

Opening Scripture: Isaiah 49:1–3

Introduction: In the 18th century, William Wilberforce was a politician, philanthropist, abolitionist, and Christian minister. His transformation from a parliamentarian and worldly socialite to a compassionate servant of God was remarkable.

It was a time when the English and American economies relied heavily on the slave trade. Wilberforce had a sudden awakening, struck by a bolt from beyond the blue, giving him clarity of purpose. He knew that he must be God’s instrument to eradicate this scourge in Britain; in a fiery speech before Parliament, he declared, “A trade founded in iniquity, and carried on as this was, must be abolished, let the policy be what it might,—let the consequences be what they would, I from this time determined that I would never rest till I had effected its abolition.” (William Wilberforce, Parliamentary Speech, 1789). Despite fierce opposition from those who profited from slavery, his unwavering sense of justice and faith in God led him into an inspiring but difficult journey to change hearts and minds. And it worked. Eventually, the British Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807, and America followed suit. Great Britain (1807, 1833) and the US (1808, 1860) were the first countries in the history of the world to abolish the slave trade by law.

Transition: Today, we explore 1 Samuel 3, a pivotal moment in Israel's history marked by corrupt leaders, an apathetic patriarch who tolerates injustice by his sons (the priests of Israel), and God's selection of a young boy called to reform the priesthood, ultimately becoming God's anointed spokesperson and king-maker.

1 Samuel 1:1–10 The boy Samuel served the Lord in Eli’s presence. In those days, the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread.² One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in his usual place. ³ Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was located. ⁴ Then the Lord called Samuel, and he answered, “Here I am.” ⁵ He ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “I didn’t call,” Eli replied. “Go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down. ⁶ Once again the Lord called, “Samuel!” Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “I didn’t call, my son,”

he replied. "Go back and lie down." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, because the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ Once again, for the third time, the Lord called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ He told Samuel, "Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ The Lord came, stood there, and called as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

1. God's presence resides wherever his Word is abundant. 1

Samuel 3:1 "In those days the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread." Spiritual revival begins in the written and living Word. Where God's word abounds, God abides, and we experience the fullness of His presence.

Let me give an illustration of that: Last week, I had an intense hunger for this story.

My usual sermon prep involves exploring original languages, historical context, and fact-finding until principles emerge. But this week was different; I sensed my need for to really hear from the passage. During workouts and walks, I immersed myself in various sermons, including those by Bobby Jamieson at CHBC, Tony Evans, and others. I listened to the audio Bible app and YouTube. When I sat to write the sermon I was already so filled with the passage that the Spirit filled me with a sense of awe and wonder and worship. I sensed the LORD's presence unusually. I met the same God who revealed himself to Samuel in the text.

We know God is omnipresent, but I am here referring to that moment when we become acutely aware of his presence.

Now, we have just come out of Judges and discovered that even though God sent deliverers, he didn't often speak to the people through them. By contrast, God is now raising up a prophet whose word will go out all of Israel, whose influence will reach as far north as Dan and as far south as Beersheba. Verses 19–21 read, "Samuel **grew**. The Lord **was with him**, and he fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied.²⁰ **All Israel** from Dan to Beer-sheba **knew** that Samuel was a confirmed prophet of the Lord. ²¹ **The Lord continued to appear in Shiloh**, because there **he revealed himself to Samuel by his word.**"

Notice that the Lord appeared to Samuel (his presence) because he revealed himself by his Word. There is an inseparable connection between God's Word and his Presence. Paul can say, Col 3:16, "Let ***the word of Christ dwell richly among you***, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." Notice that same verse in Ephesians 5:18, Paul calls this very practice "being filled with the Spirit."

Hophni, Phineas, and Eli have religion's form but no power. They have mastered the artifice of religious service but no substance, no heart, no presence. They've got the sanctuary, but as we'll see in Chapter 4, no glory—God's transforming presence has left the building. There are few things more tragic than God having to leave a church because neither he nor his Word are welcome there anymore.

Let me ask you, how rare was God's word in your life this week? How rare is his voice in your world, in your leisure, in your religious observance, in your heart?

