

Scandal in Shiloh

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[0:00] Fit. People seem to have rejected Christian morals, Christian ways of living. It seems to be a nation darkened by sin.

! That seems to be a good description of our country right now. More and more, I'm sure we're aware of the darkness that we see around us.

The sin of the people. Rejection of the truth. Everyone seems to do as they see fit.

But at least we have the church in this country. At least we have a place where God is honoured. At least there are people who honour and glorify God.

And yet, I think over the last few years, of people, of leaders among God's people who have rejected God's way and decided to go their own way.

[1:11] Leaders who have been found to be bad leaders. Corrupt. Bullies. Harming people. Even over the last few weeks, there's been news of another church leader in the UK who's been found to be like that.

And so even in the church, we do not see sinlessness. Even in the church, we see darkness. And so what do we do? Well, we come to God's words.

And we come to 1 Samuel 2. And we come to Shiloh in Israel. And sadly, we come to a place which Judges describes as a place where in those days Israel had no king.

And everyone did as they saw fit. Another nation. Another land where people have rejected God's ways.

But at least you have the temple. At least you have a place to go and worship God. At least you have a place where you can have sacrifices made for your sin.

[2:25] At least you can find priests who honour God. But no. Even there. Even as we have read.

There are priests who do not honour God. There is a scandal among the leaders. We find that the leaders who are meant to be honouring God are actually bullying God's people.

That's the context that we find ourselves in as we look at this chapter. And it's a sermon which is quite heavy on the sin and judgment side.

There is hope and we will see the hope. And we have sung of the hope. But I think it's helped to have Paul's words in mind as we come to a passage like this in the Old Testament.

That these things happen to them as examples or as warnings to us. On whom the culmination of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

[3:36] These things are written as warnings to us so that maybe we won't fall into the same traps, the same sins that they fall into.

God is gracious to us in giving his words. So we're going to see three things. And the first thing in this chapter that we're going to see is the scandal.

The scandal. We're told very clearly in verse 1 of this chapter, in verse 12 even, of this chapter how we should see Eli's two sons.

Eli's sons were, as my Bible says, scoundrels. Or as I think Maria in the Bible she was reading from says wicked men. Eli's sons were scoundrels.

They were wicked men. And they had no regard for the Lord. Eli's sons. Eli's sons, they were called Hophni and Phinehas. We get their names later on in the chapter.

[4:41] They were scoundrels. They were dishonest and rogue. That's what a scoundrel is. And they're forever recorded in the Bible as that for us.

It's not what we'd want to have printed on our gravestone, is it? That person was a scoundrel. They had no regard for the Lord. But that's how the Bible shows Eli's sons to us.

That's what they were. And so how were they scoundrels? How were they wicked men? How did they have no regard for the Lord?

Well, the scandal kind of comes in two parts. The first part is the meat scandal. I'm not talking about the horse meat scandal that we had a number of years ago.

But I'm talking about an even more serious meat scandal involving the worship of God in the temple. So verse 13.

[5:39] Now, it was the practice of the priest that whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot, whatever it was being cooked in.

Whatever the fork brought up, the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh.

These men, these sons of Eli, they were out to grab, to take from God's people. Out to grab meat. And so they sent their servant off with their three-pronged fork to dip it into the pan of meat as it was cooking in an Israelite's home.

And get as much meat as they can. What on earth was wrong about that, I may hear you crying. What is going on?

[6:50] Well, what happened with meat and sacrifices was that the fat parts were to be an offering to the Lord. God gets his share of the meat.

And then there was a share for the priests as well. So let's turn to Leviticus. We'll just read a few verses from Leviticus to just try and help us in our understanding of this scandal.

So Leviticus 7, verse 28. Leviticus 7, verse 28. We read there, The Lord said to Moses, Say to the Israelites, Anyone who brings a fellowship offering to the Lord is to bring part of it as their sacrifice to the Lord with their own hands.

They are to present the food offering to the Lord. They are to bring the fat together with the breast and wave the breast before the Lord as a wave offering.

And the priest shall burn the fat on the altar. So what happens to the meat, the fat parts, therefore the Lord. The fat parts were deemed to be a delicacy.

[8:12] That's where the flavor is, the juicy bits. Many of you might be going home to enjoy a roast dinner later. Maybe you've got some, I was thinking about pork crackling.

Oh, that goodness of that fat. Well, the fat on the meat for the offering to the Lord, that was for God. He was to get that part of it.

