

# Where True Honour Lies

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[ 0 : 01 ] The scripture reading comes from 1st Samuel chapters 1 and 2. Please follow along on the screen the bulletin or your own Bible.

Starting in verse 1 we read. There was a certain man of Ramathayim Suphram of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah, the son of Jeraham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuth, and Ephraimite.

He had two wives. The name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophani and Peninnahai, were the priests of the Lord. On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnahai, his wife, and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah, he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb.

[ 1 : 31 ] And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year.

As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore, Hannah wept and would not eat. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Hannah, why do you weep?

And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons? After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose.

Now Eli, the priest, was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly.

And she vowed a vow and said, As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth.

[ 2 : 53 ] Hannah was speaking in her heart. Only her lips moved and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman.

And Eli said to her, How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you. But Hannah answered, No, my Lord. I am a woman troubled in spirit.

I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink. But I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman.

For all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation. Then Eli answered, Go in peace and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.

And she said, Let your servant find favor in your eyes. Then the woman went away and ate. And her face was no longer sad.

[ 4 : 00 ] They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the Lord. Then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah, his wife.

And the Lord remembered her. And in due time, Hannah conceived and bore a son. And she called his name Samuel. For she said, I have asked for him from the Lord.

The man, Elkanah, and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vows. But Hannah did not go up.

For she said to her husband, And as soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the Lord and dwell there forever. Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Do what you seem best to you.

Wait until you have weaned him. Only may the Lord establish his word. So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him.

[ 5 : 03 ] And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, and ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

And the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh, my Lord, as you live, my Lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord.

For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore, I have lent him to the Lord.

As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there. And Hannah prayed and said, My heart exalts in the Lord.

My horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord, for there is none beside you, and there is no rock like our God.

[ 6 : 18 ] 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.

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hidden themselves out for bread. Those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.

The barren has born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down to Sheol, and he raises up.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low, and he exalts. 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. 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.

[ 7 : 30 ] 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. Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, and the boy ministered to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest.

This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Bernard and Angeline, for reading that. Happy New Year! Happy New Year! Great. There are some people who are excited.

That's really good. Welcome, everyone, to Watermark. Just in addition to Simon's welcome, it's really exciting to see you in 2022. And as Oscar shared, we have no idea what this year has coming up, but actually I'm excited because we're going to be moving in a new sermon series in 1 Samuel, and just really excited to see what God's going to do in us as a church over this year.

So let me, before we start, let me just pray for us as we get going. Father, I just want to thank you so much that there is none holy like you.

[ 8 : 48 ] Father, I pray that this year, regardless of how our feelings are, regardless of what our desires and what our plans are, I pray that the boast of our hearts will be at the end of 2022.

There is none holy like our God. That we'd say there is none besides you. There is no one like you. Lord, I pray that you would humble us this year so that we see that our honor and our glory comes from you and not from anyone else.

We would see that even as we look through this book of Samuel, Lord, that when we trust you, that you are the one who is so faithful, you are the one who is so true, that we need to look nowhere else other than to you at this time.

Lord, I pray for those of us who have had a really tough 2021. I pray, Lord, that you would just minister to us and give us courage and hope for 2022. I pray for those of us who had a great 2021. Lord, I pray that for 2022, Lord, we'd not trust in our own abilities or our own success, but we'd run to you knowing just how much we need you.

[ 9 : 54 ] Lord, I pray that this year we'd be a church which knows how to pray in all weathers and in all circumstances and to see and rejoice in your salvation. So, Lord, we just give you this.

Please open our hearts, open our ears to see you and to hear you, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Great. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Chris and I am not quite that short.

So, let me just... All done. There we go. Great.

I have a love-hate relationship with these things. So, great. Just really excited to be going through Samuel in this series and if you've got your bulletin, please kind of have it open so that we can kind of refer to the passage as we go.

But just to kind of set the scene a little bit, I don't know when you were a kid what you wanted to do when you would grow up.

