

1 SAMUEL 2:12-36

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter and the next one we have a number of contrasts between the ungodly family of Eli and the godly family of Elkanah and Hannah. We will see the abuse of the things of God from Eli's family and the faithful ministering of the things of God by Samuel's family.

1. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LEADERS DO NOT KNOW THE LORD (vs. 12-18 & 22-26)?

While Samuel was still young; a scandal rocked the community of Shiloh. The scandal concerned the conduct of Eli's sons. We are told that these sons were wicked men and they had no regard for the Lord even though they were operating as priests at Shiloh (v 12).

They were supposed to be representing the people before God but they were thugs and bullies and were only interested in themselves and profiting from their position rather than obeying and faithfully serving the Lord (v 12). But what in particular was the scandal that was taking place? The scandal was the fact that these priests had no regard for the Lord that phrase literally reads "they did not know the Lord."

In other words they are suppose to be serving God and doing his work but they did not know him they had no experience of him for themselves, it was no more than a job. Therefore because they did not know the Lord they had a total disregard for the offerings that were being made at Shiloh. They simply have introduced ways of grabbing more for themselves.

Their service was selfish, it was all about them and what they could get out of their job, and it never crossed their mind to consider what God had said about the process or procedure for presenting these offerings. Worship has become a farce because of these corrupt priests.

Here we have the worshipper cooking his portion of a peace offering (vs. 13-15) for the post sacrificial meal that he and his family were going to enjoy. Then the corrupt priest comes along with his three-pronged barbecue fork and plunges it into the worshipper's pot and whatever the fork brings up he takes for himself.

Now there was no need for this action for according to God's word the priests were already allotted the breast and right leg (Leviticus 7:28-36) but the priests were not content with what God said they could have; they wanted more. However they were not content with that for these priests would demand uncooked cuts of meat from the worshipper (v 15) and even when the worshipper reminded the priests of the need to show proper reverence to the Lord by first burning the fat on the altar the priests would threaten to take the meat by force; if they did not respond to their requests (v 16). In all their actions these crooked priests were treating the Lord with contempt they were completely ignoring his regulations for the way offerings should be presented and handled (v 17).

Sadly in the modern church and I use the word church very loosely when you get ministers who do not know the Lord then you will always have abuses in the church. The Roman Catholic Church for example has undergone a number of scandals over recent years because of priests who abused their position and as a result they sexually abused children.

They misused their office and their position for their own selfish gratification and this is sadly what happens when people do not know the Lord, they have no regard for him or the office they hold. But the Protestant church has also had its own scandals over the years with men who have abused their position for their own selfish ends.

Even the Evangelical arm of the Protestant church has had to endure scandals from men who have been involved in sexual sin and on most occasions those sins occur because of the abuse of their position of trust within the church.

It seems to me from what I know of one or two scandals, Ministers who fall into sin are usually men who at the time of their sin were not walking consistently with the Lord even though they may well have experienced God's grace in salvation. That is why we ought to pray for Pastors and Ministers that God will help them to walk consistently before the Lord and that they will be people who take God's word seriously.

It is so easy for such men to simply go through the motions and fulfil their responsibilities in the church yet to do so without walking consistently with God or without taking his word seriously. That is why sending your Pastor on conferences etc is good for it helps him to have a spiritual health check.

Now these scandals happened at Shiloh because Eli's sons did not take God's word seriously, they preferred to please their own sinful desires rather than seeking to please the Lord and obey his word. When any church puts God's word aside for convenience sake or for pragmatic reasons then it needs to beware because sin is lurking and it may not be long before a scandal hits that particular church.

You see what is true of Pastors and Ministers is true of every Christian, we are all prone to sin and therefore we first of all must know the Lord and seek to daily walk consistently with him and we must all seek to take God at his word rather than seeking to please oneself otherwise sin and scandal will not be far away.

Now the sins of Eli's sons were well known even Eli knew about them and in his old age he tried to do something about the situation (v 22-23). Eli's sons seemed to have had a free rein for they simply used Shiloh as a place for them to satisfy their sexual desires and it seems that poor Eli was powerless to stop such abuses (v 22).

It seems that Eli had spoilt his children allowing them to have their own way and children are good at exploiting weak parenting and so for years Eli was powerless to do anything about it or it seems he was unwilling to do anything about it. However in his old age perhaps thinking he had nothing to lose and he would soon have to meet his Maker he decides to rebuke his sons (vs. 24-25).

But his rebuke did not go far enough for as High Priest he had the power to remove his sons from their positions but he failed to do so perhaps he was simply too afraid of them by this stage.

It seems that Eli is trying to smooth his own conscience perhaps he is being forced to act by those who were godly and had complained to him about the actions of his sons, whatever his motivation was; he did not put a stop to the practices but contented himself with a well known proverb (v 25).

What he was saying was that in the case of wrong between man and man; God as judge and mediator may settle the dispute for them; but when man sins against God what human power can mediate on his behalf? The answer is no one; for no one could ever mediate between sinners and a holy and righteous God. This is why God had to send Jesus into our world He is the only one who could mediator and He did that by becoming like us yet He was without sin.

He took on human flesh lived upon this earth and then died and rose again; so that sinners could be reconciled with God through the work of Jesus Christ. That is the only hope for sinners to be forgiven; only Jesus is able to mediate between sinners and God because He alone died in the place of sinners and He alone is able to plead the merit of his work on behalf of sinners.

Therefore if you know you are a sinner and want to be reconciled with God then you must ask him to show you mercy on the basis of what Christ has done on your behalf. If you do that then God will accept Jesus work on that cross and it will be credited to your spiritual account. That is why you must trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation there is no salvation outside of him.

