

God Begins to Speak to His People Again

1 Samuel 3:1 – 4:1

Halifax: 17 November 2024

Introduction:

Today in our morning sermon series we have come to 1 Samuel 3.

Last week in chapter 2, we saw how God showed us the sin and disorder in the house of Eli, the high priest.

- He would not remove his sons from their office in the priesthood even though they were profaning the sacrifices that God had appointed for His people. These sacrifices were shadows God gave to His people to reveal His mercy and forgiveness in Christ.
 - When the people objected about these rogue priests eating the fat that was supposed to be given to God first, these priests threatened to take the meat by force.
- God turned them over to immorality so that they were even sleeping with the women who served at the temple gate.
 - When Eli could no longer ignore this because of all the bad reports that were coming in, he dealt with it in a very lame and ineffective way—which is to say, he didn't really deal with it.

But the passage was not all doom and gloom.

- Blaikie put it like this: “The notices of little Samuel, that alternate in this passage with the sad accounts of Eli and his house, are like the green spots that vary the dull stretches of sand in a desert; or like the little bits of blue sky that charm your eye when the firmament is darkened by a storm.”
- Repeatedly they appear, telling us that little Samuel is ministering before the LORD—right there in Eli's house. It is powerful foreshadowing that there is hope—that God has His hand on this lad and is going to use him.

Today with chapter 3, we get to see our gracious LORD bring forth Samuel as His faithful prophet to begin to speak to His people again after a long famine from hearing the Word of God.

Here is our passage. 1 Samuel 3:1 – 4:1. The holy and inspired word of God:

1 Sam 3:1 – 4:1: Then 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. 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, 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, ⁴ that the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, “Here I am!” ⁵ So he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called

me.” And he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” And he went and lay down. ⁶ Then the LORD called yet again, “Samuel!” So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” He answered, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷ (Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor was the word of the LORD yet revealed to him.) ⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. Then he arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you did call me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli

said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”

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. ¹² In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 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. 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.” ¹⁵ So Samuel lay down until morning, and

opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. ¹⁶ Then Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son!” And he answered, “Here I am.” 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.” 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.”

¹⁹ So 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 *had been* established as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD. ^{4:1} And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Thanks be to God for His precious and holy Word.

In looking at this passage for our edification, I want to proceed as follows.

- First, we will look at an overview of the whole passage and how it shows how God in mercy restored His word to His people.
- Then, we will zero in on the convicting message of judgment that was the first message.
- And then I want to address how this relates to us as a congregation at this time with some pointed application—because it really does relate to us quite a lot.

So let’s get started.

I. First, see how God begins to speak to His people again.

A. The chapter opens with a literal and symbolic description of the dark time that Israel was in.

1. We already know that this was a dark time.

a. We know from the book of Judges because it tells us that at this time everyone in Israel was doing what was right in his own eyes.

- They were not paying much attention to the word of God. God had been chastening them repeatedly for several centuries, but their repeated restorations had only become more shallow and more temporary—

- They were like a child when you try to make them do something, but you can tell that their heart is not really in it, and you know that there is no real repentance yet.

- b. We also know the darkness of this time from the previous chapter that told us about the wickedness that was at the central sanctuary with Eli's sons.
- 2. The passage informs us that God had ceased to speak much to His people at this time.
 - a. Why should He when they were not listening?
 - He stops speaking to nations, to churches, to families, and to individuals to chasten them—with the intent that if they are His, they will miss Him and come seeking Him like the bride does in the Song of Solomon.
 - b. In verse 1, after reminding us that young Samuel is there ministering to the LORD (that wonderful note of hope that keeps sounding), it says:
 - **And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.**
 - When the church is not hearing from God, it is a dark time.
 - That is certainly the situation in Canada today.
 - Hopefully it is not also the situation in your life.
 - Hopefully God is speaking to you through His word.
 - It is very sad when He is not.
- 3. We are given some interesting details that seem to be designed to symbolise this time of darkness.
 - Eli is lying down—he had been doing that spiritually for a long time.
 - His eyes, we are told, had grown so dim that he could not see well.
 - This also represents his spiritual state as the high priest.
 - The lamp of the Lord had not gone out yet—but the light was dim...
 - Here Samuel is mentioned again as a ray of hope—there was still a little light burning in Israel. There was still a remnant of grace according to election.
 - You can see his ready obedience as he jumps up when he supposes that Eli has called him.