[ 10 : 55 ] For me, one of the things I dreamed of, I dreamed of being a cricketer for England and a rock guitarist. Not at the same time, but that was my career progression that I was hoping to go for

and none of those have materialized, as you can tell.

But I bet whatever you would answer to that question that none of you would answer that you wanted to be a mortuary beautician. Does anyone know what a mortuary beautician is?

Rhoda does. Okay, you can talk to Rhoda afterwards. But a mortuary beautician is when someone has died, it's someone who puts the makeup on the corpse afterwards.

And I read in the SCMP of one person who described the work that she did for a relative of hers who'd just died and here's what she said. She said, my aunt looked so gorgeous like never before. And I read that and I wondered what her aunt had looked like before she had died. But in one sense, the picture there is actually, the book of Samuel is actually brilliantly going to tell a narrative which cuts right to the heart to show us that it's possible to spend your entire life, it's possible to focus so much on the outside and making up the outside to look beautiful when what's on the inside can actually be rotten and dying.

[12:23] And so the whole of Samuel's message can be summarized from chapter 16 with this phrase which is, man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.

You see, and you're going to see this again and again. You're going to see it how Eli's sons versus Samuel, you're going to see it with Saul versus David, you're going to see it with David versus Goliath and all the way through you're going to see God actually looks beneath the surface and he looks to see are you trusting him or are you seeking your own glory and your own honor for yourself?

And that's where the book is all the time through multiple narratives is going to show us this theme. And originally the book of Samuel was actually, it's so long, it's actually one book, one Samuel and two Samuel, actually there was only Samuel originally but it was so long that they put it on two scrolls and it became two books.

And it's the story of the rise and fall of two kings, Saul, King Saul and King David. And actually the way that it's written, the Hebrew Bible actually has Samuel coming straight after the book of Judges.

The Greek order which some of our New Testament Bible follows, it has a different order but the Hebrew Bible has Judges first and then Samuel next because do you know how the book of Judges ends?

[13:50] And Samuel, by the way, is the last judge of Israel. The book of Judges closes like this, in those days there was no king because everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

That's the backdrop to the whole book of Samuel. It's a dark time, everyone's doing what they want to do. And even the religion was corrupt and you're going to find that the sons of Eli's who were the priests, like the pastors of the time, they were a nasty, dodgy piece of work.

So it's a dark time and what we're going to look at in this first opening chapter or so is three things. We're going to see a family, a little glimmer of light that comes in this darkness with a family and we're going to look at the shame of Hannah because it's really focusing on Hannah, this first part. The shame of Hannah, the response of Hannah and then the boast of Hannah. Okay, so that's where we're going with this narrative because in this story what you find is you find a husband called Elkanah and he seems like a good guy.

He's still following the Torah which is the law of Moses which called you to go up to the tabernacle, God's meeting place which was at Shiloh, this place at the time, to offer what were called fellowship offerings as worship to God.

[15:17] Okay, so and this time of fellowship offerings, you would sacrifice an animal and then it was like a community barbecue. You'd eat the meat, you'd kind of offer the sacrifice, you'd kill it and then you'd share out the meat and everyone would sit around and have an amazing party.

It'd be like Christmas and New Year all rolled into one. Deuteronomy 12 actually tells us like everyone was to rejoice before the Lord. It was a happy occasion and so you have here this family who's going up and there are two wives.

There are two wives. One is called Hannah and one is Penina and if you notice Hannah's name comes first in chapter 2 which commentators think means she was the first wife married and so what happens as she's coming there and it's supposed to be this joy-filled time everyone else is laughing but Hannah is weeping.

She's the first wife and yet the text then says in verse 2 it says Penina had children and Hannah had no children.

Do you notice whose name comes first now? You see Hannah's name now comes last because socially she's considered inferior because she can't conceive.

[16:40] She can't have a child and in a family culture where your honor your status your whole identity for a woman was wrapped up with whether you could bear children and carry on the family name this was absolutely devastating for her.

