

Broomfield



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Temptations in Service

The Attributes of a Prophetic Call, Part 6

A fascinating and worth-while study is an examination of the types of people who gathered around Christ in His first advent. For example, there are the thrill-seekers who gathered only to see a miracle.¹ You have the selfish who came to get a meal.² There also are the genuine that were chosen by Christ to enjoy a deep intimate relationship with Him.³ And yet even among the genuine, you have the self-deceived who followed Him for personal gain.⁴ And there also were the timid — the many who on account of fear secretly followed the Lord. In fact, we see such a disciple in John 19..

John 19:38, “And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.”

Joseph represents the child of God who genuinely loves Christ, but for whatever reason shrinks back to safety. In time their devotion is seen as in this text; but until the time, they offer many excuses for why they don't actively and openly serve the Lord.

The Samuel of our passage — the young boy who here is receiving a call unto the prophetic office — is one such timid disciple. Eventually he will serve with a boldness matched only by a few in Scripture. But not yet... not now... not in this text.

Truly, whatever else we might say about the verse at which we are looking this morning, we must recognize that Samuel is holding back when it came to proclaiming the vision that God gave him.

1 Samuel 3:16-17, “Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I. And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.”

¹ Compare Matthew 12:38

² Compare John 6:26

³ Compare Mark 3:13-14

⁴ Compare John 12:4-6

Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. And yet, Samuel is not alone. His reaction is typical of so many in the Kingdom of God — like Joseph of Arimathaea,⁵ the believers of the epistle to the Hebrews,⁶ Timothy,⁷ Peter,⁸ Elijah,⁹ and Moses, the twelve disciples, Abraham, and you and me!

Postpone Service

Let's examine three temptations that confront any and every minister/servant in the Kingdom of God — the first temptation is to postpone their service. After receiving the Divine message, we read this of the prophet Samuel.

1 Samuel 3:15, “**And Samuel lay until the morning**, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.”

In the Hebrew this expression basically takes three words: so-Samuel... lay.. until-morning! The shortness of the phrase illustrates the levity of Samuel's reaction. What a shock!

Samuel had just received a message from the Lord — God just spoke to him! Think about that for a moment! God spoke to him at a time when visions were most “precious”- —so rare were they.¹⁰ And the word that he received from God was such that Samuel knew that everyone who heard it would be left dazed,¹¹ in awe, broken, confounded, shocked, longing for grace and mercy, both of their ears would tingle!

This ought to amaze us! The King of kings and Lord of lords appeared to this prophet, and rather than responding with the words, “here am I! Send me!” or falling on his face like a dead man, Samuel fell on his bed and slept!

In the context of the prophetic office, this is amazing! Think of Isaiah who when he was confronted with the divine call.

Isaiah 6:5, “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

John:

Revelation 1:17, “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:”

Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 20:9, “hen I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with

⁵ Compare John 19:38

⁶ Compare Hebrews 10:32-39

⁷ Compare 2 Timothy 1:6-8

⁸ Compare Galatians 2:12

⁹ Compare 1 Kings 19:4-5

¹⁰ Compare 1 Samuel 3:1

¹¹ Compare 1 Samuel 3:11

forbearing, and I could not stay.”

The two disciples following the resurrection of Christ who at night did this:

Luke 24:32-33, “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them.”

Truly throughout God's word, the natural response to the receiving of the word of God was one of burden, a longing to proclaim it. And that is why this text is so odd, inappropriate, and shocking. God gave this prophet a message and rather than waking up Eli and all of Shiloh to herald the message he went back to bed. He acted as if nothing had happened, to attend to his own needs, and perhaps hoping that tomorrow would throw new light on his situation.

From this I want you to notice that the first temptation when it comes to the gifting and calling of the Lord is to sleep on it, put it off, and postpone it for when the time is right!

Family of God let us beware of such a temptation. If it occurred in the life of Samuel — a godly and most effective Old Testament prophet then it could occur in our life.

From this perspective I hope you see that “tomorrow” is such an ugly word when it comes to the gifts and callings of the Lord. Do you realize that if everyone of us this day said, “Tomorrow!” when it came to God's gifts and callings, if we said:

- I'll call them tomorrow.
- I'll write the note tomorrow.
- I'll witness to my neighbor tomorrow.
- I'll pray for them tomorrow.
- I'll start having devotions tomorrow.

We'd have lost a third of a year of ministry!

And if each of us this week did that just three times, put off ministry, postpone service just for a little while, we'd have lost a year's worth of labor for the Kingdom of God — in less than one week.

Oh the opportunities that are wasted in a given week.

- How many decades of ministry have we already lost in this church- never again to be utilized?
- How many souls have been left uncared for?
- How many opportunities for eternity have we forsaken.

All because of that horrible word, *Tomorrow!*

You say, “But I have a good excuse!”

- My children are young.
- My marriage is new.
- I've started a new job.
- Life is rather complicated now.

- I'm busy with school.
- I've got my own problems.

Brothers and sisters listen! The temptation to put off ministry until the appropriate time is an abuse of the gifts and callings of God.

