

1 Samuel 3 — The Call Of Samuel

February 6, 2022

Good morning! If you are a visitor, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. It is great to have you. Before we get to our study, let me catch you up on the progress of our capital campaign and the renovations of the building we bought for the Spencer Campus.

We are at the end of the capital campaign. Our goal is to raise \$650,000. Last week, we were at \$456,000. After last Sunday we are now at \$517,000. That leaves \$133,000 left to go. Those funds will be used for the renovation of the new Spencer Campus which is at the north end of the north mall in Spencer. A portion of those funds will also be used for renovations at the Spirit Lake campus.

Last week, I told you we were starting renovations at the new Spencer Campus this week. We went to work 6-9 p.m. Thursday and 8-11 a.m. Saturday. Most of the work this week was the demolition of existing walls. We filled a large dumpster with drywall. This week, cranes will be installing new HVAC units on the roof. That will give us a significant cost saving for heating and cooling. This week, we are working Thursday night and Saturday morning again. It is great if you can make it, even if it is just for an hour or two. Many hands make light work, and there is always something to do. So a lot is happening. Let's pray, and we will get into our study.

Many times we take things for granted in life until we don't have them. We forget how thankful we are for our health until we are sick with COVID. We forget how thankful we are for our family until we meet people who don't have loving families. We forget how good it is to live in a free country until some of those

freedoms are taken away or you are an Olympic Athlete in Beijing. As long as those good things are a part of our lives, we don't think too much about them.

One good thing it is easy for us to take for granted is the Word of God. Imagine what life would be like if the Bible was taken away. Imagine what life would be like if you never heard about God's love for you through Jesus? That would be tragic.

In the eighth century B.C., the prophet Amos warned God's people that God was going to adopt radio silence. There was to be an absence of God's Word, and people would be desperate to hear.

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it." Amos 8:11–12 (ESV)

It was to be like a famine when people desperately search for food and drink but are not able to find anything to satisfy their hunger. The famine was to be worse than being without food. It was to be a famine of the Word of the Lord. God's people would not realize how much they missed God's Word until they didn't have God's Word.

This morning, as we return to our study of the book of 1 Samuel, let me remind you where we left off. Young Samuel was left by his mother at the temple to be raised by the priests when he was only 4 years old. He was a little priest dressed in a little priestly robe. Even though he was young his character was completely different from the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas. Today, as we come to 1 Samuel 3, it is the story of the rise of Samuel. It is how Samul moved from a God-honoring little priest to a leader in the nation. As we begin this

chapter, we find the Word of God was rare in those days, just as it was rare 200 years later in the days of Amos.

When I say the Word of God was rare, what does that mean? Realize, this is early in biblical history. They didn't have most of the Bible that we enjoy. In those days God would speak his Word through the prophets to people. The prophets would speak and say, "Thus saith the Lord."

At this time, that rarely happened. Why had God taken a position of radio silence? Why were God's words absent from God's people? The reason why God rarely spoke was because of the priests. The priests were the men appointed by God to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people and to represent God to the people. As we saw last week, Hophni and Phinehas were not godly men, they were worthless men. There is a connection between the rarity of God's Word in those days and the complete failure of the priesthood. When these priests chose to live sinful lives, there was an absence of the Word of God in their lives.

So as we pick up the story in 1 Samuel 3, it was very dark times. Young Samuel was at Shiloh. He lived and worked with Hophni and Phinehas, who were extremely corrupt. Eli was still in charge of the tabernacle, but he was old and mostly incompetent. When he died, his corrupt sons would take over. How would God come to the rescue? Let's find out.

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am,

for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. And the Lord called again, “Samuel!” and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.” Then the Lord said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.” Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.” And 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.” So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, “It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him.” And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. 1 Samuel 3 (ESV)

This chapter breaks into three pieces. First, the Lord revealed himself to Samuel. Second, the Lord gave his first prophetic message to Samuel. Third, the Lord’s established Samuel as a prophet of the Lord.

The Lord revealed himself to Samuel.

