

1 Samuel

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Preacher: Sam Low

[0 : 00] I have been particularly excited about preaching this particular section of 1 Samuel since we've begun the series. And that's because when I was younger, a friend of our family's who was an artist gave me this picture, which was his summary of basically the chapter.

Obviously, my name being Samuel, it was his gift to me. I could see Tarshi questioning the artistic credibility of this with that facial expression, but he's famous and you're not. But I will equally accept a gift from you if it's a summary of a chapter of the Bible.

Let me pray and we're going to get stuck into this chapter. Father God, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you give it to us so that we might know you. And God, we ask that as you speak tonight that you would help us to listen, that you would help us to recognize the things that we do or the ways that we approach your word that maybe prevent us from hearing what it is you have to say.

And I pray that the result will be that as we hear you speak, we will see you clearly and we will live accordingly. Amen. Have you ever had a one-sided conversation?

I have a gift which some of you have heard about before and if you're really lucky have seen in action. Basically, that gift is when the television is on, nothing else exists. When I was a teenager or maybe just out of high school, so maybe I can't claim youthful ignorance, but I was dating a girl and we were having a conversation as you do.

[1 : 33] This was before you could sit on Facebook all the time and do that sort of stuff. So we were actually on the phone and I was watching TV and a really, really significant thing came on. It was an ad or an infomercial or something, something equally life-changing.

And I got sort of really involved in this ad and then at the end of the ad, the show came back on. I noticed that I was holding a phone to my ear, but there was no one there, so I put it down and just continued watching the show.

It turned out that my girlfriend at the time had been chatting away and pouring out her heart. I got in a fair bit of trouble off the back of that. But a one-sided conversation doesn't really work.

It's necessary that there is two people both giving, both talking, both communicating. But as we open this chapter of 1 Samuel, it kind of feels like Israel and God are having a one-sided conversation.

The word of the Lord is rare. There's not many visions. And we've got to be careful not to let that slip past easily. We need to remember that this chapter is happening within a historical context.

[2 : 38] And if you've missed what we've been looking at throughout this series, basically God's agenda throughout human history is that he wants a relationship with his people.

That's what he's doing in creation. That's why there's priests. That's why there was a tent for them to meet at. And God's word, which is particularly rare, is a way of just referring to what God has revealed of himself.

His word, if you like, is not so much word as in sit or run or jump or whatever. It's the stuff that he has shown of himself for us to know. And it's essential, if people are going to know him, that they get his word, that they get what he reveals of himself.

And so into that context, with a God who wants a relationship and people who want that relationship back, God is being strangely quiet.

Don't you think? God's agenda is, I want to know people. And then we hear at the beginning of this chapter, in those days, the word of the Lord is rare and there's not many visions.

[3 : 43] Now, it's not that he's completely silent, because just last week when we were looking in chapter 2, he delivered his word that Eli was about to be judged, because he'd failed to restrain his sons.

But his word is still rare. And when it does come, it's almost like people don't want to listen. They don't want to hear it. And the problem's not with God. It's with the priests. It's where we were last week. Their job, they're supposed to be the ones who hear God's word and then pass it on. They're the representatives. But of course, the problem with that is, the priests, Hophni and Phinehas, don't even know God. So they haven't got much hope of introducing God to everyone else, or teaching everyone else about God. Now, look at verse 7. Samuel did not yet know the Lord. Samuel has been living at the temple. This is God's house, if you like. Samuel has been training as a priest. He's been under Eli's leadership. And when God actually speaks to him, like audibly speaks to him, Samuel doesn't know what's going on. [4 : 49] Because he doesn't yet know the Lord. He doesn't yet know God's word. The priests in Israel, the priests of God's people, have failed so significantly that a priest in training doesn't even know who God is.

