

“Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.”

Samuel served in the Old Testament times. He served in a time that is not unlike ours. We often think the Bible times were magnificent where amazing things happened all the time. To be certain, there are many miracles and extraordinary things that the Bible records, but those things are often the highlight reel in between everyday ordinary life that the God’s people lived day in, day out. In the average, everyday life that God’s people lived, nonetheless, God was raising up servants to do His will day in, day out.

Today, we’re going to examine what God’s servant is like by looking at the account of Samuel’s calling. We see that Samuel responds to the Lord’s calling: “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.**” This happens three times in this fashion. We see Samuel’s attentiveness to the call. It is only at the third time that Eli, who should have known better, realizes that it was the Lord calling Samuel.

You see, Samuel was spiritually alert even when those around him weren’t. Yes, the text tells us, **“Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.”** How could he know the Lord? The word of the Lord was rare in those days, and those entrusted with it were not faithful. Once Samuel heard from the Lord, he would know the Lord and serve him throughout his lifetime.

This is in contrast to Eli and his worthless sons who also served as priests. We read of them, **“Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD.”** Samuel acted out of ignorance. That’s one thing. It’s another thing to know the right thing to do, but to behave incorrectly. Eli’s sons Hophni and Phinehas took meat sacrifices and ate them for themselves. They slept with women at the entrance to the tabernacle. When Eli finally got around to rebuking them, they wouldn’t heed his warning.

Samuel heeded the Lord’s calling three times before Eli instructed him what to do. Hophni and Phinehas never heeded those warnings. God warned Eli twice about the disaster that would befall his house because of their disobedience.

Samuel teaches us to be attentive to God’s calling. Don’t put off until tomorrow what God is calling you to do today. I know I should read my Bible daily, but I just don’t have time right now. I know I should go to church weekly, but things just keep getting in the way. I know I should get my finances in order so I can give a portion of God’s gifts back to the church, but I haven’t gotten around to it yet. I know I should stop that sin habit, but we’re all sinners, so why does it matter?

This sin is called the sin of sloth or apathy. It's not just laziness, but it's carelessness. It's saying, I'm as good as I can be, so it's not worth trying to change. It's despair of improvement or repentance. Eli and his sons could have avoided disaster if they repented, but sloth is the voice of Eli saying, **"It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."**

We are thankful that the Lord Jesus Christ is *the* servant of the Lord who never gave up. He was completely attentive to the Lord's voice and followed His every command. His diligence covers our apathy, and He forgives us for our laziness. No matter if it's been days or years, Jesus invites you to follow the Lord's calling today, and to stumble out of your stupor. God is calling you to a life of spiritual attentiveness because Jesus has lived, died, and rose for you. 3. God's servant doesn't need to be told twice.

When the Lord speaks to Samuel, the Lord gives an oracle of judgment against the house of Eli. **"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."** In the next chapter, we read that Israel goes to battle against the Philistines, they lose, the ark of the covenant is lost to the Philistines, Phineas and Hophni die in battle, and upon hearing the news Eli falls over and dies.

Samuel receives this prophecy of bad news and was initially hesitant to repeat it to Eli, but he does indeed repeat it word for word. Whereas Samuel faithfully repeated to Eli what the Lord had said, Eli's sons twisted God's words so they could take their fill of meat, and if a faithful Israelite tried to contradict them, they would threaten with force to take the food.

God is not idle. He will not be fooled. Those who intentionally stray from God's teaching risk bringing God's wrath upon them. God's servant is not called to make friends and influence people, but to be faithful. **"And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground."**

We want the loving Jesus who is the Good Shepherd who lays His life down for the sheep, but we don't want the Jesus who tips over temple tables and rebukes the pharisees. We don't realize that you can't have one without the other. You cannot have the loving God without also having the just God. The same Jesus who forgives sinners punishes those who reject Him. You can't be more loving than God Himself, and you can't soften God's words to make Christianity more palatable. Above all, we are called to be faithful.

But of our Lord Jesus Christ we read, **"if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself."** Our Lord Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. He who has seen Him has seen the Father. **"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days**

he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

He who endured slander and false accusations has borne your faithlessness and calls you to be faithful. He sends His Holy Spirit upon you who will give you the words to speak even as you are set before kings and governors. It’s not your job to make people like you, it is your job, like Samuel, like Jesus, to say what God says, and to teach and share what the Bible teaches. 2. God's servant doesn't play telephone.

Our text concludes saying, **“And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD.”** Even in a time where the Word of the Lord was rare, Samuel was established as a prophet. He took responsibility and he carried out the commands of the Lord. We think of Samuel as a cute boy in our text, but he grew up to be a fearsome prophet.

After King Saul refused to destroy the Amalekites, Samuel delivered the bad news that Saul would no longer be king, and Samuel himself executed the king of the Amalekites. Samuel anointed David as king even as Saul still was serving as king. That could have been considered an act of treason.

This boldness stands in stark contrast to Eli who ultimately doesn’t stop his sons from doing evil. He takes them aside and warns them, but he never removes them from the priesthood. It was his duty to relieve them of their position as priests.

The story of Eli’s sons stands as a stark warning to all Christians, but especially to pastors. There are things a pastor can do that would render him unfit for ministry. The second a pastor says that it could never happen to him is when the devil opens the door a crack. It is the duty of congregations and district presidents to hold pastors accountable, and to remove him if necessary. It is not merciful or gracious to allow a morally corrupt pastor to continue in his office precisely because it hurts the people the pastor is sinning against. A pastor removed from the office can repent and remain a Christian, and that is always the hope, but it is not right to have him continue as a pastor.

It’s easy for us to wash our hands of things and say it’s in God’s hands rather than ours, but God calls His servants to be responsible for their actions. We all make excuses, but God is calling us to live a holy life. He is calling us to live out the calling to which we have been called. No matter your financial situation, no matter your upbringing, no matter your past habits, you are not beyond saving or improvement. The Holy Spirit is calling you to follow the Lord Jesus.

There were many chances for Jesus to take the easy route. He could have caved to Satan’s temptation in the wilderness. He could have acted in such a way to please the religious elites. He could have stepped down from the cross and sent a legion of angels to defeat the Romans. However, He didn’t. And thank God He

didn't. He took on not only His responsibility, but responsibility for the sins of the world. He, as God's true servant, lived perfectly when we failed, and we can live in the abundant grace He grants us. No more excuses, we can follow Him. 1. God's servant doesn't pass the buck.

Speak, O Lord, your servant listens. What is God's servant like? GOD'S SERVANT IS ATTENTIVE, FAITHFUL, AND RESPONSIBLE. We see this in faithful Christian examples. We see this in Samuel the prophet, but we see all of this ultimately in the Lord Jesus in whom we have our hope, our salvation, and eternal life. Amen!