

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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The Attributes of a Prophetic Call, Part 9

Unknown Consequences

In Matthew 20 we read of the time that the mother of James and John approached Christ with a question.

Matthew 20:21b-22a ,” She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask.”

I can't help but to wonder how many times we serve in ignorance. We fail to consider what we'd have if God gave us everything we asked. We do not realize the profound impact holiness could have on our lives. And we do not understand how God plans to use this or that providence. We have a limited perspective.

Let me ask you these questions: What would happen if you and I served the Lord with fidelity? What would be the outcome say if those of us who have been given the gift of compassion, exercised that compassion? What would happen if those of us with the gift of helps, proved faithful to that calling? What would happen if those with mercy showed mercy? What if we did this things in love without hypocrisy?

The answer is that unimaginable things would occur.

And yet, while we may not know the full extent of how God might use us, nevertheless our passage gives us some idea as to what might happen if we served faithfully.

As we have seen, the text at which we are looking details Samuel's call and service as a prophet of the Lord. Now as a young boy, he at first buckled under the pressure of such a calling. Rather than boldly proclaiming the message of the Lord, he withdrew because he feared Eli.¹ But then we read that “And Samuel told him [Eli] every whit, and hid nothing from him” (1 Samuel 3:18a).

And in Samuel's obedience we find that not only Samuel was blessed, but the people of God as a whole were blessed.

¹ Compare 1 Samuel 3:15

As we continue looking at this text detailing the consequences of fidelity to the calling of God we will discover that the blessings that we can expect when we are faithful to our callings. Now, we have already seen the first consequence of fidelity: The well-being of the people of God. There are three more consequences of faithfulness on which we will focus our attention, the next being personal maturation in the faith.

Maturation in Faith

1 Samuel 3:19, “And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.”

This is similar to the many reports that we have seen throughout the opening chapters of Samuel.² It helps us behold the status of Samuel — the epitome of faithfulness — and Eli’s household — the example of compromise.

In contrast to Eli's household, Samuel here is pictured as growing in stature, in favor with God, and in favor with man. In other words, this young servant is maturing and so prospering in his walk such that he was established as a true prophet of the Lord.³ And it is not that we don't nor won't read of difficulties or set-backs in Samuel's life in the chapters to come, it is that through all Samuel remains steadfast in Christ!

Now in this context, what is to explain Samuel's determination — his unwavering commitment to Christ and the consequent growth in grace? How is it that we continue to read of “God being with Samuel — letting none of his words fail?” This passage points to one answer: “And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him” (1 Samuel 3:18a).

It is as Samuel proved faithful to his calling that he grew in the Lord. It is as Samuel ministered according to the will of God that he matured in the faith. This unfolds the second consequence of fidelity when it comes to our gifts and callings: Personal maturation in Christ.

Now, this involves one taking the focus off of himself and serving God and His people according to the gifts and calling with which he has been entrusted. This is a rather simple truth that has profound consequences. If you and I prove faithful to the call God has placed upon our lives three things happen:

- We are forced to live by faith. Think of the temptations to withdraw from ministry. The only way around these temptations is to trust God to work His will through you. You will be placed in situations where only God can deliver you.⁴
- After all by definition, a spiritual gift is an endowment from the Spirit whereby He enables us to do that which we would not naturally do. Thus if we serve according to our gifts and callings, we will be placed in situations beyond our natural abilities. We will become God-centered rather than self-centered.
- No gift was ever given for the benefit of the one to whom the gift was entrusted.⁵ As such, to prove faithful to the gifts and callings of the Lord is to live not for yourself but for Christ and His

² Compare 1 Samuel 2:11, 18-21, 3:1, 19-21; a

³ This passage is stressing that Samuel evidenced the marks of a true prophet. Compare also Deuteronomy 18:21-22

⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 3:15

⁵ Compare 1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11

people! In light of all of this, how could we not grow if we serve according to Christ's appointment? In fact if there were any doubts, listen to Ephesians 4, where Paul shows us this threefold process:

Ephesians 4:13, "Till we all come in the [1] unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, [2] unto a perfect man⁶, [3] unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

This is the end of the exercise of all gifts: Maturation of the body of Christ of which we all are a part. To serve according to Christ's appointment is to grow in the Lord. Thus when Samuel by faith opened his mouth and served according to the gifts and calling of the Lord we read "and Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground" (1 Samuel 3:19).

