

Old Testament Characters: Samuel – The Early Years

Goldstone Church – 17-Jul-16 10:30am

1 Samuel 3:1-21

Introduction

We are continuing our series looking at various Old Testament characters. This is the first of 3 weeks looking at the life of Samuel. Today, we're focusing on the occasion when Samuel meets with God for the first time.

1. Samuel

EXPERIENCED GOD (v.4)

"Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, 'Here I am.'" (1 Samuel 3:4)

Almighty God, the Creator of the Universe, is speaking directly to Samuel – but he doesn't recognise the voice. Instead, Samuel thinks that Eli is calling him from another part of the tabernacle.

To get the full picture of how Samuel comes to this point, we need to see how this all started:

Hannah, Samuel's mother, had prayed for a son, and God answered that prayer. In response to what God had done (1 Samuel 1:28) *baby* Samuel was dedicated and given back to God.

Furthermore, 1 Samuel 2:18 says that the *child* Samuel was ministering before God. And as he grew, his mother brought him a new wardrobe each year.

We are also told about Samuel's older childhood. 1 Samuel 2:26 says that the *adolescent* Samuel was favoured by God.

These 3 verses show an amazing progression: Samuel was *dedicated* to God, he was *ministering* before God, and he was *favoured* by God.

But despite Samuel's progress, we still read that, *"In those days the word of God was rare"* (1 Samuel 3:1b).

The Hebrew word for "rare" also means "a prized possession", i.e. everyone knew the value of God's word, but it came to the people less than "not many" times.

Samuel had grown up in the tabernacle, under Eli's instruction – but around people who had little expectation that God would speak. Eli was well-respected by the people, and he had served faithfully as a priest for many years. Yet it seems he was in the business of religion, not in the joy of a relationship with God.

But now (1 Samuel 3:4), God calls Samuel. The word "call" is rich in meaning.

"Call" can mean to summon someone to do something – just like Samuel assumed that it was Eli summoning him to his bedside.

But "call" can also mean "to be chosen". God was commissioning and setting Samuel apart for his purposes.

Most importantly, God makes the first move towards Samuel, for the purpose of having an ongoing relationship with Samuel for the rest of his life.

Today, God is makes the first move towards us. God wants us to hear His voice – not a voice of anger or condemnation or rejection, but a voice of love and compassion and acceptance. These are the opening words of a personal relationship with God.

Like Samuel, we may not recognise the voice, but it is still a personal Experience with God.

2. Samuel

ENGAGED WITH GOD (v.10-11)

“The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’ 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.”

(1 Samuel 3:10-11)

There is a significant difference between the way Samuel responds in these verses, compared with how he reacted to God’s first 3 calls. When Samuel answered with “Speak, Lord, I’m listening”, the flood-gates are opened. Samuel has moved from an unknown “experience”, to being fully engaged in a deep relationship with a living God. Previously, Samuel was just an errand-boy for Eli. Now, he is hearing the very words of God. This was a new and personal interaction with God.

Samuel stepped out in faith – he called out to God, and God responded and engaged in a relationship. Stepping out in faith is an essential ingredient of a relationship with God. Hebrews 11:6 says, *“without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

Today, God is inviting us to move on past an unexplainable or unknown “experience”, and, in faith, to fully engage in a deep and meaningful relationship with God.

Faith is more than just believing or agreeing with the truth. Faith means committing our lives to the truth that we believe. It is an intentional step of being in an intimate relationship with God. It is Engaging fully with God.

3. Samuel

EXPLAINED ABOUT GOD (v.18-19)

“So Samuel told [Eli] everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, ‘He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.’ The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground.” (1 Samuel 3:18-19)

Even though Eli had worked faithfully for many years as a priest, it was the young Samuel who was sharing and speaking-out the prized possession that was a word from God. Note that Samuel spoke up – he shared with Eli about his personal experience with God.

It is significant that Samuel didn’t preach a sermon, lead a Bible study or even open a Bible. Samuel simply spoke and shared everything about his personal experience with God. Nothing more.

Today, God is inviting us to do the same. We have had an Experience of God, and we are Engaged in a personal relationship with God. God is now inviting us and

encouraging us to Explain and describe our personal experiences with others. The opportunities to speak and share about our personal experiences might come at different times. We need to be ready to share what God has done in our lives.

CONCLUSION

We are all impressed by the way Samuel was called by God – yet we would not be at all comfortable if God were to call us in the same way! When we hear God calling, it is easier to listen instead to the voice that says, “God can’t possibly use someone like me.”

Many people make excuses why they cannot serve God. But in the Bible, we read that God used many people with significant shortcomings:

- Abraham was old,
- Jacob was insecure,
- Leah was unattractive,
- Joseph was abused,
- Moses stuttered,
- Gideon was poor,
- Samson was relationally dysfunctional,
- Rahab was immoral,
- David had an affair and all kinds of family problems,
- Elijah was suicidal,
- Jeremiah was depressed,
- Jonah was reluctant,
- Naomi was a widow,
- John the Baptist was seriously eccentric,
- Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered,
- Martha worried a lot,
- Samaritan woman had several failed marriages,
- Zacchaeus was unpopular,
- Thomas had doubts,
- Paul had poor health, and
- Timothy was timid.

The list is long because there were many different types of excuses. And yet, God used every one of these individuals to do great things.

As we reflect on the early life of Samuel, our challenge is to:

- Cherish our **Experience** of God.
- To step out in faith and **Engage** in an ongoing, personal relationship with God.
- Then speak up and **Explain** to others everything about what it means to be in a genuine relationship with a living and loving God.

When we do this, God will ensure that, like Samuel, none of our words will fall away. God’s kingdom will come on earth, as it is in heaven.

Amen