

January 15, 2012

Epiphany 2

*"Speak Lord, Your Servant Is Listening"*

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### **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."

If you look at the front cover of your bulletin you will see a woman folding her hands and bowing her head in prayer. Beneath her are the words just read to you, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Every time we open the Bible to read God's Word, the Lord speaks to us through that Word. It is truly amazing how the Lord spoke to certain people and then led them to write these words down in this very special book we call the Bible.

I had a great week this past week, because the Lord gave me opportunities to open this book, the Bible, and listen to him speak to me. I pray that all of you had a similar experience in your life. We need God to speak to us in his Word, because there are other voices speaking to us that influence us in the wrong way. Think of all the bad thoughts Satan tries to put into our heads, or how the world dumps its garbage into our homes and hearts, or how we can listen to voices within ourselves that conflict with what the Lord is telling us here in his Word.

When the Lord spoke to a young boy named Samuel, he responded by saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Wouldn't you agree that this is also a good prayer for us as we approach reading the Bible and listening to it read in worship: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

### **Competing voices**

Have you ever been in a situation where there is so much background noise that you could not hear someone speaking? At the time of the prophet Samuel, there were so many loud voices saying trash about the Lord, the voice of the Lord was hardly heard by the people.

"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 had stopped speaking to his people through the prophets, because the people had rejected the word of the Lord. They did not want to hear what the Lord had to say to them.

The Lord had told his people he wanted them to stay close to his Word when they entered into the Promised Land that was flowing with milk and honey. The Lord was very specific in Deuteronomy 8 when he said, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day... Otherwise you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt."

The people forgot the Lord. It happened so quickly, in just one generation. The book of Judges tells us, "After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the people around them." The fathers and mothers did not pass the Word of the Lord down to the next generation. The children were so caught up with their material prosperity that they tuned out the word of the Lord and listened to the voices of the false prophets and false gods they allowed to live next to them in the land. That is why it says that the word of God was rare and there were not many visions.

Martin Luther once said, "The human heart is an idol factory." Without God's Word in our lives, we develop our own ideas about God and how we are saved. Someone once said, "If you want to make people mad, preach the law to them. If you want to make them really, really mad, preach grace to them." Romans 8 tells us that the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not want to be told "You are doing wrong and you have fallen short of God's glory." It resists putting faith and trust in Jesus as the one who can do everything necessary to save us. Without God's Word, I will be going off in my own direction worshiping false gods just as the children of Israel turned to Baal and other gods in just one generation.

I am holding in my hand a balloon. By blowing into the balloon it can be inflated. I am born into this world with an inflated ego that thinks I can make up my own religion and my own ideas about God and be saved. Ephesians 2 says, "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of the sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest we were objects of wrath." God's Word needs to poke a hole in this balloon and leave me without hope in myself. God's Word needs to speak to my heart and direct me to Jesus as the only source of forgiveness and acceptance before God. So we pray as Samuel did, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." The Lord did speak to Samuel and he also speaks to us in his Word.

### **God speaks to us**

"One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place." Eli's physical eyes were weak. Perhaps he had cataracts. His spiritual or faith eyes were even weaker. His two sons, Hophni and Phineas, were stealing meat from the animal sacrifices brought to the temple of the Lord and seducing the women who

came to worship. Instead of telling his sons to correct their lives, he tolerated their sinful lifestyle. In our reading for today from 1 Corinthians, the Lord spoke through the Apostle Paul to tell the people they should not tolerate sexual immorality among the members of the Corinthian congregation. When God's Word no longer speaks to us, how quickly we can lose our moral compass and tolerate sinful thoughts and actions in our lives.

Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord when the Lord spoke to him. "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. Then the Lord called Samuel." Samuel was probably about twelve years old at this time. His mother Hannah had prayed fervently for a son, and when the Lord gave her a son she named him Samuel which means "The Lord hears." She took her son to the temple where he served under Eli the high priest.

It was towards morning. The lamp of the Lord is burning down low. Samuel hears the Lord calling him. "Samuel." He answers, "Here I am." He runs to Eli thinking Eli has some important task for him. Eli tells him, "I didn't call. Go back and lie down again." The Lord calls him again, "Samuel." Samuel runs to Eli again and says, "Here I am. You called me." At this time in his life, Samuel did not yet know the Lord because the word of the Lord had not been revealed to him. Samuel certainly believed in the Lord. His mother Hannah had taught him well. But he did not have the special revelations from the Lord that would mark the rest of his life as a prophet of the Lord.

It says that "Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy." There is always that time in the history of the Christian church that the Lord needs to break through with his Word and speak to people. I find great comfort in the words of Ephesians 4 which remind us that our risen Lord and Savior will direct his church by raising up people who teach his Word correctly and build up the body of Christ instead of tearing it down. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so the body of Christ will be built up." In Ezekiel 34 the Lord says, "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them." The Lord does this by raising up faithful prophets such as Samuel who will listen to the voice of the Lord and speak that word faithfully to others.

Old Eli tells Samuel what to say when the Lord speak to him again. "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. Samuel lays down one more time and the Lord calls again, "Samuel. Samuel." Samuel says, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Today we stand in awe at how the Lord spoke to certain people like Samuel who then faithfully spoke these words to the people or wrote them down so that they become part of this holy book that we have today, the Bible. 2 Peter 1 says, "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 the God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Jesus told his disciples he would give them his Holy Spirit who would teach them and bring everything to their memory. Today we can open the Bible and say, "This is God's Word. This is the place where God speaks to me. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

My greatest need in life is righteousness. I find this righteousness here on the pages of the Bible. Here in God's Word I learn that I need to be righteous or holy to be accepted by God. God's Word tells me that I will always fall short of God's glory and his righteousness. I need to have my ego deflated so I do not put my trust in my own righteousness. In Romans 10 we are told that Jesus' righteousness is our hope of being righteous. "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." According to Romans 10 we do not have to ascend into heaven to bring Christ down to us or descend into the deep to bring Christ up. Our hope is found in the Word. "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart." God speaks to us in his Word and says, "You are justified. You are righteous through Jesus' death and resurrection." In John 15 Jesus says, "You are clean through the Word I have spoke to you."

I have no way of knowing what is going to happen to us in this week that lies before us, or the week that follows, or the months and years that follow after that. I do know that when we open the Bible, God speaks to us. As you open the Bible this week, think of this little prayer, this powerful little prayer that Samuel prayed, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Amen.