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. 1 Samuel 3:1–3 (ESV)

When we first thread through this, there doesn't appear to be much here beside a brief introduction. Remember the Holy Spirit inspired the biblical authors to carefully tell these stories. When there are details in the story, they are there for a reason. The details of the story are not wasted information. They are intentionally given to help focus the message of the story. Let me show you what I mean.

Samuel was serving in the tabernacle in the presence of the Lord, working for Eli. It says the Word of the Lord was rare in those days, there was no frequent vision. Immediately afterward, the author told us Eli's eyesight had grown dim so he could not see. Obviously, Eli's failing eyesight was part of the physical deterioration that came with his old age. Why did the author choose to highlight this particular aspect of Eli's decline at the same time he told us there was no frequent vision from the Lord? Eli's declining physical condition was a picture of his declining spiritual condition. Just as Eli could not see the physical light of day, Eli also could not see spiritually. There was no frequent vision from the Lord. God was no longer speaking his Word to the people through Eli. Eli was no longer able to see physically and spiritually. God was no longer giving his word to the people through the spiritual leaders of the nation. As a result, the nation was living without hearing God's Word.

In addition, we see Eli was lying down. In a moment, we will see Samuel was lying down too. However, Eli was lying down in his own place. He never got out of bed. Young Samuel was lying down, but he was lying next to the ark. When God speaks, Samuel energetically gets up out of bed responding to God's

voice. From the placements of their beds, who was closer to God, Eli or Samuel? When it came to listening to God's voice, who was more eager to hear and respond?

Old Eli is pictured as an old man that was too old to do much at all. His physical and spiritual vision had grown dull. All we have seen him do so far in the book is sit, speak, hear, and now lie down.

As we look at old Eli, we should sense a growing crisis. The Israelites had always needed a mediator to receive God's Word, to offer sacrifices for their sins, and to represent them before God. Here we see Israel's mediator as feeble, old, and frail. He couldn't do much of anything. What would happen when Eli was gone? Would his corrupt sons take over?

We also read that the lamp of God had not gone out. This lamp is also a picture of what was happening in Israel. God's presence in the nation was dull. It was small. It had not gone out but there wasn't much light left.

What lamp was this? This was referring to the seven-branched menorah that was kept in the tabernacle. It was filled with oil and lit in the evening. It burned until morning. Since it was an oil lamp, as the oil drained from the lamp, the flames grew smaller. The flames being small but not out means that what was about to take place happened in the early morning hours shortly before dawn. Let me show you about this in the book of Exodus.



“You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may regularly be set up to burn. In the tent of meeting, outside the veil that is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be a statute forever to

be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel. Exodus 27:20–21 (ESV)

Let's get back to the text.

Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, “Here I am!” and ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. 1 Samuel 3:4–5 (ESV)

The Lord’s Word was rare in those days. What was rare was happening that night. God was speaking again.

It is clear that at least on this occasion when the Word of the Lord came to Samuel, it came in an audible voice. Whether or not it was an audible voice that anyone else was able to hear, we do not know. Eli was sleeping in his place. It must have been some distance away. Maybe that is why he didn’t hear God speaking. It is also reasonable to assume that the reason Eli did not hear God’s voice was that just as Eli’s eyesight had grown dim, his hearing probably had also grown dull.

If God called Samuel in an audible voice, that would explain Samuel’s reaction when he jumped out of bed and said, “Here I am!” He ran to Eli and asked if Eli called him. After all, who else would call Samuel in the middle of the night? I suspect Samuel was probably used to hearing Eli call for him in the middle of the night, asking Samuel to help him since he was old.

Let me share a few thoughts on these verses. It is clear that the Word of the Lord was rare at this time. There was no hearing of God’s words or vision from God. This is because God’s leaders walked from God and drifted into sin. This points out a principle that is true today.

The health of a church is determined by the presence of the Word of God in the church.

God withdrew his light from the wicked priests at Shiloh. The same thing happens in modern churches today who turn away from God's Word and teach a self-help message, a prosperity message or follow critical scholars who undermine people's confidence in God's Word. When God's leaders walk away from obedience to God and walk away from the Word of God, the spiritual life of God's people goes into decline.

