

The Word of the Lord

Text: 1 Samuel 3

Introduction: As you know, we are in the midst of a sermon series on the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel.

And over the last two sermons in 1 Samuel, we have been focusing on Eli the priest and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. We've contrasted Samuel with Hophni and Phinehas, but the focus has really been on Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas. But now in chapter 3, the focus shifts to Samuel.

You'll remember that there was a man in Israel named Elkanah. Elkanah had two wives: Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah was barren. So, Hannah begged the Lord for a son and promised that if the Lord would hear her prayer and give her a son, she would give him back to the Lord.

The Lord heard the cry of Hannah's heart and answered her prayer according to His good purposes. Hannah conceived, bore a son, and named him Samuel. After Samuel was weaned, Hannah followed through with her promise. She brought Samuel to the house of the Lord at Shiloh and dedicated him to the Lord. And Samuel was placed in the care of Eli the priest.

After Hannah's prayer at the beginning of chapter 2, the narrative of 1 Samuel focuses on Eli and his sons. But there are some references to Samuel throughout chapter 2 that draw attention to the sharp contrast between Samuel and Eli's sons. Chapter 2 verse 18 shows Samuel ministering before the Lord. We saw Hannah's continued provision for Samuel in verse 19. We saw in verse 21 that Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord. Verse 26 says that Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and man. And finally, we saw in verse 35 that Samuel was the immediate fulfillment of the promised faithful priest of whom the Lord spoke to Eli.

That brings us to chapter 3. If you haven't yet opened your Bible to chapter 3 of 1 Samuel, I encourage you to go ahead and do so. We do still have a few of the 1 Samuel Scripture journals available. If you haven't yet gotten one, I encourage you to do so at the end of our service this morning. They are a great resource for note taking and further study.

(Read 1 Samuel 3...Pray)

There are a lot of interesting things happening here in 1 Samuel 3, but to sum the chapter up in one sentence, we could say: Samuel heard the Lord's call and committed himself to ministering as a prophet of the Lord.

The question for us then becomes: What does Samuel's experience with the Word of the Lord teach us about how we ought to respond to the Word of the Lord?

I. Prepare to hear the Word of the Lord (1 Samuel 3:1-14).

- A. To understand what's going on here in 1 Samuel 3, it's helpful to understand a little bit about the cultural context in which Samuel found himself.
 1. We know that this was the time of the judges. The last verse of Judges says, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).
 2. We shouldn't think that this period of time was devoid of religion.
 3. Samuel had grown up in the house of the Lord where Eli's sons desecrated the sacrificial system and were sexually immoral with the female servants.
 4. And now we see in verse 1 that "the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision" (vs. 1). No one was hearing from God. And the problem wasn't God.
 5. Proverbs 29:18 tells us the inevitable result of a lack of God's Word. The text says, "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint." The NLT really gets at the meaning of the verse. It says, "When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild."
 6. This was the situation in Israel at the time. People were living however they pleased. They were doing whatever they wanted. All without any regard for God and His Word. There was nowhere in Israel where this rejection of the commands of God was seen more clearly than the house of the Lord in Shiloh.

- a. As we think about the cultural situation into which Samuel was born, we can't help but see parallels to our own day.
- b. An increasing number of Americans have forsaken any absolute standard of morality and choose to do what is right in their own eyes.
- c. Not only is this true in the culture around us, but far too often it is true among the religious and even those who claim the name of Christ.
- d. There is a lack of desire to actually hear from God. Because we know that if we hear from God and understand what it is that He requires of us, we actually have to walk in obedience to Him.
- e. That's our cultural situation today. And it was the cultural situation in Israel in Samuel's day.

B. But Samuel stood out in the midst of this situation.

- 1. As we saw in chapter 2, Samuel "was ministering before the Lord" (2:18). He "grew in the presence of the Lord" (2:21). And he "continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man" (2:26).
- 2. We come here to chapter 3 verse 1 and we read, "Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli" (vs. 1).
- 3. In the midst of what can only be described as a terrible cultural situation, Samuel stood out.
- 4. And because Samuel stood out, and God determined that He could trust Samuel, God gave His Word to Samuel.
 - a. Eli was getting old, and his eyesight was failing him, so he was sleeping in his own place (vs. 2).
 - b. Samuel, therefore, was tending to the lamp of God in the temple (vs. 3).
 - c. And he was lying down when he heard a voice calling his name. The Bible tells us it was the Lord. But Samuel didn't know it was the Lord. So, Samuel said, "Here I am!" (vs. 4).

