

Bible Conversions (4) - Samuel

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Date: 25 January 2015

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn this morning to the chapter we read in 1 Samuel and chapter 3, where we find an account here of Samuel and his coming to know the Lord.

Now, we're looking at a series we've called Conversions. We did mention earlier on in our studies of conversion, when we're looking at examples of conversion in the Bible, that conversion is a word that in the Bible is used about more than just the first time we are coming to know the Lord or the first time we are converted or turned to the Lord.

Whatever descriptions we use, we very often use conversion for that first turning to the Lord, for that first time our life comes to know him, to be changed and to begin to follow him.

But the Bible uses it of the very many turnings back to God that you find in the life of Christians, because we all know that our Christian life is far from perfect.

That sometimes we find ourselves having turned away from the ways of the Lord to a greater or lesser degree. We have to come back to the Lord. We have to be brought back by God himself sometimes just to recommit ourselves to God.

[1 : 15] And that too is a conversion, like you find in the Apostle Peter, for example, in the New Testament, when he had denied the Lord three times and had to be interviewed by Jesus as to his love.

Well, he was being converted again, turned again, being brought back to be redirected in his life towards the Lord and following him and being obedient to him again.

When you come to Samuel, it's not obvious in the life of Samuel that there was what you would normally call a conversion, because he was brought up to know the ways of the Lord from his youngest days.

His mother had obviously prayed for him before she was ever pregnant with him. She had prayed for a child, for a son, or for a child at least, and the Lord gave her a child.

And then she fulfilled her promise or her vow to God that if he gave her a child, she would dedicate him to the Lord. And that's what she did with Samuel. After he was weaned, which was normally about three years old, she took him to the tabernacle, to the house of God, and she gave him to the Lord for his service in the house of God.

[2 : 25] And that's where he came under the old priest Eli, so that he would take him under his care. And this chapter tells us that this occasion in the chapter is when Samuel came to know the Lord.

Now, despite the fact that Samuel had that background, that he had the advantage of such an upbringing, that he was already in the house of God serving the Lord, being trained, if you like, by Eli in different things that he had to do in the house of the Lord.

You read in the chapter that he, obviously, one of the things he had to do was open the house of the door, the doors of the house of the Lord every morning. Samuel had been taught to do that by Eli.

That was one of his tasks. But you read in verse 7, Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

That really captures something for us which is also crucial to our understanding of conversion. Because conversion, really, for us, is coming to know the Lord for ourselves.

[3 : 35] In conversion, we're brought to know the Lord. We're brought to know him personally. We're brought to know him in a way that becomes familiar with him. Just as you come to know someone ordinarily, in a personal way.

So in conversion, you're brought to know the Lord in a very personal, very intimate way. You enter into a living relationship with him.

And that's the focus of our study this morning. As you see that coming to the forefront in the passage about Samuel here. First of all, though, we'll need to see the conditions of the day in which Samuel was converted.

Or Samuel is brought to know the Lord. We're using the word conversion, but we're using it in that particular meaning of it. Or coming to know the Lord. First of all, there was a day when there was more darkness than light.

There were not very good days spiritually into which Samuel was born. There were days of backsliding. Days of unfaithfulness to God.

[4 : 39] Days of more darkness than light, as we've called it in the first heading. Because what there was really, as the chapter begins, was what we've called a famine of the word of the Lord.

I've taken that from a verse in Amos, in chapter 8 and verse 11. Where Amos, as a prophet of the Lord, was saying to the people that what was in front of them, what they could expect in the future, was a famine of the words of the Lord.

Not that the word of the Lord would be unfamiliar to them, but there'd be a famine. There'd be an absence of the word being understood or being proclaimed.

And that's what you find in Samuel. The word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no frequent vision. The Lord in those days revealed his will through people like prophets or people like Moses, people like certain priests as well, where the word of the Lord, where God revealed himself and gave a message for the people through such individuals.

And what you read of there is that that was a rare occurrence in those days. There was hardly any speaking by God to the people.

[5 : 56] He had almost stopped speaking to them. The word vision there really fits in with that. It's not so much a thing that was seen where God gave people visions that could be part of it, but it was especially concerned with transmitting the word from God to the people.

It was God revealing himself to some individual, so that then the message would be passed on to the people. That had not been happening. Why had it not been happening? Because the people had become so disobedient to God.

These were days when even the priests themselves, we'll see in a minute, were actually engaged in leading the people in gross iniquity, in sinful practices, in lifestyles which were grossly immoral.

And that's why there had been this absence of the word of the Lord. It was a judgment of God. It was something that God brought about in response to the way that they themselves refused to listen to him and refused to accept his ways and had included all sorts of other things that they found in the Canaanites around them, in the practices and the religion of the Canaanites, in the paganism of the Canaanites.

