

Is God still speaking?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 June 2025

Preacher: Adam Penwright

[0 : 00] Have you ever received a message that's changed your whole day? A family member you haven't heard from in a long time. You miss them. Then your phone lights up with their name.

To hear from them changes your whole mood. Or waiting to hear back from a job interview. Many of you will know I had my interviews for ministry with the Church of England recently.

I knew that on a Thursday afternoon at some point I would get a phone call. Until it came, it was all I could think about. I was so nervous. A single message, either way, would change so much.

The stakes of a message you've been waiting for can be even higher. Think of getting the results from a biopsy. The waiting for that would be heavy.

And when the message comes, either with a dreadful diagnosis, or that there's a life-saving solution, getting that message will change everything.

[1 : 00] We all know the feeling of waiting. Waiting in silence. For a message that will change everything. As we've been reading through 1 Samuel the last few weeks, we've seen a nation in crisis.

We first met Hannah and her miracle boy Samuel. But also we met the corrupt priesthood of Israel. A nation in crisis are wondering where God is.

Israel, generations ago, heard from God all the time. And through the prophet Moses, they got God's word to them.

And now, generations later, in time of crisis, they're thinking, where is God? Is God still speaking? What a difference it would make if God would speak clearly into our lives. Perhaps we wonder that too. Is God still speaking?

[2 : 01] Well, today, in 1 Samuel chapter 3, we'll see what happens when God breaks the silence and speaks. We'll discover that even in a time of darkness, He is still speaking.

Just not always in the way we might expect. So let's see what happens when God has a message that can change everything. The passage begins in the dark.

It's night. And young Samuel is lying down in the house of the Lord. He's in a position of incredible privilege, But things around him are dark, physically and spiritually.

Throughout the whole chapter, the passage focuses on God's word. Yet the phrase again and again, the word of the Lord. We get that first time in verse 1. In those days, the word of the Lord was rare.

Samuel is there at night with Eli. But Eli, whose eyes were so weak that he could barely see, is a terrible leader.

[3 : 06] We saw that last week. His physical blindness mirrors his spiritual blindness. We saw last week how Eli was letting his sons get away with horrible rottenness in Tabernacle.

Verse 3 is very poignant. It describes, the lamp of God had not yet gone out. Priests were commanded in Leviticus to keep a lamp burning continually as a symbol of God's presence.

If you went to a car mechanic and they said to you, Your engines not yet died. You would know what they meant was that your engine is going to die soon.

It's just not yet. To say the lamp had not yet gone out shows that Israel's spiritual state is spluttering. It's close to being extinguished on Eli's watch.

And the word of the Lord was rare. So our first setting is, God's word is not recognised. No one is hearing it really at this point. People heard about God.

[4 : 13] People perhaps remembered the generations past where God spoke through his prophet Moses. But these days, well, no one is hearing from him anymore.

Life without God's word is like being on a boat at night. Where the power is out. You have no light and clouds obscure the stars.

You're drifting through darkness. Who knows where you're heading? Into an iceberg? Off the very face of the world. And we know this.

Without God's word, we inevitably follow the corrupt desires of our own hearts and the wayward voices of the world, getting us into all kinds of messes.

We need God to speak to us, to guide us, to reveal himself to us, to be that voice from the outside. But here, there's just a dark silence.

[5 : 11] The word of God was rare. And yet, into this darkness, God speaks. Verse 4 Then the Lord called Samuel.

Now we have the benefit as the readers that we know where the voice is coming from. But Samuel doesn't. And so he assumes it's the only other human around.

His master, Eli. What follows is this iconic scene. It's almost pretty funny scene. Samuel's slowness to recognize God's voice as he runs backwards and forwards at night to Eli.

Samuel says, Here I am, you called me. And Eli says, It wasn't me. I didn't call. Go back to bed. Neither of them know what's happening.

God's word is not recognized. And yet, it's important to see, Samuel is not being stupid. Nor is Samuel being sinful. The word of God was so rare that this was entirely unfamiliar.

[6 : 17] Even Eli, the high priest, doesn't recognize what's happening. Do you notice something else? God's pattern that he bypasses the corrupt, powerful, established religious leaders and initiates his turnaround through the humble, powerless and unexpected Samuel.

We see this pattern again throughout one Samuel. And actually we see it in Jesus. God does not speak through the Pharisees of the day, but through his unexpected man, the one who's going to save people, that is Jesus.

