

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

**1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

We are on the second sermon of a series I'm doing this fall in the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. Today we are covering quite an expanse of scripture—from 1 Samuel 1:21 all the way through chapter 2. My message today is titled "Samuel Goes to Bible College." I thought that was a fitting title this Sunday for all of the returning students and the students entering colleges. I'm not going to be able to read all of the Scripture. Let me just focus on some key verses.

"After [Samuel] was weaned, [Hannah] took the boy with her, young as he was...they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to [Eli], 'As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given to the LORD.' And he worshipped the LORD there. Then Hannah prayed and said, 'My heart rejoices in the LORD'" (1 Samuel 1:24–2:1, NIV).

Then for the next ten verses, her great hymn of adoration and praise to God who is mighty and just goes on. Finally in verse 11, Hannah and Elkanah go back home, and Samuel stays with Eli the priest.

Verse 12 says, "Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD." Scripture goes on to tell us that they took a three-pronged fork and dipped it into the caldron of sacrificial meat and pulled out the choicest parts for themselves, even though they were not supposed to do this. Levitical law prescribed that they only take certain portions of the meat, but they took the best. And they were not supposed to eat the fat of the sacrificial animal. All fat was the Lord's. In the Old Testament, the fat was the most delicate part of the meat—the stuff people really liked to

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

eat. They were taking the fat of the sacrificial animals and eating it. Then verse 17 says, “This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD’S sight, for they were treating the LORD’S offering with contempt.”

Verses 18 and 19, “But Samuel was ministering before the LORD—a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.”

Verses 22–26, “Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. So he said to them, ‘Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD’S people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?’ His sons, however, did not listen to their father’s rebuke, for it was the LORD’S will to put them to death. And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.”

The last part of chapter 2 talks about a prophet, a man of God, coming and telling Eli that doom was coming to his house because he didn’t restrain the evil in his sons. How do we apply this to our lives—not just to college students, but to all of us at whatever age and station we are in life? Three fundamental issues that relate to everybody in this room popped out to me as I read these chapters this week. Two issues are derived out of Hannah’s spiritual growth. The third issue is derived out of Samuel’s growth. The first issue is a question.

#### **I. Does God ever require us to make difficult personal choices?**

Does God ever require that of us? I’d like to say, “No, God would never do that to you. If you’re a Christian, everything’s going to work out all right. Pay your tithe, attend church regularly, and

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

try to be a good, moral Christian. Then you'll have money in the bank, a long life, and prosperity—everything is going to be wonderful!" That's what I'd like to tell you. If I were able to tell you that, I'd probably be a better salesman. But if I told you that, I probably wouldn't be in business too long. God sometimes asks us to do things that fly in the face of what we want to do. And sometimes, they fly in the face of what seems normal and natural. There is nothing more normal and natural than the bond of a mother to her child. Yet, here is this woman, Hannah, who responds to God in a way that sets aside her normal bond—she gives her son into the care of the priest Eli. He's a young child! He's past the terrible twos! If she'd brought him when he was two, I'd understand. But he's into the threes—talking in sentences and potty trained! Hannah said, "God answered my prayer. This beautiful child was born. Now it's time I make good on my promise."

Have you ever made any promises to God? I have. How do you typically fare with those promises? Do you take those promises seriously? Or do you forget them? What if you make a promise and then circumstances change—you don't want to keep it anymore? Do you just ignore the promise? Or do you first wrestle with God asking Him whether you should keep it? Hannah's commitment comes at the highest possible cost—handing over her son. Hannah's model is underlying in our baby dedications today—the child is literally handed over but not handed back. The child is God's. There are very few instances in human history where God has asked this of a parent. But in this case, He did. Hannah kept her word. She had to go back home alone. That must have been terrible. Her days had been busy and delightful with this little guy—now they were empty. Time fell heavy on her hands.

The reason I'm dwelling on this matter is because we're living in a time when the American church's basic preoccupation is "What do I get out of serving God? What's in it for me? How

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

will this enrich my life? How will this add to me? If I go to this church, hear this speaker, read this book, attend this seminar—what will it add to my life? Will I be a more fulfilled and complete person?” I think this is dangerous. Instead of focusing on “What can I get?” focus on “What can I give?” Or even more profoundly, ask, “What must I give up?” Is it always easy to be a Christian? By no means! What must I give up? Does it cost me, in any way, to be a Christian? Does it cost me anything?

