

Hearing From God

1Samuel 3:1-21

How many of you have ever heard the story of Pheidippides?

He was a Greek who lived in the 5th century BC and is most famous for running.

In 490BC the Persians decided to try and invade Greece and there was a great battle near the city of Marathon.

The Greeks were greatly outnumbered and so their victory was very good news so Pheidippides ran the roughly 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to announce that they had prevailed.

As the story goes he died right after he pronounced the news.

This is where many people think the idea for the distance of a Marathon comes from.

What most people don't realize is the story, according to the Historian Herodotus, is actually much bigger than 26 miles.

Pheidippides was sent first from Athens to Sparta to ask the Spartans for help.

That is a distance of roughly 150 miles which he is said to have covered in just two days.

While they agreed to come they said it would be about a week before they could make it which meant he had to run back to Athens straight away to tell them the news.

He covered that distance again in a little less than two days.

From Athens he went to Marathon for the battle and then returned to Athens to deliver the news where he died after running a little over 350 miles in total.

That is a ridiculous amount of running and all because he had the important job of being a messenger for the Greek army.

I'm not sure how he came to get that job, but one thing is clear if the story is even remotely accurate he took his job seriously.

He knew how important it was for him to carry the messages given to him from place to place.

[If a person can be convinced of the importance of delivering messages for mere human beings, how much more should people be convinced of the importance of delivering messages on behalf of Almighty God? That is where we meet Samuel in our text this morning **1Samuel 3:1-21**. We find him here being enlisted by God to deliver His word to people. Samuel hears from the Lord and his experience has some important lessons for us when it comes to hearing from God. I can't think of anything that is more worthy of our attention than this. Here is the first lesson we need to learn about hearing from the LORD...]

Point #1 – God chooses who to speak to. (Verses 1-9)

Throughout the history of creation God has always made Himself known through a relatively small group of people who He decides on according to His own wisdom.

Verse 1 gives us the situation in the nation of Israel in the early days of Samuel's life (Verse 1).

This adds to the spiritual darkness that we read about in chapter two.

In chapter two we are told about the spiritual bankruptcy of Eli's sons who were supposed to be serving the LORD as priests for the good of the people of Israel, but instead they were living wicked self-seeking lives.

Worship was all messed up and on top of that God wasn't saying much of anything to or through hardly anyone in those days.

That is about to change. Samuel, who was born by the will of God in response to the fervent prayers of his mother who vowed to set him apart to serve the LORD for his whole life, had been growing up.

In contrast to the wicked priests, Samuel from a very young age had been ministering before the LORD. (**1Samuel 2:26**)

This is why God answered Hannah's prayer. He had chosen Samuel for His service long before the night that we are told about here in chapter 3.

It's not clear how old Samuel is here, my guess is somewhere between 8-16 years old.

Like the other priests, Samuel was assigned a place to sleep in the courts of the Tabernacle and while he is lying there something amazing happens (**Verses 3-9**).

The reference to the 'lamp of God' places this sometime in the middle of the night and so we might be tempted to think Samuel is having a dream.

It's not a dream, it can't be because he gets up and with clear purpose goes straight to Eli ready to serve.

It wasn't Eli that called, however, so he tells the boy to go back to bed.

That happens twice.

Since this has never happened before Samuel doesn't know what is going on and Eli doesn't figure it out right away either.

When it happens the third time Eli figures it out. He knows Samuel's faithfulness, he knows the boy isn't playing games, and then the thought occurs to him that the LORD is speaking to the boy.

Why not just say, "Hey Samuel it's the LORD, I have some things to say to you!"

Because God wants Eli to know and He wants Samuel to learn that Samuel is the one God is choosing to speak to.

Samuel is not looking for this, he is just serving. No man or woman can get God to speak to them by following a formula, God speaks to whom He wills.

[We see this all the time in the Scriptures. Abraham was living in a place called Haran and God chooses to call Abraham. Moses after fleeing Egypt was a shepherd in Midian. God chooses him. David another shepherd God chooses. God says this about Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."]

Why is God speaking to this boy? Because He is choosing to do so according to His own sovereign plans and purposes.

That is very helpful for us in a few ways. First, it is a cause for great rejoicing at the grace of God.

God speaks to people! He makes Himself known.

It is always good for us to remember that God is so far above us that we cannot possibly know him by our own will or desire. No more than an ant can know us.

We cannot reach up to Him but in His immeasurable kindness He reaches down.

This also teaches us that pride and ability are irrelevant when it comes to being used by the LORD.

If you think you are irreplaceably awesome think again. If you think you are totally incapable you are right but our limitations are irrelevant to the LORD Who does all that He pleases.

