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I Samuel 3:1:

“The Word of the Lord Is Rare in These Days”

I. The Text.

II. The Case of Matthew 22:29.

III. It Can't Be for Our Lives.

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I Samuel 3:1

Dear Friends in Christ,

Years ago, a pastor wrote:

"There was no gymnasium on our seminary campus, so we played basketball in a nearby public school. The janitor...would wait patiently until the seminarians had finished playing. Invariably he sat there reading his Bible.

"One day I went up to him and inquired, 'What are you reading?' The man did not simply reply, 'The Bible.' Instead he answered, 'The Book of Revelation.'

"With a bit of surprise, I asked, 'The Book of Revelation? Do you understand it?' 'Oh yes,' the man assured me. 'I understand it.'

"You understand the Book of Revelation! What does it mean?' Very quietly that old janitor answered, 'It means that Jesus is gonna win.'"

That might be one of the best summary statements one could make of the Book of Revelation. But what's really impressive is the man's desire for the Word and the strength he gained from it.

What makes that so impressive for this day are the multitudes sitting in all sorts of supposed "Christian" churches with little or no knowledge of the Word. And that's frightening because of the willingness of a multitude of pastors to keep it that way. After all, as most are seeing it, the less we examine the Word the less we have to combat objections and people walking away, and those who will hate us because of the Word.

We're standing with Samuel. What was true of his time is true of ours:

THE WORD OF THE LORD IS RARE IN THESE DAYS

I. The Text.

I Samuel 3:1: "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." What a disturbing reality: *the word of the Lord was rare in those days*.

And, now, here we are in **these days**. The Word has been available in abundance. Churches and pastors have had generations of opportunity to proclaim its truth. But in the space of what seems to be a passing moment, laws are passed prohibiting public reference to the Word. Christian prayer is prohibited in our public schools. The religion of evolution is substituted under the guise of "science" while the drumbeat of "separation of church and state" exacerbates the deception! *For Sale* signs appear more frequently in the yards of churches. The vast majority of main line denominations eliminate real study of Scripture for the grind of positive thinking. And few apparently have noted that we have become a vulgar, decaying, predatory society. Positive pursuits? Self-esteem? Seriously??

I've always liked Vance Havner's insight:

Today, 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.

And then I came across this quote:

So great is my veneration of the Bible, that the earlier my children begin to read it the more confident will be my hope that they will prove useful citizens of their country and respectable members of society. (Inspiring Quotations, by Albert M. Wells, Jr., Thomas Nelson Inc., 1988, p. 13)

That's a quote from John Quincy Adams, the sixth President of the United States. So much for separation of Church and State; at least at that moment in history when this country was on a road to something some have called "greatness".

II. The Case of Matthew 22:29.

I want to draw your attention to the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel; specifically a portion from verses 23-33. This text starts with, "The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, 'Teacher, Moses said, "If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother."' (verses 23,24)

Isn't that incredible? These are supposed theologians of that day - spiritual leaders - in reality, unbelievers! For them there is no resurrection. And they plot to discredit Jesus by asking a stupid question regarding the husbands this woman had in this life. "In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven (brothers whom she married), whose wife will she be? For they all had her." (vs. 28)

And then comes Jesus' answer: "'You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.'" (vs. 29) The case of Matthew 22:29 is the case of almost all theology today: Men (and today men and woman) pretending to be theologians (with or without credentials) when, in reality, it's "you now neither know the Scriptures nor the power of God"!

It's the case of the smoke people blow around in their "I think this about God and I feel that about God" theology. It's the biggest absurdity Satan cooked up in the Garden: ***Did God actually say...***" (Gen 3:1b) It's along the lines of, "It doesn't make any difference what you believe. God is whatever you want him - or her - or it to be!"

Can you even imagine applying that kind of thinking to your daily walk of life? "It doesn't make any difference what street you take to work. You'll find your place of work at the end of any street!" "It doesn't make any difference how you understand 2 plus 2. It's whatever you want it to be." Tell that to the banker, the creditor, the grocery store clerk, the IRS! "It doesn't make any difference what pills you take for your ailment. Take any pill you think will help." We would say, "What stupid thinking." But it is no more than how most see or reject God.

And, to think, it all began back in the Garden. It all began with that question: "'Did God actually say...?'" (Gen. 3:1b) We've traveled full circle. It's the darkest lie Satan ever perpetrated: *Did God actually say. It doesn't make any difference what you believe; believe whatever satisfies your thinking.* The other side of the grave gives a different response!!

III. It Can't Be for Our Lives.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (Jn. 1:1,13,14a) That Word was the Christ; the Living Word. And He has left us with the written Word and the Word made visible in Baptism and the Supper. It is that Word that speaks to us and says: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." (Jn. 3:36)

It is the Word that confronted our first parents in the Garden: "But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:9) It is that same Word which confronts us every day: "Where are you?" Where are you - am I - in our thinking, our doing, our understanding? How can Christians limp along on bits and pieces of the Word of God, but find comfort in the misery of worldly thinking and the nickel and dime liberal theologians and their writings and DVD's. How many are left who deeply grasp the Word's words: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn. 14:6)

It's hard to count the number of times both pastors have entered the room of a dying member. It's quite a reality. Usually there is no television blasting away. No concern about the latest upheaval. No thoughts about the next vacation. No interest in whether or not the sun is shining, the snow falling, the rain flooding. No excitement about the next trip, the next party, the next outing, the next birthday, the next anniversary, the next Christmas. Wrinkle removers and rock hard abs don't make their way on the list of concerns.

But one thing does. Jesus. And the comfort is given us:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (I John 4:9-10)

We still have access to the Word; the place where God speaks to us and directs us to forgiveness of sin and eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. Forgiveness and eternal life. Eternal.....life. How easy those words roll off the Christian tongue. And those words are always there for us in God's Holy Word. It's our source of hope and eternal comfort. As the Psalmist said: **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.** (Ps. 119:105)

It doesn't have to be rare.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott