

1st Samuel Ch 3

We read in John 10:14-16 where Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”* and In Vs 27 He said, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”* The Psalmist wrote in Ps 95:6-7 *“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.”* We are the sheep of the Lord’s hand, we are the people of His pasture, and Jesus, our Good Shepherd wants to lead us (His flock) personally, intimately, and precisely. How, by the sound of His voice, He said, *“My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me.”*

And in the chapter that’s before us tonight we have an account of a young fella learning to discern the voice of God, and receive direction from the Lord. The boy’s name? Samuel, and Samuel has led his entire life consecrated and separated to the Lord, has been busy about the work of the Lord from as early as he can remember. His mom brought him to the temple as soon as he was weaned and there Eli, the high priest has been teaching him what it means to lead a life that’s set apart to God. Now as for Eli’s sons, he didn’t do so well with them, they turned out to be a couple of rag tag losers that have defiled themselves, the sacrifices of God, and the ministry in general, so much so in fact that the people have begun to disdain bringing their offering to the Lord. And verse 25 of chapter 2 reveals the fact that they’d gone too far and God had given them over to their own vile passions, refusing to repent, God’s judgment upon them is eminent. But in sharp contrast, Samuel has grown in stature, and in favor, both with the Lord, and with man and has served the Lord faithfully, even though at such a point as we enter this ch he’s yet to have heard from the Lord. He doesn’t yet know the Lord, but moms and dad’s understand that that didn’t stop Eli from teaching Samuel about the Lord and the ways of the Lord and what it meant to serve the Lord. The bible places the accountability on the parents to train up their children the way that they should go, which goes way beyond just bringing them to church. It’s not the Sunday school teacher’s responsibility to train up your child the way he or she should go, though you do well to bring them and place them in a God centered environment with other children their age to hear the Word, and worship the Lord. But that’s just like icing on the cake; it’s your responsibility to teach your children. And Eli did a much better job with the 2nd chance that God gave him in Samuel, and so we read in verse 1 of chapter 3.

Vs1

God just wasn’t speaking to man, I mean after all you remember that this was at a time shortly after Samson, the time of the judges of which the bible says was a period in Israel’s history where every man did what was right in his own eyes. The people just weren’t seeking the Lord (as a nation) and beyond that, the priesthood was defiled and even the high priest had grown complacent in allowing such compromise in the ministry, so God just didn’t have anyone (you might say) in whom He could confide.

And so the stage is set in simply letting us know that at this point God just wasn't speaking to man, and when He would speak, as we saw in chapter 2 concerning Eli and his sons, it only seemed to be a word of judgment. But as far as widespread revelation, it just wasn't happening.

Vs2-4

Mark those words back there in vs 2 regarding Eli, *“his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see.”*

As much as time had taken his sight physically, complacency and compromise had taken his sight spiritually. As he'd grown older instead of becoming more and more of a treasure storing up the wisdom of God to unfold to people, he'd become less and less able to effectively lead the nation. Don't miss the implication here; the high priest of God was barely able to see!

And this “lamp of God” was that 7 branched golden candlestick that stood in the tabernacle before the veil on the left of the altar of incense. And one of the things that it was to represent was the light of God's truth being given to the world through the nation of Israel. And before it went out, (the implication on the spiritual side again being that Israel was a dim light at this point at best) but before the sun came up God called out to Samuel, now don't miss the significance of this.

Before the light of the world was completely snuffed out, even though it was just barely burning (as it were) in the darkness, God called out to Samuel. Now if we were to look at this through allegorical eyes, this is what we'd refer to as the “lamp of prophecy” meaning that before God caused the sun of one of the righteous to set, He causes the sun to rise in the life of another. So that before the sun set in the life of Moses, the sun rose in the life of Joshua, and here before the sun set's in the life of Eli, (though he could only barely see) the sun rises in Samuel's life. And in that is where the significance lies in this statement, “before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle” “the Lord called Samuel”.

