

The call of Samuel

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Date: 28 May 2023

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[0 : 00] On the 19th of September 2022, just last year, our nation was on its last day of mourning. It was the day of the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. I, along with many others, made my way up very early that morning to London to line the streets of London with those thousands, millions probably, of other people to see the procession that came past, the coffin, to hear the funeral being relayed over speakers. And one of the most extraordinary things of that day that I will never forget is the extraordinary silence that there was.

I was in a crowd of thousands of people on Horse God's Parade and there was just silence. It was pretty powerful. And silence can be powerful, can't it?

It can mean, like it meant on that day in September, people in mourning, grieving. It can mean respect. Maybe it can mean rejection. It can mean all sorts of things. It's a powerful thing.

And as we come to the beginning of this passage in 1 Samuel 3, we see the silence. We see the silence. So, chapter 3, verse 1, In those days, the word of the Lord was rare. There were not many visions. God's word was rare.

[2 : 00] There was not much speaking from the Lord to his people. He spoke to his people, didn't he, through prophets. There weren't really any of them around. It was very rare to find a prophet.

God's word was rare that even in the temple, as we saw last week, there was scandal among those who were meant to be ministers before the Lord, those who were meant to be priests.

The word was rare and it led to darkness and to sin. The word of the Lord was rare. It was dark. Not many people willing to listen to God's word, willing to be obedient to it. And even in the very place where God was to be worshipped, there was scandal and corruption.

It's a very dark scene. And so, there is this silence that we find as we read that opening verse of chapter 3. The word of the Lord was rare.

[3 : 13] God wasn't really speaking. God was really speaking. It feels like a rejection from God.

A kind of judgment. They've gone their own ways. Everyone did as they saw fit. The absence of God's word leads to darkness and to sin.

Israel was under judgment. And verse 3. It seems like Eli, the guy who's meant to be a priest, is kind of a picture of what Israel were like spiritually.

So verse 2. One night, Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. Eli was going blind.

He couldn't see. He couldn't see. He was getting old. And judgment had been pronounced on him and his family because of the scandalous behavior of his sons.

[4 : 24] Eli couldn't see. And it feels like Israel itself were blind. Eli's sons were blinded to the truth of God and rejected him.

There's not much light here. There's darkness. Darkness seems to reign. And God's word is rare. But as we saw last week, we saw a kind of glimmer of hope in the boy Samuel. The boy Samuel, who we find at the beginning of this chapter, is ministering before the Lord.

Compared to Eli's sons who weren't ministering before the Lord, he was. And there's a kind of glimmer of hope.

And we see, we even see a bit of light as we look at verse 3. Have a look at verse 3 with me. The lamp of God had not yet gone out.

[5 : 32] And Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord where the ark of God was. There is light in this dark tunnel that Israel are going through.

This dark period. You can just about see a light shining. And it's there, right where the boy Samuel is sleeping.

The lamp of God had not yet gone out. The lamp of God, which was to be lit in the temple, from evening until morning, it was still shining.

But maybe the light is drawing to a close because it says it's not yet gone out. Maybe it was slowly fading, but there was still light.

There's still light there. There's still hope. And there was hope in this boy Samuel, who is ministering faithfully before the Lord.

[6 : 37] But right now, in these opening verses, the word of the Lord is still rare. It is still dark. It is still dark. I was thinking about things being rare over this last week.

I'll share another one in a moment. But something I was reminded of a few years ago, we had that shortage of petrol in this country. Do you remember that?

Do you remember the anarchy it caused? The chaos? The cues? The frustration? The anger? As people lined up to try and get hold of as much petrol as they could.

Petrol was rare and it sparked chaos and anarchy. Darkness. The word of the Lord is rare here.

And it's darkness and it's chaos. It's chaos in the house of God. There's scandals going on. The priests are robbing from people. They're robbing from the Lord. They're sleeping with women.

[7 : 43] It's scandalous. The word of the Lord is rare. And in our day, it seems like the word of the Lord is rare too in this country.

So little people paying any interest in the word of the Lord. People rejecting God and his ways. This evening, we'll think of the issue of gender.

Where people have gone against what the creator says. And tried to invent their own ways of living. And it's dark and it's chaotic.

The Church of England, the established church in this country. They're rejecting God's words.

They're rejecting the truth. And it's leading to darkness.

The word of the Lord is rare. But there is hope. There is hope. See, after darkness, after it's dark at night, comes light.

[8 : 51] And that phrase, after darkness, light, was a phrase which was spoken a lot in the time of the Reformation. Do you know about the Reformation?

