

1 Samuel 2:11-26: Sons in Contrast

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Date: 20 June 2010

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[0 : 0 0] This reading comes from 1 Samuel chapter 2, verses 11 through 26, and may be found on page 214 of the Red Pew Bibles. And just as a reminder that children from age 3 through grade 5 are with us in the service for the sermon today, but there are packets at the back that might entertain them if Pastor Jackson doesn't do so sufficiently well.

Again, that's 1 Samuel chapter 2, verses 11 through 26. Would you please rise with me for the reading of God's Word? Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, and the boy ministered to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest.

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. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.

And if the man said to him, Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish, he would say, No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force.

[1 : 3 2] Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt. Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy clothed with a linen ephod, and his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, May the Lord give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the Lord. So then they would return to their home.

Indeed, the Lord visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters, and the young man Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord. 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 meeting.

And he said to them, Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons, it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad.

If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him. But if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.

[2 : 5 3] Now the young man Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Thank you, Drayton. Good afternoon to everyone. It's good to be here. And thanks for that prelude to my message. And perhaps we should pass out sheets for everybody on this afternoon.

Well, let's pray. Lord, we love you. We thank you for this opportunity before your people and before you. Pray that you would be glorified through your word proclaimed.

This afternoon is our prayer. Amen. Raising up leaders is our focus for the summer. I pray that it would be a good series for all of us, regardless of where we are in our stages of life.

Whether you have children or not, perhaps there are those who have, like we do, grandchildren. Perhaps there are those who are not in their child-rearing or bearing years.

[4 : 08] Take note. There's some great things for us in this series and in God's word. Seven chapters only. But up to this point, we're into chapter 2.

The main person, humanly speaking, that's been, in our view, has been the woman named Hannah. Hannah's name, however, once we get past 1 Samuel chapter 2, she sort of just sort of goes off the pages of Scripture as far as her name.

And you don't see her name or hear her name mentioned anymore after we get out of 1 Samuel chapter 2. But Hannah's son, Samuel, moves into biblical limelight.

We see him, a major player, you might say, in redemptive history. We see him mentioned. Old Testament, the Psalms, the prophets. And he is held up as a standard.

I mean, matter of fact, one of the passages that I recall said, though a couple of people in Samuel was included in that number were before me, God says, I still would not listen to you.

[5 : 20] In other words, he was a powerful intercessor, one who could hold the attention of God because of his godly life and stature. Look at the text with me on this afternoon, and I think one of the things that will help us if we notice some structure of the passage that is here.

First of all, look at verse 11, where it speaks about the boy that is Samuel, ministered to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest.

And then look at the last verse, verse 26 in this particular segment, that speaks about as now the young man Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with man.

Samuel, on either end but also through the passage, comes into view. I want to highlight him at the end because I want you to see how the structure is moving here.

Okay? Additionally, the sons of Eli come into focus. You will see them particularly both in verses 12 through 17, but you also see them mentioned in verses 22 through 25.

[6 : 43] But at the middle, right in the middle, we see Samuel's family. They really come into view. To put it another way is it goes Samuel, the sons of Eli, Samuel and his family, the sons of Eli again, and then Samuel comes back into focus.

That's on a structural level. That's what we see here, and we'll observe it as we work through it. But let me give you some thoughts as far as the presentation level, particularly very simply for the children and the childlike among us.

What you have before us, you see three sons, you see two families, and you see one sovereign God.

If you can count a little backwards, very simply you can get that. Three, not three, one, two. It's three, two, one. You see three sons will come into view.

Two families. But overarching all of this, you've got one sovereign God who is absolutely in control. And we will show you that.

[8 : 06] What about the three sons in the narrative? Of course, you see clearly, the first one in verse 11 is Samuel, is it not? Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, and the boy ministered to the Lord, notice, in the presence of Eli, the priest.

It's interesting doing some research on Samuel because we were wondering, how was it that Samuel, and it seems like in chapter 1, verse 1, he was from the tribe of Ephraim.

Okay? That's where he was from territorially. All right? He was from Ephraim. But if you look at his history, as we see in 1 Chronicles, he really came from a Levitical tribe.

So he was sort of in this order of people, particularly from the children of Levi, that took care of the things of the temple.