Some of you would say it does. “I’m the only one in my family who’s a Christian, and I take the heat for it.” Another would say, “I’m wrestling with an issue in my life. I want to do something that I know is out of God’s will, but I think I’d feel better if I do it. God’s will seems so difficult. The future seems so bleak if I do God’s will.” Another might say, “I’m taking time I might have used to earn a little extra money, and I’m using that time to serve the body of Christ in some way.” Yes, there is cost. Some of you know what cost is because you’ve taken a stand for Christ at school or at work, and you’ve been ridiculed for it. Some of you may say “I backed out of a courtship with a non-Christian whom I really did love. I read in God’s Word that I should not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever, and I put loyalty to God’s Word ahead of my feelings. I paid a price for that.” Someone else might say, “I’ve chosen not to have an immoral sexual relationship with another person, even though the opportunity has presented itself and all my senses tell me to go for it. I remain committed to Christ.” Where is the cross in the Christian life—in this age, in this era? Is the cross only something we wear as a bracelet or as a pendant or put on a church sanctuary wall? What price is associated with being a Christian? As you live the Christian life, you’re going to be continually faced with two choices: Are you going to make decisions based on Jesus being your Lord? Or are you going to make decisions that are easy? Doing it Jesus’ way is going to be costly for you. It will not be easy. It will not seem gratifying.

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

But as you do God’s will, you’ll find that it is the most gratifying thing you’ve ever done—in the long run. It just won’t seem like it at the time. Is there any cost to the Christian life? Is there a cost to commitment? That’s the first issue that arises.

### **II. Next, in what spirit do you follow through on your commitments to the Lord?**

First, will the Lord ever ask you to do anything that is difficult? Second, if He does, in what spirit will you do it? Had you been Hannah, how would you have felt leaving Samuel at Shiloh? I know how I felt a few days ago—I was so depressed. Sometimes I find that it can help to compare yourself with someone worse off than you. In Hannah’s case, she didn’t have anyone as a comparison. There was no one who had made a more sacrificial commitment than her. I think she had every right to be grouching as she left, “God is a hard God. I wish I had never made that promise. I miss my little boy!” And what if she had known what was going on at Shiloh Christian College? I have a suspicion she didn’t know what the upper classmen were like—or she would have really been depressed!

I stumbled on to this verse, chapter 2, verse 1—she’s on her way home—“Then Hannah prayed and said, ‘My heart rejoices in the Lord.’” I have never really seen that before. I know it’s been in the Bible, but I’ve never really seen it. Her reaction on the way home was not one of despair. She was rejoicing in the Lord! She gives her child to God as a symbol that God is working in bigger ways through her smaller, personal decision. In fact, since God is infinitely just and infinitely powerful, He is going to bring His justice and His power together and do something great. He’s going to lift up the poor. He’s going to bring down those disobeying God. The end result is—He’s going to anoint His king. When she was singing this song, Israel didn’t have a king. But by faith, she was leaping down the road. It would be her son, Samuel, who would make possible the kingship. He would anoint kings. How did she conduct herself when making a

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

difficult commitment? She brought her soul to God and said, “I’m doing what the Lord asks of me. I will have inward satisfaction. My heart will rejoice in God.” It’s a choice. I don’t believe it automatically came to her. I think it was a choice she made. “I’m doing what God has asked of me. I know He would not ask that which is not right or good. Therefore I will rejoice.”

Centuries later, Mary, the mother of Jesus would sing Hannah’s song. In Luke 1, Mary’s Magnificat simply takes Hannah’s song and reworks some of the language. Basically, it’s the same. Personally, I would have thought that Hannah would have sung this song after the birth of her son. I thought that’s when she did—after Samuel was born. But it was sung after she had left him—after she had released him to God. She trusted God with her decision. That’s hard, isn’t it? There are some things in life where you just have to trust God.

I think one of the most important things we learn from Hannah is how to release things. We release things in faith and trust in God. We realize that to bind a child to our own apron strings can only stunt their development. It will actually rob them and society. We may have to release money or investment. Maybe we got taken in a deal—an idiot decision we made. Maybe we dropped a bundle—maybe our whole retirement! Rather than grouching the rest of our life about it, maybe we just have to say, “God, You gave it. It’s gone. Blessed be Your name anyway. I’ve got to go on. I can’t get stuck here.” Maybe we need to release a dream—something we really wanted. Maybe it’s a big dream, and we’re not going to get it. Maybe it’s a smaller dream. Maybe the guy we were really in love with just announced his engagement to somebody else. We have to say, “I’ve got to release that. I’ve got to give it up.” Or maybe a change you wanted to see take place in someone you love is not taking place. And maybe they’re never going to change. Are you going to live in the pits the rest of your life because of that? Or can you say, “God, I just give that to You.” Sometimes we need to release our health. We’re all going to die. I

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

don't want to be dragged off into death kicking and screaming—resenting God and acting like it was the worst thing that ever happened to me. I want to say with the Apostle Paul, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” Praise God! If this is my time, let's go! I hope when it comes my time, I really do that. I've preached about heaven and believed it all these years. Why should I be dragged off to heaven kicking and screaming? There are times we need to release a loved one in a situation. I realize we have to work through a process to do that. You can't always just snap your fingers and do it.

