

1 SAMUEL 3

INTRODUCTION

Some time has passed since the birth of Samuel and his commencement of his work at Shiloh. It is likely that Samuel is now about 12 years old and each day throughout those 12 years Samuel was at Shiloh ministering before the Lord under the authority and supervision of Eli the Priest. He is of course seeking to serve God in the midst of corruption from Eli's sons who have turned the worship of God into a racketeering business.

Sin abounded and yet Samuel is God's faithful man in the midst of ungodliness. In the same way in our day in the midst of ungodliness and corruption God still has the remnant of his people seeking to serve God and bring honour to his name.

1. THE PROBLEM WITH SAMUEL'S TIMES (v 1)

The call of God to Samuel comes in the context of the word of the Lord being rare; there was not many visions which was the way that God communicated his word to his people through the priests and prophets (v 1). God was not giving his word to his Prophets and Priests except in rare instances (2:27-36). This was a very serious situation for without God's word people fall apart for they have no direction from the God who made them. They have no moral standards by which to live and more importantly they have no direction as to how to find the God who made them. But we need to ask why God's word was rare at this time. Why did God keep silent and not give his word to his people?

It seems clear from what has already been said in this book that the rarity of God's word was a type of judgement upon the people because of their sin. Israel stood under the wrath of God at this time because of their poor spiritual state, which is seen in the corrupted leadership of Eli's sons but it is also seen in the people who were worshipping false gods (7:3-4).

The people had given their hearts over to other things rather than being wholeheartedly devoted to their God. This displeased God and so He withdraws his word from them and left the priests and people to their own wisdom and to their own devices. You see God's word is God's gift to his people and that is something that we who are his people ought to realise; it is a privilege to have God's word and sometimes God withdraws his word as a mark of his judgment upon nations and people.

We see this judgement during the time of Amos when in 760 BC God announced his judgement on Israel through Amos the prophet by threatening a famine of hearing the words of God. During this judgement people would wander everywhere in order to seek a word from God but they would never find it (Amos 8:11-12).

When God is not speaking; then God is not present and that is a tragedy for those who claim to be the people of God. However the good news is that God breaks that silence in this chapter; God is raising up Samuel He is beginning a new era He is speaking his word again to his people through the prophet.

From now on there is a prophet at Shiloh who will consistently speak God's word to God's people, God is once again showing his grace to his people in bringing his word to them. It is always a matter of grace when God's word is proclaimed among his people; it is a sign that God has not forsaken his people. This is why God's word must be at the centre of all that this church does, for without it people throw off restraint (Proverbs 29:18).

In some churches God's word has been squeezed out, by music and drama groups and by social activities and committees and by clever programs but such churches are churches that are experiencing the wrath of God, God's judgement is being poured out upon them because his word is being withheld from his people.

But where a church has the teaching of the word of God at its heart, when a church has a preacher who consistently and persistently preaches the Scriptures accurately and helpfully then they are experiencing God's grace rather than his judgement.

We ought to be grateful that although we are small in number and might feel our own weakness and inadequacies we are a blessed people because each week we are hearing God's word, which is able to guide us and direct our lives. We are able by the grace of God to understand God's word to us in our modern world and to act upon it accordingly. God is being very gracious to us and that is something that we must rejoice over.

My dear friends do we realise the privilege that it is to have a Bible in our own language? Do we really prize this fact? How often do we read it and commit its truth to our hearts? Have we become so use to having God's word that we have become complacent with it? Why is it that when someone is unable to get a Bible and then is given one they devour it, while we who have had it on our bookshelves for years hardly spend much time reading and considering it?

It might not always be the case that God will continue to bless us with his written word He may act in judgement upon us by withdrawing his word from us and with it his blessing of course. Therefore we must not take God's grace for granted, we must delight in God's word we must read it and give ourselves to its study. We must seek to listen to it being preached often, both live and through the Internet and CD's etc.

