**The LORD calls Samuel**

I Samuel 2:12- 4:1a

Key verse: 3:10 “The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” the Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Today’s passage consists of three parts. The first part is about Eli’s wicked sons and their sins (2:12-2:26). The second part is about God’s prophecy against the House of Eli (2:27-2:36). The third part is God’s calling of Samuel (3:1- 4:1a). I want to start from chapter 3, then go back to chapter 2.

1. **Listening to God’s voice**

We just read the chapter 3. Let me check your reading. How many times did God call Samuel? Next, how many times did God call you in your life?

It was interesting for me to see the way the Bible described God’s calling of Samuel. If I were the Bible writer, I would write in this way. “God called Samuel 4 times because he never experienced God’s calling as a young boy. Finally, Samuel responded to God and God gave him the words.” However, the way Bible describes is like a video clip, describing every detail. God could say to Samuel from the beginning, “Samuel, I am the God of Abraham. Listen to me.” Then Samuel did not need to go Eli many times.

However, God kept calling Samuel until he could respond. At first, I thought that these verses are showing God’s patience. When I kept reading the chapter, I began to realize that this is the way God calls us. God keeps calling us until we respond to him. God is waiting until we are ready. Then, one question came to my mind. How many times did I miss God’s calling on me because I was not ready to listen? It will be many times. Sometimes, I missed God’s calling because I did not know it was God’s voice. Sometimes I missed God’s calling because I didn’t pay attention. Sometimes, I was sleeping and sometimes, I didn’t want to listen. So, I rejected intentionally. The fact is that God kept calling me and I failed to respond.

Chapter 3 begins with the verse saying, ***“In those days the word of the LORD was rare. (V1)”*** However, the end of the chapter 3(V.21) reads, *“****The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.”*** Simply speaking, God didn’t talk to anyone before Samuel, but God continues to talk when he called Samuel.

Why was the word of God rare in the days before He called Samuel? It was not because God didn’t want to talk with the people. It was because no one wanted to listen to God or no one was able to listen to God. When God found Samuel who was able to listen to God although he was a boy, God began to talk a lot.

In New York City, we can see only a few stars in the night, so we are able to count them. Almost every day when I go out to my backyard to give food to my dog “Dori”, I look at the night sky and see the moon and the stars. But when I went to the Pennsylvania Blue Mt. for a retreat years ago, I could see the numerous stars like sands on the sea shore. I couldn’t count them because there were too many. Do we have less number of stars in New York City sky than that of Pennsylvania? No. The problem is the pollution of New York City or the distraction of city lights. On a rainy day, we can't see the Sun. Is there no Sun in the sky on a rainy day? No, there is. But, we fail to see the Sun because clouds block the Sun.

God was looking for someone who could listen to his voice. When God found Samuel and he responded to God, God began to speak. If we cannot hear God’s voice, it is not necessarily that God didn’t speak to us, but because we failed to listen.

Then, how could we hear God’s voice? What are the obstacles that block us from listening to God’s voice? It is our hearts. Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”* People who are pure in heart, can recognize God and experience God. Do you remember last week's passage? Look at Lk 9:44a. Jesus said to his disciples. *“Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you.”* But verse 9:45 reads, *“But they did not understand what this meant****. It was hidden from them****.”* Why was Jesus’ word hidden from them even though he spoke directly in front of them? when their hearts had problems, they acted as if they did not hear. Jesus could not talk about the cross anymore at that time because they did not respond. The disciples' heart was filled with their own thoughts and human ambition.

How can someone have a pure heart and someone have a messed-up heart that cannot communicate with God at all? Is there any way for us to fix our hearts? How can we have a pure and clear heart that is sensitive to the words of God?

Our hearts are like the ram memory of a computer. We can bring the information to the ram memory from outside of the computer by downloading through the internet or by using a USB. We also can bring up the information or program from the stored memory of the computer. After that, we process the information, and delete the information we don’t want and save the information we want to keep to the hard drive of the computer to use later.

Likewise, information comes into our heart through “thoughts.” There are three different thoughts.

First, there is the thought that comes from Satan. (LK 22:3, “then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot.”)