1 Chronicles chapter 6, you can see that very clearly. So he was rightfully, though not necessarily a son of Aaron, but God had a way of sometimes putting people in places, and he certainly had that right, but he was among the sons, the children of Eli, who were attended to, I mean the children of Levi, who attended into the things of the tabernacle and the temple.

[9 : 43] So the first, Samuel, the first son that we see, the son of Elkanah and Hannah, and you remember we found, we saw Hannah in chapter 1. She is this devout woman of prayer, and when she could not have children, she praised to the Lord who enabled her to conceive and to be pregnant, and from that pregnancy, Samuel came into the world.

Now, if you will look at the overall section again, what the writer is showing us, he is giving us a glimpse of Samuel's life before he becomes an adult.

And this youthful Samuel is characterized by devotion to God. And what a beautiful picture we see of this young man in the tabernacle environs, and he is serving, he is devoted to God from his youth.

It's interesting you see the words in, let's see, the boy Samuel, verse 11. You see that also in verse 18, the boy Samuel.

And notice in verse 21, it speaks about the young man Samuel, and you see it also in verse 26. Believe it or not, the same word translates all of those.

[11 : 08] And it looks at, it really was this sort of stretch of life all the way from reigning on up until adulthood. But again, I think that the translator just put it nice because the writer is showing us some progression, how he moves along this life continuum.

But there's one thing that sort of characterizes him all during these particular stages, and that is his devotion to God in each one. God-centered devotion.

Now, notice the word ministered. You see that there in verse 11? It was particularly used of priestly activities in the very service of God.

So that's where he was. We also see that word in verse 18 in chapter 3, verse 1. Samuel was at work in the place of worship, in the presence of God, doing age-appropriate kind of things, under the tutelage.

You might even say Eli was his spiritual coach. Age-appropriate tasks under his spiritual mentor. He's innocent. He's willing and responding appropriately to God.

[12 : 27] We know something about this kind of mentorship at varying stages in the lives of our children. Whether it's a daughter with her mother or some sons with their mother cooking, they'll put on the little apron that's there.

They're not doing very much. May get a little flower on their hands. Or doing different things because there are people who are in training. Or dad, he straps on his tool belt.

And little junior, he has on his little tool belt also. He's got his little plastic hammer and screwdriver. Age-appropriate kind of things. But are in that stage and in that age of training.

And so we see little Samuel in the tabernacle environs, this complex there. He's under the mentorship of his spiritual guide, Eli.

Notice you also see that word. He's ministering before the Lord. Verse 18. And also look at verse 21 that speaks about Samuel in the presence of God. Indeed, the Lord visited Hannah and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters.

[13 : 35] And the young man Samuel, her firstborn, grew in the presence of the Lord. And again, I also see that in verse 26.

He's in the presence of God. The narrator enables us to see the growth and the progress of Samuel. The report card is given.

Samuel is a son in process. He's useful and being prepared for greater usefulness in the very service of God.

But notice who also we see. So we said there are three sons. Samuel, but then there are two sons of Eli. We know who these sons are because we have seen them already early on in chapter 1 and verse 3.

As a matter of fact, turn back over in your Bibles to chapter 1 and verse 3 and we'll see when these men were introduced initially. Now, this man, that's Elkanah, went to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh where the two sons of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas were priests to the Lord.

[14 : 58] There they are right there. So we see them introduced there, but here we get them, we get a more close-up picture of them beginning in verse 12 of our text.

And notice what this text says about them and friends, these are not flattering terms at all. Now, the sons of Eli were worthless men.

What a label. Worthless men. What the writer wants us to see in this text is how Samuel and the sons of Eli, these are quite different kind of people.

Samuel is youthful, he's God-centered, and he's eager. They are older, perhaps upwards of 30, the age in which Levitical service and priesthood actually began.

But they're rebellious, and they're self-centered, and they are corrupt. Professionally, they occupied the positions of spiritual leadership, but spiritually, they were quite unprepared for the task that was, that were at hand.

[16 : 17] First of all, they're described as a mention as worthless men. What we do see in the text helps us to see why they are so described.

They are abusive and selfish and greedy. That's what, we'll look a little bit more about that. But, and Hannah, in chapter 1, verse 16, she reacted to being called a worthless woman, but here, the term worthless men actually fit.

