

Powerful Dependence

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1 Samuel 2:1-10

“The Lord will.. exalt the power of his anointed.”

Movement 1 – Can you praise the Lord?

Can you praise the Lord? Can you shout out at the top of your voice the glory of the Lord? Can you stand up and clap, can you stomp your feet, can you raise your hands in joy and glory, in glory and joy? Can you praise the Lord? Are you at a place where you are ready to run to your neighbor and spill over with the love of God? Are you at a place where you can run to the stranger on the street and gush about your connection, your friendship, your reliance upon God? Are you at a place where you never find yourself embarrassed, you never find yourself searching for words? Can you praise the Lord?

This need to praise is a strong feeling we encounter in our life. It is that feeling you have when you hear that your loved one’s surgery went well. It is that feeling you have when your child returns home safe, when your spouse finds a job, when the results come back negative, and when you realize that God is with you. It is that moment when God makes a way out of no-way. It is that feeling you have when you realize that you were protected by the hand of God. Are you there right now; are you at a place where you can praise the Lord?

I think most neophytes in the faith are more ready than others to shout God’s praise. These new converts are full of life, excitement, and love for the Lord. They are new to the feeling of forgiveness, they are still overwhelmed by the love of Christ, and the newness, this freshness, leads them to want and need to praise the Lord. Maybe you have seen this new Christian, or maybe you know this neophyte of faith, and you admire their spunk. Maybe you remember what it was like for you when you could also shout such praise and glory. I’m asking you, today, can you praise the Lord?

Can you praise the Lord with Hannah? When I read this prayer in 2 Samuel, when I read the joy that Hannah had, I wondered if I could praise the Lord in the same way. Here in the text we find such power, such hope, and such joy which is palpable, and threatens to overwhelm us. You can feel Hannah grabbing you by the arms, her beaming smile, jumping up and down, shouting God’s praise. You can almost feel Hannah dancing around the room, filled with such exuberance towards the Lord. Do you know why Hannah is shouting such praise? Did you know that Hannah could not have children? It was a mark of shame and a burden in her life. She was mocked by the other women, she brought herself down because she could not bare a child, and she prayed to God again and again for hope.

God answered her prayer.

God opened her womb.

And Hannah praised the Lord! She praised with thanks, she praised because of glory. Hannah praised the Lord.

Let me ask you again, can you praise the Lord? I ask because sometimes we find ourselves in a rut and routine, and we forget to praise. Sometimes we loose the excitement and the passion that we felt when we were new to the faith. Sometimes we loose the freedom to shout, to jump and to declare our “amen” to the convictions of grace and glory. Sometimes, especially those of us who worship with “ice,” get to a place where we can feel like curious onlookers to other Christians who are outwardly praising the Lord. Like children in a classroom

watching other children playing outside, we find ourselves looking through our own glass of decorum and couth, of respectably and appropriateness, wondering what it might be like to freely praise God with such strength and power as we witness Hannah, and others shouting, singing, and dancing. Can we dance with David? Can we shake the tambourine with Miriam? Can we sing songs in prison with Peter (Paul)? Can we praise the Lord, or are our legs held down, are your hands heavy, are your voices hoarse, so that you can no longer dance, shout, and sing God's praise? Can you praise the Lord?

Movement 2 – Do you remember when you had nothing?

Take a chance with me, and remember the time when you couldn't praise the Lord. I don't mean that time when you didn't know the Lord, but that time when you couldn't. Life was too difficult, the worries, the dangers, the concerns were too heavy on your heart. The world was pulling you down, and you couldn't find the strength to look up. It was that time you struggled through a difficult illness. It was that time when your family situation was strained and stretched. Remember that time when your responsibilities become so heavy that you could barely walk. Remember that time when you could not see the light of day. Remember that time, remember the darker times in your life, and ask yourself, could you then praise the Lord? Could you see yourself shouting praise when you did not know if you would survive tomorrow? Could you praise the Lord when your worries for your child were so heavy on your heart? Could you praise the Lord when life was so heavy and pulling you down?

Maybe that is where you are right now, today. Maybe today, you are at a place where you can't praise, where you can't shout with joy, because the concerns, the worries, the weights of life are pulling to strongly. Maybe you can understand and you can relate to what I'm talking about; this feeling of hopelessness and despair. You can't pray, because you don't have the words, or the hope to offer praise.

Remember Hannah yesterday, before she could bear a child. Look back one chapter, and you can hear a prayer not of praise but of petition. In anguish and shame and despair, Hannah prayed to God for help. Have you ever found yourself next to Hannah? Have you ever found yourself in that place of despair. Are you there now?

Remember the prayer of Israel at this same time. They are led by judges not by a king. Their country is still unsettled and chaotic, and had no real hope for the future. They could not offer songs of praise, but instead prayers of petition for help, hope, and safety. Yesterday, Hannah could not praise the Lord. Think of Job, who lost his family, his home, his livelihood, and even his health. He could not offer praise to the Lord.