Martin Luther nailing those theses up in Germany. People coming back to the word of God. And in Geneva, where John Calvin was based, apparently this was the norm for people there.

Each Sunday, there is to be a sermon at St. Pierre and St. Gervais. There are two churches. At the break of day. And at the usual hour of 9 o'clock.

At midday, there is to be a catechism, which is teaching for children. At 3 o'clock, a second sermon. And besides, on working days, there will be a sermon at St. Pierre Church.

Three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. After years and years of darkness and of God's word not being preached. Suddenly, at the time of the Reformation, you've got five or six times where God's word is going to be preached.

[10 : 02] Where people are going to gather and hear it. Because after darkness comes light. And there is hope in this country.

In the silence. In the time. In a time where it feels like God's word is rare. There is hope. Because statistics show that actually, most of the churches in this country that are growing, might be growing very small.

In very small numbers. But the churches that are growing are churches where the Bible is taught.

And so there is even a glimmer of hope in our country. As we were thinking, on Wednesday evening, the Lord Jesus has still promised to build his church.

And the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. The word of the Lord is rare. There is this silence here.

But, the Lord calls. The Lord calls. That's the second thing that we see in this chapter.

[11 : 14] After years of silence. After years of nobody really hearing from the Lord. Suddenly, we read this. In verse 4.

Then, the Lord called Samuel. The silence is broken. The Lord called Samuel.

The Lord is speaking. In the tabernacle at Shiloh. God's word is going out. And it is calling the boy Samuel.

And Samuel answered, Here I am. And he ran to Eli and said, Here I am. You called me. But it wasn't Eli who called him.

The word of the Lord is so rare that Samuel does not know what to do. Another rare thing in this country is snow.

[12:14] Lord, thinking about snow on such a hot day, silly, but we don't really get snow in this country. And when we do get snow, especially in Brighton, we don't know what to do with it.

It's so rare. I remember back in December when snow fell one Sunday afternoon just for a few hours. The chaos it caused. I didn't know what to do driving in the snow.

To leave my car, nobody's ever told me what to do. It's so rare. And here, as Samuel hears God's voice speaking, he doesn't know what to do.

He thinks it's Eli speaking to him. He thinks it's Eli calling his name. That's logical, isn't it? Eli's not far away from him. And maybe Eli often called in the night.

He was getting old. He probably needed some help. And so Samuel goes and says, Here I am. You called me, but Eli said, I did not call.

[13:14] Go back and lie down. So he went and lay down. Eli's disturbed in the night. This boy comes. What do you mean?

Go back to bed. But it happens again. Verse 6. For the second time again, the Lord called Samuel and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, Here I am.

You called me. And Eli says to him again, I didn't call. My son, I did not call.

Go back and lie down. After the word of God being so rare, you wonder whether God might just kind of stop there with Samuel.

He's not listening, not responding, or go silent again. But that doesn't happen. The Lord calls Samuel a third time. Verse 8.

[14:15] A third time, the Lord called Samuel and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, Here I am. You called me. But then, that third time, sparks off a thought in Eli's head.

Samuel's clearly not making this up. He's clearly hearing his name being called, but it's not me. Eli knows that. And Eli wonders whether it might be the Lord. And so, when he realized that it was the Lord calling the boy, Eli says to Samuel in verse 9, Samuel, go and lie down.

And if he calls you, say, Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. Eli realizes what is going on here. It's unusual, isn't it? Because the word of the Lord had been so rare. Verse 7.

Oh, I can suddenly hear myself louder. Verse 7. We can have sympathy with Samuel for not realizing it was the word of the Lord, can't we?

[15:26] It says this, verse 7, Now Samuel did not know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The word of the Lord was so rare, Samuel had no idea what was going on.

It hadn't been revealed to him before in this way. He was honoring the Lord. He was ministering before the Lord. This was all new stuff.

God had called him once, twice, three times. Samuel had an answer. He'd gone to Eli. Would the Lord call again? Is the Lord going to be patient with Samuel?

Well, he is. He calls again. He is patient with this boy, Samuel. Thank God for those who have been patient with me when I've been slow to realize something, when I've been slow to learn something. I remember in driving lessons, the amount of times my driving instructor had to go through with me, how to approach a roundabout, how to go from a roundabout, the amount of diagrams he had to draw.

[16:42] I just didn't get it. I was just stuck at a roundabout. And yet, thankfully, he was so patient with me. He said he'd never had to draw so many diagrams of roundabouts for someone.