But the priests also get their share. So in Leviticus 7 as well, as we continue, it says in verse 31, The breast belongs to Aaron and his sons, the priests.

You are to give the right thigh of your fellowship offerings. To the priest as a contribution. So the priests, they get a share of the offering.

They don't go empty-handed. They get the right thigh and the breast. That's for them. They can enjoy that. God was generous to them.

[9:17] But as we turn back to 1 Samuel 2, we find that they weren't content with just their share. They wanted more. And so they sent their servant out with that fork to grab after more.

But they don't stop at that. They get even cleverer in their scandal. Okay, so verse 15, But even before the fat was burned, the priest's servants would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, Give the priest some meat to roast.

He won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw meat. Now this gets clever because the raw meat probably still had the fat on it. They could take all the meat for themselves, not just a little bit that the fork brings up.

They were getting cleverer in their scandal here. But a good Israelite who knows their law, they might turn and object to them and say, No, you can't have it because the fat part, that's got to go to the Lord.

And so, verse 16 says, If a person says such a thing, if a person says, Let the fat be burned, then take whatever you want, the servant would answer, No.

[10:39] Hand it over now. If you don't take it, if you don't give it, I'll take it by force. The big point there is they force people to give them far more than the priest should have.

All the meat, with the fat. They wanted it. They were taking. And they were taking. They were stealing from the Lord and from his people.

I'll take it by force. Or perhaps they'll, if they don't hand it over, then maybe they'll wrestle them to the ground. All just for a bit of meat. They were bullies.

They were spiritually abusing the people. They were meant to be honoring the Lord and honoring his people, serving them. But they're out to satisfy their own greed.

It's a sad and it's a sorry state of affairs. And there's a kind of summary of this sin of Hophni and Phinehas in verse 17.

[11:50] This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt. That word sin, apparently, the meaning behind it is like missing the target.

So if you were to play archery with me, no doubt you would see me take aim and fire at the target and missing completely. That's what sin is.

It's missing the target. Missing going away from what the Lord wants from his people. Completely failing.

And this says their sin was very great. It was a very great sin. It was a scandal. So that's the meat part of the scandal but there's another part of the scandal.

And it's down in verse 22. Now Eli who was very old heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

[12:59] Not only were they taking people's meats but they were sleeping with the women who served in the temple. Women who weren't their wives. Bringing dishonor.

It was bad. It was a real mistreating of God's people. A sad and sobering state of affairs.

Robbing people from of their meat. Robbing women of their dignity. Robbing from the Lord all for selfish gain.

And this sin deserves judgment. That's the second thing that we see here.

And the judgment kind of starts with Eli talking to his sons rebuking them. So have a look down in verse 23. So he said to them why do you do such things?

[14:01] I hear from all the people about all these wicked deeds of yours. No my sons the report I hear spreading among the Lord's people is not good. That's a bit of an understatement.

It's terrible. But Eli he has a word with them. He rebukes them. This is terrible what I'm hearing.

It is. But he doesn't go very far Eli. He was very old. He was an old man probably in his 90s.

And it tells us repeatedly that he hears what's going on. So verse 22 he heard about everything his sons did. Verse 23 I hear from all the people.

Verse 24 I hear spreading among the Lord's people. He hears he hears he hears he doesn't go and investigate he doesn't do anything but he hears and Hophni and Phinehas well they don't hear.

[15:15] So in verse 25 his sons however did not listen to their father's rebuke. They were like children rebellious children putting hands over their ears I'm not listening to you dad.

not going to do it. Not going to listen. Going to carry on. And Eli sits idly by.

He has a word with them but kind of sits idly by. And as we'll see in a moment he kind of joins in with their sin too. sin isn't really taken seriously here in the very place that it should be.

In the place where sins are meant to be dealt with. Where forgiveness of God can be found through sacrifice. They are scoundrels and they are bullies. This is the kind of corruption we expect to find outside of God's people.

Big corporations in politics not in God's people not in the church. And yet as I said earlier all too often we hear of Christians Christian leaders who have failed in this way been bullies taken advantage of people.

[16:44] Probably the biggest name in the last few years sadly Ravi Zacharias after he died it was found out that he was a bully that he took advantage of people.

And others in this country I was reading the reflections of a church minister this week as he was reflecting on these kind of things.

He posted on Facebook and he said I need to be the chief repenter among my people. The problem seems to be going unrepentant and someone's heart continuing to grow harder and harder.

And this pastor said I need to be the chief repenter among my people. So pray that your leaders here would be that.

