

8.27.06 **Samuel: Man of Integrity and of Faith** 1 Samuel 3.1-10; 12.19-25

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

One of the fun things about our journey through all 66 books of the Bible is reading about some of my favorite people. Many of the characters we encounter in the pages of the Bible, we see only for a moment, or only at one time in their life. **Samuel** is that rare person we learn about from before he is born, to childhood, mature adulthood to the very end of his life. In the book that bears his name (which reflects his great impact and influence) we learn about his family before he is conceived, about his early childhood and we read about his rise to prominence as a prophet and leader in Israel.

Samuel's mother, Hannah, follows in the line of formerly barren women who later in life give birth to a child of importance upon whom the favor of God rests. Before Hannah are **Sarah** (Genesis 17.16-19), **Rebekah** (Gen. 25.21-26), **Rachel** (Gen. 29.31;30.22-24), and the **mother of Samson** (Judges13.2-5). In the Gospel of Luke we see this pattern continue with **Elizabeth** the mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1.5-17). Samuel's mother Hannah was the second wife of a man named Elkanah. Bigamy was prevalent enough in Old Testament times that we read about it involving several key figures, including Jacob, Samuel, David, and Solomon.

Hannah prays fervently for a child and her prayer is answered. Her prayer of thanksgiving in 1 Samuel 2.1-10 is the model for the better known prayer of Mary known as the Magnificat in Luke 1.46-55. It seems like the beautiful stories of the birth and childhood of Samuel were in the mind of Luke as he wrote the first two chapters of his gospel. If you have never looked closely at the prayers of the two women to see the similarities, I think you will find it enlightening. Often we don't realize how much the New Testament is built upon the foundation of the Old Testament.

Hannah prayed that if God gave her a son that she would give him to the Lord's service and she is true to her word so after wanting a child for years she gives up her boy so that he will be raised to be a priest serving the Lord and God's people. Can you imagine the emotion and poignancy when once a year Hannah would make her little son a robe and bring it when she and her husband came to make their annual sacrifice? 1 Samuel 2:26 says, *"Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people."* Luke uses very similar language to describe the growth of John the Baptist and Jesus (see Luke 1.80 and 2:52).

So we come to 1 Samuel 3:1-10:

"Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli.

The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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.

Then the Lord called, "*Samuel! Samuel!*" and he said, "*Here I am!*" 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. The Lord called again, "*Samuel!*"

Samuel got up 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.*" Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

The Lord called Samuel again, a third time.

And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "*Here I am, for you called me.*"

Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "*Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'*"

So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "*Samuel! Samuel!*"

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

The word of the Lord was rare in Samuel's day, visions were not widespread. The people had not heard from the Lord. In 1 Samuel 3 it is also the darkest time of the night. We know this because the lamp of the Lord, a flame that burned pure olive oil in the tent of meeting where the Ark of the Covenant was kept (yes, that ark for you Indiana Jones fans) had not yet gone out. The lamp was tended by the sons of Aaron, the priests, from evening to morning.

In most cases, working third shift usually falls to those with the least seniority. The rookies are the ones who get stuck when the shifts are bid. That is also the case here, Eli, the old priest, is in his room asleep. Samuel is "*ministering before the Lord,*" which is a spiritual way of saying it was his responsibility to make sure the lamp didn't go out during the night.

In many ways, **this is a story about interrupted sleep**. It is a story about an older man who is trying to sleep but keeps having his rest disturbed by a 12 year old boy who comes into his room three times in the middle of the night. This is a topic I feel qualified to preach on based on personal experience. There are perhaps a few

circumstances in life which our thoughts fly faster to our lips than when someone wakes us up in the middle of the night, but not many. *“Dad, I’m hungry.” “Aghh. That’s why I told you to eat your dinner.” “I’m thirsty...” “I can’t sleep, I’m too hot. I had a bad dream.”* While no one likes being awakened in the middle of the night, we understand these things happen. However, it is not a pretty sight to wake up a man in the middle of the night to tell him he did something he *knows* he didn’t do. When Samuel shows up saying, *“Here I am, for you called me!”* Eli, due to his spiritual maturity or perhaps his drowsy state simply tells Samuel to go back and lie down. Eli probably went back to sleep muttering, *“I can’t believe this kid keeps waking me up. I’m not going to be able to function in the morning.”*

But Eli is not the only one having someone call him and interrupt his sleep. Samuel is lying down, I don’t know if he was asleep on the job but if he wasn’t he must have been close. Samuel is pretty mature and respectful in his response to the older priest. Sometimes when we’re young, we can become impatient with those who are older as their physical capacities diminish. A typical 12-year-old boy might have thought to himself, *“The poor old man, not only can’t he see, now he’s losing his hearing. I know I heard something. Just because he’s lived five or six times longer than I have, what does he know?”* So there are two confused, frustrated people, hearing voices in the night, tired of being interrupted. Most of us don’t like being interrupted when we’re trying to do something. However, if this story teaches us anything, it teaches us that **interruptions can be divine appointments.**

A number of years ago I was at a pastor’s retreat at the Craigville Conference Center. This was billed as a time to get away from our busy schedules and the activity and noise of parish life to spend time quietly listening to God in prayer. Sixteen of us were gathered in a big room in one of the houses. The leader had just finished some introductory remarks about how we were going to proceed through these quiet hours of contemplation. From where I sat, I could see out the windows to the end of the porch. Just as we were getting ready to begin praying, two workmen, one with a crow bar and the other carrying a large hammer, arrived on the end of the porch with the clear intent of ripping out an old door frame, and the surrounding shingles. As they got ready to begin, unseen by everyone else, I walked over to one of the organizers who was seated with his back to the porch and suggested he might want to go talk to these guys who were about to shatter the quiet, contemplative atmosphere literally with a bang. The noise commenced, startling several folks, but Tony left and returned saying the men were

leaving for now but they would be back at four o'clock. A few comments were made about why, since we were the only group at the Conference Center, this work had to happen today. Then someone made the comment that it was interesting that we had come to listen to God and God had sent two workmen to begin the symbolic work of ripping out an old entryway and constructing a new one. Perhaps the Lord was telling us through this interruption to look at our own lives and how we let God in or shut God out. Maybe we needed to be open to God entering our lives and speaking to us in new ways. That interruption and word was the most insightful part of the whole retreat.