There's no kind of medical support to help things along and we know this in Hong Kong you know for some of you who've experienced the pain of not being able to conceive and you may know people with that it can be a really painful hard situation but in Jewish culture it was so huge for them I mean do you remember the story of Abraham and Sarah and God comes to Abraham and says to Abraham listen I'm going to give you an amazing reward and Abraham replies what can you give me I don't have a son like there's nothing you can give me that is worth anything if I don't have a son and that's the guy imagine what it was like for the woman in that time for a woman to be unable to bear children was considered by many to be a curse from God for maybe some secret sin that she had and the text seems that says twice the Lord had shut her womb and for Hannah she has got every right to think well maybe

God's against me in some way what's going on and if that wasn't bad enough you then see different responses from people but I mean Elkanah though he loved Hannah he didn't do what Isaac in the book of Genesis did when his wife was barren Genesis 25 says this Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren and the Lord granted her granted his prayer Elkanah doesn't do that he's a kind of typical guy okay he takes the matters into his own hands he tries to fix the situation and does what everyone else in the culture would do because Hannah's not getting children so he marries another wife which was Penina and his little plan seems to work because Penina is just knocking out kids like nobody's business and Hannah's there looking on left behind and here's where it says it says verse 6 her rival notice how it's phrased her rival used to provoke Hannah grievously with deep grief it caused her why to irritate her what a wonderful woman right like just to show that she's superior and she's better than her year after year at this celebration she cruelly rejoices in Hannah's failure like what good are you Hannah like why are you so useless and Elkanah that's kind of Penina's response pretty harsh right Elkanah's response well like most of us guys he's actually got good intentions okay ladies if you are married or if you're not most guys have some good intentions okay but he's totally clueless when it comes to this kind of deeper emotional issues that are going on right now and so his response in verse 8 when Hannah is weeping you know a lot of guys don't know what to do when women are crying and so what he does he goes why do you weep why do you not eat why is your heart sad super empathetic right you want him as your counsellor and he goes oh and what he says have another piece of steak a double portion that will make everything better isn't my love enough for you and Hannah's kind of response

I can imagine is no Elkanah you don't get it at all my wife often says that to me you know but I'm trying in my logical way to kind of fix the problem come up with solutions and it doesn't work okay that's just a tip for you husbands and actually as husband let me just talk to the guys for a second if you are a husband many of us when we have marriage issues many of us when we have just issues with our family we turn into fix it mode we try and find the solution and the worst thing for us is actually if it ever seems to work for a while because it blinds us to our actual incompetence and this passage for husbands there is a challenge here Elkanah at no point you see him praying but actually you can be a nice guy like Elkanah but actually the passage is going to call us if we're going to lead our wives and lead our families well in 2022 do you know the number one thing that you need to be doing as a husband your wife so how are we doing in that because you know it can be like hey the kids are going crazy okay you go hey love let's just pray about it together because that is what

[22:02] Christian leadership is going to look like for us to be guys who initiate and lead by praying with and for our wives not trying to fix the issues that's an aside but that's there because Elkanah who's fixing leads to Hannah being trampled on and crushed and this doesn't happen just once do you notice what it says verse 7 it says it went on year by year man that's crushing isn't it there's just no way out of this oppression and this sense that she doesn't know what's going and then to make Hannah worse okay if that's not bad enough society shames you it's not bad your rival wife is shaming you your husband doesn't get you and then it's even worse because it feels like church is judging you as well because she goes to pray and