Pray for Phil and I. Pray that we're quick to turn to the Lord when we fail. That we take sin seriously. Pray that we all would take sin seriously in our lives.

[17:47] It's not to be played around with. And sin is serious because as we see in a moment it leads to judgment. So verse 27 we see a man of God coming to visit Eli.

Verse 27 Now a man of God came to Eli and said this is what the Lord says. Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestors family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh?

I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest to go up to my altar to burn incense to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your ancestors family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites.

Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?

This man comes and reminds Eli of the privileges of being a priest, of the position that he's been given, that he gets to bear the names of Israel on the ephod before the Lord, the twelve tribes of Israel, their names were written on it.

[19:10] He got to wear these priestly garments, burn those sacrifices. It wasn't for anybody to do. And it's no trivial matter. And so, through this man of God, Eli's question, why do you do this?

Why? Why do you bring dishonor? Why are you honoring your sons? He holds Eli responsible for his inaction. And in fact, I think Eli was probably himself joining in, fattening himself.

It says, verse 29, why do you honor your sons more than me? By fattening yourselves. Eli's included in that. We're quick, aren't we, to condemn others who sin.

The rich people who don't go and pay their taxes, they're slaughtered in the media, or politicians who don't keep rules that they have set. We're quick to condemn.

And we're quite quick to justify our own sin, our own inaction. I was tired, I was feeling weak, I was feeling vulnerable. But it's like playing with fire.

[20:28] Fire is warm and inviting, isn't it? You can toast marshmallows, you can play games around a fire, but fire is also dangerous, and it's deadly, and get too close and you'll be burned.

Temptations may seem fun, they may seem attractive, but fall into them and we get burned. Sin is serious. And this judgment pronounced on Eli and his family, Eli could say, well, the meat was cooked anyway, it was in front of me, it smelled so good, I just took a bit.

It wasn't me, it was my son's fault, blame them, don't talk to me. But no. Eli then goes on to hear what the judgment of the Lord is going to involve for him and his household.

Verse 30, therefore the Lord, the God of Israel declares, I promise that members of your family would minister before me forever, but now the Lord declares, far be it from me, those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.

The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly! the house so that no one in it will reach old age, and you will see distress in my dwelling.

[21:57] Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age. every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar, I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

Judgment on the house of Eli. It's a sad and it's a sorry state of affairs, isn't it? People not honoring the Lord, bringing dishonor.

the position of Eli's house and family line, the position that they have as priests, it's become untenable.

It cannot go on. God's going to have to cut short the days of his family. Cut people short in the prime of their life.

And as for these two scoundrels of a son, more, verse 34, what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be assigned to you. They will both die on the same day.

[23:09] And flick over a page or two, chapter 4 and verse 11, the ark of God was captured and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

It happened. The judgment did come. Sin is serious. It's to be taken seriously. We all need to take sin seriously.

For those of us who have hope in the Lord Jesus will be reminded of this hope in a moment and it's glorious good news. But if you know that you're not trusting in the Lord Jesus as your Savior yet, sin is serious and it leads to judgment and it leads to an eternal death.

Take sin seriously. take the hope that we proclaim here seriously. We're left longing for hope, aren't we, in the darkness?

And we do have hope. So thirdly and finally, the hope. Even in the judgment pronounced on Eli and his family, there's a bit of hope, a glimmer of hope.

[24:22] far be it from me, verse 30, those who honor me, I will honor. If only Eli and his sons honored God, he would honor them still.

They wouldn't have to have this judgment. There's lots of dishonor going on, but in the background, in these verses, in this chapter, there's another family.

There's another son who honors the Lord. Verse 18, but Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod.

Samuel, the boy who was given up, Hannah's one and only son given up, consecrated it to the Lord's service. He is there. And he's not caught up in all this sin and wickedness.

He's not described as a scoundrel. No, he's ministering before the Lord. He is faithfully honoring him. And we get that repeated to us through this chapter.

[25:30] So verse 11, the boy ministered before the Lord under Eli the priest. Verse 21, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord. Verse 26, and the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and people.

And chapter 3, verse 1, the boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. Samuel was doing what the priests Hophni and Phinehas should have done and was ministering before the Lord. He was serving him faithfully. He took his role seriously and he was growing in stature and in favor with the Lord and with his people. There's some hope here.

There's some good here. It's not all judgment and sin. The boy Samuel, he was even wearing a linen ephod, that priestly garment.

And he was serving the Lord faithfully, kind of in the role of the priest. He was doing what the priests were failing to do. Whilst Eli and his sons were dreadful, scandalous, scandals.