Unfortunately Eli's reprimand had no effect upon his sons it did not touch or bother their consciences. His rebuke was necessary for they needed to be told about their sin before God's judgement fell upon them and God's judgement would fall because their sin had simply gone too far; it had reached its goal and God had decided to act (v 25). The truth is that sin always has its own consequences and its own punishment.

When sin is persistently followed and rebukes unheeded then one's heart becomes hard and one's conscience is deadened and the result is that the sinner goes further and further into sin so that repentance is impossible because God has decided to bring judgement upon such a sinner. The chance to be saved has gone, there is no reconciliation, and God's patience has run out, sin has reached its fulfilment punishment must come.

Such sinners have no one to blame but themselves, they chose to disobey God and follow sin they chose to ignore God's warning and rebukes. They ignored their conscience and therefore like Eli's sons they have to pay the price for their sin (vs. 27-36).

Now it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God which is why if your conscience is bothering you tonight and if you sense God's rebuke in your heart then I urge you to repent now and receive God's gift of salvation through his Son who died and rose again in order to bring sinners to God.

Do not wait another moment; repent now and turn to God because if you continue in your sin then one day your sin will reach its goal and hell will come upon you. So please listen and repent for now is the day of salvation not tomorrow. Therefore turn to him now.

2. WHAT IS GOD DOING WHEN RELIGION IS IN A MESS (vs. 18-21 & 26-36)?

It appears that sin is rampant and reigning and that God is almost powerless to stop the tide of evil. But we see what God is doing when his work is in a mess; when ungodliness is apparently reigning and when sinners sin wilfully. In the midst of this moral and religious mess God is at work quietly in the background accomplishing his purposes. This is seen in two areas:

a) God Is At Work In The Life Of Samuel And His Family (vs. 11, 18-21 & 26) – We are told that Samuel who is only a boy is serving the Lord at Shiloh (v 11). Although all that is going on at Shiloh is unsavoury to say the least, there is a little godly boy who loves God and is seeking to faithfully serve him.

That contrast is brought out beautifully in verses 17-18, the sins of Eli's sons were very great in the Lord's sight (v 17) **But** Samuel was ministering before the Lord (v 18). What a contrast this is, some are sinning but Samuel is serving. While the time is running out for Eli's sons, Samuel is continuing to grow in stature and in favour with the Lord and with men (v 26). You see while all this sin is going on God is already at work preparing a new godly leadership for his people.

This is all happening quietly and unnoticed by most except Samuel's family of course, but soon Eli's Son's time will run out and God's preparation of Samuel will be complete and God will raise him to a position of leadership within the nation. He will be God's judge and prophet in ungodly times.

For the people living under the leadership of Eli's sons it must have seemed that there was no end to the nightmare, but God is quietly at work getting ready for the next phase of history preparing Samuel to be his new leader over his distraught people.

But Samuel is not the only one that God is working in for He chooses to bless Elkanah and Hannah with five more children, children that were not asked for in the way Samuel was asked for; but children that expressed God's blessing upon this couple. But you see God is blessing the godly and is quietly at work encouraging his true people in the midst of ungodly days. Now this is a lesson that we must remind ourselves of.

God is at work quietly accomplishing his purposes and that work involves blessing his people and even preparing them for better days. We live in a day when sin is rampant when evil is being legalised by our Government and when sin is encouraged. When we look at the state of the church at large there is not that much there to encourage us. It is liberal and worldly with everyone doing what seems right in his or her own eyes. Even the Evangelical cause is often small, weak and lacking leadership.

But we must remember that God is at work in such days preparing his people maybe even preparing his people for better days. Who knows but there may in our time be a young boy unknown to us but like Samuel is being prepared for future leadership in his church, a boy who is faithfully seeking to serve his God in his own church at this moment of time.

Perhaps there is yet to be a child conceived a child that God intends to use greatly, another Wesley or Whitfield or Newton whom God will use to turn this nation back to him. We must encourage ourselves that God is often at work quietly, there is often no great publicity or fuss about God's work in this world, it often goes on unseen by many but understood by the few. Likewise God is quietly at work blessing his people in various ways in our own land.

There are churches that are quietly getting on with living out their Christian faith and they are faithfully seeking to present the gospel to this wicked age and God is quietly blessing their efforts. He is perhaps saving the ones and twos and is working in the hearts of his people so that they are growing and maturing in the faith. Be encouraged, God is at work in these days fulfilling his purposes and He is doing so quietly.

b) God Is At Work In Judging Sin (vs. 27-36) – Now my time has almost gone so I do not have time to say very much except to say that ungodliness does not go unpunished. God tells Eli through an unknown man of God (v 27) that He is going to punish his family and his two sons will die on the same day (v 34).

His sons are being punished for their scant regard for the Lord and Eli is being punished for his failure to act in order to remove his sons from their positions of power. Therefore we need to remind ourselves that although we might think that sin is winning in the days in which we live; God actually punishes sin and sinners. Sometimes we can see his punishment of sin in this world and death is certainty his punishment but ultimately sin will be dealt with and punished in hell.

Do not think that you will ever get away with sin, you will not, which is why you ought to turn to the Lord and seek his grace and ask for mercy. If you do that then you will receive it for in this passage his judgement is tempered with mercy and grace (v 35).

We also need to remind ourselves as believers that sin must be rooted out of God's church. Eli did nothing and was punished therefore the church must act in discipline to remove from our midst anyone who is deliberately sinning against the Lord. Eli probably failed to act because it was family, but by failing to act he showed his love for his family was stronger than his love for God, which of course is sin.

We too must not allow our friendship with people to get in the way of church discipline when that needs to be implemented, otherwise we too might come under the judgement of God.

Let us remember these two lessons as we finish, God is at work quietly blessing his people and punishing sinners. Therefore then let us ask God to open our spiritual eyes that we may see him at work in these dark and difficult days.

Amen