Eli the high priest who is the most respected religious leader of the time he sees her praying silently and he knows what the culture is like everyone has just had a big party and so in her most vulnerable state he comes over to her and identifies her as a worthless good for nothing drunk he says how long will you go on being drunk put your wine away from you do you know what he's saying he's basically telling her we don't want your type around here get out man cursed cursed by god she feels rejected misunderstood judged shamed even by the religious people around you how do you respond when you're in that place you know I heard one pastor say this and I think it's true he said when people are mildly distressed they often pray you know you've got a job interview or something you're feeling a bit stressed you might pray about it when you're moderately distressed you sometimes pray but when people are deeply distressed they rarely pray we rarely pray when you're really hurt or when you really feel helpless we often fail to pray but these moments are the defining moments of our lives they are the crossroads of our hearts because how we respond will shape the entire trajectory of your heart and life when you are in those moments that is where Hannah is in the moment of the deepest pit of shame hurt judged misunderstood offended in so many ways what's her response and I love this because what you discover as you look through and verse nine you see that Hannah she's a victim right but she doesn't have a victim mentality she's a fighter she's a woman of backbone and steel in her in the midst of her helplessness she doesn't just stay bitter she doesn't just stay kind of comparing it's not fair she doesn't kind of withdraw she doesn't just vent to her friends she doesn't go I'm going to show Penina verse nine it says after they'd eaten and drunk in Shiloh Hannah rose I love that some of us need to learn how to rise because some of us have stayed living in the court of human opinion for too long living under the offense of other people maybe hurtful comments maybe even just jealousy or just comparison at work or in other places you stay bitter at circumstances and we're coming into 2022 and God says there's a new chance because

Hannah in that place she rose she gets up out of the place of shame she goes to the tent of God's presence to pray and here's how she prays verse 10 she was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly that's not how many Christians pray many of us as Christians we kind of pray superficial prayers she pours out her entire soul to God some of us think you can't tell God if you're angry if you're hurting or you're in pain because you know Christians you're supposed to be full of joy all the time and you know he might get a bit annoyed that's actually the enemy because you know shame always wants to isolate you from others but also from God in the deepest wounds of your heart and that just leaves you with yourself but actually the place of helplessness is the place of prayer because it is a great place to be author

Oli Hallisby said in his book on prayer here's what he said he said only he who is helpless can pray now listen to this this is really insightful only he who is helpless can pray your helplessness is your best prayer it calls from your heart to the heart of God with greater effect than all your uttered pleas what does he mean he's saying that prayer that is not from a place where you know your absolute helplessness and need of God is like asking God just to put the icing on the cake but we'll make the cake ourselves it's like we'll stay in control of our lives you just kind of fix a few things I can't fix but helplessness invites God into your uncertainty into your distress into your weakness into where you feel like I don't know how to do this and that's where he's going to get glory by showing his power in your weakness as he brings his answer and you know it can help when you unload your feelings to your friends or to your spouse but I fear that many of us substitute sharing with friends with actually talking to God about our deepest issues even about what you're thinking for 2022 and so let me encourage us as a church if your friend unloads to you listen to them really well don't be like

[ 28 : 40 ] Elkanah be empathetic listen to them but at the end say hey can we give this to God now because his shoulders are way bigger than mine and he can handle this you see Hannah prays and runs to God in a helplessness but the second thing that she does and this is also super challenging second thing she does she surrenders to God her greatest desire here's what it says her prayer verse 11 and she vowed a vow and said oh Lord of hosts the God of all the armies all the heavenlies the most powerful God if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant and 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 this is really remarkable if I was to say to you what do you want right now more than anything else just think for a minute what do you want more than anything else and if you were going to pray for that what would you say you know better job promotion whatever it is we might say hey God give me this

I'm praying for this God help me out of this situation whatever but if what you then said was and I'm willing to surrender completely the answer to you it's totally in your hands take it it's your will I give it back to you just like you remember Abraham offered his most precious son on the altar and just like Hannah now makes a vow and offers the son that she craves more than anything else in the whole world as a Nazirite which means somebody who is fully devoted to God set apart from him to go and live in the tabernacle to be there away from home in Shiloh she says I give him away back to you it's actually insane because this son could be the answer to every one of Penina's attacks right if you go okay yeah just look at my son this son could remove all her shame in the village this son could give her a new status identity and honour and yet she says