That's what they had brought into their practices and to their lifestyles. That's why Amos in his prophecy put it that way, where in days again where you found disobedience to God, chapter 8 verse 11 of it says, And that included a contempt for God's ways in the days of Samuel.

[7 : 54] If you look at verse 13, you can see there, I am about to punish Eli's house forever for the iniquity that he knew because his sons were blaspheming God and he did not restrain them.

Now you've got to go back obviously to the beginning of 1 Samuel and find a description there in more detail of the kind of practice, the kind of conditions, the kind of days in which Samuel was born or born into.

And two sons of Eli were priests in the temple, in the tabernacle, in the house of God, Hophni and Phinehas. They were wicked. They were grossly immoral.

You read there from chapter 2, verse 12 onwards, the way that the priests were carrying on and the way they were, greed, sexual immorality, all of that was in their lifestyle.

And when that's the case, well, you don't expect anything other than the Lord will respond in his judgment to that.

[9 : 05] And Eli was old. They took advantage of his age, of his incapacities. We know that he was nearly blind. There was obviously other weaknesses as well with him at that stage of his life.

His sons took advantage of that. They refused to listen to him. It doesn't seem from what the chapter says that he was very strong anyway in actually trying to regulate the life of his sons as they grew up.

So they just grew up without restriction virtually in the way they wanted to live. That's the kind of situation into which Samuel was born.

And you know, something of that can be seen, of course, in our own day as well. Not just in terms of society out with the church, the way people live, the kind of lifestyles people have, the way people have thrown off restraint, the way that the impact of the gospel has more and more waned and decreased over the years, over the decades.

You've got all of that. But then within the church, you've also got reinterpreting of the Bible. You've got a reinterpreting of the teaching of Scripture on things like relationships and marriage and various other things as well.

[10 : 19] So that that is really a famine of the word of the Lord. The understanding of the meaning of Scripture has changed. And it's changed in order to accommodate things which Scripture itself denounces.

These are the days that we're living in as well. You could say the word of the Lord was rare in the days of Samuel, but there's all too much of a rarity in our day as well of people understanding and accepting the meaning and the authority and the unchangeableness of God's truth.

And you and I are born into that. That's what you and I have to respond to. That's what you and I have to live amongst. How are we going to do it? Well, this famine of God's word, this contempt for God's ways, that's the kind of darkness.

There was darkness more than light in the days of Samuel. But then secondly, let's look at a new day that dawns. Because Samuel was obviously born so that God would use him to change things around.

And it's through Samuel coming to be the kind of leader that he came to be, or God equipping him and preparing him for that. It's through that that God came once again to reveal himself as the chapter ends by speaking of God revealing himself again.

[11 : 49] God having come back to show himself or speak again to the people the way he used to. Well, here's two things in this new day that's dawning. First of all, a life-changing conversation between Samuel and God.

And secondly, a shared concern that's shared between Eli and Samuel. Let's look at the life-changing conversation. Now, just look at verse 3.

First of all, 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 the Lord had not gone out.

You know yourselves that the tabernacle as God had specified it in Exodus had three sections to it. And the middle section had certain articles of furniture in it including this candlestick or candelabra.

It was an ornate thing that had been described by God so that Moses would make it or arrange to have it made exactly as God commanded. And it had lights on it. Candles that were that were lit or you could say candles anyway.

[12 : 57] Lights that were fueled by a special kind of oil. and it had to be kept lit in the holy place which was between the most holy place and the other outer court.

and it was the duty of the priest to make sure that the lamp didn't go out. What it says here that the lamp had not yet gone out.

You could say that's just a reference to the time of day when it was the oil perhaps needed replenishing or the week needed attending to when it was beginning to flicker near the end of the day so the priest would attend to it so that it would quicken and revive and keep going.

There's something more than that. In the context there's actually a spiritual meaning in these words. The lamp of God had not yet gone out.

What does that really mean spiritually? It means that although things were bad although the conditions were as they were although there was more darkness than light there was still a bit of light.

[14 : 01] The old religion if you like the old ways that Moses or God through Moses had taught to people that was to say God himself alone being their God free from idolatry free from these immoral practices free from the things that had now come to be imported and were so common in the life of the people that religion that kind of devotion to God that kind of thing had not yet disappeared.

