

The Forgotten Father

1 Samuel 1:21-28

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Father's do ever feel neglected on Father's Day?

1. You know what I mean: the kids want to make something special for Mommy on Mother's Day, you take her out to a nice restaurant, you pamper her, and Father's Day rolls around, and it's the same ol' thing.
2. If you've ever felt that way, don't despair:
 - a. Before the widespread use of cell phones, there were more collect calls on Father's Day than any other day of the year.
 - b. Also, fathers receive far fewer cards than moms: About 140 million moms receive cards for Mother's Day, compared to just 90 million days who get Father's Day cards.
3. Dads (and moms), did you realize that we get one day out of the year dedicated to us.
 - a. Egg salad gets a whole week. As do pickles, pancakes, pickled peppers, split pea soup, clowns, carpenter ants and aardvarks.
 - b. Peanut butter, chickens, and oatmeal each rate an entire month!
 - c. But, we can take solace knowing that national treasures such as rubber erasers and moles also only merit a single day of recognition.

B. This morning—because I will be away next Sunday—we will talk about a father who has truly been neglected.

1. We have read the narrative of Samuel's birth countless times, but we've read this passage from the standpoint of Hannah.
 - a. How many Mother's Day sermons have you heard from this text? But, how many times have you ever heard a preacher come here on Father's Day?
 - b. The fact that Hannah and Samuel remain popular names testifies to our emphasis in this text. How many boys do you know by the name of Elkanah?
 - c. In my living room, hangs a picture of a woman's holding a baby with the words of Hannah: "I have asked for him from the LORD" (1:20).
2. Poor Elkanah!
 - a. He has been neglected through centuries of Christian preaching and teaching.
 - b. However, as we read this narrative, it becomes quite clear that it wasn't just Hannah who was so godly, but Elkanah was everything we need a father and husband to be. In Elkanah, we see a father who was **LEADING, LOVING, & LISTENING**.

II. LEADING, v 3.

A. Elkanah "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, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD."

1. Three times a year Israelite males were to travel to the sanctuary to offer sacrifices.
 - a. "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed." (Deut 16:16).
 - b. While the men were required to sacrifice, they were required to bring their households with them in order that the households might eat and rejoice before the Lord: "You shall seek the place the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you" (Deut 12:5, 7).
2. Here's the point:

- a. Elkanah was not only faithfully going to Shiloh to sacrifice as the Law required, but he was faithful in leading his family in doing the right thing.
 - b. Elkanah is quite like Joshua when Moses' successor declared: "If it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh 24:15).
 - 1) In his farewell address, Joshua speaks for God and recounts the Lord's mighty acts on behalf of the Israelites.
 - 2) Joshua calls on his hearers to make a decision: to rid their hearts of the idols their forefathers had worshiped and to serve solely the Lord.
 - 3) And, he concludes with his famous call for action: You can choose whatever deity you want to worship, but my family and I are going to worship the true God.
 - 4) Joshua stakes his claim in a pagan world: I'm going to do what's right, and I'm going to lead my family in doing what's right.
- B. Oh, that we had more men like Elkanah!
1. We understand, do we not, that God intends for us to be that kind of men.
 - a. About Abraham, God says, "I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice" (Gn 18:19).
 - b. God "established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children" (Ps 78:5).
 - c. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4).
 2. Fathers play a very, very important role in the development of their children.
 - a. Dr. Paul C. Vitz, professor of psychology at New York University and a former atheist, is the author of *Faith of the Fatherless*.
 - 1) In his thought-provoking book, Vitz diagnoses the root causes of atheism and agnosticism.
 - 2) In studying the biographies of many of the leading atheists of the past three centuries, Vitz concludes that virtually all had an absent, distant, harassed or abusive father early in their childhood—often before 18 months of age.
 - b. Did you realize that the United States leads the world in fatherless countries, and that nearly 34 percent of American children live apart from their biological fathers?
 - 1) That poses great dangers for our society.
 - Research demonstrates that children who live apart from their fathers are approximately 2-3 times more likely to use drugs, to experience educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems than are those who live with their married or adoptive parents.
 - Children with engaged fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy and prosocial behavior, and avoid high-risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy, and criminal activity compared to those children who have uninvolved fathers.
 - 2) Are we loving fathers who are engaged in our children's lives?

III. LOVING, vv 4-5.

- A. "On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah 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," vv 4-5.
 1. The worshipers ate sacrifices under the OT: Deut 12:17-18.
 2. What is interesting from this passage, however, is not that Elkanah did as the Lord instructed, for he was leading his family in doing the right thing.

