

"A PROPHET OF THE LORD"

I. Introduction

- A. In 1 Samuel 2, we saw references to the offices of king and priest.
1. Hannah concluded her prayer with the assertion that God "will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed."
 2. Then God sent the man of God to Eli and said, "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind."
 3. Here in chapter 3 we are told that "Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD."
 4. All three of these offices are mediatorial in nature.
 5. A mediator is necessary when there is a breach in a relationship.
 6. Sin has created a breach in our relationship with God.
 7. Sin has separated us from God's favorable presence and placed us under his just wrath.
 8. In the Old Testament, God ordained the offices of prophet, priest, and king to mediate his relationship with Israel, and each of these offices finds its ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- B. Our text this evening focuses on the office of prophet.
1. The reason why this office is so central to our relationship with God is because God's speech is the primary mode by which he makes himself present to us.
 2. We can only relate to God to the extent that he reveals himself to us.

3. The absence of God's speech is the absence of God, at least as far as his favorable presence is concerned.
4. We see this 1 Samuel 28, where King Saul complains to the spirit of Samuel that "God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams." (1 Sam. 28:15)
5. Saul realized that it is a terrible thing to be without the word of God.
6. In 1 Samuel 3, we see the Lord providing his people with a prophet who speaks his word.

II. God Gives His Word (3:1-14)

- A. Our text begins by telling us about Samuel's continued service at the sanctuary of the Lord under Eli.
 1. The events that unfold this passage are then introduced by the statement that is made in the second half of verse 1: "And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision."
 2. Of course, Israel did have the five books of Moses at this time, but there was a virtual cessation of new revelation.
 3. The term "vision" is used here because this is the technical term that the Old Testament employs to describe the typical way in which God communicated his word to his prophets.
 4. We might wonder why God was silent during this period.
 5. In light of what we know about the era of the judges, it stands to reason that this silence was due to God's wrath and displeasure.
 6. The absence of God's Word is a sign of judgment.
 7. We see this in the judgment that God announced through the prophet Amos, saying, "'Behold, the days are coming,' declares the Lord GOD, 'when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine

of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it." (Amos 8:11-12);

8. Martin Luther comments on this passage by saying, "This is the last blow. It is the worst, the most wretched, of all. [God] is threatening to take away the genuine prophets and the true Word of God, so that there is no one to preach, even if men were most eager to wish to hear the Word and would run here and there to hear it." [cited in Trueman, 88]
 9. The thing that makes the absence of God's word so tragic is that it is through his Word that God mediates his presence to us.
 10. Without the Word, we remain alienated from God.
- B. Of all the tangible gifts that God gives us in this world, his Word is the most precious.
1. The Word of God is the means by which he makes himself and his will for our salvation known to us.
 2. We should never let ourselves take the Bible or the preaching of the Word or our willingness to sit under that preaching for granted.
 3. Be diligent to take full advantage of the Word and its proclamation.
- C. Several of the details in this passage seem to have symbolic significance.
1. Notice that the Lord called Samuel when lamp of God had not gone out.
 2. This is referring to seven-branched lampstand that was kept burning from evening till morning in the sanctuary.
 3. This lampstand had a symbolic and typological purpose.

4. It signified the fact that God's people live under his continual blessing and guidance.
 5. The fact that God called Samuel when the lamp of God was still burning appears to indicate that God's light had not entirely left Israel in those dark days.
 6. Even in the darkest eras of church history, God does not abandon his people to total darkness.
- D. We should also note that God came to Samuel while he was sleeping.
1. This is something that we see quite often in Scripture.
 2. God comes to people in their sleep in order to draw our attention to the fact that he is the one doing the action.
 3. Salvation is not a joint effort.
 4. We do not supply our own mediator.
 5. God is the one who raises up a prophet for his people.
- E. Another detail that bears mentioning has to do with the way in which Eli is described.
1. Eli is very slow to perceive what is happening.
 2. It took three times before he realized that God was calling Samuel.
 3. Eli's lack of spiritual perception may very well be symbolized by the mention of his failing eyesight.
- F. The text explains Samuel's confusion over what was happening by saying that he did not yet know the Lord.
1. You will recall that the same thing was said about Eli's sons in the previous chapter, but the phrase does not carry a negative

connotation here.