Doesn't even have a relationship with God. He hasn't even yet heard the word of the Lord. That is the whole priestly responsibility, to bring the word of the Lord to the people. And yet one of their own in training doesn't know what the word of the Lord is. Now, we need to put that in a bit of context. So last week in chapter 2, we saw that Samuel is already ministering before the Lord. He's already growing in the presence of the Lord. He's already growing in favor with the Lord. Yet at the same time, we've just read in chapter 3, he did not know him. How can he be in his presence, be growing in his favor, but not know him? The key word comes in verse 7. It's revealed. Look at verse 7 again. [5 : 52] Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. Now, in spite of the fact that Samuel's in the right place, he's at the temple, he's where God's going to speak if he does, in spite of the fact that he's being trained personally by God's priest, the word of the Lord has not yet been revealed to him.

So Samuel's learnt all the right moves. He's learnt about the sacrifices and the prayers. He's learnt about what things he's supposed to wear. But the priests have failed to show him, this priest in training, that everything he does, points to God. Everything is trying to teach him something about God. God gave them this whole tent and this sacrificial system as a means of revealing himself. That's the whole point of it. And the priests are there to maintain it, to oversee it, to ensure that it's continuing. And so they're like a conduit, if you like, of God's revelation. But the priests that we've got at this point in Samuel are not a conduit, they've become a barrier. It's almost like a mirror has been installed backwards. The whole function of a mirror is for light particles to hit it and bounce back so that you can see something that you couldn't see before. [7 : 08] But if you flip that mirror around, it's completely non-functional. It's still a mirror, but the light particles hit it and stop. You don't see anything extra.

See, the priestly system is supposed to show people God that they can't see, that they can't just approach and know for themselves. But it's like they've flipped it around backwards and what was supposed to help is now blocking their vision of something that they need to see if they're going to know God. And God hasn't yet dealt with that barrier. He's about to, but so long as these priests stand there as a barrier, Samuel does not and will not know the Lord. He's in the right place, but with the barrier there, he cannot know the Lord. God hasn't revealed himself yet, at least not directly. And for Samuel to know God, in fact, for anyone to know God, God has to take the initiative to reveal himself. You can't take hold of God by force. God has to come and introduce himself to you. I was wasting some time last night, actually, in front of the television and just the fantastic show, The Bachelor, was giving an encore episode, Bachelor Australia. [8 : 22] Now, for anyone who hasn't had the opportunity to waste some time watching this show, let me give you the basic premise. There's some guy who apparently used to be a topless waiter, and apparently that's really appealing.

And then there's 20 girls fighting for his affection. And it's just, it's comical to watch. These girls are sitting there and they're devastated because they haven't had their chance to get some time with

this guy.

I'm like, there's 20 of you, that's the whole point. But every single one of them is getting really emotional and really catty, and, you know, the word above, catty. They're getting very aggressive towards one another because they want their chance to get to know this guy.

And you watch them scheming. And so the guy will come in and pick the girl he wants to talk to, and he'll take them for a walk off to the other side of the house and they'll sit down and talk. And the other girls kind of try and sneak in and hover as if somehow they can force their way in to having a conversation with this guy.

And it just keeps not working. And these girls are left awkwardly kind of standing next to a conversation that's happening just trying to hope they can get into it. And it's like the bachelor's sitting there and he's like, hi.

[9 : 28] Just keeps talking to the girl that he wants to talk to because he has all the power in this scenario. It's all about who he wants to get to know. If he doesn't want to get to know, you don't get your flower, you go home and you've made an idiot of yourself on TV and that's all that you've gained.

But in a relationship like that, one person has the power and it's all about his initiative. And it's not exactly the same, but on some level, God has all the power when it comes to relating to him. No matter how clever you are, no matter how, what ways you invent to come and start a relationship with God, actually it only begins if he chooses to reveal himself to you. And so Samuel's in the right place.

Samuel's training as a priest. Samuel's doing all the right things. But until God reveals himself, Samuel will just continue going through the motions without ever actually having a relationship. But thankfully, God is about to remove the barrier. Verse 4. Then the Lord called Samuel.

[10 : 36] We can't underestimate this. It's just a few words, but we've just heard in verse 1, the word of the Lord is rare. We know that we've got three dodgy priests standing in the way and making it really difficult for Israel to know God.

And God punches through and breaks the drought, not with Eli, the most senior priest, not with Hophni, not with Phinehas, but with Samuel. He bypasses the dodgy, failing priesthood and calls a new one instead.

