

15 January 2012

Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-21(OT page 274)  
Reader: Chris Graham

**Background to the reading**

Priests needed no divine call to office, because they were born into priestly families. Prophets, on the other hand, received individual calls, direct experiences of God. Our reading is all about the prophetic call of Samuel.

*The word of the Lord* and *visions* mentioned in verse 1 were the two types of divine gift to prophets. There are two reasons for telling us that both were *rare* (or as it says in the text 'precious' meaning that it did not happen often) at that time. Why? Well Eli the priest have been condemned as a priest of the Lord for not disciplining his sons and therefore the "apparent silence" of God. Israel needed a prophet who would speak God's word to them. It is nae wonder both Eli and Samuel were both quite surprised when the Lord called aloud to Samuel.

Verse 2 can be the indication of the state Eli was in. He was really getting older and it was time to make a place for someone else to be a priest and a prophet to Israel. Verse 2 and verse 3 emphasizes the difference between Eli and Samuel. Eli slept “away” from the temple while Samuel slept in the temple near the ark of the covenant. The one was not in touch spiritually with God while the other was.

Two features of the temple are mentioned in verse 3, *the lamp of God* and *the ark* of the covenant. Both were symbols of the presence of God. Leviticus chapter 24:1–4 gives careful instructions to the priests to keep a lamp burning in the sanctuary every night. When Samuel heard God’s voice, the lamp was still alight. The call came three times, confirming to both Samuel and Eli that it was truly a message from God.

Samuel have not been taught to listen to the word of God and he did nae know how to answer to the Lord. So after the third time, upon realizing that it was God calling, Eli instructed/taught Samuel how to respond. And when after the third time, the Lord stood there and spoke to Samuel.

This is a way of speech to emphasize the important and the urgency of God's message to Samuel.

God's message to Samuel, confirmed the prophecy of the previous chapter 2:27–36 whereby the family of Eli are condemned by the Lord. The full details of what would happen are not repeated, but the guilt of Eli himself is given new emphasis. Eli had not been a vicious or *contemptible* priest like his sons, but he was after all the man in charge of the shrine, and *he failed to restrain them*. Samuel naturally hesitated at first to tell Eli what he had heard. On hearing the stern words of Yahweh, Eli made no complaint. His response showed his resigned acceptance of God's judgment, so making it clear that the change of priestly leadership in Israel was accepted by Eli himself.

Vs 19–21 give a brief summary of the years that followed, during which Samuel *grew up*. For the time being Eli continued as priest at *Shiloh*, and so did his evil sons; but already it was Samuel who attracted popular attention. The difference between Eli and Samuel are again stated, none of

the words God spoke, and fell to the ground meaning it “did not disappear”. No longer was the prophetic word or vision a rarity, and *all Israel* came to realize this. *Dan* was the most important town in the north of Israel, and *Beersheba* lay in the far south of the country; thus Samuel’s reputation spread through the whole extent of the land. God’s *word* came regularly to Samuel, and from Samuel it was passed on to all Israel’s citizens.

**MP 857**            **I, the Lord of sea and sky**

### **Sermon**

The text verse for the sermon is verse <sup>10</sup> The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Our reading emphasizes the importance of the calling of God and how difficult this calling can be. I mean to say: this first prophetic task of Samuel must have been really hard for Him – to condemn someone that has been so near to him!

But more generally it is about God speaking to human beings, to you and me.

One might immediately ask: But is God still speaking today, in our post modern time, in our world with all its evil, corruption, war and brokenness. Many would say: No God is silent, he has been silent since He died on the cross!

Well, let us think for a minute if this is really true because if it was, would we have been sitting in a church several centuries after the crucifixion, listening to the Word of God. If it did nae mean anything to us, why are we here this morning. I am sure there are a lot of things we can do on a Sunday morning, other than coming to church. We are here, hopefully because we felt spiritually inclined to come and hear God's word speaking to us in whatever circumstances we are facing.

So God is still speaking. But why don't we hear it all the time?

Well there can be several reasons for that. We can be like Eli, spiritually weak and weary, far from having a living relationship with the Lord. We can be in some sort of hiding because of something that has happened to us that makes us ashamed to talk to God or even to come into His presence. Or we can be hurting so badly emotionally that our tears make it impossible to hear anything. Or we can be so self absorbed in our own selfish ways that nothing else matters not even God speaking to us. Or some of us have a perception that God only speaks in big visions with angels and trumpets and white doves while in the case of Samuel it happened in the silence of the temple in the night!

To be able to hear the Lord speaking will mean a life of commitment to Him, a life of following Him through faith and sacrifice and obeying His word. Yes we will have to be tuned in to His speaking to us because He does not speak the same way to all of us. To some it can be in the silence, to others through an amazing sunset or nature panorama, to others through people, and I can go on and on. The fact of the

matter is: God still touches our reality through His word on a daily occurrence once we read it and we live to fulfill His words. If we do not read and know God's word and how He "exists" we will be like Samuel – not knowing that it is God speaking! I hear it often in the stories people who does nae have faith tell always saying "by some chance this and that happened!"

To illustrate this I want to tell you a story that I read on the internet during the week.

A Native American and his friend were in downtown New York City, walking near Times Square in Manhattan. It was during the noon lunch hour and the streets were filled with people. Cars were honking their horns, taxicabs were squealing around corners, sirens were wailing, and the sounds of the city were almost deafening.

Suddenly, the Native American said, "I hear a cricket." His friend said, "What? You must be crazy. You couldn't possibly hear a cricket in all of this noise!"

"No, I'm sure of it," the Native American said. "I heard a cricket."

“That’s crazy,” said the friend.

The Native American listened carefully for a moment, and then walked across the street to a big cement planter where some shrubs were growing. He looked into the bushes, beneath the branches, and sure enough, he located a small cricket. His friend was utterly amazed. “That’s incredible,” said his friend. “You must have super-human ears!”

“No,” said the Native American. “My ears are no different from yours. It all depends on what you’re listening for.”

“But that can’t be!” said the friend. “I could never hear a cricket in this noise.”

“Yes, it’s true,” came the reply. “It depends on what you’re listening for. Here, let me show you.”

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins, and discreetly dropped them on the sidewalk. And then, with the noise of the crowded street still blaring in their ears, they noticed every head within twenty feet turn and look to see if



the money that tinkled on the pavement was theirs. “See what I mean?” asked the Native American. “It all depends on what you’re listening for.”

The point is: If you’ve tuned in to God, it doesn’t matter what’s going on around you, you can hear Him speak!

May we all receive the grace and mercy of God to be attentive when God is speaking to us through His word – remembering that it will never be in opposition to His nature or His Word? He will not for instance tell people to kill, or to break up a good relationship, or hurt other people. He will always speak in accordance to His Word, the Bible. May we never ever stop reading our Bibles because if we do – we will miss each and every opportunity of Him touching our lives! And may we keep praying because praying is the life line we all need to speak to God!

Amen