

# The Anointed One is Awesome 2) His Word is Precious

1 Samuel 3:1-10 • 2024-01-14 • Epiphany Series



Children are well known for having selective hearing. You know how it is. Maybe you're sitting at a fast-food restaurant or waiting for a checkout line and there is the kid who is getting into trouble. Their mom or dad say, "Corey, please stop." They repeat, "Corey, stop it." Corey apparently doesn't hear. Or at least his mom and dad start acting like his hearing might be the problem. "Corey, stop it I said," shouts the parent. Corey, of course, has become an expert at knowing just how loud mom and dad must get before he really has to listen. "Corey," the parent says as loud as he can without getting too embarrassed, "stop now!" Corey knows that as long as he doesn't make eye contact, he can probably get away with more. Mom or dad debate what to do next –meanwhile the cashier or the person sitting across the table is thinking, "I think there's more than a hearing problem going on." We've all witnessed this going on at some time. Failure to listen has long been a human problem. How does God respond when we fail to give his Word the attention it deserves? This morning we find out as we look back at a time in ancient Israel when there wasn't a whole lot of listening going on.

It can sometimes be cute when little children don't listen. But what about when they grow older? This was the problem Eli the priest faced. His sons were wicked men. They were so godless that they helped themselves to the best part of the offerings brought for the Lord. They even slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Eli knew about their wickedness. He told them to stop. But they didn't listen. Eli's sons weren't the only ones failing to listen. Much of that generation had stopped listening to the Lord. Many were worshipping false gods and had mingled with the godless people from the nations around them. And so, Israel is described at this time as experiencing a famine of the Word of God, "The Word of the Lord was scarce, there were not many visions." This means that God did not give the people many prophets to share his Word. It's not that the Word of the Lord was gone. It's not that God didn't want to shower his Word upon his people for blessing upon blessing. It's that no one was listening.

But Eli was given a second chance at mentoring a young child. One day a grateful mother came to the tabernacle and dedicated her firstborn son to service for the Lord's work. His name was Samuel. Eli was now an old man, and his eyes were failing him. So, Eli would call on Samuel to assist him in many tasks. Samuel watched, learned, studied, and served. One night something took place that showed us Eli must have done something right in his parenting.

We read that Samuel's nightly job had been monitoring the tabernacle of the Lord through the night. One night "before the lamp of the Lord went out" Eli was lying in his place and Samuel was nearby. The lamp of God is the lamp stand which was supposed to be in the tabernacle of the Lord and it was to remain lit. Naturally the oil would gradually run low as morning approached. It was likely very early morning, before the breaking of dawn. Samuel, whose name means "God listens," heard his name called. "Samuel." He got up and immediately ran to Eli. "Here I am. You called for me?" Eli didn't call for him. "I didn't. Go back and lie down." Again Samuel heard his name "Samuel." Again, he went to Eli "Here I am." Once more Eli says, "I didn't call you. Go back and lie down."

We are told it is the Lord who is calling Samuel. But apparently Samuel didn't understand. And Eli hadn't yet figured out what is going on. How can this be? Here they are serving in the temple of the Lord. Eli is a priest of the Most High God. Surely if anyone knew when God was speaking it would be him. But this awkward scene of confusion is presented to us. There is an old, blind man and a young, confused boy –neither knows what disturbs their sleep.

Why did Eli not get it yet? "In those days the Word of the Lord was rare, there were not many visions." Think of how easy it would be for Eli to dismiss any notion of God's speaking a revelation at this time. The people had turned against the Lord in unbelief. Many were no longer even listening to the Lord. As far as Scripture reveals, Eli's own sons never received such a vision when they served in the tabernacle. Eli apparently wasn't receiving any special revelation from the Lord. And besides all that, wouldn't God want to come to Eli, the old and faithful servant in his tabernacle? Eli was caught off guard. Was it pride? Was it because his own sons made him so jaded that he no longer thought God's Word made any impact on people? The Word of the Lord was rare. And Eli was slow to look for any revelation from God.

And what about the boy? Why didn't he get it? We are told, "Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." His excuse is legitimate, isn't it? It says he didn't know the Lord. Now, obviously this doesn't mean that he didn't know who the Lord was. The Hebrew Word translated as "know" is often used to talk about having an established relationship with someone (like difference in Spanish between *saber* and *conocer*). "God knows those who are his" means more than he knows we exists; it means he has a special relationship with us. When it says Samuel did not yet know the Lord, it explains it for us in the following statement, "The Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." He didn't know the Lord through the special prophetic revelations he would be given.

This is really a desperate scene. The two people who ought to have been most ready to respond to the Lord's calling are taken by surprise and are not expecting it. Isn't that a scary thought? The Word of the Lord was scarce and those who actually do have it right before them are so unprepared for it they don't recognize it!