I mean, look at Samuel in this story. Even as someone who doesn't know the Lord yet, he's ready to listen. He's eager to obey, unlike everyone else. Eli is asleep in his usual place.

Now, we don't know exactly where that usual place is. It doesn't say. It just says Eli is in his usual place. But we do know that Eli's usual place for sleeping and Samuel's usual place for sleeping are different.

Because each time Samuel hears his voice, he has to get up and run to get to where Eli is and say, Eli, you called me. So we don't know exactly, but it's in a different place. But where's Samuel?

Samuel is in the house of the Lord.

[11 : 46] Samuel is sleeping where the ark is. Samuel is where God is. Now, the ark, if you're not familiar with that, is basically a fancy box. It's a pretty big box.

It's covered in gold. It's something that Israel carried with them as they went. And inside this box was the tablets of stone from when God gave the commandments to Moses. So this is significant for their history because those tablets represent God's covenant or God's contract, if you like, with Israel.

This was in writing that God had chosen them. This is God's way of committing to them. And so they carried it around. It mattered to them. And it represented this box and the stuff that was in it, God being present with his people.

So this was in the middle. This was the centerpiece of the tent that Samuel works at. And this tent was in the centerpiece of the country that Israel had control of. It was everything to them because it was God with them.

And so if you wanted to meet God, if you wanted to talk to God, if you wanted to interact with God, you did it in the house of the Lord where the ark was. And so Samuel, at least, out of all the other priests, is in the right location to hear from God.

[12 : 59] He's actually there. If God's going to speak, Samuel's going to be the first one to hear it. Now, that's not to say God is limited to a room or a box. It's not to say there is a specific country we need to go if we want to hear from God.

But it is important that Samuel is the only one we find in the right location to hear from God. This was the place God had told them he would be.

It was the place that he had chosen to limit his dwelling for them. And if and when he does speak, Samuel is at least ready to hear. Now, I wonder, for those of us who call ourselves Christians, I wonder if we're waiting for God to speak into some circumstances in our life.

I wonder if there's answers that we're after, if there's direction that we want. But we're kind of like Eli and we're just in our usual place. We're not actually going to look in the obvious place where God has said he's going to be and he's going to speak.

We sit there going, God, I really want to know what your will is for my life with our Bibles closed. Being in the right location matters. But as well as being in the right place at the right time, Samuel's attitude matters.

[14:13] He sits under authority here almost before he even recognizes who the authority is. He sits under the imperfect authority of Eli who we know is already getting judged by God.

I mean, after Samuel hears his name called out, what's his response? Verse 4, have a look. The Lord called Samuel, Samuel answered, here I am.

And then he ran to Eli and said, here I am, you called me. Samuel's ready to do whatever is required of him. He's ready to go. He's eager. He doesn't say, shh, I'm trying to sleep.

He doesn't say, temple will be open again tomorrow about nine if you can come back then. Even in the confusion of running to Eli three times. I mean, can you imagine? He gets up, he hears a voice, goes to Eli, no, it wasn't me.

He goes to bed, what was that? Again, runs to Eli over and over and over but every time he says, here I am. What do you need? I'm ready, I'm willing.

[15:11] And then finally when Eli figures out what's going on, sends Samuel back and how does Samuel respond to hearing from God knowing that it's God the very first time? Verse 10, the Lord came and stood there calling as at the other time Samuel, Samuel.

Then Samuel said, speak for your servant is listening. His first response to the word of God is I am your servant.

He hasn't even seen what it looks like to serve God. His only model is three dodgy priests who use their position for power and for abusing women, forgetting food, and his first response to God when he speaks is I am willing, use me.

But calling yourself God's servant and actually serving him are two pretty different things. Again, if you follow Jesus I'm sure that you would say you're ready to obey him.

I'm sure you would say that your agenda is to do what he would have you do. But do you ever come to God's word with a bit of an attitude of I'm going to see what it says before I commit to doing it?