Today, just as in Samuel's day, there is no shortage of "religion." There is a famine of hearing the Word of God. The revival of the church is tied to the centrality of the Word of God in the church. When God is speaking and people are listening, the church is growing.

Let's get back to the text.

And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 1 Samuel 3:6–7 (ESV)

At this point, neither Samuel nor Eli understood what was happening. The writer of 1 Samuel told us twice that the Lord was calling Samuel. Now he gives us an explanation for Samuel's dumbfounded responses to God's voice.

Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. This is a strange thing to say. After all, Samuel was ministering to the Lord. In chapter 2, we learned Samuel was growing in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and men. How could he not know the Lord when by all appearances he loved the Lord? When it says Samuel did not yet know the Lord,

the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him, the point is that up to this time, Samuel had never heard God's voice. This is not saying Samuel wasn't a believer. This was the first time God spoke to Samuel directly.

What is happening is God was changing Samuel's office. Samuel began as a little priest, and now God was also making him a prophet. He was hearing God's words that he was to speak to God's people. From this point forward, Samuel would be able to say, "Thus saith the Lord." God had chosen to make Samuel his prophetic mouthpiece for the next generation. This is the first time this experience happened for Samuel.

And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 1 Samuel 3:8 (ESV)

This time old Eli finally recognized something was happening that hadn't happened at Shiloh for a very long time. God was speaking again. God wasn't speaking to Eli. He was speaking to Samuel.

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 1 Samuel 3:9 (ESV)

Would it happen a fourth time? What would happen if Samuel followed Eli's simple instructions. Let's find out.

And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." 1 Samuel 3:10 (ESV)

We don't have to wait long to find out. This time, it was different. There was more than just a voice calling Samuel's name. It says "The Lord came and stood." Without any more details, we should refrain from speculating too much about what happened, but God showed up in a real way. This was not just God's

voice calling to Samuel. This was God's presence with Samuel. When we began this chapter, the Word of the Lord was rare and visions of God were not happening. Now they were happening, but they were happening to Samuel!

One small issue we should discuss is how liberal scholars handle this passage. It is common for them to claim Samuel had a dream and God spoke to him in a dream. The problem is that cannot be true. It says God came and stood next to Samuel. That doesn't happen in a dream. It is not presented as a dream. This is presented as a statement of fact to describe what happened.

God spoke His words through Samuel.

Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle." 1 Samuel 3:11 (ESV)

What God was about to tell Samuel was the substance of the prophecy that was given years before by a man of God to Eli. We studied it last week in chapter 2. Since Eli did not restrain his sons when they were showing contempt for God's offerings, God was going to bring judgment on Eli and his family line. God's words about the destruction of Eli and his family will hit Samuel like a ton of bricks. He loved Eli. Eli was his mentor. Eli was his foster father. This was not just the first time God gave a prophetic message to Samuel but it was probably one of the most difficult messages Samuel would ever hear.

God was about to do something that would make everyone's ears tingle. What does that mean? It means to hear a message that is so horrible, it hurts to hear it. This past week, like you, I was shocked when a young woman was gunned down in the Grape Tree parking lot behind Perkins, leaving behind her two small children. I cannot imagine the horror of the moment the police knocked

on her parent's door to tell them their daughter was gunned down with a 9mm by her former boyfriend. That will make your ears tingle. It is that kind of response people had to the message God is giving Samuel to share. Let's see the prophetic words God gave to Samuel.

On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. 1 Samuel 3:12–13 (ESV)

The simple but terrible news was God was about to do what God said he would do years before in chapter 2. If you remember last week, on one of those rare occasions when God did speak in the past through a prophet, it was to deliver a message to Eli that God was done with his family. Eli knew of the wickedness of his own sons and how they were stealing food off people's plates and fat portions right off God's altar and eating it themselves. Eli knew his married sons were sleeping with the young women who served at the tabernacle, and he did nothing to stop them. He did nothing but verbal correction. He took no action to correct them. Eli wouldn't take any action to stop his sons, so God was going to take action against the entire corrupt family. The entire family was to be destroyed.

