

Turn your back on idols, and turn to God.

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[0 : 00] 1 Samuel 3, and seeing that it is only a short chapter, we will read it. Now those who are paying attention on Wednesday evening may have noticed that I've...

My eyes are growing dim, not like Eli's, where I have to go and lie down, but where I have to... Oh, that's what you look like. I'll take them off when I look at you then.

What a shock. I need a sip of water for that. My word. Should I turn around, ladies, or is that going to be a shock as well? That's a joke.

Okay. 1 Samuel 3, and I might actually read the words in the text this time instead of mixing them up, which a few have pointed out.

Now hear God's word. Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli, and the word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no frequent vision.

[1 : 06] At that time, Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. 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.

Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, here I am, and ran to Eli and said, here I am, for you called me. But he said, I did not call you. Lie down again.

So he went and lay down. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

And the Lord called Samuel again the third time, and he arose and went to Eli and said, here I am, for you called me. Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the young man.

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, speak, Lord, for your servant hears. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

[2 : 22] And the Lord came and stood calling, as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. And Samuel said, speak, for your servant hears. Then the Lord said to Samuel, behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears will tingle.

On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house from the beginning to the end. To end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.

Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever. Samuel lay until morning.

Then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, Samuel, my son.

And he said, here I am. And Eli said, what was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.

[3 : 41] So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, it is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him. And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground.

And all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh. For the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

May God bring a blessing to his word. We will turn again to 1 Samuel chapter 3. And as you're making your way there, let's remember the sort of main focus of the lesson from 1 Samuel 2 last week, where you have this up and down between the rise of Samuel and the fall of Eli's household. And the principle from that is that the faithful understand the cost of unfaithfulness. Therefore, follow faithful leaders. The faithful understand the cost of unfaithfulness, therefore, and the consequences that follow.

And therefore, follow faithful leaders. That's the principle point, the main focal point. In other words, unless you have a leader who has skin in the game, then why would you follow someone where all the downside and all the risk of losing something is on your side and not on the side of the leader? [5 : 21] In other words, I use the illustration of a financial advisor who gives advice, but if the advice that he gives is wrong and you lose and he loses nothing, is he really the best person to be listening to?

Isn't the most appropriate person to listen to is the one who has skin in the game, the one who has something invested in the words that he is speaking.

And so in chapter 3, where we actually Samuel being established as a prophet, now we begin to understand that because he belongs to the Lord and he is going to speak for the Lord in and amongst the Lord's people, that what he says doesn't just affect the nation of Israel but will affect him as well.

So he has to make sure that the words that he says is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The faithfulness, those who are faithful, understand the cost of unfaithfulness.

And that's crucial for really understanding these early chapters of Samuel. We also recognize that Hannah recognizes, and the book obviously is about the nation moving from the magistrate to the monarchy.

[6 : 35] It is moving from the time of judges, magistrates, law, to the time of kings, the monarchy. But the question that is before us as we read Samuel is, if the people are doing what is right in their own eyes, will the coming of a king make any difference to that?

Or will it simply be a repetition of what it was like when they lived under the time of judges? And it is true that God in this chapter gives his people a prophet in the name of Samuel.

But the question, the underlying question is, will the people listen? Now the Lord does establish Samuel as a prophet, and the whole nation recognizes it.

But what the Lord is actually doing is giving his people guidance. He is giving his people a sense of direction through the words that he will speak to his people.

Now one of the ways in which Samuel was confirmed as a prophet here, and some might say even tested, his first test, is the vision that he is given about Eli's household coming to an end, and the fact that he will then have to tell this truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth to Eli, and not hold anything back.

[7 : 57] And so the question that is always going through our minds is, how will these words be received? Will people listen to them? Will they accept them? Will it be the same as in the time of judges, or can we expect something new in the time of kings that is to come?

In other words, will God's people follow God's word, or will they continue to do what is right in their own eyes? And if they do continue to do what is right in their own eyes, what does that actually look like?

