Introduction

“The responsible person seeks to make his or her whole life a response to the question and call of God” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

The call of God.

You will remember the book of Judges ends with the statement; “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Samuel was born into a world where religion became more about symbol than substance; and where leadership was marked by corruption, scandal and abuse.

Eli had received several warnings about his sons, who served in the Temple, but who took advantage of the things of God, and the people of God, and abused them for their own selfish purposes. Eli spoke to his sons, but it did not seem to have any effect. Clearly Eli had the power to discipline his sons, but he refused. An unknown prophet appeared at Shiloh and pronounced judgment on Eli and his family. The Bible will often draw a sharp contrast between the wickedness of one group, and the faithfulness or righteousness of another.

It is easy to relate to the call of Samuel. He is called by God as a child. For Moses it was a burning bush; for Isaiah it was a dramatic vision. Samuel was lent by his mother to God to serve in the Temple. But God called Samuel to be a prophet.

God calls believers; to rise up and go forth, and serve Him.

People are in pain. They are suffering. Sin is taking its toll. Some people are hungry and thirsty, some people are sick, some people are depressed, disturbed, diseased, uneducated, untrained. Others are filled with anxiety and stress, others are gripped by fear, bankrupt or facing the possibility of financial ruin. People are empty, looking for meaning; with little or no contact with the God of the Bible. God issues a call to believers. To hear the Word of God, to believe the Word of God, to impart the Word of God, to share the gospel of hope that is found in the person of Jesus Christ, the living Word of God.

Putting Yourself In A Place To Listen (vv.1-9)

1 Samuel 3:1; Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.

Samuel is perhaps 12 years old (or younger!).

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The Prophet’s Call
1 Samuel 3:1-21

1 Samuel 3:2; And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see,

1 Samuel 3:3; and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down,

The “lamp of God” was the seven-branched golden candlestick called the Menorah; that stood in the Holy Place before the veil. In close proximity was the golden altar of incense; it was the only source of light in the Holy Place; and the priests were ordered to keep it burning always (Exodus 27:20); and to trim the wicks when they offered the incense in the morning and in the evening.

The lamp of God is a type and a picture of God’s light; the light of truth; the light of God’s Word. We know the lamp is a type and a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true light of the world.

But the light of God’s Word was flickering, filled with shadows; (there was no widespread revelation).

Think about what the text is saying; the High Priest can’t see; the Ark of the Covenant was there; it contained the law of God (see 25:10-22; 37:1-9); Heb. 9:1-5); but the law was largely ignored, and even broken; not simply by the people; but by the leaders!

1 Samuel 3:4; that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, Here I am!

The Lord speaks to Samuel four times (v.4.; v.6.; v.8; v.10); and the first three times Samuel believes it is the voice of Eli.

Samuel had never heard the voice of the Lord before.

Do you remember the story of Saul of Tarsus; while persecuting the church, Saul saw a blazing light when he heard God’s voice; and asked the question; “who are you?” (Acts 9:1-9). We sometimes mistake the voice of men for the voice of God. But sometimes God calls us through familiar voices. How do I know if it is God calling me?

A Willingness To Obey God (vv.10-14)

1 Samuel 3:10; Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, Samuel! Samuel! And Samuel answered, Speak, for Your servant hears.

The young man Samuel was obedient to the Lord.
The Prophet’s Call
1 Samuel 3:1-21

1 Samuel 3:11; Then the Lord said to Samuel: Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.

1 Samuel 3:12; In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.

1 Samuel 3:13; For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.

1 Samuel 3:14; And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.

When people heard about the judgment, they would be terrified, fearful. There would be great shock in Israel. Chapter four will describe exactly what happens; Israel will be defeated by the Philistines, 30,000 Israeli soldiers killed, Eli’s two sons killed, Eli dead, with the death of the three priests will come a radical void in leadership; the Ark of the Covenant will be captured. This is the very symbol of God’s presence among the people; to lose the Ark, meant to lose God’s presence; God would no longer be present to guide, protect, and provide for them.

The message of judgment seems lost in the present world. Please stop talking about judgment. Can’t you say something nice? The message of the gospel is that of judgment; either Jesus receives your judgment on the Cross that brings salvation; or you will experience judgment when you meet God face to face; if we continue in our sin and wickedness and die; we will bear the judgment of God. The faithful prophet of God cannot ignore the message of judgment.

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

When the story is told in Sunday school class, the message is often left out. This young man, will hear the message, will hear God’s plans for the future. This is a very weighty message for a young boy. When God can’t find an obedient adult; he may find himself using an obedient child.

Samuel certainly did not know the message of the unknown prophet who had earlier warned Eli.

The message God gave Samuel confirmed the earlier prophecy; the Lord would judge the house of Eli. Even though Eli and his sons were priests; there was no sacrifice they could offer for themselves to escape the judgment of God. There sins were deliberate and defiant, and for such sins no sacrifice could be offered (see Numbers 15:30).

The sons had defiled themselves, and the priesthood; the Lord had been patient, long-suffering, but the sons refused to repent, refused to return to the Lord; and now it was too late.
The Lord declared He was ready to execute a severe judgment.

