

1 SAMUEL 3 - After Darkness... Light

Study 4

LET THE WORD DO THE WORK

After a long period of near silence from God, His voice is finally heard once again. The battle cry of the Protestant Reformers protestant reformers was “After darkness... light.”

In Geneva in 1541, John Calvin set up an extensive weekly preaching schedule, as he trusted that it was the Word of God that would awaken the hearts and minds of people to God.

Similarly, when Martin Luther was questioned about what was taking place in Europe he answered:

“I opposed indulgences (sale of forgiveness) and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philipp and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the Papacy (Roman Church) that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses on it. I did nothing; the Word did everything”

Long before the reformation, in 1 Samuel 3, we read of an event when the voice of God is once again, finally heard. Hophni and Phinehas were no longer holding the word of God captive (see also Amos 8:11-12).

A new era was about to break in the life of Israel.

QUESTIONS

1. To contemplate times 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?
2. It is a sobering thought that starvation may not mean lack of food but of appetite. Is your appetite for God’s Word still keen? Do you read it at home and hear it in church as often as you once did—and do you still obey it?

READ 1 Samuel 3

THE KINDNESS OF THE PROPHET'S GOD (1-10)

What use do verses 2–10 hold for us? New Testament believers do not stand in Samuel's position: we are not being called to receive direct divine revelation as Samuel was. We are in no way prophets as Samuel was (to be) a prophet.

Instead, we can ask “what do these verses reveal about God.”

There we see the kindness and gentleness of the Lord. This is a new step in God's dealing with Israel, and He gives Samuel time to catch up with this new work. 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.”

Here with Samuel we have a true glimpse of the Lord. He is willing to give us time to understand him. He is not holding a stopwatch over Samuel, threatening to have done with him if he does not wise up.

This describes Samuel's Master—and ours. And disciples who tend to cast their God into a mental graven image of a gruff, efficient, impatient sergeant need to know this.

QUESTIONS

1. If it is true that ‘once we see what Scripture reveals about God we usually will see how it applies to us’, does this suggest that, before asking how any Bible passage applies to me, I ought always first of all to seek what it says about God?
2. Are there any other characteristics of God that you see in the passage?

TENSION IN HEARING AND PROCLAIMING THE WORD (11-18)

Samuel's call, however, highlights the burden, pressure, conflict, and pain of the word of God. No sooner is Samuel called to the prophetic task than he finds how difficult and heart-rending it can be. He is caught in the dilemma only a true prophet knows. The true prophet must speak God's word (else why is he entrusted with it?); yet the true prophet recoils from speaking judgment (v. 15). He will speak judgment because truth is at stake; he cringes to speak it because compassion moves him.

QUESTIONS

1. Have there been times when you have been fearful about teaching the Bible to others or sharing the good news? Why?
2. True preaching should afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, which are you needing most just now, and are you ready to receive it?

OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN HEARING GOD'S WORD (19-21)

Israel once again, has an established prophet who hears from God, a prophet-in-residence.

Now the Lord repeatedly appears and reveals himself to Samuel “by the word of the Lord” (1 Sam. 3:21) and now that word will be coming to all Israel (4:1a). That is both an immense privilege and a terrible responsibility, both a welcome benefit and a fearful liability. What if Israel refuses to hear (cf. Deut. 18:19)? Even worse, what if we refuse to hear God’s final word spoken through his Son-prophet (Heb. 1:1–4; 2:1–4)? Perhaps the Lord himself then gives us the correct starting point (Isaiah 66:2):

But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.

QUESTIONS

1. What should be the place of God’s Word in the life of the church?
2. Are there any other features of this passage that caught your attention?