

# WHEN THE LORD SPEAKS, HIS SERVANTS LISTEN

January 14, 2024  
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Psalm of the Day; Psalm 67  
Epistle Lesson; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20  
Gospel Lesson; John 1:43-51  
Sermon Text; 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen

God's Word for our consideration today is our Old Testament Lesson from the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, chapter three, verses one through ten. We read this in our Savior's name.

*The boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. The Word of the Lord was rare in those days. Prophetic vision was not common.*

*Now it happened that Eli's eyes had begun to grow dim, so that he could not see. Once when Eli was lying down in his place and God's lamp had not yet gone out, Samuel was lying down in the Lord's temple, where God's ark was. The Lord called Samuel, and Samuel said, "I am here." He ran to Eli and said, "I am here, since you called me."*

*Eli said, "I did not call. Lie down again." So he went and lay down.*

*Then the Lord called once more, "Samuel!"*

*So Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "I am here, since you called me."*

*He answered, "I did not call, my son. Lie down again."*

*Now Samuel had not yet experienced the Lord's presence, that is, the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.*

*The Lord called Samuel for the third time. So he got up and went to Eli and said, "I am here, since you called me."*

*Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the young man. So Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if He calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"*

*So Samuel went and once again lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there and called as He had the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"*

*Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

These are your words, Heavenly Father. Make us holy by Your truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

*(For 30 seconds, Pastor Van Kampen stood in front of the congregation, saying nothing!)*

That was 30 seconds of silence. If you don't mind, let me ask you what happened to you, during those 30 seconds? Did you perhaps maybe feel just the tiniest bit uncomfortable? Was it a little awkward? Maybe you got to the point that you sat up a little bit higher in your chair, and started to maybe anticipate, *"He's gotta talk at some point here, right?"*

You know, silence can be 'deafening', right? By nature we are not really big fans of silence. That is why, whenever you walk into a store, there is a reason that the store is playing some kind of music. They don't want you to shop in silence. Silence can be absolutely

'deafening'.

That is true of God's silence, too,

-when we feel that silence, during tough times,

-when it feels like we are waiting for God to tell us something,

-the silence we experience, when the voice of God is rare.

And yet, the beautiful part about silence, and that includes God's silence, is that eventually God's silence comes to an end. We finally get to hear God's Word.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel we get to see how God brings His silence to an end, how He continues to call, and build up His people, even in tough times, so that when the Lord speaks, His servants listen. The servants listen, first of all, receiving His Word with humble faith.

We realize just how rare a treasure the Word of God really is. Right off, in the first verse we are told,

**“The boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord  
in the presence of Eli.**

**The Word of the Lord was rare in those days.  
Prophetic vision was not common.”**

We hear those words, and it is easy to kind of slide right past them, and not think, *“Why? Why was prophetic vision not common in those days? Why was God not actively talking to His people very much?”*

The answer is; This was really a dark time in Israel's history. This was The Period of the Judges. This was the time in Israel's history when instead of listening to the Will of God, instead of obeying the laws God had given through Moses, and sticking to the covenant they had made with God at Mt. Sinai, the Children of Israel instead chose to live life on their own terms. They chose, instead of the doing what was right in the eyes of God, they chose to do what was right in their own eyes. They chose to follow their hearts, and to follow the devices and desires of their hearts. Nobody took the Word of God seriously.

Again, and again, you can read through the whole book of Judges, and see that downward spiral of God's people, as again, and again the Lord would call them to repentance. He would bring spiritual leaders to call His people back to Himself. It would work for a little while, but then again, and again God's people would just refuse to listen. And so, eventually God stopped talking.

**“The Word of the Lord was rare...”**

Silence reigned.

