

Samuel's Call

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[0 : 00] Well, folks, I want to just dish the dirt a little bit before Alan comes up and just tell you to welcome him, please.

I have known Alan for over 15 years, the best part of my Christian life since he became a father. And Alan was actually at that time a Bells Hill man.

He lived in Bells Hill, he knows Bells Hill. And we worked together along with Jeanette. And so if you want to know any of the mistakes that me or Alan made in the past, just ask Jeanette, she'll tell you.

But really, as a young Christian, Alan was one of the few people in that work who was seriously interested in living for the Lord. And he took me under his wing as a bigger brother.

And ever since, he has encouraged me. Him and his wife, Fiona, have been a terrific encouragement to me and Jen our entire marriage. And, yeah, I just thank the Lord for him.

[1 : 07] And I pray that he is blessed, just as you're blessed, by him being here. But, yeah, come on up, Alan. I want to pray for you as you come here.

But I also want to just thank you for your encouragement over the years. There's been two big things that Alan has always encouraged me by over the years. One is his insistence on praying to God.

He's just always been a man of prayer. Asking for prayer, offering prayer. Prayer's always been at the center of his life. And number two, his desire for knowing and sharing the faithful truth of God's word has just been at the center of his life the whole time I've known him.

And this morning, I know he comes on the back of prayer. And I know that he comes with a desire to share faithfully the truth of God. So I thank you for it. And I'll pray for you just now.

Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for your word. As Alan said, it is a privilege for us to open your word this morning freely. And I pray that if the time should come, that it is at great cost that we should continue to do that.

[2 : 16] But I thank you for Alan's preparation this morning and your sharing your word. I pray that you would move him as he shares it. Move him by your spirit.

And I pray that also we would be moved by your spirit as we hear your word. In Jesus' name, amen. Thanks, man. Good morning, guys. Good morning, guys.

Good morning, now. I always have that fear before, you know, when I come up to do this, that it's accidentally on. Then everybody hears my singing, which is not good.

Thank you. Thank you, one and all, for having me along, myself and the family. It always helps put the nerves at ease when you get such a lovely welcome.

So thank you. Thank you again. So I'm just going to have a little bit of water because, as I said, the nerves have kind of gotten to me a little bit. So I thought I'd start by telling you a little bit about myself before we dive into the text.

[3 : 28] So I'm a member of Calderwood Baptist Church in East Co-Bride. I've been married to my wife, Fiona, for nearly 15 years. And as Calderwood Baptist Church in East Co-Bride.

And as Calderwood Baptist Church in East Co-Bride. I study at Corn Hill, the Corn Hill Training Course in Glasgow. And that's really for anybody who wants to get to know their Bible better.

And that allows me to share what I'm learning with people that want to know more about Jesus. I also work for Christians Against Poverty, or CAP, where we help people that are struggling with debt.

And we try to find the best route for them to become debt-free. And that's great because we get to do that in Jesus' name. When I was preparing to come and talk to you guys, I thought I need to find something interesting to share about myself.

And the first thing that came to mind is, well, last year I bought a telescope. I'm kind of an amateur astronomer. And a big part of astronomy is about the setup.

[4 : 39] And how you bring things into focus. And how we see things that are already there a little bit more clearly. And that's kind of what we do when we're learning about the Gospel.

Whether that be if you're at college studying it. Or you're part of a congregation listening to the message. So this morning, I'll try and do my best to bring the text into focus for us.

And we'll see how we go on as we delve into our passage. So, we're in chapter 3 of 1 Samuel. We'll be reading from that.

And we'll bring in some other verses as well to help us out. But if you've got your Bibles, if you can turn to 1 Samuel chapter 3. 1 Samuel chapter 3. 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.

[5 : 47] 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 to 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.

[6 : 47] 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 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 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.

[7 : 56] 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 if you hide anything from me 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. Excuse me.

So again, I thought I'd start by highlighting some of the big things in the passage. In the opening chapters of 1 Samuel, the Lord is referenced frequently.