I am willing I desperately want that but I'm willing to give him back to you in worship do you see what he's saying she's saying she's saying I want this badly but actually I want to know God that you care for me that you remember me and that I as your servant want you to be honoured more than I just want to get my personal comfort my situation sorted out I want you to be my treasure and only your love can cover my shame more than Elkanah's come more than even having this son can cover my shame you are the source of it all that's what she's saying I'm your servant it's not about me it's actually about you that's a really powerful prayer because you see everyone else Eli Elkanah everybody else they're offering small animal sacrifices to God on the altar as worship and everyone's going oh you guys are amazing but actually they look and judge

Hannah as cursed by God but Hannah is offering the most precious and the greatest desire of her soul to God as worship because she knows that her God is faithful and her God is good and God sees her heart it's beautiful I mean what do you want this year what do you want what are you praying for how willing are you to say God I surrender that to you and I trust you with the outcome more than this job more than this relationship because I know that you are the place which will cover my shame you are the place which gives me honor you are the place which will satisfy me you are my treasure because when we trust God in that kind of place do you see what happens in verse 18 verse 18 says then the woman went her way and ate and her face was no longer sad suddenly she found peace and joy again you know some of us can pray and we get up from prayer miserable still burdened going well that was no use because we've not reached the place of surrender we've not reached the place of finding God as our treasure do you know the Puritans they used to say pray until you pray

I love that pray until you pray that means keep coming back to the presence of God until you walk away with a peace knowing God has got this and it's in his hands and I'm going to trust him with this keep praying until you get to that place and the amazing thing is God answers Hannah gives her a son who's called Samuel who's going to become the king maker as we're going to go on in the story and the amazing thing is Hannah doesn't go back on a promise even when she experiences the sweetness of the son and that maternal bond that she has man that makes it hard to keep going with your promise doesn't it but even at that point she's still going God I want you to be my treasure and she takes him to live at Shiloh to worship God there it's a super challenging response after the shame that she's experienced but finding the response that she goes through of running to God in prayer surrendering and finding

[ 34 : 45 ] God's grace in the midst of it and the final thing that we see is not the shame not the response but the boast of Hannah how are we doing good Annabelle's good I'm going to just look very briefly chapter 2 verse 1 to 11 this is just there's time we could do three sermons on this but I'm going to go really briefly 2 verse 1 says that this is actually a prayer of Hannah it's a beautiful prayer but do you notice something if you look in your bulletin it's not addressed to God at all it's actually a testimony of answered prayer for us as readers to make note of and actually in this testimony are the themes of the whole book of how God raises the lowly and brings down the proud but actually this testimony is a boast he says that there is none holy like the

Lord that means God doesn't work the way we work his operating system isn't the way that we operate he works in our weakness to show his power as Paul says his glory is shown in taking the weak things of the world to shame the strong and going into 2022 for each one of us we have a choice this is where Hannah's going we have a choice of whether we want to live in the court of human opinion or whether we want to live in the court of God's opinion because human opinion is a court that looks at the outward appearance and it wants to associate in some way with what seems successful which seems powerful secure respectable whatever it is if you say I work at Google or I went to Harvard or even I went to Hong Kong U that's honour people go oh really that's honour