It's the old King James word, belial. They were selfish men who were occupying a very sacred office.

And such people have a way of causing a shadow to be cast over the entire profession. And there are people today, because of one or a couple of bad experiences with so-called men or people of the cloth.

They've been turned off to anyone honorable or otherwise who would claim to be a servant of God. That doesn't only go with preachers, does it? Lawyers is another one that people pick on.

[17 : 36] And don't mention the word politician. Huh? Tell you, there's some that you never can gain a good reputation because of what someone has done. It's hard to outlive.

But they were worthless, they were also ignorant men. The text says they did not know the Lord. And there seems to be a cause-effect relationship here.

Why were they worthless men? Because they did not know the Lord. They disregarded his word, they had ignored him. And they were worthless men because though they occupied the priesthood, they did not know the very God that they were supposed to be serving.

Rather, they were living off of substance provided by God's people, commanded so in the law. That was the means through the sacrificial system of maintaining both the priest and the Levite.

So these men were enjoying the privileges but had not embraced the responsibilities of the priesthood. And because they did not know the Lord, they couldn't fulfill their role as leaders of God's people.

[18 : 52] Malachi speaks about what should characterize those who occupied the role, the position of priest. Listen to what he says in chapter 2, verse 4. For the lips of the priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth.

For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. How could these men teach about a God that they did not even know themselves?

While enjoying the privileges of the priesthood, they failed to fulfill the responsibilities thereof. There were men who didn't know the Lord.

Worthless. Here's another way of putting it. The pastoral team at Shiloh consisted of Eli and his sons. But here's the picture that the narrator is showing us.

He is showing us the scene that is a prelude to the kingship. And what the spiritual leadership of that day, what characterized them.

[20 : 00] And you're going to see that things were about to change in Shiloh. God was on the move, and perhaps people didn't fully recognize it, but he was going to do something about the situation.

We see, if you look at the text as you follow on down in 14 and following, that these men, they were grabbing, as it were, for the best portions of the offerings that were being offered up by God's people.

It would be like they would go through the offering and they would get the largest checks or the largest bills that were there.

They were in it for themselves. Again, that would be characteristics somewhat of our system today. Shameful. Their abuse, look at verse 22, included sexual abuse.

They had a system that was consistent with their greed and with their lust and with their desires. And plain and simple, it was abuse. They took advantage of the system.

[21 : 14] They took advantage of the people. And here it was in a very sacred place, which was to be characterized by safety. The people of God were in jeopardy because of these men.

Safety should not have been an issue, but they were there and it certainly was. They had established their own system and the system served them.

And God's work, friends, was ignored. Again, this was the spiritual condition. This was what spiritual leadership was like. But God had a plan. Now, as we think about these kinds of people today, their cousins remain with us.

Several years ago, there were several articles and I'm sure if I had done a Google search, I would have come up with some clear, clean examples today. But a headline several years ago read this.

Priests at the center of Boston sex scandal defraud. Clergy charged with skimming cash.

[22 : 31] And two ministers were cited. And this beats it all. Listen, pastor gets 35 years for rape, he says, God approved.

Huh? Abuse. Pure and simple. Then, and now, and no wonder, people don't have the kind of respect for those who are trying to uphold the office of pastor or minister.

Hey, here's what the writer wants us to see. He wants us to see there's a contrast between Samuel and the sons of Eli three sons.

They're sons in contrast. Here you've got a young, tender Samuel fully devoted to God. You've got two sons occupying an office and they're in it for themselves.

Three sons, but notice the two families. Not only do we see these three sons, but we see the two families that they are a part of. Notice what it was that characterized Samuel's family.

- [23 : 49] Look there, beginning in verse 18. Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy clothed in a linen ephod, and his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went in with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, May the Lord give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the Lord so they would return to their home.

Indeed, notice here, the Lord visited Hannah and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters and the young man Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord.

His family. Not only was Samuel about his family, was also devout. His God-honoring parents took their covenant responsibilities seriously.

We see that in chapter 1, verse 3. They made their way to worship as prescribed by the law. Chapter 2, verse 19. They were a worshipping people, a worshipping family.

- [24 : 59] Notice they were both, they were parental, they're their son, you might say, he was away, being trained, trained, but yet they were supportive of him, supportive of God's purposes for their son that they had brought into the world.