B. This brings us to God's call of Samuel.

- 1. It is quite touching to see the LORD's gentle way with this young lad—a very well-known and memorable story.
 - Here Samuel is, in the darkness of this house, in the night—and the LORD calls him gently three times. Each time, he jumps up and runs obediently to Eli without complaining... presenting himself for service... “Here I am.”
 - That is the kind of young man he is—yes, there is still some light in Israel and the three calls alert us that the LORD is getting ready to do something!
- And you see what the LORD does!
- 2. He calls Samuel to be His prophet.
 - Eli still has some light flickering in him, and he recognises what is happening and gives Samuel some very good advice.
 - Verse 9 says: **Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.’ ”**
 - That is what we all need to say when God begins to open our hearts to His word.
 - “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!”

- Not that we look for direct revelation like God gave to prophets, but that we look to Him to open His word to us so that we hear it in a rich and powerful way.
 - Is He indeed speaking to *you*—perhaps right now?
- God speaks to Him—we will look at the content of the prophecy in a minute, but first:
- C. Our gracious God gives His people Samuel to speak His word to them!
 1. The Lord is breaking the period of silence!
 - By Samuel, He is going to address them constantly.
 - They will be hearing from God and it will lead at last to God’s anointed one—David, a type of Christ, who will carry out the full restoration of Israel.
 2. Look at how this is described in 3:19 to 4:1.
 - **So Samuel grew,**
 - He continued to grow in godliness as a faithful servant of the LORD.
 - **And the LORD was with him...**
 - Samuel had true communion with God and was upheld by His grace.
 - **and let none of his words fall to the ground.**
 - He confirmed him as a prophet—God did this with His prophets—their words were always 100% accurate.
 - **Verse 20: And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel *had been* established as a prophet of the LORD.**
 - Samuel’s reputation as a prophet spread throughout the whole church. People know that he was truly speaking for the LORD.
 - **21 Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.**
 3. This is a cause for great rejoicing.
 - When God begins to speak again and His people begin to hear again—what a tremendous blessing it is!
 - It turns empty lives around.
 - It restores families.
 - It brings joy in the LORD.
 - It makes His people strong and courageous!
 - It brings them back into fellowship with the living God.

TRANS> Now let’s look at the initial message that God gives. It is not an easy one.

II. When God begins to speak to His people again, the message is often a convicting, yet gracious one.

- A. We see here that His first message to Samuel is a hard message of coming judgment.
 - Look at verse 11-14: **Then the LORD said to Samuel: “Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹² In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 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. 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.”**
- 1. Wow. That is the extent of it.

- It is all negative.
 - God begins with the conviction of sin.
 - His people must see how they have gone wrong that they might see their need for Christ—they are not addressed as victims, but as sinners!
2. This message and the carrying out of this judgment that we will look at in the future would have resonated with all the elect people of God.
 - They would not just look at Eli and say, “What a loser,” but they would look at themselves and see their own sin too. Some would begin to see, some already saw.
- B. This is a great mercy (though it is painful) because God is making Himself known to His people who have forgotten Him!
1. He thrusts Himself on us—as we read in Romans—sometimes when we have not been looking for Him.
 - Overall, as a nation, they had not missed Him.
 - He had not been in their thoughts.
 2. He had been chastening them, but they had not repented.
 - Their families were divided.
 - The tribes were quarrelling with each other.
 - Their enemies were oppressing them.
 - They were dealing with poverty and famines.
 3. They had paid no attention to God in all of this.
 - But now God is telling them that this dreadful judgment is going to fall on Eli and his sons so they cannot continue to ignore Him.
 - God is saying, “Since you would not discipline your sons, I will discipline them.”
 - *His* discipline is to cut them off and remove them from His people by death.
- C. Samuel will speak these judgments to draw the people’s attention to God.
1. By His grace, they will listen and believe.
 - And believing, they will repent and turn to God (as Hannah had already done) crying out to Him for mercy... pleading with Him to restore them.
 2. And He *will* restore them—even though they must go through much tribulation over the next two or three generations—until David’s kingdom is established...
 - They will go down this hard road listening to God again—looking to Him for mercy.
 - More and more people will find Him and go through the hard years of restoration with joy because they will go in fellowship with the LORD.
 - The joy of the LORD will be their strength. His word will be their stay.
 - David’s Psalms show the beautiful fellowship that they will experience with the LORD through the decades of restoration.
 3. And let me add that God does this at different levels.
 - With nations, it can take generations before many people get on board and significant change comes.
 - With villages or local churches, the change can happen a lot faster as one by one, the people are renewed.

- With families, it can go even faster, and with individuals still faster.
- It depends on where you are coming from, but the lower you were, the greater your joy will be in coming out from the mire you were in.
- For those who do not have as many scars and habits and train wrecks, the pathway to fuller fellowship can be easier and restoration quicker.