In the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the early recruits were anxious to go into the glory of war. They were almost praising the god of war, ready to run into the glory of battle. Then they meet the seasoned veterans. These were soldiers who had no hope, who had no joy, and spoke of little glory because they had seen the horrors of war. They cannot praise, because there is nothing in their life that will let them praise.

Some of you today are in a place where you cannot praise the Lord. Some of you are now looking for help, hope, and grace from God, and find it hard to praise. The shouts of alleluia are hoarse in your voice. Your hands are heavy from working and worrying, and you cannot lift them to the glory of God. You are not in a place where you can praise the Lord.

We have all been in that place. We have all been in a place in our life where we found it difficult to praise. Maybe we need to remember those dark, difficult days. Maybe, as we look and we wonder about those who can praise, we need to look back at the days when we only saw one

set of footprints in the sand. It is not an easy place to go, but I am asking you to take that risk, and remember the time when you couldn't praise the Lord.

Movement 3 – Do you realize how you now still need the Lord?

Remember when and realize that we need the Lord. Our dependence on God continues every day. Our reliance on God carries through every day. Even if life is going well for you, can you realize how you need God still? Consider your life today, the challenges, the difficulties and the burdens you still carry. Who here is not carrying responsibilities? Who here is not carrying burdens? Who here is not carrying fragile hopes and dreams that can easily fall, crashing and be swept away. Who here is not struggling to live a life that is worthy of the Lord? We are taught by the world to rest on things like our nest egg. We are taught by the world to rest on things like our goods that we have gathered, collected and stored. We are taught to rest on things like our own strength. But money will be spent, things will be lost or break and our strength will fail. The other day I was talking with a friend of mine about how easy it is to fall into a place of financial insecurity. It only takes on auto accident, one sickness, and one furnace to break and we can find ourselves in a place of financial chaos. Think of your work at school. How easy would it be to slip from passing to failing? Fail one test, miss one assignment, and turn one paper in late and your academic carrier changes. Think of those working in the auto industries that are told that they may lose their job. One day you have security, and the next day it is gone. Life is full of constant pressures and responsibilities. We are constantly juggling responsibilities for our friends, our families, and our lives, and it is very easy to slip. The pressure itself is enough for us to turn and say, "Yes, we need the Lord."

With my work here at the church I constantly have to relay upon the Lord. There is more that needs to be done than is possible. There are more burdens than I can hold or attend to, and I can't attend to every need that darkens the doors of the church. And I think about who I am as a person, as a person of faith, and remember that there are times when I doubt. There are times when I question, when I wonder and struggle with the will of God. Alone, I can't preach, I can't teach, and I can't live into the vocation as your pastor. I need the Lord.

Do you also need the Lord, today? Do you need to hear that you are forgiven? Do you need to hear that you are loved? Are you sure of your salvation? Are you sure of your life? Jonathan Edwards, the fiery congregational preach of the 1700s, preached this kind of dependence. He would call people to remember their salvation, and wonder if it was assured. Edwards was pushing them to fall into a dependence on the Lord, and that is where I am calling you to go right now as well. Realize that without God we have little to nothing! Hannah prayed for a dependence on the Lord in a time when there were not any fertility drugs or other methods to encourage conception. She had to depend on the Lord. Israel had to depend on the Lord for safety and security in a time when they were without a central political system. We all need the Lord.

We have to depend on the Lord for grace and forgiveness. We have to depend on the Lord for strength and wisdom. We have to depend on the Lord for hope and peace. Life is difficult, life is challenging, and life is demanding. Even if your life has changed for the better, you still need the Lord.

Movement 4 – Depend on God!

Realize how much you need God, and you can start to depend on God. God will pull us daily into glory! God will stay with us, and bless us and help us. God has been with us, and will

continue to stay with us. You remember when you couldn't praise God, and do you remember how God pulled you through the grace and glory. You remember when all you knew was darkness, do you remember how God pulled you through to glory. Do you realize how God has reached down to the darkest point of your life and pulled you up? I am calling you to remember those moments, because then I think you can start to hear and understand and even say Hannah's song of praise.

This is a song that does not speak of people getting by day to day, but of the broken made mighty. This is not a song that speaks of people holding onto the basic standard, but of the hungry being made full. This is not a song that speaks of basic care, but of powerful care for the least, the poor, and the low. The poor are made rich, the low are exalted, the barren bare child, and the feeble are given strength. This is a song of God reaching into the darkest night, and making the stars shine. This is a song of God going to the deepest valley, going to the most difficult mountains, and making the way level and smooth. Remember those times when you were in despair, realize how God has helped you, and you can relate. Even now, we can see ourselves as people who, without the Lord, have nothing and we realize how much we need to depend on God. Even now, we can see ourselves as people we look to God for hope and strength because we can look nowhere else. It is a difficult and honest place to be, and at the same time it is a place where we can truly begin to depend on God.

It reminds me of the way John Wayne's character acted towards the prostitute in the movie *Stagecoach*. In that movie, Wayne's character was looking at someone who the town condemned as dirty, worthless, and no good. But Wayne looked at her and saw someone holy, blessed, and beautiful. In the same way, God looks at us, and sees someone holy and beautiful, and can make us so.