[8 : 59] And it's no different here in chapter 3. Reference to the Lord is made well over 20 times in our chapter. While references to Samuel fall just short of that.

In following this, Eli the priest is mentioned around half of that. But there's real value in examining his involvement also. An appropriate thing to observe would be that the writer wants to give a proportionate amount of airtime to the actions of these central figures.

Giving us clues on whose example is actually best to follow. And there are key themes that are strategically placed in running through the passage. That allow us to understand not just the narrative.

But the wider implications for the reader. And whether or not they choose to accept God's word. And be obedient to him.

The revelation of God's word is big in the passage. As we see his word being referred to at the very beginning. And then at the end of the text.

[10 : 08] And he's specific word for Samuel revealed during the overall course of the narrative. So, I've got two headings as we move forward.

Which I think reflect some of the main points for us to take away. The first heading I'll work under is listening for God's word. And the second heading that I'll use as we move on is respond appropriately.

So, the first heading for it is listening for God's word. In the opening three verses of our passage. We see that our writer makes reference to sight, light and insight.

And the word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no frequent vision. And at that time, Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim. So that he could not see was lying down in his own place.

And 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. So, firstly, we're told that there's no frequent vision.

[11 : 11] But before we do a deep dive into that situation to set us up a little, I thought it would be worthwhile shedding a little bit of light on the role of the temple priests at the time. So, a temple priest would have been under the high priest.

Who, in this case, is Hophni and Phinehas' father, Eli. Hophni and Phinehas, of course, are the temple priests that are working under the high priest. And some differences between the two would be that the high priest would have sole access to the holiest of holies within the temple.

Which was separated, of course, by the curtain. That curtain that was torn in two when our Lord Jesus died on the cross. And the high priest would have officiated at the most important ceremonies, such as Yom Kippur, which was the Day of Atonement.

In which the high priest would seek forgiveness from God for the sins of the people during the past year. And while the priests had more general duties, such as overseeing the temple's upkeep and interpreting scripture and educating the people.

And in addition to that, they would have performed maybe other animal sacrifices that would have not been exclusive to the high priest. And one of them would have ultimately had the role of an apprentice.

[12 : 33] As they would be preparing to eventually take over that role of the high priest. But to be a high priest, you had to be a descendant from Moses' brother, Aaron.

As the priesthood came directly from his family line. And you had to be pure. So this meant avoiding contact with anything that was considered unclean.

And the book of Leviticus goes into a massive amount of detail on this. But what I will say is that that in itself was a full-time job.

There were many different animal sacrifices or burnt offerings that were appropriate to cover a wide range of things. They had a sin offering, a guilt offering, and even a fellowship offering.

And these sacrifices or offerings had to be done in a certain way according to the instructions set before us in Leviticus. So I'll briefly read from Leviticus chapter 7 so we get an idea of what should have been happening.

[13 : 38] And then we'll see how our priests in 1 Samuel have been measuring up. So this is from verse 1 of chapter 7 of Leviticus. And this is regarding the guilt offering.

This is the law of the guilt offering. It is most holy.

Let's go back to 1 Samuel and we'll see how they've been measuring up. So verse 12 of chapter 2. Now the sons of Eli were worthless men.

They did not know the Lord. The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling with a three-pronged fork in his hand and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot.

All that the fork brought up, the priest would take for himself. That tradition is slightly different from what we're told to do in Leviticus.

[15 : 05] Then if we jump to verse 22, it continues. Now Eli was very old and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of the meeting.

So we're told that Hophni and Phinehas have been sleeping with the women who are serving at the doorway of the tabernacle. These are the priests that are meant to be advocating for all Israel.

In addition to that, they've been helping themselves to whatever they fancied from the sacrifices that were meant for God. And although Eli does have a word with them as such, there doesn't appear to be any real consequences for their actions.

Things are very different to what we're supposed to be seeing. And I think their behavior is probably reflective of Israel as a whole at this point.

While there weren't immediate consequences for Eli's sons, we're seeing things in the chapters prior in the land like famine, and we're told again that there is no frequent vision.

