

A Faithless Father and His Worthless Sons

Text: 1 Samuel 2:12-26

Introduction: Everyone has hopes and dreams for their children.

When asked about their dreams for their children, one parent on the internet said, “My dream is that my children have the passion, means, and opportunity to achieve whatever it is they want to achieve in life.”

Another parent said, “My dream is that my children will have the confidence and the passion to make their dreams come true and that they will believe that they can do whatever it is that they dream...because I know that they can!”

Still another said, “My dream is for my children to grow into compassionate, strong adults that follow their own dreams and aren’t afraid to be different or stand up for what they know is right.

This one’s funny. The parent said, “To follow their dreams!!! My four-year-old son wants to be a drumming mailman when he grows up, and if that’s his dream, I hope he reaches it one day...and I’m paying for his drum lessons right now to get him there!”

Another parent said that her dream for her children is “To be happy. Period.”

The only parent who mentioned anything about God said, “My dream for my daughter is to grow up and be successful in whatever she does and always remember to give back and help others in need. I want to teach her to have an unselfish heart and love everyone. Be strong and know who GOD is.”

What are your hopes and dreams for your children or grandchildren?

My children have very intentional names. Their names reflect something of our hopes and dreams for them. Hudson is named after Hudson Taylor who was a missionary to China. Addie is named after Ashley’s great-grandmother Addie. Amos is named after the Old Testament prophet Amos. Calvin is named after the great Baltimore Oriole Cal Ripken Jr. And Lydia is named after Lydia from Acts 16 who was a worshiper of God and came to know and follow Jesus.

Our text this morning is about a man who undoubtedly had hopes and dreams for his sons. He was a priest and desired to see his sons serving as priests as well. When they were born and he first held them in his arms, he likely began thinking about their respective futures, as all parents do. He may have wondered what they would look like when they got older. He may have wondered what their personalities would be like. I am sure all kinds of thoughts and dreams flooded his mind concerning his two sons.

We find the story of this father and his sons in 1 Samuel 2. Go ahead and turn there in your Bible if you haven’t already.

(1 Samuel 2:12-26...Pray)

Often our hopes and dreams for our children don’t come to pass as we might hope or even expect. This can happen for many reasons. But here in 1 Samuel 2, it seems that Eli’s hopes and dreams for his boys didn’t come to pass, at least in part, due to his own faithlessness. In fact, Eli and his sons are a tragic example of what happens when God’s people do what is right in their own eyes.

So, as we look at Eli and his sons’ failure to honor the Lord, I want us to examine our own hearts and lives and think about what their story teaches us about how we can be faithful to the Lord.

I. Heed the warning of Eli’s worthless sons (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25).

A. We learned back in chapter 1 that Eli the priest had two sons: Hophni and Phinehas (1:3).

- 1. Like their father, the Bible tells us that they were priests of the Lord.**
- 2. But the narrative of chapter 1 focused on Hannah, her husband Elkanah, and their eventual son Samuel.**
- 3. But now the focus shifts to Eli and his sons.**

B. And the author of 1 Samuel tells us very clearly what we are to think of these two sons, Hophni and Phinehas (vs. 12).

1. Verse 12 says that they were “worthless men” (vs. 12a).

- a. Now, this is a stunning statement that seems really harsh when you first read it.
- b. We might wonder how the author of 1 Samuel could make such a harsh judgment regarding these two men.
- c. But then we realize that ultimately this is God’s judgment of Eli’s sons as this is what is said of them in God’s inspired Word.
- d. It’s important to note that a literal English translation of the Hebrew text would say, “the sons of Eli, the sons of Belial.”

- 1) *We know that Belial can be a name for Satan as it seems to be used in 2 Corinthians 6.*
- 2) *So, it’s possible that the author’s intent here is to say that Eli’s sons were really sons of the devil.*
- 3) *If that is the case, it certainly says something about the sons, but it is likely intended as an indictment against Eli as well.*

2. Now, this is not intended as a statement concerning their dignity and worth as image bearers of God.

3. It’s intended as a statement of their value to God’s kingdom.

a. In fact, the next sentence in the verse says, “They did not know the Lord” (vs. 12b).

