

Whatever we are dealing with in life, we are always dealing with God

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[0 : 00] are taking up the challenge to read 1 Samuel with me, at least ready for the Lord's Day in coming to 1 Samuel, will know that this chapter in particular is beautifully written.

It is one of the most beautifully written chapters in all of God's Word. All of God's Word is beautifully written, of course. But 1 Samuel chapter 2 that begins with Hannah's prayer. And then in verse 11, we move on to the distinction between Samuel, Hannah's Samuel and Eli's sons. So if I can just sort of preface this, and then we'll pick up our reading in verse 22. In verse 11, it says, then Elkanah went home to Ramah, and the boy ministered to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest. This is Samuel. And then of course, 12 through to 21, it really speaks, sorry, 12 through to 17, it speaks to the sinfulness of Eli's sons and Eli himself. Then verse 18, Samuel is ministering before the Lord, and Hannah and Elkanah are blessed with more children. And then in verse 22, we'll pick it up. Now hear God's Word. Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons, it is not good, not a good report that I hear that, hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. If someone sins against man, God will mediate for him. But if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death. Now the young man Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man. And then it goes on to show why the Lord rejects Eli's household and takes the life of his two sons. We're going to pray and ask for God's blessing. The reason we will do this is because it is sometimes very difficult to listen to God's Word because of the preconceived ideas that we may have or the idea in particular of service that renders man in front of God. And what I mean by that is, you know, one minister said to his congregation once, you know, we both serve God. I serve God in his way and you serve God in yours.

Now if that doesn't come across like a bit of a tension point, then you can understand what you're missing because that's exactly the sort of conviction that you're meant to feel.

Two people can be serving God, but you can either be doing it in the Lord's way or you can be doing it in your way. And Eli's house is rejected because it does it in their way.

[3 : 25] So as we come and pray this morning, we need to pray that our eyes are open to what the Lord has to say to us because there is, there is here this morning, this is why I think it's a beautiful chapter, it teaches that there is, without faithfulness, there is the potentiality to lose and lose big.

And hopefully you'll see that as we go through. But let's ask for God's blessing upon us here this morning and for those who aren't here but who wish they could be. Let's pray. Father God, we look to you knowing that your grace is sufficient, your strength that you give to us each day is enough for each day. And we ask, Father God, that you bless us here and you bless those who want to be here but who can't.

Father God, we know that you are the one who ministers to us. We know, Father God, that we'd rather have you than what you give us. But in having you, we have your blessings. By belonging to you, we receive your blessings. And Father God, if we separate ourselves from you, we separate ourselves from the hand that blesses. Father God, we look to you this morning to open our mind and heart, enlighten our mind and heart, so that we would be moved to faithfulness and away from unfaithfulness.

That, Father God, we cannot change ourselves. We can only be changed by you, by being faithful to what you have given us. So, Father God, we are to put to death the deeds of the body by the

power of the spirit within us. And at the same time, Father God, we recognize that all of this happens because of your grace towards us. Father, may we also be very clear and distinct about telling the difference between the material blessings that we receive and you who give. May we never turn our attention to what we receive and away from the one who gives. So, Father God, we look to you this morning to give to those who cannot be here and who want to be here. Would you love them and care for them? Would you bless them and keep them? Would you give them strength for what they are going through, the difficult health issues that many have? And, Father God, for those who have hard and unrepentant hearts, we ask, Father God, that great conviction would come upon them, that they would turn again to you lest something worse happen to them. So, Father God, we take the seriousness of you and your word and we ask for your blessing this day in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, if you'd like to turn again, please, to this part of Samuel. I'm just going to move these because they sort of capture my eyes. I can almost see 360 degrees. I'll bring them back up before I'm younger than him. I can manage that.

[6:27] Yeah. So, if you can turn again, please, to Samuel. And as you do, let's be aware of where we are in the book of Samuel and where we are in history. What do you do when all the people in the land are doing what is right in their own eyes? What do you do when you live in a time where you know what the Lord God has taught, what he expects, but then you live amongst people who are still doing what is right in their own eyes? Samuel is in the time when there is no king and the people do what is right in their own eyes. This is explained almost over and over again. Therefore, as we would expect, God doesn't allow this to go on forever. He addresses the situation. People cannot get away with doing what they want to do endlessly. God always addresses people. And therefore, the way the book begins is quite a strange way, but an expected way, given the way God does things. It begins with a barren woman praying for a child. And how often do barren women play an important role in the scriptures, especially when God is about to bring about his promises? It begins in many ways when you think with