Could this happen today? The Lord doesn't give us the same measure of prophetic revelation as he did for ancient Israel. He doesn't need to. He's revealed through his prophets and apostles all we need. And even if there were a prophetic vision today, the apostles remind us that they are to be compared to what has already been revealed. John says let no one add to what has been revealed and recorded in Scripture. Paul warns if anyone changes the message we have already received from God they are to be condemned—even if an angle should appear to give the message. Yet we too have the revealed Word in our midst. It is in the Bible and shared by Christians. The Word of the Lord is in the Christian Seminary classroom. It is in the Christian home. It is here as we gather in God's name around his Word and Sacraments. And God himself says he is here among us as we speak and hear his Word.

But are we immune to the situation which is presented here for Eli and Samuel? Could it ever be that so few people are listening to the Word of the Lord that those who do have his Word are unprepared to listen to it anymore? We are only one generation away from losing his Word. God doesn't have to give us his Word. It isn't a right. You were not born and baptized and brought up in God's Word because of any special right you had. It was a blessing and grace afforded to you which you did not deserve.

A third time the Lord calls to Samuel. Now Eli gets it. *"When you hear the voice say, 'Speak Lord, your servant is listening.'"* Eli knew that God still wanted to reveal his Word to Israel. He now understood the importance of making sure Samuel was ready and willing to listen. Samuel returned to his bed. This time the Lord came visibly and called him *"Samuel, Samuel."* Samuel responded *"Speak, your servant is listening."*

Eli is often critiqued in Bible commentaries because of his poor parenting with his own older sons. God himself condemns his poor parenting practices and lack of zeal to stand up for righteousness and justice when his sons were in the wrong. But we see in this section that Eli was still a believer. Though he had struggles and was weak, he still knew and had the Lord as his God. Eli understood that God would also reveal himself to a young boy like Samuel. Eli knew the importance of listening for when God speaks. And he passed that on to young Samuel. Of all the parenting he ever did, this was the most influential say *"Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."* For all his sins and faults, Eli got it. Instruct your children, your family, your friends in the importance of listening to the Word of God. Be the example which treasures the hearing of his Word. Help others understand how it is very important to listen when God speaks. He speaks in the Bible. He speaks to you through your Christian parents. He speaks to you through your Sunday School teachers. He speaks to you through your pastors. He speaks to you as you learn to read and listen to his holy Word.

Eli finally got it right. Do we? Do we ever fail to instruct the youth to readily respond, *"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."*? Or are there times when God speaks, and we don't readily listen nor have them listen? I can see you listen on Sunday mornings, that's true. But do you take every opportunity to hear the Word? What does your home look like during the week? Who is speaking more, your tv or your God? Who is speaking louder, your hobbies or your God? Who is getting you to listen most eagerly? Sports announcers or Christian magazines and music? If you never attend any Bible Class in your adult life, do you think your children will think they should listen to the Word too? Do you pause from your daily routine to say, *"Speak, Lord, your servant is listening?"* If you don't, if your children never see you reading the Bible, why would they think it is a treasure and privilege to listen to his Word?

I have to close my own mouth in shame when I think of how few times—outside my study—my children have been able to see me spend my down time with eyes down in the Bible. I know it ought to be more. How about you?

What would happen if we didn't impress on the next generation the importance of listening to the Word of God? The Word of the Lord becomes scarce and rare among us. At some point it became scarce in Israel, and they lost it. At some point it became scarce in the same land where Luther brought it to light. At some point it will become scarce among us too. As less and less people treasure it and stop listening to it, less and less it will be shared.

The Word of God has always been rare in the world because the world in sin has always not wanted to listen. But in his grace God has revealed his Word to us. The most remarkable thing is that the Lord still came at all. Through Samuel and through the faithful remnant of Israel the Lord shared his Word. Through his apostles and prophets, he continued to share his Word. He sent his Word, his only Son, in the flesh. When Jesus said he was the Bread of Life and his Words were life, many of his disciples no longer followed him or listened to him. But he still came in grace. He came to his own temple, and those there did not recognize him. They would not listen. He was despised and rejected—the world rejected the Word in the flesh. But still the Word took on flesh to suffer for the world's inexcusable crimes, including our own, for neglecting, silencing, and shunning of the Word.

By the same grace he has called you to hear and believe his Word. He shares the awesome truth of his sacrificial death for us on the cross, of his rising to life in victory, of his sending us to share his good news to the world, and of his coming again. And you can be sure by grace he keeps calling, *"Come to me. Listen to me. Follow me. Live with me."*

Sometimes we begin to stop listening to the Word because we don't think it will make any impact on us or on others. But with one single phrase and with one night of listening the situation in Israel began to turn around. One servant listened. He in turn told others. Others then listened. They in turn returned to faith in God. The Anointed One is

Awesome; his Word is precious.