[26:43] disciples. And we see, too, that Samuel's family are honoring the Lord as well. Where Eli and his family were bringing dishonor, Samuel and his family were bringing honor to the Lord.

So verse 19, each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him. And when she went up with her husband to offer an annual sacrifice, Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife saying, may the Lord give you children by this woman and take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord.

Then they would go home. And the Lord was gracious to Hannah and she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Hannah, her husband, they went faithfully year after year offered that annual sacrifice to the Lord.

They were honoring him. They were obedient to the Lord. Even when those who were serving in the house of God weren't. And his mother faithfully every year made a little robe for Samuel.

No doubt allowing for a year's growth. Year after year giving this robe to the boy Samuel as he was growing up. As he was growing in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people.

[28:05] And instead of death being pronounced upon this family, life is pronounced. Eli could bless this family whilst he had to rebuke his own sons and the Lord was gracious and gave new life to them.

Three sons and two daughters. Life for this family who honored the Lord. That's such a contrast, isn't there?

God. We have a son who honors God. Parents who take seriously the worship of God. Maybe there's a lesson in that for those of us who are parents.

Do our children see that we take seriously the worship of God in our lives? As you came here this morning, are they seeing parents who want to come and honor the Lord or parents who want to put on a bit of a show and make yourselves look good to other people?

It's a challenge. God in the midst of wickedness is raising up this boy, a boy who honors him.

[29:18] There is hope when leaders go bad, when the church seems in a bit of a mess. And you never know who the Lord might be raising up in this country.

Maybe even among our own church family. Pray for our children. Pray that God would help them to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with his people.

Pray that God would choose to use them mightily in his kingdom, in his service. Pray that they would be children who honor the Lord, who will glorify him.

But finally, there's even more hope. Even more hope than just a boy ministering before the Lord. Eli, in his questioning to his sons, ends up saying, who will intercede for them?

Who can mediate for the offender? But if anyone sins against the Lord, who will intercede for them? Who? The priests aren't doing it. Who?

[30:30] Where is there a faithful priest? Verse 35, I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and mind and I will firmly establish his priestly house and they will minister before my anointed one always.

Currently, there isn't a faithful priest, just wicked priests, scandals of priests. Where is that faithful priest? That faithful priest who will minister before the Lord for always?

Well, in part, I think this was answered in the boy Samuel who was really a prophet but certainly played a bit of a priestly role in the life of Israel.

go further through into 2 Samuel and you'll see Zadok the priest. We all know about Zadok the priest from the coronation, don't we?

Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon as king. We all know about him but he doesn't minister before the Lord always and forever.

[31:37] Where is that faithful priest? We go into the New Testament and we're told of some parents and a boy who go up to Jerusalem every year for the Passover.

And we're told in Luke chapter 2 that this boy is called Jesus and he grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. Rings a bell from that boy Samuel, doesn't it?

And this boy Jesus would grow up and offer up his very self. as a sacrifice for our sins.

And the book of Hebrews, which I'll read just these few verses from, Hebrews 7 describes the Lord Jesus as our faithful high priest who is our faithful high priest forever.

Hebrews chapter 7 verse 26, such a high priest truly meets our needs.

[32:44] One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day for his own sins.

Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness, but the oath which came after the law appointed the Son who has been made perfect forever.

There might be wickedness, there might be darkness, it might feel like everyone is doing as they see fit. We might look upon the state of the church in this country and see leaders who are not serving the Lord as they should, leaders who turn out to be bullies, but praise God we have a faithful high priest.

one who has given his very life up for us. Not a priest who is human and weak and sinful, but the Lord Jesus.

[34:12] And so there is great hope in him. And so we take seriously our sin, we do. Sin deserves judgment. But we thank God that Jesus has taken

our sin and our judgment on himself and know that he, we can know that when we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

And because of that we can say to God take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee. let's take a moment to just be quiet, be still in our own hearts and respond to the Lord.

We've heard heavy stuff this morning and then we'll turn to sing. Amen. Oh Lord God we do thank you for the Lord Jesus our great and faithful high priest.

Thank you that there is great hope in him even in the darkness of this world, even when we see sin and failing, even in your church.

And we pray Father that you would help us to keep looking to Jesus to have our eyes fixed on him, our great savior. And because of what he's done help us to offer up our lives in his service we pray.

[36:18] Help us we ask in Jesus name. Amen. We're going to turn to respond to God's word in song now. We're going to sing Take My Life.