We too, will grow up in Christ as we minister.

Affirmed a Servant

1 Samuel 3:20, "And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD."

This portrays both the scope and character of Samuel's call. As to its scope the Scripture tells us that it was from Dan to Beersheba. These were the northern and southern borders of Israel in Samuel's day.⁷ It would be similar to our modern day expression "from sea to shining sea."

The impact of Samuel's ministry was not just local. It extended throughout the entire Kingdom of God — something unheard of in Samuel's time. For example, it is clear that the impact of the Judges was local. When we read of Gideon, Samson, Japhthah, and Deborah they did not fight on the behalf of the nation. Rather their battles took place at the local level. They delivered their tribe (at best) from the foe.

Now, Samuel is contrasted to this context. His ministry extended not just to the environs of Shiloh, but all the way from Dan to Beersheba!

As to the character of Samuel's ministry this text indicates that Samuel was confirmed or attested as a prophet of the Lord. This means that Samuel met the three-fold criteria of the Old Testament for a prophet. First he had to be able to predict future events.⁸ Secondly his prophetic word was accompanied with miraculous signs.⁹ Thirdly, his prophecies had to be in accordance with the rest of Scripture.¹⁰

While man cannot add to God's word¹¹, God can. And when He did, He always protected His revelation by hedging in the office of a prophet with these three tests! Thus if a man arose claiming to be a prophet of God and yet he failed at any one point, he was to be rejected and put to death.^{12 13}

⁶ Mature man

⁷ Compare 2 Samuel 17:11; 1 Kings 4:25

⁸ Compare Deuteronomy 18:21-22, 1 Samuel 3:19; and Jeremiah 28:1-17

⁹ Compare 1 Kings 18:36-37 and Deuteronomy 13:1-2

¹⁰ Compare Deuteronomy 13:1-5

¹¹ Compare Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation 22:18-29

¹² Compare Deuteronomy 18:22; 13:5

¹³ This is one of the reasons why we reject the notion that the office of prophet still exists today. NO ONE CLAIMING THE OFFICE SATISFIES THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENT. For example: Bob Jones (not of the University) in his teaching

And yet in contrast, evidenced by these three signs, the prophet was to be feared because God was truly speaking through him!

And this is the case with Samuel. Even though he was a mere youth, he was established as a prophet of the Lord. Had Samuel remained on the course laid down in verse 15 where he is seen shrinking back from ministry no one would have known that he was a prophet.

So what made the difference?

The fidelity evidenced in verse 18 in which he spoke everything that God gave him.

From this we conclude that without fidelity to his calling, Samuel would not have been confirmed as a prophet. Without exercising his gifts and calling, Samuel would not have been affirmed as a servant of Christ.

Affirmation as a servant of the Lord is the third consequence of fidelity to one's call. This is such an important message for the body of Christ! Many are waiting for when they will be called upon to serve. Consider the woman who believes she has the gift of encouragement, but no one comes to her for encouragement. Or consider the man that believes God has called to be an elder or deacon, but no one nominates him. Or the man who believes God has called him to teach and shepherd but the church is so "top heavy" that he is convinced he will never be asked to teach, serve or shepherd. If this is your outlook, you have it all wrong!

One's gifts and calling will find you out only as you exercise them. One doesn't need an official invitation to love someone, serve them, come alongside them and minister, teach by the bedside, and shepherd another soul, you just need (1) the eyes to see the multiple needs that exist in the body of Christ, and (2) the willingness to serve.

But that's the problem in a nutshell. Many are waiting to be recognized and then they will serve. Many are waiting to be called and then they will come. Yet, according to this text, this is backwards. Samuel humbly served, ministered, spoke, and then he was recognized as a prophet.

If Broomfield Presbyterian Church is going to raise up deacons, elders, ministers, servants, and the like it must begin with the decision one makes to be a blessing to someone else or to be mute — waiting for the time they are asked. This passage exhorts us to exercise our gifts and callings. It is in exercising our gifts that we will be affirmed as a servant of Christ!

titled *The Shepherd's Rod*, explains why so many modern prophecies go unfulfilled.

"[God] said, 'If I release the hundred-percent rhema right now, the accountability would be awesome and you'd have so much Ananias and Sapphiras going on that the people couldn't grow- they'd be too scared.' But He said, 'If it was on target, it would kill instead of scaring the people to repentance'... That is what He told me, so I figure if I hit two-thirds of it, I'm doing pretty good."