[So in the face of spiritual darkness among His people, the LORD chooses to speak to a young boy. Why? Because that is His right as the creator of all things and we should all be very happy that He has chosen to speak to people through many centuries, in different places, and to different people because our eternity depends on it. Not only does the Lord choose who to speak to but we also learn in the chapter this second lesson. That...]

Point #2 – God chooses what to say to His servants. (Verses 10-14)

When the LORD speaks to and/or through someone He is the One who decides what is said.

When Eli tells Samuel to go back and lie down the third time he tells him to wait in if he hears the voice to say, "Speak LORD for your servant is listening."

Your Bible translation is probably like mine and has LORD in all capital letters.

That represents God's proper name being used in the original language.

Hearing that from Eli means that Samuel is returning to his bed with the expectation of the God of all creation speaking to him.

The text doesn't say anything about this, but I highly doubt he went back to sleep.

Sure enough we are told this in **verses 10-14**.

When it says that the “LORD came and stood there” it means that God made His presence known.

We are not told how. It may be that He becomes visibly present or that Samuel is acutely aware of God being there in some other way. Whatever the case may be it is significant.

It is a picture of a deepening personal relationship between God and this boy who is now taking on the role of a prophet (a spokesman for the LORD).

What God tells him confirms the word that He had already spoken concerning Eli’s house in the previous chapter.

It’s not good news.

I suspect this is not news Samuel was happy to hear.

Go back up to verse six for a moment.

This is after the second time Samuel thought Eli was calling. Do you see how Eli refers to Samuel?

He calls him, “my son.”

I admit it’s possible that Eli uses that as a general expression, but I doubt it.

I think it indicates an affection for the boy.

I think Eli sees and delights in Samuel and his dedication to the LORD.

I think he sees in Samuel what he wished he saw in his own boys.

I also find it hard to imagine that Samuel has no affection for Eli.

He has lived and worked for this man since he was a little boy.

In many ways Eli would have been a father figure to the boy.

Now, God is telling him about judgment coming upon this man he has served for a long time.

Samuel, I am convinced, would have much rather had God say something else, but it is not up to him it is totally up to God.

[How many people have ever had a situation where you were talking to someone and didn’t know what to say, but then later on you thought of something way better and think, “I wish I would’ve have said that instead.” I’ve had that happen lots of times.”]

That never happens to God!

He is always happy with what He says and never thinks He should have said something different.

Psalm 18:30 says, “As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless.”

That is true of the Bible from cover to cover and it is true of what He says here to Samuel.

[God decides who He will speak to and He decides what is said. That leads us to a third lesson from this text. It is a lesson that logically flows out of the first two and we see it lived out through Samuel in verses 15-18. The lesson is this...]

Point #3 – God’s servant must faithfully speak God’s word. (Verses 15-18)

While it is far from easy and at times can go against a person’s natural sensibilities, when the LORD clearly speaks His message must remain the same.

Look at what it says in verse 15.

Samuel goes straight to work in the morning and the impression is here that he is hoping to avoid a conversation with Eli.

Quick show of hands, how many people would want to go a tell the guy who is responsible to look after you that God is going to dramatically bring destruction on him and his family because he failed to do what he was supposed to do?

On top of that, there is absolutely no hope offered to Eli in what God has said to Samuel.

Add to that the likelihood that Samuel and Eli had a seemingly warm relationship and it is easy to see why Samuel is fearful to tell Eli what was said.

If he just goes about his day maybe he can avoid it.

Of course there is no chance of that.

Put yourself in Eli’s shoes for a minute.

You know there is a good chance that Almighty God said something to this boy, are you wanting to know what He said?

Of course, we would all want to know **(Verses 16-17)**.

Samuel is fearful to tell Eli and ironically Eli says some things with the intention of putting the fear of God in Samuel concerning what the LORD had to say.

Samuel responds in **Verse 18**.

He told Eli everything holding nothing back from him.

That is God’s expectation when He gives His word to people.

[If you follow politics at all you know how easy it is to misquote someone. It is even possible to misquote someone with something they actually said simply by taking it out of context or by stringing together a bunch of video clips that make it appear like they said something they didn’t actually say. Now, how do people respond when they are misquoted? They usually get upset. How would you respond is someone misquoted you on something important? Most of us would be angry about it.]

Let me ask, does God say frivolous or unimportant things?

How then do you think He feels about quoting Him?

He wants us to get it right, even when it's hard.

Samuel had some tough news to relay to Eli, but he says it all as he should.

Eli's response helps us understand why God says to Samuel in verse 14 that Eli's sin "will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering"

Where is the grace in that? Well, what does grace require? Grace requires repentance.

