

# 1 Samuel 3:1-21

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[ 0 : 00 ]     1 Samuel chapter 3, the entire chapter. The children from age 3 and up are with us in the service, but there are some worksheets back there to help them pay better attention during the sermon.

Would you please stand with me for the reading of God's Word? Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the Lord under 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.

[ 1 : 07 ]     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 to 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 young man. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, Go, lie down.

And if he calls you, you shall say, Speak, Lord, your servant hears. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came and stood, calling out 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.

[ 2 : 16 ]     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.

[ 3 : 18 ] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, we've got a great text before us today.

But before we launch in, I want to make a couple of opening comments that are just a bit unrelated. It was a great time in Nairobi with Jim and Jeremy and Jonah White, my own son Silas.

Thank you for praying for us. We spent 10 days there together, and there's a lot to share with you, and hopefully I'll be able to do that over the coming weeks. But today I just wanted to thank you for your prayers.

The church is being strengthened, and we were being strengthened as a result of having gone. The other thing I want to mention today is it's a final day of sorts for some.

We have graduating seniors, five in the church this year, Julia Dennis, who attends the downtown congregation, and four, the four horsemen from our own congregation here, Grant Henzel, Baxter Helm, Matthew Ehrenholz, and Justin Berchioli.

[ 4 : 36 ] I don't know if Justin's walked in today or not. Has he walked in? So Justin's not here, but we've got the other three here. I just want you to come up for a second. Matthew is actually leaving this coming week for a pre-college trip to Wisconsin with a bunch of the incoming class.

The other two will be on their way to college shortly. Nice job on the color selection, gentlemen. They didn't know this was happening, of course. But, hey, when we started this church, these guys were preparing for kindergarten.

Can you believe it? And two of them stood on a platform with their parents as kindergartners when we launched. Matthew joined us just a short time later.

So your life has been tracking educationally with this church. I wish Justin was here.

But you guys are men, young men. And we send you forth under the grace of God. It's a very interesting text that we have today.

[ 5 : 51 ] And I wanted you guys, if you don't mind, just do me the favor of sitting right there, front row. Can you do that?

Your moms need to let go of you anyway. But if you just sit right here in the front row, as they all leave the front row, look at that, to get their Bibles.

This is good. I don't know if there's room for all three of you. Maybe you should sit in the second row.

Maybe a little more room. What a great word to go out on.

Verse 1. Now, the young man, Samuel, was ministering to the Lord. Here he is, a young man.

[ 6 : 59 ] Not told his precise age. I know in the flannel graph stories of childhood, he's a very little boy.

But if I'm not mistaken, the term is the same term we find previously in chapter 2, 17, by way of contrast to the young men who were the sons of Eli, who were at least old enough at that time to be serving in a very unworthy manner before the Lord.

Also in chapter 2, Samuel is called a young man again, and at this time, in contrast to the sons of Eli, who were old enough to already be indulging in sexual immorality with other women.

So his precise age, we don't know. He's a young man getting ready to make his way in the world. What was the day in which he lived?

The text gives us this incredibly desperate phrase. Verse 1, And the word of the Lord was rare in those days.

[ 8 : 21 ] In a complimentary way, there was no frequent vision. Of course, a vision was what would happen to the seer. Later in the scriptures, when we read of the prophetic office underway, you could not be a prophet without being lifted up into the very presence of God and seeing the things there and in seeing, hearing, and in hearing, speak.

So these are ways of speaking about the difficulty of the day in which he was a young man. The word of the Lord was rare. There was no frequent vision.

On top of that, we see this verse 2 opening that at that time, Eli, this is the oldest holy man among the people of Israel, is old.

And his eyesight has begun to grow dim so that he could not see, and he's lying down in his own place. This is the day in which Samuel was a young man.

The word of the Lord was rare. The man who was leading the people of God spiritually was old. On the verge of blindness, it's almost as if the headlamps had dimmed and were going out.

[ 9 : 48 ] What a terrible day to be alive. For God mediates relationship with his people from the very beginning through his word.

