

Samuel's Call

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[0 : 0 0] we pray amen so there is it is estimated that on the average person the average person like you or me would speak around seven to sixteen thousand words each and every day this changes obviously from person to person some people are more chatty than others some are more quiet and then it's also estimated that women are supposed to speak more than men and i'm pretty sure this is just because you have to repeat everything that you say to us because we will we forget it the first time around never mind the figures don't really back this claim up though if you look at them in detail but i wonder if there is some truth to it we are people and people like to talk we like to speak we like to have conversations we like to chat don't we we like to talk an awful lot but most of the things that we say do not really make that much difference most of the things we say don't change anything really do they if you think about it what about here in church what happens when we speak in church do we say a lot that has little to no effect or do we use our words more carefully because of where we are i recently was talking online to a a baptist minister down south who was commenting on how difficult he was finding it to preach two sermons a week consistently never having done that before he was used to having to only to do one it made me realize that in the free church we've we've got a lot of work you know many free church ministers will preach three times a week you know and they have been doing that for years it's a part of our background and of course in some free church circles you'll have more than that a week if you know when it comes to communion seasons and things you could be preaching you know seven ten times a week hopefully it's not the same person but you never know it maybe is if we go back to calvin's geneva it was specified by the by the law that there were to be six sermons heard each week you'd have three on a sunday so you'd have one very early in the morning one around you know nine ten and then one in the evening there's also to be a sermon preached a one eats once each on a monday a wednesday and a friday now that seems like an awful lot for us today you know you're used to having to come on a sunday and maybe a wednesday night if you can manage it but the reason that they did this the reason why they thought it was important the reason why preaching held such a big role in the early reformation era was because of the effect that the word of god has on people's lives because when you hear the bible being read when you hear it being preached when you sing it you are hearing the word of god itself and when god speaks things change one of the mottos of the reformation was the latin phrase post tenebris lux which means from darkness light the idea behind this was that for hundreds of years the people had been in darkness the light of the gospel had been hidden away obscured by the false teachings of the roman church people couldn't read the bible it was in latin people didn't speak latin even some priests and monks had never read the bible and so

when the reformation took hold when the bible was translated into languages people could read and people could understand the word of god started being heard again people started preaching it they started reading it for themselves and again there was light there was light where once there had been only darkness god's light was shining again when we read first samuel chapter 3 we encounter a land that is currently filled with darkness there was no light to be seen we've heard already in previous weeks how god's own priests did not know the lord they did not honor him they did not obey him we hear how the word of the lord was rare that god didn't speak to his people anymore very often but we also hear about how god is about to change that drastically so three things to consider then as we look at first samuel chapter 3 together we're going to look firstly at not listening then we're going to look at listening and acting and then we've got god at the center firstly then we have not listening the end of chapter 2 sets up the scene for how god will call samuel eli had been the high priest of israel for many years serving at the temple with his sons at his side he was now an old man we're told how his eyes were failing him how he was nearly blind we hear how

god was displeased with him despite eli carrying on with his duties as a priest he and his household had stopped listening to god we hear at the end of chapter 2 of how an unknown prophet comes to eli and tells him how much god is displeased with him how he and his sons were corrupt how they'd broken his law and how they would be punished just read a few verses quickly from the end of chapter 2 it says behold the days are coming when i will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house then in distress you will look with envious eyes and all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on israel and there shall not be an old man in your house forever the only one of you whom i shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men and this shall come upon your two sons hophni and phinehas shall be assigned to you both of them shall die on the same day and i will raise up myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind i will build him a sure house and he shall go in and out and before my anointed forever this is pretty damning really isn't it this is a pretty harsh judgment i imagine it was very upsetting for eli to hear this this is the first instance we have of god speaking in this story in these books and it begins with a judgment with a curse remember hophni and phinehas were worthless they were corrupt they had ignored the word of the lord they had done what was forbidden and eli both as their father and their high priest should have stepped in and should have stopped them but he failed to do so and that's why he was being punished there are consequences for blaspheming against god