- 1) *This is why they were worthless. They did not know the Lord.*
- 2) *It wasn’t because they lacked intelligence.*
- 3) *It wasn’t because they came from the wrong family.*
- 4) *It wasn’t because they were unable to work and make a living.*
- 5) *It was because they did not know or follow the Lord.*

b. And this is shocking because they were priests.

- 1) *They were part of God’s covenant people by birth.*
- 2) *They grew up in the temple. Their father was a priest.*
- 3) *They had access to everything they needed to increase in godliness.*
- 4) *Yet they were unconverted men who were ignorant of God’s grace and cared nothing about obedience to Him.*
- 5) *As priests, they had the responsibility of representing the people of Israel to God.*
- 6) *They had the responsibility of offering sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of the people.*

4. But they were worthless men who did not know the Lord.

C. The text goes on to tell us about Hophni and Phinehas’ desecration of the sacrificial offerings (vs. 13-16). (Read vs. 13-16)

1. These verses do not describe the practice as had been prescribed by the Lord, but rather they describe the ways in which Eli’s sons had perverted priestly practice.
2. It is true that the law of Moses provided that the priests who served God’s house would receive their food from the sacrifices that were offered (Deut. 18:3).
3. God gave his people explicit instructions regarding how it was to be done. The law even specified what portion the priests were to take.
4. But Eli’s sons were taking whatever they wanted (vs. 13-14). While the meat was boiling, the priest’s servant would stick a fork in it, and whatever the fork pulled out, they would take for themselves.
5. And if that were not enough, they went on to demand even the fat portions which were reserved for the Lord (vs. 15-16). They would only accept raw meat that they could roast. They were unwilling to wait until the fat portions were offered to the Lord. And if the person bringing the sacrifice would not give it to them, they would take it by force.

6. Where they were supposed to be acting on behalf of the people, they were stealing from them and robbing them of the blessing associated with their sacrifice.
- D. Verse 17 serves as a strong indictment against Eli's sons for their sin against the Lord (vs. 17). (Read vs. 17)**
1. The sin of Hophni and Phinehas was great in the sight of the Lord.
 - a. This is a reminder to us that the Lord demands holiness from His people.
 - b. God does not take sin lightly, and we shouldn't either.
 - c. In fact, Eli and his sons would pay for their sin, as we will see as we continue through the narrative.
 2. The problem was that they treated the offering of the Lord with contempt. And not only did the Lord know this. But the people who came to sacrifice witnessed it as well. And perhaps some who came to sacrifice were even led astray by the very ones who were supposed to lead them to the Lord.
- E. In fact, as we keep reading, we learn more of Hophni and Phinehas' sin against the Lord and the people.**
1. Eli, their father, was very old (vs. 22a).
 - a. We don't know how old he was, just that he was VERY old.
 - b. And not only was he advanced in years, but his health was likely betraying him.
 - c. This helps us understand why Hophni and Phinehas were in charge of offering the sacrifices at this point instead of Eli.
 2. Eli kept receiving reports concerning the sin of his sons (vs. 22). (Read vs. 22)
 - a. The reports of their sin would have included their stealing from the people and profaning the sacrifices.
 - b. But we also learn here of something else they were doing. They were fornicating with the temple servants.
 - c. In fact, their positions of power and influence as priests probably mean that there was some level of coercion involved as well.
 3. Notice that the author of 1 Samuel says that Eli "kept hearing all that his sons were doing TO all Israel." The priests were sinning against God's people.
 - a. This is a reminder that it is rare that your sin only hurts you.
 - b. We don't like to think about sin that way. One of the great myths of our culture is that it doesn't matter what you do or how you live as long as you don't hurt anyone else. But that is a lie from the mouth of the devil himself. Because when you sin, you almost certainly hurt other people.
 - c. When you sin, you hurt those you sin with. This extends to many areas of sin, but it is especially true with regard to sexual sin as we see with Hophni and Phinehas. This is why Jesus said, "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."
 - d. When you sin, you also harm those who love you. Those who love you desire good for you. They desire abundant life for you. And abundant life is never found in disobedience to God and His commands. You hurt those who love you when you thumb your nose at God and thus set yourself up to incur the wrath of God.