[16:26] Do you actually approach God's word every time before God speaks to you and say I'm your servant just tell me which way to go? Or do you open the Bible do you come to church thinking I'm going to hear what God has to say and then I'll consider whether or not I think that's the best thing for me?

When you open the Bible and God says I want you to be generous with the things I've given you is there a part of you that goes not this week I'm really keen on a pair of shoes?

Is there a part of you that goes let me just have a look at my situation my finances and I'll think about it? When God calls you to purity sexually do you hear that and you go I understand why but God I'm just in this great relationship me and this girl we just we make each other so happy physically it's just great so I hear what you're saying but not for me right now or when you open the Bible and God calls you to sacrifice for Him calls you to put Him first calls you to forsake everything else in your life and love Him more than anything else do you hear that and go God whatever you need or do you go God just let me think about whether or not I'm actually in for that calling yourself a servant of God saying you are following Him saying you love Him and actually doing it are two very different things and I wonder will Samuel still be so eager when he hears the message that God's got for him

I mean imagine this this is Samuel's first assignment as a prophet this is the first message that God gives him listen to it verse 11 the Lord said to Samuel see I'm 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 will judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about his sons blasphemed 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 Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord he was afraid to tell Eli the vision this is the moment of truth in this chapter God has broken in God has spoken God has called Samuel and the first message

Samuel gets is basically this go and tell the man who raised you go and tell your father figure Eli even calls Samuel his son in this passage go and tell that guy that God is about to judge him and there is no hope for forgiveness I mean did you catch that in verse 14 the guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for judgment is definite Samuel's not giving a message to Eli hoping that Eli will turn around and fix his life and come back to God Samuel is telling his father figure that God's judgment is coming and it cannot be escaped no wonder Samuel was scared this is his first word from the Lord and he has to go to somebody he cares for and tell them that they will face the judgment of God but this is the moment of truth is it just lip service from Samuel that he's a servant of God is it just lip service that he loves him that he wants to follow him or will he bear the weight of speaking

[20 : 03] God's word no matter what it costs him personally look at verse 15 Samuel lay down until morning and then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord he was afraid to tell Eli the vision but Eli called him and said Samuel my son Samuel answered again here I am what was it he said to you Eli asked 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 then Eli said he is the Lord let him do what is good in his eyes 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 recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord the Lord continued to appear at Shiloh and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word Samuel's faithfulness in those few verses there shows that the situation has changed the beginning of the chapter we have dodgy priests we have a fairly silent God and now they have a prophet things are about to be different for Israel

Samuel is growing up as somebody who now knows God as somebody who will speak God's word even if it costs him personally and it tells us that God is with him and God empowers him so that the words he speaks are effective but the really exciting and important thing in this whole chapter comes there in the last verse we open the chapter with a quiet God not many visions and Samuel not even knowing the Lord and everything that comes with that all the problems now we get to the end we have the Lord continuing to appear at Shiloh we have God revealing himself to Samuel in a way that Samuel can pass the message on we've got a God speaking again a God who wants to be known a God who has pushed over the barrier of dodgy priests and is making himself available to his people now it's tempting given the focus on Samuel in this story and given the book is called One Samuel to think that the key thing to take away is wow thank God for Samuel what a great guy he's better than those dodgy priests we had before he's the saviour he's fixed everything but look again the big change both in Samuel and in all of Israel is there the difference between verse 1 and verse 21 look at them verse 1 in those days the word of the Lord was rare verse 21 there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word the thing that changes in this passage is not so much Samuel it's the word of the Lord it's God's word that makes a difference to people it's God revealing himself that changes circumstances that changes attitudes I mean if you take God's word out of this chapter you've still got Samuel but he doesn't know God nothing changes you just get another generation of dodgy priests no matter how hard they try who can't do the job that they're supposed to do I mean without God's word Samuel is useless he's pointless I mean he can open the doors of the temple that was one of his jobs he can probably tidy up around the place but as a priest he's about as useful as a comb is to a bald person he can't actually fulfill the function that he needs to as a priest he can't point people to God he can't hand on the revelation that God has entrusted to him God's word is what matters God himself is what matters and only as God reveals himself can Israel come to know him now for Israel at this point in history