Abraham, Sarah and the promised child. And she's old and she's not getting pregnant. And then all of a sudden, after Abraham goes off and tries to do it himself, his own way, in his doing what is right in his own eyes, Sarah then falls pregnant by God's grace. And of course, there are consequences to not living by faith. And so what we see in this chapter is God fulfilling his promise of faithfulness that Hannah bears a son. Samuel is then given back to the Lord to serve the Lord. And then in the contrast, Eli has his sons taken away from him. God takes away their lives. So we have Hannah who is faithful to the Lord God and prays to the Lord God for a son, is given a son and the son serves the Lord. And then in contrast to this, in the rest of chapter two, Eli has sons and they are taken away from him. And so this is the sort of background of what we're dealing with here. Samuel, the book of

Samuel addresses the transition from magistrates to the monarchy. We go from the time of judges, the magistrates, to the king, the monarchy. And this is the transition that we are in. And in the midst of this, God's people are doing what is right in their own eyes. And this has to change. And it changes with a barren woman giving birth to a child by God's grace. She gives the child back to God.

The child will then grow up and be a faithful priest. And she understands immediately from the very beginning that dependence on God is always necessary because none of us know what the future holds. So we depend on God for the future and for the present, most importantly, because we don't know what the future is. So we pray because we don't know what tomorrow holds. We pray because we don't know what the future has in store for any of us. We get down on our knees before God and pray hard, really hard, because we don't know what is coming. And so what we recognize here is that as we depend on God, we recognize that there is a difference between depending on God and the things that God gives. And the temptation to move your attention away from God to the blessings of God is one that is seen throughout the whole of the Old Testament, perhaps most clearly in Luke 15 where the two sons leave their father. So, you know, one moves away from his father while staying at home. The other one moves away from the father by leaving home. Both want what the father have, but neither son wants the father. And that temptation is found within the church. We all want the blessings of God, but we don't necessarily want the God who comes with those blessings. And so it is tempting, but it shouldn't really be, to understand that while food addresses my hunger and money pays my bills, it is never the food or the money that is actually

doing that. The food is not really addressing my hunger, and the money is not really paying my bills. It is God who blesses. Okay? So the temptation is that when you take your eyes off God is to think that your savior is money and food. And food, because food gives you instant gratification, you're hungry, you eat, and now you're no longer hungry, you're almost overwhelmed by the power of food. Look at what it does. And the same with money. You have bills and what you need is money because money can get you out of the debt you're in, and you pay the bill, and suddenly money becomes this sort of savior to you. But it is a mistake to think that money and food is actually saving you, or even serving you in a way. It is God who gives. And Hannah understands this. She understands the difference between who is actually saving and what the blessings actually do. And this is a really important distinction for us all to remember. Food solves my hunger, but God provides me with the food. God gives, and God uses secondary causes, of course, but it is God who always gives. Hannah trusts God for a child, and she is barren. So this is a situation where it doesn't matter what you can try and do to bring about a child. You can't. So you are forced by your condition to trust in God. And every now and then, God gets you into a position where he forces you to trust in him because you're not doing it automatically.

And Hannah's barrenness not only is there to glorify God, but it is there to teach us all a very important lesson. That future change depends on God blesses, not by what I can bring about myself.

[13:17] And the contrast between Hannah and Penina is seen here. That Hannah gives her child back to the Lord, but Penina provokes Hannah by saying, I have what you don't have. Look what I have. I have children.

You want children. I have them. You don't have them. Taunting her, but not once do you see Penina ever giving thanks to God for the children that she has, as if, well, it's just natural, just something that we do. And this is that subtle shift between recognizing the material things that you have or the physical things that you have, and not recognizing the God who actually gives them. That's the heart of the sin within the nation. Everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes. Now, there are more differences that lie ahead of us, but the basic difference here is that difference. What people recognize. Are they calling out and trusting on God, the God who gives the hand of blessing, or are they trusting in what they can bring about themselves by doing what is right in their own eyes? The main difference in this chapter is that Hannah's son that God has given serves the Lord, and Eli's sons, who are priests, are not serving the Lord. Hannah's son grows in favor, and Eli's sons have their life taken from them. And if you think, well, hang on, this is just an Old Testament story. It has no bearing on the church today. This is your mistake to think that that is the case. So here's the summary. In verse 11, Samuel is ministered, and the boy ministered to the Lord, verse 11, in the presence of Eli, the priest. Then in verses 12 through to 17, we see that Hophni and Phinehas, this is Eli's sons, are not really serving the Lord, but they are serving themselves. Then in verse 18, Samuel is ministering before the Lord. Hannah clothes him, but Hannah and Elkanah are blessed with more children.