eli's told your family will be punished your sons will die but this prophecy is not completely judgment and curse it's not without hope it tells us how god will raise up a faithful priest how he will come and replace the unfaithful priest how israel will enjoy prosperity again so eli's told his house is going to be destroyed his sons will be killed and god is going to replace him eli's family has been thoroughly rejected they knew what god's lord demanded they were his priests but they refused to listen and they did not obey him they went through the motions of the priesthood they went through the motions of worship but they did not listen to god and they did not expect him to say anything they knew of him but they did not know him this raises up a stark point for us here this evening of how many of us are simply going through the motions not just in this church but in all the churches around the world how many of us are not fully aware of god not aware of his word not aware of his promises not aware of what he asks of us how many people seek positions in the church for misguided reasons for power or personal gain rather than the glory and the furthering of god's kingdom and proclaiming christ to the people eli and his sons give us quite a dire warning it's a warning that those who hear god's will and those who ignore it and rebel against it will be condemned they will be cut off ignorance of god's will is a terrible thing it's something that the church is tasked with correcting we're supposed to be going out and teaching people what god says that's part of our mission for those i think who have heard the truth those who know it those who have lived maybe it for a time in their lives and yet still rebel i think for them it's even worse they have seen the very thing that can save them before their very eyes and yet they turn away from it or they put it off for another day a day which may never come we keep coming back to those words of jesus that he said at the end of the parable of the sower that he who has ears to hear let him hear we keep coming back to it because it's so important because today we want to be praying for those people who we know who are in those positions maybe even for ourselves that they and that we would have ears to hear that we should hear god's word that we should listen and that we should obey just as samuel even as a very young boy was learning to do we start off with a land in darkness with a priesthood condemned with no hope in sight but of course god was not done with israel god is always faithful to his people

always faithful to his covenant even in those times when we are unfaithful god had a plan and this plan involved a little boy so we have not listening and secondly we have listening and acting first samuel chapter 3 gives us the first proper introduction to samuel himself we have heard the circumstances around surrounding his birth and he's given he's been given to the temple to serve but this is the first time we really see samuel as himself and it begins with his calling it begins with god calling him god we are told had been quiet when god is not heard when he is kind of away from his people in this sense it's usually a sign of his displeasure but now we see how all that is about to change it was night eli who was practically blind at this point was fast asleep in his place and samuel we hear was asleep in the tabernacle itself we're told that the lamp of god had not yet gone out this could be a simple reference to the time of day the lamp was lit in the evening and would burn through to the early morning each day suggesting that this encounter took place just before

the dawn but i think also this idea of the lamp not having yet gone out is a bit of a metaphor lamps are often used in the bible as a metaphor for guidance for blessing for proclamation and for revelation so i think the idea of this lamp still being lit is a reminder of what we heard back in verse 1 that tells us the word of the lord was rare in those days though rare the divine revelation had not completely gone away we've seen it a bit already at the end of first samuel chapter 2 that prophecy against eli god was not gone he had not abandoned his people the light was still burning and it was about to be ignited into a raging blaze because now god speaks to samuel samuel he calls his name out loud samuel he calls and samuel answers here i am but of course samuel is confused i mean why wouldn't you be he thinks it is eli who is calling for him remember eli is old he's blind maybe he does this often he calls upon his young servant his young trainee to come and help him at night if he needs something so samuel hears his name being called instinctively thinks it's eli calling and so he goes off to see him eli of course tells him it wasn't him and sends him back to bed but then it happens again and the lord called again samuel and samuel rose and went to eli and said here i am for you called me but he said i did not call you my son go down and lie again now samuel did not yet know the lord and the word of the lord had not yet been revealed to him here it happens again god calls samuel's name he thinks it's eli he goes and sees what his mentor needs and yet he sent back because it wasn't him but now