The call of God was given to Samuel repeatedly. Remember, Samuel mistook the voice of God for the voice of Eli (of man). God wanted a response from Samuel. “Speak Lord, for your servant hears and is listening” (v.10). The call of God demands a response, therefore we must never reject the call of God. Remember when the call is repeated, time and time again, we must submit ourselves and surrender our lives to serve God. It is true, many are called, but few are chosen; many are called to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, to turn from a lifestyle of carnality and self-indulgence; to rededicate their lives and live wholeheartedly for Christ, to serve in the ministry, to serve in missions, to minister to the poor, to cultivate skills necessary to participate in the weakness and illness of others, to enter a profession, to prepare and secure an education so you can serve in a lifetime of ministry, to earn money and to give specifically and sacrificially, to witness to a certain person, or group, to write in you wills some gift of money, or property, or an entire estate to the cause of Christ.

But when God calls, people shut their ears, shut their hearts, turn away. Almost every time when the body gathers together, there are people present, called by God, to make a specific decision for their lives. What does God want you to say? Speak Lord. Your servant is listening. Or simply, “here am I Lord, send me”.

Maintaining A Healthy Humility (vv.15-18)

1 Samuel 3:15; So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision.

Notice what Samuel does; he lies down until morning; and opens the doors of the house of the Lord. The young man goes back to his routine. Samuel opens the doors of the house of the Lord so the people can continue to offer sacrifice. Samuel has heard the voice of the Lord, and the message of the Lord;

I believe this is the only mention in the life and ministry of Samuel where the word “afraid” is used. We can certainly understand the source of Samuel’s fear. Eli had blessed Samuel’s parents, Eli was the High Priest, Eli had taught Samuel the fundamentals of ministry; earlier he had helped Samuel discern the voice of the Lord. If Samuel’s love for Eli caused Samuel at some level to shield the truth from Eli; the Word of the Lord, the command of God, would give Samuel the courage, when push comes to shove, to deliver the Word.

1 Samuel 3:16; Then Eli called Samuel and said, Samuel, my son! He answered, Here I am.
The Prophet’s Call
1 Samuel 3:1-21

1 Samuel 3:17; And he said, What is the word that the Lord spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you.

How are we to think about Eli’s words? Is this the response of a carnal man, who uses threat and intimidation to get Samuel to talk?

1 Samuel 3:18; Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him.

What do you think of Eli’s response? Do you think this is repentance on the part of Eli; or resignation? Do you think Eli is joyfully submitting to the will of God and the Word of God; or resigned to the fact that God will do what God will do?

Eli was an old man. He had not been a good father or a faithful priest; his sons would perish in a day, and his family would lose the privilege of serving in the priesthood.

God had made the choice that Samuel would serve as priest, but Samuel would also serve as prophet and judge. The Lord would use Samuel to speak the Word of God to the people of God, in a time when the people desperately needed to hear the voice of God.

All the old man could do was to wait patiently for the hand of God to execute justice and judgment.

In the end, the place of peace and mercy is to be found in the Word of God and the Will of God.

Samuel will be Israel’s new leader. Eli knows this. In a single day, his two sons will be killed, the Ark of the Covenant will be captured, and Eli will die.

Cultivating A Routine Of Righteousness (vv.19-21)

1 Samuel 3:19; So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

The expression “and let none of his words fall to the ground” means the Word of God came to pass, or came true.

More specifically, the things Samuel said, concerning the Lord, came to pass. When Samuel said something would happen in the name of the Lord, it would in fact happen.
The Prophet’s Call
1 Samuel 3:1-21

1 Samuel 3:20; And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord.

Dan was the northern border of the Nation of Israel. Beersheba was the southern border. Samuel’s influence would be nation wide.

The nation of Israel recognized the gift and the calling, the people know God had called Samuel to be both priest and judge and prophet; Samuel could speak the word of God to the people of God.

1 Samuel 3:21; Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

Israel was about to embark on a new beginning; the transition from a time of judges to the time of kings.

The Lord showed up in the Temple at Shiloh.

Look carefully at the words; “For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord”.

Richard Parker made famous the words; “God doesn’t call people who are qualified. He calls people who are willing, and then He qualifies them.”

How does Samuel know he is called by God?

1. The Lord is present in the life of Samuel. The Lord has revealed Himself to Samuel by the Word of the Lord. Remember, Samuel grew up and matured in the Lord. God spoke through Samuel, helping and encouraging the people of Israel. Everything Samuel said was wise and helpful” (see v.19 NLT).

2. The people around Samuel recognized the call (v.20). The people of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba acknowledged Samuel as a prophet of God. When people came to the Temple in Shiloh to worship, Samuel imparted, gave, the Word of God to the people. As Samuel gave them the Word of God, Samuel’s reputation began to grow from Dan to Beersheba. Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:18 wrote; “And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches”. 3 John 12; “Demetrius has a good report of all men, and of the truth itself; yes, and we also bear record (or witness); and you know that our record is true”.

3. An ongoing walk, continuous fellowship, and an ongoing revelation by God. The Lord continued to reveal Himself to Samuel through His Word.

4. Obedience to the call is proof of God’s call upon a person. When God spoke to Samuel, Samuel was faithful to give the Word of God to the people; Samuel faithfully and continually proclaimed the Word of the Living God (see chapter 4:1).
The Prophet’s Call
1 Samuel 3:1-21

Conclusion

Elizabeth Dole;

“It is not what I do that matters, but what a sovereign God chooses to do through me. God does not want worldly successes. He wants me. He wants my heart in submission to Him. Life is not just a few years to spend on self-indulgence and career advancement. It is a privilege, a responsibility, a stewardship to be lived according to a much higher calling. God’s calling. This alone gives true meaning to life”.