While this happens, verse 22 to 25, Eli's sons are laying with women. Eli doesn't address the situation, and when he does address the situation, he asks why they are doing what they are doing, which is not addressing the situation. You never ask why. It should always be what. We'll get to that in a minute. And he's looking for a reason for why they're doing what they're doing, but the reason is clear. Everyone knows the reason. Everyone's talking about what they are doing, and it's obvious why they are doing it. But he doesn't address his sons properly. He doesn't get to the conscience. Now, on the other hand, Samuel, verse 26, grows in the stature and favor of the Lord. So again, we've got this to and fro between the growth and stature of Samuel and the decline of Eli's sons. Then verse 27 to 34, God rejects Eli's household. And the Lord addresses Eli because Eli did not address his own sons.

So the Lord is addressing Eli. Eli's not addressing his sons. And the sign that God gives to Eli that his household is coming to an end is that he takes away the life of his children. That's the sign.

[16:58] Your sons' lives will be taken away from them. God will then raise up a priest, a faithful priest, who will do what is exactly in the heart of the Lord. What we see then in this second chapter is the sort of flourishing of Hannah and her children and the end of Eli's household.

Do you see that? The flourishing of Hannah and her children, namely Samuel, and the end of Eli's household. Now, we might have been right to question now Eli's lack of discernment when it comes to mistaking Hannah praying for drunkenness. Now we can begin to see that that wasn't an honest

mistake. This is really speaking into Eli's lack of discernment. If he couldn't tell the difference between a woman praying and a woman drunk, that's a discernment issue. And now we begin to see in this chapter that because he doesn't really address his sons, we've got a discernment issue all over again, especially when God addresses Eli. Eli is as much at fault, though the sin is different, as his sons.

So don't think, well, Eli's a good father here and his sons are just the bad ones. No. Eli is as much at fault in a different way as his sons are. And so even though he corrects the mistake with Hannah and he gives her the benediction that she would be blessed by the Lord and gets what she prays for, and she does have a child, Eli's lack of discernment is clearly seen in this chapter here.

So here's the principle. God honors those who honor him. There it is, verse 30. God honors those who honor him. Not any other way. God honors those who honor him. And this is the main difference between Eli and his sons and Hannah and Samuel. Hannah and Samuel are honoring the Lord. And in return, the Lord is honoring Hannah with more children. Hannah and Elkanah have more children. And Samuel is growing in favor and stature of the Lord. They are being honored by the Lord. But Eli and his sons, who are not honoring the Lord, have the household taken away from them, and priests are taken away from them, and Eli's sons are also taken away from him. In other words, Samuel does what is right in the Lord's eyes, and Eli and his sons are doing what is right in their own eyes. And there's the distinction all over again. There's the problem within the land. The people in the land are doing what is right in their own eyes. And so when you have a leadership that is doing what is right in their own eyes, you can't really expect too much difference in the people that they're supposed to be leading. They're going to do the same.

They're going to do the same. Like children who says, well, he had two biscuits. Why can't I have two? Well, he was not meant to have two. He took two, and he was not meant to take two. And so I can't let, you know, what am I supposed to do? Let you have two? Do the same wrong that he did, just so it's fair?

[20 : 21] But that's what young, sinful people are like. And I don't mean young in age. I mean young in maturity. But he did it. Why can't I do it? And so when you have people up in the church who have done things visibly in the church, sort of like live together when you're not married, or marry an unbeliever, or take drugs, or do this, or whatever, and now they're still functioning in the church, you have a whole generation growing up. You have a whole generation growing up after them, and the generation growing up after them says, well, they did it. Why can't I? And so you set a standard, and the standard is let everyone do what is right in their own eyes. And that's the problem.

That's the big problem. And so this is the issue that the Lord God is addressing. Now, God addresses Eli because he does not address his sons. That's why God addresses him. Eli's sons were wicked.

It says that in the very beginning of verse 12. Now, the sons of Eli were worthless men. They were worthless. They're wicked men in what they are doing. And what they're doing is they're taking the choice meats for themselves. As priests, they should be provided for. But now they want what they want. They don't want what they can be given. They just want what they can take. And if they don't get what they want, they threaten it with force. Give us what we want, or we'll beat you up.

There's the problem. They also lay with women, verse 23. Lay with women, and in verse 23, Eli says to them, why do you do such things? Now, there's the problem. Fathers, when you're addressing your children, and they've done something wrong, never say why, say what. And if you don't understand why you should say what rather than why, get tongue-tied here. Let me explain. When you say why, you're looking for a reason. The trouble is when you look for a reason in a child, the child's going to turn around and give a reason that won't necessarily be truthful. Well, it wasn't my fault.