Fall into God's grace, because we can't rest on anything else. We can't rely on money, or power, or pastors or parishioners, but only on the Lord. Fall into God's grace because our skills will not be enough. Our strength will not be enough. Our desires will not be enough to truly and fully live with the Lord. As a church we have to fall into God's grace. As people we have to fall into God's grace.

Soren Kierkegaard suggests that when one becomes a Christian, he or she must forget everything that he or she once knew and learn a new life in God. That is what we have to do. We have to forget the idea that we are the ones who can make things new. We need to shed the idea that we have the resources to build ourselves up. We need to drop the presumption that our gifts will be sufficient for the ministry of this church. Look at Hannah's song, and notice that it is God who is doing all of the work. Notice that God is the principle and primary actor. We have to learn to trust, to rest and to follow God. God will lead us, and pull us into glory. We only need to follow.

Movement 5 – This is the beginning of the walk

When we follow the Lord, we can begin to praise the Lord. When we walk with God, when we trust God, then we will begin to praise God. Not because of anything we have done. Not because of any feat we have performed, but because of what God will do with us. Hannah walked with God, stayed with God, and God opened her womb. Hannah could praise the Lord because of what God had done.

Or think of Dorothy Day. Dorothy Day grew up an atheist, had a questionable marriage and divorce, and had little direction in life. She could not praise the Lord because she did not know the Lord, and she had little in her life with which to praise. Then she started going to

church, she started learning about Christ, she dedicated herself to Christ and God changed her life. God gave her hope and passion and made her a new person. She devoted her life to serving the working poor, the lower class; she helped to start the workers movement. Before, without God, her life was empty and meaningless, but when she started walking with God her life changed, she found hope, she was made new, and she could praise the Lord. It wasn't because of anything she could do, or that she did, but because she trusted God, and walked with God. When we follow the Lord, then we can begin to praise the Lord.

Today can be the beginning of your walk with Jesus. You can start today following Jesus, trusting Jesus, and resting in the God's grace. Let go of your old life that rested in material things that trusted in your own strength and your own abilities. Look to the Lord and let the Lord change you. Let go of your old life that rested in and idolatry that believed you could earn your own salvation. Rest in the assurance that your salvation, your redemption, and your forgiveness are offered freely through Christ by God. Let the Lord make you a new person, let the Lord give you a new speech, and you will walk with a new step, as you walk with Jesus. We are straw without God, let God lift you up. We are lowly without Christ, let Christ exalt you. You lack speech without the presence of the Holy Spirit, let the Holy Spirit give you speech that is bold and that speaks truth. And you will begin to praise God.

God can change us and changes us. God can change this church and God is changing this church. Just as God changed Hannah, just as God changed Mary, just as God changed Paul and just as God has already changed you and me God is working with all of us. The song *Amazing Grace* is so apt at this point; we once were weak but now we are strong; we were blind but now we see. Even the composer, John Newton, was changed by the grace of God. After almost losing his ship and his life, he began to walk with Jesus, and he could then praise God. There is nothing we can do but walk with the Lord.

We need to let go of our faith in everything else. We need to rest on the grace of God, walk with God, and we will be changed, and we will begin to offer true praise.

Movement 6 – Can you praise the Lord?

Can you praise the Lord? This is where we started. This was the question that I asked at the beginning of the sermon? Maybe you couldn't answer. Maybe you weren't sure if you could praise the Lord, you have lost or forgotten that passion you once had. Yet now we have sat with Hannah, who was mocked and ashamed. We have wept with her and we have prayed with her. Witnessing the great and glorious things God has done, we have praised the Lord with her. I have asked you to remember your own life; the moments and times when you were in darkness. I have asked you to remember the time when you could not live your life on your own, when you could not walk without God's help, and when you truly needed the Lord. I have asked you to consider how even today we cannot be a church; we cannot truly live without God. I have asked you to realize how, without God, this church is empty and shallow, but with God, this church can be great and glorious. Then I have asked you to follow Hannah's footsteps and trust in God, and let God change you. Have you already seen how God has changed you? Have you already seen how God has graced you and how God has graced this church? Now let me ask you again, can you praise the Lord?

Can you praise the Lord with your trust, with your faith, and with openness to the ways that God can and will change you? I have challenged you to pledge and commit your prayers to the Lord. I have challenged you to pledge and commit your time and your talents to the Lord. Today I'm asking you to consider your resources. Can you pledge your resources to the Lord

with a sense of faith, trust and praise? Remember that your blessings come from God, and I'm asking you to give to the Lord and trust that God will take care of you. I'm asking you to give to God through this church and trust that God will take your gift, bless it and make it holy through the ministry we do as a church. I'm asking you to give doxologically, in a spirit of praise. Let your offering be a sign of your praise of God. Can you praise the Lord?

Let your commitment; let your walk be a gift to the Lord. Have faith, have hope, and have joy that God will continue to lift you up and exalt you. Praise the Lord. Fall down before the Lord with your gifts, with your life and offer your praise. Shout out, holy, holy, holy and praise the Lord. Let us all, with our gifts and with our lives, praise the Lord!

AMEN