

LORD, SPEAK TO ME IN YOUR WORD

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ January 17, 2016

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. ² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ 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 Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. ⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:1-10)

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Any good conversation has two parts - one person to talk and one person to listen. If you have two people talking, then no one is listening. If you have two people listening you have no one talking. Another important point to note is when you're listening to the other person talk, you shouldn't be thinking of what you're going to say next, because then you're not really listening. Just like we can have good conversations with those around us, the same tips apply when we have a conversation with God. But I wonder if we are as good at communicating as we think we are.

I wonder how often we open our mouth to speak, when we really should just shut our mouths and listen. The young boy Samuel was given some sage advice from an older priest - "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." These are words we can remember. But I wonder how often instead of saying "speak Lord, your servant is listening," we have said, "Listen Lord, your servant is speaking." Whenever we feel deprived, whenever we feel taken advantage of, whenever we feel like we know our lives better than God, we say to God, "Listen Lord, your servant is speaking." All this gets us into the same problems.

Instead what Epiphany teaches us, what the Bible teaches us is to listen before we speak. Because God's words are far more important than our own. And God reveals his words to us in his Word, the Bible. Because of that, we will learn to imitate young Samuel from our first lesson who said: "LORD, SPEAK TO ME IN YOUR WORD"

1. Help me accept those things that seem so wrong
2. Help me trust those things that seem to impossible

So who was Samuel? Samuel was one of the key figures in the Old Testament. Apart from Moses, Samuel would have been considered the first of God's prophets - individuals who would proclaim to the people what God had spoken. He stood at a crossroads in Israel's history. The time of the Judges was coming to an end - when everybody in Israel did as they pleased, and the time of the Kings was soon to start. He was well respected by the Israelites at that time because everybody knew when he spoke, he spoke from God. But before Samuel could proclaim what the Lord said, he first had to listen, something that we can learn from today.

Samuel was not always a great prophet in Israel. The lesson we have before us this morning shows us near his humble beginnings, at his call into the ministry. It was Samuel's mother who had instilled in her son the importance of the Lord. Hannah, his mother, had been childless. And each year when her family made a pilgrimage to the Tabernacle she prayed for a son. Finally, the Lord answered her prayer and gave her Samuel. Hannah had made a promise to God that if she granted him a son, she would allow him to serve in the House of the Lord. Hannah kept her promise to God and gave up her son to serve in the Tabernacle under the aging priest Eli. He was still just a young boy at the time, maybe only 12 years old. He helped with the ordinary tasks of the tabernacle, making sure the doors were opened in the morning and closed at night, making sure the candle was trimmed so as to make it through the night, and helped Eli with any tasks that he needed assistance.

So it would not have been that unusual for Samuel to hear a voice calling his name in the middle of the night. The first time he heard it, he rushed to Eli's side and said, **"Here I am"** "I'm ready to help you." Samuel was surprised that Eli had not called him. Maybe he had just been dreaming. But then the voice called a second time and he thought for sure this isn't a dream. But it was like before, Eli had not called him. The third time he might have wondered if someone was playing him. But thankfully at this time Eli had an answer. Eli said it was God himself calling to Samuel, and he was given the words with which to respond. **"Speak, for your servant is listening."**

Even though Samuel knew the Lord by faith, he did not have a special direct knowledge of God, in fact, no one really did. The times Samuel lived in were apostate. The very first verse of the lesson gave that away, **"In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions."** At first it might seem similar to today - God isn't speaking directly now as he did during the days of the Bible. But the difference is that God promised to reveal himself to his Old Testament people. At this point in time, the only "Scriptures" that the Jews had were the first five books of the Old Testament. So God would reveal himself directly to people. But not so much now. At that time, many of the people, even the priests, were apathetic to God and his Word.

An example of this disregard for God is displayed in Eli's two sons, which is the very reason God was calling to Samuel at this time. Eli's two sons were priests who abused their position. They took choice meat from sacrifices meant for the Lord and ate it themselves, the Bible calls them wicked. God had predicted a clearing of house, to rid his house of these wicked priests. This was the message Samuel received from the Lord.