Yes there is a place for maturation and training.¹² There is a place for balance.¹³ However the call of ministry is not, “Arrive and then shepherd, love, care, make disciples” but as you go make disciples.

We don't like this. We have compartmentalized our living. We have placated our conscience with that heinous word, “Tomorrow!”

Listen! There may be no tomorrow. Tomorrow you may be sick. Tomorrow they may have left. Tomorrow you may have lost your wits.

Truly in the words of Hebrews — TODAY is the day of salvation.¹⁴ Indeed, today is the time to care. Today is the day to exercise your gifts. Today is the time to teach your children what life in a body is all about. Today is the day to demonstrate the love of Christ.

So, while the temptation exists for us to postpone ministry until the right time, we must resist! It is day time and we must do our work in the day — today.¹⁵

The Mundane

And yet there is another temptation when it comes to the gifts and callings of God — and that is the temptation — to bury service in the mundane.

1 Samuel 3:15, “And Samuel lay until the morning, **and opened the doors of the house of the LORD.** And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.”

We've already seen that while Eli slept in one of the many rooms just off the main sanctuary at Shiloh¹⁶ Samuel slept in the very room which housed the ark.¹⁷ Furthermore, we've noticed that some of the most “sanctified” words used for ministry are attributed to Samuel in this passage — though he was just a boy.¹⁸ As such we know that Samuel wasn't just a low-level apprentice of Eli; rather he had an integral function in the Shilohic worship.

Now, in Samuel's position, there were duties and functions that were nothing less than holy and profound. We don't know, but perhaps he help trim the candles. Perhaps he placed the bread on the table of shewbread. Perhaps he even performed the divine offering of animals. However, as he was sleeping

¹² Compare 1 Timothy 3:6

¹³ Compare Psalm 90:12

¹⁴ Compare Hebrews 4:7

¹⁵ Compare John 9:4

¹⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 3:2

¹⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 3:3 For obvious reasons, Judaism challenges this view and suggests that 1 Samuel 3:3 could read that Samuel was simply sleeping in the bedding quarters of the temple — the one where the ark was. However, this is not the natural way to read this. The most natural is to interpret this as it is translated in the NASB- Samuel was sleeping in the temple beside the ark.

¹⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 3:1, 10

beside the ark and was called to “minister to the Lord,” none of these would have been beyond him.

And yet as a “priest-in-training,” there too would have been the mundane things- like sweeping the courtyard, gathering supplies, cleaning up after Eli in his ministrations, maintaining the temple, and opening its doors each morning!

In light of this when we read here that upon waking it is NOT that Samuel immediately presented the daily offering, changed the loaves of shewbread, trimmed and relit the candles of the lamp of God,¹⁹ or a host of other important duties that could not be postponed. RATHER he “opened the doors of the house of the Lord!” — a statement implying that Samuel went about the mundane. From this we conclude that this isn't a priest longing to serve, but a minister avoiding his call — burying it in the mundane things of life!

This is the second temptation that comes to the gifts and callings of God: Burying Them In The Mundane!

And you know, this just naturally flows from the first response. It is not too difficult to know when we are putting off ministry. While our hearts are deceitful, they are not unknowable! Thus in an attempt to avoid ministry — and to do it in such a way as to placate a guilty conscience — we can be found occupying ourselves with “important” details like these:

- Educating our children.
- Making a living.
- Earning the degree.
- Studying for service.
- Caring for our homes.
- Attending to our weekly obligations.

The Parable of the Dinner

We see it in the parable of the dinner.²⁰ A man planned a big dinner and invited many in his community. When the time came, no one showed up. So he sent out a servant to announce that it was dinner time. And out came the excuses. And all the excuses were lame.

Luke 14:18, “And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.”

When you get to the details, this is a horrible excuse. No one even back then bought land that they hadn't already examined. Yet for someone who really didn't want to attend, this could work. Hey, responsibility means check out that property. As much as I'd love to go, I can't.

Luke 14:19, “And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.”

Again this is an horrible excuse — no one would purchase oxen and then endeavor to see if they were healthy. But again, for someone who really didn't want to attend, this could pacify the guilty conscience. You know I want to come. But what can I do? I've got to be a faithful farmer.

¹⁹ Compare 1 Samuel 3:3

²⁰ Compare Luke 14:16-24

Luke 14:20, “And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”

This perhaps is the best of the three — “Listen, I agreed to come but now I'm married; I've got responsibilities.” Again, for someone who didn't want to attend the dinner, this might work. The truth is marriages were planned years in advance. This man agreed to come knowing he would be married. Thus this really is no excuse.

What's the point here? Why did Christ tell this parable?

Because if you look hard enough you will always find an excuse for neglecting ministry. See, the truth is we don't want to serve, and most often our conscience won't allow us just to “sleep on it.” And so what do we do? We throw ourselves into sanctified activities which keep us from ministry.

We are busy with all kinds of stuff:

- Work.
- Family.
- School.
- Life.

But listen! If you are too busy to fulfill the ministry entrusted to you, exercise the gifts that God has given to you. Then... you are too busy!

Fear of Man

But again, “busyness” is just an excuse. The real reason we put off ministry lays in the final temptation—the temptation shrink back from service on account of the fear of man.

1 Samuel 3:15, “And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. **And Samuel feared²¹ to shew Eli the vision.**”

This sentence serves as the basis for the other responses in this text: Samuel Feared Eli! Samuel really didn't need to sleep that night. In fact many commentators imagine that Samuel wouldn't have gotten much sleep as he lay there contemplating all that God had say. The mundane things of the temple could have waited. Yet, both were utilized because Samuel didn't have the heart to give Eli God's message.

Look at the passage again: “And Samuel feared.” The Hebrew word here means to fear, be afraid, or to be in terror. A common word in the Bible, it can be used in a variety of contexts. For example, it is used to convey the emotion of fear.²² It conveys the anticipation of evil.²³ And it conveys the idea of reverence or awe.²⁴ It is used to express righteous behaviour or piety which proceed from reverencing God.²⁵ And it is used in the context of formal religious worship.²⁶

²¹ יָרֵא yare'

²² Compare Deuteronomy 5:5 and 1 Samuel 7:7

²³ Compare 1 Samuel 21:13, and Genesis 31:31

²⁴ Compare Leviticus 19:3, 26:2; Psalm 112:1; 86:11; Habakkuk 3:2; and Job 6:21

²⁵ Compare Leviticus 19:14; 25:17; 2 Kings. 17:34; Deuteronomy 10:18-20; 17:19; 25:18; 31:11-12; Exodus 1:17, 21.

²⁶ Compare 2 Kings 17:32-34; Deuteronomy 14:22-23; Joshua 22:25

Now in and throughout all of its uses is the concept of weight or deference. To “fear” is to react to the influence of someone or something. For example, when David anticipated peril, we read this:

1 Samuel 21:12-13, “And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard.”

Here David feared the king because of the influence that Achish had in determining David's welfare, we read of David changing his conduct! We see it in our relationship with God.

Psalms 112:1, “Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.”

Here man delights in God commandments because of the weightiness of God. To fear God is to respond appropriately to Him. And yet we also see it in our relationship with man.

Proverbs 29:25, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”

When we live in deference to man or what man might do, this text says that our fear may lead to a trap! Such is the nuance of this word. It reacts to the perceived influence of someone or something.

Thus when Samuel was told the vision of Eli's doom, he considered the implication of this message and evidently quaked in his boots for fear of what might happen. He wondered if Eli would respond in anger, or would be in great and horrible anguish, and scream, rant and rave. Now because Samuel did not want to experience any of these things (and who could blame him?), he put off the call to preach and busied himself in the temple.

And this illustrates the third and final temptation when it comes to the gifts and callings of God: To Not Use Them On Account Of The Fear of Man.

Surely, it is not that we are too busy. It is not that we have other obligations and responsibilities that keep us from service. It is not that our house-work really is that important. It is that we are afraid of what might happen if we exercise our gifts and callings.

You say that I am not afraid to show love to someone, call them on the phone, and extend the grace of Christ to that individual. Perhaps, if we were speaking about sharing our faith or standing up for what is right, that would be a different story — but to care?

Family of God I believe that “fear” is a primary factor that keeps us from ministry. Think of it. What if the person breaks down — do you really want to be responsible for his soul? What if the person starts relying upon you too much — do you really want them at your house that late? Do you really want to get that close to an individual?

There is a lot to fear when it comes to genuine ministry!

And yet, may I encourage you today?

WE DO NOT NEED TO FEAR! God will not give you anything that He can't handle by and with you. And thus we need only to “commit the keeping of [our] souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful

Creator” (1 Peter 4:19).

In fact, listen to the many charges of Scripture. When Joshua was thrust into leadership upon the death of Moses God said:

Joshua 1:9, “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

To the disciples who were called to make disciples of all nations Christ said, “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). To a church entrusted with the ministry of suffering and trial:

1 Corinthians 10:13, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

Do you know what all this translates as?

We need not fear man, what will happen if we avail ourselves to God, the future, or the consequences. We need only to offer ourselves to God for His service as a living and holy sacrifice.²⁷ We only need to prove ourselves faithful to Christ.²⁸ We need only to trust Him in and through all things.²⁹ And nothing will be placed in our path that God will not see us through!

Ministry requires faith. Faith is the willingness to rely upon an unseen God for unseen results in the face of difficulty. Samuel would soon learn this, and so must we!

Let us not shrink back in fear. Let us not placate irresponsibility with the mundane. Let us not put off ministry until the time is right. Rather in the words of the Hebrew writer:

Hebrews 12:1, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”

And so let us boldly and faithfully exercise the gifts and callings that God has placed in/on our lives.

²⁷ Compare Romans 12:1-2

²⁸ Compare John 17:4

²⁹ Compare Proverbs 3:5

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About the Preacher

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