- d. Samuel thought it was Eli who was calling him. So, he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me" (vs. 5).
- e. But Eli hadn't called Samuel, and he instructed Samuel to lie down again (vs. 5).
- f. Then the Lord called again: "Samuel!" And again, Samuel thought that it was Eli calling him (vs. 6).
- g. Verse 7 explains why Samuel didn't know it was the Lord calling him. (Read vs. 7) Samuel knew OF the Lord. He had even ministered TO the Lord. But he had never encountered the Lord in a personal way. He had never heard God's voice before.
- h. But now the Lord is speaking to him. And in verse 8, we see that the Lord called Samuel a third time. And again, Samuel thought it was Eli calling him (vs. 8a).
- i. But this time the text says, "Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the young man" (vs. 8b).
- j. So, Eli told Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for you servant hears'" (vs. 9).
- k. So, Samuel went and lay down. And this time the text says that "the Lord came and stood" (vs. 10a). This is different than before. It seems to indicate an escalation in the Lord's effort to get Samuel's attention.
- l. The Lord said, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel responded just as Eli had instructed him, "Speak, for your servant hears" (vs. 10b).
- m. And that's when the Lord told Samuel of His plan for Eli's household (vs. 11-14). (Read vs. 11-14)

C. This account of Samuel's calling by God is a reminder to us that our God is a God who speaks.

- 1. Verse 1 says that "the word of the Lord was rare in those days." But that was an indictment on God's people rather than on God. There was no frequent vision because the people of Israel, including and especially their leaders, were not seeking the Lord.

2. **Eli was the priest. We've already seen how he and his sons were not attentive to the Word of the Lord. Instead, they were committed to going their own way and doing their own thing.**
3. **So, the Lord spoke to Samuel.**
 - a. **Samuel had never heard the voice of the Lord, so he didn't recognize it at first. Eli wasn't used to hearing the voice of the Lord either, so he didn't immediately recognize that it was the Lord speaking to Samuel.**
 - b. **But the Lord spoke to Samuel. And this stands out because Samuel was still very young. One commentator estimates that he may have been around 12 years old.**
 - c. **Yet, the text says that the Lord "came and stood" and called out to him, "Samuel! Samuel!"**
 - d. **The Lord sought him out. The text presents the Lord as walking right up to Samuel and calling his name.**
4. **You see, Goshen family, our God is not silent. Our God is a God who speaks.**
 - a. **He speaks to us in many ways. Through His Spirit. Through His people. Through Creation. And so on.**
 - b. **But the primary way that God speaks to us is through His Word.**
 - c. **Have you ever wished that God would speak to you as He did to Samuel? Maybe you had a big decision you needed to make. Maybe you just wanted some clarity about life. You wondered why things happened the way that they did. Perhaps you just think it would be cool to hear the audible voice of God or have a vision where God speaks to you.**
 - d. **The truth is that God has already spoken to you. We are not lacking a word from Him because He has given us His Word. Every time we open this book and read it, we are reading the very Word of God.**
- e. **I've heard it said, "If you want God to speak to you, read your Bible. If you want to hear Him speak to you audibly, read it out loud."**
- f. **Goshen family, as God's people, we should long to hear from Him. And each time we open His Word, our response should be as Samuel's "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."**
5. **It would be easy for us to criticize the people of Israel in Samuel's day. The word of the Lord was rare. They were not hearing from God.**
 - a. **But are we not the same when we allow other things in our lives to crowd out our time with God in His Word?**
 - b. **Are we not the same when we gather as God's church out of routine rather than with our Bibles out expecting to hear from God?**
 - c. **I wonder if you came to church this morning expecting to hear from God?**
 - d. **We have to prepare ourselves to hear the Word of the Lord so that when God speaks, we will recognize His voice and be ready to walk in obedience to whatever He says to us.**

Samuel heard the Word of the Lord. And we must prepare to hear the Word of the Lord. We also must...

II. Commit to speak the Word of the Lord (1 Sam. 3:15-21).

A. This is what we see with Samuel in 1 Samuel 3.

1. **Why did God speak to Samuel? He was to be God's mouthpiece. Samuel was to speak what he heard from God.**
2. **God didn't speak to Samuel solely for his own information or edification.**
3. **This message of judgment on Eli and his household was given to Samuel so that Samuel could share it with Eli.**

4. God said in verse 11, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle” (vs. 11). Those who heard the words that God spoke to Samuel would know of the holiness and judgment of God.
5. God had already warned Eli of coming judgment back in chapter 12. But there’s no indication that Eli took that warning as seriously as he should have. So, God uses Samuel to confirm His warning of judgment when he says in verse 12, “On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end” (vs. 12).