He was patient. And here, God is so patient with Samuel. He calls again. He calls a fourth time. And so let's see what happens as he calls a fourth time.

So in verse, in verse 10, the Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, just in the same way the Lord calls, saying, Samuel, Samuel.

And so then Samuel said, Speak, for your servant is listening. Samuel hears God calling.

And Samuel answers. And he responds, saying, Speak, for your servant is listening. Eli gave him good words to say.

[17:53] Good words to say to the Lord who was calling him. Speak, your servant is listening. I'm ready to hear from you. I'm your servant. I'm going to hear you.

I'm going to do what you call me to do. And today, as we hear God's word, we get to hear God's word. God's word isn't rare in our lives.

We have it so accessibly, don't we? We have the Bible in our own language. We have it on our phones. We can come to church freely. Not everyone in the world can do that.

We haven't been, I think, beyond other people, we haven't been so blessed. We haven't had it so accessibly to us, have we?

God's words. And when he comes and he speaks to us in his word, let's have the same attitude that Eli gives to Samuel, saying, Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

[19 : 02] Don't harden our hearts to God's word. Today, if we hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, the Bible says. Be willing and ready to listen, to learn, to receive, to obey what God says.

A great, great prayer that Eli teaches Samuel that maybe we should be praying to you. speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

We don't have to wait like God's people had to wait for God to just call a prophet. We have it so, so easy for us to be ready and willing to hear God's word speak.

speak. And so as he calls, as he speaks, as he calls Samuel, he speaks to him. There wasn't much seeing going on in this chapter, was there, at the beginning?

There wasn't much hearing of God's word going on. But now, we get into verse 11. As God begins to speak to Samuel, and we hear him say, see.

[20 : 25] After Eli being blind, after there not being many visions from the Lord, the Lord says to Samuel, see. See what I'm about to do in Israel.

Something that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. People who hadn't heard from the Lord, who weren't listening.

Eli's sons refused to listen. Now, people's ears are going to prick up and they're going to listen and it says that their ears are going to tingle.

I remember, I don't know if anyone knows this strange phrase, if your ears burning, it means someone's speaking about you. I remember being told that by my mum and dad when I was a boy. I was like, what's going on? Who's speaking about me? Why are they speaking about me? And I googled it the other day and apparently, so the saying goes, if your right ear is burning, it means someone's speaking something good of you and if your left ear is burning, it means someone's speaking ill of you.

[21 : 36] I don't think any of that's true but here, God says, people's ears are going to tingle.

People's ears who had not heard from God at all, they're going to prick up and they're going to tingle and it's a sign of God's judgment.

This phrase, ears tingling, happens a couple of other times in the Bible, can look them up at your leisure, 2 Kings 21, 12 and Jeremiah 19, verse 3.

This phrase is used, again, just before judgment. Ears tingling, ears pricking up. They refused to listen to the Lord before but now it's going to involve judgment.

They're really starting to tingle their ears now. They're really going to hear it. And in verse 12, we get some details as the Lord continues to speak to Samuel.

Verse 12, at that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family from beginning to end.

[23 : 04] God is going to carry out the judgment that we heard pronounced upon Eli and his households. He's going to carry out from the beginning to the end.

It's going to happen. God's word won't fail. God's word can't fail. Verse 13, the Lord continues, for I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about.

His sons uttered blasphemies against God and he failed to restrain them. Eli knew all about the sin of his two sons and failed to restrain them, failed to take responsibility for his sons.

And God is going to execute this judgment upon them. Verse 14, we continue, therefore I swore to the house of Eli, the guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.

Those sons of Eli, their sins can't be atoned for because they're so defiant they're refusing to turn. Their hearts are so hard. Numbers 15, 30 to 31, back in hearing God's law, it says, but anyone who sins defiantly, whether a native-born or a foreigner, blasphemes the Lord and must be cut off from the people of Israel because they have despised the Lord's word and broken his commands, they must surely be cut off, their guilt remains on them.

[24 : 55] And that's a description of Eli and his sons. They stood defiantly, they refused to turn, they refused to be obedient to the Lord and to his words.

And so they can't stand, they don't have a leg to stand on. And so this boy Samuel, he has a weighty message that he's been told, really weighty message of judgment, one that we're told that he's understandably afraid to tell Eli.

So verse 15, Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord and he was afraid to tell Eli the vision. But Eli called him and said, Samuel my son.

Samuel answered, here I am. What was it he said to you, Eli asked? Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely. If you hide from me anything he told you.