God does not speak through the darkness. It's a common pattern in God's story. But this scene, Samuel running backwards and forwards through the night. It's kind of funny.

And maybe you remember it from Sunday school growing up. Yeah, it's wonderful because into the darkness, God speaks. While to Israel's ears though, God's word is just so unfamiliar that they don't recognize it at all.

It is painful to live without God's word. Without God's word, we are lost. We're in silence. We're in darkness.

[7 : 38] It is not good. Finally, after three attempts in this story, the old priest understands what's going on. And Eli sends Samuel back to his bed with instructions, which leads us to our next section.

God's word is received. The scene is set. Samuel lies down waiting, prepared. And then the turning point of the whole chapter.

Verse 10, The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, Samuel, Samuel. This is an amazing moment.

The Lord, Creator and Covenant King of Israel speaks. More than that, he came and stood there. In a time of spiritual darkness, God hasn't given up.

He wants to reveal himself. Samuel, now ready, gives a great reply. Speak, for your servant is listening.

[8 : 38] It's a simple, beautiful response. What a great prayer it will be for us, before we open our Bibles or listen to a sermon, to say, speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

I'm ready. I'm ready for your word. Remember our boat drifting in the dark. Well, now the lights flicker on. A voice crackles over the radio.

The clouds part so you can see the stars again and know your way. There is direction and hope. Can you imagine what this would have been like for Samuel?

It must have been totally astounding. For him, as a boy, to have this encounter with the Lord, to have God speak to you.

It is totally transformative for him and will be for the whole nation. I guess seeing this, though, it's natural for us to think, wow, if only that would happen to me.

[9 : 46] If only God would speak to me like that. Well, ask the question, can we have the same experience? And in one sense, I want to say the answer is yes.

Because God has not hidden himself, but wants to be known. Hebrews chapter one says this. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. In Jesus, we have God speaking to us most clearly.

Jesus is the word of God become flesh. And all the Bible is God's word pointing to Jesus.

God does not want to keep himself hidden, but wants to be known by us. Many of us will have a story of God's word breaking in in our lives into our personal darkness.

[10:52] Probably not with an audible voice in the night, but a real transformative encounter that changes everything. I want to tell you the story of one student I've got to know this year.

You might know that my day job is helping university students find out about Jesus. I want to tell you about this one student. Over the summer holidays, his aunt gave him a little flyer, little leaflet, which was explaining the gospel.

His aunt is his only Christian relative and pretty much the only Christian he knows. And she just gave him a very ordinary, very little gospel leaflet.

But God used those words to speak directly to this student's heart. God's word transformed this student. It turned the lights on for him.

And now he's following Jesus. It's amazing. God does not want to be hidden. God wants to be known by us. And that's why he speaks so clearly.

[11:56] That's why God's word became flesh in Jesus. And it's why God has given us the Bible, his words, that we can know him and know his ways. I want to say at the same time, we shouldn't expect the exact same experience as Samuel.

Samuel was being called as a prophet, someone uniquely appointed to speak God's word. Samuel gets a unique calling because he has a unique task.

And Samuel's calling like this was never the normal experience of God's people. As well as the phrase, the word of the Lord being repeated all throughout the passage, the other key word that comes up again and again throughout the passage is calling or call.

It's Samuel's calling. And that is because he's going to have a unique role for God's people. And actually in the next, in the rest of one Samuel, Samuel has this unique role.

And so this chapter is validating his calling. The rest of Israel. Well, if they want to hear God's word, they need to listen to Samuel. Samuel's role, his unique role is to share God's word with the rest of the people.

[13:11] This doesn't mean though, that God isn't active and speaking today, just because we're not Samuel or even we don't have a Samuel around us.

But we do have the Bible, which is God's spirit-breathed writings telling us about Jesus. And the Bible is something that Samuel would have longed for.

And I do believe God can today put something on your heart or mind that he wants you to know.

Through a Bible verse, a sermon, someone else or a particularly strong sense, God might be putting something on your heart or mind that he particularly wants you to know.

We have the Holy Spirit who helps us to know God. And yet all of those things must be tested against the Bible because God's spirit might use those things, but he will never be inconsistent with God's word already revealed to us in the Bible.

I want to say to you, particularly today, if you feel like you are kind of in the dark spiritually, that you've never had a time where you've particularly thought, oh yeah, I do believe Jesus is real and God is speaking to me through his word.