Vs 5-9

Now how old was Samuel when all of this took place, well the bible doesn't say, though Josephus (the ancient Jewish historian) records Samuel as being 12yrs old at this point. However old he was, God began to speak to him, now how did God speak, and how does God speak to us, some people wait upon an audible voice, and generally they wait indefinitely, others say they hear audible voices and they're generally committed to some institution. But most people when they refer to “hearing God's voice” they're in reference to a thought or an impression upon their heart that they believe has been prompted or placed there by God. But it's important to be careful when listening for the voice of God not to act hastily or irrationally at some thought or impression that comes upon you because believe me when I tell you that God isn't the only source of thoughts or feelings that come into our head and into our hearts. You can manipulate yourself, and influence yourself and speak to yourself and give God the credit for it, or Satan can lay an impression upon your heart or mind as well.

Peter experienced both in a matter of minutes, in one moment he had the mind blowing revelation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God by which Jesus said, flesh and blood hasn't revealed this to you Simon, but My Father who is in heaven. And the next thing you know, Jesus is telling them how He has to suffer for the sins of the world and starts speaking of the cross and Peter says, far be it from you Lord, it's never going to happen.

And Jesus spins around and says to him, "Get behind me Satan, for you are an offense to Me." and (snap of the fingers) Just like that Peter went from receiving a godly impression to a Satanic impression and apparently was unable to discern the difference. David Guzik says this, "Because it is uncertain, there are three things to keep in mind. First, we must always judge what we think God may be telling us by what He has certainly told us in His Word, the Bible. God will *never* contradict His eternal Word." and We talked about that Sunday morning regarding the peace of God, God will never give you His peace in doing something that contradicts His Word, nor will He speak to you in a manner which opposes the clear instruction of His Word. "Second, we should always be humble when it comes to the idea of God speaking to us. We can never completely trust our ability to hear from God by this "inner voice" accurately.

It is easy for us to add something to what God has said, or to stop listening, or to misapply what He has said, or to think that it was God when it was ourselves or something else. It is far better to say and think, "I *think* the LORD told me . . ." than to talk and think as if you hear God perfectly." Why, because that can carry a certain arrogance with it, and the fact is, is that by having to filter everything through our fallen and fallible humanity it's very easy for us to miss it now and again. And the Bible is very clear about the "Woe" to those who say thus says the Lord, when the Lord hasn't said. So we need to be careful. He concludes, "Finally, no one should feel "unspiritual" because they think God does not speak to them the way He seems to others. If you really want God to speak to you, and to speak to you the *best* way, get into God's Word, the Bible! We *know* He has spoken there!"

So many times we can become envious because, "Gosh, the Lord doesn't speak to me like that, I must be some kind of spiritual idiot or something" and we start getting beat up over the deal. The fact is that we know God has spoken to us through His word and that's the best and most certain place to receive His direction, from that which we know with out a doubt that He has spoken.

Now the fact that Samuel called out, "Here I am" alludes to the fact that he did hear an audible voice, but again Heb 1:1-2 "*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.*" So we're living in different times as far as the audible voice goes, now, can God call out to us that way, you bet, He can do whatever He likes. But I believe the fruit of a person's doings after hearing such a voice should be highly scrutinized to verify if in fact their instructions came from God.

But I love Samuel's response, "Here I am" not that God doesn't know where we are, but that we're at His beck and call, this is the disposition and demeanor of a servant. This is the same way that Abraham (Genesis 22:1), Jacob (Genesis 46:2), Moses (Exodus 3:4), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8), and Ananias (Acts 9:10) all responded to the Lord's calling out to them. Now, Samuel didn't yet know the Lord and so he's not accustomed to hearing his voice, so he believes it's Eli, but notice the Lord kept calling out to him. And this will also be true in our lives, again don't be too quick to jump at some thought or impression, or "inner voice" the instant you believe that, "this may be the Lord." God will continue to call out to you; He will (as we would say) confirm His calling to you most generally often times and in numerous ways.