Well, he took two. I'm going to take two. This happened because they did. Or suddenly, you get into blame. So you ask the reason why, and then there's blame. You're addressing the child's mind.

Why have you done what you have done? And the child gives you a reason.

[22 : 47] But what they give you often is a sinful reason. But when you say, what have you done? Then you address their conscience. Because now they know that you know that it's wrong.

What have you done? Because now they know it's wrong. You're addressing the wrong. You're not addressing the reason. And the basis of Eli's sin was that he said to his children, why have you done what you've done? It's obvious why they have done what they've done. They're worthless and

wicked men.

They're sinning against God. That's why. So the moment you ask men like that for a reason why they've done what they have done, if they're honest, they would turn around and say, well, I'm doing what is right in my own eyes. Yeah, I've given you a reason. You ask me a question, I've given you a reason.

You may not like my answer, but that's the reason. But when you say, what have you done? Then you address the conscience of the individual. And that there is the bone that God picks with Eli. Eli, verse 29, honored his sons more than the Lord. And there's Eli's failure. Eli fails as a father because he honored his sons more than he honored the Lord. And in honoring his sons more than honoring the Lord, his son's life were taken away from them. No big deal. It's just an Old Testament story. It's a big deal to Eli with two sons. And it's a big deal today of how important it is to have a faithful leadership. And so the reason why Eli did not discipline his sons is a simple one. Here's the reason why. It's because he honored them more than he honored the Lord. So when the Lord asks Eli, why did you honor your sons more than me? Or why have you? It's a rhetorical why. God's not looking for a reason. It's a rhetorical why. I know what you have done, but you can't, you know, a bit like when God says to Adam and Eve, why are you hiding? Why are you? It's a rhetorical. God knows. God knows.

[25 : 15] This is a question of honesty. And the sign that God is dealing with Eli's household is that he takes the life of his children. Now, why is that important? Why is that important for the church?

Well, let me put it this way. In Titus 1.6, here's a parallel by way of illustration. We learn that children of elders are to be believers in order for the man to be an elder, to be qualified as an elder. Now, I know that a lot of churches don't necessarily practice that, and I don't understand why because it's quite clear. And I have said that if my children, God forbid, and I pray to God with heaviness, that it never happens that my children turn away from the Lord. But if they did, then I would leave the ministry because I don't set the standard. I can't do what is right in my own eyes. I can only do what is right in the Lord's eyes. And it's no embarrassment to step away. You're actually honoring the Lord in doing so and asking him for his grace upon your children. But those men who stay within ministry when their sons have walked away damage the church.

God removes Eli and takes his son's life because of their sin. But why? Why would you do that? What is the reason for removing them all together? Well, everyone knows, verse 22, that Eli's sons were laying with women. They all knew what Eli's sons were up to. Threatening to take the food by force, laying with women, and why this is serious for the nation. Now, Eli understands why this is so serious, not just for his own household, but for the whole nation. Verse 25, here it is.

If someone sins against man, God will mediate for him. But if someone sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him? There's the problem. If you have a priest who has been appointed by God to intercede on behalf of man before God, what happens when you have a corrupt priest? who will intercede for him? See the problem? Yeah? If priests are there to offer the offerings on behalf of people so that they can be assured of their sins being forgiven, so you have man interceding on behalf of man before God, what happens when you have the priest sinning against God?

[27 : 59] Do you think God would find any of their offerings acceptable? No. And who does that affect? Them or everyone who relies on them? So now you begin to see that their unfaithfulness affects the whole nation. It doesn't just affect them. Hence why you elders must have believing children.

It affects the whole church. Let me try and illustrate this in a slightly different way. Imagine a person. You have a lot of money. You might have to imagine that you have a lot of money.

But you have a lot of money. Imagine that a person is giving you advice on what you should do with that money. But that person doesn't lose anything himself if his advice is wrong.

Most typical financial advisors. Would you trust him? Most sensible people would say no once it's put like that, but it happens all the time. Now if I said to you, here's a financial advisor who actually will give you the same advice he gives to himself, that he will tell you to invest in the same things that he's invested in. Are you more likely to invest in him than the other one? Of course you are. Because you know he has something invested in the outcome. Because now he can suffer loss, not just you. And there is this symmetry of loss which is really, really important.

