

This Little Light of Mine

1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a

Key verses 3:10,19 “And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant hears.’” “And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.”

Happy Father’s Day! A good dad loves giving nice gifts to his children. Imagine your dad gave you a small lamp and matches. Picture the room suddenly going dark. Quickly, light your lamp. “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine...” Watch it grow until there's no more darkness.

In the books of Judges and 1 Samuel, Samuel lived in a time of moral and spiritual darkness. When he was young, his mother sent him to live in the temple of the Lord. One night, still in bed, he heard someone calling him, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Today's message is about God who called the boy Samuel who had a right attitude toward God and his servant. Upon calling him, God trained him to grow into a faithful and courageous prophet who could shine the light of God over all Israel. Through this message, may we learn what kind of attitude God wants us to have so that we can receive His calling to shine His light into darkness.

I. God’s plan to drive out darkness (1-3)

The first verse of today’s passage shows the dark times of boy Samuel. Look at verse 1. “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.”

Can you imagine a boy in priestly garments working in the temple? Some may say, “Cute!” But this scene is odd. According to Numbers 8:24-26, only adult Levites between the ages of 25-50 should serve the Lord in the temple. Here, a boy, less than 13 years old, and from the tribe of Ephraim (1 Sam 1:1), was ministering to the Lord. Another irregularity is Eli, who was over 90 years old (1 Sam 4:15). He should have retired long ago. Where were his sons or other priests who should have succeeded him?

1 Sam 2:12-17 and 22-25 explain where Eli’s sons, the priests, might have been. These verses start with, “Now the sons of Eli were worthless men.” Firstly, they forcibly took the raw meat from the sacrifices people offered to God and made roasted beef steaks for themselves. Secondly, though married, they lay with the serving women at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Despite knowing his sons’ sins, Eli, the High Priest, did not restrain them. They still held the priestly office with authority and power. If the spiritual leaders lived such sinful lives without the fear of God, the rest of the people must have been worse. Judges 21:25 says: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Chaos, immorality, crimes, despair, and darkness covered the whole nation. Aren’t Samuel’s days similar to our own?

How do people respond to the darkness? One of my nephews who got married recently decided not to have children, considering all the exponentially increasing issues their future children will face.

What does the Bible say about the pervasive darkness? Look at verse 1b. “And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.” So, God had a plan. He did not abandon his people. 1 Samuel 2:35 reveals God’s plan: “And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him up a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever.” His plan then was to raise up faithful people of God who will shine His light into the dark world. God’s plan now is still the same— to raise up faithful men and women to shine his light.

II. God’s call of Samuel as a prophet (3-19)

Before His call of Samuel, God was already working. It started surprisingly, with a barren woman named Hannah. In chapter 1, the author, likely Samuel himself, notes, “the Lord had closed her womb” twice (6). Her husband’s other wife, Peninnah, who had many children, provoked and irritated her day and night, year after year, saying her barrenness was God’s curse. Though she was dearly loved by her husband, she couldn’t eat and wept daily. Hannah was in a personal darkness. However, that personal darkness led her to the Lord. She prayed to Him, weeping bitterly, and made a vow that if God gave her a son, she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life (2:1-11). God answered her prayer and gave her a son, whom she named Samuel, “heard of God.” As soon as she weaned him, she returned the young boy Samuel to the Lord according to her vow. Despite Eli and his sons being poor priests, she entrusted her son to God the Father.

The author could have described young Samuel’s life in the temple in many ways. However, the author writes one thing: “Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man” (2:26), which echoes the boy Jesus’ growth in Luke 2:43. God became his heavenly father. God raised boy Samuel to grow in stature and favor with God and men. Therefore, as parents, we do not need to be afraid to devote and entrust our children to the Lord. God honors the faith and prayers of godly parents! Praise God!

Now, let’s see how God called Samuel. Look at verse 3: “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.” The lamp of God was placed in the tent of meeting, outside the veil before the Most Holy Place, where the ark was. The lamp burned every day from evening to morning (Ex 27:20-21). Since it had not yet gone out, it was nighttime, pitch dark outside. This verse tells us more than the time; it metaphorically suggests the lamp of God through boy Samuel was still shining in the darkness.

Look at verses 4-6: “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 didn’t 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.’”

In these verses, we see boy Samuel’s attitude towards Eli. He heard a voice in the middle of the night. Thinking it was Eli, he jolted awake, shook the sleep from his eyes, and ran to Eli saying, “Here I am, for you called me.” At any time of day or night, he was eagerly ready and available for Eli, with a servant’s heart for God’s servant. When he heard his name, he took initiative and ran to Eli. He didn’t just shout from his bed, “What? What do you want? I’m so sleepy!” When Eli told him to go back and lie down, he was teachable and obeyed. And two more times when Samuel heard his name, he faithfully got out of his warm bed and went to Eli.

This amusing scene also reveals Samuel’s spiritual condition though: he couldn’t distinguish God’s voice from Eli’s. Verse 7 adds, “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.” The boy Samuel did not yet have such a personal relationship with God.

When Samuel couldn’t differentiate God’s voice from Eli’s, did God change His mind? Look at verses 8-9a: “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 boy. Therefore, Eli said to Samuel, ‘Go, lie down, and if He calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.’”

So, Samuel obeyed Eli’s words exactly. He went and lay down. Now look at verse 10a. “And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’” Samuel said exactly what Eli taught him– ‘Speak, for your servant hears.’” From God’s call of the young Samuel, we learn two important lessons.

