

Date: June 7, 2020

Series: Heroes of Faith

Title: *Samuel – The Boy Who Heard God’s Voice*

Preacher: Mark Adams

Scripture: 1st Samuel 3:1-10

Thank you Erica! I love that hymn; it’s a great reminder of how we get through tough times---day by day---strengthened by our faith in God.

We haven’t done a children’s moment in a long time, so I thought it would be good to begin my message with one this morning. All children---come close to the screen!

Closer...closer...closer...not that close---back up a bit.

Perfect!

I’m going to show you guys some pictures of a Bible story; ones that I am sure you have heard in Sunday School or RBC Camp or at home. If you can guess what story the picture shows---shout it out loud! Your parents are welcome to join in, but you may have to help them. Okay, ready?

PICTURE One: what is this story?

RIGHT: the story of Cain and Abel!

PICTURE Two: what is the story?

RIGHT: Noah and the Ark!

PICTURE Three: what is the story?

RIGHT: the story of Moses!

PICTURE Four: what’s this one?

RIGHT: David and Goliath! That’s David on the left!

Okay, one more.

PICTURE Five: what’s this one? Think hard; little boy in his pj’s who has woken up an old man in the middle of the night...any guesses?

RIGHT! It’s the story of Samuel, and that’s the focus of this morning’s message.

But before we read this Bible story let’s get the setting in mind. We are at the end of the cycle of judges that I talked about last week. In fact, that little boy in the picture, Samuel, will be the last judge of Israel.

Now, if you remember the sermon from Mother’s Day then you know how Samuel came to be in the Tabernacle. Remember? His mother Hannah dedicated him to God before he was born. Once he was weaned, she followed through with her commitment and brought him to Eli to raise her child as a priest. Here’s something else you need to know. The central part of the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies where God dwelt. One of the special fixtures of this holy area was a Menorah; like the kind you see at Hanukah, but this one burned not electricity but olive oil and according to the Law of Moses it was never to go out. In fact, one of the jobs of the priests was to make sure that didn’t happen, make sure the oil reservoir was full and the wicks were carefully trimmed.

Well, when priests maintained the Menorah during the midnight shift they would sleep near the lamp, waking every couple hours to check on it. In our text, Samuel and Eli were on duty during the night, each of them sleeping in one of the little rooms set aside for that purpose.

With that in mind, turn to this morning's text: 1st Samuel 3:1-10.

1 - The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the Word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

2 - One night, Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place.

3 - The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

4 - Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am."

5 - And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So, he went and lay down.

6 - Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

7 - Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

8 - A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy.

9 - So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So, Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 - The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Now, God does speak to us; but the Bible tells us His voice isn't always audible.

- To Daniel God's voice sounded like thunder.
- God appeared to Solomon in a Dream.
- When he spoke to Elijah it was with a "noiseless sound."

But here; God spoke audibly, like a man, which is why Samuel thought it was Eli. You see Samuel and God were not yet on "speaking terms." All Samuel knew about God came through Eli. Another reason Samuel didn't realize it was God was because, as chapter 3 says, **"Word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent."** In fact, Eli had never heard the voice of the Lord.

What did God say to Samuel? Look at verses 11 and following:

"I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time, I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

Now Eli was a great preacher, a fine priest. But he was a passive, inactive father who indulged his evil sons who were also priests---Hophni and Phinehas. Chapter 2 verse 12 says, **"Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord."** According to the Law of Moses, priests were to burn the fat as an offering to the Lord and take whatever didn't burn from the altar. In this way they were to receive only what the Lord provided. But Hophni and Phinehas defied God's law and took the choicest cuts of meat for themselves and offered the leftovers to God.

Worse than that they took sexual advantage of the women who served in the temple. As Swindoll puts it, *"They were willful, carnal reprobates."* They were priests, pastors, who didn't know the Lord. Instead of serving Him, they served themselves. Eli knew all this; but instead of being outraged, instead of disciplining his sons, he did nothing.

Well, Eli asked Samuel what God had said and Samuel told him word for word. Eli's response is disappointing and typical of his character. Basically, he said, *"Well, that's the way it goes."* He could have repented right then and punished his sons, but that's not how Eli rolled. He did the same thing he'd been doing for years--- NOTHING.

