

INTRODUCTION:

From time to time, I will run across various lists of actual bloopers that have been found in church bulletins. Maybe you have seen some of those lists yourselves, but as we begin this morning's lesson, I would like to share some of my favorites:

- *The eighth graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the church basement on Friday at 7 PM. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.*
- *For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.*
- *Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.*
- *Don't let worry kill you, let the church help.*
- *Weight Watchers will meet at 7 PM. Please use the large double door at the side entrance.*
- *Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles, and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will go to cripple children.*

We think about some of these examples, and we understand how easy it is for us to miscommunicate.

- We can miss the true message because of a typo or some awkward wording.
- And yet at the same time, we look to the word of God, and we see that God is truly the Master Communicator.
- In **Hebrews 1:1-2**, we find that the inspired writer started his book by saying, *"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."*
- We find in this passage that God now communicates to the human race through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- We know from **John 1** that Jesus is the Word of God, and we know from **Hebrews 2** that that Word has now been written down and confirmed in the Scriptures.

And yet it is interesting that in times past, God communicated in some rather strange ways.

- In the Old Testament, there were times when God communicated through the heads of families and prophets, but he also communicated through a burning bush, through various dreams and visions, through miraculous signs, and even through various animals.

This morning, I would like for us to study one of these rather strange accounts of God speaking to someone, and in the passage, we will discover a young man who hears the voice of God but does not recognize it as God's voice right away.

- The young man's name is Samuel, and his story unfolds in the opening chapters of the book known as **1 Samuel**.

We can look through the Scriptures, and as far as I can tell, other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Samuel is the only Bible character to hold the offices of Prophet, Judge, and Priest.

- Samuel is also quite unique, in that (other than the Lord), he is one of very few Bible heroes whose life is chronicled literally from beginning to end.
- The Scripture tells the very unusual story surrounding Samuel's conception and how he was promised to God even before being born.
- His life is then traced from childhood, to old age, and eventually to death.
- But this morning, I would like for us to look at **1 Samuel 3** and consider a very unique glimpse into the very first time that Samuel heard the Lord's voice.

I should point out that in some ways, this story is just a little bit creepy—a little scary—especially if we try to put ourselves in Samuel’s place.

- We will find in **verse 3** that he was sleeping, *“...in the temple of the Lord where the Ark of God was.”*
- I can imagine being in the temple; a large stone structure that had all kinds of eerie sounds at night.
- I am sure it may have been comparable to some of the old churches that are found in Europe that would be rather scary to be sleeping in at night.
- We add to this that Samuel was sleeping with the Ark of God.
- A little later in the Scriptures, we find that a man was actually killed simply for touching the Ark.
- The events of this evening for Samuel must have had an incredible impact on his life.

Commentators have suggested that Samuel was probably in his early teenage years or perhaps even a little younger.

- We have a number of young people in that age group here at Salem, so it is especially important that we study the life of this particular young man who ended up being such a dedicated listener to God in his later years.
- Please read with me **1 Samuel 3**...

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.

2 It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well),

3 and 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,

4 that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am."

5 Then he 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 The LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again."

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him.

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

9 And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

11 The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.

12 "In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.

13 "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.

14 "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. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.

16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am."

17 He said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you."

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."

19 Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail.

20 All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD.

21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

As we look back over this chapter, I would like to break it down by looking at the situation in Israel at the time, then considering how Samuel was prepared for this particular evening, and then by looking at the fact that Samuel ultimately listened to the Lord and obeyed the Lord's voice.

I. First of all, though, let us consider THAT LACK OF COMMUNICATION WITH GOD LEADS TO A HORRIBLE SPIRITUAL SITUATION.

Up in **verse 1**, the Bible says that a *"...word from the Lord was rare in those days..."* and that, *"...visions were infrequent."*

- Part of the reason is found in the previous chapter, in **1 Samuel 2:12-14**, where the Bible says:

12 Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the Lord

13 and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand.

14 Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

In other words, we find that Eli's two sons had corrupted the religious system and had ignored the word of God because of their own selfishness!

- These two men were taking more than their share of the sacrifices.
- In the following verses, we find that they even threatened worshipers with force if they did not turn over the very best of the animals that were killed.
- Eli was the high priest, he was in charge, he seems to be a decent man in many ways, but he did not restrain or discipline his two children as he should have done.

In many ways, we could simply say that Eli was lazy.

