

Title: Don't Stop Believin!  
Text: 1 Samuel 2:1-11  
Theme: How to respond to blessing  
Series: 1 Samuel  
Prop Stmt: Singing to one another helps teach us how to respond to life

Read Text:

Just a small town girl  
Livin' in a lonely world  
She took the midnight train goin' anywhere  
Just a city boy  
Born and raised in South Detroit  
He took the midnight train goin' anywhere

Most of you recognize those words and are now humming the song, "Don't Stop Believing" from the band Journey on their 1981 album, "Escape." Around here, most of us don't remember the name of the album but we will never forget that song. The band needed one more song to finish the album and Jonathan Cain, who had recently joined the band had this idea for a song because when he was at one of his lowest points in life, his dad told him, "Don't stop believing." The song climbed to #9 that year, but around here, we still love it because there is a shout out to Detroit in it. That was Steve Perry's idea. He was the vocalist. The band had just been here and Steve wanted a line in the song to be about a boy born in Detroit. They tried north Detroit, east Detroit, west Detroit but settled on south Detroit, only later, too much later finding out that there is no such thing as south Detroit, since that is Windsor. But, around here, we don't care, do we? If you are from Detroit, and this area you feel overlooked and marginalized and you tend to take it personal. You see it in the hoodies, shirts and hats that say, Detroit vs. everybody. This is part of the grit of our culture and so, when this song is played at sporting events around here, everybody waits for the line and then shout it, "south Detroit" even though, we of all people know that it doesn't exist. To us, it's close enough. "Don't Stop Believin" is almost part of our community liturgy.

The song is a communal expression of our ethos. It captures what we feel. Life is against you. Life has you down. The odds are not in your favor, but deep inside we will not give up on our dream. This sounds, in some ways, similar to Hannah's song/prayer. This song that she sang and prayed was a song that the believers in Israel sang. It was one of their songs of faith. But there is a major difference between the two. Journey's song tells us not to give up, but it never tells us why. Just because you believe, does not make it come true. Your believing does not create reality. Sometimes you believe with all your heart but what you are believing in is wrong. Hannah's song, on the other hand tells us not to stop believing but it tells us why. God flips the script. Therefore, Hannah's song is a song of warning to those who appear to be "winning" right now and a song of encouragement to those who appear to be "losing" right now. Those, who reject God and appear to be doing just fine are going to end up being the losers and those who follow God, but have nothing to show for it, will end up being the winners.

This sermon has 2 parts: 1) 4 observations of this song. 2) 3 important applications of this text.

- 4 Observations

1. **Hannah's song is the song of true Israel.**

The words of this song/prayer reflect some of Hannah's story, but not everything lines up exactly. It is very likely, and I certainly think is the case, that this song was one of the songs of Israel. She probably knew this song, sang this song and in fact, was comforted and challenged by the truths of this song to keep hoping in God. Now, she sings it with greater conviction because she has experienced some of this. Let's say that last week we sang "It is well" or "10,000 reasons", or "When trials come" or even, "A Mighty Fortress is our God" but this past week you lost a parent, or your family was rocked with a serious diagnosis, or loss of job. You can still sing those songs, but now it is with deeper meaning.

Like her nation, Hannah appears to be a nothing in the eyes of her world. Israel isn't coming apart, she is apart. The Philistines are the latest regional enemy to do whatever they want without consequence. Israel is at the mercy of a cruel world. For many Israelites, these are the consequences of rejecting God and following after idols. But, within the nation of Israel is the true Israel, like Hannah. There is a faithful remnant who in spite of the world, in spite of her own nation believes God and believes that he is and that he will keep the promises that he made to Israel. Look at how this is born out in the life of Hannah.

Hannah has many circumstantial reasons why she should doubt God's goodness. She is childless and within her own home is another woman who appears to be able to get pregnant and have a baby just by thinking about it. The text does not hide the pain. Yet, Hannah prays again. This is probably the 1,000<sup>th</sup> time that she has prayed and she prays with her whole heart – again! If we did not already know how the story would go, we would find ourselves wanting to run into the story and hold her and in a way protect her from the sorrow that we think that she will just face again as she has so many times before. There really does not seem to be a way out. Yes, yes, yes, only God can do this, but he hasn't so far and the pool of the faithful is getting smaller and smaller. Maybe Hannah would be better off if she just joined them. But, she doesn't. And neither does a few others. These few have convictions that are actually rooted in the character of God himself. You are never in the wrong to hope in God. God will flip the script.