we're given a bit more information we're told something about samuel himself we're told that despite serving at the temple despite ministering to the lord for a few years now but he did not know the lord we hear that the word of the lord had not yet been revealed to him it's no surprise then that samuel didn't recognize who it was that was calling to him he didn't know it was god who was calling his name he didn't know god personally although he obviously knew of him but he did not know him but the next time god calls the story changes and the lord called samuel again a third time and he rose and went to eli and said here i am for you called me then eli perceived that the lord was calling the boy therefore eli said to samuel go lie down and if he calls you say speak lord for your servant hears this time it's not samuel who recognizes who it is who is speaking but it's eli now i've always had a bit of a soft spot for old eli ever since i first read this story many years ago obviously he's failed in his roles and his duties as a father and as a priest but he does still have the odd good moment in the short time we hear about him remember the blessing he prayed over hannah when she was begging god for her son he had raised and he'd mentored samuel during his younger years and here it's him who recognizes what is going on although god did not speak to him he did know that god does speak and he tells samuel what to do when it happens again eli had failed as a father to his sons hophni and phineas but now as a sort of father figure to samuel he does his job well he had raised samuel to know about god to be faithful in his worship to him training him perhaps to listen for this very moment but samuel just needed that one little push which eli now gives this is something to us those who are parents to learn or those of us who are involved in teaching or the guidance of children to take on board we want to make sure that we teach and we train our children in such a way that when god willing they receive their own call their own call to faith they will recognize what is going on they will know who it is that is talking to them and that they will respond accordingly read in verse 10 and the lord came and stood calling as at other times samuel samuel and samuel said speak for your servant hears finally samuel knows what's going on he is listening he is ready when god calls he responds shockingly though if we think about samuel this young boy who for the first time is hearing the voice of god not only that but the first thing that god says to him is a judgment again it is a fulfillment of the prophecy against the house of eli can you imagine what samuel must have felt during this experience how difficult it must have been not only

[20 : 07] is god speaking to him audibly but now there appears to be some vision of god some physical representation of god in the room with him talking to him god stands and speaks to samuel and he tells him to take a message of judgment to his mentor to his father figure a man i probably suspect he loved very dearly samuel is now a prophet of god he now has a job to do samuel lay until morning and he opened the door to the house of the lord and samuel was afraid to tell the vision to eli it would seem now that samuel couldn't sleep he was near enough the dawn might not have been too long for him to wait but i think it's fair enough given what he just experienced that he couldn't get back to sleep samuel is afraid he's afraid to tell eli what he's heard eli again guides him through it this is important this whole story highlights to us the importance of not only listening for what god tells us to do but actually going and doing it it's important whenever god tells us to do something we need to do it even eli who's just been told some devastating news accepts that it must be done that it has to happen again another reason i'm quite fond of him god spoke and things

changed when god speaks we change when he says repent we need to do it when god says worship him we need to do it when god says pray we need to do it when god speaks our hearts are changed we're born again making all these things possible it might seem a bit overbearing doesn't it but when god tells us to do something even if we don't like it even if it's something not very pleasant like what samuel had to do it's always for our good it's always because he loves us and because he wants all his best for us so these these verses that we've read today how can we apply them to ourselves today it's a great story it's a wonderful story but what does it mean to you what does it mean to me as we sit here in livingston in 2022 the first thing it's important to note that we are not samuel while there are some important things we can pick up from the story we've picked up a couple already such as how to be obedient and how to be listening we are not god's prophet we do not receive the revelation of god as samuel did so rather than trying to think what does this mean for me let's see what these verses tell us about god and then we'll go from there as our third heading then is god at the centre because while we may not be sure about what these verses tell us about us