- He was content with the job he was doing. He had a wife and a family.
- He was happy the way he was, and when sin was found in his own family, Eli basically laid around and did nothing.
- There is an interesting passage back in **Deuteronomy 30** that emphasizes, though, that hearing the Lord and following the Lord's will is not very difficult.
- This is what it says in **Deuteronomy 30:11-16...**

11 "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.

12 "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'

13 "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'

14 "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it

15 "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;

16 *in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.*

And so we see that the Lord's word is not difficult to hear or to follow, but it does require diligence.

- However, Eli the High Priest was apparently lazy.
- For this reason, I believe, we read in **verse 1** that the *"...word from the Lord was rare in those days..."* and that, *"...visions were infrequent."*
- Their situation was so bad, because the people had decided not to follow the Lord's word.
- God's word, therefore is readily available, so there is no acceptable excuse for losing touch with God.

I once read a story about a man who noticed that he was having some pain after eating his favorite food.

- He went to the doctor, and the doctor warned him that the food was causing the pain.
- He returned from the doctor's office, his wife asked him what the doctor had said, and the man replied, **"The doctor said that I would be having this pain about three times a week."**
- In a slightly similar way, Eli could see his own sons and their sins, and yet he refused to put an end to what they were doing.
- And even today, we have to realize that a lack of communication with God can very easily lead us into a poor spiritual relationship with God.

It is for this reason that God stopped communicating through Eli, but in this chapter the Lord started trying to contact a young man by the name of Samuel.

II. Now that we have considered how bad the situation in Israel really was, let's go on and notice a second aspect of this chapter, and that is, **SAMUEL WAS PREPARED FOR THIS EVENT IN A VERY SPECIAL WAY.** Through the providence of God, **SAMUEL WAS AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.**

In the opening chapter of **1 Samuel**, we find a Godly woman named Hannah, who would go to the temple to sacrifice, but she was extremely sad because she could not bear a child of her own.

- On one occasion, Hannah prayed to the Lord and made a vow.
- Her vow was that if God would give her a son, that she would give him back to the Lord.
- It is interesting that Eli saw her make this vow from a distance, and that Eli then approached her and accused her of being drunk—since her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard.
- He was apparently thinking the worst in her... It didn't even cross his mind that she might be praying.

The next morning, the Bible says that Hannah worshiped the Lord, went home, and had relations with her husband.

- Hannah conceived, and when the son was born, she named him Samuel.
- The Bible then says that as soon as he was weaned, she took him to the temple and left him with Eli at the temple.
- Samuel, then, grew up serving in the temple, under Eli's leadership—probably for about a decade before the account we read at the beginning of this morning's lesson.

During that decade, Samuel maintained his childlike obedience—the exact attitude that God wanted to see in Eli, but did not.

- My point in all of this is simply to point out that Samuel's faithfulness was not an accident.
- Hannah made a very deliberate effort to bring this child up in a way that would prepare him to be a true servant of God.

So many times in the Scriptures, we see those who are young, and we see them willing to follow the Lord in obedience, and we see them doing great things for God and on behalf of God's people.

- We read about the young man Joseph who not only saved his family, but saved several surrounding nations as well.
- We read about David who saved his nation from defeat by the Philistines.
- We read about Daniel and his three young friends who stood up for the Lord in a far away land.
- In the New Testament, we read about the young boy who gave his very small sack lunch to the Lord, and we read about the Lord multiplying that bread and those fish so that thousands could be fed.
- We read about Timothy, a young preacher who learned the faith from his mother and his grandmother.

Just as these situations were not by accident, and just as Samuel's faithfulness was not an accident, we can also say that when a young person today grows up and is faithful to the Lord...it is not by accident!

- It is so refreshing to see those parents who make a special effort to have their children in Bible classes on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening.
- It is so refreshing to see parents make a special effort to bring their children to special activities—things like VBS and the YES (Youth Eager to Serve) Activities.
- And to Little Egypt Bible Camp in the summer, to the youth rallies at area congregations, and the other special get-togethers that take place during the year.
- These things, of course, will not guarantee that our children are faithful, but certainly it helps to prepare them, just as Samuel was prepared.

And so we learn that whether he knew it or not, Samuel was trained to listen to the Lord.

- He was prepared, and he was certainly in the right place at the right time.

III. There is a third and final aspect of this passage that I would like for us to consider, and that is, **SAMUEL LISTENED TO THE LORD AND PASSED IT ON**—just as he should have done.