- e. **And believer, when you sin, you harm the name of Christ and the bride of Christ, His church. The world is watching you and me, and they can smell hypocrisy from a mile away. Now it is true that the world will often cry wolf and yell hypocrisy when hypocrisy is nowhere to be found, but it is also often true that hypocrisy abounds among those who claim the name of Christ.**
4. **In Hophni and Phinehas' case, they were the religious leaders. They were the priests!**
 5. **Yet rather than leading people to God and a closer relationship with Him, they were pulling people into sin and driving them further from Him.**
- F. This led to a rebuke from their father beginning in verse 23 (vs. 23-25a). (Read vs. 23-24)**
1. **It's good that he is rebuking them now, but we have to wonder what took so long.**
 - a. **There's no mention of any kind of rebuke until this point.**
 - b. **But we get the idea as we read the narrative that Hophni and Phinehas have been out of control for a long time.**
 - c. **It seems that by mentioning that Eli was "very old" the writer may be implying that Eli had neglected his parental responsibilities earlier in life.**
 - d. **God had given His people very clear expectations regarding training their children in righteousness, but Eli had failed to train his children in the way that they should go.**
 2. **But here, Eli confronts his sons about their sin (vs. 23-24).**
 - a. **It seems that the reports of their sin had become so frequent and numerous and of such a serious nature that he could no longer ignore them.**
- b. **Eli had not just received a report from one person. The text says that he was receiving reports from "all the people" (vs. 23b).**
 - c. **Many had been affected directly by the sin of Eli's sons.**
 - d. **And even if there were those who had not been affected directly, they had heard of the abominable things that were taking place in the temple.**
 - e. **The reports Eli was receiving were not good reports (vs. 24).**
 - f. **The truth is that the witness of Eli's sons was on the line. The witness of Eli was on the line. And ultimately, the character of God was on the line. God was being misrepresented by His priests.**
 - g. **Eli had to do something.**
- G. So, he issues a warning to his sons (vs. 25a). (Read vs. 25a)**
1. **The warning that Eli gives them utilizes courtroom imagery. If you commit a crime against someone, you can hire another person as your lawyer who will then mediate for you. If you commit a crime against a lawyer, you cannot then turn around and hire that lawyer to defend you.**
 2. **Eli's point is that sin against other people can be forgiven through the atoning blood of the Lord's sacrifices. But what is left as a means of atonement for the sin of profaning the sacrifices themselves?**
 3. **God had provided a means of salvation, but what was left if they rejected that means?**
 4. **Eli's warning to his sons ought to remind us of the holiness, justice, and wrath of God. Eli's sons had apparently forgotten about the holiness of God. They were participating in actions intended to satisfy the wrath of God, namely the offering of sacrifices, but they were doing so in a way that would actually incur God's wrath.**
 5. **They were essentially looking God in the eye and calling Him a liar.**

6. They had God's revelation to them concerning Himself. They knew the law of God. They knew that God is holy. They knew that God requires holiness of His people. They knew WHY they were to offer sacrifices to God. They knew HOW they were to offer sacrifices to God. They knew the penalty for sin. They knew the story from Numbers 3 of Nadab and Abihu who, as priests, were killed because they offered up strange fire to God. Yet they persisted in their sin.
7. The truth that Eli's sons needed to hear was that while they fattened themselves on the meat of Israel's sacrifices and satisfied their sexual desires with the temple servants, a day of judgment was coming.
8. In fact, this is the truth that you and I need to be reminded of today. This is the warning that we need too. God is holy. The wages of sin is death. There is coming a day of judgment. But God has also provided us a means of escape through His Son Jesus Christ.

H. Sadly, despite Eli's warning, the brothers remained obstinate.

1. They would not listen to their father (vs. 25b). (Read vs. 25b)
 - a. It seems that rebukes from their father in the past had been few and far between.
 - b. And because they had not developed respect for him already, they were not going to listen to him now.
 - c. This unwillingness to listen to their father made them stupid in the eyes of God. Proverbs 12:1 says, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid."
 - d. And their unwillingness to listen would ultimately lead to their destruction. Proverbs 29:1 says, "He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken beyond healing."
2. Now, what does the text say is the reason that they would not listen to their father.