because you're associated with someone who's got respect or someone who's got cred street cred right but actually you've got to keep that up because actually if you have been to Hong Kong U many of you feel like well no I'm not that honourable yet and so that's what keeps us continually striving and striving for more it's the relentless chase in Hong Kong because the court of human opinion the court of Penina's judgment and even the court of Eli's judgment initial judgment is a fickle court it boasts of your position and it looks down on other people who haven't made it but you know one moment you're praised and then the next moment you're forgotten and notice in the passage it says here it says verse 3 talk no more so very proudly let not arrogance come from your mouth and then he's going to go the mighty the full the one with many children the exalted one he then brackets them actually in the wicked and he says those people that everyone looks at and says wow you're so impressive he says they will be the broken the hungry the forlorn those who hire themselves out for bread those who are cut off in darkness what he's saying is trusting in yourself and just the outward appearance looks like glitter but in the light of God's judgment and he is the ultimate judge the glitter soon falls on the carpet and gets swept away and all that impresses you all that glitters is not gold that's the title of our series but if you live in the court of God's opinion it's a court of joy sometimes pain but a court of joy which looks at the heart which wants to associate itself more with God than what the world thinks it's a court whose boast is in the hope of God himself and Hannah says in verse one my heart exalts in not myself but in the Lord my strength is exalted in the Lord I rejoice in your salvation you see this joy is actually the joy for where he goes through it's the feeble it's the hungry it's the barren it's the poor it's the needy it's those who know how much they need God and it's those who are faithfully wanting to go to him the faithful ones looking to God those people in that place they're the ones who will be they will have strength they will cease to hunger they will sit with princes they will inherit honour which is not just here one day and taken away and the next they are the one who are guarded and protected in 2022 it's a court for those who run to God in their helplessness knowing their need and knowing he's the one who comes through every single time and the thing is this it's a challenge you cannot live for both courts you cannot live for the court of human opinion and the court of God's opinion you've got to choose one of them because you see the gospel says this the one who has the name above all names the most honoured one Jesus Christ is the one who had no beauty that we should desire him he was despised and rejected by men we've looked at Christmas how he was born in shame the lowest of the low to a young peasant girl called Mary who actually sings a song in Luke chapter one which is just like Hannah where she exalts she proclaims how God exalts the humble and brings down the proud and this king Jesus he grows up and he seems to be successful for a little while he attracts the crowds but John says he doesn't entrust himself to them because he knows what's in a man he knows how fickle the court of human opinion is and he's totally right because even as he's going around doing good the religious leaders turn on him judge him call him a follower of Satan condemn him and he gets betrayed rejected by all alone and then in Gethsemane at the point of his greatest helplessness do you know what he does he goes let me just fix this let me call down a legions of angels just to come and just show you who's boss here no he doesn't he prays it's an agonizing prayer of distress it's not kind of nice [ 41 : 38 ] British kind of polite prayer and he says God if there's another way out of this I don't want to die I don't want to be separated from you please give me another way you know he's totally real we don't expect that of Jesus do we but that's what he calls us to and then he surrenders his greatest desire and says but it's not my will but it's yours I want you more than I want me and on the cross the ultimate shame and humiliation Jesus is treated as cursed by God mocked and scorned by others in a worse way than Hannah ever experienced and he prays again and he says into your hands God I commit my spirit and then he dies and then he rises again in power and the place of greatest weakness the place of greatest shame the place of greatest dishonor in everybody's eyes on the human court becomes the place of the greatest glory and the greatest honor and the greatest vindication from the court of heaven and if you're a

Christian today this is our king this is the one we're following and so in 2022 the question is who do you want to be associated with most who will you boast in God because when Jesus is your boast our helplessness our weakness whatever struggles we go through or don't go through becomes a chance an opportunity to run to him and to find and revel and delight in him do you know have you ever tried sharing the gospel and it just felt weird and just super awkward and people just kind of went roll their eyes or maybe made some sarcastic comment and you and you just went away going

I never want to do that again anyone done that maybe it's just me do you know what's happening at that moment I'm allowing the court of human opinion to judge me but what if actually at that point I actually said I came in prayer and remembered that actually my honour is from associating with Jesus not from how well I performed and we go we remember he says you're my dearly loved son you're my dearly loved daughter I'm proud of you I am pleased with you and at that moment if his voice counts more than other people's voice to you you can go wow I understand just a little bit just a tiny fraction of what Jesus went through the shame he experienced and here's an honour for me to be associated with him and you can rise with joy and peace and go out again that's freedom right that's freedom let me close with this Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall he was really good at sitting you know for an egg to sit on a wall is pretty impressive and then