And Mike Bickle, the pastor of Bob's church, added, "...when Bob first said [this] I said 'Two thirds?' He said, 'Well, that's better than it's ever been in this nation up to now... That's the highest level it's ever been.'"

While I would not suggest that Bob Jones be "put to death" (Deuteronomy 13:5), nevertheless by self-attestation he disqualifies himself from the office.

Strengthening Worship

1 Samuel 1:21, “And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.”

I don't know if we can grasp the profundity of this statement; “The Lord Appeared Again At Shiloh”¹⁴ but we can try!

The worship at Shiloh had been compromised on account of Hophni and Phinehas.¹⁵ As a result, when the people of God considered this holy place, hatred mixed with levity welled up in their heart —Shiloh had become a joke.¹⁶ And thus as evidenced in our passage, somewhere along the way the Lord lifted His special covenantal presence whereby He would have blessed the worship of this sanctuary.¹⁷ In fact by the time of our passage, Shiloh had been the source of so much dishonor that God promised to destroy it.¹⁸

BUT THEN... the servant of the Lord, Samuel, began ministering according to his call. And our text tells us the marvelous things that happened. First, the Lord appeared again. Secondly, the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh. And thirdly, the word of the Lord came anew to the people of God.

This is like the glorious end of a bad dream in which darkness turns to light. Because the Lord was with Samuel- ministering in and through him- AND because Samuel was in Shiloh, the Lord once again blessed the worship of that dwelling!

The worship of God is strengthened when we are faithful to our calling. I hope you see that this is one of the more important ramifications to the Christian's ministry. It is important because ultimately we are children of God, servants in His kingdom, workers that are Christian, and ones who are forgiven. In our most fundamental state we are nothing less than worshippers of Christ.

Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

When you strip everything away from the Christian what you have is a worshipper of Christ. At our roots this is what we are.

Acts 18:7, “And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.”

Do you see it? A synonym for a Christian in Scripture is, “a worshiper of God.” This is what we are all about in Christ!

¹⁴ While the Hebrew could also be translated as, "the Lord continued to appear," the nuance is the same. For truly before this time, the Lord rarely appeared at Shiloh- visions were precious/rare (3:1). But now the Lord continually appeared at Shiloh. Hence the many translations which opt for "appeared again."

¹⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 2:12-17

¹⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 2:17

¹⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 3:21

¹⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 2:32

Since this is true, to discover that which provides for God attended worship is to discover something more valuable than gold. And what is it that provides for God Attended Worship?

By the example of Samuel, the body of Christ serving according to their gifts and calling.

You say, “this seems rather simplistic. What does the six-day-service that I render to God have to do with the worship I offer on the seventh?”

The answer should be obvious.

We are not robots which have the ability to compartmentalize life into separate areas. We are organic beings which means that at any given moment we are the sum total of all that has occurred in our lives. Thus, when the Old Testament people of God brought wonderful gifts and offerings to the Lord in worship they nevertheless were rejected because prior to the Sabbath they had trampled underfoot the Kingdom of God.¹⁹ Ah but when Samuel proved faithful to the calling of a prophet Sunday thru Friday, we read, “and the Lord appeared again at Shiloh.”

So it will be with us. If we make it our habit to gather on Sunday to tell God how much we love, need, and want Him and yet live six days — not in overt sin — in violation of our gifts and callings, by our deeds we are proclaiming that God is a joke, and that we don’t really care about Him.

In other words, love, sincerity, devotion, and honor are met out not only in what we say on Sunday but in how we serve on Monday thru Saturday. Thus to cultivate a life of sincerity when it comes to service in God's kingdom, is to cultivate genuine worship on Sunday.

Now as children of God whom the Lord loves, do not hear condemnation in this. God is your Lord. He loves you. He saved you when you were a sinner. He loves you much more now that you are His child.²⁰

Rather, I hope you walk away from this with the conviction that fidelity to our gifts and calling is not an option. You must not postpone service in Christ because that postpones your good and God’s glory.

Because we know the kindness of God, let us not shrink back in our service. Let us boldly serve the Lord this day and every day!

¹⁹ Compare Malachi 1:6-14

²⁰ Compare Romans 5:8-9

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 18, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.