

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: God Has Heard**

### **Lesson: 1 Samuel 1:4-20**

*<sup>4</sup>Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup>But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. <sup>6</sup>Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. <sup>7</sup>This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. <sup>8</sup>Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"*

*<sup>9</sup>Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. <sup>10</sup>In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. <sup>11</sup>And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."*

*<sup>12</sup>As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. <sup>13</sup>Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk <sup>14</sup>and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."*

*<sup>15</sup>"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. <sup>16</sup>Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."*

*<sup>17</sup>Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."*

*<sup>18</sup>She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.*

*<sup>19</sup>Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. <sup>20</sup>So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."*

Matthew 5 introduces what is commonly known as the Beatitudes, a series of eight blessings. You are likely familiar with them:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those who mourn; blessed are the meek; blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." (Matthew 5:3-10)

In the Beatitudes, those who are blessed are not the ones who meet society's standards of success. They are often the poor, the sick, the marginalized, and those

who fear persecution for their faith—people leading lives that seem hopeless. In the past, when I read the Beatitudes, I saw them merely as words of comfort from Jesus to those enduring hardship in this world.

Recently, as I meditated on the Beatitudes again, my focus shifted. I lingered on the promises that follow each blessing: *“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, for they will be comforted, for they will inherit the earth, for they will be filled, for they will be shown mercy, for they will see God, for they will be called children of God, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Reading and rereading these words led me to wonder: Are the Beatitudes simply words of comfort for those suffering in this world? Or do they go beyond comfort, containing God’s promise to lift us up, open our eyes, reveal new possibilities in the midst of our sorrow and despair, and lead us down new paths? At this moment, I firmly believe the Beatitudes are more than comfort—they are God’s promise. Yet, I must admit there was a time when I thought God’s role was solely to console us in our pain.

Buddhism describes life as a sea of suffering. Similarly, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer declared, “Life is suffering.” Life is filled with moments of joy but also seasons of sorrow. Everyone carries concerns—whether they are about health, relationships, or the future. Children worry about toys or treats; students worry about grades or fitting in; adults worry about their careers, families, and retirement.

The people of Jesus’ time had concerns, just as we do today. From this perspective, it’s easy to see why life can be viewed as a sea of suffering. When I studied in seminary, I often pondered questions like, “Why do we face pain?” and “Why does God allow it?” What I learned is that God does not cause our suffering. Instead, God stands with us in our struggle, offering strength and comfort. That’s why I initially understood the Beatitudes as God’s words of consolation.

When visiting grieving families or speaking with church members in times of hardship, I’ve occasionally been asked questions like: *“Did God give this illness to my loved one?”* or *“Why did God seem absent during my mother’s final days?”*

These questions can be hard to answer, and I often respond by affirming that God does not cause suffering but remains with us through it, offering His presence and comfort. Still, as a pastor, it is not always easy to answer such questions.

Sometimes, words meant to comfort can inadvertently wound. Though my role is to provide prayer and support, there are moments when it feels like that isn’t

enough. At times, I have even questioned why God seems only to comfort and not act.

As I prepare for ordination and reflect on my ministry and life, I realize that God has revealed something to me. When I left my familiar home, family, and friends in Korea to come to the U.S., I faced many concerns. Those concerns often led to worry and moments of despair. But looking back, I see that God was with me every step of the way. God strengthened me, encouraged me, sent people to help me, and opened my eyes to new possibilities. God led me down paths I hadn't imagined.

These experiences have shown me that God doesn't merely console us. God promises us something greater. I am now convinced of that promise and deeply grateful to God for it.

From my own life, I can confidently say: God does not abandon the poor, the marginalized, or those suffering in despair. God hears their prayers, blesses them, and promises them hope beyond comfort.

Consider Hannah. Though deeply loved by her husband, she carried a heavy burden: she was unable to have children. In her time, having many children was considered a great blessing and even a sign of financial security. Without a child, Hannah faced scorn and despair.

Hannah displayed symptoms of severe depression—refusing to eat, weeping constantly, and feeling utterly defeated. Yet, in her anguish, she decided to go to the house of the Lord and pray. She poured out her heart to God, surrendering her worries, desires, and hopes. Her prayer wasn't merely a request for a son; it was an act of surrender, promising to dedicate her son to God if He answered her prayer.

Through this process, Hannah aligned herself with God's will. Although she didn't immediately conceive, her prayer gave her peace, and she no longer wept or despaired. Her faith in God's promise sustained her.

Eventually, Hannah did bear a son, Samuel, which means "God has heard". Last week, we learned that Ruth was the great-grandmother of David. In a similar way, God worked through Hannah to bring Samuel into the world, using him to guide Israel during a spiritually dark time.

Friends, we will all face difficulties, pain, and despair at times. But remember this: God hears your prayers and responds. God promises us salvation beyond comfort.

In our trials, God works in ways we cannot imagine, helping us endure, accept, and rise again. Through this process, God opens our eyes to new possibilities and leads us down paths filled with hope and promise. These are not compromises or alternatives but paths so new and complete that our previous plans and desires fade from memory.

Hannah's prayer of gratitude after experiencing God's work in her life deeply moves me, and I'd like to share it with you:

- 2<sup>1</sup> "My heart rejoices in the Lord;  
in the Lord my horn is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.*
- 2 "There is no one holy like the Lord;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.*
- 3 "Do not keep talking so proudly  
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,  
for the Lord is a God who knows,  
and by him deeds are weighed.*
- 4 "The bows of the warriors are broken,  
but those who stumbled are armed with  
strength.*
- 5 Those who were full hire themselves out for  
food,  
but those who were hungry are hungry no  
more.  
She who was barren has borne seven  
children,  
but she who has had many sons pines  
away.*
- 6 "The Lord brings death and makes alive;  
he brings down to the grave and raises  
up.*
- 7 The Lord sends poverty and wealth;  
he humbles and he exalts.*
- 8 He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  
he seats them with princes  
and has them inherit a throne of honor.*
- "For the foundations of the earth are  
the Lord's;  
on them he has set the world.*
- 9 He will guard the feet of his faithful  
servants,  
but the wicked will be silenced in the  
place of darkness.*
- "It is not by strength that one prevails;  
10 those who oppose the Lord will be  
broken.*
- The Most High will thunder from heaven;  
the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.*
- "He will give strength to his king  
and exalt the horn of his anointed."*