Second, there is the thought that comes from God. (Jn 14:26, “the Holy Spirit will remind you of everything I have said to you.”)

Third, there is the thought that comes from ourselves. (Self-thought that comes from our experience or value system stored inside our deep hearts)

Out heart is like a battle ground because these three different thoughts come into our hearts at the same time and struggle to take possession of our hearts. Here, there is one Key player in our heart that the computer doesn’t have. That is the “God given Free Will.” God gave us free will to choose. We have Free Will to accept Satan’s voice or God’s voice or self-judgment. But self-judgment is biased and has an inclination. It usually likes Satan’s voice more than God’s voice. So, this biased Self-judgment is called “Sinful nature.”

For example, if someone hurt your feelings by saying harsh words, Satan immediately put the feelings of anger and hatred into our hearts, whispering, “You should take revenge by saying harsher words.” And our Self-thought also condones Satan’s idea by telling to self, “Yes, if I don’t do anything, I will become like someone stupid.” However, the Holy Spirit gives us the thought “you should not retaliate. He might have a bad day. Forgive him as I forgave you. Be kind to him.” Do we have to choose Satan's voice? Do we have to be angry all the time, when we feel anger? No. not necessarily. It is up to our Free-Will. We have to screen the thoughts and choose the best option. God gave us the ability to choose, but we forget to use it.

Three days later after I found that I was a messenger for I Samuel chapter 2,3, my body began to develop severe shoulder and neck pain on top of the back pain that I had last summer. Satan put the thought of giving up the message into my heart. He whispered, “Hey Moses, you didn’t get any inspiration for 5 days though you read the passage. On top of that, think about your body condition, you cannot even rotate your neck without pain. How can you type the message for a long time? Tell pastor David that you cannot do it. He is generous. He will understand. “

My self-thought also assisted Satan’s thought, “Yeah! If I give up, at least I can relax without stress. I had enough stress from school. It would be better to take care of my body first. Be wise!” However, the Holy Spirit reminded me of the words of God. ***“I can do everything through him who gives me strength (Phi 4:13).”*** “When you are weak, that is the time to experience the strength given by God.” “What is your choice, take relaxation by giving up the message or trust in God who provides everything you need?” I struggled on last Tuesday. By the grace of God and help of many coworkers who prayed for me, I was able to choose the voice of the Holy Spirit. And help came the next day. Gloria brought medication for me. God gave me the outline of the message in my mind. Great victory comes from one small victory from our hearts, choosing God’s voice.

If we begin to choose the voice of the Holy Spirit day by day, our heart will be changed to become very sensitive to the words of God. Our self-thought is probably polluted and corrupted by many worldly ideas and thoughts. However, our acceptance and obedience to the words of God **will form a new heart and new self.** When our heart is changed, it will be joyful to live according to the words of God. Otherwise, living a Christian life will be very dry and a heavy burden due to the ongoing conflict.

What was Samuel’s final response to God’s calling? Let’s read 3:10. *“The LORD came and stood there calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said,* ***“Speak, for your servant is listening.”*** Eli advised Samuel to say “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.” I think this is the best advise Eli ever said. This response enabled God to deliver his word to Samuel. Let’s do the same thing. Whenever we read the Bible, whenever we start to pray or whenever we meet conflicts and incidents in life, we can say, “Speak, LORD, your servant is listening. “ And heed God’s voice.

What did God say to Samuel? Look at 3:11-14. This was about God’s judgment on Eli’s family. It was too hard task for the boy Samuel to handle. He was fearful to say. He thought about the consequences that would come saying the truth. He might be kicked out from God’s house. He might be charged as the one who cursed the high priest at that time. Do you remember when Jesus was slapped in the face by answering a question to the high priest?(the authority of High Priest in Israel) Moreover, Eli was the father-like figure to Samuel. It would look like he was betraying Eli’s favor by saying the curse. It seems that his life as a priest would be over when he speaks the truth. The best thing he could do will be to modify God’s words to compromise it. However, what did Samuel do?

