

- We are in a teaching series that is focusing on OT characters.
  - We are examining the lives of certain people from the OT history in order to see how they interacted with God, how they responded to him, what they did, what they said and thought.
  - In doing so, we get a window into how we ourselves can and should respond to the activity of God in the world and in us.
  - Today we are going to look at Samuel and a little account about how he heard God's voice.
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- The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir."
  - It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming."
  - If you've like me you've been on both sides of that conversation. We have spoken and wondered if anyone is paying attention.
  - Or we were on the other side where someone was speaking to us and we were utterly unengaged and at some point we brought our mind back from thinking about that last Facebook post we put out there and wondering how many likes it got to realize we have no idea what that person was saying.
  - Sometimes no one ever notices. Sometimes it is harmful or creates conflict.
  - Do you ever wonder the same is true in our relationship with God? What if God is speaking and we do not hear it? What if we miss it?
  - Have you ever had a conversation with someone who talked like they heard God all the time? Like God is communicating with them on a daily basis, and they hear his voice clearly about things they should do or say?
  - Have you ever wondered if that is even possible? What would it be like hear God's voice speaking into our lives every single day? About the myriad of decisions or issues that we face?
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- Samuel was a prophet in Israel. It meant that he was the one who led the spiritual lives of the nation of Israel. He was actually the prophet who led Israel in the transition time before they got their first king.
  - Samuel was what you might call a "miracle baby." His mother's name was Hannah, and her story is fascinating in itself, but essentially Hannah was childless. She could not have a baby and one year as she and her husband did their once a year pilgrimage to the sanctuary to worship and offer sacrifices, Hannah was so distraut she stood and poured her heart out to God.
  - The priest at the time, named Eli, thought she was drunk because of how she acted so went to bring her into line, but found out her story and her anguish and blessed her and prayed that she might conceive. And she did.
  - She had made God a promise that if she could have a baby, she would dedicate that baby to God and put him in God's service for the rest of his life.
  - That's exactly what she did. She had a boy and named him Samuel and she raised him for the first few years and then, when he was still very young, she brought him to the sanctuary where he might serve God and grow up under the tutelage of Eli the priest.
  - So Samuel is young, probably only 10-12 years old, and that is where we pick up the story in 1 Samuel chapter 3.

1 Samuel 3:1 The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

- The set up to the story is an interesting one. People did not hear the voice of the Lord.
  - Visions and other communications had been common but had become rare over the years.
- 2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 5 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. 6 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." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" 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. 9 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. 10 The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."
- He heard God's voice. He listened. And it changed the entire course of his life.
  - What do we learn from this? Can this be true of us?
  - **GOD IS SPEAKING TO YOU!**
  - I want to unpack three things Samuel did that give us three principles that I believe will lead every single one of us to hear God's voice in a regular and powerful way.

## I. He was in a position to hear God's voice.

1 Samuel 3:1 The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. 2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

- Whenever you see details in a story, pay attention. The author wants you to know something.
- Samuel was serving in the temple. He was around the things of God. He was learning the law. The ceremonies. The way that God dealt with his people. He was focused on the things of God.
- Second, he's not just in the temple that night, he is in the place where the ark of the covenant was.
- The ark of the covenant was the symbol of God's presence for the nation. It was where God was, where he dealt with his people. It was where God had promised to meet with Moses and give his commands to the people.
- It is interesting that Eli, the priest of God, was not there. In fact, his "usual" place was obviously somewhere else. (Perhaps this is why he was not hearing God's voice?)
- Thirdly, notice the time. It was late. Samuel had laid down to sleep. Everything was quiet. There were no distractions. No noise.
- Samuel was in a place, physically and mentally, where he was ready to hear God's voice.
- We could look at this and think that just like Samuel, we need to be in church to hear God's voice but that misses it entirely. After all, Eli the priest's sons were in the temple all the time and were condemned as evil men.
- Many people say that they never hear God's voice but they have never placed themselves in a position to hear him or listen for him.
- Are you placing yourself in a position to hear God's voice?

- What does that look like for us? You are probably not going to be serving full time in the church building. You have jobs, families, kids, responsibilities, hobbies, friends, TV shows to watch . . .
- Make a practice of focusing on God. If the only time you do that is Sunday morning, you will not hear God's voice often. Take time with him. Read your bible. Listen to a podcast or sermon online. Listen to worship music or music that directs your mind to him.
- Practice his presence. Have a regular time that you connect with God each day. It is simply not enough to say that you just talk to God whenever he pops into your mind. That is good, but develop a time where you are focused and being with him.
- Get rid of distractions. Put yourself in a place to hear him. Turn off the TV. Shut off the phone for 15 min. Go for a hike without headphones. Take a walk. Just sit and be silent. Drive without the radio on.
- Good listening is like tuning in a radio station. For good results, you can listen to only one station at a time.
- **GOD IS SPEAKING TO YOU!**
- We CHOOSE whether to hear the voice of God or not.