Firstly, God calls people of “FAITH,” though they are humanly unqualified. In Israel, young children and women were not highly respected. But the God who called old men like Abraham and Moses also called the boy Samuel, who seemed too young and unimportant. Soon, God would use Samuel to anoint another young shepherd boy, David, as King of Israel. Sometimes, we feel like boy Samuel. We are too young, too insignificant, too uneducated to be called by God. However, God was seeking boy Samuel. 2 Chronicles 16:9a says, “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the whole earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (NIV).”

How did Samuel respond to God’s calling? Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.” Samuel had a fully committed heart. He was a boy of FAITH: he was “Faithful” to God and God’s servant; he was always “Available” day or night however inconvenient. He took “Initiative,” and was not passive, staying in bed. He was “Teachable,” with an obedient, listening, and humble heart towards God and God’s servants; and he had a “Heart for God and God’s people,” to serve God and God’s servant at any place and any time.

So however humanly unqualified we may be, we don't need to despair. Rather, all we need to do is cultivate a heart of "FAITH." Practically, every day, let us start each day with this prayer, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Then, come out of our beds, away from cell phone screens. Cultivate the habit of coming to his words faithfully with a humble heart to hear and obey. Be willing to learn humbly from our shepherds and parents. And lastly, practice being available, to take initiative and find ways to serve God and others. And God will qualify us and strengthen us to be his useful servants. Praise God!

Secondly, young children can hear God's voice personally. Samuel had learned about God through his mother and Eli the priest. Now, with Eli's help, Samuel knelt before God and heard His voice independently. Parents, God can speak to your children! You are to prepare your children to hear and obey God's voice. Have you heard of the 4 to 14 window? In 2003, Barna Research Group found that 70% of Christian adults in the U.S. accepted Christ by age 13. This groundbreaking research shows how impactful it is to reach kids with the gospel by the time they turn 14. Parents and Bible teachers, plant the seed of the gospel in their hearts. Parents, help your children hear and obey the word of God, over all the other voices.

Now let's see God's word to Samuel. Look at verses 11-14: "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.'"

What a painful message it was! God was going to punish the house of Eli forever. In turn, Samuel was to proclaim this message of judgment to Eli, the High Priest, whom he loved and respected as his spiritual father. This was the first cross Samuel had to bear as a prophet.

What did Samuel do with the word of the Lord? Look at verse 15: "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." Yes, we can sympathize with him! But Eli called and said, "Samuel, my son! 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."

Eli could have said, "My son, if God has spoken against me and my sons, please be silent." Instead, he strongly urged Samuel to tell him the whole truth.

We can only imagine the distress of the young prophet. However, Samuel obeyed. Look at verse 18a. "So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him." He told him the whole truth of God's impending punishment. Samuel completed his first and most difficult mission as a prophet—

to speak the words of God as they were. And Eli accepted God's message of judgment with humility and repentance.

As a prophet, our most important task is to speak the words of God as they are, however painful they may be. We live in politically correct time which makes it difficult to share the gospel because the gospel is offensive. The gospel tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And there is salvation found only in Christ. However, God calls us to be prophets who speak the truth in love. Only when we speak the truth can people be set free from their sins. Only then can people see their true darkness and come to Christ, who is the light of the world. May God help each of us overcome our fears and live as courageous prophets, who speak the truth of the gospel that is life-giving and light-bringing in our dark times.

What happened afterwards? Let's read verse 19 together: "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground." There were three significant changes.

Firstly, Samuel grew. As a boy, he grew physically. However, his growth was not just physical. As a boy, he used to run to his spiritual father Eli. But now he learned to kneel before God and hear His voice personally. He became completely dependent on the Lord God. Some might think they can only experience significant spiritual growth if they study the Bible enough or go to church long enough. While that might be true, Samuel grew as he obeyed God's voice and delivered God's message of judgment to Eli. So how can we grow? We cannot just hear God's words with our ears. We must obey and put his words into practice. We must share the truth of the gospel. May God help us to grow by obeying his words.

Secondly, the Lord was with him. In verse 7, Samuel did not know the Lord. Now, he says, "the Lord was with him." When he obeyed God's words absolutely, Samuel began to have a personal and intimate communion with the Lord. As a result, Samuel knew the heart and mind of the Lord.

Thirdly, the Lord let none of his words fall to the ground. What an amazing statement! The Lord Himself ensured that none of Samuel's words fell to the ground. Literally, the Lord fulfilled all Samuel said. As we read 3:21 and 4:1a, the word of the Lord and Samuel's word are interchangeable. As a prophet who knew God's heart and mind, Prophet Samuel proclaimed the word of the Lord as it was, and the Lord fulfilled His purpose through His word.

What was the impact of Samuel's ministry? Verse 20 says, "And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord." And 4:1a adds, "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel." The word of the Lord through Prophet Samuel shone over all Israel. His little light grew in power and brightness. And the darkness that had covered the nation began to disappear.

In today's message, we learn the God of Samuel, who called "FAITH"-filled boy Samuel as a prophet. When God called him, boy Samuel said to the Lord, "'Speak, for your servant hears.'"

When his heart was right with the Lord, God told him to deliver the most difficult message. While obeying the Lord, Samuel grew. And God empowered young prophet Samuel. He was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And the light of God shone to all Israel driving out darkness. May God enable each of us to cultivate a FAITH-filled heart and grow as obedient and courageous prophets as we deliver the gospel light wherever darkness is. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine..."