2. God's Spirit opens our eyes to the truth. 1 Samuel 3:2 "Eli, whose eyesight was failing," Eli's spiritual blindness mirrors the scarcity of divine revelations in Israel during his leadership (v. 1). In contrast, Samuel is closely connected to the Lord, even sleeping near the ark, representing God's presence (v. 3). The text highlights Samuel's proximity to God compared to Eli's sons' sinful actions (2:22). Both "lying down" and "slept" originate from the same Hebrew verb (*shakab*).

The contrasts are evident: Samuel grows in wisdom, while Eli's sons grow colder due to sin. Samuel faithfully serves the Tabernacle, whereas Eli's sons profane it. Samuel hears God's voice, but Hophni and Phineas remain deaf to the truth. Samuel obeys Eli, while Hophni and Phineas reject their father's wisdom. While Eli is physically blind he is actually spiritually without insight, without influence, or impact.

Jesus said this to the Samaritan Woman in John 4:23 "true worshipers will

worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

Of the Holy Spirit, he taught the disciples in John 15:26; 16:13 “When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father —the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me...When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

Eli is sitting there going blind in his old age. But he’s been spiritually blind to what’s been happening under his roof for decades. Listen, personal renewal begins in the Word, and the Word and the Spirit turn on the lamp of the darkened mind. Is the Word having a renewing effect on your mind? Is your heart being refreshed by the Spirit as he leads you into worshiping in Spirit and in truth?

3. God only requires our availability, not our exceptional aptitude. 1 Samuel 3:4, 5, 6, 7, 16 “Here I am.” We see this phrase several times. In 1 Samuel 3:4, Samuel basically says, “I’m here and ready.” It’s like he’s all set to do whatever his master wants, just like how Abraham (see Genesis 22:1, 11), Jacob (Genesis 31:11 and 46:2), Joseph (as in Genesis 37:13), and Moses (Exodus 3:4) did in the past. He’s responsive but confused—availing himself to whatever is needed.

I have to tell you, as I studied this story this week, I was moved beyond words by this one little phrase. A little boy who simply says, “Here I am. I’m available.” Understand that God values your willingness more than your present expertise. God is more interested in an open and surrendered heart than our skill set.

Remember God telling Moses that he is Israel’s deliverer, and Moses protests, “Yeah, uh, thanks. But, I can’t do what you’re commanding me to do. I mean, you definitely have the wrong guy. And even if I did what would

be the sign?” God replies, “What is that in your hand?” A staff, Moses says. “Good, then I’ll use that. I’ll use what you’ve got on you.”

Moses has no idea of all that God is going to provide—a dry path through the middle of a sea, a column of fire to warm them in the howling winds of the desert, a cloud to shield them from the hot sun of the Sinai Peninsula; water, manna, military victories, wise counsel and organizational structure—he doesn’t know that God is going to supply all his needs in the future—but right now all requires of him is to surrender, and he says, “What did you bring. We’ll start there.” ***God isn’t looking for people of exceptional aptitude; rather, he’s seeking people with exceptional readiness. God can develop knowhow in any heart that is submitted to him and his Word.***

Let me ask you, when is the last time you said to God, “Here I am. Thy will be done.”

Some of you may be on the verge right now—on the verge of getting connected into community through our community groups and classes. Or you may have thought about engaging in ministry but wondered, “Who am I? Why would God need me? What do I have to offer?”

It’s going to take a while for Samuel to become the fierce and fearless prophet we see in later chapters. And God will supply every word, direction, and instruction, and eventually, a new and faithful king. All that is needed right now is to say, “Here I am.”

4. God’s patience has a limit. 3:11–12 “The Lord said to Samuel, ‘I am about to do something in Israel that will cause everyone who hears about it to shudder.¹² On that day I will carry out against Eli everything I said about his family, from beginning to end.’” God confirms to Samuel that His previous prophecies regarding Eli’s family will come to pass, reiterating the message delivered through the “man of God” (1 Samuel 2:27). Why is this principle so important? Because, folks, we (I mean the church at large, not CCC) have to stop singing false theology about God’s love.

Hear me well, I believe that so long as we are drawing breath, there’s hope. How many of you came to Jesus relatively late in life? Aren’t you glad God

didn't give up on you? Are you glad that His mercies were new every morning? Paul tells us that God's love is unconquerable, and it is literally the basis on which Paul says we become more than conquerors in Christ. He writes in Romans 8:37–39, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We must become converted with Paul that for the believer who is loved by God, who loves God and is called according to his purpose—nothing in the spectrum of the created order could possibly separate us from the relentless love of God. And, we learn that God loved us while we were still sinners—enemies of his cross and his Christ (Rom 5:6–8).

