

Introduction

God's word has a lot to say about its importance to us as believers in Christ. Let me just read through a few key verses for you. You don't have to look them up, just listen and rejoice that you have a copy, probably multiple copies, of God's word.

1 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is *breathed out* by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

Isaiah 40:8 - The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God *will stand forever*.

1 Peter 1:19 And we have the prophetic word *more fully confirmed*, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, (Peter is basically saying, I saw God and heard his voice, but the word of God is more sure than my eyes and ears)

All told we have a Bible that is breathed out, will stand forever, and is more reliable than personal experience.

We also see in the Scriptures that men of God like Timothy, Isaiah, and Peter are the bringers of God's Word. So what does the Word of God say about the man of God? Let's look!

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, *rightly handling the word* of truth.

2 Timothy 4:1-2 - I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: *preach the word*; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Isaiah 52:7 - How *beautiful* upon the mountains are the *feet* of him who *brings good news*, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

These men should handle the word rightly, preach the word in season and out, and it is a beautiful thing that to bring the word.

Notice that God's word is brought by God's man. These two things are inseparable! God's man and God's word are inextricably linked in the Scriptures. When men are not doing as God commands the word of God is heard less. When men are living in accordance with the commands of God the word thrives and moves out over the land. That is exactly the situation we face in our text today. We will see the connection between God's man and the spread of God's word in 1 Samuel.

So look down with me at first Samuel chapter three and verse one. This is what God's word says,

Word is Rare (3:1-8)

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

Have you heard the first part of that verse before? If you've been reading along with Pastor Russ as he's been taking us through 1 Samuel you may have thought to yourself, "I've heard that before". In fact, you have, look back with me to verse eleven of chapter two. It says this, "And the boy was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest." Remember, whenever you hear something twice in Scripture you should key off that and go find out why. In our case I want you to think of the phrase as bookends. Look at what's in between our two bookends. The headings read like this, "Eli's Worthless Sons", "Eli Rebukes His Sons", and "The Lord Rejects Eli's Household". All of those things tell us how things are with Eli and his sons, but God wants us to see that there is something else here. There is Samuel! And what is Samuel doing...He's ministering to the Lord.

One more thing we see is this, "Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli". Is there something wrong with that? Does that make you pause. Why is Samuel ministering to the Lord in the *presence* of Eli and not *with* Eli? As I read that I can see the picture in my mind of Eli sitting around telling Samuel what to do and paying little attention, if any, to the ministering being done. Remember chapter two. Eli is one of two things. Complete incompetent as a priest, and father I might add, or he is complicate in the sinful actions of his sons. Now we see him, in the presence of Samuel, but any sort of actions is conspicuously missing. We'll learn more about Eli as we move along. But keep this in mind for now, while corruption and chaos reign all around him and it is being revealed to Eli that his household is to be rejected, Samuel, this son on loan to God for as long as he lives, is ministering faithfully.

But there's more here isn't there. Not only should we see the difference between Samuel and Eli, but we see something even more disconcerting. Frightening even. We see that the word of the Lord was rare in those days and there was no frequent vision. Now, if anybody is going to hear from the Lord, you might expect it to be the priest at the temple, right? I mean he lives within a few feet of the Ark and we would expect something of a close relationship between God's spokesmen and their God. But that's not the case here. Does that set off red flags for you as you read God's word? It should. God's man, Eli the priest, is an abject failure and God's word is rare. Those two things are not mutually exclusive.

Well, suffice it to say, we have some problems at the temple. We have some serious problems. God's man, Eli, is not hearing from or seeing God. If you're the priest, that is a big problem. Our light of hope in all of this is a "boy" named Samuel who was left with this, sorely lacking, priest. He is doing exactly as he is supposed to do. He is ministering. The word is rare and the visions are few with Eli and his sons at the helm, but things are looking up. There is a faithful servant

ministering again in the temple!

Look down with me at verses two and three. God's word says this,

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. 3 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.

