

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, “Here I am.” ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down.

⁶ Again the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

“My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ A third time the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’ ” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:1-10 NIV2011)

Are You Listening?

If you are like me, you’ve been in this situation a time or two. You sit there nodding along the entire time. You say “mhmm...oh-yeah...really...you don’t say” throughout the conversation. But then you start to think about it. You hear the words, as in, you hear the syllables and noises. But that’s it. You quickly try to apologize and ask, “Could you say that again? I didn’t quite hear you.” Or someone thinks they are talking with you. You see their mouth moving at least. But your mind is off somewhere doing something else. Then it’s ripped back into the present time and place when you hear, “Are you even listening to me?” Some call it not-paying-attention. You maybe claim having selective-hearing. Whatever it is, we understand there is a difference between hearing something and actually listening.

When we meet Samuel in 1 Samuel 3 he’s a young boy, or better, an apprentice to Eli the high priest of Israel at the time. So that means Samuel works at the Tabernacle, the center-piece of Israel’s worship life at the time. Eli seems like he is slowing up a bit these days. His eyes are weak and has a hard time seeing. So, it’s fairly safe to think, not only would Samuel be helping out with the work in the tabernacle, he’s probably helping Eli in other ways too.

For all intents and purposes, today was like any other. As the day winds down Eli is ready to go to bed. He lies down in his usual place and trusts Samuel to do what he

needs to do. Eventually, after making sure the rest of his duties are done, Samuel heads to his own bed. Then he hears it. “Samuel!” (And if you’ve heard your name being called in the middle of the night, you know the feeling.) Samuel gets up and runs off to Eli. He must have forgotten something and needs Samuel’s young eyes and body to help him out. I’m sure this has happened before where Eli needs him. “Here I am,” he says. But when Samuel arrives he quickly learns he had not. Eli tells him, “I didn’t call; go back and lie down.” Samuel was sure he heard someone calling his name. But, if it wasn’t Eli, than who can it be now? Maybe he’s just so tired he’s hearing things. So he goes back, lies down, and tries sleeping. The crazy thing is that this happens another two times! And each of those times Samuel rushes off to take care of his responsibilities. And each time that’s not what he is supposed to be doing. But because the Word of the Lord is rare in those days, Samuel doesn’t know who or what he is hearing.

Do you recognize the Lord’s voice calling to you? He’s most likely not coming to you in visions or dreams. That’s how he operates in Samuel’s day. But in these Last Days—since Jesus’ return to heaven—the Lord speaks to us through his Son, the Word, in the Bible (Hebrews 1:1-2). No, he’s not coming to you in dreams, visions, signs from nature, or feelings in your heart. He speaks to you through His Word, the Bible. The problem is, it’s hard to hear him if you aren’t in the Word. Like Samuel who dutifully goes to take care of his responsibilities, you hear your responsibilities in life calling you too. You hear the calling of your parents and teachers who expect you to get your work done. You hear the calling of your loved ones that you want to make sure they are okay. You hear your children call your name needing your love, support, and appreciation. You hear your spouse calling you to set work aside for a little bit and actually pay attention to them. You hear your friend who just wants you to be there for them. All responsibilities and duties that you need to address. You hear the call of your career. You hear the work at your job that needs to get done yesterday. You hear the call of things that need your care at home. Important things. Needed things. You hear the call of your own body that needs rest, being mindful of your personal needs. All important. All needed. There are so many different things calling our names that we find ourselves running all over trying to take care of them.

But are you hearing the Lord’s voice? Or is it rare to hear the Word of the Lord in your day? In order to hear the Lord, you need to be in the Word. In order to be in the Word, that means actually taking time to be in it. But don’t think you will just do it whenever you can find the time. Nowhere does God give the impression in the Word that he is okay with the leftovers. Nowhere does he say, “You know what, I’m okay with waiting until you have some free time.” No, he’s a jealous God who expects top-priority. And don’t kid yourself either. You know how that works out after running around to all those

other responsibilities—you are tired. You know how quickly those precious hours are eaten up where it can feel like there isn't enough time in the day. But, if 24 hours in a day was perfect in the beginning when God creates the heavens and the earth, it's still the perfect amount of time for you and me today. The problem is we waste too much of it or we fail to properly prioritize it.

