

## THE MAN WHO PREACHED FROM THE GRAVE

"Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samual." I Samuel 28:11.

Biography makes fascinating reading, and characters of divine record are no exception to this truth. Most newspapers are eager to publish human interest stories. God has made His Book replete with simple stories of human life.

History is made by big men, and big men are the sons of great mothers. This has been true all down the ages. There are times in the life of nations when someone has to intervene to start again on the upward path those things which have gone wrong. God usually starts things in the right direction with the mother. He uses men, but the mother must come along before He can find His man.

In the time when Hannah lived, the nation was bogged down in the mud and muck of idolatry and sensuality. National leaders were wanting. Freedom was lost, racial pride and patriotic spirit had vanished, and their vision had faded out. The heroes were gone, and priests had failed, and the prophets had not yet come. It was a dull, drear drab sort of time; ideals were low; manhood was flabby and cowardly; and all Israel was corrupt and swinishly content. A revival was sadly needed, but there was no preacher, and worst of all, no man out of whom a preacher might be made.

Back in those dim days when Hannah prayed at Shiloh for a son, we find God waiting for a man. Think of it! God waiting for a man, and up there in the hill country of Ephraim a poor disappointed woman praying for a son. Hannah, wife of Elkanah, had been denied the crowning glory of the Hebrew woman, the privilege of motherhood. Hannah was just a poor, sad-hearted, simple souled woman who told her troubles to God. She had prayed a long time for a son, and when she had no child to go with her on their annual visit to Shiloh for worship, her disappointment came more persistent in her praying. "And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." I Samuel 1:11.

Here was what God had been waiting for; He wanted a man, but before He could have such a man as He needed, He must have a mother like Hannah. Even God could not carry out His plans without the help of that little home in the hills. God passed by the homes of the priests, the mansions of the rich, and stopped at the little home in the hills to hear a woman pray. When God listened to that prayer and that vow, it was as if He had said, "I have found a mother and I shall have My man."

Hannah was not looking for what people call a career; she was old fashioned in her thinking and counted it more important to rear a boy for God than to attain some sort of notariety outside her home. Hannah believed that being a good mother was the most wonderful thing that could come to her.

Hannah's name was not on the roster of the "400", but she got on the honor roll of heaven in the foremost files of eternity. She did not get much recognition upon earth, but she had the right of way in heaven's inner circle; and the King put out a busy sign for angels when Hannah wanted to talk with Him.

Hannah gave her boy to God, not to business, not to his country, not the the giddy

whirl of social gaety--but to God. Many present-day mothers do not want their children to belong wholly to God. They are teaching them to play with fire, and trying to see how near they can come to the flames and not be burned. To give a son like Samuel to God, and to humanity, was a work that angels might have envied.

A disturbing picture haunts the imagination of many thoughtful observers of our time. It is the picture of children and grandchildren sitting amid the wreckage of western civilization and vainly wishing they might get back again the chance we have now. The more intelligent and thoughtful persons are most disturbed by it. The careless and thoughtless fear it least. To say it is impossible is nonsense. Many times in history the children of great civilization -- like the Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman--have sat amid the wreckage of power wishing they could get back again the chance their fathers took away. Such a fate can befall us. This kind of situation is dramatized for us in one of the most picturesque scenes in the Old Testament, that of Saul going down to the witch of Endor's Cave crying, "Bring me up, Samuel." I Sam. 28:11.

Samuel had been Saul's friend in his youth. He picked Saul out to be the king of Israel. He had been his guide and counselor in those happy days when the young king walked uprightly and all went well with him. He had tried to stand beside him and counsel him, he had offered him his friendship and his wisdom. For many years Saul had disregarded Samuel and humiliated him. He had dropped the old pilot and floundered on alone with growing folly and misfortune. Finally Samuel died. What the thoughts of Saul were, we are not told. Perhaps he was glad of his removal. Although he had dwelt near him, he was estranged from him and entirely neglected his counsel. When the crisis came and the Philistines were about to defeat him, he felt the need of Samuel's counsel. He realized his worth and longed for his help, but it was too late. Much of his distress might have been averted if he had listened to the counsel of Samuel. Samuel was his best friend. He told him the truth and sought his welfare rather than his favor. Saul wanted the ghost of his old chance back again.

Saul had been a great soldier, but now the time had arrived for him to fight his last battle. Haggard and haunted with care, Saul leaned on his sword on Mt. Gilboa and surveyed the host of the Philistines who lay beneath him all along the valley. In this crisis Saul felt the need of a higher power, and reached out after the help of the unforeseen. "Saul inquired of the Lord." In his brief reign he had too often neglected to do that and had followed his own way, but at last he sought after the help of God. There was no prophet to whom he could go, for Samuel was dead. What would he not have given now for the presence and counsel of Samuel.

One can visualize Saul at night slipping away in disguise from the army, skirting the hosts of the Philistines, appearing at the witch of Endor's cave and there in desperation over the situation pleading with that ancient medium for a chance to speak with the dead prophet again. This is a testimony to the value of faithful counsel. Reproofs and warnings are not always agreeable. They are often deemed unnecessary, regarded with contempt, but they are justified by events, and then their worth is felt. This is a confession of the folly of faithless neglect. How many grieve their parents by disobedience and despise their advice, and then long to bring them back after they are gone for the benefit of the counsel which they slighted and scorned. Saul failed to obtain the aid he desired, and hastened his doom.

How familiar and how tragic that situation is. To have a great opportunity, be careless about it, lose it, and then want the ghost of it back again -- how human that

is! How many men, nations, and civilizations have gone down to Endor's cave crying, "Bring me up Samuel."

Many husbands and wives had beautiful weddings, lovely homes, and every opportunity for happiness, but they wasted their opportunity and since they have slipped down to the cave craving the ghost of the old chance back again. In the intellectual realm many who were in school have wasted their opportunities and their years, decided to quit and get married or get a job, and since have wished they had taken advantage of the opportunity offered them. In business life many have had an opportunity, friends, a job, but started drinking, fell, lost out and now they talk about a chance of a decade ago, saying, "Bring me up Samuel." They say, "If only I had what ran through with". It pays to make good in life.

We find whole nations at Endor's cave. They had their chance, they rode high, they played the insane game of war, and today they're considering if they will ever get the ghost of their old chance back again. How many of us can remember chances which we lost that we wish we had back again. Make the most of your worth-while opportunities. It is exceedingly difficult or all together impossible to recover lost opportunities. This is true about reputation. The importance of a good reputation is not adequately stressed. When one sees a young person with a clean name and no tarnish on it yet, he thinks of how easily that could be lost and how many would give almost everything they possess to have it back again. No doubt you have heard that character is what one is and reputation is what people think one is; therefore take care of your character and your reputation will take care of itself.

Saul went to the cave of the witch of Endor, not more than six miles from Nazareth. For whom did he ask? Whom did he want brought up from the unseen world in his hour of great need and anxiety? He asked for Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, who anointed him, gave him a new spirit, warned him, and wept over him.

God, rather than the witch, answered Saul's prayer. When the frightened faker, the woman with the familiar spirit, saw that Samuel was actually coming out of Sheol, she fell on her face in terror. Samuel was not yet visible to Saul for he asked the woman what she saw. She said, "I see a god coming up out of the earth." Saul said, "What form is he of?" She replied, "An old man is coming up; and he is covered with a mantle." At this Saul perceived that it was Samuel and bowed his face to the ground in reverence and obeisance. Samuel said to Saul, "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" Saul answered, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophet nor by dreams; therefore have I called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do." Then Samuel answered, "Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?.....Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." With that Samuel vanished. This is the only sermon in the Bible that was preached by a preacher who had come from the grave. The rich man asked that Lazarus should be sent from the dead to preach to his five brothers, but that request was not granted. Here is the only sermon that was ever preached by a man who had passed into the world of the dead.

One thing always lies behind this tragic experience at Endor's cave. What was it? Sin--yes, but that is too general.

#### 1. A silly optimism.

Life is dreary without hope, but when hope goes to seed in foolish optimism, the

consequences are disastrous. If one had gone to Saul and said, "Saul, you are making a fool of yourself; Samuel is the greatest opportunity you have; make the most of him or, if not, some day you will go to a cave wanting the ghost of your chance back again," he would not have believed it, but would have hoped for the best, and would have thought that everything would come out right. That attitude which is one of the most prevalent in the United States, needs resolute tackling. We are tempted to be silly optimists. Our country will be going to a cave unless we are cured of this fatuous optimism.

2. A Faith in inevitable progress.

Their philosophy is that we are on an escalator going up; if we should walk or run, we would go faster, but no matter what we do, we will be higher tomorrow than we are today. That is disastrous absurdity. Ask Greece, ask Rome. Regression is as possible as progression. Progress depends on whether we successfully utilize our opportunities while we have them.

3. A comfortable religion.

Americans have worked out the most comfortable religion on earth. We have far too little grappling with stern facts; too little facing of difficult issues. The idea that God will let us steer our boat and when we get in peril, He will rescue us and that regardless of what we do everything will come out all right in the end, is false. If you will look down the shores of history, you will see man after man, civilization after civilization, and nation after nation that had their chance and rose to prominence and power, then growing wayward and throwing their opportunity away, beaten to pieces of reefs of history. God does let His children wreck their boats.

Our Samuel is not dead yet. That is why it is worth talking about him. We still have a glorious opportunity. It is in our hands, but now is the time to emphasize that fact. If on this road of foolish optimism we go much further, there is no power in heaven above or on earth beneath that will keep us from Endor's cave.

This message is meant to be a lesson, not in gloom, but in appreciation. What it says to every man and nation is: "appreciate your Samuel; while you have him, appreciate him". How fortunate many of us are with home, friends, character, reputation, opportunity, and a magnificent chance left yet. God keep us from throwing the chance away. God save us from Endor's cave.