One thing we parents can hear God saying to us at this point is the importance of disciplining our children. As Proverbs 13:24 says, ***"Those who love their children care enough to discipline them."***

Okay, here's the question I want us to deal with this morning.

Does God still speak to people today, like He did to young Samuel? And wouldn't it be great if He did! You graduates; wouldn't it be wonderful to have someone tell you, *"Here's where you should go to college. Here's what you should major in. Here's the career that is best for you."* Sure, it would! We'd all be much better off if we had a reliable expert to guide us through all of life's twists and turns. Well, the Bible says we do. In its pages we learn that God is our Creator, our Redeemer, our Father, our Judge; but He is also ready and willing to be our Guide. And that's why I'm preaching this morning from our prayer chapel. This room is set aside as a place for people to come and talk to God, asking for His guidance. Well, how does this happen, not just in this room, but anywhere? How does God speak to us?

(1) First, He does so through the Bible.

God has filled the Bible with both principles and precepts to guide us through life's decisions.

PRECEPTS are clearly marked statements like ***"Thou shalt not steal."*** This is like the precept we have seen in COVID that says, ***"You must wear a face-mask"*** or ***"You must wash your hands 20 seconds."***

There are also PRINCIPLES in Scripture. These are general guidelines to apply to various situations in life. For example Jesus said we are to ***"love our neighbors as ourselves."*** This is like the guideline we have seen in this pandemic that says, ***"Avoid crowded places."***

Well, the principles and precepts of God's Word will never steer you wrong. You can always rely on them. In fact, God will never lead us to do something that contradicts the guidance He has put in His Book. It is as the Psalmist says, the Bible is a ***"lamp to our feet and a light to our path."*** (Psalm 119:105)

Many of the decisions we face in life are no-brainers because God has already told us what to do in the Bible. He has told us how He wants us to live, love, talk, take care of our bodies, handle our money, pray, function as a family member or employee, and many other things. For example, if someone were to wonder if they should sell their house, take all the money, and buy lottery tickets we could tell them with absolute confidence that according to the Bible, God would say "NO!" His written Word is clear about "get rich quick" schemes or attempting to earn our livelihood through games of chance.

- Should we tell the truth? The Bible says yes.
- Should we marry a non-Christian. 2nd Corinthians 6:14 says that is not best for us.

The Bible is a powerful source of guidance. Recently, I started getting e-mails from an individual I do not know personally, but in his e-mails he was criticizing others---people I do know. I think this person was doing what

gossips frequently do, trying to get others on his side with the tool of slander. And sadly social media has become one of a gossip's favorite tools. Well, at first, I ignored the slanderous e-mails, but then I felt God telling me to use His Word. So, I replied---but not with MY words---I used GOD'S Word.

I send him Proverbs 6:19 where it says: ***“God hates those who sows discord among brothers.”***
He replied back with justification of his slander.

I responded with Ephesians 4:1: ***“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”***
He replied back with more of the same.

I responded with Ephesians 4:29: ***“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”***
After that there has been silence. No more emails for me to deal with. I'm hoping he's not emailing anyone else either---but God's guidance was good---His Word took care of the issue. It is indeed ***“profitable for reproof and correction.”*** (2nd Timothy 3)

(2) This leads to a second way God speaks to us---through His Spirit.

Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit came He would speak in ways that would, ***“guide us into all truth.”*** (John 16:13) And He does that; in fact, it was God's Spirit Who prompted me to send those verses as a reply to those slanderous e-mails.

You know, to “speak” to someone is simply to direct their thoughts toward something. Since I am a finite human being, I have to use indirect means to guide your thoughts. I can't just send you my sermons via telepathy. And, I'm not sure you'd want me to. I mean, how would it feel to hear my voice in your head saying, ***“It's sermon time!”***

All kidding aside, I have to express my ideas in words so you can hear them or read them. I need to give my ideas some physical form in order to communicate them to you. But God does not have to do this. He can directly guide our thoughts without the aid of intervening sounds or images. And He does this through the Holy Spirit.