We live in an age when we can hear God's word from the best of preachers through our computers; yet sadly so many British Christians are ignorant of its truth. We lack a real understanding of the doctrines of the word of God and yet there is no excuse for there is no famine of the word of God but our problem lies with spiritual laziness and with wrong priorities. We would rather be entertained than hear the word of God.

We would rather think about who won "Britain has talent" or ponder the latest news reports rather than the word of God. We would rather read the latest novel than read the word of God. This message should challenge us to think again about our commitment to the word of the living God.

But there is also another danger connected with the word of God. We might think that the word of God will never become rare in our country because we have the Bible in written form and in many different translations. However there is no reason why God could not remove that privilege if Islam ruled this country; there would once again be a shortage of the word of God.

However I am more concerned with the possibility of the word of God becoming rare because of how one receives that word (Mark 4:9). We may have the Scriptures and have them faithfully preached; but we may suffer from spiritual deafness so that the word becomes rare to us. It may also become rare to us because of our lack of appetite for it, therefore we need to be very careful, make sure we are really hungry for God's word, I hope it still excites you and I trust that you can't get enough of it for if that is the case then it might well be that God might make us deaf to it as a type of judgement. That seems to be what is happening in our nation.

There are churches that preach the gospel faithfully but there are few with any desire to hear it and even a smaller number who want to obey it. Let us remember that the word of God preached faithfully is indeed a mark of God's grace to us.

2. THE CALL OF SAMUEL (vs. 2-10)

The Hebrew word “call” occurs some eleven times in these verses so it is clear what the main theme of this section is. Although the narrative gives us other details about the time of day and the state of Eli’s eyesight etc (vs. 2-3) there is no doubt that God’s call to Samuel is what the narrative is all about. Apparently God’s call to Samuel was so clear and audible that Samuel was sure it was Eli who was calling him (vs. 4-6).

There is no doubt that young Samuel is willing enough; but why is he so slow to understand that it is God who is calling him? The key is found in verse 7 where we are told that Samuel “did not know the Lord, the word of the Lord had not been revealed to him.” Now this verse explains why Samuel did not recognise God’s call, it does not seek to blame him.

This is a very different situation from the one in 2:12 where we are told that Eli’s sons had no regard for the Lord (literally “did not know the Lord”). The point is that Samuel did not yet have any direct experience of receiving God’s word, this is a completely new experience for him so it’s no wonder that God’s call confused him, Samuel was facing a new experience but when Eli realised what was happening he advises Samuel to respond with “speak for your servant is listening” (v 9).

But how does this call of Samuel apply to us? Unlike Samuel we are not in a position where we receive direct revelation from God as Samuel did. We are not prophets like Samuel was. We have the completed Scriptures and therefore God has said all He is going to say, there is no new or fresh revelation from God today. If we want to know what God is saying if we want to hear his voice today then we have to understand his word?

Perhaps the lesson that we can learn is to adopt Samuel’s attitude to God when He speaks to us today by his word through his Spirit. We all need to say “speak Lord for your servant is listening.” That should be our attitude every time we come to God’s word, whether privately or publicly, we should come expecting and longing for God to speak to us through his word and pray towards that end. Before we came to church today have we been praying for God to speak through his word to us personally and to his people collectively?

If not then perhaps we don’t believe this book is God’s word or perhaps we have taken it for granted. Are we expecting God to speak powerfully and convincingly to us today?

If not then it is no surprise that we do not hear his voice. But even if we do expect him to speak to us are we prepared to obey; for that is what it means to say speak for your servant is listening. What did God say to us last week either through the public ministry of his word or through our private devotions? Have we obeyed his voice, are we serious about listening to what God has to say to us? I trust we are.

Now there is another application that we need to think about. Is it possible that you do not hear God’s voice through his word because like Samuel you did not know the Lord, his word has not been revealed to you in the sense that it has not yet broken your heart and exposed your sin and brought you his salvation? That is why people can sit and listen to sermons and be unmoved. They do not know the Lord; they have no personal experience of him or of his voice. If that is the case then those of us who do know him must pray that God will reveal his word to sinners and speak powerfully to them convicting them of sin and pointing them to Jesus as the only Saviour. If you are a sinner then you ought to call out to God asking him to reveal himself to you through his word.

