

“When God is Silent”  
1 Samuel 3:1  
(Preached at Trinity, May 29, 2016)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we enter **Chapter 3** let me remind you again of the context of this time in Israel's history. It was a lawless time; a rebellious time.  
**Judges 21:25 NAU** - "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
  - A. Corruption was all around. It even extended to the Tabernacle where we find the sons of Eli.  
**1 Samuel 1:3 NAU** - "And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the LORD there."  
**1 Samuel 2:12 NAU** - "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD"
  - B. Even Eli, the high priest, seemed unable and unwilling to bring order to the wickedness.
2. This context is significant as we consider the first verse of **Chapter 3**  
**1 Samuel 3:1 NAU** - "And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent."  
In other words, God was silent.
3. It is important to remember; God can only be known by Divine revelation. He has to reveal Himself.
  - A. God reveals Himself in a general sense to all men through the works of creation and providence. We call this Natural or General Revelation  
**Psalms 19:1** – “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”
    1. Creation shouts the existence of its Creator  
Paul says that this revelation of God is so sure and definite that no one can mistake the existence of God. It is so sure that all men are left without excuse.  
**Romans 1:20** – “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”
    2. While general revelation declares the glory of God it doesn't contain a moral element. While it demands the worship of God, it doesn't declare God's moral demands upon humanity and it doesn't point men to Christ

- B. God can only be fully known through special revelation
1. God reveals Himself directly to men. This was done variously throughout redemptive history.  
**Hebrews 1:1 NAU** - "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,"
  2. God spoke to Adam, He spoke to Noah, and to Abraham. He spoke to Isaac and to Jacob. God spoke to Israel through Moses. Of Moses we read:  
**Exodus 33:11 NAU** - " Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend."
  3. God spoke through Joshua.  
**Joshua 1:1 NAU** - "Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant"
3. During times of sinful rebellion God spoke loudly through the prophets with a clear voice of warning. Joshua announced:  
**Joshua 24:15 NAU** - "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."
4. As the people continued in sin the voice of God became more and more silent. There is no worse silence!
- A. During the days of the monarchy Israel's sins were continually denounced by the prophets. When they refused to repent the voice of God grew more and more hushed. The absence of God's Word is a sign of God's judgment and the free course of God's Word is a sign of God's grace.
  - B. When Amos was a prophet God's prophetic voice rang loudly. God had many prophets sounding the alarm. The Word of God went forth abundantly, but Israel took it for granted and the people would not hear. Amos prophesied of a time when the Word of God would be removed. He described it as a great famine.  
**Amos 8:11-12 NAU** - "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD. <sup>12</sup> "People will stagger from sea to sea And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, But they will not find it."  
(1) The silence in Babylon was deafening.  
(2) After Malachi during the Inter-Testamental period there was no prophetic voice from God at all. For over 400 years before John the Baptist there was no prophecy in Israel. No word from God. Finally, John the Baptist broke the silence as the "voice crying in the wilderness" announcing the coming Kingdom and commanding repentance.  
**Matt. 3:2 NAU** - "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
5. The latter period of the judges was also a time of silence. The voice of God was seldom heard. It was a time of great spiritual darkness.  
**1 Samuel 3:1 NAU** - "And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent."  
A. But it wasn't an absolute silence. The text tells us that a Word from God was "rare" and visions were "infrequent."

- B. God sent forth an unknown prophet to announce judgment upon the house of Eli.  
**1 Samuel 2:27 NAU** - "Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD"
- C. **Verse 1** is significant because God was about to raise up Samuel as His mighty voice in this dark day. It was a great token of His mercy upon Israel. He was about to raise up the greatest of their kings. The Davidic monarchy.
6. What about today? Does the Word of the Lord sound forth today?  
 In terms of prophets the work of prophesy has ended. This isn't because God has stopped speaking. It simply means that God has given us the fullness of Divine revelation through the Scriptures. He speaks today through His Word. It is a mighty voice.  
 Peter wrote:  
**2 Peter 1:19 NAU** - "So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts."  
**Hebrews 4:12 NAU** - " For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."  
**2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU** - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."
7. Even still, we are living in a day of spiritual famine.
- A. Amos' words still sound loudly:  
 "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD.
- B. How can this be? With the fullness of the Word of God standing before us in all of its abundance and all of its power how can it be said there is a famine?  
 Two reasons:  
 1. Because it isn't being loudly proclaimed.  
 2. Because it isn't being solemnly received.
8. Tonight I want us to pause here and consider the words of **Verse 1** as they apply to us.
- I. There is a famine of the Word of God when it isn't being loudly proclaimed
- A. The Word of God must be held in high esteem
1. The preaching of the Word must be considered valuable
  2. As soon as it loses its value it also falls behind in priority
    - a. In many circles this has become the case
    - b. It is being usurped by music, drama and skits, puppets, or just entertaining stories.
    - c. The church has lost its clear voice today and our society has quit listening. We have become irrelevant.
  3. In the absence of the Word of God the people starve. Visions were one of the primary means God spoke to prophets. We find in **Verse 1**:  
**1 Samuel 3:1 NAU** - "And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent."