Humpty had a fall and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again do you know what a tragedy it would have been if they'd managed to fix him or even worse if he'd managed to fix himself because he'd have gone hey I'm a pretty good egg fixer and he'd have boasted in himself maybe just put his shell back together everyone else would have gone wow so impressive but inside he would have been empty but if and the nursery rhyme doesn't tell us this I'm using a bit of imagination here he like Hannah had prayed at that moment of his breaking on the floor the mess that was there I don't know what would have happened but maybe God would have made him into an omelette or something that's just speculation guys just don't quote me on that but it would have been for the delight of many people and when they looked at him they wouldn't have praised him they would have praised the chef who had actually made one mess of a life and turned it into something of beauty and honour and glory

I am so challenged by this passage personally if I can be honest you know we this year for us we're going through transition we're going to be moving to pastoring a church in the UK in Manchester and it's a church that you know they've said to me hey we want to bring change we want to draw new people in a lot of congregations are much older than myself and as I look into the year my prayer is kind of God I pray that things will grow I pray that you would just kind of bring new people you'd save people that you'd create a success out of all of this and I feel completely inadequate to do so I don't know what's coming up and my temptation is to try and strategize and plan and try and go okay here's all the things I've got to do okay make sure I've got to do this get to do that and try and get all my ducks in a row but you know the problem is and this is where

[ 47 : 08 ] God has challenged me he's challenged me to pray not just to kind of go ahead and try and plan but you but to he's buttoned he's all the know the desire for things to work really well will I surrender even the desire that people think oh you're doing a good job because, you know, that is actually really scary because I fear failure.

But at that moment, God has just been saying to me, it doesn't matter whether other people get excited or disappointed. That's not the issue. The issue is, will you take joy in me and just pleasing me and be like Hannah?

Because when I'm at that point, I know, because I've seen it so many times, that God is faithful. God is faithful. And when I do that, there is a peace where I don't have to fix everything and that takes the stress way off.

So 2021, some of us have felt very broken. Some of you, it's just been a hard time, a hard year. And you felt hopeless. Some of you have just been waiting for God's answer.

I believe this year, that God actually wants to draw you and to bring you to a place where at the end of this year, you will have a testimony, a boast like Hannah does.

[ 48 : 34 ] That you have seen how he has exalted and honored you in a way that you couldn't by yourself. He's going to bring restoration into your life. I really believe that for some of you.

But he calls you, just keep running back to him in prayer. Some of us, actually, you want to be strong and successful this year. My prayer for you is actually God breaks you.

Not because I'm being cruel. But actually because you need to know, like Humpty Dumpty, and like Hannah, that when we learn to boast in Jesus and not in ourself, that's a place of greater freedom than when everything goes right for you.

And that's a place where this year, in our church, my prayer is that maybe people look at us and we go, hey, you did really well or maybe you didn't do really well.

I don't know. But actually my prayer is, in one sense, that's not the key thing for us. The key thing for us is that we want to boast in Jesus and we want him to be honored more than we even want the best desires of our own hearts.

[ 49 : 41 ] And we're willing to surrender this year to him and watch and see what he does with it and be surprised. Let's pray. Amen. Maybe you just need to think how you are looking at this next year.

How you're looking at your desires. Maybe you just need to respond to him. Some of you need to respond in just thanks and praise. Because actually God has been so good to you and you have seen his faithfulness.

Some of us need to respond in repentance because we really are trying to just fix things and it's become stressful in so many ways. Even as Oscar shared, we've been so centered on ourselves and our problems that we fail to see God in the midst of it.

And some of us need to just walk by faith this year. Surrendering and trusting him that whatever's going on, whether it's an amazing year or whether it's a tough year, he's got us and he's going to bring us through.

So Father, I just pray that as a church, our greatest boast would not be in ourselves, but with how that you take and lift the needy out of the ash heap to make them sit with princes and give us an inheritance of honor.

[ 51 : 16 ] I pray that that would become so precious to us that we don't have to live for the honor that comes from other people around us. That we have such security in you that we can walk in a freedom this year with a joy so that actually if you provide us with abundant blessings, it's not going to inflate our egos.

Or if you take away certain things, that's not going to deflate us completely. But we'll learn how to run to you in all and every situation and find joy in the King of Kings.

In Jesus' name. Amen.