



A Kingdom Established • Samuel's Call • 1 Samuel 3:1-21 • 09/23/2018

Main Point

Obedience to God is not as complicated as we tend to make it. In the end, we need to listen to God and do what He says.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

If you could go back and give one piece of advice to your teenage self, what would you say?

Why?

How do you think your life would be different if you had known that?

How do you think the teenage version of yourself would have responded?

Hindsight is 20/20. We've all made mistakes that, if we could, we would love to go back and make a different choice. Problem is that even if we could, most of our past selves wouldn't listen. We have trouble with that a lot of the time—simply listening to someone who knows what he or she is talking about and then acting accordingly. But as we will see in today's discussion, obedience to God might not be as complicated as we tend to make it. In the end, we need to listen to God and do what He says.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

When you spend time with God, do you spend more time talking or listening? Why?

What things in our lives distract us from hearing the voice of God?

We live in a noisy culture. Whether it's the TV, our cell phones, music in the background, or even billboards on the side of the road, we are constantly being bombarded with voices. Most everyone of those voices is telling us to do something. If we want to listen to God and do what He says, we must first put ourselves in the right surroundings.

Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 3:1-9.

Why do you think the Lord called to Samuel the boy instead of Eli the priest?

How did Samuel's surroundings help him hear from God? What does this tell us about hearing from God?

If you decided to absolutely commit yourself to hearing from God on a daily basis, what distractions would you need to limit or eliminate?

What's keeping you from making some tough decisions like that about your schedule and habits?

The main reason we don't hear the voice of God is not because He's not speaking; it's because we're not listening. But putting ourselves in the right surroundings to listen isn't just about time and place; it's about our relationships. One of the reasons we do life together, investing in each other, is so that we can help each hear and recognize the voice of God. Once we hear the voice of God, that voice requires a response of surrender.

Who has been an Eli to you in your life—someone that has helped you hear the voice of God more clearly?

Are you investing your life right now to be an Eli for someone else? If not, why not?

Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 3:10-11.

How does Samuel's response to the voice of God indicate his surrender to the will of God?

Is that how you typically respond to God's voice? Based on your actions, how does your typical response to God's voice sound?

If we want to listen to God and do what He says, we must put ourselves in the right surroundings. Then we must have an attitude of surrender. When we do, we will find success. But success might look different than it looks in the eyes of the world.

Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 3:12-21.

Did God give Samuel an easy message to deliver? What, in your own words, did God tell Samuel to do?

Given that message from God, how do you think we should define success?

Is that hard for you? How would you usually define success?

Success is measured not in size but in obedience. Samuel delivered a tough message to his mentor. It probably didn't feel good at the time, but Samuel was successful because he listened to God and did what He said. When we put ourselves in the right surroundings, choose to surrender to what God says, then there's no doubt we will find success in the eyes of the Lord.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What's your next step today to make sure you are putting yourself in the right surroundings to hear the voice of God?

What's your next step of surrender today? Are there any practices you need to start? Is there anything from your life that you need to remove?

Pray

Before you speak in prayer, spend at least a minute in silence just listening to the Lord. Pray that your group would put themselves in a position to continue to hear God's voice and then do what He says.

Commentary

| 1 Samuel 3:1-18

3:1-3. Samuel, as a youthful Levite, was providing service to the Lord under Eli's tutelage. In the days of Eli, prophetic revelations in the form of visions and divine words had been "rare" (v. 1; lit., "precious"), a circumstance that can be linked to divine displeasure (see 14:37; 28:6) and helps explain why society was so degenerate at that time (see Prov. 29:18; Amos 8:11). Background details provided here are laden with symbolism relevant to the events that follow; Eli's eyes—and by extension his spiritual insight—were "so weak that he could barely see" (v. 2). The mention of "the lamp of God" (v. 3) still burning in the midst of Shiloh's darkness provided not only a temporal setting—the predawn hours (see Ex. 27:21)—but also a symbol of Samuel's presence in that spiritually benighted worship center. Samuel lying down in the Lord's temple, "where the ark of God was," positions the youth not only spatially but also spiritually; he was of all Israelites closest to the Lord's throne (see 4:4; Num. 7:89).

3:4-14. While Samuel was fulfilling the Torah obligations to tend the lamp of God (see Lev. 24:3; Num. 18:23), the Lord called the youth and delivered a message of judgment to him. In a form paralleling Abraham, Jacob, and Moses' obedient responses to divine calls (Gen. 22:1, 11; 31:11; Ex. 3:4), Samuel responded, "Here I am" (v. 4). Because he did not initially know the Lord, however, Samuel at first went to Eli for further instructions (vv. 5-6, 8). Eli twice turned Samuel away (vv. 5-6), perhaps because Eli

essentially was blind to the possibility of the Lord's revealing Himself in a personal manner. Eventually, however, the elderly priest came to understand that the Lord was calling the youth and advised him to respond submissively.

On the climactic fourth approach to Samuel, the Lord called the boy's name twice and also "stood." The repetition of the personal name is reminiscent of the divine call to Abraham at Mount Moriah (see Gen. 22:1,11) and the one to Moses at the burning bush (see Ex. 3:4). The similarity suggests that this moment was as important in Samuel's life and for all Israel as the parallel moments were in the lives of the earlier heroes of the faith. Samuel obediently identified himself as the Lord's "servant" (v. 10; 1:11) and urged the Lord to speak.

The Lord's terrifying revelation was in fact a confirmatory repetition of the judgment against the house of Eli given by the unnamed prophet (2:30-36). Though prophetic messages could be conditional—warnings of possible consequences resulting from continued disobedience (see Jonah 3:4)—in the case of the words spoken against the house of Eli they were certain. Every promised outcome—"from beginning to end" (v. 12)—would become reality. And Eli, as the family patriarch, would bear the brunt of the blame because "he knew about" (v. 13) his sons' "contemptible" sins but "failed to restrain them" (Deut. 21:18-21). Eli's conscious failure to enforce divine law in his own family amounted to a high-handed (i.e., deliberate) sin; as such it could "never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering" (v. 14; see Num. 15:30-31). Furthermore, the magnitude and form of God's judgment would be so shocking that it would cause "the ears of everyone who hears it to tingle"—that is, to give rise to great fear and dismay (see 2 Kings 21:12; Jer. 19:3).

3:15-18. With the coming of morning, Samuel "opened the doors of the house of the Lord." The description of a dawn marked by the prophet's reopening the way into the Lord's presence is an obvious double entendre: on the one hand, Samuel was merely performing his daily duty as a temple servant; on the other hand, he was ushering in a new era of spiritual consciousness in Israel.

But Samuel did not enter into his role as the Lord's spokesman without hesitation (v. 15). Eli's fatherly reassurances and stern admonition provided the encouragement the lad needed to perform his duty. The interaction between Eli and Samuel in verses 17-18 conveys an idealized model of prophetic activity in society: the addressee encourages the prophet to speak the full revelation, the prophet does so, and the addressee accepts it willingly. In these verses both the seriousness of the prophetic responsibility and a model of its proper discharge are presented. Samuel's alert, expectant reception of the divine message (v. 10b) and his full disclosure of the Lord's revelation (vv. 17-18a) in spite of personal misgivings (v. 15) are the proper responses of a prophet to a revelatory divine visitation.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

1 Samuel 8-10