And something else we might see here is the fact that even though Samuel was raised in a godly home, (in that he was taught the ways of the Lord) that didn't mean that he knew the Lord. Conversion happens on an individual basis as by the Spirit of God. And as for Samuel it seems that his conversion and his calling happened simultaneously, much like that of Paul the apostle in Acts chapter 9.

But as Eli finally gets a grip on what is happening here, he gives Sammy some wise counsel here in verse 9. And he tells him 1st of all to make himself available to the Lord, go lie down and wait, but 2^{ndly} don't be presumptuous about God speaking to you, don't just presume that God is going to speak to in a manner that's any different than the way He deals with anyone else. He says, "if" He speaks, not "when", but "if" and 3^{rdly} now that you're available, if God should speak, "respond" to Him. Respond to the Word of God, but notice, in a disposition of humility, "your *servant* hears." So Samuel went and laid down.

Vs 10-11

Now in the OT when we read of tingling ears God's in reference to a judgment that's coming.

(2 Kings 21:12; Jer 19:3), One commentator put it this way, "It shall be a piercing word to all Israel; it shall astound them all; and, after having heard it, it will still continue to resound in their ears." (Adam Clarke)

Now He goes on to give him the news.

Vs 12-14

Again the opportunity for repentance is passed and now judgment is sealed, so this word confirms the Word of the Lord from the anonymous man of God in ch 2. Maybe that word invited repentance but still Eli refused to deal with it and so now God's confirming His message, or maybe Eli had been pleading that God would restrain and God is saying, no. But either way this is a hardcore message to deliver to a 12 yr old boy.

Vs 15-18

Now there's a bit of conflict here between commentators as to Eli's response, some say that this is sort of a "whatever" type response. You know, "Whatever, the Lord's going to do what He's going to do" almost a lethargic type mentality. And others commend Eli, saying that he'd resolved to be submissive to the righteous judgment of God; I'll let you wrestle with that.

Vs19

When he spoke in the place of God, he never missed, nothing failed that he said.

Vs20-21

4 Things to take note of as revealed in this ch regarding hearing the voice of the Lord, because one thing is for certain, He wants to speak to you, to lead you, and to guide you. In speaking to the church in Rev 3:20 Jesus said, "*I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*" He's knocking, He's speaking, the question is, are we listening? and I believe this ch gives us some key insight as to honing in on God's voice. Because there are always voices around you, as I speak there are many voices permeating this building, not just mine, but maybe a few Dj's from our radio stations here in town, any number of voices from television or radio waves are floating through this room, we just can't hear them because we're not tuned in. Our antenna's aren't up, our TV sets aren't on, the voices are here, we're just not tuned in. And it's exactly the same when it comes to hearing from the Lord, He's speaking, we're just not generally tuned in (many of us). A few things to maybe jot down.

#1 Notice who God speaks to, He speaks to a child, the boy Samuel. Now at this time there in Shiloh there's an experienced old pro of a priest, his name as you know is Eli, now his eyes were dim and he was over weight. But nonetheless he'd been at this thing for yrs; he had all his credentials his PhD's and doctorates in theology and all the rest, but he didn't hear from God did he? God didn't speak to him, but He bypassed him and spoke to a child. Who does God speak to, to children, Jesus said, "*Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.*" We have to become childlike if we're going to enter into the kingdom, not childish, but childlike, He went on to say, "*whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*" The expectancy of a child, the anticipation, but as we get older, and more scholarly, and degreed we begin to lose our fascination and sense of wonder and we get it all figured out and know how God does things and what He does and doesn't do. Eli represents the old order, the blindness, the hardness and insensitivity, the coldness of what can happen when one loses their sense of wonder and anticipation and replaces those things with pessimism and cynicism. Guard against the "old pro" mentality thinking you've got it all figured out, heard it all before because if that's you, then you're not going to hear the voice of the Lord.