These two verses are going to further separate our two main characters here in chapter three. I want you to notice the contrasts between them. Eli's sight is growing dim and he cannot see. Cannot see what? The floor in front of him? Or is it more than that? Is it that Eli cannot see what God wants him to see. He has been blinded by sin and no longer can the priest fulfill his role as the word bringer and God seer. Notice one other thing, Where is Eli? Eli is "in his own place".

Then we have Samuel.

When I first read through books and passages to preach on I write down all the questions I have. One of my questions as I initially read through 1 Samuel was "what's with the lamp of God"? Why has God told us that the lamp of God had not yet gone out. Is it just so we know that morning is approaching? Could be. Is it so we know that Samuel has been fulfilling his duties in the temple. Could be, but don't we get that from verse 1 and chapter 2:11? I think there is more here. We have just seen that Eli's sight is going dim and he cannot see, and can I put it this way, "but Samuel can because his faithful God has not let the lights go out on his people". The contrast continues, not only has God provided sight for Samule but where is he? Oh yes, He is lying down in the temple of the Lord". And if that weren't enough, God wants us to know that's, "where the ark of God was". Samuel is not in "his own place", He is in God's place.

Do you feel the tension? God's man, the priest, has not fulfilled his role. He has not honored the God of the Universe and the word of the Lord is rare, but God is faithful to bring his word and he has brought a boy, a miraculous son, to do so.

Look down at verse four and we'll see how he does it. This is what God's word says,

4 Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and 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.

6 And the Lord called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

8 And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.

Two things should be clear to us as we read through these verses. First, Eli has been so long and so far from the Lord that he is unaware that God is calling on Samuel. It takes three time for

the thought to dawn on Eli that God might be the mysterious voice calling out to Samuel.

Side note: Is this you? Would you be likely to know God's voice? Or are you so far from where you should be that you can't hear and wouldn't know his voice. The Bible tells us that God's people know his voice.

Second, Samuel does not yet know the Lord. Is he faithfully serving? Yes. Is he sleeping in the tabernacle by the ark of God? Yes. And yet still, God has not moved to bring Samuel to himself. As it stands, we have a boy who does not know God ministering to him in the temple a few feet from the ark, the very presence and power of God, the very ark for which God killed Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire around (Leviticus 10), and will kill Uzzah for "[taking] hold of it" (2 Samuel 6). Samuel is indeed in God's place, and he appears by all accounts up to this point to be God's man, but the word of God is still rare.

This is one of those times as you read your Bible that you should audibly shout out to the room in which you are sitting, "But God!". But God is good, but God is faithful, but God wants His people to have his word, but God has not let the lamp stand go out, but God will not allow his men to not bring the word, but God has brought a son to a barren woman to serve him. Do you see it? God is about to break into time and space and changes everything...because that's how God is.

Are you ready for it? Here we go, Look down at the text in verse nine. This is what God's word says,

Word Comes (3:9-18)

9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." 11 Then the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. 14 Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

See, the word of the Lord did come. Eli did finally perceive what was happening and he give Samuel sound advice. The next time you hear the Lord calling your name, answer him. Samuel does just as he is instructed when the Lord calls him again. Now notice this time is not like the others. When God says that he "came and stood". It's going to be big. When God says your name twice, it's going to be big. And I can only imagine that what the Lord says is very hard for Samuel to hear. I mean, imagine if this was your first time, as a boy to boot, that you had heard from God and he started off with, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle." This is going to be big and you know it. Notice a few things with

me here.

1. God will fulfill all he says. You may think he has forgotten. You may think evil doers will prosper. You may even think you can get away with sin, but the Lord will do everything he said he would.
2. Eli knew what his sons were doing. Eli was not just incompetent, he was indeed complicit. He knew and did nothing to stop the blaspheming of God. God's man was not doing God will and God was removing him from a position of bringing the word.
3. God's word and the bringing of it is very serious business. I can only imagine that this was the most difficult thing for Samuel to hear. He had been ministering in the temple for a while. He had seen the sins of the people covered by the blood of animals. Surely he knew this was happening and yet listen to the most devastating part of the God's pronouncement on Eli, "Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever". Um wait, what? The iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for! How awful for Eli and his house. There is no worse thing in the world than this. The Bible tells us over and over, blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not count against him. But Eli has been cursed. There's no out for the priest. He, and his house have sinned grievously and they will pay with their lives.

