

4. Listening ears and unrepentant heart

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Tonight we will see only two humans in this chapter:

A young child away from his own parent and comfort of his home, yet he was about to take the office of prophet of God as he grows up. The people around him started to notice that indeed this child will be the prophet of the Lord, but the child, first, had to learn how to hear from the Lord.

An aged man with the prestige, being the high priest of Israel. There was no one higher than him in the land. The people thought that he had the ears and the heart of God because of his position. But he was far from both.

A. MINISTERING TO THE LORD

1 Samuel 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. V1a says, "The boy Samuel ministered to the Lord." The preposition is not "for," rather "to." What's the difference?

When we minister "TO" the Lord, it means a personal and intimate relationship with Him. It is the highest calling for 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, worshiping 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 sounds other than my voice. There is jazz music, Latino music, country music, talk shows, or football games from somewhere else, Sahuarita Police Department and Pima County Sheriff's Department dispatcher's voice and officers' voices. 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.

B. LISTENING TO THE LORD

1 Samuel 3:2-9 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, 3 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, 4 that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" 5 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. 6 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." 7 (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.) 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. 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.

What is your interpretation for this?

In v3 it says, *"Before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord."* What time would it be? *"Before dawn."*

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 sequence. God speaks, and 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 created 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.*

Almighty God still speaks to us today. Try that next time when you come to church. A few seconds before the sermon begins, pray that prayer. You will be amazed how much more you can hear.

C. THE LORD SPEAKING, HIS SERVANT LISTENING

1 Samuel 3:10-15 Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears." 11 Then the Lord said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 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. 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." 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.

What is your interpretation?

In taking Eli's advice, Samuel begins a lifelong career of relaying God's messages to others as a prophet of God.

In v10, it says, *"Now the Lord came and stood."* Who would that be? It is Jesus. In the OT, from time to time, we find God made Himself visible to human and conversed with them. In a fancy way to say this is *"Christophany,"* a visible appearance of God, as in Genesis 12:7.

This time God spoke the boy's name twice. Not only that, the Lord came and stood near Samuel as He spoke to him. This experience wasn't a dream or a vision, but a manifestation of the presence of the Lord.

Because Samuel was obedient to God and to Eli, he heard the message from the Lord and learned what God planned to do. This was a weighty message to give to a young boy, but in so doing, certainly God was rebuking the spiritual lethargy of

the adults, because to which of them could God give this message? When God can't find an obedient adult, He sometimes calls a child.

When we're going off course, the heavenly Father will sometimes speak through other believers to reach us. Therefore, it is vital to maintain a close network of men and women who love and seek Jesus in their lives. Thank the Lord for the Christ-centered people in your life, and pray for wisdom in discerning their counsel.

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. And what the Lord speaks to our hearts NEVER contradicts His Word.

Samuel didn't know the message that the unknown prophet had delivered to Eli, but the message God gave him confirmed it. The Lord would judge the house of Eli because Eli's two sons "made themselves vile" and Eli did nothing to restrain them. Though Eli and his sons were priests, they could offer no sacrifice that would atone for their sins. Their sins were deliberate and defiant, and for such sins no sacrifice could be offered. Not only had they defiled themselves, but they had also defiled the priesthood. The Lord had been longsuffering toward the house of Eli, but they hadn't repented and turned from their sins; now it was too late.

God is not looking for ability as much as He is looking for availability. God is not looking for strong people. He is looking for weak people through whom He can be strong. That means every person is qualified to be used by God. That means God can use any one of us.

2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."

Are you available to be used by God? If not, why don't you let the Lord know that you would like Him to call upon you? He may call upon you before the night is over.

D. UNREPENTANT HEART

1 Samuel 3:16-18 Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!" And he answered, "Here I am." 17 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." 18 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."

Please give me your interpretation here.

Was the response of Eli to the message active submission or passive resignation to something that couldn't be changed? I vote for resignation, the same attitude that Hezekiah displayed when Isaiah told him his foolish actions would one day bring ruin to the kingdom of Judah in Isaiah 39.

Eli was an old man who had not been a good father or a faithful priest, and he had already been warned that judgment was coming. His two sons would perish in one day and his family would lose the privilege of the priesthood, so what was there to

live for? God had chosen Samuel to be a judge, a priest, and a prophet, so the light of truth would keep burning in Israel. All the old man could do was to wait for the sword to fall. But he could do what was right in the sight of the Lord from that moment to please the Lord by removing his two wicked sons. However, he didn't. That was another active disobedience in omission by Eli.

Disintegrating families rationalize wrong behavior, and thereby become part of the problem. Eli participated in his sons' behavior. We know this because Eli got fat on the food his boys had stolen from the altar. That sin is worse than not knowing what is going on. We find a different Phinehas, in Numbers 25, a Levite 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.

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

E. A PROPHET IN TRAINING

1 Samuel 3:19-21 So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. 21 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 speak 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 into Him?" Because Samuel tuned into God, he could hear God. Why? Because he learned to love God and ministered to Him at his young age.

2) Can we start to hear from Him 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 through His Word.

3) Why is that Eli couldn't hear God?

Because God knew that Eli chose to ignore God's voice like his sons. God shall not speak 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?

F. APPLICATIONS

Some people wait for God to speak in an audible voice. Not anymore. You don't see that in any of biblical background of the NT other than Jesus and His apostles. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit speaks to us through His Word in many different ways.

1) Let's learn to recognize His voice.

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 for God, and at the next moment speaking directly for the devil.

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

3) When we hear His voice, let's not harden our hearts, not like the unrepentant heart of Eli. But let's obey Him.