[29 : 41] Why would anyone follow someone who doesn't share the loss or the risk? It doesn't make any sense to me to take advice from someone who charges me X amount of money to do this

with my money, but doesn't lose anything if the advice is wrong. It makes no sense to follow someone like that. But yet the world is full of people who do such things. So let me bring that illustration into the church. So imagine an elder that reflects Eli's and his sons, where the elder doesn't discipline his children biblically.

And he doesn't leave the eldership when they are unfaithful. And so he continues in his eldership, and you know that because his children are disobedient and they're not in the church and they're out in the world, that this is not only a poor witness, but he's not upholding the very word that he claims to be teaching. Do you think he is more likely to teach the church how to discipline their children? Yes or no?

You see, if elders don't hold to Titus 1.6, the whole congregation suffers. The whole congregation suffers because elders, like priests, ought to know that their faithfulness or unfaithfulness makes a difference to the people they serve. Right? You have this asymmetry.

If I don't care about losing, okay, then what I teach you is I don't care about whether you lose. But if I have something invested in the church, like the future biblical strength and growth of my children, and I look at a church that wants the same, do you think I'm going to teach on the church more or less about the importance of family and discipline in children?

This is what Nassim Taleb, I don't know if you've ever read the book Black Swan, there's Black Swan, there's Anti-Fragile, Skin in the Game, and after his book, this is what he called Skin in the Game.

[31 : 53] In 2008, the world trusted bankers who placed large bets on the financial markets who lost, but they didn't lose anything you did. So why wouldn't you take risks if you're not actually going to suffer any loss?

It encourages risk. But in the church, it doesn't work like that. And this is why things don't get taught sometimes. It doesn't get taught because we're too afraid to address the situation head on.

See, when elders know that they are part of a body, not just an individual entity, they are more likely to teach on the family and discipline in children and what have you because they recognize that they're invested in that very outcome.

because the children of elders ought to be believers in order for them to keep their position or even have the position in the first place. Now you begin to see the importance of something to lose.

And it is no shame whatsoever, and I've known elders who have done it, who have said that, my children are going through a tough time, I'm going to step away from the eldership because this is where my attention needs to be.

[33 : 11] Is he a more faithful elder than the one whose child is out gallivanting around the world and who stays in the outer ship? Of course he is. Of course he is. And the reason why it's important for the church is because it comes down to investment.

If you have a leadership who doesn't care if they lose, then you are following people and taking advice from people who probably don't care if you lose either. You see, faithfulness and unfaithfulness makes a big difference.

So when Eli's sons are doing what they're doing, doing what is right in their own eyes, laying with women, taking meat by force, yes, ultimately, they paid the price by having their life taken from them, but they don't care.

Look at the damage they've done to the whole nation in not being able to bring forth their offerings because the Lord doesn't accept them. Malachi won. Am I really to accept these defiled offerings? You see the problem? You ought to. And you ought to be able to see it in such a way where you recognize the importance of faithfulness because the faithful person knows the cost of being unfaithful.

[34 : 24] Here's the exhortation as we close. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. The Lord exalts, Samuel, and the Lord brings down Eli and his sons.

The Lord honors those who honor him. Hannah and Samuel are blessed by the Lord. They have honored the Lord. But Eli and his sons have not honored the Lord.

In fact, Eli is even told that he honors his sons more than he honors the Lord's. And in doing so, the Lord removes the household. time and truth go hand in hand.

Just because it hasn't happened yet, don't think that it won't. Because the principle remains the same, the only difference is the duration of time.

That's the only difference. How much time God is taking to bring about his discipline. And so, in a world where so many people are doing what is right in their own eyes, do you think it's necessary to have faithful leaders?

[35 : 32] The comfort of knowing that your leaders know that they need to be faithful is the comfort of knowing that what's at stake if they're not? There's something to lose.

And the faithful leader knows what they will lose if they are unfaithful. And the reason why that is a comfort to the congregation is because the congregation knows in the body of Christ that if he loses, we all lose.

If he's unfaithful and he can suffer loss, we can all suffer loss. Because that is the way that God has shaped his nation and, of course, his church.

In God's order, following faithful prophets means that you're following those who understand the consequences of unfaithfulness. That's what it means. Following faithful leaders, whether it be judges, kings, watchmen, elders, prophets, priests, means that you're following those who understand the consequences and cost the loss of unfaithfulness.

Unfaithfulness cannot continue and time and truth go hand in hand. It's a matter of duration, how long God takes to address the situation. Because, whatever we're dealing with in life, we are always dealing with God.

[36 : 58] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Let us stand and sing and then we'll come again.

Let's stand. May the grace that God has given us and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.