God reveals God's revelation of himself is kind of limited there's just a small number of people that he's working through there's a very specific system with the tent and the sacrifice and all that and now it was still sufficient to define their whole existence as a nation they revolved around who God had shown himself to be but we get so much more than they had let me read to you a couple of verses out of Hebrews chapter 1 it says in the past 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 whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he also made the universe the son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being sustaining all things by his

powerful word after he had provided purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven

God used to speak in bursts he used to have the odd revelation the odd special event where he would show himself with fire or with thunder or with whatever it was but now in Jesus God has blurted it all out there's no more secrets there's nothing more he has given us everything that we need to know Jesus is the word of God the word that Israel so desperately wanted to know more of we get it all in Jesus he is God on display he is the window the mirror into the glory of God Jesus came so that we could know the God of heaven Jesus has sacrificed himself so that we can be forgiven so that the temple and the sacrifices that we read about in 1 Samuel and all through the Old Testament can be replaced by a group of forgiven people gathering around God's word in scripture Jesus has come to take away the barriers to make the access easy to make the access possible everything you would ever need to know about God is found in Jesus he is the full revelation of God he is the answer to every prayer and desire of your heart he is God's full and final answer to whatever it is that you need to ask him sometimes I think we have selective hearing we hear what it is that we want to hear what if God is already speaking to us and we are just not listening what if we are so convinced that there is a specific answer that we want from God that we refuse to hear the one that he is giving to us what if you are like me and God is speaking down the phone and you are distracted by something trivial and unimportant

[27 : 03] I know it doesn't feel trivial or unimportant but what if God is speaking to you and you are just not listening here is why all this stuff matters here is why this matters when you go to work tomorrow when you go to uni when you go to school here is why this matters when you have a fight with your friends when you are overwhelmed with stress when you can't afford your bills when you are wrestling with a big decision about your future or a job or a career as you cry out to God searching for his answer wanting him to speak to you wanting him to be specific about your circumstance and your situation God's word which changes everything has already been spoken to you in Jesus that is God's answer to unemployment to singleness to heartache to sickness

Jesus is God's word to you Jesus is the best answer that God has for your situation he's the answer to the questions that you're asking Jesus will give you the vision of God which is firmer than the foundation that you're standing on now Jesus will give you the vision of God that can allow you to pray like Hannah did when she still didn't have any kids remember she'd had her one she'd given him back she's still a childless woman and she prays I rejoice in my God because there is no one like him in Jesus God looks in your situation and says I love you in Jesus God says never will I leave you never will I forsake you in Jesus God says in everything you're going through I'm working for your good not just some vague idea of good your good in Jesus God says I'm sufficient when you're weak when you're struggling when you're suffering and in

Jesus God says someday soon I'm going to fix it all someday soon I'm going to right every wrong I'm going to wipe every tear I'm going to end all the pain God is not silent anymore God has spoken decisively and fully in his son the question for you isn't what will God say in my situation the question is are you listening to what he is saying in Jesus because Jesus changes everything he changes barrenness for Hannah he changes unemployment he changes sickness he changes death Jesus is God's word to you in your situation whatever that situation is the question is are you listening let's pray father god we want to admit that we take for granted that you have given us free access to your word we want to admit that we waste so much time and opportunity that you have given us to have you speak into our lives we want to admit that we distract ourselves with our own desires or with what we think the answers should be and we want to admit that sometimes we just don't listen to the better answers that you have offered us in your son

God God I want to pray for all of us in this room whether we're wrestling with stress loss plenty whatever it is that is in our situation right now show us how Jesus changes that show us how Jesus redefines that God I want to pray for people who are hurting right now that you would open their ears to hear that you love them in Jesus for those who feel sufficient in themselves open their ears to hear that they need you and that Jesus is the only way that we can know you and we can call you our heavenly father God I want to pray that we would be people who are so firmly fixed on what you have done for us in sending your son so focused on his death and his resurrection in our place that our lives would also speak your word to the world around us may people hear of your love because of the hope and the foundation that we have father speak to us your servants for we are listening amen