Don't get me wrong. Sometimes God speaks audibly, but mostly He leads us through gentle inner promptings. And that leads me to point out that to benefit from the full advantage of God's wise counsel, you must be a Christian. Romans 8:14 says, ***“those who are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God.”*** When you accept Christ as the Savior and Lord of your life God adopts you as His child and when that happens, His Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you and one of His purposes is to reveal the will of God to you. So only Christians have the Spirit's presence within, and we must have this “inside help” if we are going to be able to hear God's guidance clearly.

(3) A third way God speaks to us is through the Counsel of wise GODLY people.

Proverbs 12:15 says, ***“The fool is right in his own eyes but he who heeds counsel is wise.”*** So, when you face a decision, follow the example of all those people who played “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?” with Jimmy Kimmel. Use a “lifeline” and call on someone whom you know to be a mature, experienced disciple. Talk to people who are known as wise and godly, people who have been around the “spiritual block” so to speak and ask them for input. For me it's been people like Richard McClain and Bill Wehunt and CC Day and Bob Michael, Bill Jones and Paul Jordan. Proverbs 24:6 says, ***“In a MULTITUDE of counselors there is safety.”*** I could go on and on listing people whom God has used to guide me. My Heavenly Father has indeed blessed me with a multitude of counselors! I'm sure that's because He knows I NEED their help!

(4) Finally God speaks to us through the doors of PROVIDENCE.

Hannah Whitall Smith, author of the classic book, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, wrote, "If a leading is from the Holy Spirit, the way will always open for it." In other words, God will always go before us and open the doors through which He wants us to walk. It is never a sign of divine leading when a Christian insists on opening his own way and riding roughshod over all opposing things.

In Acts 16 we find a perfect example of this principle in the lives of Paul and Silas. Paul had already had one successful missionary journey and now the church at Antioch that had sent him the first time was sending him again. This time rather than crossing the Aegean Sea, they were going by land. They came to the cities of Derbe and Lystra and in Lystra the Lord led them to a young man named Timothy and he began to travel with them. And verse 5 says, **"the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily."** So, things were going wonderfully. Paul and his companions were in a pagan region where idol worship was prevalent. Yet people were coming to Christ and churches were being founded. So, they moved on toward the Phrygian/Galatian regions with high hopes. But listen to what happened. Verses 6-7 says, **"And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go to Bithynia and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them."** Now, remember, they had had great successes, open doors, green lights, things were working; but when they moved into the more central and southern regions, God closed the door.

They assumed then that God was leading them north so they headed for Mysia and Bithynia but again the door was closed. Let's put it in our own geographical terms to help us understand what happened. They arrived in Virginia and things went great so they headed south to Louisiana and the doors were closed so they headed north to the Dakotas and God said no. So, they wound up on Troas. That's like going all the way to San Francisco. And when they arrived and prayed for God's guidance Paul had a night vision of a man from Macedonia saying, **"Come on over to Macedonia and help us."** (Acts 16:9) Now, that's like standing on the beach in California and feeling God calling you to China or something.

Think of what this call would require of Paul and his companions. They were in Asia. Macedonia is all the way across the Aegean Sea on the European side. This is another culture, another language, another continent. Closed doors on one side. Open door on the other. And Paul responded to God's guidance. He didn't force his way through closed doors but rather he allowed God to guide him and went through the only door open to him. Look at Acts 16:10. **"After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."** When they arrived they met a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. This led to the beginning of the church at Philippi, the church at Thessalonica, and the church at Corinth. This was the first work of evangelism in Europe recorded in the New Testament. God guided Paul to this wonderful ministry by closing and opening doors and He guides us the same way today.

You may remember our mission trip to Puerto Rico six months back. There was a major earthquake while we were there and that closed the door on our repairing two roofs that had been damaged by Hurricane Maria. But God opened another door, a door of evangelism. Because we had to hire a local contractor to do the work. He was not a Christ-follower and in hiring him we had an opportunity to share the gospel, he even came to the Bible study we led that night. We heard God through the doors of providence.

So, God does speak to us as He did to Samuel, He still leads and guides us. This morning I believe that God wants to guide you and me and He is speaking to some of us very specifically guiding us to important decisions. Perhaps He is guiding some of you to seek reconciliation with someone. Maybe He's guiding you to repent of some sin. If you are not a Christian, I believe God is guiding you to become one.