With Samuel, we can see his willingness to listen started in **verse 4**.

- As the Lord calls Samuel, Samuel responds by saying, ***"Here I am."***
- Of course, he thinks that Eli is calling, so he goes to Eli, but Eli tells Samuel to go back to bed.
- Not everyone will completely understand what I am about to say, but for those of us as parents, we know how hard it is to get up in the night when we are called.
- One strategy that a lot of people employ is to just pretend to be asleep (and maybe it will go away...or at least go to the other side of the bed), but we all understand how frustrating it is when our sleep is interrupted!
- And this may be similar to what Eli was doing... he tells Samuel to go back to bed.
- However, Samuel hears the voice a second time, and Eli tells him again to go back to bed.

The third time it happens, though, Eli figures it must be the Lord, so he tells Samuel that if it happens again, he is to respond by saying, ***"Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening."***

- Very interesting advice, but it is rather odd that Eli would give this advice, because he has been ignoring that advice in his own life for a number of years.
- Nevertheless, Samuel goes back to bed, and it does happen a fourth time, and the Lord has a message for Eli.
- Eli had not been listening to the Lord during that time, so the message had to come through Samuel.

I find it interesting that Samuel, not Eli, was the one who was truly tuned in to the Lord's word.

- A number of years ago, my dad used to talk a lot on his CB Radio.
- He used to spend hours sitting at that CB talking to people all over the United States and Canada.

- I remember that he used to keep track of people's "**handles**" and try to reach them at different times...My dad's handle was "**Pale Face**"...My mom's was "**turtle dove**" and mine was "**Jiminy Cricket.**" (I was pretty little at the time I came up with that one...)
- Anyway...It used to be a challenge to keep up a conversation because of the static and the interference from other CB users.
- My dad had a huge, motorized antenna mounted on the roof that he could rotate slightly if he was getting bad reception when talking to someone.
- Hopefully the reception would get clearer, but occasionally he would not be able to tune in the person and he would have to sign off.

In a similar way, it can be challenging for us to keep ourselves "**tuned in**" to God.

- There are many things that might cause interference and might keep us from listening to God's word as we should. Maybe there is some sin in our lives.
- Sin can keep us from hearing God. Maybe our priorities are a little off track.
- Maybe we have put the emphasis in our lives only on a career, or maybe a hobby, or maybe even a person. In Eli's life, he was simply content.
- In **1 Samuel 2:29**, the Bible says that Eli and his sons were growing "**fat**" with the best of the offerings from the temple.
- For those of you who remember how Eli died, you know that he heard the news of his sons' death and the capture of the Ark of God, causing him to fall off of his chair, breaking his neck because he was "**old and heavy.**"
- Eli was a fat, lazy old man who took advantage of God's people.
- He "**tuned out**" any messages from God.
- But Samuel, though, listened to the Lord.

Because of this, Samuel developed into an amazing leader among God's people.

- He developed into a prophet who the people trusted, and he eventually bridged the gap as the last judge before Saul becomes the first king in Israel.
- I find it especially interesting that (as far as I can tell) Samuel never messed up.
- In other words, all through his life Samuel honored God. As far as I can tell, nothing bad is ever said about Samuel. It all started when his mother prayed for him—even before he was born.

SUMMARY:

Israel was in a terrible situation.

- When they stopped listening to the Lord's word, they became spiritually weak.
- The situation was so bad that God had basically stopped communicating with the religious leaders.
- Samuel, though, was prepared. Through prayer and the providence of God, he was in the right place at the right time.
- And then finally, at the appropriate time, Samuel listened to the Lord and became one of the most successful prophets in the Old Testament.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

As we close, I would like to go back to something in the very last verse of **1 Samuel 3**.

- The Bible says that "**...the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.**"
- The Lord does not speak to us directly as He did back then, but the Lord does still speak to us through His word.
- Every time we read and study the Bible, the Lord is speaking to us if we are listening.

- Too often, people today have the attitude, “**Listen, Lord! Your servant is speaking!**” instead of Samuel’s attitude of, “***Speak, Lord! Your servant is listening!***”
- As we close this morning’s lesson, I’d like for us to respond to what God has said by determining to spend more time in God’s word during this week.

The Bible says that faith comes from hearing God’s word.

- Through hearing, we understand that our faith requires us to change our lives and then be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins.
- If you have any questions, we hope you will talk with us.
- If you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let’s stand and sing...