This is a great reminder of some of the things we learned last week. Eli was a father who was responsible for restraining his children. He failed to restrain do that, and he was bearing responsibility. No parent can control the hearts of their children, but they are responsible for taking action and restraining their children from sin if they choose to pursue sin. I recognize that when children are out of the house, there is a limited amount of authority parents possess at that

time, but Eli's sons worked for him. They were dependent on him. Even though they were adults, Eli should have addressed them and stopped their behavior. At this point, it was no different from a boss addressing the behavior of a corrupt employee.

There are two types of sin talked about in the Bible. There is sin of commission and sin of omission. Commission is choosing to do something wrong. Omission is failing to do something right. When we think of sin, we typically think of commission. We think of sin as actively going out of our way to make a sinful choice. Those were the actions of Hophni and Phinehas. They chose to do what was wrong. Eli was different. He was guilty of sins of omission. He knew what his sons were doing. He failed to step to the plate to address their behavior and stop their sinful choices. He didn't actively go out of his way to make a sinful choice, he passively did nothing to stop the sin of his sons when they were under his authority. That is a sin of omission.

James reminded us of this in the New Testament.

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. James 4:17 (ESV)

Eli knew the right thing to do. He just avoided doing it because it was hard work. It would have been a tough conversation. He was lazy. He was probably trying to avoid friction in the family, so he closed his eyes and let his sons dishonor people and the Lord.

If you are in a leadership position, chances are you are also struggling with sins of omission. There are people under your authority who are cutting corners. They are not treating others with respect. Maybe their attitude is

negative and is creating poison in the organization. As leaders, it is easy to avoid the battle and tolerate these things rather than doing the hard work of addressing them. As organizational leaders, we can be guilty of a sin of omission because we avoid tough but necessary conversations with other people, just like Eli.

As parents, we can be guilty of the sin of omission when it comes to parenting our children. Sometimes we see behavior that puts up a flag or we see our children spending time with friends that don't give us a good feeling, and we avoid the hard conversation for too long. When we finally have the tough conversation, it is a battle and we know we should have been more courageous and had that hard conversation earlier when it wasn't so hard to have. That is a sin of omission.

Sometimes we find ourselves in a broken or splintered relationship with a brother or sister in Christ. Every time we see him or her, the Holy Spirit keeps reminding us that our relationship with him or her is not in a good place. We start making excuses to avoid talking with him or her. We tell ourselves that if there was a real problem, surely that person would tell us. This is a sin of omission. The Holy Spirit keeps prompting us and telling us we need to make a phone call. We need to make sure we are in a healthy place with our brother or sister in Jesus, but when we avoid that conversation, we are being just like Eli. We are being lazy, possibly cowardly, and we are guilty of sin. We know the right thing to do, but we are refusing to do it.

Not all sins of omission carry consequences as serious as the ones Eli bore, but I think it is worth noting that Eli's sin of omission carried very serious

consequences. It resulted in the death of his sons and their family line. That is serious, and we shouldn't miss that.

"Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." 1 Samuel 3:14 (ESV)

The worst of the rotten things Eli's sons did was to treat God's offerings with contempt. The very provisions God made for the forgiveness of sin in that time were what they disrespected. Remember they were not just stealing food out of people's pots and pans, they were stealing food that was to be put on God's altar. They stole the fat portions! This has frightening consequences. Their sin would not be atoned for forever. There is a lesson for us in this verse. When God makes a way for us to have forgiveness of our sin, if we despise and disregard God's means of forgiveness for our sin, there is nothing left for us!