In Hannah's case, God does. This did not mean that every childless wife in Israel would get pregnant and have a baby. But Hannah did and she takes no credit for this complete change in her life. This is what God has done.

In verse 1 Hannah is exulting in the LORD. Peninah found sick pleasure in exulting in Hannah's weakness. Hannah exulted in the LORD. She credits him with the being the source of her strength. She does not fear her enemies because she rejoices in the salvation of the LORD. God is not only powerful, but God acts on behalf of the weak, neglected and broken who lean upon

him. Our God is not like the gods of this world. Our God is a God of mercy, a true God of strength, goodness and holiness. All of this is reflected in the 3 lines of verse 2. Our God is unique. This is a very important message that Israel needs to hear and remember. Our God is not like any other god. Our God is holy. There is none other. There is no rock like our God. If you lean on any other god, it will crumble because no other god can sustain the weight of your life and carry you.

### Verses 3-8

The scope of Hannah's song now expands. While verses 1 and 2 were her testimony she now sings/prays in the plural and warns those who presume upon their situation. Those of you who think that you have no need of God, are in for a rude awakening. Those of you who live as if God is distracted and is not paying attention need to be warned. God knows! Note the contrasts:

Mighty vs. feeble

Full vs. hungry

Barren vs. surrounded by children

It's like the Lions have won the Super Bowl! Seriously, this is way bigger and better. The source of it all is God. Don't forget that. Life and death belong to God. Riches and poverty are his to give and use for his purposes. And he will accomplish his purposes in his time. Therefore, those who wait on the Lord will be renewed. Those who trust in the Lord will be rewarded. Those who stay faithful in spite of the world will rule and reign. The song ends with statement of the absolute sovereignty and authority of God (8d) and with additional promises of God bringing at some judgment to his enemies and rescue to his people.

At this point in Israel's history nothing has changed. Some no-name woman in Ephraim got pregnant and had a baby boy, but Israel is still fractured and suffering under the oppression of the Philistines. The priesthood is a corrupt mess. There is no king and everyone is still doing whatever they think is right. But, this story line is clear. What God did for Hannah is what God will do for his people. This is the story of 1-2 Samuel. I do not know who wrote these books but I can't wait to meet whoever it was. The writing is superb and one of the evidences of that is this. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter we have a song of a faith by a neglected and marginalized woman. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last chapter of 2 Samuel we have a song of faith by the undisputed ruler of the Ancient Near East and they are saying the same thing. What Hannah says by faith, David says by sight. God has flipped the script. David's song appears in 2 Samuel 23. The chapter begins with, "Now these are the last words of David." The fortunes of Israel have drastically changed. Sadly, they won't stay that way. For now, Hannah's song is echoed by a king and not just any king. The line of this king will produce another king and that king will not have last words, because that king and his kingdom will reign forever.

## 2. Hannah's song (and Israel's) points to the song of Mary.

When you read Luke's account of the birth of Christ you are brought into the small, provisional, poor and overlooked home of a girl named Mary who is betrothed to a man named Joseph. They are from Nazareth. They are Jews who live under the oppression of Rome, and they live in the city no one wants to admit they are from; Nazareth. Hannah finds out that she is pregnant and her heart is overwhelmed with praise for God. She brings her son Samuel to the Tabernacle and gives him back to the Lord and rejoices in God that she can participate in God's plan. Mary is not yet married. She is not praying to get pregnant. Her son is from God, for God and is God. Like Hannah, Mary has a heart for God in spite of the fact that much of her world did not yet. When you look at Hannah's song and Mary's song they sound so much alike that I would guess that Mary sang her expression of praise patterned after Hannah. The overlooked Hannah became a titan of faith to the women of Israel and her song provides the music and lyrics for Mary to sing and for many others, like us. The themes are the same. Be faithful and be warned. God flips the script. Winners will become losers. Losers will become winners. Mary would learn this lesson over and over in the years to come and in ways she would never have imagined.

### 3. **Hannah's song (and Israel's and Mary's) is fulfilled in Christ.**

The book of Judges is the depressing story of how Israel needs a king. The rest of the OT is, mostly, the depressing story of how the kings failed to lead well because they failed to follow God. There are the occasional good ones, like David. But even the good ones have issues. At this point, when Hannah is singing this, there is no king, yet. But, notice the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last line of verse 10. Yahweh will give strength to his king. This song looks forward to the day when Israel will have a king and this king is strengthened by God, exalted and empowered by God. Now, we know that this hope was fulfilled by Christ who came as the King who rescued his people by dying for them, but will return to rescue his people by reigning over the earth. Therefore ...

