

January 15, 2006

*"God Still Speaks to Us"*

**1 SAMUEL 3:1-10**

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**T**he boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. <sup>2</sup> One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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." <sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <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."

I am holding in my hand an interesting flashlight. It has no batteries, but it does have a crank that you can turn for one minute to generate and store enough electricity to power an LED light for 45 minutes. You are hiking in a very remote jungle region of the Amazon. This flashlight falls out of your backpack. A native from a tribe that has had no contact with the outside world picks it up and begins pushing buttons and turning the crank. He does not assume that this grew on a tree like fruit or popped out of the ground like a mushroom, or evolved from some plant in the jungle. He is intelligent enough to know that this interesting light must have come from other people more advanced than he is, or perhaps one of his gods had it drop out of the sky as a gift for him and his people. Intelligent people are able to use their intelligence to acknowledge the existence of intelligent design.

The book of Romans says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." God speaks to us in the mountains, the streams, the beaches, the flowers, the trees, the stars in the sky and our own human bodies. Psalm 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge." Everything that we observe around us declares to us there is intelligent design and our God is an awesome God.

Human reason and logic says that if there is a God responsible for design in the universe, then there must be some way in which this God reveals himself to us and tells us more about himself. You have come to believe and confess that this revelation comes through the pages of the Holy Bible. This morning we want to take a closer look at how the Lord came to Samuel and spoke to him. It is our prayer that we will be more confident God

speaks to us, not in mystical visions and inner revelations, but here on the pages of the Bible.

## **1) There will always be resistance to the Word**

What we notice first from these words just read to you is the resistance to the Word of God that existed at the time the boy Samuel was serving the Lord in the temple. "The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." God was not speaking to his people the way he once spoke to them through Moses, or other leaders of the nation of Israel. There were not many visions or revelations from God. The problem was not with God. It was the leaders of Israel, the high priest Eli and his sons Hophni and Phineas, who resisted the Word of the Lord in their lives. These two sons were nasty to say the least. They stole meat from the sacrifices that were brought to the temple, and even seduced some of the women who came to worship. Making money and living a wild life were more important than animal sacrifices that pictured Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There have been times in the history of the Christian church when the Word of God was rare in the land. We think of those awful times prior to the Lutheran Reformation when the church willfully kept the Scriptures away from the people and made the traditions in the church more important than the Word of God. The great Reformers took the Bible and translated it into languages that the people could read and understand. Commenting on the words of Psalm 23 Martin Luther once wrote, "The pasture, or the grass in it, is God's Word, with which our consciences are strengthened and restored. ..For just as the grass in the green pasture stands very thick and full and grows more and more, so it is with believers; they not only have God's Word richly, but the more they use and apply it, the more it increases and grows among them."

What about our situation today? Can we say the word of God is rare in our land? Hardly. For a few dollars we are able to order Bibles from large publishers and put them into the hands of people. We can listen to the Bible on tapes, or CD's and even download portions of the Bible and put them into MP3 players. The radio stations abound with messages drawn from the Bible. The Internet offers opportunity to link up to churches and resources where sermons can be heard and even listened to online. We can hardly say the Word of God is rare in our land.

Yet, dear friends, with the abundance of opportunity to read the Bible and even listen to it through headphones, it seems there are some many competing voices calling out to us that we have little time for the Bible and the Word of God. Several years ago our national church body conducted a study to determine what the number one need of our people was. What emerged at the top of the list? It was spiritual growth. That growth takes place by contact with the Word of God in multiple different settings. The word of God becomes rare because other voices call out and compete for our attention especially in our homes and personal lives. If I hold a small radio in my hand and begin turning the dial, you can tune into the voices that exist in this room. How many television channels do you have coming into your home? And to add further to the confusion in these last days, people want God on their own terms. They prefer to listen to the inner voices speaking inside of them. They interpret that as God's voice, rather than listening to what God says on the pages of the Bible. What amazes us about our God is the way he reaches into our lives

and speaks to us, amid all the confusing voices around us.

## **2) The Lord will always find a way to reveal himself**

God broke through the confusion that existed at the time of Eli and made his voice known through a young boy named Samuel. Samuel was serving in the temple of the Lord. At night the young boy Samuel hears a voice calling to him. "Samuel!" Immediately he runs to Eli thinking the elderly man who was losing his eyesight needed help. Eli tells him, "I did not call; go back and lie down." He falls back to sleep, and then hears a voice calling again. Samuel! He runs to Eli and offers to help again. Finally Eli realized it was the Lord calling out to Samuel. He told Samuel to wait for the voice of the Lord and then say, "Speak Lord for your servant is listening." The Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel humbly said, "Speak Lord for your servant is listening."

Up until this time it says, "Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." The Hebrew word for "know" is used for intimate relationship between a man and his wife. The word for "reveal" is used in the Old Testament for removing clothing. The mighty God, the creator of the universe, made himself known in a very special way to Samuel. He revealed himself, and shared message with him that were to be delivered to the people. The God who reveals himself to us in nature as an awesome God, also chose to speak directly to us through certain people he appointed to be his mouthpieces. These words were then written down and recorded for us on the pages of the Bible so we can still listen to the voice of God speaking to us through these people from the past. We are actually able to understand how the world was formed by the words given to Moses.

The things of God are made known to us in his Word. Some things will remain hidden or secret. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may follow the words of this law." The key word in that verse is "forever." God has chosen to reveal secret things to us and make them known to us. He has chosen to preserve these words for us in the Bible so that we can have them for ourselves and for our children and for our grandchildren. The night before he died, Jesus prayed to the heavenly Father for himself, then for the disciples and finally for all people. He prayed for all people with these words, "'My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for all those who will believe in me through their message.'" The message of the apostles and the prophets will remain to the end so people of every generation can understand the things the Lord wants them to know. He wants them to share in salvation and be one with him.

How true are the words of 2 Peter 1. "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Imagine the chaos that would exist if everyone ran around saying, "The Lord spoke to me, The Lord spoke to me." The prophecies or messages that came to Moses, or Samuel, or Isaiah, or Paul or John were not self-induced words or personal interpretations. These people spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Picture the gold from the Mother Lode that was carried down the streams

by fast rushing waters and floods. These precious nuggets were deposited randomly in different places, to be later discovered by the miners. The prophets did not randomly deposit the truth of God's Word or offer their own opinions and interpretations. They listened to the voice of the Lord and the Holy Spirit helped them put their words on the page. It is the Lord who has preserved these words for us, so we can read them and trust that the Lord still speaks to us.

When we read the Word of the Lord we come to the true understanding of who we are and how why we need Jesus to save us. I can read Ephesians 2 and say these words apply to me. "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of this our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest we were objects of wrath." I can read words from Isaiah the prophet such as, "Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead." I can say, "That was me." This infallible, reliable Word of God lets me see myself for who I am in the eyes of God. It leads me to cry out to God, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

The Word that we have preserved among us shows the need, and also shows the help and rescue I have in Christ. It was a prophet, a prophet Isaiah, who made it clear, long before Jesus was born, what the Messiah would do with my sin and yours. "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Let this be another week of blessing for you and me as we open the Bible. We do this knowing the Lord still speaks to us.