As we said last week, in Eli's day, the sacrificial system was the way sin was atoned for by God. Today, we have Jesus. He is the ultimate once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin that made the entire Old Testament sacrificial system obsolete. Jesus is the way we handle sin. Jesus died for our sin. We trust in Jesus to forgive our sin by his death on the cross. If we despise Jesus or have no respect for Jesus, there is no other way for our sins to be handled.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:28–29 (ESV)

We know the right things to do, but we fail to do them all the time. As a result, we are deserving of God's wrath. We are deserving of God's judgment. The good news is God loves you. God sent a way to handle our sin. He sent his

own son to die in your place for your sin. Jesus died for you. When he hung on the cross, an eternity of God's wrath for your sin was poured out on Jesus in your place. God made a way for your sin to be paid for. It is Jesus. When we ask Jesus to forgive our sin and be king of our hearts and our lives, God saves us through Jesus. We literally go from being the object of God's just wrath to the most blessed beings in the universe --- adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Jesus is God's gracious provision for our sin. If we reject Jesus we remain under God's fully deserved wrath for our sin. There is no other plan. There is no other way. If there was another way for our sin to be paid for other than God sending his own son, God would have done it.

I say all this to urge you, please do not turn away from Jesus. Do not treat Jesus casually. There is no other way for our sins to be forgiven outside of Jesus. Other religions are not other ways of approaching God. There will be no Buddhists in heaven, because they reject Jesus. There will be no Muslims in heaven, because they reject Jesus. There will be no Hindus in heaven, because they reject Jesus. They may be decent and seemingly nice people, but like all of us, they have sinned, and Jesus is the only way for the penalty of our sin to be released!

Let's get back to the text.

Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 1 Samuel 3:15 (ESV)

I doubt Samuel slept for whatever remained of the night. I know I would not have slept after seeing a vision of God, hearing God speak, and then receiving a message that Eli, my foster father, was toast because he failed to

address the sins of his sons. When Samuel woke up, he went about his regular duties and opened the doors of the tabernacle.

For obvious reasons, Samuel was afraid to tell Eli what God had told him. Eli wasn't going to let him be silent.

But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." And 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." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him." 1 Samuel 3:16–18 (ESV)

Eli knew God spoke to Samuel. How could he not ask what God said? I think Eli also suspected God's words to Samuel might involve him and would not be positive. After all, back in chapter 2, a prophet warned Eli that God's judgment was coming on him and his family for their sin. We do not know how many years passed between chapter 2 and chapter 3.

I cannot imagine the difficulty of that conversation. Imagine a 14- to 16-year-old boy needing to tell his foster father, his mentor, that God was done with him and his family once and for all.

What I find especially intriguing is Eli's response to this message. He simply submitted to it and said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him." Let me share my personal thoughts on his response. For years, his words have perturbed me. In one sense, they are appropriate. It is God. Let God do what seems good and right for him. That is appropriate. But there is a tone to Eli's answer that I do not like. It is a passive response. It is a self-resignation response. It is not a manly response. As is typical for Eli, it is a do-nothing response. In chapter 2, when the man of God told Eli his family was going to be destroyed because of his sons' sins and Eli did nothing about it, what did Eli do

between chapter 2 and chapter 3 to put a stop to his son's sin? Absolutely nothing!

I feel this is one of Eli's fatal character flaws. He just went with the flow. He showed no initiative. He showed almost no leadership and courage. He never showed a backbone. It was his complete lack of initiative that led to the destruction of his sons and their family line and the spiritual stagnation of a nation.

As I was studying this, I found myself saying, "Am I like Eli?" Do I fail to take the initiative in my family and the spiritual tone of my home? Do I lack courage and manliness when it comes to having hard but important conversations? Are we like Eli? When it comes to our homes and the positions of leadership God has given us, are we failing to step to the plate and have the courage and love to have tough but loving conversations?

At the end of the day, it will probably not be the sins of commission that will eat our lunch. It will be the sins of omission when we failed to step forward to do the right thing that will snag us.

There is more here than just the passivity of Eli. There is also the courage of Samuel. This was not easy for Samuel. The first time God spoke to him and gave a direct word from the Lord to convey, it was about the destruction of his foster father and his family. That was not an easy message to share. Samuel shared it even though it was hard to speak.

In a similar way, we are given a message from God to speak that can be hard to share. It is the gospel message. The gospel message is a good message

but it is also a hard message. It is the message that all of us are sinners by nature and by choice. God's just response to our sin is eternal condemnation in the lake of fire. We are helpless to save ourselves. There is nothing we can do which would adequately pay for our sin.