So what does it look like to being a church where the people in the church are doing what is right in their own eyes? How do you spot or tell the difference between someone actually following the word of the Lord and someone actually doing what is right in their own eyes?

How do you actually tell the difference between the two? Well, here's the summary then of chapter 3. Chapter 3 begins, very similar to chapter 2, in that Samuel is ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli, and the time that is described is that the word of the Lord was rare in those days, for there was no frequent vision.

And the absence of God's word is the presence of God's judgment. We see this kind of thing in Romans 1, don't we?

[9 : 20] And if you even read the book of Ruth, Bethlehem meaning house of bread, and the book of Ruth is about there being no bread in God's house.

It is a time of famine, and Elimelech does what is right in his own eyes, and he takes his wife, Naomi, and their two sons off to Moab, a land that is not known for honoring God.

It's a land of idols. And, of course, because he does not follow the word of the Lord, you can understand that because of where he ends up. So, it's very easy to tell whether or not someone is doing something in their own eyes, or following the Lord, based on where they end up.

There it is. It's really not that complicated. And so, the famine that actually came upon the time of Ruth, in the book of Ruth, is the judgment of God.

God said that this would happen back in Deuteronomy, and God is judging his people, but God is bringing his people through the judgment as he always does. I mean, I never forget the passage where Naomi is brought back to her hometown, and the women of the town recognize her.

[10:37] And she doesn't want to be called Naomi. She wants to be called Mara, you know, because she feels bitter because of what has happened to her. And the striking thing that you recognize about that passage is that if women recognize Naomi after her absence, and she comes back, it means that those women must have made it through the famine, thus speaking to God's faithfulness.

That's the crucial point there. And so, even though when God does bring judgment upon his people by not speaking, he keeps them where they are in order to learn the lesson.

Very similar to the book of Jonah. Jonah has to go and give a message of judgment, but the very message of judgment is what brings about sort of salvation in terms of non-destruction for Nineveh. God knew that the message of judgment to Nineveh would cause them to repent. So judgment is not just seen as a finality. It's over and done with.

There is a point of no return. Not at all. God uses discipline in judgment to turn his people around, to turn nations around. And so the word of the Lord being rare in the days here is in the context of trying to turn, or God will turn his people around.

[11:58] Now it goes on to say that Eli's eyesight had grown dim. He was laying down. Samuel was lying down in the same place. And he begins to hear his name being called.

And he goes to Eli two times and then a third time. And Eli perceives that it's, that he doesn't know what Samuel was actually hearing the first two times.

I didn't call you, he says. Go back and lie down. And then this happens again and Samuel comes to Eli and Eli says, go back and lie down, verse four and verse six.

And then in verse seven, it says that Samuel did not know the Lord. We could spend quite a lot, quite a long time on this verse alone. But Samuel did not know the Lord.

But what we have seen is that he is ministering to the Lord. And he is growing in both stature and favor with the Lord. But the Lord has not yet been revealed to Samuel, meaning that he has not yet received the vision that it will establish him as a prophet, someone who will speak God's word to God's people.

[13:05] And so for the third time, Samuel hears his name being called and Eli now perceives that this must be the Lord God that is calling him.

And I think that we ought to give a little bit of leeway here to both Samuel and to Eli. If it is the case that they're living in a time where the word of the Lord is rare, then it's almost excusable to understand why they didn't recognize that the Lord is calling Samuel at this point.

Because if it's rare, no one's expecting it to happen, right? If it's not happened for a long time, the longer something doesn't happen, the less expected you are for it to happen.

That's just the way that things happen. This is why some things stay around forever and some things disappear very, very, very, very quickly.

So you have beautiful cathedrals that will stay around for a very, very long time, but you'll have modern architecture that will disappear in a moment. You'll have bicycles that will probably stay around forever, but you'll have certain types of cars that will come and go.

[14:19] And this is because if it's stayed around for a long time, it has a greater life expectancy to stay around even longer. But something that has a short expectancy, it just disappears and goes.

We're still reading the Bible thousands of years later. And yet there are many other books that have been printed in the last hundred years that people are no longer reading. Some things have this life expectancy.

Well, if you're living in a time where you're not expecting to hear the word of the Lord because it's rare, then you're not expecting to hear the word of the Lord because it's rare. And so it's almost excusable.

But Eli perceives, no, this is the Lord who is calling you. So the next time this happens, say, speak, Lord, for your servant hears.

And so Samuel verse 10 presents himself as a servant to the Lord. He wants to hear what the Lord will say. He presents himself as a servant. The Lord tells Samuel verse 11 that he's about to do something that will cause the two ears of everyone to tingle.

[15:27] And then this is what it is. Verse 12, he describes how Eli's household will be brought to an end because Eli did not restrain his sons. He knew that his sons were blaspheming against God. He knew that they were committing iniquity, but he did nothing. His sons were blaspheming against God. And this is so serious, verse 14, that their sin will never be atoned for. Never be atoned for. I want you to appreciate the seriousness of those words. That so serious was their sin against the Lord God.

Very similar to greater knowledge, greater judgment. Do you remember how Jesus, when he's brought before Pilate, and he says those words, greater is the sin in him who brought me to you. Greater is the sin in him who brought me to you. It is not the case that all sin is the same. It is the case that God judges all sin, but it is not the case that all sin is the same in terms of its level of iniquity.

[16:37] And one of the reasons for that is based on knowledge. So when Jesus says, greater is the sin in him who brought me to you, referring to Judas, is because Judas had spent three years with Jesus, hearing what he had said, hearing what he was teaching, seeing the miracles, seeing people healed, seeing these followers of Jesus, miraculous signs of bread and fish, and then he hands Jesus over.

Greater is the sin in him because he knew more. And the reason why Eli's sin is so great and his son's is so great is because they knew better.

They were sinning against what they knew. And that's why it's so serious. So serious, in fact, that God will not make atonement for that sin. So God describes that his household, Eli's household, that is, will be brought to an end to Samuel.

And now Samuel has to convey this message to Eli. But he lays down until, verse 15, until the morning. And he has to tell Eli, without holding anything back, he has to tell him the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

And Eli, sorry, Samuel is afraid to tell Eli, but Eli pushes Samuel to tell him because prophets must speak the word of the Lord.

[18:02] If their sole calling is to speak God's word to God's people, then they cannot modify it. They cannot only allow part of the message to get through.

They cannot be like a faulty telephone where you can just hear a few words. And that's all that messengers are. We are nothing more than sort of the means of communication from God to the people of God.

And we mustn't alter what has been said along the way. And therefore, Samuel has to tell Eli exactly what he has heard.

Now, Samuel grew, and he grew in favor of the Lord continually, but his knowledge, sorry, people knew that he was a prophet throughout all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba.

And so he is established now when he proclaims these words. So the question we ask in chapter three is, why, after all this time, does God give his people his word again?

[19:07] And he gives his people his word again by giving his people a prophet. He is addressing the judgment, and he is addressing their need for guidance.

Now, there is a difference, of course, between direction and following, and this must be understood not just by the people of God back then, but also by the people of God today.

When you hear God's words, do you take them and receive them as direction? Or do you weigh them in the balance so that you can decide to do what is right in your own eyes?

This is the underlying question, isn't it? Do you take them as direction and follow them, or do you weigh them in the balance, sift them, allow some to get through and others to not get through?

Now, the difference here will always be seen in where you end up. It will always be seen in where you end up. So it's not really a complicated thing to understand. When a traveler on a road sees a road sign, he should know that as he looks at that sign that he will end up in that place if he follows the sign.

[20:23] But if he doesn't follow the direction that the sign is giving, then he will not end up in that place. And so now we begin to see the difference between direction being given and following.

Okay, the direction can be true and just and beautiful and right and correct and everything. But where you end up will always determine whether or not you have followed the direction, whether or not you have listened to the word.

And therefore, as we sit in church and as we live our Christian life and we grow and we wonder why we are in the position that we are, we are, have you ever questioned or gone back to God's word and go, now I know because I've not paid attention to the direction given.

If you look at the limilex life in the book of Ruth, just turn back a few pages and you'll see it for yourself. What happens to people when they do not follow the direction given in the word of the Lord?

So what does it look like when people do what is right in their own eyes? That's what it looks like. It means that they are no longer guided by God but they are guiding themselves into deeper and deeper self-deception.

[21 : 40] And one example of this, probably the best example of this in Ezekiel 33, is where the people were so deceived, so self-deceived, that they thought that if they brought themselves before the Lord to hear his word, that they were doing it.

They thought that if they brought themselves before the Lord to hear his word, they were doing the word.

And that was the deception. They thought that hearing the word alone was the same as doing it. It's the difference between direction and following.

And so in the same today, people in the church can be deceived in exactly the same way. I've heard hundreds and thousands of sermons, perhaps not hundreds and thousands, but I've heard hundreds of sermons, perhaps thousands, and the question is always whether or not I am following the word.

And the evidence will always be seen in where I end up. And it's the same with all of us. God's word directs.

[22 : 50] It is the sign that points and tells us to move. It is what gives us strength. It encourages us. It sets us free. It convicts. It binds. It comforts.

It does a number of different things. But when it comes to guidance, where I end up will determine whether or not I am actually following the direction of the Lord.

And so Eli's household, it becomes very clear that once we've understood this is the purpose of the word of the Lord, it becomes very clear to understand how Eli's household has sinned against God. That we know what is expected of priests and they have not done what has been expected of them. And how long will God allow this to continue? Not very long.

Not very long before he brings it to the end. And so where does Eli and his household end up? God brings it to an end. You see, never ever forget that time and truth go hand in hand.

[23 : 52] That given enough time, the truth always comes out. It'll always come out. It'll either come out in terms of, further down the line in terms of cost or consequence, or most often, in terms of the hypocrisy that then follows.

And that, what I was addressing last week about the sinful symmetry. That if you have a child that takes two biscuits out of the biscuit tin when they're told not to, and then another child comes along and does exactly the same thing.

And the child says, well, hang on, mum. You know, she's just been told off. You're not allowed to take two biscuits out. And she says, well, hang on. My brother did an hour earlier. What she is looking for is sinful symmetry.

She wants what is fair according to what her brother did. But both have gone against what the mother said not to do. And so what does the mother do?

Affirm sinful symmetry, what is fair in their eyes, or reestablish what is true and right. And so this is what happens further down the line when time and truth go hand in hand.

[25 : 04] You'll either be caught in the trap of having to affirm sinful symmetry. Well, you allowed this to happen before. You'll have to allow it to happen again. And that'll be, that'll always be the point across.

So if you don't get rid of it at the beginning, it'll continue like a thorn in your side forever. That is how serious it is to get rid of sinful symmetry.

Because it just permeates for every generation. You know, and we've seen it too many times. You know, way too many times.

So now we have God's word established to his people through giving his people a prophet. And the message that Samuel gives is, the first message that he gives is to Eli.

Eli accepts this, verse 18, with a level of humbleness. He accepts the judgment. And Samuel words, the words that Samuel has are words that he has received from the Lord.

[26 : 02] And the people see this, this connection between what the Lord has spoken to Samuel, what Samuel has spoken to Eli, and what will actually happen to Eli's household. All of it goes together, thus affirming Samuel being established as a prophet.

So then, what about making decisions? hearing God's word is crucial for making the right decision. And this will become more and more apparent as you read through the book of 1 Samuel. But the Christian who convinces themselves that they don't need to hear or know all of God's word to make decisions will often be the type of person who makes wrong decisions.

It's that simple. In other words, the limit of your knowledge, of biblical knowledge and understanding, is the limit of your biblical decision making.

And this isn't a case of, well, let's start a biblical university so that we can become educated as possible. But God has given us this word. We're all to receive this word wholly, completely, without anything being held back.

[27 : 20] And the less we know, the less biblical decisions that we're able to make, we're not able to live completely biblically unless we receive the full biblical revelation.

So though it's very tempting to say, I don't need to know that in order to make a decision about what job I should take or who I should marry or any of these things. No, you really do. You really do need to know that because those who don't present themselves before the word of the Lord, hearing it, and then following it, will often make bad decisions.

And the trouble with bad decisions is they always have consequences. Remember, what a person sows, they will also reap. So nothing happens all of a sudden.

Everything takes time. Time and truth go hand in hand. And so when people are honest, genuinely honest, you often hear them say, well, if I only knew that before, then I would have chosen differently or done something differently.

So we've all had the experience of having knowledge too late and making the decision beforehand and then living with the consequence of the decision not based on faulty knowledge or no knowledge rather than what we should know.

[28 : 39] We've all been there. And so it's absolutely crucial for God's people to have a prophet who will speak God's word to the word of God to the people of God because they are going to have to be a people who will make decisions most importantly about who will be their king and what do they actually want that's coming up.

So we can see this building about how important it is going to be for the people of God to choose the right person to be king. So now we understand the reason for the prophet.

It's not just so that he can speak God's word and so that people can be guided but so that they can make the right decisions because when you don't make the right decisions you make the wrong decisions.

So people need to hear God's word. Now, as we come to the exhortation I want you to consider this.

Those who do not believe that they need to hear all of God's word to make decisions and that they can somehow make decisions without being guided by God's word that sounds more like doing what is right in your own eyes.

[29 : 55] And that's the situation you're in. So you may rally against what I have just said that you need God's word to live but those who say well I don't need to know that in order to make this type of decision where I'll work who I'll marry what I'll do how I'll bring up children how I'll be like as a husband I don't then the only thing that you're left with is doing what is right in your own eyes because if you're not guided by God's word then you're guided by yourself.

You are doing what is right yourself. And so Samuel is having to speak the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth to a generation of people to Eli and to his household who have done what is right in their own eyes.

And Samuel was afraid to speak this word. And Eli says to him in verse 17 may God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me that he has told you.

In other words Eli has enough sense to understand the danger for Samuel to not speak the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

But what I want us to recognize here what I want us to learn here is that it is never easy to speak God's word.

[31 : 32] Samuel was afraid to speak God's word to Eli. It is never easy to speak God's word. Samuel had to live with an eternal internal conflict and a pressure that come with having received the word that he had and then having to speak it to someone he loved.

Eli even calls Samuel his son. So close is the relationship. So on one level you can understand why Samuel is afraid to speak these words to Eli. especially when Eli considers Samuel to be a son. And so Samuel when he receives these words receives conflict.

He receives pressure. He receives the fear of being afraid to speak these words because it is never easy to speak God's word.

It is never easy to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Especially when you're speaking it to people that you're in relationship with.

[32 : 47] And this is what we're really learning towards the end of this letter or this chapter 3 here. His relationship with Eli brings this internal conflict and this pressure and being afraid of having to say what he needs to say.

Eli knows that he must say it in order for him to be a prophet. He must speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And also because the Lord has given him this word, there is a double fear or you're afraid on two levels, that you're afraid of saying it because of the relationship with Eli and you're afraid of not saying it because it was the Lord who told you to.

So you see the pressure that Samuel is under, the internal conflict that he has in speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

And so as we listen to the word of God each week from God's word, understand as you listen to Samuel just how difficult it is for him to speak these words.

Not because they're not true, but because there is a dimension on the ground of relationship that brings a certain type of pressure with it.

[34 : 13] But what's at stake? But what's at stake is this, if Samuel doesn't speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth, then the people of God will continue to do what is right in their own eyes.

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

Amen. Amen. Well, may the Lord bless you and may the Lord keep you both now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.