Look at verse 18. *“So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him.”* He obeyed God, not partially, but completely. If Samuel compromised at that time due to the fear, God couldn’t use Samuel anymore. Later Samuel said to King Saul, *“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. (I Samuel 15:22)”* Listening to God’s voice is not enough. God counts obedience. God counts only complete obedience.

Someone once said, the reason we live a miserable life as a Christian is because of our disobedience and the reason we are still maintaining our lives thus far is due to our obedience although they are few.

**II. The words of God and Vision**

Let’s go back to chapter3:1. ***“The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.”***

Is there any problem living without visions? Usually, those who are ambitious tend to talk about vision. These days, many people talk about visions. From Jan 7 to 10, 2020, CES Convention was held in Las Vegas. CES is an annual trade show organized by the Consumer Technology Association. Each leading technology companies like Samsung, Apple, LG in the Convention talked about future visions, including life with 5G, and 6G communication, Artificial Intelligence (AI), self-driving vehicles, flying cars, Hydrogen fuel cell cars.

However, verse 1 tells us about visions that come from God’s words. In both cases, vision gives us some kind of motivation and energy to our lives. It seems better for us to have visions than not to have. The original word for vision is ‘Hazon,’ which means “looking ahead, recognize, realize and prepare.” Judge 21:25 describes the life of the people who don’t have visions from God. *“In those days there was no king in Israel:****every man did that which was right in his own eyes.(ASV)*** What would be the best life in our own eyes? That would be being a rich, famous, successful man and woman in this world like Mark Zucherberg, or Jeff Bezos. However, when God’s words come into our hearts, we begin to see different things that we never see before. We begin to see our lives with different perspective and emphasis.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Visions from God’s words** | **Right in our own eyes(vision from the world)** |
| The way of cross is the way of life | Avoid the cross (live a comfortable life) |
| Seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness | Seek first benefits |
| God is the master. Deny yourself | You are the owner of your life. Be yourself |
| Be a fruit | Be a flower(place of receiving glory and attention) |

We say we are the people of God. We say we live by faith, not by sight. We believe that life following the truth of God is the best way of life. When we choose to live a life following the words of God, soon we will find that the way is a narrow road. However, do not worry. The narrow road becomes wider and wider. Later we will walk on the golden street. But the worldly way of life is wide and paved at first, but it becomes a dead end. The life with the words of God is followed by love, hope, peace, true life, goodness, and real joy. The life with our own eyes results in frustration, distrust, emptiness, and worry. Do you remember the Steve Jobs’ deathbed speech?

“I reached the pinnacle of success in the business world. In others’ eyes, my life is an epitome of success… I realize that all the recognition and wealth that I took so much pride in, have paled and become meaningless in the face of impending death… God gave us the senses to let us feel the love in everyone’s heart, not the illusions brought about by wealth… Material things lost can be found. But there is one thing that can never be found when it is lost – Life…”

His life ended filled with regrets. However, most people in the world still follow his way of life. Without the words of God, we don’t have strength or wisdom to follow the way of life. God’s words give us not 20-20 vision, but the vision that can see through the life and see the end point of our lives, which is real wisdom. This is the vision that comes from God and I want everyone here to have that vision. Especially, I hope our young people may have that vision.

**III. The sins of Eli’s sons**

Let’s go back to chapter 2:12-36. This contains tragic stories of Eli and his sons. Eli was a high priest at that time and he had led Israel for forty years. (I Samuel 4:18) The first high priest was Aaron. Aaron had four sons. But two sons died without children and two sons Eleazar and Ithamar became priest. At first, the high priesthood descended to the line of Eleazar, not Ithamar. Eli was a descendant of Ithamar, but he became a high priest. He was a high priest and Judge at that time. That means he was the most influential and powerful person in Israel.