- a. It was the will of the Lord to put them to death (vs. 25c).
- b. What in the world does this mean?
- c. This phrase could be translated, "It pleased the Lord to put them to death."
- d. This does not mean that God takes pleasure in killing people. God says in Ezekiel 18:32, "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone." 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."
- e. God does not take pleasure in killing people, but He does delight in bringing justice because He is just. He always does what is right.
- f. And the nature of Hophni and Phinehas' sin was so great, and it continued for so long that God was determined to pour out His wrath on them in a display of His justice.

The tragic account of Hophni and Phinehas, their sin against the Lord, and their father's inability to lead them in the way that they should go serves as a warning to us that we must heed. Thankfully, as we heed the warning of Eli's worthless sons, we can also...

II. Follow the example of Elkanah's faithful son (1 Samuel 2:18-21, 26).

- A. See, where Eli's sons treated the offering of the Lord with contempt, our text tells us that Samuel was ministering before the Lord (vs. 18-21). (Read vs. 18)
 1. This stands out to us because Hophni and Phinehas were the sons of the priests. They were priests themselves. If anyone should have been ministering before the Lord, it was them. Yet they profaned the Lord's sacrifices.
 2. On the other hand, Samuel was just a kid born to a no name family in Israel. Yet he was the one faithfully ministering before the Lord.

3. In fact, Hophni and Phinehas were grown men, but the text makes clear that Samuel was just a boy (vs. 19).
4. Even in an environment where it would have been very easy for him to be led astray by the sin of Hophni and Phinehas, Samuel remained faithful to the Lord.
5. Hophni and Phinehas should have been setting an example for Samuel of what it means to follow the Lord. Instead, they were participating in all kinds of wickedness with no concern for their own spiritual state or Samuel's relationship with the Lord.
6. We're told in verses 20-21 that Eli spoke a blessing over Elkanah and Hannah, and they had five more children together (vs. 20-21a).
7. And then look at the second half of verse 21 (vs. 21b). (Read vs. 21b)
8. Where Eli's sons wandered further and further away from the Lord as time went on, Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord.
9. In fact, as we continue reading in 1 Samuel, we'll see more of Samuel and his life of faithful service to the Lord. In so many ways, he lived a life worthy of commendation.

B. But our text this morning has a little bit more to say about Samuel down in verse 26 (vs. 26). (Read vs. 26)

1. You can contrast everything we've said about Hophni and Phinehas with what is said about Samuel here in verse 26.
2. You may also notice that what is said of Samuel here is very similar to what is said of Jesus in Luke 2:52. Luke 2:52 says, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."
3. I want you to see that Samuel here is a picture of Christ.

Which leads us to our final exhortation this morning. Yes, heed the warning of Eli's worthless sons. Follow the example of Elkanah's faithful son. But most importantly...

III. Trust the work of God's sinless Son (1 Samuel 2:25).

A. We have seen that Samuel was the opposite of Eli's sons in just about every way possible.

1. But the truth is that Samuel was still a sinner in need of God's grace just like you and me.
2. Samuel's role in this contrast with Eli's sons is to point us to Christ.
3. Because the truth is that we are all sinners. We have all sinned against other people. And ultimately, we have all sinned against God.

B. I want you to look back at what Eli told his sons in verse 25. (Read vs. 25a)

1. The job of the priest in Israel was to act on behalf of the people in relation to God. The priest would offer sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sin.
2. The problem was that in the case of Hophni and Phinehas, they were the chief of sinners.
3. And they profaned the very means that God had given them of restoring a right relationship with God, namely the sacrificial system.
4. So, what were God's people supposed to do?
5. Let me ask a more personal question. What are we supposed to do?
6. Eli asks, "If someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?"
7. We've sinned against the Lord! Who can intercede for us?
8. The author of the book of Hebrews answers that question for us in Hebrews 4 beginning in verse 14: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that

we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

- 9. The truth is that like Eli, and Hophni, and Phinehas, and Elkanah, and Samuel, we have sinned against the Lord. But we have a high priest who was and is without sin. The Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 10. And by turning from our sin and placing our trust in Jesus, we can draw near to the throne of grace with confidence. And there we will receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.**

Conclusion: