

4. Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears

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It is very important that we have to learn how to listen well. Most of us love to talk, especially preachers. We'd rather talk than listen. It is the same way in spiritual area. We need to learn to listen to God's voice and recognize it and follow it.

A. THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

1 Sam 3:1 Then the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.

V1 "The boy Samuel ministered to the Lord." Notice that Samuel ministered "TO" the Lord, not necessarily "FOR" the Lord. When we minister "TO" the Lord, it means personal and intimate relationship with Him. It is the highest calling to all of us. You don't have to be a preacher or pastor to minister "TO" the Lord. As a matter of fact, you can do this every day, anywhere, in any circumstance. By loving Him, worshipping Him and obeying His Word, we can minister "TO" the Lord.

V1b is a sad verse. Because people were not willing to listen to God, He was not forcing Himself to speak to His people. How about us? Are we listening to Him? If we hear His voice, do we follow what He tells us?

In this room, it is filled with many different sound other than my voice. There are jazz music, latino music, country music or talk shows or football games from somewhere else. But we cannot hear them. Why? Because we cannot tune into their frequencies. We need that special way to catch those sounds. Just like that we need to have a way to hear God's voice. That is what we are going to learn this morning.

1 Sam 3:2-4 And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!"

As a figure of speech, "before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord" simply means "before dawn."

1 Sam 3:5-8 So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down. Then the Lord called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.)

By now Samuel is thinking Eli is pulling a fast one on him.

1 Sam 3:8 And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. Then he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy.

1 Sam 3:9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

It is important for those who are mature in the Lord to explain to younger Christians how to listen to God's voice.

Did you notice what Eli said to Samuel, *“Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.”*? That is the right priority. God speaks, we listen. We are not supposed to tell Him what to do. He is the One who tells us how to live and what to do. Because we are made for His pleasure, not Him for our pleasure.

Eli tells Samuel to make himself available for God to speak - *Go, lie down.*
He tells Samuel to not be presumptuous about God speaking - *if He calls you.*
He tells Samuel to respond to the word of God - *Speak, Lord.*
And he tells Samuel to humble himself before God and His word - *Your servant hears.*

1 Sam 3:10 Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”
“Now the Lord came and stood” Who would that be? It is Jesus. In the OT, for time to time, we find God made Himself visible to human and conversed with them. In a fancy way to say this is “theophany,” a visible appearance of God, as in Gen. 12:7

1 Sam 3:11-12 Then the Lord said to Samuel: “Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.

Remember, God’s warning was given to Eli by the unnamed man of God who visited him a while ago? When speaking to us, God almost always confirms His word again and again. It is generally wrong to do something dramatic in response to a single “inner voice” from the Lord. If God is speaking, He will confirm, and often in a variety of ways.

1 Sam 3:13 For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.

Eli knew his sons’ vile behaviors before the Lord, yet he didn’t stop them from continuing. That sin is worse than not knowing what is going on. We find Phinehas, a Levites saw an Israelite soldier having sex with a Midianite woman when they were told not to do such a thing by God, Phinehas picked up a javelin and killed both of them with one thrust. God said, *“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.”*

If Eli listen to God’s warning and turned from his sin and dealt with his evil sons, do you think that God would forgive Eli? Thousands times YES! Our God is God of the second chance and third chance and many chances. His mercy renews every morning and His compassion fail not, for great is His faithfulness.

1 Sam 3:14 And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”

Eli and his sons were guilty of presumptuous sin that mentioned in Numbers 15:30 & 31.

Numbers 15:30-31 But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.”

The Hebrew phrase translated “presumptuously” means “with a high hand,” with open disdain for the will and work of God. This is a sin that is done, as it were, while looking God in the eye and shaking one’s fist at Him.

B. THE DUTY OF A PROPHET

1 Sam 3:15 So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision.

I don’t believe that this young Samuel had any wink for the rest of the night.

1 Sam 3:16-18 Then Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son!” And he answered, “Here I am.” And he said, “What is the word that the Lord spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you.” Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, “It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him.”

How hard it is to bring a message of judgment! There may be a few, with hard hearts (like Jonah) who are happy to announce God’s judgment, but most find it difficult. Yet, it is always the responsibility of God’s messenger to bring everything God says, not just the “easy” words.

Even with all his failures as a father, Eli remained faithful to God in this matter. The second warning was issued by God to Eli through young Samuel. Eli wanted to know the word from the Lord, but he didn’t do a thing about it again. The Lord helps us not be like Eli. I hope and pray that all of us to hear from God and obey what the Lord says, so that we may please Him, not be upset with Him.

1 Sam 3:19-21 So 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 had been established as a prophet of the Lord. Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

1) Does God still speaks to people?

Yes, God still speaks. If you choose to listen to Him, you can listen to Him. The issue is not if He still speaks or not. The issue is “Are we tuned to hear Him?” Because Samuel tuned to God, he could hear God. Why? Because he learned to love God and ministered to God at his young age.

2) Can we start it even though we are much older than Samuel’s young age?

Yes, if we are willing to hear God’s voice, God is willing to speak to us personally and individually.

3) Why is that Eli couldn’t hear God?

Because God knew that Eli chose to ignore God’s voice like his sons. God will not talk to those who choose to ignore Him. How about us? Are we ready to hear from Him? Most of all, are we willing to hear Him and obey Him?

C. APPLICATIONS

Some people wait for God to speak in a audible voice. Not anymore. You don’t see that in any of biblical background from the NT other than Jesus. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit speaks to us in many different ways.

1) Let's learn how to recognize His voice.

God loves to talk to us as a loving father would love to speak to his children.

2) We cannot always rely on our conscience as His voice.

Most people believe God speaks to them by an "inner voice"; by the thoughts and feelings which may come into our hearts and our heads, which one believes are prompted by God. But this hearing from God is an uncertain business. God is not the only source of thoughts and feelings coming into our hearts and heads. Thoughts or feelings (good or bad) can come from ourselves, or they can also come from satan. Peter, in Matthew 16:13-23, was at one moment speaking from God, and at the next moment speaking directly from the devil.

Besides, our conscience can be seared by our wicked and sinful behaviors to justify our actions.

3) God often uses godly people to speak to us with godly counsels.

Prov 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

4) God's Word is always a great way to hear His voice for our lives. Because He will not go against His own Word.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Mt 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

Ps 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

5) When we hear His voice, let's not harden our hearts. But let's follow Him.

If we don't, we are going to be in the shoes as Eli in v13.

If you can't hear His voice, you might have to examine your salvation. Ask yourself if you surrender your life to Christ who is God eternal. If you have not, it is not surprising that you can't hear His voice.

John 10:26-27 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.