The lamp was flickering it was just about out. there was more darkness than light but not quite yet out extinguished gone and that's a sign of hope because that's really a note of hope in verse 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out thank God today that around us although there is so much immorality so much ungodliness so much antipathy to the gospel the lamp of God has not gone out you are proof of that this place is proof of that and as you look throughout our nation with regard to the rise of Islam and the rise of atheism and the increase of humanistic and atheistic philosophies as you look at all of these things around us as a church and around the gospel the lamp of God has not gone out there is still hope as you look to faithfulness in the people of God as you look to people who are keeping alive the testimony of God in faithfulness to him in the purity with which they want to have his gospel maintained and proclaimed and that's where

Samuel's call or Samuel's conversion fits into that there you have the description a number of times the Lord calls Samuel but as verse 7 says Samuel did not yet know the Lord he didn't realize that this was God calling he heard the voice he thought it was Eli and in fact Eli himself rather slow to pick up what's happening not really on top of things but he eventually realizes that the boy is being called by God and so he tells him what to say next time and that's what happens God is beginning to change things the dawn of a better day is just about to begin and it begins with this boy in the temple with this little young lad what age is he who knows he's round about early teens probably 12, 13 something like that must have been something like that before he was able to do things like opening the doors of the house of God in any case he was quite young and yet that's where God is focused that's where God is actually setting his mind to work that is where the hope for the future lies in this little boy you see how how much God is saying to us by that it doesn't matter really how low the cause of God gets it doesn't matter how much the flame seems to be just about going out as long as there's a little boy a little girl here that fears the Lord as long as people are there even if they're just still very young and tender and years that come to know the Lord there's hope in that that's why we want to have our young people come to know the Lord that's why it's important that we pray for our youth as well as our older people that's why it's important that our meetings for various things throughout the weeks each week as they go by that they're blessed by God that's why we pray for our Sunday school and pray for our ABC and pray for the scripture union and pray for all the work that's done with young people not to the neglect of of older people but because as we look to the future we want to see the flame which seems to be so flickering at the moment we want to see it revive we want to see God coming to pour more of his spiritual oil if you like to fan the flame of the gospel into greater effect and that's where we come back to this verse 7 now Samuel did not yet know the

Lord that's what God is setting about changing he's bringing him to know him he's going to bring him to speak back to him and hold conversation with him and enter into a living relationship with him now that's conversion let me ask a question of myself let me as a preacher of the gospel ask it of you as well in the Lord's name do I know the Lord do you know the Lord there's a big question it's not asking do you know about him I know you know about him your Bible tells you about him you read your Bible you come to church you hear sermons preached they're all about God as you know the

Bible is about God but here's the critical question do I know him do I know him in a living relationship with him is my relationship with God a living relationship is it more than just head knowledge is it more than familiarity with the teaching of scripture am I his friend do I correspond with him does he speak to me am I concerned to hear his voice every day to guide my life is my life based upon a proper knowing of God see that's why Paul in Philippians 3 and giving his testimony really says something quite amazing all things he said that I once thought were important for my standing with God for my relationship as I thought it to be with God I now count them but loss I'm glad that God has shown me that they were worthless yes

[20 : 47] I knew the law he's saying I kept the law as perfectly as I could I thought that was the way by which I would be pleasing to God by which I would be righteous but now he says I understand that's all like rubbish to me why because my righteousness is in Christ and in knowing God through him therefore I count all things but loss why for the excellency of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and to count them but worthless rubbish that I may know him and the power of his resurrection do you know God do you know this power in your heart do you know this drive in your life that comes from a living relationship with God that's really what the passage is saying to us that's what it's challenging us with today that's for you and I to really think about deeply do

I really know the Lord for myself because that's conversion and it's part of conversion it's very much a crucial part of conversion and here is Samuel when he follows the direction that Eli gave him speak Lord for your seven hears it's better I think if that were saying speak for your seven is listening that's really what it means speak Lord for your seven is listening I'm ready to hear what you're saying and that's when the Lord spoke to Samuel and as he spoke to him so he enters into this new relationship with God you know God in conversion you might say retunes our souls because until we're converted until we come to know the Lord it's a bit like an encrypted message if you like that nowadays you find a lot of stuff for security reasons electronic messages they're encrypted jumbled up in such a way that unless you know codes and unless you're able to unscramble them you can't really understand properly what it's saying well for us until

God retunes our soul the message of the gospel itself even is somewhat encrypted we hear it but we don't yet know the Lord we need to come to know the Lord to really come to appreciate as we should the message of the gospel the word of God to us in other words as he retunes your soul as you come to know conversion as you come to the word of God takes on a whole new meaning you have a desire for it you didn't have before you really appreciate how central it is how foundational it is to your life how absolutely necessary it is for you every day to consult God through his word and through prayer so a new day dawns there's a life changing conversation going on between God and Samuel and in that you see something of the essence of conversion in coming to know the

Lord entering into a living relationship with him but there's something else to that her shared concern develops out of that Samuel lay till the morning verse 15 and then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli now that's not surprising because when you think about it the vision the words that God had given to Samuel were very very devastating words for the house of Eli God was going to actually bring punishment judgment upon Eli and his house and he specifies it there as he said to Samuel he knew that his sons were blaspheming God and he did not restrain them therefore I swear that the iniquity of Eli shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever in other words he's saying to Samuel don't come between me and Eli and what I'm about to do don't try and actually in some way make provision so that