### 4. **Hannah's song is the song of all of God's people.**

Hannah's story is our story. We are followers of Christ. We are followers of the crucified One. Our leader was publicly shamed, humiliated and executed in one of the most inhumane ways possible. Historically, those who associate with him can expect similar kinds of treatment. The powerful hated Jesus. They used their influence to do evil. And this evil was the worst evil imaginable. They plotted and schemed to execute God's Son, Israel's Messiah, the Savior of the world, the perfectly, holy, righteous and humble King. It is stunning to think how the Scribes, who copied and taught God's law, and the Pharisees who were so picky about details to enforce their version of following the law thought that it was somehow acceptable to commit murder. They played about every card they could to get Pilate and Rome to go along with their despicable plan and for about 3 days it looked as if they got away with it. But then, God flipped the script. That's how he does it. The loser who died on a cross, walked out of a tomb and is coming back on a white horse with an army to establish a kingdom that will never end.

- 3 Applications

#### 1. **Singing is a major part of the life of God's people.**

Singing is a major part and critical component of our worship. We sing for a variety of reasons. We sing as an expression of faith, hope, joy and love for God. We sing as a confession of what we believe. We sing as a way of encouraging one another since we sing to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We sing to God and about God. We sing not only because we are commanded to sing, but we sing because we want to sing. Think about that for a second. It feels like most of the time we are commanded to do something that we would otherwise not want to do. Clean your room. Get off your phone. Get out of bed. Get a job. Go to work. And those kinds of commands are good and right, although they are not always viewed as such in the moment. Here is a command to do what we want to do and love to do. This ought to inform us about God. God loves good singing and God sings. We reflect our good God when we sing good songs.

## 2. Singing good songs teaches us and reminds us of good truths.

God has designed singing in such a way that long after you have forgotten most sermons, you remember the songs. Creeds can be useful to help people learn and remember truths, but in our tradition, we do not recite creeds as much as we sing them. We are reciting our beliefs to God, to one another and to ourselves when we sing. This means, of course, that we are to be careful that what we sing is an accurate reflection of what God has revealed in his word. Our singing is our liturgy. This is what we see in the Psalms and we seek to copy that. We learn how to praise, how to confess, how to thank, how to ask and how to rejoice all from the Psalms. Therefore, when we aren't always certain how to pray or what to pray, we turn to our songs which give avenues of expression for our hearts. You will not be humming the sermon this afternoon, but you will likely be humming a song that we sang.

## 3. Singing prepares us to respond to difficulty and blessing.

We sing in celebration in church with hands raised and with clapping. We sing in the hospital and in funerals with eyes closed and heads bowed. The singing that we do in church teaches us how to respond in difficulty and blessing. The song that Hannah sang was a song that she likely sang by faith and then was able to sing it when a prayer was answered, even though there were more prayers in that song that were yet to be answered. The songs of God's people give expression to our hearts and function as a guide for us. When we sing those songs, we join with the lives of God's people who also sang those songs. When we sing the songs of the church it is a one of the ways in which we can stand on the shoulders of those before us. When we sing newer songs of the church it is a way that we can lock arms with our brothers and sisters now. In both cases, it reminds us that we do not travel alone.

If you want to understand Israel, you have to understand David and in order to understand David, you have to understand Saul and Samuel and Hannah. There is some of that still today. If you want to understand our story and the gospel you have to go back to Jesus, his life, death and resurrection. But it is also helpful to know that the real story of Jesus and the meaning of his life death and resurrection was buried, for almost 1,000 years under ceremonies, rituals,

traditions and some bad theology that did not square with what the Bible actually said. Therefore, some of it just didn't make sense. But, who could argue with the monolithic church that claimed to speak for God? Who could stand up against the power of the institutional church that even controlled thrones throughout western Europe? What could one person do?

On this very day, 504 years ago, a young priest from the town in Wittenberg, Germany posted a document on the local castle door. It listed 95 things that he could not reconcile as a priest who represented the church with the Bible. What difference would one little voice make? We date the reformation and the recovery of the gospel back to this day in 1517. Our story is indebted to Hannah, Mary and many others, like Martin Luther. For over 450 years the recovery and now world-wide expansion of the gospel is celebrated and affirmed by our singing of: A Mighty Fortress is our God. It is our tradition to sing it on this Sunday every year. In these words, you will see the themes of Hannah's song. God flips the script. Be faithful and be warned. Losers will be the winners and winners will be the losers. That is why, we don't stop believing.

A Mighty Fortress is our God