How many times in the Scriptures do we see God threaten certain destruction and people fall on their faces pleading for mercy and the LORD gives it to them?

Israel as Sinai, Hezekiah, Nineveh, etc...

Does Eli plead? No, he just throws up his hands and says, "Whatever!" which is why God brings this word against him in the first place.

[Don't be fatalistic in your life. Rather fear the LORD and His Word. Plead for mercy through His Son Jesus Christ. God's mercy and grace are limitless to the one who acknowledges their sin, who turns from evil, and looks to the cross and empty tomb of Jesus. That's why we seek to teach God's word as it is from week to week. This is one of the reasons we go verse by verse, because we want you to know what God's says as He has said it. Sometimes that is hard, but that is our goal. It is useless to do anything else because of what we see in the last few verses of this chapter. You see it is possible for people to be deceived, it is possible for godless people to try and twist the word of God, but no matter what this fourth lesson will come to pass. Here is the fourth lesson...]

Point #4 – God always proves His word true. (Verses 19-21)

When the All Powerful, Unchanging, All knowing, Infinite Creator of all things speaks you can be sure that what is said will happen.

Look with me at how this chapter concludes in verses 19-21.

To hear the audible voice of the LORD once would put a person in rare company in the history of the world, but Samuel hears from God on the regular basis.

God was doing something incredibly important in those formative years of this man's life.

He was giving him the great privilege of knowing the LORD like few others upon the earth and he was clearly establishing his ministry among the people of Israel.

Look again at what it says at the end of verse 19. It says, "he (that is God) let none of his words (that is the words spoken to and through Samuel) fall to the ground."

Every word that Samuel claimed was a word from the LORD happened.

That is the test of a true prophet of the LORD.

[If you google the phrase ‘modern day prophets’ you will find a long list of people claiming to hear from God. I have yet to hear of one that lives up to the biblical standard. I heard one pastor out of California a couple of years ago responding to someone asking him about predictions that he made that didn’t come true. He said, well not all them come true they are more like impressions. Listen, I don’t know who people think they are hearing from but it isn’t God that is for sure.]

God worked consistently in Samuel’s life so that the whole nation from the very northern part in ‘Dan’ to the very southern part in ‘Beersheba’ recognized that God was speaking through him.

God leaves no doubt concerning His word.

That is certainly true of His written word the Bible! He has confirmed it in many ways, the most obvious of which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Today we live in a vastly different day from the time of Samuel. All of us here today and the majority of the people in the world with an internet connection have access to the written word of God.

A book clearly attested to by the power of the Holy Spirit which is sufficient for all of life.

That is why it is beyond troubling to have practices under that banner of Christianity encourage people to go beyond the written Word of God.

A very popular example of this is the book “Jesus Calling” which has sold 30 million copies.

That book expresses dissatisfaction with the bible which prompts a pursuit of hearing directly from God.

My question is if you are not satisfied with God’s written word what makes you think you’ll be happy with anything else He has to say?

Also, if you hear something you are happy with and that takes precedent over what God has written down what makes you think it is God speaking to you?

A while back I listened to a pastor for the US who claimed to have a dream in which God said everyone was going to heaven and therefore he should stop telling people to repent and believe in Jesus because it wasn’t necessary.

Instead of rejecting the dream he rejected the scriptures and began leading people towards eternity in hell.

Listen, God has proven this book to be true and it is completely sufficient and every single person who belongs to Christ ought to be totally satisfied in this.

We can literally hear from God any time we want. You simply have to open this book and read it.

Are we? Not just a verse here and there based on a situation or mood that we find ourselves in, but truly digging through every page to learn about this incomparable God Who has acted in history to make eternal life possible.

Some people might use a text like this one in 1Samuel 3 to justify actively seeking to hear to audible voice of God, but if you actually think through the text and read it carefully you will see that is an utterly foolish thing to do.

Samuel wasn't looking for it. He was seeking to be satisfied in ministry before the Lord according to His already revealed word.

God doesn't speak to him because of a formula that he followed. He speaks to Samuel because He chooses to.

He chooses who to speak to and He chooses what will be said.

I would argue we have the opportunity in the Holy Scriptures to hear far more from the LORD than even Samuel or any individual prophet ever did because we get the whole story.

Our task is to rightly understand it and faithfully repeat it.

We can do that in the full confidence that everything God has said He will prove true.

Oh how I pray our confidence in the Word of God would increase.

There is no other book like it. There is nothing else that is trustworthy like the Bible.

There is no other place where we can go and be sure we are hearing from God.

Are we listening? Let's pray together towards that end.