They had brought him into the world, but they did not neglect him, though he was being, he was a son in training, so to speak. They provide for him yearly.

His mother would bring up a robe, a priest-like garment that was brought to him. Notice also in here, they are people who are under the very covenant blessings of God, and that we see in verse 21, they are fruitful.

That was one of the key covenant blessings for God's people, that they would be a fruitful people, bearing sons and daughters. The barren woman had born six children.

Remember, if you look back at chapter 2 and verse 5, the barren has born seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.

- [26 : 10] Oh, as you look back at chapter 2, 1 through 10, and we'll say some more about it, but that's sort of a template that will take us throughout the Samuel narratives, that we refer back to those kinds of things.

We see God who is ultimately in control, he raises up some, and he puts down others, and again, we'll see these things replayed again and again in the Samuel narrative.

Here's a measure of application for you on this afternoon. If you were looking verses 18 through 21, I would hope that you would see reflections of your family.

If your family approximates what you see here, you, friend, should be grateful. If you have godly parents, and godly parents does not mean perfect parents, because there are none, but if you have parents that are seeking to do God's will, you should be thankful.

Huh? Huh? We can find fault with our parents, but if they are seeking God and seeking to honor him, that's something to rejoice about. And if for some reason they didn't quite measure up, I want to encourage you here this afternoon, don't hold a grudge against them.

- [27 : 32] Most families are doing the best that they can. No goal, no family has the intentional goal of failing or messing you up, so to speak.

Huh? If your home looks like what we see here, be grateful and support what is going on there. If you have parents who are supporting you in your life endeavors, huh?

Be thankful. Through monies or other resources they're investing in your physical and spiritual and educational well-being, be thankful.

If you got God honoring, God-fearing parents, huh? If you have brothers and sisters, be thankful. That's the blessing of God, huh?

If you're expecting, be thankful. Even in July weather, be thankful. It's a blessing of God to be fruitful.

[28 : 33] Huh? Notice, we see Samuel's family, but on the other hand, there's this priestly family that comes into the picture, huh?

Eli and his sons, but we also see Eli himself beginning in verses 22 and following. It's not our first glimpse because we saw Eli in chapter 1, didn't we?

There he mistook a distressed, a woman in distress, a distressed Hannah as a worthless woman. Far from it, huh? Maybe he thought that she was one of the women that his sons were, whether it was temple, prostitution, or whatever, were engaging.

We don't know. But he was wrong. We do know that. He was elderly. Look at verse 22. He was very old, and hopefully older should mean wiser.

Once we get a little mileage on the odometer of life, hopefully some of the mistakes that we've made in the past, not that we're beyond mistakes, but hopefully we've overcome the ones that we've been tripped up by before.

[29 : 41] He hears about his son's immoral conduct. You see that there in verses 22. And then in verse 23 he said to them, why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people.

No, my sons. It's no good report. Now Samuel had a good progress report. The sons of Eli didn't, huh? That I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad.

It was not, it was a public kind of thing. He warns them about the danger of what they were doing. Their sin, and here's the big deal with that, their sin in both areas, whether that's sacrificial system or with these women.

They showed disrespect for the very system that was designed to deal with their sin. And because they had disrespected that system, what was left for them?

And that's why he says what he does in verse 25. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him. But if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?

[30 : 44] But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death. Notice, life in one home, the other ones were marked for death.

Speaking about, speaking, Samuel, I mean, Eli did, but he stopped short of correction. He was the chief priest.

priest, he could have removed them from their office, but he failed to do that. This family contrasts with the family that's marked for blessing, it's a family that's marked for death.

Now, here's another application. If the family situation that you're in, or came from, if this is more your reality, there is definitely reason for concern in prayer and repentance.

Effective discipline includes verbal correction, but it must not stop there. See that here?

[32 : 01] Three sons, two families, and finally, one sovereign God of the covenant. God of the covenant. Now, what was going on in the midst of these things?

The Lord was raising up for himself a godly servant who would do his will. Samuel, who would reestablish the priesthood as an honorable office and anoint two kings, two leaders of God's people.

Santa Hannah's song that we see in chapter 2 verses 1-10, it really shows us who is the one who is ultimately in charge. The sovereign God.

