

## **“Here I Am, Lord”**

**I Samuel 3:1-21**

**By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)**

When I began this series on 1 Samuel I knew that I would have to preach a message on this very well known passage of the calling of Samuel. Now, Samuel has been born and somewhere between the age of three and four, at least in Hebrew culture, at the time of festival, Hannah and Elkanah take him to the temple in Shiloh, and there she leaves him. And last week, we were watching how Hannah makes this journey. Once a year, she makes for him this garment, and we were introduced to the context in which Hannah has now left her son, Samuel — a context of sin and rebellion and debauchery — and we were told a little about Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phineas. And an unknown prophet comes to Shiloh and pronounces a word of judgment upon Eli's house: in particular, his two sons, Hophni and Phineas, will die in one day. Well, the death of Eli himself and the death of his two sons will come in the next couple of weeks, but tonight we take up the story in chapter three.

Samuel is now a young man. We don't know precisely what that means, and perhaps he's more than just a little boy and he may well be into his teens, and he may be in our eyes a young man — meaning perhaps somebody of college age, even. And you notice in the opening verse of chapter 3, he's ministering unto the Lord under Eli.

Well, before we read this wonderful, well-known passage, let's look to God in prayer.

*Father, we want to thank You again tonight for the Bible, for the holy word of God. We want to thank You that we have the Bible in our own language — not just in any language, but in a language that's familiar to us in a contemporary translation, so that we can read it and understand it and make sense of it. We thank You that we have not just a part of the Bible; we can't imagine what it would be like simply to have one Gospel or a couple of letters of Paul, because we have the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We thank You because some of us have many, many copies of it in our homes, in our cars, in our places of work, on our telephones and other devices. Father, we thank You that we are surrounded by the Scriptures.*

*Tonight as we read this passage, we ask that You would teach us the value of*

*the words that You have given to us. Now bless this word as we read it together. Come, Holy Spirit; help us to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, and this for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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.

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; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

And the Lord called again, 'Samuel!' and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 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.

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 it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning 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." 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.

Amen. And may God add His blessing to the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

Now we're told in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul that the Church is built on the foundation of prophets and apostles. Samuel is the first great prophet. True, Abraham is called a prophet in Genesis 20, and Aaron is also referred to as a prophet. But in the great sense, for someone who looks like a prophet and sounds really like a prophet, you have to go to Samuel. Samuel is, above everything else, someone who receives God's word and passes it on, and passes it on just as God had given it to him. That's the main function of a prophet. He's a mouthpiece of God. He's a plenipotentiary of God, someone who speaks on behalf of the living God.

And there are two things about the life of Samuel as we'll be looking at it over the next two weeks — two things that emerge about Samuel. One is his commitment to the word, and the other is his commitment to prayer. And over the next couple of weeks, those are the two high spots about Samuel that I want us to be thinking about: his commitment to the word and his commitment to prayer.

Now as we look at this particular chapter tonight, I want to ask four questions.

## **I. Why was Samuel's ministry necessary?**

First of all, why was Samuel's ministry necessary? And the author of I Samuel tells us in the first verse:

“The young man Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare.”

If you're reading the old King James Bible, as I think some of you still are, the term that you have is *precious*, which might convey to you something entirely different, but precious in the sense of being rare. There wasn't much of God's word in those days.

Well, what days? These are the days after the Judges, and every Sunday School child knows how to summarize the book of Judges, because “In the time of the judges, everybody did that which was right in their own eyes.” That's the phrase that repeats itself throughout the book of Judges. It's a time of great sin. It's a time of low spirituality. It's a time when people are pleasing themselves. It's a

time of spiritual neglect. God has withdrawn Himself from His people for a season. There are no great preachers, there are no great prophets; and when God is calling Samuel, He's calling Samuel into a context in which God hasn't spoken. God hasn't been speaking to His people.

Several centuries later, just before the Assyrian invasion, the Prophet Amos will say that "There is a famine of hearing the word of God." There's a famine of hearing the word of God. The seventy-fourth Psalm speaks of a situation where there is no longer any prophet. What do you think the world would do tomorrow if the headline on CNN [and I've already prejudiced you!]...what do you think, if the headline on CNN were to say, "A dramatic downfall in preachers in the land"? You know, somebody's done a survey of young people, or any age really, of being called into the ministry, and it's down. Down to unprecedented proportions...that there was a famine of preaching, of ministering, of explaining the word of God.

Now, that can arise for one of two reasons. One is the lack of preachers. God didn't call many prophets in this time. Samuel is one of them. He's one of the first ones, one of the great prophets, but he's rare.

You know, one of the great blessings that I have, and Ligon, too, is to teach at the seminary. [I say I need to keep reminding you it's my day job!] And I never get over how, every fall, 25, 35, 45 students, most of them in their twenties, some of them a little older...and they come. I have no idea where they come from. They come from all over Mississippi and Louisiana and Alabama, and from places even like Alaska, and they come to little old Jackson, Mississippi, to RTS to train. It never ceases to amaze me, the bounty and graciousness of God; that God is raising up a battalion of preachers.