Hannah's song is one of hope. It basically comes down to this, “God, You're going to make everything turn out ok because You have all time on Your hands. You're all-powerful and good.” Notice there is growth going on in Hannah's life. When she didn't have a child, she was terribly depressed. If she was depressed when she didn't have a child, how depressed she could have been when she had to give him up! But she was growing through her experience. She was asking God to help her become all that He wanted. I wonder, did she have to work through that every year when she brought Samuel his new little robe to wear? He was growing, and he needed a change of garments every year. Maybe every time she went back home, she had to work through depression again and again sing, “My heart rejoices in the Lord.” As we surrender the voids in our life, God will fill them. There is another great issue that comes out of this text.

### **III. How will we handle the influence of negative examples in our lives?**

Does God ever require us to make commitments that are difficult? In what spirit are we going to make those commitments? And thirdly, from Samuel's life, how are we going to handle the influence of a negative example? Look at the negative example surrounding little Samuel at Shiloh Christian College! The president of the college was out of touch. He didn't enforce the rules of the college. He would say, “You shouldn't do wrong,” but would then let anybody do

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

whatever they wanted. He never kicked anybody out—look at Hophni and Phinehas! In fact, when the Lord talks about them, He talks first about their sin against Him, not about their immorality. We probably would reverse the order. But, in fact, immorality flows out of the lack of relationship with God. Samuel’s account shows us that money and immorality in the ministry have been long-standing problems—ministers taking the best to pad their own pockets, and sleeping around. Anyone heard of that happening lately? Three thousand years ago that was happening—back at Shiloh under Eli.

Let’s not rush to judge these two without asking ourselves, “Have I ever had the spirit of Hophni and Phinehas? Have I taken anything that belonged to God and used it for myself?” What about attitudes? What about what I’m supposed to be giving to God? Time? Tithe? The tithe belongs to God just as much as the money and property at your bank belong to you. Malachi says that God owns it. Have I taken anything that belongs to God? That’s a fundamental question.

Hophni and Phinehas can be glad you and I weren’t in charge of Shiloh Bible School. We’d have kicked them out. God is patient with people. He lets the problem go on and on. Why does He let it go on and on? I have to believe that God sometimes lets things go because He is trying to reach a person and change them through love. And when all else fails, He’ll use judgment. He finally sends a prophet to Eli saying, “You’re going to get it and so are your sons!” But I think if they would had repented at that point, God would have changed His direction—just like He did for the people of Nineveh.

The negative influence of a bad example—is there anyone you know whose faith or conduct has worsened your Christian experience? I hear all the time, “Never do business with a Christian! They do shoddy work. They don’t show up on time. They steal materials. They don’t pay their bills. They don’t answer their phone.” Or you may have had a parent who claimed the Christian

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

life in public, but you know there was a gap between what they said in church and what they did in their personal life. It could have been a pastor or a leader or a friend or a teacher who failed—those influence us. But are we going to let it deter our own commitment and walk with the Lord? Samuel had the worst possible milieu in which to grow up godly. But he made it through the negative examples. How did he do it? I think it's revealed in verse 26, "Samuel continued to grow." He kept his relationship with God fresh. It was his responsibility to know God and to walk with God.

As Christians, we must learn to never stop growing. When things confound us, we must determine that with the Lord's help, we will not get stuck there. We will grow right past it and grow right through it. Maybe when you saw the sermon title today you said, "This one's not for me." Maybe it wasn't. But on the other hand, perhaps the issues that Hannah and Samuel dealt with are so universal that they appeal to all of us—no matter what our age or what we're doing in life. They are issues we all face. What is the costly, difficult, personal choice that God is asking you to make? In what spirit are you keeping your commitments to Christ? How are you handling negative examples in your life?

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Lord, we thank You for gathering us today around Your Word. We thank You for the encouragement in Your Word. It's the furthest thing from my heart—and I believe from Yours—to lay guilt trips on people. To put them under bondage of an overactive, incriminating conscience. And at the same time, there are moments in life where You want to get face to face with us—heart to heart—and say, "What's going on in your life? Are you passing the test? Are you not only coping but overcoming? Are you living My way?" Lord, we want to hear that voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts today as You probe us—as You call us in the midst of every

## **SAMUEL GOES TO BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **1 Samuel 1:21–2:26**

choice we make in life. You call, “Follow Me! Take up your cross and be glad about it. Rejoice and be glad.” Lord, I pray for everyone here today in these words, “Help us, Lord. Help us to do exactly what You want. Help us not to get stuck in life. Help us to grow.” Lord, if there are people in our lives who are influencing us away from You, we pray You would help us evaluate that relationship and change it—or end it. There is no relationship in life that matters as much as our relationship with You. Whatever hinders or hurts our relationship with You, we must lay aside. Whatever helps and advances our relationship with You, we want to embrace and choose. Give us feet to stand on and a backbone that’s straight and solid for You. We ask this, Lord Jesus, in Your name. Amen.