Interruptions can be divine appointments if we keep our ears and our eyes open to God speaking to us.

When we picture people listening to God we may imagine priests in a tent of meeting or pastors on a retreat or ourselves seeking to carve out a few quiet moments to read, pray, worship, or journal. However, it is also important for us to develop our sensitivity to the voice of God calling to us in all the events of our daily routine, **even and often especially in our interruptions and disturbances.**

When you read the Bible, you see that many of the most significant spiritual experiences are interruptions. Moses is on the job taking care of sheep when he sees a burning bush that is not consumed and he turns aside and God speaks to him. Interruption. Luke tells us shepherds were out in the fields when, suddenly, divine interruption. Saul is on the road to Damascus, he has his own plans when, suddenly divine interruption. More often than not, it seems, God has to interrupt us to get our attention.

Eli was an old priest and though his sons were corrupt and twisted, he was trying to be faithful. He knew about prayer and listening to God. He may not have done well raising his own sons, but he wasn't about to mess up this last chance with Samuel. In his book, *Prayer and Praying Men*, E.M. Bounds describes Samuel this way, "*Samuel came into this world and was given existence in direct answer to prayer. He was born of a praying mother, whose heart was full of earnest desire for a son. This praying mother put him directly in touch with the minister of the sanctuary and under the influence of the house of prayer. He was in a favorable place to hear God when he spoke to him.*" But young Samuel didn't know the Lord and the Lord never spoken to him before, so he is hearing but he doesn't understand what is happening. Eli doesn't hear or understand what is going on.

God however is persistent in trying to communicate with us so when Samuel interrupts Eli the third time saying, *"Here I am for you called me."* The sleepy older man finally realizes this is not a child's dream but a divine encounter. Have you ever had the experience in your life of having to learn the same lesson over and over until you got it right? Have you ever prayed for patience and then had one of the worst days of having to wait every where you went? Have you ever prayed for God to make you more loving only to find yourself dealing with individuals or circumstances that made you feel more like screaming than loving? Has God ever had to tell you, like Samuel, something more than once in order to get you to listen? I suspect we have lots of company!

What do we learn from the story of young Samuel for our own relationship with God? **Interruptions can be divine appointments.** Eli and Samuel remind us to be open to hearing from God all the time. Samuel demonstrates the response God desires from all of us, *"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."* We are all called to be servants of God. Samuel's attitude was one of submission and willingness to serve. Even though the message he received was a difficult one he did not shrink from sharing it with Eli. He invited God to speak to him, listened, and then acted on what he was told. God desires to communicate with each one of us. When we were in Maine last week we went twice to our favorite Chinese restaurant Panda Garden. At the end of the meal of course you get a fortune cookie which is opened in great anticipation of the keen insight and prophetic knowledge about our life and future that will be revealed. Okay, maybe not. But there is a part of us that desires to hear from God. Can we be open to hearing God speak to us through the interruptions and disturbances in our lives that upset our plans and schedules? Might God speak to us in the night through our dreams? We will see in a few weeks that this happened to Solomon. Perhaps the way God's word gets through to us is by God first getting our attention. Can we open new entry ways into our hearts and lives so God may come in?

Samuel responded to the Lord and served faithfully and with integrity for the rest of his life, even though people disappointed him by their lack of faithfulness. The final scripture from 1 Samuel 12:19-25 reveals Samuel as an older man, heartbroken both by the people's desire for a king instead of following and serving the Lord. Samuel has been the nation's leader in every sense of the word. Regardless of his faith and integrity, his people had rejected God as their king and longed for a human king like their neighbors. Samuel felt they had rejected him as well.

"All the people said to Samuel, *"Pray to the LORD your God for your servants, so that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of demanding a king for ourselves."* And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; and do not turn aside after useless things that cannot profit or save, for they are useless. For the LORD will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. Moreover **as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. Only fear the LORD, and serve him faithfully with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you.** But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

As I reflected on Samuel as an old man looking back on his life I was struck by the cover story of the August 14 issue of Newsweek was about 87 year old Billy Graham, who is in the twilight of a life that he has sought to live with faith and integrity. The article states, "In Graham's view, the core message of the Gospel, and the love of God for all people should take priority." As he has grown older, Graham has come to an appreciation of complexity and a gentleness of spirit that sets him apart from many other high-profile figures. He says, *"I spend more time on the love of God than I used to. I believe the love of God is absolute."*

There are at least **four significant things we learn from Samuel** that are beneficial for us to emulate.

Samuel learned that Interruptions can be divine appointments.

Samuel listened to God's word and obeyed it.

He was a man **of prayer who invested his life instructing and teaching others how to live God's way.**

Samuel also served the Lord faithfully, remembering all that the Lord had done for him.

Each of us in our own way can seek to do these things as well as we pursue lives that are marked by integrity and faith.