

January 17, 2021

I Samuel 3:1-10:

“Speak, for Your Servant Hears.”

- I. Rare.
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I Samuel 3:1-10

Dear Friends in Christ,

Have you ever had someone say to you, or have you ever said to someone, something along the line of, "I told you, but you don't listen! You don't hear me!"? Does that sound familiar?

Amos was a prophet sent by God to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 8th century B.C. It was a time of political stability and economic prosperity, but also a time of corruption, excess, waste and idolatry. Through Amos, God would say to His people:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land--not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it." (Amos 9:11-12)

We pray the Holy Spirit impress upon us the importance of . . .

"SPEAK, FOR YOUR SERVANT HEARS."

I. Rare.

Our text for this morning begins with, "Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision." (I Sam. 3:1)

Samuel's time was roughly 300 years before Amos. As it was at the time of Amos so it was at the earlier time of Samuel, this statement: "the word of the Lord was rare." Lutheran commentator, John R. Mittelstaedt gives very clear and good insight here:

"In Samuel's day, as in Luther's day, 'the word of the Lord was rare.' People had little interest in hearing what God had to say. The five books of Moses were kept in the tabernacle, but even the priests neglected them. Not since the death of Moses had there been a great prophet in Israel. And, 'there were not many visions.'

"No greater judgment can fall upon a nation than when it suffers the loss of God's Word. When people do not appreciate the gospel, God often takes it from them. Are we aware that by our repeated neglect we can bring about such a famine of God's Word? (See Amos 8:11,12) (John R. Mittelstaedt, Samuel, People's Bible Commentary, CPH, St. Louis, 1993, p. 20)

II. And Now.

When I wrote this sermon I figured it would be at this juncture when you would say to yourselves, "He's going to say that we are suffering loss of God's Word today; that there is neglect and, consequently, a famine of God's Word." And, of course, you would be correct. I found myself compelled to repeat the words of Vance Havner from some years ago:

...for all our talk about religious revival, and for all our gigantic church activity, something is still missing. How often we hear that something "new" has been added to this or that. The real trouble with us is that something very "old" has been subtracted... We are waving the scabbard when the sword is gone.

Most of you are very familiar with the prayer Jesus made prior to His arrest; the prayer known as His High Priestly Prayer. Please, please carefully hear the following selected petitions of Jesus from that prayer because what he prayed is directed to the church:

"For I have given them (the Apostles) the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know the truth that I came from you (Jesus is the Word in the flesh, sent by the Father to reveal the Word to His disciples)... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world so I have sent them into the world... I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word (that is, for the future disciples who have access to the written word as we do...)." (vv. 8,17,29)

With those words of Jesus before us, I am including the following: First, from Paul: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel (the Word), for it is the power of God for salvation..." (Rom 1:16) Second, as the Holy Spirit had the Psalmist write, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Ps. 119:105)

And I have to repeat this: If all we had was some sort of a room in which we could meet and worship, had to sit on folding chairs, had to bring our own Bibles or rely on what we had committed to memory, had no hymnals but had to rely on what we committed to memory, had to sing a capella (no organ or piano or instruments); if all we had were the truth and purity of the living Word of God would we long to be together and faithful to that setting? Would we??

III. Who Was He?

Next, consider Samuel. The Jewish historian, Josephus, says Samuel was around 12 years old at the time of our text. Walter R. Roehrs says, "This chapter tells how God again transmitted His Word to 'all Israel' through Samuel so clearly that everyone knew he was 'established as a prophet of the Lord.'" (Concordia Self-study Commentary, CPH, St. Louis, p. 188) Our text reports:

"And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

"And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant hears.'" (vv. 8-10)

Who was Samuel? He was, very simply and yet most wondrously, a young, obedient and chosen child of God to proclaim God's Word and will. He was one of the great judges and prophets.

And we need to understand that we, too, are chosen children of God. As I quoted a couple of weeks ago, Paul writes, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." (Eph. 1:4-5) And as Peter writes, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people..." (I Pt. 2:9-10a)

I understand. We're not a Samuel - Apostles - a Luther. But we are His chosen, given faith in Christ; faith that receives and holds to the promises of forgiveness of every sin and eternal life through Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. We are to grow in the Word. We are to see to it that our children grow in the Word. We are servants. Dear brothers and sisters, those words the Holy Spirit gave to Peter to give to us cannot be sidestepped or ignored: "...that you may declare the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

For the children of God, life is not just a matter of who we are, but what we do with what has been given us in Christ. To quote the commentator Mittelstaedt:

Isn't it interesting that when the Lord looks for someone to speak for him, the very first qualification is that the person be willing to listen when God speaks. The secret of Samuel's success as a prophet was not that he excelled in speaking but in listening. (pp. 20 & 22)

IV. Where This Takes Us.

A graveside service was held for Pilgrim sister, Doris Giesler on August 25th of this past year. I was asked by the family if I would read a witness she had written to family and friends. Normally, I prefer that family read such items at the close of the service since they are so personal, but after reading what Doris had written I considered it both a wonderful witness and blessing. I pray you will find it to be the same. She wrote:

I want everyone to know this: You cannot achieve a place in heaven merely by being a good person. If we love God, we try to be good and kind, as Jesus taught us. But the only key to heaven is to truly believe that Jesus is the true Son of God, born of (the) Virgin Mary; that He truly died and rose again from the dead; that He conquered sin and death for you and me. Then I will see you eventually in heaven, because I truly believe this myself.

The only ending I could find to this sermon were the words, "Speak (Lord), for your servant hears."

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott