

Epiphany 2
January 15, 2012

1 Samuel 3:1-10
283-86-79/85-283, v. 4

“Speak, LORD, Your Servant Is Listening”

I. What a blessing to have God’s Word!

II. We listen to learn God’s will.

Dear Christian friends,

As I worked on this sermon I ran across this comment, “Notice that Samuel said, ‘Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening.’ He didn’t say, ‘LISTEN, Lord, Your servant is speaking.’”

That’s an important point. You talk to somebody about their RELATIONSHIP with God. **You know** that they don’t go to church. Their priorities in life are all messed up. You express your concern about their soul. But they tell you there’s **no need** to worry. They assure you that while they MAY NOT BE in church, they DO TALK to God **regularly**.

Did you catch that? They TALK to God – but do they LISTEN to God? Do they shut up and LET GOD TALK to them? That’s not meant to **put down** prayer. But let’s be clear – we need to LET GOD GET a word in. We need to have a TWO-WAY **conversation** with God. That conversation begins with GOD TALKING to us.

Today we have this beautiful example of young Samuel. **“Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.”** Let’s make Samuel’s prayer our prayer. “SPEAK, LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING.” As we pray that – 1)what a blessing to have God’s Word! **As we pray** that 2)we listen to learn God’s will.

I. What a blessing to have God’s Word.

These verses take us to a DARK TIME in Israel’s history. It was also a time OF TRANSITION. Samuel lived a little more than a 1,000 years before Jesus was born. The time of the JUDGES was **ending** and Israel would soon become a monarch. You remember some of the judges – **Samson** – **Gideon**, etc. Samuel was the last of the judges. He would later anoint Saul the **first king** over Israel. POLITICALLY – and **especially** SPIRITUALLY – it was a dark time in Israel. The Book of Judges ends with the comment, **“In those days everyone did as he saw fit.”**

There were still the FAITHFUL FEW in Israel – people like Samuel’s parents Elkanah and Hannah. And let’s not picture the Israelites as totally UNRELIGIOUS. **Many** of them devoutly worshiped the **worthless idol** Baal. Some still went THROUGH THE MOTIONS of worshiping the Lord – offering sacrifices, etc. Eli was the **high priest** – but he was TOO OLD and **feeble** to really serve anymore. His two sons – **Hophni** and **Phineas** – led the Israelites in their worship. But they only led the people AWAY from God. In chapter 2 we’re told, **“Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD. (Their) sin was very great in the LORD’s sight, for they were treating the LORD’s offerings with contempt. They (also) slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.”** It was not a GOOD TIME SPIRITUALLY in Israel. **“The word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.”**

Here we are in OUR HOUSE of God. We have our Bibles – our Christian **schools** – Sunday School – Bible class. Could what happened in Israel happen TO US? Yes! The Israelites HAD God’s Word – they took it for granted – they ignored it and FINALLY lost it. **Sadly** that’s a lesson repeated over and over. God gave us His Word to BLESS us. But so often people ignore and **defy** it – so God TAKES IT AWAY. Through His prophet Amos God once said, **“The days are coming when I will send a famine through the land – not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of**

hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea ...searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it."

WITHOUT God's Word where do you turn? Isaiah pictured life without God's Word this way – **"darkness covers the earth, thick darkness is over the peoples."** Without God's Word we are IN THE DARK about God and our relationship with Him. **Without God's Word** try answering CORRECTLY who God is – what He's really like – how we can get to heaven. **Without God's Word** you can join millions of **Hindus** worshiping rats in a **temple crawling** with rats. **Without God's Word** you can join millions of **Moslems** who think Allah is God – **some** of whom even think that blowing themselves up and killing innocent people will get them into heaven. **Without God's Word** you can join the many who think THIS IS ALL there is to life – who think life is **all about** THEMSELVES and having fun. **"Everyone did as he saw fit"** is a pretty good description of America today!

What a blessing to have God's Word! The psalmist says God's Word is **"more precious than gold, than much pure gold; sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb."**

"SPEAK, Lord," we pray and God speaks to us THROUGH His Word. That's what the Bible is – GOD'S Word. Think how often we hear that OT REFRAIN, **"This is what the LORD says"**! Peter tells us, **"Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."** Because the Bible IS GOD'S Word Peter adds, **"You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place."**

WHAT A BLESSING to have God's Word! This was a DARK TIME in Israel – but it was also a TURNING POINT. God was calling Samuel to **be His prophet** to lead the Israelites BACK to the Lord. But FIRST Samuel needed to listen and **learn** God's Word. So he prayed – WE PRAY – "Speak, Lord Your servant..."

II. We listen to learn God's will.

Put yourself in Samuel's shoes. You hear someone calling your name. You ASSUME it's **old Eli** needing some help. But no – **maybe** you were just dreaming. AGAIN you hear someone call your name. **Again** you assume it's Eli – but no. After the third time **"Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy."** Eli instructed Samuel, **"Go and lie down. If He calls you say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'"**

You go back to your room. You climb back into bed. Do you think Samuel was able to FALL BACK to sleep? Or do you suppose he laid there – eyes WIDE OPEN – listening – wondering? Is it REALLY the **"LORD"** who is calling ME?

Then it happened. **"The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel, Samuel!'"** **"Speak, LORD, Your servant is listening."**

Do you know what God told Samuel that night? The very first message God gave Samuel was one of JUDGMENT – God's judgment on Eli's wicked sons. **"The LORD said to Samuel, 'See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears it tingle.'" God would show** NO MERCY to Eli's sons. The next morning Samuel was **afraid to tell** Eli what God had said. But Eli insisted on hearing God's Word. **"So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him."**

Not everything God **has to say** to us in His Word is FUN to hear. God is VERY JUDGMENTAL. There are certain things – certain thoughts, words, actions, behaviors – that God plain and simple

ABSOLUTELY FORBIDS us to do – things God will simply not TOLERATE. God makes clear that He ***“will not be mocked, a man reaps what he sows.”***

“SPEAK, Lord, Your servant is listening” – **listening** to You talk TO ME about MY LIFE and MY **sin**. It’s **not** a very comfortable conversation. There’s nothing we can say in OUR DEFENSE. There are NO EXCUSES God accepts. The Ten Commandments are NOT HARD to understand. Nor is that word **“servant.”** We are God’s **“servants”** – not His BOSSES. As God’s servants we are to do EVERYTHING God tells us – do it the FIRST TIME God tells us AND without complaining. ***“Everyone did as he saw fit”*** – but that doesn’t mean God APPROVES of everything people do. God may be very PATIENT but He is not a PUSHOVER. Do you remember the Conclusion to the Commandments **in the Catechism?** “God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear His anger and **not disobey** what He commands.”

“SPEAK, Lord, for I need to understand Your HOLINESS – Your **righteousness.**” THEN I will indeed be amazed at Your GRACE! Oh what a blessing to have God’s Word! In **1 Corinthians 2** Paul quotes Isaiah, ***“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed us to us by His Spirit.”***

We may be SO FAMILIAR with the gospel facts but GOD HELP us to never take them **for granted**. God keep us from **ever thinking**, “Tell me something NEW – something I DON’T KNOW already!” What a blessing that we **know** and **believe** that Jesus is the Son of God Himself – our PERFECT SAVIOR! What a blessing to **know** and **believe** that Jesus has already taken care of everything for us – that Jesus has perfectly obeyed all the commandments for us – that Jesus suffered and died on the cross to PERSONALLY PAY for all our sins **in full!** What a blessing to **know** and **believe** that Jesus lives risen triumphant from the dead – ruling all things for our eternal good!

LISTEN – **listen!** – as our Lord speaks to us! ***“Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you. Because I live, you shall live also. Lo, I am with you always. Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me. Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are Mine!”*** Oh Lord KEEP SPEAKING to us Your servants through Your Word!

LISTEN to how this chapter ends. ***“The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and Samuel let none of the LORD’s words fall to the ground. All Israel recognized that Samuel was a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to reveal Himself to Samuel through His Word. And Samuel’s word came to all Israel.”***

Isn’t that WHAT GOD ALSO WANTS to do with you and me? HE SPEAKS – we listen. We treasure His Word – ***“let none of God’s Word fall to the ground”*** like some worthless crumbs. But it doesn’t stop there! The Lord CONTINUES to speak to us – and we CONTINUE to listen and **learn**. THEN we take God’s Word to our family, friends, neighbors, world. God willing, **more and more** will then join us in praying LIKE SAMUEL, ***“Speak, LORD, Your servant is listening.”*** Amen.

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