Now imagine you're a 12-year old boy and you've just received that news? This was a prophecy against the family of your mentor. It's no wonder Samuel couldn't sleep anymore that night as he wondered how in the world he was going to tell Eli what the Lord told him. In a way it seemed right because of the wickedness of Eli's sons, but in a way it seemed wrong, because Eli was his mentor. LORD, SPEAK TO ME IN YOUR WORD, help me accept the things that seem so wrong.

In a way, we live in a similar time as Samuel. The word of the Lord is rare. That's not saying that you can't find what God's Word says, but how many people in the world really care about it? Instead they have all sorts of other more important things on their mind. But that isn't to say that we should care not about God's Word. We should not just care about God's Word, but care about listening to God's Word. For it is in his Word that God speaks. So we want to say with Samuel, **"LORD SPEAK TO ME IN YOUR WORD."**

What are we asking him to speak to us? Not just whatever we want to hear, but what God says, even those things that may seem to wrong, that may seem so difficult. LORD SPEAK TO ME IN YOUR WORD, help me accept those things that seem so wrong. Yes, like Samuel, God speaks to us that does not always make a lot of sense. He speaks in a way that could seem unloving, uncaring, uneducated. That's where our prayer comes in. Help me accept those things that seem so wrong.

It's not that hard to find places in God's Word that it seems like God has it wrong and I have it right. Or that God had it right back in the day, but it's different now. It seems so wrong that love can't be free - shouldn't love be between anyone who wants it - it doesn't matter their gender, their sexual orientation or even their marital (or lack of marital) status. It seems so wrong that God limits love between one man and woman one in a committed, unconditional relationship. It might seem so wrong that God doesn't want women in leadership positions, even though there are women who have proved God wrong by doing so well. It might seem so wrong that God doesn't want us to welcome and associate religiously with someone who doesn't agree with all of what's in the Bible.

But that's not even the worst "wrong" to our ears. The worst wrong that we hear from God's Word, and we hear it a lot that it perhaps is overlooked, is that we have no say whatsoever in anything. We do not have a say in what God's Word says, but we don't have a say in how utterly sinful we are. We're not just people who commit little mistakes, or make a few errors. We were not just troubled youths who have now found a better path. No, we are through and through sinners - sins that are despised by God, sins which merit nothing more than death - and there's nothing we can do about it.

And so we pray LORD SPEAK TO ME IN YOUR WORD to help me accept those things that seem so wrong. Because in reality - the Bible says that we are wrong. So it shouldn't surprise us when we find things we disagree with in his Word, and there's nothing more disagreeable than saying we're completely helpless. But it's only when we accept that we are completely helpless that we see the wonderful grace of our God. For when we were helpless, he helped us. He not only helped us, he did it all for us. He completely changed us. And he tells us this in his Word. The same word he spoke to the Prophet Samuel, the same Word he spoke to the Apostle Paul, it's the same Word as we have today. And he speaks to us in his Word.

That's easy enough to say, but sometimes I think it's hard for us to believe and apply in our lives. Which leads us to the second point. Lord, help me trust those things that seem so impossible. Think about Samuel. Who was he to receive a vision from God? He was just 12 years old, who would listen to him? Shouldn't others be more qualified to receive visions from God? But what seemed so impossible, was not so impossible with God.

I might question God's goodness. Why would God be so good to me? Who am I that God would work through me? Which is also why I need to pray to God to help me trust those things that seem so impossible. It will always seem impossible that God would send a perfect son to save imperfect creatures like you and me. It seems impossible that he asks for nothing in return to go be with him in heaven. It seems impossible that even after all of that he still showers me with blessing upon blessing. The blessing to be living here in the United States. The blessing of family and friends. The blessing of health. Anything that God has given me is more than I deserve.

But even though it's more than you or I deserve, it's not something I need to feel guilty about. God is happy to bless me, God is happy to tell me how much he loves me, God is happy to tell you the plans he has for me. So we ask God that he might help me trust those things that seem so impossible.

A good conversation has two parts - speaking and listening. The same is true in a conversation with God. But if we're honest with ourselves, we know who should be doing more speaking, and who should be doing more listening. As we grow in our faith, let us speak to God less, and listen to him more, no matter how wrong or how impossible his Words may be. LORD, SPEAK TO ME IN YOUR WORD. Amen.