And yet, in His infinite love and grace, we see how God brings that silence to an end, and He does it in a very unusual, surprising way, doesn't He? It happened one night in the Lord's Tabernacle. In those days, Samuel was ministering to the Lord under the direction of Eli, who was the High Priest at that time. We are told Eli was going blind. In his old age his eyes had begun to grow dim, so he could not see. You think about what that means to not be able to see, anymore. That means you rely more, and more on other people to help you. And so, Eli was relying more, and more on Samuel to kind of be his 'eyes', and to take care of things around the tabernacle. So, Samuel was basically keeping watch in the sanctuary of the tabernacle. That is where he put his bed, while Eli slept in his own room, which was probably off to the side, somewhere. You can imagine Samuel sleeping on a cot, just kind of outside of where the Holy of Holies was, just outside of the place where the Ark of the Covenant was. (*He could not be in there. That was the place where only the High Priest could go in, once a year, on the Day of Atonement.*)

Samuel went to bed. You can just imagine the stillness of that night, the silence of that night. *Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.*

Until, all of a sudden, the silence was broken. The silence was broken, when the Lord called Samuel, and called him by name.

“Samuel!”

Samuel immediately answered, and said, "I am here."

The Lord called Samuel! (*We'll talk in just a minute about how surprising that it is that He called Samuel.*) But, Samuel did not recognize it was the Lord. So, Samuel ran into Eli's room, and said, "I am here, since you called me."

Eli said, "I did not call. *Go back to bed.*"

So, Samuel went to lay down, but then again the Lord called, and said, "Samuel!"

Immediately, Samuel got up, and ran to Eli's room, and said, "I am here, since you called me."

Again, Eli said, "*Go back to bed.*"

Then, a third time God called Samuel.

Samuel got up, and ran to Eli's room.

Now Eli is the one who realized what is going on. It is very ironic because Eli, blind, old Eli can 'see something' that Samuel cannot 'see'. Eli realized the Lord was calling the young man. Eli realized what was going on. Eli realized that this long silence God had over His people was now broken, and that now God was going to start speaking to His people, again. And, Samuel was going to be the one through whom God would do that. Eli realized that.

So, how did Eli respond? He did not respond with jealousy, or anger. "*Why didn't God chose me?*"

Instead, he responded with humble faith. He told Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if He calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

**"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."**

Imagine how humbling that must have been for Samuel to hear those words come out of Eli's mouth, to understand what Samuel was being told by Eli, to realize, "*This is not Eli talking. It is the Lord speaking! And, He is speaking to me!*"

You know, you can read about Samuel's kind of miraculous birth, and how Samuel's mother, Hannah, was barren, and prayed to have a

son, and promised to dedicate her son to the Lord, after he was born. And, she did that when Samuel was born. But, Samuel was really not all that special. Samuel was still the boy, Samuel. He still was basically Eli's apprentice. He was the guy who could not even figure out that it was God talking to him, and yet the Lord kept calling him! Think about the wonderful love God has for each, and every one of us! In this darkened world, with each, and every one of us, God would have the right to stay silent, giving us the 'silent treatment'. But, He chooses to speak. He chooses to speak to us. Only, He does not do it by calling out our names in the middle of the night. He speaks to us ultimately by sending His Son. In Hebrews, chapter one, it says,

**“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.”**

In the middle of the night, in a lowly Bethlehem stable, God's silence toward sinners was broken with the cries of a new born baby. A new born baby who was both Son of Man, and the Son of God. A baby who would grow up to redeem the whole world from sin and death. Through The Good News of God's Son, God now speaks to and calls rebellious sinners like you and me. Even though we all deserve the silent treatment, God has broken His silence toward us through the power of The Gospel. In Isaiah, chapter forty-one, God says,

**“I have called you by your name, and you are mine.”**

Through His Word, God calls us to repentance, and faith in Jesus, as our Savior, through The Good News of His saving work. Christ, Himself, says to each, and everyone of us, (*just as He said to Phillip, as He found Him that day*), He says,

**“Follow me”.**

It doesn't mean we are always listening. It doesn't mean we always hear Him, when He calls. Sometimes, we are as dense as Samuel. Sometimes we think, “*Why isn't God talking to me?*”

