought up in the temple. But because of her honouring her vow, two things happened. In many ways, that must have been a painful experience too for her. Firstly God's plan worked out, not just for Hannah but for Samuel and the nation of Israel. He was a great prophet and the last of the Judges and paved the way for the transition of Israel into a kingdom. But secondly God blessed Hannah for her devotion and preparedness to hand Samuel over to Him – she was blessed with three sons and two daughters after this.

God honours this kind of commitment and devotion to Him. Sometimes we don't see it immediately but we always see it in the end. But before you start to think that God expects people to do things He knows nothing about, this story also points forward to a God who never asks of others He wouldn't do Himself. Take a look at this verse – I'm sure its familiar to many of you.

JOHN 3:16 It speaks of a God who gave up His Son for a higher purpose. Jesus died for each one of us so that we could each know forgiveness of our sins and enter into a living relationship with God, not just for now but for eternity. As a result of His act of devotion to the human race, we each can enter into that relationship. This is the ultimate message of hope.

TITLE SLIDE The human race is doomed – it's separated itself from God and to bring us back to the beginning.

But we have to make that decision for ourselves. That's how God challenges each one of us this morning.

CLIP

TITLE SLIDE

So if you don't know Jesus this morning, then this is God's invitation to you to press the eject button and find Him and find hope.

If you have major issues in your life – then like Hannah, bring them to God. There's not need to make a deal with God, but expect Him to do things with your life that you never expected!

As we look at what God has done and what He's doing in our lives, Let's dedicate ourselves afresh to Jesus, our Saviour and Lord, to follow Him and be faithful to Him