## II. He learned to recognize God's voice.

*8 A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" 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. 9 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. 10 The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

- Samuel was not expecting to hear God's voice. He was not even looking for it, but it did not mean that he did not WANT to hear God's voice.
- Once Eli figures out what is going on, he helps Samuel know what to do. Eli chooses a very specific phrase: "*Speak, for your servant is listening.*"
- It's something a servant or slave would say to his or her master. With this response, Samuel is saying, "My will is neutral here, Lord. It doesn't matter what I want or don't want. All that matters is what you want. Your will be done."
- When Samuel tells God to speak, he is really saying that he is ready to listen.
- How do we learn to recognize God's voice? He probably is going to speak aloud very often.
- Hearing God's voice has nothing to do with age or some spiritual qualifications. Samuel was a kid. He had no experience. He had less experience than you do. Yet God spoke to him.
- To recognize his voice, we must expect that he will speak. Do you expect to hear God speak? Are you looking for it? Do you want to hear his voice? Or do you sail through your days and not give it much thought?
- This is so important because God does not always speak to you on your timetable. He addressed Samuel in the the night.
- God will find times when we are open and he will whisper to us. It will not only be during one specific time. It is sometimes unexpected.
- TIP: Stop overthinking it. If you are prompted, and you are not sure it's God, then if it lines up with the heart and values of God, do it.
- Secondly, we have to value what God is saying.
- I wonder if that is true of us with God. Do I recognize and value it.
- **GOD IS SPEAKING TO YOU!**

### III. When God spoke, he did what God said to do.

- God finally had Samuel's attention. He is really hearing God for the first time. What would God say. Encourage him about his future? Give him a grand mission, like he did for Paul? Tell him about the work he is going to do in, around or through Samuel? Just show him how amazing God was?

*11 And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. 12 At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family – from beginning to end. 13 For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. 14 Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.' "*

- No instead, "I am going to judge your mentor and his family, they are going to die and it is going to be bad enough that people who hear about it aren't going to stop talking about it.
- In the morning, Eli asked Samuel, young child Samuel, what God said.
- He was faced with a choice. Say nothing, change the message or tell him what God had said.
- He told Eli everything, even though he didn't want to.
- Listen, nothing stops the voice of God faster than ignoring it when we hear it.
- I don't know God's purpose here with Samuel, but I wonder if he was testing Samuel to see if he would obey what God would give him.
- Perhaps it's because God knew what kind of job was in front of Samuel.
- God's communications come in two general categories.
- General communication – these are the ones that are common to all Christ-followers. It has to do with who we are, our identity, who God is, and how we are to act as a Christ-follower.
- When God says we are adopted, part of his family, it is true for everyone. When he reveals to you how much he loves you, this is true for all of us. When he says we are to forgive or confess, it is true for all of us.
- Don't dismiss this. This is not an intellectual thing. It can be, and usually is, very specific to my own experience and where I am in life.
- Example: I was going through a particularly difficult time in my life years ago. I was filled with doubt, did not like myself, was depressed. It was in the midst of this that God showed me who I really was in him. How he saw me. What gave me value. The Holy Spirit took truths I had known but brought them home in a way that was specific and unique to me. It was powerful. It changed my life.
- God is constantly speaking into our lives to draw us to him that we might be more like him. When you are totally frustrated about a situation and you feel God remind you that you need to confess your part in it.
- Pay attention to when you are worried. Upset. Angry. Frustrated. Happy. Excited. Bothered. Conflicted. In every case, your loving Father is ready to speak into that in your life.
- Specific communication – these are the unique things that God says to you.
- When you are sitting at home and are struck with the idea to text someone and let them know you care. When you are standing in line and God tells you to pay for someone's groceries.
- **GOD IS SPEAKING TO YOU!**
- When he speaks in either of these ways, we always have an option. Obey or disobey. This is no other option. And when we ignore God's instructions, he often will go quiet. He is not going to simply skip what he said to tell you to do something that you like better.
- Do it. Do it again. Do it over and over. The more you obey, the more he will open the window into greater and greater things.

- I was reminded that God is a speaking God.
- Hearing his voice in amazing ways is not beyond me or you.
- If I put myself in a position to hear his voice, if I practice listening so I can recognize when he speaks, and then obey what I hear, my life can and will be changed.
- **GOD IS SPEAKING TO YOU!**
- There is connection between effectiveness in life and listening to the voice of God.  
*19 The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. 21 The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.*
- When Samuel listened to God, he began to fulfill the purpose for which God had called him in this life.
- Don't get discouraged. This is a learned skill. The more we try, the better we get at it. Just like Samuel, we need others to help us. We need practice. We need to continually be pointed in the right direction.
- **GOD IS SPEAKING TO YOU!**
- Let's practice hearing God's voice.
- It is the voice of the one who is deeply invested in your life.
- It is the voice of one who knows exactly what you are like.
- It is the voice of one who knows what you need.
- It is the voice of the one who created you, who loves you, who has a purpose for you.
- It is the voice of one who is proud of you and who wants to be known by you.
- It is the voice of one who always is in this for your good.
- Ask these questions: What does the Spirit want to say to me? What is one thing I can do regularly this week to make space to practice recognizing the voice of God?
- Make the promise that this week you will do whatever he tells you to do.