they tell us an awful lot about god and what he's all about firstly it tells us that god is holy and that he is just god is perfect in every way and he cannot let evil prevail especially in his own temple he could not let his people suffer injustice any longer but neither could he let them off scot-free remember he is just this morning we looked at how he sometimes displays what we call non-justice or the idea of grace but god is never unjust eli through his sons was responsible for horrendous blasphemous crimes against god and these crimes could not go unpunished the terrifying thing that we're told about these crimes is that no sacrifice would be enough for them there was no longer any hope for them because they had so mocked the sacrifices the very things that could have saved them because they had openly defied god there was no way out for them anymore we learn that god is holy and just we also learn that he is gracious we learn how god who would have been well within his rights to cut off israel forever to wipe the slate clean and start again didn't do that because he had promised to be faithful to his covenant to his people god rather than wiping the slate clean and starting again would instead work to preserve his people he would bless them with a great king in david later on a king who would save them and deliver them the priesthood also had failed so god gives the people a new priest a faithful priest who is also a prophet somebody who would take his word out to the people and would deliver to help deliver them from the darkness that they were currently living in we also learn that god is patient god has suffered the rebellion of his people for thousands of years now and yet he was and he is patient with them in samuel's time that patience in some respects had run out but he was also patient with samuel he didn't rush samuel when he revealed himself to him he waited until samuel understood what was going on when he knew what was happening he didn't push him he didn't condemn him for not instantly recognizing who it was that was speaking to him he waited until samuel was ready have you ever struggled with something in school something that on the outside is really really simple something that you think you really should be able to grasp and yet you just can't get it it just evades your brain you know this is you just don't understand and was there ever that one really really patient teacher or parent or helper who was willing to sit there and give up their time to help you understand this really simple thing it didn't matter how long it took they were willing to sit there until you got it in a way that's how god was

with samuel he was willing to sit and wait for samuel to get it to know what was going on and that's also how he is with us Jesus' words in John chapter 16 tell us as much he says I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now the disciples needed god's help to understand these things that jesus couldn't tell them yet they needed the holy spirit to teach them things they couldn't bear to be taught otherwise that's how patient god is with us he sends his spirit to help us and to teach us we also learn that god is personal he calls on samuel by his name he knows him he loves him he is gentle and he is patient with him but he still expects a lot from him but god would be with him throughout his life he would help him to do the tasks that god had given him god in his judgment had turned away from israel for a time he had gone quiet but now this has changed god has spoken and now his word is once again heard in shiloh once more we also learn that god had a plan god needed samuel to do what was necessary god had a plan for a great king in israel and in turn a greater king who would come the messiah the incarnate word of god himself who would change the world forever when god speaks things change jesus changes people jesus saves people jesus speaks and we listen jesus speaks and we love him jesus speaks and we serve him i

never tire of marveling at how god's grace and his patience towards his people goes it's really remarkable even in the dark days of eli god doesn't allow his lamp as it were to go out completely he keeps it burning and we are infinitely better off because god keeps his lamp burning samuel would come do his job and would die david the greatest king would come do his job and die when jesus came he would come and he would die but he didn't stay dead he was raised again samuel came to help god save a nation save a people from destruction jesus would come to save a world full of nations and today you need to ask yourselves is god calling you to himself today is jesus knocking at that door of your heart are you unsure whether to answer or not or who it is that is speaking today is the day i urge you to open the door and say yes to god to say those words that samuel said speak lord for your servant listens and because god's grace is persistent because he is patient because he is kind because he is loving even even one whose life has been marked by failure or uncertainty or doubts or fears even one such as that can have hope for renewal jesus paid it all on the cross and to him i owe it all let's pray heavenly father we thank you about how you revealed yourself to your servant samuel but how you showed so much about yourself to him how you showed that you are holy and just that you are loving that you are patient that you have a plan and just how far you will go to save your people we thank you for this story we thank you for what it teaches us of you and we ask lord that when you call on us to do whatever it is you want us to do when you call on us to have faith in you when you call on us to serve you in whatever way that we will be ready that we will be willing that we will be listening and we would say those words speak lord for your servant ears be with us and bless us and encourage us this coming week help us to serve you and help us to turn to you now if we haven't yet done so open the door of our hearts lord help us to see you remove the scales from our eyes so that we can see the risen son and know that he is god and that he died for us in jesus name we pray amen