God says to Israel through the prophets, **“All day long, I've held out my hands to a stubborn and obstinate people”** who just refuse to repent. God's love and calling is indefatigable in terms of its pursuit of the sinner. But let me tell you some things that people are singing and affirming about God's love that aren't true: “Oh, never-ending, reckless love of God.” Now, that is one of the most memorable, poetic, and singable songs I've ever heard. And I wish we could sing it here. But we can't because it has a false theology of God's love. God's love, though it is persistent, it is neither reckless nor is his offer of salvation un-ending. There is an end-point at which God will no longer strive with the sinner, will no longer woo the unrepentant, will no longer pursue those who refuse to repent. **Hear me well, God is a God of mercy until he isn't. God is longsuffering and patient with us, until he isn't.** That's why the writer of Hebrews says, Hebrews 3:12–15 **“Watch out** (alertness), brothers and sisters so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away (apathy, secret sin, and unbelief cause the heart to turn away) from the living God. ¹³ **But encourage each other** daily, while it is still called **today**, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. ¹⁴ For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start. ¹⁵ As it is said: **‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’”**

When God comes calling, it requires an urgency in our response. Hophni and Phineas exhausted God's patience. And his verdict, in finality, was not

overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love—but judgment and condemnation.

Let me put this question to us—Do we have a sense of urgency in our repentance and seeking the Lord? Or has apathy set in? Have we begun, as the Hebrews author says, to turn away from the living God? Have we stopped seeking the encouragement we need to sustain our fervency?

5. Samuel chooses the fear of God over the fear of man. 3:15–18

“Samuel lay down until the morning; then he opened the doors of the Lord’s house. ***He was afraid to tell Eli the vision,***¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.” “Here I am,” answered Samuel.¹⁷ “What was the message he gave you?” Eli asked. “Don’t hide it from me. May God punish you and do so severely if you hide anything from me that he told you.”¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and did not hide anything from him. Eli responded, “He is the Lord. Let him do what he thinks is good.”

The priority in our fear. Many people fear awkward conversations—that is, a conversation that might turn confrontational or cause someone discomfort. Notice that Samuel was “afraid to tell Eli the vision.” It’s not that he’s just fearless and automatically infused with uncommon boldness in telling the truth. And when he is pressed by Eli with the threat that God will judge him (Samuel) severely if he does not speak the truth, Samuel chooses fear of God over fear of man.

Who in your life needs to hear the truth this week? Who needs you to say something that they may not want but that you know they need? Who in your life needs to hear the gospel from you? ***You’ve worked hard to develop a cordial relationship with them—a coworker, neighbor, a family member—but your friendliness isn’t going to save them.*** Only the offense of the cross will do that. It’s not that you don’t have anxieties or certain fears of sharing the truth to work through, but our reverence of a holy God outweighs our need to be liked. And he calls us to speak the truth in love.

What is Samuel learning in all this? He’s learning the lesson about God that Hophni and Phineas forgot or never learned—the God of kindness and severity. The message is a pretty heavy one right out of the gate for a ten-year-old. But unmistakably from God. Samuel’s first introduction to the

LORD is a message prophesying God's judgment on Eli's household and family line.

So let's put it all together:

- Where God's word abounds, God abides as we experience the fullness of his Spirit—allowing the word of Christ to dwell richly in us. How rare was the word of the Lord in your life this last week? How rare is his voice in your decision-making, in your leisure, in your work?
- How's your eyesight? How's your spiritual sight—is the Spirit working in you to lead you to the truth? Is the Word renewing your thinking and guiding you into all truth?
- Are you waiting on the sidelines in terms of community and ministry before you've "arrived?" Maybe all God requires of you at this point is your simple availability, not your extraordinary aptitude.
- Is there a sense of urgency in your heart to respond to God's call to avail yourself? Or has apathy, unbelief, and hidden areas of sin clouded your focus and dulled your intensity?
- Who needs to hear the truth from you this week, or this month, or this year? Are you more worried about what they think or God?