- a. We read in Proverbs:  
**Proverbs 29:18 NAU** - "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, But happy is he who keeps the law."
  - b. Without God's Word there is no guidance for God's people.
- B. Pastors must see preaching and teaching as their chief priority
- 1. Paul told Timothy:  
**1 Timothy 4:13 NAU** - "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching."  
**2 Timothy 4:2 NAU** - "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."
  - 2. God sends pastors to give knowledge and understanding  
**Jeremiah 3:15** – "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."  
**Ephesians 4:11-12 NAU** - " And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ"
  - 3. The good pastor must give himself to feeding his congregation  
**Acts 20:28 NAU** - "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."
  - 3. Pastors must give themselves to diligent study
    - a. This was the function of the first deacons and should be their first duty today—to deal with practical issues in order to free up the pastors for study so they can preach and teach.  
**Acts 6:3-4 NAU** - "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. <sup>4</sup> "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."
    - b. The early deacons were men filled with the Spirit. They were able to put out the fires of disputes so that the Apostles could focus upon the ministry of the Word.
    - c. And the result was immediately evident  
**Acts 6:7 NAU** - "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."
- C. When a pastor loses sight of this priority he loses his usefulness as a pastor
- 1. This doesn't mean every pastor is a vocational pastor. It does mean that every pastor recognizes the priority of God's Word in his life and ministry. He ungirds the teaching and preaching ministry of the church.
  - 2. During times of spiritual famine the teachers lost their voice. Isaiah referred to them as dumb dogs.  
**Isaiah 56:10 NAS** - "His watchmen are blind, All of them know nothing. All of them are dumb dogs unable to bark, Dreamers lying down, who love to slumber;"

3. Shepherds often used sheep dogs to help in guarding the sheep. A good dog was always on the alert to warn when a wild animal approached.
4. Isaiah said that a dog that cannot bark is useless. A pastor who does not sound the alarm with a clear voice is like a dumb dog.
5. Many are silent because they have nothing to say
  - a. They have become unqualified to teach
  - b. God sends pastors to give knowledge and understanding  
**Jeremiah 3:15** – “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”
  - c. They are constantly ready with a clear voice.  
**2 Timothy 4:2 NAU** - "preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."
6. Pastors must hold Christ high before those who sit before them. They must herald the good news of the Gospel. They must preach boldly and with clarity presenting the demands of Christ upon the hearts of men.
7. When a famine becomes severe there is widespread starvation. This is also true when the preaching of Word of God becomes scarce.

II. There is a famine of the Word of God when it isn't being solemnly received.

- A. There have been times when there has been a great dearth of hearing the Word of God.
  1. Hophni and Phinehas understood the truth. They had access to God's Word.
    - a. They knew the rules  
**Leviticus 7:31-32 NAU** - "The priest shall offer up the fat in smoke on the altar, but the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. <sup>32</sup> 'You shall give the right thigh to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifices of your peace offerings.'"
      - b. Hophni and Phinehas devised a “three-pronged fork” to take whatever they wanted from the Israelites. It was a process of human invention.
  2. The problem wasn't a lack of God's Word. Their problem was a lack of hearing it.
  3. Dale Ralph Davis wrote: “Some may think, “Yes, but the word of God can't be ‘rare’ anymore because now the church has his complete word in writing; we have the Scriptures; so we don't need to worry about that.” Wrong. What makes the word of Yahweh rare? In Eli's day it was because Yahweh was not giving it frequently. But Yahweh's word can become rare because of problems on the receiving end”<sup>1</sup>
- B. Paul wrote this would be the condition in the latter days
  1. They would have no interest in the Word of God. They would have no interest in the truth.
  2. Paul implies there would be religious people, people supposing a desire to be taught. But they would not be interested in the truth. They would not endure the true teaching of the Word of God. Instead they would find teachers who would teach them what they want to hear.

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, D. R. (2000). *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (p. 44). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.

**2 Tim 4:3-4** - "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."

3. This is widely the situation in our generation. The majority of Americans profess some form of Christianity, but they close their ears to the truth. They deny the demands of the Gospel.

**2 Timothy 3:7 NAU** - "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

C. This is always a danger

1. A congregation can cease to see the value of the Word of God. They don't embrace it as a great treasure.

2. Few today see Bible study as an important activity. Preaching isn't looked upon as being important. The Bible tells us to place great value on it.

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 NAU** - " But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, <sup>13</sup> and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another."

3. Never have we had greater access to the Word of God. We have the sure Word of Prophecy, the glorious counsel of God, and yet we can find ourselves shut off from its power because we refuse to take heed.

**2 Peter 1:19 NAU** - "So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts."

#### Conclusion:

1. The Word of God will only benefit us when we hear it.  
I've often said, "People always do what they want to do."  
It is also true that often "people only hear what they want to hear."  
Many find it frightfully easy to reject the plain teaching and preaching of the Word of God.
2. This is a most dangerous place to be. God will give us over to spiritual dullness so that we will cease being able to hear.  
**Mark 4:23-25 NAU** - "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." <sup>24</sup> And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. <sup>25</sup> "For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him."
3. Are we a church that places high value upon the Word of God? Do we tune our ears toward it?  
**James 1:22 NAU** - "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."
4. May the day of Eli never be our day.  
**1 Samuel 3:1 NAU** - "And word from the LORD was rare in those days"