Genesis 1-1 And God said, let there be light, and there was light. His word is by nature a creative act. He speaks.

He mediates. He creates. So that when you get to the end of the Bible in Revelation, and John sees this bride, the bride in all her fullness coming down out of heaven like a holy city, the angel does not say to John, wow, aren't you glad you're here?

This is such a great experience. He says, no, write these words down for they are faithful and true. God mediates through his word at creation.

The consummation of his bride comes through the mediation of word. The conversion of his bride through word. It's the proclamation of the word. Peter in Acts 2 that as he preaches the word, God's bride is born.

[ 11 : 07 ] It creates community. mercy. And so we are now living in a day, 1 Samuel 3, when the word of the Lord is rare.

Little mediation with God. Little understanding of what he would have. And the priest himself is old.

And the eye, like his heart, is already closing. He closing. the young man.

The scene shifts. Verse 3, by this beautiful, contrasting expression, 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. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, although the lamp of Eli was about closed and finished.

[ 12 : 22 ] The lamp of God here refers probably by way of contrast to Eli, but also by way of direct connection to what's the very closing line in that verse where he's laying where the ark of God was.

In the days of Moses, he was given instructions for the construction of what would be the tabernacle. 30 feet by 15 feet, that little outer area.

And in that area behind the veil was a table upon which bread was always present, lamp stand that was lit in the night according to Leviticus wherein the priesthood would tend it so that the light would not go out from dusk until dawn and the altar of incense.

So in all likelihood when it says that Samuel as a young man is laying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was and the lamp had not yet gone out, he is laying down just outside the most holy of places, which itself was just beyond the purple and embroidered veil that was actually stitched in with cherubim and angels and beyond it the holy of holies and the ark of the covenant, which Moses had been given instruction to build and it was built and it was about four feet long out of acacia wood covered in complete gold with a lid on it which was eventually called the mercy seat out of pure gold and at the end of the mercy seat made of one piece with the lid were two cherubim facing one another with wings out stretched over the mercy seat and that mercy seat was the place where sacrifice was made that we might relate to

God and it was also the place according to Exodus where God listen to this from above the mercy seat Exodus 25 22 from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel so the ark of God is where God met with his people in sacrifice and it's the place where God spoke to his people and Samuel now a young man having been dedicated by his mother to the welfare of the church lays at night tending the lamp lest it go out all the olive oil purely ground to keep it burning through the night so that the people would know God is and the old man lays in his own place lamps gone but God is awakening another day what a story here he is in

[ 15 : 52 ] Shiloh for that tabernacle that had been created constructed under Moses had been carried with the people throughout its time period and now all of these years later Joshua 18 1 had been set up in Shiloh and that is the place that God's people came annually to offer sacrifice and the young man ministers to the Lord there what happens next in verses 4 to 14 is the stuff of the stuff of story but it's true story he lays there and all of a sudden hears his name audibly notice his eagerness to serve it says here I am and he verse 4 ran to Eli and said here I am for you called me but he said I did not call you lie down again so he went and lay down the Lord called again undoubtedly from above that mercy seat just beyond the veil

Samuel and again he arose and went to Eli and said here I am for you called me but he said I did not call you my son lie down again and interestingly the narrator now moves in the text from the opening where the word of the Lord was rare in those days to the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to 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 I mean his eagerness his willingness his readiness is quite amazing you'd think by this time any young man would say the guy's losing it he's old he can't see I'm not going but he goes and the old man slow on the uptake finally recognizes that

God himself might be speaking so he says in verse nine 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 this story has a marker in my own family my grandfather was a pastor missionary for many years father to six children at one time four of them when they were in their youth turned away from the Lord and made a despicable mess of the gospel heritage that had been given them my mother one of the six children remained loyal to the Lord and it became a very difficult situation in the family as you might anticipate the old preacher and four of his kids gone AWOL and two remaining faithful I was about nine or so years old my mother and father lay down to bed and began to sleep and as my father tells the story and he's a basketball coach who grew up in a locker room not used to experiential stuff he's a man with his feet on the ground puts it this way that he awoke in the night and saw me approaching him from the doorway to his room with a robe on and as

I recall him telling it it was polka dotted and as I approached him in the night he reached out and said David David and reached and it was as if I evaporated and was gone he rolled over and went to sleep he woke up the next morning and said to my wife his wife my mom I had the strangest dream last night she said what happened she said I thought I had woken up and I thought Dave had come in the door with a polka dotted robe on and I said David David and he was gone and she said that wasn't a dream I woke and saw the very same thing happen they didn't know what to do with it although this story came to their mind they went back and read and they realized that the situation was that the old preacher had not confronted his sons in the way that was to be done and they immediately called my grandfather her father and said we have had something happen to us that we cannot explain other than it is an experience that led us to the word and the word we bring to you it is time for you to confront your sons for the sake of the gospel and he did and I am living testimony to tell you that all four of those siblings came back to the

Lord all four of them follow Christ all four one of the strangest encounters I've ever had with a biblical text and true now here he is the third time now going to lie down and the Lord came again and stood at other times verse 10 calling Samuel Samuel and Samuel said speak for your servant hears what a moment what a moment he moves from eagerness to unpreparedness to readiness to receive the word of the Lord and the Lord gives him the content of verses 10 through 14 a message that confirms what we saw last week in regard to the man of

[ 22 : 36 ] God who had already gone to Eli that Eli's house was coming down and that God would indeed judge his family for not following the Lord fully and that is the word and no wonder then Samuel goes back and lays down because while he might have moved from eagerness to serve Eli to a readiness to receive God's word there was a reluctance on his part to go to Eli to tell him the word because it was the most difficult word you could possibly imagine and so he lay until morning and he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and he 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 young men he was like you eager to serve the Lord he was ready to hear his word he may have been reluctant to share it but at the end of the day he was willing to move forward with God's very word he did not hide anything from him and all of us need to remember this whatever God says in his word he means whether it be a word of mercy or judgment curses or blessings his word is exalted above all words and so we get the summary Samuel grew and the

Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground in other words I think a double meaning almost the words of God that came to Samuel never fell to the ground in a useless way and the words of Samuel from God that came to the people well of course nothing fell to the ground that was not of use the!

word of! Lord of the Lord it almost would be like saying all the people in Chicago from Rogers Park all the way down to the skyway knew that the top to the bottom the north to the south all God's people 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 what do we say about the summary I want you to notice what's important notice how God reveals himself in the world he appears but how he appears again by revealing himself through word that's how God appears he appears through word and there you have the full compass of the chapter the day in which the word of the

Lord was rare the day in which Samuel had not yet had the word of the Lord revealed and the day in which it is revealed to all the people so that chapter 4 verse 1 states and the word of Samuel came to all Israel equating his very words with the word of God contra Igmar Bergman in his great trilogy of the silence where that movie was birthed out of an experience he had in a cathedral standing before Jesus as the great shepherd and he comes before it and he says speak to me and thankfully the stained glass remained silent and said nothing and he goes to the portrait again and says speak to me and is met with nothing and he walks out and he pens his play the silence indicating that

[ 27 : 22 ] God no longer speaks you have been here 13 years under the ministry of the word we don't do a lot at holy trinity but if I die today this has forever stood between the preacher and the people this is where God speaks this is where we know him this is how we love him this is what we learn of him the word is ever between the people and their blessed creator and redeemer the word should never be rare in our day it should be at the center of all of church life not sacramentalism not mysticism not experientialism biblicism in the best of ways as you three leave you will forever know this word is where

God speaks and if it is rare in your day God help you and God help us all I think of Van Gogh 1885 what a portrait still life with the Bible table on the table a Bible next to the Bible a lamp stand in the lamp stand a candle burned out in the foreground Emil Zola's the joy of life in a yellow jacket as if any illumination we might now receive in the foreground is coming through people just being told to experience the joys of life because we live in a day where the