III. Now let's consider how this passage relates to us as a congregation.

A. Over the last few years, we have experienced God's hand of chastisement.

1. It seems that there have been a lot of us who have been afflicted with sickness.
 - Perhaps this has been true across the nation as a whole, but we have certainly not been exempt from it—though God has been merciful in that we have had very few illnesses that led to death.
2. Just lately, we have had the sadness of a lot of people leaving, all at the same time.
 - This is not necessarily a chastisement per se, but it can be disheartening in a place where you struggle, at times, to keep your witness alive.
 - We had such wonderful fellowship with the Pedroso family, and they had to leave because their immigration did not go through.
 - We also had Clarke and his family from China who came to faith among us, but had to move to Victoria before they were able to actually be baptised.
 - Then there were some young adults who had to move, in part, because they could not afford to live here (Monil & Holly, Marius and Hannah).
 - There were some folks who simply grew discontent with our fellowship and wanted to leave.
 - And there were those who went away to study or because of marriage.
3. But the greatest hardship of all has been with the departure of those who departed from the Lord.
 - The Stulp family, the Paul Lindsay family, Colton Shermion, Graeme MacKinnon, Lauren and Sarah Alexander, Janita Henken, Jesse Bigney, Sarah Staples, and Alyona Mukharova, who was just put under discipline this week.

B. Of course, our LORD Himself had to experience sorrows like this in His ministry.

1. But what makes it more difficult for us in one way is the knowledge that we have contributed and brought some of these troubles upon ourselves because of our unfaithfulness or negligence.
2. What has been especially disheartening is the rebellion or the spiritual indifference of some of our covenant children.
 - We believe in the doctrine of covenant succession—the promise that God made to parents that He will bless us and our children unless we are unfaithful as parents.
 - Like Eli, our unfaithfulness can lead to the cutting off of our children.
 - Even with a man like David who was especially loved and praised by the Lord this can happen—in part *because* he was so faithful and the LORD was so disappointed with him when he committed adultery and tried to cover it with murder, that He chastened him by causing many of his sons to rebel.

- We are expressly told that that was God's punishment to David.
3. Sadly, this cutting off of children has been the experience of both of our elders.
 - By the way, at our elders' meeting this week, they encouraged me to preach about this.
 - They are both faithful men overall, and for that reason, God holds them to a high standard and brought chastisement on them.
 - Both of them have confessed sins that they can see contributed to the apostasy of some of their children.
 - I also have a daughter who, though I am very glad to say has continued in the faith, has expressed the struggles that I brought upon her by my lack of love and compassion.
 - It is something God has graciously addressed in my life as I told you when I preached through Song of Solomon.
 - And indeed, there has been at times an overall slackness among us as a congregation... many are rather indifferent to God overall.

TRANS> This is the wintertime for us.

- We grow strong in the winter and we grow fast in the spring and summer.
 - One thing that makes the winter even more difficult is that some people want to leave because it is winter. They want to go to churches that are experiencing the spring or the summer. That adds to the sorrow of the winter for those who stick it out.
 - I remember seeing this in Moncton and Covenants a while back. It is salt on wounds.
- I know Christians that never go through the winter.
 - They change churches every five to ten years.
 - They never get to experience the deep and less showy work the Lord does in the winter.
 - I have observed one thing about those who have been doing this for a long time.
 - The wives of these families learn this pattern from their husbands.
 - The two families I thought of as prime examples of those who avoid winter are families where the wife ended up leaving, not because her husband committed adultery or beat her or anything—but because she was not being emotionally fulfilled with him.

C. These chastisements have been very hard on all of us, but praise God, He is, I believe, beginning to bring His word to us in fresh ways.

1. Unlike Eli, God has enabled our elders to discipline their own children—to suspend them from the sacrament and to remove them from the church.
2. There have been heart searchings in many of us, there have been repentances, there have been fervent cries for mercy.
 - I have personally experienced, and some of you have experienced, a moving of God's Spirit that has stirred up yearnings in you.
 - You have heard His word in fresh ways and you have been fervently seeking Him and His blessing.
3. Sadly, some of you are still dragging along.
 - My prayer is that you will not continue to do so.

- God is speaking to us as a congregation.
 - He has is renewing His word.
 - Be sure that you are listening. Listen with reverence and gratitude.
- Let cries for mercy be heard from you before your God.
 - He has told us that He cannot resist such cries—even when He has purposed to chasten us.
- That is what Eli should have done.
 - Even though God said it was too late for repentance, he should not have said **“Let God do what seems good to Him.”** He should have said, **“No, Lord! Have mercy on me!”** And who knows, God might have relented.

Conclusion: Please rise and let’s thank God for beginning to work among us—to speak to us from His word—to stir up our cries for His mercy.

- And let’s plead with Him to continue this gracious work until it spreads throughout the congregation.
- We will have more sorrows to experience—but where sin abounds, grace does far more!