I was having a conversation. I was with somebody of my age [and my children are here tonight, so I'm old!] and we were having this conversation about what a thrill it is to know that God is taking care of His church...that if I died tomorrow, God has already raised up a battalion of preachers. Now, my exhortation to you is you need to pray for these men. You need to pray for these preachers. These are tough days. I uttered it this week to the senior minister: I wouldn't want to be 25 again. I wouldn't want to go into today's church starting all over again with all of the battles and all of the difficulties and all of the worldviews that are in contention. Pray for these young men, these young prophets, these young expounders and preachers of God's word. What a bounty! We're not living in Samuel's day. We could be there.

But you know, there's another way a famine can arise. Not by a shortage of preachers, but by selective deafness...selective deafness. There's plenty of the word of God, it's just that you don't hear it.

There was a great early Puritan preacher by the name of John Rogers, in the

sixteenth century. He studied at Cambridge University. He was a friend of William Tyndale. He refused to acknowledge the validity of the Roman Catholic Church, and especially the doctrine of the real presence in the sacraments, for which under Queen Mary he was burnt at the stake. He was married, and he had eleven children. There's a tender description in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* of John Rogers bidding farewell to all eleven of his children, and then his wife. And then he mounts the stairs and is burnt at Smithfield Market in London. In one of his sermons, John Rogers, as he was reading the Scriptures, stopped, and pretending to be God said to the people (who apparently weren't listening) that God was angry with them. And he lifted the Bible and began to walk out of the building. And then (putting himself in his own person) he falls upon his knees and begins to implore God not to take the Scriptures away from the people, but to return the Bible. And then (in the voice of God) relents and says, "I'll give the Scriptures back to you for a little while longer."

Now, my friends, the word of God was rare in Samuel's day, but it's not rare in our day. But it can become rare by selective deafness on our part. Are you hearing the word of God?

## **II. How did Samuel's ministry begin?**

Now, the second question I want to ask is this: How did Samuel's ministry begin? How did Samuel's ministry begin? God calls him. He's lying down in the temple at night. In verse 3, "The lamp of God had not yet gone out." That probably means that it was early morning. It was nighttime; there was a lamp that had been kept aflame in the temple all night long, and it was part of his duty to make sure it didn't go out. But there may be a play on words here by the writer, because these are dark days. These are the days after the judges, and the writer is saying in another sense the lamp of God hadn't *yet* gone out.

And Samuel hears a voice. It is the voice of God, and God calls him by name. What a thrill it is to know that God knows our name! It's a little thing...it's a trivial thing, perhaps...but that God knows your name! He knows you personally. He knows all about you. And He calls Samuel by name. And this happens four times. The first three times, of course, you remember Samuel runs in to Eli. Eli's aged a bit. He can't see so well now, and he's lying down in his own room. And each time he hears this voice that says, "Samuel!" Samuel runs in to Eli and says, 'Here I am. You called?' But it wasn't Eli who was calling. Isn't it interesting to note, by the way, that Eli...and we've been critical of Eli in chapter 2, and especially of his ungodly sons, and especially of his demeanor with his sons, but you have to acknowledge here that something about Eli...Eli realizes that this is God speaking to Samuel. And later on we'll see Eli saying to Samuel, 'Don't hold anything back, and may the Lord do so to you and more also if you hold anything of what God has said to you...and hold it back.' God is calling Samuel, and Samuel utters those wonderful words: 'Speak, Lord. Here I am. Speak Lord. I'm

ready to do whatever You want me to do. I'm ready to say whatever You want me to say. I'm ready to go wherever You want me to go.'

Is it possible to say "No" to God? Is it possible to hear the voice of God calling you by name and to say "No"?

Well, of course it is. Jonah did. God told Jonah to go to the Ninevites, and Jonah didn't like Ninevites. Jonah didn't think that the Ninevites deserved to hear the message of God's grace. Jonah went in exactly the opposite direction to the direction that God had asked him to go.

My friend, is God speaking to you? Oh, not an audible voice in the middle of the night; God doesn't speak to us that way any more since the closing of the canon of Scripture. But He may speak to you through the Scriptures, and He may speak to you through providence. Maybe in recent days you have been aware of His voice — His voice of providence, His voice as the Scriptures are read and expounded — and they're saying something to you.

I happen to know there are two or three prospective seminary students in the building tonight. What a word to you, that God is calling you...calling you to ministry, calling you to a lifetime of service, calling you to deny yourself, to give yourself entirely to His cause and His work.