Bible no longer illuminates or gives light to the world it had been burned out still life with Bible might as well said still born the need in Samuel's day was that God would put his word into the mouth of his people and then that word would rule for God's people are truly only happy when they're ruled by his word and so may you and may we all have a hunger for his word it's not academic to me these words are your life and it doesn't end with Samuel Samuel is preparatory there's no other gospel writer that leans on Samuel like Luke leans on Samuel the gospel writer of Luke is continually trying to move you from Samuel to Jesus who is the fulfillment of

God's word God's priest God's prophet God's king Luke couldn't have been clearer that he wants you to make those connections he continually is quoting Samuel he quotes him in Luke acts 27 times just first Samuel alone whereas all the other New Testament writers only quote or allude to first Samuel 31 times nearly half of the quotations and allusions of Luke who wants to give you the historical record of Jesus come from this narrative if you take second Samuel into play 17 more times 44 times Luke is bringing you back to this material to show you the fulfillment of God's word in Christ constantly not wanting you to miss that Jesus is the word made flesh that he is the one who sits at the father's feet and grows in stature among men that he is the one who on the cross separates that veil walks in walks up makes sacrifice speaks for

God the curtain comes down access is given he is the most holy place and then he puts that word in the mouth of his apostles and they begin to preach it and it rolls through the century so that as you and I come here today when we hear that message whether we be 6 16 56 or 86 we resonate this is true I can move from Samuel to Jesus and know God and know the forgiveness of sins that comes at the cross where sacrifice is made and speech is given do we have a hunger for that word is it everything to us you three as you leave may you always hunger for the word of God Flannery O'Connor and I should close with this because it's hot in a narrative well read

[ 33 : 14 ] Flannery O'Connor what's that you're reading shepherd asked sitting down the holy bible johnson said shepherd leaned forward and said in a low furious voice put the bible up eat your dinner the boy stopped and looked up his expression was startled but please the book is something for you to hide behind shepherd said the bible is for cowards people who are afraid to stand on their own feet and figure things out for themselves shepherd reached across the table to grab the book but Johnson snatched it back and put it in his lap Shepherd laughed book and you know you don't believe it I believe it Johnson said you don't know what I believe and what I don't shepherd shook his head you don't believe it you're too intelligent I ain't too intelligent the boy muttered you don't know nothing about me even if

I didn't believe it it still be true you don't believe it Shepherd said his face was taut I believe it Johnson said breathlessly I'll show you I believe it he opened the book in his lap and tore out a page of it and thrust it into his mouth his jaws worked furiously and the paper crackled as he chewed it stop this Shepherd said in a dry burnt out voice stop it the boy raised the Bible and tore out a page with his teeth and began grinding it in his mouth his eyes burning Shepherd reached across the table and knocked the book out of his hand leave the table he said coldly Johnson swallowed what was in his mouth his eyes widened as if in a vision of splendor were opening up before him I've eaten it he breathed I've eaten it like Ezekiel and it was honey to my mouth leave eaten it the boy cried wonder transformed his face

I've eaten it like Ezekiel and I don't want none of your food after it nor no more ever more does that reflect your heart we have a lot of children in here some of you are in preschool kindergarten on summer break hoping school never starts again some of you are in junior high almost in high school you're wondering what are your friends going to tell you if you continue to read and believe in the Bible but first Samuel is clear and first Samuel speaks to all of you who are growing up in this church the word of the Lord was rare and there were young people who were eager but unprepared for it yet

God made them ready for it and they received it so that they could speak it to the whole world some of you are going to go all over the world with God's word what a joy that is for those of us who remain and what a fearful thing for any of us who are old to think that the children that one day are attentive to the word like Samuel could be the children who turn and face the people in judgment like Samuel had to say to Eli in his very first sermon what a hard very first sermon it must have been to call upon the parents and say what have you done why don't you lead your children what a fearful thing Eli says Samuel my son and then the son speaks to the parent and gives him the word heavenly father we thank you for first samuel three we pray that all of us young old alike would understand the glory of the scriptures and even more the wonder of your son and as we send another generation out the doors there will be others coming in and we pray that the whole congregation would be united around this idea that the word of the

Lord is pleasant and in its preferred and central place and that we would be a people who would hear it and live under it to the glory of your name amen