That is a lot for your first hearing of the word of God. Samuel is not going back to sleep. He is about to tell the bring of God's word to the people that he is cursed forever for his knowing blasphemy of God. God's priest is condemned.

Look down at verse fifteen. This is what God's word says,

15 Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." 17 And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you."

Wow! Eli has no idea the threat he has just leveled at Samuel. Is Samuel afraid? Yes. But surely he is not more afraid of Eli than God. You wonder if Eli was jealous that Samuel had received the rare word from God since he doesn't just ask for the information, but, unknowingly, threatens him with a curse over his house forever. So Samuel does what he is asked to do and we see his first action as a prophet of God.

God's word says this in verse eighteen,

18 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."

The mantle has been taken away from Eli and given to Samuel. Can you picture the scene here? As I read Eli's response I am stunned. Think to yourself what your response would have been if someone had just told you your entire house was cursed and without hope. Would you not cry, would you not beg God and Samuel, as God's mouthpiece, for mercy. Would you not tear your

garments like Job? Eli further shows us his character through his nonchalant attitude. "It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him". "Let him"! Really, that's what you came up with after God took away your place as priest and spokesman for God and left your house without any means of atonement. You will not ever "let God" do anything. But he goes on and ends with this, "what seems good to him" statement. Eli is no longer in left field, as it were. He has left the stadium. What God does IS good because he does it. He can do no other and yet Eli seems to say, "Well, it's not good, but He thinks it is, so, whatever, He's God and gets His way in the end". Right? If ever we thought God might be being a bit harsh with Eli we now see his heart exposed for what is truly there - A contempt for God that is detestable.

So our priest with rapidly declining eyesight and a rarely heard word has been removed and our boy who was lent to God and slept near him in the temple with God's lamp shining upon him all through the night has heard the word, seen the vision and spoken the prophecy he was given. Truly God is faithful to bring his man, with his word, to his people.

And that's not all. Look down at verse nineteen. This is what God's word says,

Word is Returned (3:19-4:1a)

19 And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord. 21 And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

4 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Well, we see here that God not only brought his word to Samuel, but that his word has returned to all of Israel. Samuel is turning into a man physically and his words are born along by God himself. Samuel has spoken and God has put out the word from Dan to Beersheba. From the far North of Israel all the way to the far South. All of Israel knew that the word was back and Samuel was the bringer of it.

Praise God for his faithful bringing of Godly men who will bring the word of God to his people.
Praise God for Samuel.

Conclusion

The third chapter of 1 Samuel clearly shows us that what Israel needed most was a man of God to bring the word of God to them. As we know from other parts of Scripture, Samuel was living in a time where people were doing what was right in their own eyes. They sorely needed God's man to bring the power of God's word.

You might be sitting there thinking our world looks much like that of Samuel's - chaotic, turbulent and one in which everyone does what is right in their own eyes and I wouldn't disagree. Again though, you should be thinking to yourself as we talked about earlier, "but God"! I have great news for you. We do not have to suffer like Israel suffered. We have been given God's word through God's man. God himself. Listen as read from the book of John,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Praise be to God! He has sent his Son, the word in flesh, to tabernacle, to dwell, among us and to give his life for us. God has given us his word and he has come in the flesh to tell us how to be reborn not of the flesh but from God. There is no longer a physical temple to sacrifice in. God now resides in his people. He has offered to take your punishment for your sin on the cross and God has raised him from the dead. God's man and God's word are now one in the person of Jesus Christ. You will either stand before God like Eli - having no one to atone for your sin or you will stand before him like Samuel - believing what he has done and bowing your heart to him. Saved forever from the punishment you deserved by the God/Man, The Word in flesh, The Lord Jesus Christ. It is my great hope, and will be until my dying day, that you will come give up your life to serve Him.