#2 Notice not only *who* God spoke to (a child) but notice *when* God spoke to him. In verse 1 we see where Samuel was ministering "to" the Lord, and you may know this but maybe not, ministering "to" the Lord is different than ministering "for" the Lord.

Ministering “for” the Lord is when I give a bible study, or do something for someone else on the Lord’s behalf. It’s something that’s on the horizontal plain, something that’s others oriented in the name of the Lord. And all of that’s good, but by comparison it’s a curse compared to our higher calling of ministering personally “to” the Lord. Ezekiel ch 44 makes that clear, doing the ministry “of” the Lord (as rich as that is) is a curse compared to ministering personally “to” the Lord. That personal intimate worship, whereby you are pleasuring the Lord privately, no one else knows about it, you’re not on stage publicly, but you’re ministering to Him privately. You tend to things when no one else is around; you open your mouth and worship the Lord from your heart when no one else is near you. You’re taking the time to seek Him in His word, and spending time alone with Him in prayer and availing yourself to minister to Him. Loving on Him, appreciating Him, praising and adoring Him. And the cool thing about that is that we can all do it, not everyone can preach a sermon, not everyone has a million dollars to give, or can cross the ocean as a missionary, ministering for Him. But the higher calling we can all partake in, ministering to Him. Samuel did that, and God spoke to him. He had his priorities right, he ministered to the Lord before he ministered for the Lord and we see this again in Acts 13:2 regarding Paul and Barnabas, it says there that, *“as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”* As they ministered “to” the Lord, they were praising Him, worshipping Him, and as they were ministering to Him, the Lord spoke to them that they might be separated “for” the ministry.

#3 So we’ve seen who God spoke to when God spoke, where did God speak to him, in the temple. Now Paul tells us in the book of Corinthians that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, Peter tells us that we are collectively living stones that make up the tabernacle of God. More times than not you’ll find that God will speak to you, give you guidance and direction as you gather collectively with these other living stones right here at church. Not because of who I am, it doesn’t matter what I say, what is God saying, we want the Lord to speak to us.

#4 and Finally, take note of the fact that when the Lord spoke, Samuel got out of bed. He was responsive to the Word the Lord, why did God speak to him? Because Samuel would respond to His Word, and notice it was in the middle of the night, all the distractions of the day were over, the house if finally quiet, the kids aren’t bouncing around, the TV is off, and God whispers “Samuel.” I believe that God will call out to us in the middle of the night, but too often we think it’s the pizza calling, or our weak bladder shouting out to us, but I suggest to you (though at times that’s the case) but don’t rule out the voice of God, waking you up, wanting to speak to you. Now the means by which you’re aroused out of your slumber may vary, but I know for myself, I’m aroused out of bed, and I don’t stop and take to my knees and say “Here I am Lord, speak for your servant hears” as I grab my bible anticipating the voice of the Lord. I go back to bed. I think it’s my stomach churning, or that double latte’ I had, but listen, that just might not be the case, 3 times Samuel thought it was something else seeking his attention, he thought it was Eli. But it wasn’t what he thought it was; it was the Lord. And when God spoke to Samuel, when He aroused Samuel out of his sleep, Samuel responded and gave ear to the Lord.

So if you’re routine, or your schedule, or your sleep is suddenly interrupted, “how could they fire me, is he blind? Doesn’t he know how much I contribute to the company?” Listen, it’s not

that blind old man you work for disrupting your life, it's the Lord trying to get your attention, He wants to speak to you, He's trying to give you new direction, but you're not responding. You're still asleep.

God speaks to children; He speaks to us as we minister to Him, while we're at the temple, and if we'll get out of bed. May we more and more develop that keen sensitivity and responsiveness to the voice of the Lord, and again know that no matter what impression you may receive, it will only fall in line with what's already stated in His written Word.