[16 : 21] What is known of God is not being reflected in his people. And although on the surface Eli's sons appear to be getting away with all sorts, the absence of any kind of vision and subsequent famines allude to the disobedience that's actually at play.

We really do get a deeper insight as to why God's people were so far from him at this point in time. As priests, Eli and his sons are meant to be acting as intercessors between God and his people.

And the people are looking to them as an example of how to live their lives. It's no wonder things are how they are. We then read that Eli's eyesight had begun to grow dim.

So he's almost at the point of blindness. And this again could be interpreted as Israel as a nation. They've totally lost their way and things just aren't going well.

We then got hope in the last part of verse 3. The lamp of God had not yet gone out. And this is one of those verses where we don't have to thankfully exegete it too much.

[17 : 34] This of course is reference to the lamp in the tabernacle that burns continuously from evening till morning. And here it shows quite purposefully to tell us that although the spiritual state of the people is really quite grim, God has not completely abandoned them.

A further point to note from this is that God would have been completely just had he decided to. And it's between verses 4 and 7 we get some insight into Samuel's nature and how that is contrasting to the nature of Eli's sons.

And it's worth mentioning that Samuel is probably very young still at this stage, perhaps even a teenager. But what we see that he is obedient and somewhat selfless.

The Lord we're told calls Samuel three times. And the first two times he thinks it's Eli calling him. It's probably not quite morning yet, but it does not matter.

Samuel is up right away and he goes to see Eli and what he needs. But interestingly, in verse 7 we are told that Samuel did not know the Lord and his words hadn't been revealed to him.

[18 : 57] I think this again is placed quite strategically because we're also told the same about Hophni and Phinehas in chapter 2.

And what I think we're meant to take from this is despite maybe some of the obvious differences in character between Samuel and Hophni and Phinehas, none of them know God at this point.

And I think this is a further warning to us today that maybe having good character or even going to church does not mean that we know God explicitly.

You see, knowing God is more than knowing information about God or merely having good character. It requires personal revelation from God. And this for me is part of what makes the Old Testament so special.

It's the same merciful God that we have in the New Testament. It's the same God that we have today. So fundamentally this is the same for us today, albeit the method is a bit different.

[20 : 14] I mean, I'm sure you might have noticed the absence of a blatant, two-way conversation between you and God, like what's going on here with Samuel.

But the New Testament says that the Holy Spirit reveals God's truth to us. John chapter 16, verses 13, 15.

Got there in the end. Helps us out a bit here. So this says, What we're seeing here, of course, is Jesus explaining that the Holy Spirit will lead us to the truth.

And we have a decision from here. We can either accept the Lord Jesus into our lives or we can reject him. However, the very fact that this is revealed to us is an act of grace and mercy all by itself.

We bring absolutely nothing to the party. You can almost imagine one of these parties where maybe, you know, I think in Scottish culture, you know, when you go to somebody's house or, you know, maybe a birthday party or an anniversary of sorts, you maybe bring something, you bring maybe some cakes or some juice or a wee bottle of wine or something like that.

[22 : 04] It's just the equivalent of turning up with nothing. We don't bring anything to this party at all. And Samuel, in essence, again, he's got a decision to make here.

But before we start to unpack that, we see that Eli appears to know God, but he's not quick to recognize him, which may reflect where he's at spiritually.

Nonetheless, it is Eli that advises Samuel to listen for God again and answer him the way that he does, which brings us to the second head and respond appropriately.

Some commentaries mention that Eli maybe redeems himself slightly with his actions here, but I don't see that in the text. In fact, I think this is contrary to the text altogether.

I believe that this is an example of having knowledge of God, but up until now, we've seen Eli blatantly show a disregard for his law, and he's not responded well at all to everything that he's come to learn about God.

[23 : 15] This is not going to end well for him. And we really do get a deeper insight as to why God's people were so far from him in these opening chapters. Reading on again, we see what God has to say to Samuel.