He's Lord over the whole earth. The sovereign covenant keeping God of Israel was at work behind the scenes, raising up a faithful priest even in the midst of leadership corruption in Israel.

God was at work. that was the picture. That was the prelude to the monarchy, to the king coming on the scene in Israel. And someone may have been prone to ask, where is God?

[33 : 13] He's at work through the prayers of a barren woman who knew that fruitfulness was the sign of God's blessedness. God was at work growing and nurturing one who would eventually anoint his king.

And one of them would be the ghost. standard for earthly kings and the forerunner of Christ himself. He's the Lord over all things. And such would be the case at the dawn of Christ's coming, where once again, spiritual leaders would occupy the position, but they were deficient in their practice.

God would once again raise up one who would herald, number one, the coming of the king, and be used of God in the anointing ceremony in the Jordan River, who, like Samuel, that's John the Baptist, would grow in raidedness.

Luke chapter one, verse 80 says this, and the child, this is John the Baptist, grew, became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until his public appearance to Israel.

But likewise, we hear echoes of Jesus' growth in this very, in verse 26, where Luke writes in chapter 2, verse 40, and the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

[34 : 38] We see it again in verse 52, and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. And might the God of Samuel, even in our day, a spiritual decline, might he be at work in our own families, raising up those that he would launch into various areas of society and be a light in places of darkness.

Might he be doing that in your family? People who seek to know and reverence the sovereign God of the covenant who has revealed himself through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Might he be doing that in your family? Families who are God sensitive, God honoring, used of God to launch their offspring.

Huh? And then, guess what, they get to come to God's house and we get to have them in places like wonders of worships and team kids. Huh? Huh?

People who come to the environs of the faith family. And God uses you as teachers, as you as worship leaders, and God uses you in their lives. The story before us is about what the Lord did in ancient Israel, but there are things that you and I must consider from this story, this narrative on today.

[36 : 13] Christian institutions, whether the home or the church must not simply be Christian in name. Sacred places, whether it's the home or the church, need mature spiritual leadership who live and teach God's word.

Need that. Spiritual leadership and nurture must begin in the home. We don't expect what happens even in the family of God to displace what happens in the home.

The first place of leadership development is in the home. Parents and children of God must alike see God as the sovereign God over all things. And effective discipline, friends, includes not simply verbal kinds of things, but also steps of correction that will help a child grow and be nurtured in God.

So from the lips of Hannah and last week's text, the woman who became the mother of a son, we heard prayer and praise to the one who rules over all things.

There's no one like him. He knows everything. He's almighty and he holds the fortunes of his people in his hands. He's the God of the covenant, the God of the promise, and he wards the faithful and punishes the wicked.

[37 : 40] So Samuel's response to this God coming on the heels of verses 1 through 10, his response is proper and it's exemplary.

How do we respond to the God who is God of all, the God who is ultimately king, who raises up and puts down, who gives, makes the baron, a mother, and in other ways he reverses things in life and in history.

How do you respond to that kind of God? You do it like Samuel did, with the whole of your life, with a life of devotion, but we're going to see Samuel, he's a listening person, one who listens to God.

He's sensitive to a spiritual mentor, but ultimately he's sensitive to God. how do we respond? We respond like he responded. If we want our lives and homes to be marked by what we see in verses 18 through 21, where do we begin?

We begin with both recognition and reverence for God that is mirrored in chapter 2 verses 1 through 10. He's the sovereign God of the covenant.

[38 : 57] He's over all things. the one who gives strength to his anointed. And another way of seeing verses 1 through 10 is that he is Lord.

And how do you respond to the one who is Lord, even the Lord Jesus Christ, with obedience, recognition, and reverence, and surrender of your life?

That's the appropriate response. Samuel leads the way in that. We have the courage. on this afternoon to follow his lead. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, thank you for this glimpse, this prelude to the monarchy, what we see in these sons in contrast.

And may it be very clear for us what our response needs to be, even in our day and time. And Lord, may we see you, the God and Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, God over all.

[40 : 08] And you made yourself known in and through him, his person and work. And we declare in a similar way that he indeed is Lord.

And may our response to these realities befit your grand and glorious worth. We pray in Christ's name. The priest team is going to lead us, follow their lead.