[14:36] I say to you, particularly today, the good news is that God does not want to stay hidden. He wants to be known. That's why he sent Jesus to be his word into the world.

If that is you and you would love to know God and to feel like you heard from him, I'd love to invite you to take one of these Gospels home. Pretty much every week we have a pile of Gospels on this little table, John's Gospel at the moment, which is one of the accounts all about Jesus.

And so you could read it and it will be really simple. To read a bit and find out about Jesus. And you could pray a simple prayer like Samuel did before you did so, saying, Lord, please would you speak to me?

For I'm listening. And we believe that God will reveal himself through his word, the Bible, so that you can find out about Jesus, that you can know God through what he says about him.

And that would be like going from darkness to light. You see, this encounter, it transforms Samuel. And it is so good when God speaks to us, taking us from darkness to light.

[15 : 58] And yet, as we actually see in this passage, God speaking is not always a very comfortable experience. Because here, God speaks with a word of very serious warning.

Would you look down at verse 11 with me? And the Lord said to Samuel, See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle.

At that time, I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about.

His sons uttered blasphemies against God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, the guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.

This is a difficult word. But Eli and his sons have scorned God's sacrifice. And so no other atonement for their sin is available.

[17 : 06] God's judgment here, though, is good news. Because as we saw the rottenness of Eli and his family last week, it shows us that God is not like a sentimental grandfather who sees his teenage grandkids messing about and being horrible and just says, Oh, don't worry, boys will be boys.

No, God takes it seriously. When people repeatedly and ultimately choose their own pleasure over honouring God, when they have no regard for God all their life, God will bring fair judgment and keep his word.

So we've seen God's word was initially not recognised. Then God's word was received. What happens next?

God's word is relayed. You can imagine Samuel's nervousness having gotten this message. Verse 15 says, Samuel lay down until morning.

It doesn't say he slept. I imagine he couldn't. He lay there in bed, heart pounding, mind full of thinking, can I? Will I be able to?

[18 : 20] How will I pass this on to Eli? When morning comes, it says, he was afraid to tell Eli the vision. Samuel is just a boy.

He's speaking to his father figure, his master. More than that, the high priest of Israel passing on a message that God will punish Eli and his family irrevocably.

Verse 17, Eli calls to him. He says, What was it he said to you? Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.

So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Samuel faithfully relays God's word. He doesn't edit or spin or soften the message to protect his reputation or Eli's feelings.

He speaks what God has spoken. In fact, the words for anything and everything in these verses could be translated as any word and every word.

[19 : 30] Samuel relays to Eli every word. Samuel has more trust and courage in God's word than I often do. I'm nervous of what other people will think.

But Samuel, even though he's nervous, has a humble trust in God's word. In God's word. And actually, Eli responds better than we might expect. Verse 18, He is the Lord.

Let him do what is good in his eyes. Eli can't argue with God's word. And this becomes the start of Samuel's prophetic ministry. Verse 19, The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground.

And all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, that's from the north to the south, across the land, recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.

Samuel's word came to all Israel. This chapter, as we've heard already, is important for Samuel's calling. It validates all he'll do later in life.

[20 : 38] He's called, a bit like Moses was, by God, to speak God's word to his people. And Samuel does that faithfully all his life. But this chapter, as well as being about Samuel's calling, is all about the word of the Lord.

And what was once rare and unrecognized, now becomes known throughout the land. In this chapter, I hope you can see with me the goodness of God's word.

The situation goes from darkness and silence to light. Literally, as Samuel opens the doors that morning, it's not just a physical act, it's a symbol.

Samuel is bringing light where there was darkness. And he is opening the way for people to hear from God again. God's word is really good. So what should we do with it, having read this chapter this week?

I hope you think with me, it is a great story. And maybe it's a story you remember from Sunday school or something like that. The story of Samuel, the boy running backwards and forwards throughout the night.

[21 : 50] But what does it mean for us? Well, having seen how amazing God's word is, how transformative it is, I want us to focus on two of those simple things we've seen.

That we would receive God's word and relay God's word. First, like Samuel, receive God's word. You think of the contrast in the passage from darkness, where God's word was rare and unrecognised, to the end when everyone in Israel can hear it.

And actually, I want to say importantly, it's more like we are at the end of the story than at the beginning. Because God has spoken and is speaking through his son, Jesus, and through the scriptures.

