

## Grace in Transition | The Book of Samuel

### The Calling

First Samuel 3.1 – 4.1  
9.13.20

*Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.*

*<sup>2</sup>It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well), <sup>3</sup>and 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, <sup>4</sup>that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup>Then he 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. <sup>6</sup>The LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again." <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup>So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup>And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

*<sup>10</sup>Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." <sup>11</sup>The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. <sup>12</sup>In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. <sup>13</sup>For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. <sup>14</sup>Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."*

*<sup>15</sup>So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. <sup>16</sup>Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." <sup>17</sup>He said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you." <sup>18</sup>So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him."*

*<sup>19</sup>Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. <sup>20</sup>All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. <sup>21</sup>And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*

*<sup>4.1</sup>Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel.*

We've been looking at the Book of First Samuel; it's the inspired history of the Great Transition in Israel (about 1000 BC) from a confederation of tribes into a nation with a unified government, a monarchy, a capital city and perhaps most important – in that city – the Temple. And that Temple would house the Box – the Ark of the Covenant (figures prominently in this book; next two weeks). It symbolized the throne of God and His dwelling in the midst of His people.

This was the end of the period of the Judges, a very, VERY dark time in Israel, a lawless, violent time dominated by cruel men – “In those days there was no king in Israel; every MAN did what was right in his own eyes.” (Jdg 17.6) and YET...in this book, that is changing..

This book spotlights what God was doing to make Jerusalem the “Axis Mundi”, the center of the world. The name, Jerusalem, could mean “Foundation of Shalom” or “Teaching of Shalom” This is the “City Set on a Hill” and God would draw all people TO it (1 Kings 10) in order to show all nations His foundation of shalom...how it could be to live under God's wholeness and truth!

As this book opens there IS no center... the Ark of God was still in a portable tent (Shiloh). The Judges were barely holding things together in the darkness of ANARCHY and the disintegration of the whole society. But God will make His Barren Bride fruitful... He will be the Lord and Giver of Life... Light and Life!

Today, we witness the sunset of the old regime and the sunrise of the new. It's the end of a drought and the start of a new rain. “God tells the man who cares” (A.W. Tozer) and here God awakens a man to care and to hear God's voice: God will begin again to speak to a society that has long been lost in darkness.

This passage introduces the topic of vocation or calling (11x). God calls to His people and they come to life – His word makes alive. As Eugene Peterson wrote, “Personal address... is God's primary form of speech.” TODAY'S episode (the calling of Samuel) is a unique experience as God breaks the silence AND this is also the experience of every person who comes to know God. We're going to ask (gently and beneficially): Is it YOUR experience? Have you heard the Voice of God? What does it mean to be called by God and to live as a called person? Let's look at:

- 1. After Darkness, Light (Post Tenebras Lux)**
- 2. The Calling and the Caller**
- 3. Living As a Called Person**

In the Bible and in subsequent history (right to the present) God, the Lord and Giver of Life, finds His people... over and over again... cooling off. The Apostle Paul noticed the pattern when he wrote to the Church at Corinth about the OT Church and their tendency to lose spiritual focus and heat, “Now these things happened to them as an example... for our instruction...Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.” (1<sup>st</sup> Cor 10.11-12)

And God meets His people in their arrogance and spiritual coldness and He warms/revives them... again and again. One of the many slogans in the Protestant Reformation was “post tenebras lux” – after darkness light. We depend on God to illumine us or else we dwell in the dark.

And after the Israelites settled into the Promised Land they did indeed become lukewarm and then tepid and cool and cold and finally SPIRITUALLY FRIGID and DULL. The Book of Judges documents that slide into almost total darkness. Failing again and again to trust in the God of Abraham and turning to idols and to other nations, they lost their way; they needed warmth and light and direction.

Today’s scene takes place in and around the Tabernacle (portable worship tent that shrouded the Ark of the Covenant at Shiloh). There are several important references to light and darkness.

Eli has lost the light. He’s almost blind and that’s also symbolic of his spiritual condition.

It’s noted (v. 3) that IN the Tabernacle the “lamp of God had not yet gone out.” The lampstand in the Tabernacle was to stay lit all through the night and then to be refilled in the morning and lit again at dusk. This note gives us two important clues. First, it’s almost dawn when this takes place – the lamp isn’t “YET” gone out. Second, this is another emblem or symbol of Israel’s spiritual condition at this time: they’re a smoldering wick, barely any light at all... almost completely out of oil...but not YET!

Because “post tenebras lux” – after darkness, LIGHT! The little boy who grew up around the Tabernacle and is sleeping NEAR the Holy Place where the Ark, the symbol of God’s Presence IS, little Samuel hears a Voice (“Horton Hears A Who”) and the Voice is calling his name. He does not yet (v.7) KNOW the LORD in the sense that he doesn’t recognize God’s Voice but he is being CALLED... like Noah, Abraham, Deborah, Isaiah, Mary, Paul...

As a very earnest assistant, he replies, “Here I am!” (5x) And he springs to his feet and “runs” to his almost-blind mentor, the priest, Eli. But Eli tells the boy he must be dreaming. Then it happens again and then again.

The third time, Eli, discerns that this MAY be God’s Voice (see Psalm 29!) and tells the boy how he should respond if he hears God’s Voice again: “say, ‘Speak, YHWH, for Your servant is listening.’”

And the young boy (some say maybe 12-years-old at this point), Samuel waits and God addresses him, “Samuel, Samuel...” (repeating someone’s name is always an endearing form of address in the Bible). And the LORD gives the young man a very heavy burden – Samuel has to pronounce judgment on the family of his boss, Eli.

He lays down again until morning when it's noted (v.15), "In the morning, Samuel opened the doors to the house of the LORD." He lets in the air and the light!

He's understandably afraid to tell the priest but old Eli isn't totally blind to what's been happening with his evil sons and he's prepared to hear the worst, so Eli addresses his adopted son and insists on hearing it ALL! "So" (v.18) "Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from Eli."

And once again, Eli shows that he still has faith and some remaining light as he accepts God's verdict.

And then the chapter ends with God confirming His calling of little Samuel, "Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail." The term "WORD" is repeated in these final verses. V.21 teaches a big truth: "The LORD appeared again at Shiloh because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel ...by the word of the Lord."

It's as if to say, "Where God's word is, GOD IS!" His word is that closely related to His Person.

And when we trace that idea through the whole Bible – that God's Word of personal address – God speaking to people is the indispensable sign and guarantee of God's presence – that important theme reaches its ZENITH when the Inner Thoughts of God Himself, the MIND OF GOD was expressed in an actual Person.

God's Mind/Logic/LOGOS/HIS WORD became physical – "the WORD became flesh and tabernacled among us". The Gospel According to John opens with this very idea, that the INNER THOUGHT OF GOD which was spoken and which spoke the universe into being – that WORD was again expressed in the form of a Person, the Man, Jesus of Nazareth.

THAT PERSON, the Mind/Word of God made FLESH, He is God's final message to the world. In this Person, Jesus Christ, the Mind of God made flesh, God has expressed His whole heart to the world. God appeared at Shiloh IN THE WORD TO SAMUEL and GOD APPEARED TO THE WORLD IN THE WORD MADE FLESH, Jesus Christ.

Like the word to Samuel, the Word-Made-Flesh, Jesus Christ came with a message of judgment – God is going to condemn sin (Rom 8.3)! But UNLIKE the message to Samuel, the Message that Jesus Christ IS was, "I Myself will take the judgment that YOU deserve... I will live for you... I will die and be judged for you and I will demonstrate My victory FOR YOU...by defeating the enemy you MOST FEAR, death itself – I will RISE FOR YOU!"

If you want to hear ...and to see that Heart of God most fully unveiled and expressed... the Word IS Jesus Christ Himself. He's the clearest, fullest expression of God there is. He says to the whole

world (Can't you hear Me knockin'?) HE SAYS, "Come to Me and find relief from fear of judgment OR put your trust in someone or something else and face the judgment yourself – I will be judged FOR you OR you will be judged BY Me."

Now, I admit that even after being a believer in Jesus Christ for many years...I still find this hard to believe. That a poor, blue-collar Laborer from the fringe of the Roman Empire, an non-credentialed Rabbi 2,000 years ago was actually the physical embodiment (the incarnation) of God and that He lived the life I failed to live and He died that death that I deserved to die... I think the average South Floridian who hears that, thinks it's crazy.

I used to think it was crazy...**until God called me.**

For me, it happened in a hospital bed a few weeks after my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. For some of you, it happened at Vacation Bible School when you were in fourth-grade. For others, it happened in the midst of a crushing divorce or during a sermon you heard on the radio or on a college campus or when a friend took you for coffee...or when your dad prayed for you and tucked you in.

Samuel's calling from God was unique. He was a prophet and an extremely important figure used to bring light after a long period of darkness. God used him to pull back the curtain, "So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord..."; Samuel's unique experience.

But EVERY person who actually comes to know the God of the Bible has a similar experience, a calling from God. For some it's dramatic (that was the case with me). For others, you can't even identify when it happened. It was so gentle and subtle that all you can say is, "At some point I simply came to believe that the Carpenter from Galilee was God and was God's message to the world and to me personally!"

"And I received the message – the Person of Jesus Christ – the Living Word – I was called by God...it became a personal address." It's not an audible voice but a deep conviction/liberation that, "this is TRUE and God gave me eyes to see and believe."

The boy Samuel was a sign – morning had broken and God was opening the doors – letting in the air and the light and granting access to Himself.

But Jesus Christ is THE sign – He actually opens the Door no one can shut (Rev 3.8) and grants us access to heaven and to the great plan of God to make all things NEW. "To as many as receive Him, to those who believe He gives the privilege of being children of God." (John 1.13)

Now, living as a called person IS the adventure of the Christian Life. So let me end with a few ways the called life plays out:

First, use the Bible to actually converse with God. The Bible is meant to be received as a personal address, so use it that way. When you read it, receive it as a Person speaking to you and respond to what you hear/read. Say with Samuel, "Here I am – Your servant is listening!" Learn to study it, to interpret it as it was meant to be taken (so you don't end up with weird ideas) but then take it as God's continued calling...hear and respond.

Second, get into a church that actually explains the Bible... AND explains it in such a way that Jesus Christ is the focus of every explanation. That's how the Bible is meant to be understood – "the Scriptures speak of ME", said Jesus Christ (John 5.39; Luke 24.27 & 44 et al). We need other people to live the called life – it requires relationship.

Third, walking in the light will lead you into the freedom of honesty. You'll be enabled to share your failings with people (i.e. when it will benefit those people or bring credit to God). You'll realize that your identity depends on HIS success NOT YOUR SUCCESS so you can tell the truth about your failings (1 John 1.6-7; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor 10.17-18, 12.9-10).

Fourth, let the Word that you hear and read... let the calling of God lead you to continue repenting and believing. To respond to God's calling...to live as a called person means not getting a big head but a soft heart: Psalm 95 – "For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you want to hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as (they did)... in the wilderness" (vv.7-8)

Last, be fixated on Jesus Christ. He is the Door. He opens the Doors to Heaven. He is God, personally addressing us... So, hear Him, Hear His words and His whole life.

Hebrews CH 1: *"In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."* (vv.2-3)