B. Samuel was placed in an impossible situation.

1. The text says that when morning came, he opened the doors of the temple and was afraid to tell Eli of his vision (vs. 15).
 - a. This is of course understandable. Eli was his mentor. And the message that God had given him was one of judgment.
 - b. No one wants to be the bearer of bad news. But this wasn’t just any bad news. God had said to Samuel, “I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever” (vs. 14).
 - c. Think about this a bit. Samuel had grown up in Eli’s household. Samuel had undoubtedly witnessed the sin of Eli’s sons.
 - d. Perhaps he had even wondered why Eli didn’t do anything about it.
 - e. But Samuel learned very clearly from the Lord that the Lord requires holiness and reverence to Him.
2. Though Samuel was afraid to tell of his vision to Eli, Eli was insistent that Samuel tell him all that the Lord had said. Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you” (vs. 17).

3. So, Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him (vs. 18a).
 - a. You can imagine how tempting it would have been for Samuel to soften the message that God had given him.
 - b. It’s not easy to speak a message of judgment. It’s not easy to warn people of the dangers of hell.
 - c. Maybe you’ve felt the temptation to soften the truth of God’s judgment in speaking with those who don’t know Jesus. I’m not saying we have to lead with the fires of hell when we go to have a gospel conversation with someone, but we can’t shy away from it either.
 - d. People need to know of the judgment that awaits all who remain in their sin and apart from Christ.
 - e. Having heard God’s Word regarding His judgment of sin, it is our responsibility to speak His Word and warn of the judgment that is to come.
4. After hearing Samuel’s message of God’s judgment, Eli resigned himself to the Lord’s purposes. Eli said, “It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him” (vs. 18b).
 - a. We don’t know how much time had passed between God’s warning directly to Eli in chapter 2 and His word to Eli through Samuel here in chapter 3.
 - b. There had certainly been adequate time for repentance. But since there had been no repentance, there would be no forgiveness.
 - c. The truth is that a time always comes when God’s warnings cease and it is too late.
 - d. Let this be a warning to all of us this morning. Maybe you’re here this morning and you’ve heard the gospel. But you’ve never turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus. Do not delay. There will be a day when it is too late. Today is the day of salvation. But there is coming a day of judgment.

- e. **Repent of your sin and place your faith in Jesus. Be reconciled to God today by the shed blood of Jesus Christ on your behalf.**
- f. **Maybe today you find yourself caught in sin. Now is the time for repentance. Do not delay. God is patient. He is not willing that any should perish. But eventually His patience will wear out. Judgment will come. And in that day, it will be too late. There will be nothing left to do but accept the judgment of God.**

C. Samuel's message of God's judgment on Eli and his household was not the end of Samuel's prophetic ministry. Rather, it was really just the beginning.

1. **We see this in the last paragraph of the chapter in verses 19-21. (Read vs. 19-21)**
2. **We also see Samuel's prophetic ministry in the future chapters of 1 Samuel.**
3. **Samuel was set apart by the Lord for this task.**
4. **And Samuel's calling is a reminder to us that we have also been called by God to speak His Word.**
 - a. **Maybe there's someone here this morning who has been wrestling with God's call on your life to a particular area of ministry. Maybe that's a call to vocational ministry. Maybe it's a call to some kind of other service to King Jesus. Whatever it is, will you follow Samuel's example and submit yourself to the Lord's call on your life? Will you go wherever He tells you to go? Do whatever He tells you to do? Say whatever He tells you to say?**
 - b. **The truth is that even without a special call to a specific area of ministry, if you are a follower of Jesus, you have been called. The Great Commission has been given to all of us by our Lord Jesus. We are all called to go and make disciples.**

- c. **God has not spoken to us through His Word solely for our own edification. Instead, we are His ambassadors. We must open our mouths and speak the truth of God's Word.**
- d. **And the message we proclaim as followers of Jesus should be the same gospel that saved us. We must proclaim the complete gospel. (Share the gospel)**
- e. **We don't do anyone any favors when we proclaim a partial gospel.**
- f. **We should preach the whole gospel, including God's judgment of sin, but we should do so with the same tender heart that made Samuel reluctant to bring a message of judgment to Eli.**
- g. **We don't take any delight in God's judgment. But we believe the reality that judgment is coming, and we warn those we know and love to flee the judgment that is to come.**

Conclusion: Our sermon this morning has been focused on the Word of the Lord. The Lord spoke His Word to Samuel. And then Samuel, as God's prophet, was to speak God's Word to Eli and others.

But we are also reminded this morning that God has given us His Word in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Word made flesh. He is our mediator between us and God. Just as Samuel had an intimate relationship with God, we too can have an intimate relationship with God through Jesus.

That's good news for us, isn't it?

Just as Samuel did, we live in troubled times. Just as they did in Samuel's day, the world around us is committed to doing what is right in their own eyes. But we can be certain that God is still speaking to His people. He has not forgotten us. He has given us His Word, and He has given us His Son. May we cling tightly to both.