It's an amazing privilege that even in this room, there are something like 60 or 70 copies of the Bible, freely accessible to us. You probably have some laying around your house, or that you can easily get on apps on your phone or whatever.

God's word is not hidden from us. It is not forbidden to us. It is not expensive. It is not rare. God's word is freely accessible to us. That is a wonderful privilege.

[23 : 09] And so the problem today, it's not a scarcity of God's word. The problem today is our disinterest in the face of abundance. So I want to say to you today, treasure God's word.

See how amazing it is. And therefore receive God's word. Love your Bible. If it was food, chew on it. Digest it. Enjoy it.

Learn it. Make it the guide of your life. The first place you go for help. And your final authority on big questions. When you come to church, come keen to learn from the Bible.

If we believe that our time together on a Sunday morning, and the preaching of God's word is as important as it really is, then this is the most important hour of your week.

So let's treat it that way. Don't fall asleep in a sermon. You wouldn't want to fall asleep in the most important hour of your week. And if you're not in the habit of reading the Bible daily, please start doing that.

[24 : 20] Help your kids get into the habit too. There is nothing better that you can do for yourself or for them spiritually. Because God's word brings such change and is to be treasured.

And so therefore we need to receive it. And secondly, relay God's word. Samuel heard God's word and then passed it on. He was scared, but he was faithful.

I want to say we're not prophets like Samuel, but the church has a prophetic task, if you want to put it like that, to relay the word of the Lord.

Our world is as spiritually dark as Eli's. Our friends and neighbours are drifting like ships in the night.

And God's word is the light that they need. God's word is the treasure. How can we not share it? As Jesus said, do not keep your light under a bowl.

[25 : 26] It can be scary to speak of spiritual things. I know that. But just like Samuel, the world needs to hear God's word. And I honestly think people are often more willing to hear it than we might think.

In my job, there's one student who I've been reading the Bible together each week with him all year. And he asked for prayer last week that he would have more opportunities to speak about Jesus. Particularly, he's had an engineering project the last few weeks. And he's not been able to, he's not had the opportunity or the courage to speak about Jesus with those colleagues on his project yet. So we prayed about it that we would have the chance to. And as he was walking home the other day with one of them, she was speaking about a wedding she was going to this summer. Which moved on to speaking about why Christians get married. And he was able to speak about his faith. And as they were talking, she suddenly broke down in tears.

[26 : 35] And said, I've been thinking about faith loads recently. And I've just not had anyone to talk to about it. She was so willing to hear.

She just needed someone to speak. I'm going to share with you this quote that has really stuck with me this week. Tim Chester, the pastor and author, puts it like this.

If God's word is rare today, it is not because God is silent. He has spoken loud and clear. If God's word is rare today, it is because people will not listen.

And Christians will not speak. I'll say to you, it is a really good thing when we share God's word with people and with one another.

It is a really good thing when you meet up with another Christian this week over a bacon sandwich and chat about the Bible. It is a really good thing when you go to growth group.

[27 : 33] It is a really good thing when you send a Bible encouragement over WhatsApp. It is a really good thing when Rooted go out and discuss God's word together after the sermon. It is a really good thing when we are serving one another and our wider community by sharing God's word.

It is a really good thing when our children are taught the Bible well in Sunday school. So thank you for doing that. It is a really good thing while Chris is on sabbatical.

It gives a bit more of an opportunity for more people to do leading and preaching. It is good for others in our church family to be in the habit of being able to share and teach God's word.

God's word is a treasure. It is amazing and it brings such change. And if we want to see that, then let us relay God's word faithfully.

As we finish, you might think, well, Adam's sermon has basically been read the Bible and talk to others about Jesus. That is incredibly generic.

[28 : 41] But I hope you will see that this chapter shows us that we can treasure and love God's word and be changed by it. We began thinking about a message that can change your day.

In 1 Samuel chapter 3, we've seen that the word of the Lord is the message that can change everything. Your life, a whole nation. So the question, is God still speaking?

Well, yes, he has spoken into our darkness and he wants us to know him and know his word. My prayer for us is that we would pray like Samuel.

Speak, Lord, we're ready. We're ready for your word. Speak, Lord, we are listening. And that having received God's word, we would have Samuel's courage to faithfully relay it to others.

Because God's word is the message that can change everything.