

Sermon - Great Expectations – Samuel

Pastor Ed Blonski | December 7, 2022

Expectations

When it comes to expectations, what's the difference between a "wish" and a "hope"? That's a question that I expect we can find an answer to this evening.

What do you think of when you hear the word "expectations"

As we delve deeper into this message series called "Great Expectations" I'll start by asking you to silently answer this question, "What do you think of when you hear the word "expectations."

i. A Woman "Expecting"

One of the things that I think of is a woman who is expecting a child. A pregnant woman is often described as "expecting."

And that is exactly what we're going to talk about today – the expectations of the birth of a child.

The woman is "Hannah", and the child is "Samuel."



Samuel – the Expected One

Samuel was the expected one. His mother was expecting him when she had no natural reason to do so.

Like Sarah before her – with Isaac, and like Elizabeth centuries later – with John the Baptist, it was going to take a miracle for Hannah to have a baby.

Samuel's Hebrew name שְׁמוּאֵל comes from the Hebrew phrase "I have asked/borrowed him from God." That's what his mother was praying for, that's what God gave her, and that's what he was!

Hannah's Expectations



Hannah's expectations had several different facets that I would like you to remember. Because I think they will help us with our expectations today.

That she would have a baby

One facet of Hannah's expectations was that she would, indeed, have a baby.

I believe this to be natural for just about every newly wedded woman. That is the reason many, many people get married – with the expectation of starting a family!

But Hannah wasn't like all women.

Sadly, she was like many women, however, in that Hannah couldn't have children. She was what the Bible often calls "barren."

And although the English Bible translation of 1 Samuel says that the Lord was the reason for Hannah's barrenness, that he "closed her womb," I should point out that the Hebrew translation of this phrase is far from certain.

What is certain is that the Lord is in control of this entire situation and – spoiler alert – He will do something about it!

Hannah had expectations of having a baby with her husband. But that expectation was so long in coming as to be thought to be a fruitless expectation and it caused Hannah to be very sad – understandably so.

That God would hear her prayer

But that didn't stop Hannah from praying! Because in addition to Hannah's expectation that she would have a baby, she also had the expectation that God would hear her prayer!

She never stopped praying to God. No matter how bad she felt.

No matter how ridiculed she was.

No matter that the head religious guy in the land criticized her for the way she prayed.

Hannah never stopped praying because her expectation was that God would hear her prayer.

What she would do if God answered her prayer

And Hannah's expectation that God would hear her prayer shaped what she promised to do when the answer came.

i. Answer "No" – we can only speculate

We can only speculate what Hannah would have done if God answered "No" to her prayer for a child.

My thought is that she would only stop praying when there was no breath left in her body.

ii. Answer "Yes" – she said what she would do

But we do know what she promised to do if God answered "Yes."

1 Samuel 1:11

"O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

iii. Hannah's Expectation Bargain with God

I realize that this appears to be an instance of bargaining with God. And that may be exactly what it was.

To which I would answer, bargaining was not necessary. God will do what He will do without a bargain made on our part. He's God, after all.

But this is what Hannah does. Right or wrong, she promises God that if He gives her a son, she will dedicate him to work for God all his life and that he will never have his hair cut.

This, by the way, is what is known as a Nazarite vow, and that's described in Numbers 6:1-21. Notable Nazarites in the Old Testament are Samson and then Samuel.

Right or wrong – the bargaining on Hannah's part – God makes good out of it because that is what God does!

Romans 8:28

...[for] those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

And another spoiler alert, God does indeed call Samuel!

Samuel's Expectations

So, in addition to Hannah's expectations I want to talk about Samuel's expectations.

That God would speak to him

Even as a young boy, Samuel's expectation was that God would speak to him.

Samuel's reply to God doing so is a great lesson to us for when God speaks to us, "Speak, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:10).

That's a great prayer to pray whenever you start to read the Bible for your personal devotion times!

That God would directly rule His people

Another expectation of Samuel was that God would directly rule His people.

By the time Samuel arrives on the scene of Israel's history, God has been the sole King of Israel. Yes, there have been a series of "judges" – starting with Moses and then Joshua and including people like Gideon, Deborah, and the aforementioned Samson.

But in Samuel's day the people start to grumble that they want a king like all the other nations.

Maybe a better word than grumble would be "whine." Like petulant children.

Samuel warns them that if they get a mortal king, there will be a draft, taxes, and compulsory labor.

But God told Samuel to let them have their King.

That God would "punish" Israel by answer their prayer for a king

God would allow this shift in their form of government to teach them a lesson. One way I've heard this stated is that God would punish Israel by answering their prayer for a king with a king!

God says to Samuel, "*They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them*" (1 Samuel 8:7).

Israel's Expectations

That God would give them a king

After nearly 400 years of God has their King and various judges leading them, I get the feeling that the Children of Israel that left Egypt under Moses feel they are “all grown up” now.

They are ready to be like all the rest of the nations – having a mortal king from among themselves.

“Surely, God will give us a king!” was their expectation.

Lesson – be careful what you ask for!

This is a great lesson in being careful what you ask for – you just might get it!

If you want to find out how it went, go read 1 Samuel 9-31 and 2 Samuel. There was some good in there, but a lot more bad!

Expectation – the difference between “wish” and “hope”

What can and should we learn from this?

One of the lessons I see is to know – in expectations – the difference between “wish” and “hope.”

Wish

A wish is an expectation that we want to be true despite all evidence to the contrary.

I wish I could sprout wings and fly, but there is zero chance of that ever happening!

Hope

Hope, on the other hand, is an expectation that, despite the craziness of it, will actually come true!

Followers of Jesus hope that they will live forever in heaven with God! And despite so many voices in the world, in history, and in our own minds, that actually is an expectation that will come true!

Because Jesus Christ was born, lived perfectly on our behalf, died on the cross to forgive all our sins, was buried like nearly all dead people are but rose from the dead



like no one else did in order to give us eternal life with Him in the new heavens and new earth when He comes back!

That's an expectation of hope!

An expectation that Hannah teaches us!

Hannah prayed with Hope

That her prayers would be heard

Hannah's expectation of hope was that her prayers would be heard – and they were!

That her prayers would be answered

Hannah's expectation of hope was that her prayers would be answered – and they were! Samuel was born! And Samuel was a powerful judge and prophet for God!

That God's will be done!

Hannah's expectation of hope was, ultimately, that God's will be done – and it was.

And Jesus invites and teaches us to pray exactly that, "Thy will be done." Because it will be, powerfully and truly for our good!

Expected Results



So, here's what I hope you'll take away from this message.

Hope – How we should expect answers from God

When you pray to God, pray with hope. Meaning pray expecting God to hear and answer your prayer.

Because God will hear you. God will answer you.

Now, I will warn you – be careful what you pray for, you just might get it!

Samuel was God's answer to prayer

Hannah prayed for a baby. God heard her prayer. God answered her prayer with Samuel.

i. Hannah for a child

Hannah kept her word and dedicated Samuel “to the Lord.” He worked in the Lord’s Tabernacle starting at a young age. He was a worker for the Lord all his life.

ii. Israel for a king

In contrast to Hannah, Israel wished for and, in a way, prayed for a king – a mortal king from among themselves, not God only.

God heard that prayer. God answered that prayer. Even though it wasn’t what was best for Israel.

God had to let them go through that so that they would finally understand His plan and way for them. Which would ultimately be revealed in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of His Son.

We need to pray hoping our prayers will be answered

As followers of Jesus we need to pray with hope – hoping our prayers will be answered. Otherwise we’re missing out on the precious gift of prayer that God gives us.



We need to pray with imagination as to how God will answer them.

But we need to pray with imagination. Imagine how God will answer our prayers.

He always hears our prayers. He always answers our prayers. But God doesn’t always answer our prayers as we would like Him to.

Keep an open mind as to the best that God wants for us!

When it comes to prayer, there is a difference between wish and hope.

Pray with hope – that God will hear and answer your prayer and surpass your expectations!