I will not do this I'm going to do it God is saying you imagine having been brought up by Eli having been cared for by Eli having been under the training of Eli having come to love Eli this old man in the temple in the tabernacle of God having come under the tutelage of this Eli and having an appreciation for all he had done for you now you've got to go and deliver this message from God to him no wonder Samuel was afraid no wonder he was reluctant in that sense to do it but Eli to give him his due he knew the score he realized the situation he knew that this young Samuel was going to be the Lord's man that he was going to be the Lord's prophet that that's what he was here for he knew that's why the Lord had spoken to him he knew that something had been revealed to Samuel that he needed to hear and so he came to

[26 : 20] Samuel and said what was it that the Lord told you don't hide it from me to give whatever failures Eli had and he did a failure there's no failure with him here he wants to know the entire message that God had sent to Samuel for him and that's commendable there's something in that as well that for you and I is important to know everything that God has to tell us to be willing to hear whatever God has to tell us even if it's not easy even if it's like Eli something that really condemns ourselves and our sin here's Eli as a model for us don't hide anything from me tell me everything tell me everything I need to know and Samuel does that Samuel told him all and hid nothing from him and

Eli's reaction is also so commendable it is the Lord let him do what seems good to him that's not easy to say and certainly not easy to say when you're condemned by God when God reveals judgment facing you but that's what Eli said it is the Lord in his advanced stage of life with all that's behind him knowing the situation knowing why it has to be like this what he's come to really do is as it were put his hands up and say Lord you're right you're always right do as it's pleasing to you it is the Lord and it's something that takes a lot of time and a lot of the working of grace in our lives to actually come to the point where we're able to say this genuinely

Paul said again in Philippians in chapter 4 that he had learned something and there's something that he had learned and it's important that we realize he had learned it it didn't come overnight it didn't come without him working at it without him coming through different experiences in the course of his life for over 20 years Paul had been following the Lord now he says I have come to learn in whatever state I am there with to be content or there in to be content contentment of heart with God is a precious precious thing when by the Lord's grace you are able to say it is the Lord when we suffer loss when we lose precious people when events take place in our lives that hurt us when we face crushing disappointment when we are let down when that these and many other things come our way in the providence of

God it's not easy to put your hands up there and say it is the Lord let him do as it pleases him it's good it's something that the Lord knows best but we have to learn that and the more we learn that the more we know the blessing of the Lord flooding into our life and the shared concern that we mentioned what is the shared concern is on the one hand to hear everything that God has to say that's Eli's concern on the other hand to say everything that God has given him to say that's Samuel's concern that's really in essence what makes a blessed situation for a congregation and a preacher when you come together and when it's your conviction I want to hear everything God has to say to me I want to hear it genuinely because I know whatever

God has to say to me it's bound to be for my good if I accept it as it is if I accept the truth of it if I accept my need of it let it be so and on my part I have to give you everything that God has to say to you you can tell whether a preacher is being faithful not just by the things that are included in sermons but also by the things that are left out if I leave things out of my preaching that are necessary aspects of your salvation I'm not being faithful to God if I were never to speak about the need to be born again or some of the essentials that we're looking at on Sunday evenings I would not be faithful to God but here is Samuel as a model for me just as Eli is a model for yourselves everything that

[31 : 53] God has given me in his word to preach upon and to declare and to expound I must be faithful to that however difficult it is as it was for Samuel when you come to love people when you come to appreciate who they are and what their life is and how supportive they are and how prayerful they are and how kind they are as yourselves sometimes it's difficult to be as blunt as the word of God is but I have to be it's the truth and you have to say don't keep from us anything that God has given you to tell us don't keep from us anything we need to hear because that's what makes it a shared and a blessed concern these two things come together and they came together here between Samuel and Eli and that means we end the chapter in the reverse of how it begins we began with more darkness than light and you end with more light than darkness it's very dim at the beginning the light hasn't gone out but there isn't much of it but now with

God having brought Samuel to know him a new day has dawned and look at how the chapter ends the Lord appeared again at Shiloh Shiloh is the place where the tabernacle the house of God is set and you know we should really read through that chapter and when you come to read that verse you'd say yes God's back he's returned he's speaking again the great verse the Lord revealed himself he appeared again at Shiloh for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord God has not left as the film says God's not dead but how great it would be both here and especially throughout our land if we were able to see for ourselves that

God is back that he's back in his power let's pray for it let's pray Lord we thank you for every indication of life that exists among your people we thank you for the flame of your gospel for the flame of your life that you give to your people in that conversion the life that you ignite and keep and will bring onwards to its completion we pray Lord that you would come once again in power to our midst as a nation and people that our prayer might be that of the psalmist whose words we sung that you would revive us and quicken us turn upon us once again your countenance and make us to know the safety of your blessing here as we pray for Jesus sake Amen