It is only by turning and trusting in Jesus who died in our place for our sin that we can be saved.

There are two parts to this message. There is the bad news of our sin and there is the good news of Jesus. Many times people want to avoid the hard parts of the gospel message. "Let's tell people about Jesus, but let's not tell people about God's coming judgment for our sin. I don't want them to feel bad. I don't want to turn them off with God's judgment." That would be like Samuel only telling Eli part of the message that God spoke. Samuel was not allowed to do that. He was not allowed to edit the message. He was only allowed to faithfully share the message. In the same way, we are not allowed to change the gospel message. It is God's message that we are speaking to those who need to hear.

The gospel always comes with two parts. There is the reality of our sin and God's completely fair judgment for it and the reality of God's incredible grace for us by Jesus. If we don't share the bad news of our sin, there is no reason why we need the good news of Jesus.

Samuel was recognized as a prophet.

And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 1 Samuel 3:19 (ESV)

Samuel continued to grow. He matured from an adolescent to an adult. When it says the Lord was with him, that means Samuel continued as a prophet.

God continued to speak to Samuel. Samuel would then speak God's words to God's people. Samuel was the one saying, "Thus saith the Lord."

It also says that the Lord "let none of his words fall to the ground." That means everything that Samuel spoke as a prophet speaking about the future came true. That is rock-solid proof that Samuel was indeed speaking God's words to God's people and wasn't making stuff up in his head.

The Old Testament tells us that it is when prophecy spoken about the future consistently proves true then you know the prophet indeed heard from God and was not making things up.

...when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. Deuteronomy 18:22 (ESV)

Samuel's words were different. People knew that when Samuel said God spoke to him, it was true because everything Samuel said God spoke to him about, actually happened.

And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD. 1 Samuel 3:20 (ESV)

Why were these two cities mentioned? Dan is the northernmost city of Israel. Beersheba is the southernmost city of Israel. The point is that it wasn't long before the entire nation recognized Samuel not just as a priest in Shiloh but as a prophet who was speaking God's Word to God's people. Everybody in Israel knew it.

And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. 1 Samuel 3:21-4:1a (ESV)

Here we learn that when God came to young Samuel in the night and spoke to him, that was not the only time that happened in his life. This chapter only told us about the first time that happened in his life.

Here is where it gets exciting. It says the word of Samuel came to all Israel. When we opened the chapter, there was a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord. The spiritual health of God's people was in decline. When the chapter closes, Samuel was established by God as a prophet for the people and he was speaking God's words to the people. The spiritual health of the nation was beginning to turn.

Applications

When we began our study in 1 Samuel, I told you the problem in Israel was a crisis in leadership. In response to that crisis, what did God do? Did he raise up a man who was a gifted leader to organize the nation? No. He sent his Word. He raised up Samuel, who would speak God's words to God's people, because, in all honesty, that is what the people needed.

That is true today. For the crisis of leadership we have in our lives when it comes to what our purpose is in this world and how we can be in a right relationship with God, the answer is found in God's Word. God's words are powerful. In Genesis, God spoke and this world was created. In 1 Peter, we find that just as God's Word created physical creation and physical life, it is the Word of God in the Bible that God uses to create spiritual life in us.

...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)

God's words don't just create spiritual life. Jesus told us God uses his Word to sustain spiritual life.

But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

David said this about the power of God's words in our lives.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple... Psalm 19:7 (ESV)

God's words revive the weary soul. God's words can be followed to make simple people wise.

Look what the author of Hebrews said about the power of the Word of God in our life.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

God's words in the Bible are not just used by God to create spiritual life in us and to sustain spiritual life in us but the words of God are literally alive. They are not dead words on a page.

My hope and prayer is that at CrossWinds we would be people of the book. We would always keep our fingers in the text, not just in our preaching but in our regular Bible reading, and God would use his Word to shape us to be more like Jesus.

Years ago, a preacher named Charles Spurgeon was asked how he could defend preaching from the Bible. He said he didn't need to defend the Bible. The Bible is a lion. All he needed to do was let it out of its cage. God's Words are alive. They can defend themselves.



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