Chapter 2 describe about Samuel in three verses. (V11, 18, 26) Verse 18 reads, **“But Samuel was ministering before the LORD-a boy wearing a linen ephod.”** Samuel was growing as a faithful servant, serving as a boy priest in the tabernacle. However, verse 12 describes Eli’s two sons by saying, “Eli’s sons were wicked men. (V12a) Their names were Hophni and Phinehas. (4:11) what were their sins? Verse 12b say, **“they had no regard for the LORD.”**Although they were priests, they have no interest in serving the LORD or knowing about God. They behaved as if there is no God. Whenever anyone offered the sacrifice, they came and put the three pronged fork into the pot. They took whatever meat the fork brought up. When people offered the Peace-offering, priest can share the meat with the person who offer the offering. However, the Law specified the portion of the meat that priest could take, not anything they wanted. (Lev 7:28-36, Deu 18:3)

When people offer the fellowship offering, priest should burn the fat portion on the altar first and then they could take their portion. (Lev 3:3-5, 7:23-25) Look at verse 2:16. They took the raw meat by force before the fat portions were offered to God as a burnt offering. God announced their charge in verse 17. **“This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord’s sight; for they were treating the LORD’s offering with contempt.”**

Then, why did they do that? Is it because they are meat-lovers or they preferred barbequed meat over boiled meat? No. It is because they can sell the meat at the market and make money. They were doing a money making business. I don’t think that they were vicious men who invented evil all the time. However, when they sought benefits first than God's kingdom and righteousness, they fell into great sins before God. The real problem was that they were priests who were the spiritual leaders at that time.

Chapter 2 compares the boy Samuel and Eli’s two sons. At the same time, chapter 2 compares their parents who are Hannah and Eli. Chapter 2:18-19 explain how Hannah supported Samuel. We need to pay attention to the fact that the Bible recorded the role of Hannah to raise Samuel as a man of God. When Hannah left Samuel under the care of Eli, it might bring a great trauma to the baby boy Samuel. However, Hannah didn’t just dump his son to Eli. She came to visit Samuel each year and brought a little robe. She spent time with Samuel and showed her love to his son. Although Samuel grew alone, separated from his family members, no bitter root grew in his heart. However, we couldn’t find any record of the influence of Eli’s wife on her sons. Eli might be very busy as a High priest and Judge. He failed to discipline his two sons. Two sons might be a weak spot to Eli. He didn’t want to hurt his sons. God rebuked Eli’s sin by saying, ***“why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?”*** *(2:29)*

Here, we can think of two Biblical principles for the education of our children. Hebrew 12:6 teaches us how God educates us as his children. ***“Because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”*** The two principles are “Love and disciplines.” When we say “Love”, love should be expressed enough.

**IV. God’s judgment on Eli’s family line**

God sent a man to warn Eli pronouncing his judgment. When God gives a warning, there is still a chance to repent. However, Eli and his sons failed to repent. God’s judgment happened to his family line according to his words. I made a table summarizing the content of judgment and how it came true.

Family Line: Eli 🡪 phinehas 🡪 Ahitub (14:3) 🡪 Ahimelech 🡪 Abiathar

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Prophecy against the House of Eli** |  | **Fulfillment** |
| 2:30 | Removed from priestly duty | 1King 2:27 | So Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood of the Lord, fulfilling the word the Lord had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli |
| 2:31,32 | All your descendants will die in the prime of life (No old man in your family line) | I Sa 22:16-18 | But the king said, “you will surely die, Ahimelek, you and your whole family.  That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. (by King Saul) |
| 2:34 | Hophni and Phinehas will die on the same day | I Sa 4:11 | The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died. |
| 2:36 | Poverty stricken |  |  |

Look at 2:27, 28. Before God issued the judgment, God reminded them of how privileged they were by being chosen as a priest family. A priest is a mediator between God and man. Priests bring people’s sin to God and they announce the forgiveness of sins on behalf of God. People receive comfort and spiritual rest through the labor of the priest. However, whenever human priests were corrupted, people fell into spiritual darkness. God promised to send a faithful priest. Look at verse 35. ***“I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind.”***God sent Jesus Christ who is faithful High Priest. ***“Now we do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.(Heb8:1)”***

God called us as a priestly family. Let’s read I Pe 2:9. ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”***

We are a chosen people. We are called to be able to listen God’s voice. We are called to serve people as a minister of God’s words as a one to one Bible teacher. We are the people who live according to the vision that comes from the words of God. Let us be faithful to God and his calling. Amen.