Are you hearing the Lord's voice? When someone isn't listening to us, eventually we get tired of it and want little-to-nothing to do with them. When someone fails to get the point, patient calling quickly turns into impatient frustration. And we see that consequence with the people of Israel. 1 Samuel 3:1 says: "The word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." God had promised to speak to his people in a special way through the prophets. However, it seems that because of the spiritual failures of the people, this was the consequence. He pulls his Word away. Yet, in grace, he calls Samuel again and again to work through him. There are consequences for when we sinfully do not listen to the Lord's voice. Then grace upon grace, the Lord has not taken his Word from us. He doesn't just speak through a select called group of prophets. He speaks to you through the ink and paper of the Bible. He speaks to you today through his called servant, a pastor. He speaks to you through your brothers and sisters in Christ. We have the Word more readily and easily accessible than any time in the history of the world. Hear him.

But just hearing is not enough. There's a difference between hearing and listening. We see that with Samuel. Finally Eli figures it out. Once Eli realizes what is going on he encourages Samuel, if he calls you again, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

It's hard enough for us to hear the Lord. But just hearing isn't enough. Are you listening? Are you paying attention to the Word? Or, are you paying more attention to the child who is acting out a little bit? Are you engaged with what is going on? Or, are you more engaged with your plans for later today? Are you hoping that by sitting there you can soak a few things in, put your time in, and that's good enough? If we were to broadcast what is on your mind right now, what would it show? Instead of having those servant ears waiting to hear and eager to do what the Lord says, we listen when it's convenient. We listen when it's something we think that we need. We pay attention when it's something that we want to hear. We listen, as long as God doesn't expect too much from me and I don't need to listen too closely.

Are you listening? Or are you too wrapped up wondering, "Speak, Lord, are you listening? Show me that you are listening to me. Prove that you are paying attention by doing *this*. Once I know you are listening, then I will be sure to listen to you." We treat Him more like a personal butler who is at our beck-and-call. Or, maybe not as much as a

butler but we lower him to our own level. At least that's what it seems like when instead of listening to His will we listen to the opinions, promises, and ideas of the world and our own personal reason. Instead of listening to his promises, trusting them are you filled with doubt and fear because you are listening too much to other things? When we do that, no wonder we do not listen to His Word. If he's at the same level as everything else, who needs that?

Are you listening? I hope so. Because he's not at your level. The same voice that spoke and the heavens were made and set the stars speaks to you. The one whose voice made all that is come into existence calls to you to hear. He speaks to you not from the thunderous cloud that shakes mountains. He knows how that would frighten us and chase us off into the hills. Instead he speaks with the still small voice of the Word. The Word who was there from the beginning. The Word by whom all things were made. The Word, who is True God, takes on flesh and dwells among us. The same Word who speaks with power and authority invites little children and you to come to him. The Word who drives out demons and heals diseases, calls you to follow him and promises to be with you always. God knows how we would not follow him by our own thinking or choosing. So He sends Jesus to bring you to him. Jesus whose very existence would be offensive to the Jews to call out to you. It's that voice that says, "All your sins are mine. I know how you have misplaced priorities. I know how you struggle to do what is right. I know how easily distracted you are and how you willingly neglect to really listen to God's Word. I know how because of your sin you would never get close to the same level as God. Confess your sin. And I forgive you. I take all those sins from you. I stand between you and God and with the shedding of blood pouring down that cross, I wash you clean. It is finished. I said it. I did it."

Are you listening? Your sins are forgiven. All of them. Sin no longer stains you. None of them. How do you know? Because the Spirit calls you out of the darkness of unbelief through the Word that shows you God's Son and what he has done. He cleans out your ears to hear, readies your heart to receive, and by the Spirit you believe Jesus' work is now your own. He puts his Word in ink and on paper so that you hear Jesus' voice in the Bible. He puts his Word into your hands so that you taste and see the Lord's goodness in the body and blood of the Lord's Supper. Take time to be in that Word. Grow with his voice as you continue to hear it. Really listen to what he has to say to you. Be in God's House where he comes down to you and speaks to you. Encourage one another and all people to come and hear. This Word of God gives us peace that surpasses understanding, pushes out the doubt, and gives confidence in the face of fair. We pray, "Lord, work in our hearts to say with Samuel: Speak, your servant is listening." Amen.