But there is another application that I want us to think about and it concerns God’s voice coming repeatedly to Samuel. Samuel heard the voice clearly on all four occasions the first three times he did not understand what was happening, it was only after Eli realised what was happening and

instructed him how to respond that Samuel finally understood. That is how God so often deals with us. He deals with us with great patience.

Before we were believers we may have heard his voice on many occasions but did not recognise it and it may well be that we were confused and perplexed by it. We may have read a Christian tract and felt uncomfortable, we knew something was wrong but couldn't understand it but as we look back now we know that it was the Lord speaking to us.

Perhaps for some of us the penny dropped if that is a theological term; when someone told us that God's was speaking through his word to us personally. From then on we were more susceptible to listening to God's voice. God is incredibly patient with us He gives us time to work out what is happening and He continues to speak even when we have rejected his voice or are confused by it.

Even as Christian people we can sometimes be confused and perplexed by the voice of God speaking to us through the Scriptures. There are so many voices screaming at us in the world and sometimes we are so spiritually insensitive to God that we do not even recognise his voice at first but God perseveres with us and is patient with us and comes to us time and time again until He brings us to repentance and wins our hearts.

3. THE MESSAGE TO SAMUEL (vs. 11-18)

Now that Samuel recognises that it is God that is speaking to him; the Lord delivers his message to Samuel (v 11-13) and what a message it is, it is a spine tingling message (v 11). The Lord tells Samuel that He is about to activate his threatened judgement against Eli's house (2:27-36 cf. v 12). The judgement was deserved for Eli's sons were not restrained by Eli and therefore they took God lightly and they treated him with contempt (v 13).

The message is a message of judgement; it is severe irreversible judgement (v 14). Their sin has run its full course now judgement must come on Eli's house. Imagine a young lad like Samuel being entrusted with such a terrible message.

But this was not a message that was to be kept to oneself, it was to be passed on and Eli knew that (vs. 16-17) and poor Samuel was naturally afraid to tell Eli (v 15), but tell him he must for it is God's word and God's word must be spoken and passed on to others.

Eli's response is quite remarkable (v 18) but it is the response of a man who loves God and who knows that God always acts in love and justice. Eli knew he was guilty and now he must face the consequences of his action.

Now this teaches us about the burden and conflict and even pain of proclaiming God's word today. Once we come to know the word of the Lord then we know that we must speak that word of the Lord and that word is one that burdens us; for it is not always a pleasant or encouraging word. God's word is one of judgement as well as one of love and although it is easier to preach about the love of God, a true spokesman for God will speak about God's justice and judgement as well as his love.

Proclaiming God's word can be painful, it is painful to tell people about hell and if we don't feel that pain then we simply do not love sinners like God does. The true people of God must proclaim God's message about sin and judgement but they also have to keep the balance and speak about the love, grace and mercy of God.

That is your task as well as mine. We are privileged people for we know the word of the Lord and it is our responsibility to pass it on in all its fullness. That involves speaking about judgement and hell but we are so grateful that the gospel is also about God's grace and mercy to sinners.

There is always a tension that we have to live with when it comes to proclaiming God's word, a tension between judgement and grace but unless we keep this tension in mind and speak God's word as it is then we will give an unbalanced view of God; a view that might well hinder sinners from coming to know Christ and therefore coming to his salvation and his heaven.

Therefore as we finish we need to pray for every preacher of God's word that they might be able to keep this balance but we also need to preach this message in a balanced way so that sinners will be warned of the judgement to come and flee to the God who loves sinners and is willing to show them grace and mercy. May God help us all to proclaim his word boldly and clearly and may many sinners come to Christ and experience the joy of sins forgiven.

Amen