This is personal, isn't it, for Samuel. Samuel's growing up in the temple under Eli. No doubt there was a real bond between them.

[26 : 12] We see Eli calling Samuel my son. He's like a son to him. There's a bond between them. Samuel loved Eli. But he has this message from the Lord and it's a message of judgment and it's uncomfortable and he's afraid to tell Eli.

Eli. But nonetheless, Eli wanted to hear it. Eli actually has a good attitude here towards God's word. He wants to hear it. Do not hide it from me.

He knows that the Lord was speaking and if the Lord speaks then let me hear it. So what does God say?

What does Samuel do? verse 18. So Samuel told him everything. Hiding nothing from him. And Eli said he is the Lord.

Let him do what was good in his eyes. Samuel as difficult as it must have been told Eli this message. It must have been hard for him but he did it.

[27 : 25] he faithfully proclaimed God's word to Eli. And we too in the gospel we are given really good news.

We are given such great hope but in that good news we have to warn people don't we of the reality of judgment of the reality of hell.

And we have to do that as uncomfortable as it might be. But doesn't Eli have a good attitude here when he says he is the Lord.

Let him do what is good in his eyes. God is God. He is good. His word is good. And he does what is right.

And we can rest in that God is as we are called to share the good news. As we are called even to tell people to warn people of the judgment of hell.

[28 : 32] I wonder if you were kind of walking past someone's house and you saw that it was on fire. Would you just walk past and leave it burning away? Do you think is anything being done here?

If you knew whose house it was would you tell them? Would you warn them? Maybe their next door neighbors would you send them a message? Would you phone them? Would you warn them of what is going on?

The same with the reality of judgment, God's judgment of hell. It is loving not to hide it from people. But praise God there is far more to the gospel than just that. Praise God that we find hope in the Son of God who has come and taken that judgment for us.

There is good news that we share. Well after beginning this chapter in silence, where the word of God was rare, we find an extraordinary change, don't we, by the end.

[29 : 48] The Lord has called Samuel, the Lord speaks to Samuel, and the Lord keeps speaking to Samuel. So verse 19, the Lord was with Samuel as he grew up.

And he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.

The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his words. This isn't just a one-time thing God's speaking here.

No, he keeps speaking. He keeps speaking through Samuel. Samuel grows up and he knows the Lord with him. He knows the Lord speaking to him and through him to the people of God's.

God's word was rare, but now the light of God's word is being spoken across the nation from Dan to Beersheba, that's from the north to the south.

[30 : 50] All Israel says, just into chapter 4, in Samuel's word came to all Israel. A huge change, huge turn of events in the land.

God had broken into the silence. God had broken into the darkness and his word was going forth. And that's what God's word does. It breaks into the silence. It breaks into darkness. Read that quote from that time in Geneva, after the darkness that there was before the reformation.

God spoke. God did that at the beginning of time. God spoke into the darkness and there was light. God did that in his son, the word of God.

John 1, 1 to 5, we know it well from our studies in John. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

[32 : 04] Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life. And that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness.

And the darkness has not overcome it. The Lord Jesus, the very word of God, has stepped down into the darkness of this world. world. And we still have the light of the gospel.

We still get to share with others the good news of the light of the world. I kind of ended last week's sermon reading from the book of Hebrews and I'm going to do it again.

Hebrews, in Hebrews 1, we read this, in the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, through prophets like Samuel, at many times and in various ways.

But in these last days he has spoken to us by his son. And it is by his son he still speaks.

[33 : 18] And it's the gospel message that we have, that we find in the Lord Jesus. that we get to speak to others. We warn people of judgment, we do, but we tell people of the hope, the light of the gospel that Jesus saves.

God's word doesn't need to be rare in our lives. Our lives, who we know, the Lord Jesus working in us.

And it doesn't need to be rare in the lives of those that we know and love. We can share the Lord Jesus with others. We pray that that may be so.

Let's pray. Amen. Father God, thank you again that you are a speaking God. Lord Jesus. We know that here in 1 Samuel and in other ways throughout the Old Testament, we see you speaking through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

But we thank you that in these last days, you have spoken to us by your Son, the Lord Jesus. we thank you for that.

[34 : 41] We thank you for the light of the world that stepped down into darkness. Lord, we thank you. And Lord, we pray that God's word wouldn't be rare in our lives and in our church, but that God's word would be spoken and proclaimed.

And we pray that that light of God's word would shine out to others in and around this city, we pray, and beyond.

Use us in that, we pray. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.