God is trying to talk, every time we hear His Word. Sometimes, we are just not paying attention. And even sometimes we are openly defiant, not wanting to hear God's calling. And yet, God is still gracious, isn't He? He does not give up. Just as with Samuel, He does not give up after one try. God continues to call us, again and again, all throughout our lives. That is why we call this time we are living in right now, ***Our Time of Grace***. This is the time we have been given to hear God's call through His Word, His call to faith in Jesus, as our Savior. You think about how God has even given us our own 'Eli'. He has given us people in our lives who help us see that God is calling us, and speaking to us in His Word. Ultimately, it is God, when the Lord calls us, it is God who gives us His Holy Spirit, and changes our heart to bring us from death to life, who changes us so that we are able to receive His Word with humble faith, faith that recognizes, *“This is God. This is God calling!”* When the Lord speaks, His servant listens. When we listen, we also respond to His Word with trusting obedience, even when we don't know how hard it is going to be.

That is the faith we see in Samuel. When Samuel learned it was the Lord who was calling him, what does Samuel do? He doesn't run away. He doesn't try to get out of it. He goes back, and lays down, like Eli told him to do. Sure enough, the Lord stood there, and called to Samuel, as He did all of those other times.

**“Samuel! Samuel!”**

This time Samuel answered,

**“Speak, for your servant is listening.”**

Samuel was ready to hear whatever the Lord had to say to him. Samuel was ready to do whatever the Lord was going to ask him to do. Samuel had the heart of a servant.

And yet, if you read the rest of the chapter, you find out the Lord gives Samuel some work that is not very easy to do. The very first thing the Lord tells Samuel is about Eli, how Eli, and especially Eli's

sons Hophni and Phinehas are going to be punished for their disobedience, for their abuse of the priesthood. The Lord gives Samuel this message. And Samuel (*we are told*) goes back, and lays in bed, awake the rest of the night. He can't sleep.

The next morning Eli asks him,

**“What was the vision about?”**

It says Samuel was afraid to tell Eli what God had told him.

Have you ever been afraid to share one of God's hard truths with somebody? Even us pastors struggle with that, sometimes. The message of God's Word is not always sweetness, and light. It is a message that also can be very unpopular both inside, and outside the church. In those moments when we are afraid, how often is it that instead of saying to God,

**“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”,**

how many times instead do we flip it around, and say, “*Listen Lord, your servant is speaking, here.*” We come up with all kinds of excuses as to why we should not do the thing God has called us to do.

And yet, you look back at Samuel, and how does Samuel respond every time he hears the voice of God calling his name? Every single time, he immediately jumps up, and says, “*Here I am.*” It is almost an involuntary reaction, right? That was true basically for Samuel's whole life. Samuel, when it came to the Word of the Lord, had the heart of a servant. So, whether he had to go, and speak some very difficult truths to his mentor Eli, (*the guy who raised him, and was like a second father to him*), or whether Samuel had to listen to the Lord, instead of following his own instincts, he had the heart of a servant.

For example, he went to a little town called Bethlehem, and looked at a bunch of sons from a guy named Jesse, and had to select one of them to be the next King of Israel. He had to listen to God's choice, when God said, “*Pick that ruddy looking shepherd named David.*”



Throughout his life, Samuel had an attitude that said,

**“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”**

You think about how that is really the power of the Lord's call to us.

It is the power of the Lord's call. It is the power of God's Word

-to create in us that willingness to respond

-to create in us, even in spite of our fears and reservations, to create that servant's heart in us that is willing to follow our Lord, even when it is difficult.

God's Word has that power, ultimately because it shows us the One who was the perfect servant in our place.

**It shows us Jesus Christ,**

-who even though He was God,

-took on the form of a servant,

-and allowed Himself to be born in human likeness,

-who willingly went everywhere that His calling, as our Savior, took Him,

-even when it took Him to places where He had to speak difficult truths to people who did not want to hear them,

-even when it took Him to the cross, and to death.

When we think about Jesus, and His saving work, and His death, His resurrection flings open wide the gates of Heaven, and declares to us our sins are forgiven. You and I are God's dear children. We are loved by Him. We will live with Him forever, through faith in Him.

And so, when the Lord speaks, His servants listen. His servants listen, because by the power of His Word, He makes us ready to listen. We listen, because we know the love of the One who speaks, love that ends the silence of our separation from God to Him.

Amen

And now, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts, and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.

Amen