Verse 10 of chapter 3. The Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. And Samuel said, Speak, for your servant hears. 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 declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever for the iniquity that he knew because his sons were blaspheming in 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. And 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. And I think this is definitely us sometimes, isn't it?

[24 : 29] We'll be in possession of God's word, but we're absolutely petrified to share it with others because maybe we're afraid of what that might mean.

This is exactly what's happening to Samuel. He's just had a personal revelation from God and he spent the rest of the night going over and over what's just happened.

I doubt very much that Samuel has slept at all for the rest of that night. Verse 16, 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, 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. So now there is just so much going on.

[25 : 35] We have got that mental image of Samuel's sleepless night, but Eli's probably had a bit of a sleepless night himself. We see Eli calling to Samuel, this time looking for answers, when up until now it's probably been Samuel that's had the questions.

You know, we have this image of Samuel trying to learn from the high priest. And now all of a sudden, the roles are almost flipped on their head and the high priest is actually going to Samuel to ask the questions.

This appears to be a big hinge in the passage. We've almost got a change in the hierarchy happening at this point. We've got Eli, the priest, the elder statesman, the one whom Samuel has been serving, learning his trade from, now hanging on Samuel's word.

The dynamic has shifted as Eli is now asking Samuel the questions. And Samuel's understandably apprehensive about having to share what's been revealed to him.

But what he does do is he recognizes that it is the word of God. I said earlier on that God's revelation to us is an act of grace and mercy in itself.

[27 : 00] This is a major theme. But what we're also about to see is God's justice. God is going to punish Eli and his house for their transgressions.

You see, while the sons of Eli were having complete disregard for God and his law, it didn't go unnoticed.

How often, you know, you just have to look around our world today, everything that's happening, all the, you know, the political things that are going on, you know, just wars, brewing, you know, there's so many injustices.

And one of the things that we can take heart from is God has seen all of that. It's not going unnoticed. But now God here is saying there's a time coming where punishment's coming.

Not only to Eli's sons, but to Eli as well. his entire house, there can be no sacrifice made that is going to make amends. It's too late.

[28 : 15] And this is a really scary place to be so we can maybe understand why Samuel was afraid to share this. But he does share it. And he lets the chips fall where they may.

Samuel recognizes God's sovereignty. And he appears immediately to understand his role. Samuel is obedient to God.

And even upon receiving the news that must have been pretty catastrophic for Eli, Eli himself says, it's the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him.

And from here we can see how the rest of the passage plays out. 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.

[29 : 21] Samuel, we're told, then grows in the Lord. He becomes established as a prophet in all Israel and everyone recognizes what the Lord is saying through him.

And then in the next chapter we see God's word come to fruition as Eli's sons and Eli himself are killed when the Philistines defeat Israel.

In conclusion, God's word shapes the existence of his people and it drives their history and without it his people are not in a good way.

We've seen the disobedience of God's people and the consequences of that. But the good news is that we'll never again be without God's word.

What we hold in our hand this morning has blessed me more than I can ever, you know, stand up here and, you know, can I tell you?

[30 : 33] It's, the book of Hebrews in fact, it says that the greatest word to the world is Jesus. No one can come to know God except through him.

You see, God's final word has been revealed to us. If you take nothing else away from what I've said today, take that. Because we have Jesus and this makes things in our age a little different than in Samuel's time.

we are not like the Israelites in that respect. We have God's word in abundance and it should not be neglected. This is why God's mercy has truly been poured out in abundance since Jesus came in the flesh.

Jesus laid down his life for you and for me and we have to respond appropriately. You see, we were all like Eli and his sons in that sense that we did not know God.

We did not know him personally and it's only by his grace and his mercy that we can say Jesus is our saviour.

[31 : 50] You see, we have to follow Samuel's example. We have to proclaim God's word for today and that word is Jesus Christ. We have to share God's word with anyone and everyone and this might be scary.

It might even be what keeps us up at night as we consider the consequences for those that don't turn to him and possibly ourselves depending on our audience but we know that he is a just God and that he is good.

Not not