2. The point is simply that Samuel did not have any experience in receiving direct communications from the Lord yet.
 3. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.
 4. God was extremely patient with Samuel when he called him.
 5. God could have utterly overwhelmed this young man.
 6. He could have called him in a manner that left no doubt about who it was who was issuing the call.
 7. But instead he gave Samuel time to come to the realization of what was taking place.
- G. When God called Samuel the fourth time that night, Samuel responded as Eli had instructed, saying, "Speak, for your servant hears."
1. Notice that Samuel actually heard an audible voice.
 2. It was not an inner voice but an outward and external voice.
 3. It was not at all like what you sometimes hear people say today about sensing that God is telling them to do something.
 4. Prophets received clear and direct communications from God.
 5. That is why they so frequently prefaced their oracles with the words, "Thus says the LORD."

III. The Prophet Speaks God's Word (3:15-4:1a)

- A. The word that God spoke to Samuel was not a pleasant message.
1. God revealed that he was about to bring judgment upon Eli's house.

2. And remember, Eli had essentially raised Samuel from the age of three or four.
 3. Eli was like a father to Samuel.
 4. It would have been very tempting for Samuel to be silent about the word that had been revealed to him.
 5. This reminds us of how we can be tempted to downplay or set aside the unpleasant aspects of the Bible's message.
 6. For example, it is common these days to hear Christians talking about the gospel not as the way of deliverance from God's just wrath but as the way to have a more fulfilling life.
 7. We need to remember that it is not our job to make God's Word attractive to people.
 8. Both the church's preaching and our individual Christian witness should be guided by the same principle that governed the ministry of the prophets: we are called to faithfully convey what God has delivered to us.
- B. To his credit, Eli wants to know the truth.
1. He picks up on Samuel's reluctance to tell him what God said.
 2. He puts Samuel under oath and insists that he tell him exactly what God said.
 3. When Samuel does so, Eli responds by saying, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."
 4. Eli is a flawed character, but we can admire the fact that he submits to God's sovereignty.
- C. The final paragraph of the chapter summarizes the beginning of Samuel's ministry as a prophet in Israel.

1. We are told that the Lord was with Samuel, blessing his ministry and making it effective.
 2. Furthermore, the Lord did not let any of Samuel's words fall to the ground.
 3. In other words, God made sure that every word that Samuel delivered came to fulfillment.
 4. This is the test of a true prophet.
 5. A true prophet is recognized by the fact that his word proves to be true.
 6. Prophets are agents of God's special revelation.
 7. They declare God's infallible and inerrant Word.
 8. The fact that the Lord did not let any of Samuel's words fall to the ground enabled the people of Israel to recognize that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.
- D. As we noted at the beginning of this sermon, the Old Testament office of prophet pointed to Jesus Christ.
1. Jesus is the prophet who was foretold by Moses when he wrote, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen" (Deut. 18:15)
 2. Jesus' prophetic ministry is the focus of the opening verses of the letter to the Hebrews, where it says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1–2)
 3. Jesus referred to himself as a prophet on numerous occasions (see Lk. 13:33).

4. Jesus authenticated his message with signs, and the people identified him as a prophet (see Mt. 21:11).
5. But the thing that makes Jesus the prophet par excellence is the fact that he is more than just a prophet.
6. He is also the content of the message that he brings.
7. He is the fulfillment of all that was foretold in the Law and the Prophets.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Prior to the Lord's establishing of Samuel as a prophet, the word of the Lord was rare in Israel.
 1. Yet the lamp of God had not yet gone out.
 2. The Lord revealed himself to Samuel and Samuel in turn delivered God's word to all Israel.
 3. This marked a key turning point in the history of redemption.
- B. Things did not go well for the covenant people during this period of famine of hearing the word of the Lord.
 1. In the same way, things would not go well for the church today if the Word of God were to become rare.
 2. This is why we should be so thankful for the fact that God has established Jesus as our great Prophet and has made his Word so available to us.
 3. Don't take your Bible for granted.
 4. Don't take sound preaching for granted.
 5. This is how God makes his will for your salvation known to you.

6. Consider these words from the Puritan Thomas Watson: “A man in the dark is in danger every step he takes; so man in the state of nature is in danger, at every step, of falling into hell. Thus it is before Christ teaches us; nay, the darkness in which a sinner is, while in an unregenerate state, is worse than natural darkness; for natural darkness affrights... But the spiritual darkness is not accompanied by horror, men tremble not at their condition; nay, they like their condition well enough. ‘Men loved darkness.’ John iii 19. This is their sad condition, till Jesus Christ comes as a prophet to teach them, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God... If you have been taught by Christ savingly, be thankful. It is your honour to have God for your teacher... oh, how are we obliged to Jesus Christ, this great Prophet, for opening to us the eternal purposes of his love, and revealing to us the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” [Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 169, 171-172]