**Week Three – September 6/7 – I Samuel 3**

**Introduction** - **If you were able to time travel back to your freshman year of high school, what is one piece of advice you would tell your freshman self to listen to? Even if you did give yourself this advice, do you think you would listen to it?** With more distractions and noise than ever, there seems to be an ever increasing difficulty for us to listen well. There may be times where you’re only half-listening to your professor's lecture, but in this chapter we see Samuel fully listening to God and then being obedient to proclaim what he heard. As we will see from the very first sentence of the passage, the word of the Lord was rare in those days, so the people were not accustomed to listen to His voice.

**Read I Samuel 3:1-10**

This passage has a comic feel, but it is a great verifier for Eli and Samuel. Eli receives advance notice that God is speaking to Samuel, so it makes it harder to ignore the words Samuel might bring that are harder for Eli to hear. And it is verified for Samuel that God is speaking, so he does not doubt this freshly revealed part of his life and calling. **What are some key moments in your life when you felt like God verified that He was working in you and around you?**

Verse 1 - “In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions” is an indicator of the worst kind of famine. However verse 7, though it continues the theme of not hearing from God, once again indicates a burgeoning hope, “The word of the Lord had not *yet* been revealed to him.” **When you are waiting on God for direction and guidance, how do you hold on to hope in God when the waiting period lasts longer than you would like?**

God had also given hints of hope in last week’s passage. **Read I Samuel 2:35.** The Lord says that he will raise himself up a *faithful* priest. We see this as Samuel is still found seeking the Lord even when it feels like God is not present. **How do you persevere and hold onto hope through days when your spiritual life is dry and you don’t feel God’s presence?**

The same Hebrew word in verse 1 for rareness of a word from God is also found in Proverbs 29:18. “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.” **In what ways have you observed the tendency of people (or even specific to yourself) to “cast off restraint” when going through seasons of running from God or not listening to God? How would you describe your “appetite” for God’s Word and any patterns of consistently seeking to listen to Him?**

* **Are you rarely ever “sitting down to the table to eat”?**
* **Are you caught up in a lot of “junk food” instead of His Word?**
* **Are you in the habit of listening to Him and feasting on His Word?**
* **Or is there another way you would describe your appetite for hearing from God?**

**In verses 2-10, what does God’s repeated calling to Samuel reveal about his (God’s) character and what He wants for us?** Consider these quotes from Dale Ralph Davis:

* “There is time for Samuel to catch on. God is not heaving an exasperated sigh; he is not ready to berate Samuel for being so dense; he does not launch into a tirade about how Samuel ‘never gets anything right.’” (Davis, p. 45)
* “Here with Samuel we have a true glimpse of Yahweh. He is willing to give us time to understand him.” (Davis, p. 46)

This is one more portrait in Scripture of the beauty of God’s patience and mercy. **What are ways God has reminded you of His mercy in your faith journey?**

**Why was Samuel so slow to understand what was going on?** (*Consider verse 7 with this question.*) His inexperience with hearing from and responding to God was what left him confused, but as Eli coached him Samuel was able to have a conversation with God.

**Read I Samuel 3:11-4:1**

In verse 11, God is casting His judgment on the house of Eli and “the ears of every Isrealite who hears of it will tingle.” In other words, everyone in Israel will know about and be affected by this word. All that Eli has tried to consistently deny, ignore, and avoid will have a very public reckoning. **How do you react when you read verses about God’s judgment being enacted on people or nations? Have you ever felt God’s call of conviction and correction in your life? How have you handled those occasions?**

Just as God’s mercy was seen earlier in the patient way He called to Samuel, His mercy is seen here even in judgment. Just as Eli’s house had a reckoning for their sins, we also have the weight of judgment on us - until we accept what Christ has done to provide pardon for those who turn to Him and His mercy. **Is the mercy and forgiveness of God something that is hard for you to receive?** Some people never receive His gift of mercy - for some they don’t feel “bad enough” to need it while others don’t feel “good enough” to receive it. **Have either one of these hesitations ever been part of your thinking or your story? Can anyone share a “breakthrough” story in life of when you realized that you needed His mercy and forgiveness and were able to receive it?**

**What do we see about Samuel’s character that is worth emulating?** (*Consider how Samuel delivered this heavy message to Eli. He did not sugarcoat it or beat around the bush with the matter. He was unwilling to alter it in any way.*)

**What do we see about Eli’s character that is worth emulating?** (*Eli’s declaration in verse 18, “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes” is a great statement of faith, because Eli knows that what God has revealed is not good news for him.*)

**Conclusion and Application**

As old Eli’s days as a leader were waning, young Samuel was being established. Perhaps the rareness of a word from God that we learned about in verse 1 was tied in some ways to the coming judgment on Eli’s family. But once again we get to end with hope. In verse 19 we learn of God’s continuing presence with Samuel and that Israel has some prophetic hope as God didn’t let any of Samuel’s words “fall to the ground.” And further encouragement comes in 4:1 - God, in His goodness, speaks to His people. As He upholds the words of Samuel, “Samuel’s word came to all Israel.” Despite the seasons of stubborn rebellion, despite Eli’s allowing the people to be hurt by his sons, God faithfully and generously opens up the floodgates of hearing from Him.

**What are some ways that you as a family group can encourage each other this week to increase your appetite for God’s word? What are some ways that you can encourage each other to regularly seek God and believe that He still leads people today?**

**Additional Notes and Possible Questions**

There is no doubt about what is meant in 3:12 by “everything I spoke against his family” because we have already been given this information in 2:30-36.

This is the first week we have formally quoted our lead commentary for these studies. We are using I Samuel - Looking on the Heart by Dale Ralph Davis. It is part of the Focus on the Bible Commentary Series. Any future quotes will simply be designated with “Davis” and the page number.

An additional question from Davis that might be useful is from page 48 - “To contemplate time when God has been silent should make us value his Word all the more. **Does it still amaze you that the great and holy God actually has something to say to you?**”