But some of you are being called to do other things...maybe to the mission field. Maybe you've been exercised about it. You read these prayer lists. As you see them coming in here, you are saying to yourself, "Maybe this is something that I should be doing." You've sought Him in prayer, you've sought good counsel, you've sought guidance. And it might as well be a direct voice from God, such is the force of it in your heart and in your life. Will you go? Will you lay your heart on the altar of God and say with Samuel, 'Speak, Lord. Your servant hears. I'm listening. Tell me what to do. Tell me where to go. You say jump, and I will say, "How far?" Speak, Lord.'

"Today," Scripture says, "if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

### **III. What was the content of Samuel's ministry?**

A third question: What was the content of Samuel's ministry? Well, it was devastating. You know, when God calls you to ministry it's a wonderful thing, whether it's a missionary or a preacher of the gospel or whatever it is. But Samuel was given this task: it was a word of judgment on his surrogate family. Eli is the man who had raised him. He's been in this temple in Shiloh since he was a little boy. A word of judgment, in verse 12, on Eli's house; and then, in verse 13, the reason for that judgment (because his sons were blaspheming God and he did not restrain them); and then, in verse 14, the word that says that Eli and his

house are beyond salvation...that they are beyond atonement...that they're beyond forgiveness.

You know, you have to be faithful to obey a call like that. You've got this tender moment, you notice that he spends the night there and doesn't move until daybreak. [Verse 15: "Samuel lay until morning."] Little wonder. You don't go rushing in to Eli and say, "Do you want to know what God says?" And only when Eli pronounces that word of imprecation, 'Don't hold anything back, tell me everything that God has said,' does Samuel speak the word just as God had given it...in this case, a harsh word, a word of judgment.

John MacArthur found the following advertisement about churches. He was doing some research and this is what he found. These are advertisements about churches:

"There is no fire and brimstone here, just practical, witty messages."

Here is church No. 2:

"Services at [and then there's the name of a church] have an informal feeling. You won't hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners. The goal is to make them feel welcome, not to drive them away."

Church No. 3:

"As with all clergymen, this pastor's answer is God, but he slips Him in at the end, and even then doesn't get heavy. No ranting, no raving, no fire, no brimstone. He doesn't even use the "H" word. Call it "Gospel Lite — It has the same salvation as old time religion, but with a third less guilt."

Church No. 4:

"The sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short. You won't hear a lot of preaching about sin and damnation and hellfire here. Preaching here doesn't sound like preaching. It's sophisticated, urbane, and friendly talk. It breaks all the stereotypes."

Church No. 5:

"The pastor is preaching a very upbeat message. It's a salvationist message, but the idea is not so much being saved from the fires of hell; rather, it's being saved from meaninglessness and aimlessness in this life. It's more of a soft-sell."

We need preachers who preach the whole counsel of God. We need preachers like Samuel, who is given a word of judgment and delivers that word without fear or favor of men. We need a generation of preachers who are not man-pleasers,

but God-pleasers who are true to His word in every jot and every tittle.

#### **IV. What encouragement did Samuel receive?**

My fourth question is this: What encouragement did Samuel receive? And you see there in verses 19 and 20, "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him...." Isn't that a beautiful phrase? He grew, and as he grew, the Lord was with him. Young people, oh, may you grow and may you grow and the Lord be at your side every step of the way.

And then, "...and [God] 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."

God blessed him. God blessed him. God blessed him in his faithfulness. And, oh, brothers and sisters tonight, may it always be said of this church and this pulpit and all the ministry that takes place in it, in every room and building of First Presbyterian Church and beyond, that it will be a Samuel-like ministry: a ministry that receives the word of God and delivers the word of God...a faithful ministry.

#### **Application.**

But some of you are not being called to be ministers, and some of you are not being called to be missionaries in the old fashioned sense of being sent somewhere overseas and far away. You're being asked instead to be obedient in the place where God has put you.

You know, there's a story of Henry III of Bavaria in the eleventh century. Henry III was a very devout and very deeply religious man, and at one point in his life decided that he would become a monk and that he would go to a monastery and spend the rest of his life in a monastery. And he came to the Father of the monastery and told him that he had decided to be obedient to everything that God had told him to do, and that he was going to devote his entire life to the monastery. And the Father said, "That will be hard for you as a king, to be obedient to everything that is told you." And the king insisted that's what he had decided to do. And the Father said to him, "Then I charge you to go back and be the kind of king that you ought to be." You know, when Henry III died it was said of him that he learned to be a king by obedience. He learned to be a king by obedience....

God may be saying to you as a mother, as a father, as an accountant, as a lawyer, as a doctor, as a plumber, as a truck driver...God may be saying to you [and He calls you now, by name]...and will you say — yes? Will you say with Samuel, 'Speak, Lord. Your servant hears. I'm ready to do whatever You want



me to do. I will do it for Your glory. I will do it for Your praise.' Oh, that that obedience to our God might be in all of our hearts tonight.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank You for the Scriptures once again. Thank You for giving to us this lavish provision. Help us to treasure it. Help us to love Your word and want and desire to live by Your word every day. Speak, Lord; Your servant hears. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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