- a. Yet, he gave Hannah a double portion, for he loved her, though the Lord has closed her womb.
 - 1) There was great social stigma in the ancient world for barren women. It is possible that Elkanah married Peninnah simply because Hannah was barren.
 - 2) As we mentioned a couple weeks ago, Scripture presents children as a gift of God:
 - Jacob introduced his children to Esau by saying that they were “the children whom God has graciously given your servant” (Gn 33:5).
 - “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Ps 127:3).
 - Hannah recognizes this principle herself and says, as she prays to the LORD: “f 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” (v 11).
 - The opposite would also obviously be true: if the Lord had not given a woman children, God was punishing her.
 - b. Even though Hannah was not what an ancient woman was expected to be, Elkanah loved her.
 - 1) In today’s world, so many are interested in love for what they can get out of it: they enjoy being with the person, their partner allowed them to move up the socio-economic scale, or their partner gives a lot of nice gifts.
 - 2) True love—as we have mentioned—is more concerned with giving than getting: Elkanah clearly demonstrates that type of love.
 - “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 3:4-7).
 - “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph 5:25, 28).
- B. Gentlemen, how much do we truly demonstrate love to our wives?
1. If they have worked all week, helped with baths and bedtime, are we willing to give them some time off?
 2. Do we demonstrate affection for our wives in front of our children? As we demonstrate affection to our wives, our sons learn how they should treat a woman and our daughters learn how they ought to be treated?
 3. Are we willing to do our part around the house so that everything doesn’t fall on our wives?
- C. The cliché has been told many times but rings very true: “The most important gift a man can give his children is to love their mother.”
1. Doing so provides children a sense of security. A fourth-grade girl wrote about her father: “He treats my mom very nicely, which makes me feel wanted.”
 2. Loving our wives also provides our children with economic security. The number one predictor of children living in poverty is an absent father.
 3. According to research by the federal government, healthy marriages provide numerous benefits to children: children from healthy marriages are more likely to attend college, they are less likely to exhibit problem behaviors in schools, and they are less likely to become pregnant or impregnate someone.
 - a. The government has also found benefits of healthy marriages for women: they are less likely to contemplate or attempt suicide, they have better relationships with their children, and they are emotionally healthier.
 - b. Fellas, we also gain benefits from healthy marriages: we live longer, we have more steady employment, and we are less likely to commit violent crimes.

IV. LISTENING, vv 21-23.

- A. “The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, ‘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 seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the LORD establish his word.’”
- B. Elkanah, in his devoutness, goes up to offer his yearly sacrifice.
1. Hannah says, “Honey, I’m not going this year. I’m going to wait until I’m no longer nursing Samuel. Then, I’m going to present him before the LORD forever.”
 - a. Hannah, as she prayed before the LORD, made a vow to do that very thing: “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” (1:11).
 - 1) The fact that no razor would ever touch his head may indicate that Hannah was making the vow of a Nazarite (Num 6) for her son.
 - Many point out that this could not have been the Nazarite vow, for that vow was not usually for life and was not entered into by proxy—you made the vow yourself.
 - Yet, Samson is a notable exception—the angel who spoke to Samson’s mother said he would be a Nazarite and he would be a Nazarite from the day of his birth until the day of his death (Jud13:4-7).
 - It is, in my view, therefore, at least plausible that Hannah made a life-long Nazarite vow for her son.
 - 2) Why would I even mention the possibility that Hannah made the Nazarite vow for Samuel?
 - The purpose of the Nazarite vow was to separate oneself to the Lord:
 - The word “Nazarite” itself means “one separated” or “one consecrated.”
 - Notice the words of God to Moses: “When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazarite, to separate himself to the LORD, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink” (Num 6:2-3).
 - Thus, Hannah in praying to God promises to consecrate her child to the Lord.
 - b. The text mentions that Elkanah was going up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow—the vow Elkanah intended to pay on this trip may have been to offer Samuel to the Lord.
 2. Yet, Hannah refuses to go this trip.
 - a. It’s not that she’s changed her mind about her vow—not at all. She simply wants to wait until Samuel has been weaned.
 - b. However, Elkanah had every right to nullify her vow.
 - 1) As we read this narrative, it’s clear that Elkanah was not at the sanctuary when Hannah made her vow.
 - 2) When Elkanah learned of the vow, he could have nullified it: “If her husband makes them [his wife’s vows] null and void on the day that he hears them, then whatever proceeds out of her lips concerning her vows or concerning her pledge of herself shall not stand. Her husband has made them void, and the LORD will forgive her” (Num 30:12). Yet, Elkanah allows the vow to stand.
 3. Why would Elkanah not make void the vow?
 - a. It’s obvious as we read through this narrative that Elkanah was a man who loved the Lord deeply, and he knew vows weren’t to be entered into or broken lightly.
 - 1) So, perhaps, it’s his devoutness that prevents his nullifying the vow.

- 2) However, could Elkanah not have been just as devout if he broke the vow, according to the Word of God, as if he hadn't? How can doing what the Lord permits be contrary to the will of God?
- b. I'm much more inclined to think that Elkanah permitted Hannah to keep this vow because he knew what this child meant so very much to Hannah.
- 1) Perhaps the Lord wouldn't have granted the child to Hannah had Elkanah nullified her vow; Elkanah knew that and knew what Samuel would mean to his beloved wife, so he allowed the vow to stand.
 - 2) The point is that Elkanah allowed the vow to stand because he listened to his wife, he understood her, and he sought to please her.
 - 3) That is the type of husband God expects us all to be: "Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pt 3:7).
 - We are to live with our wives in an understanding way—to be concerned about them and take their thoughts and feelings into consideration.
 - Do we live with our wives in an understanding way?