

INTRO: One of the popular worldviews today is that God is dead, and modern science and multiculturalism killed him. On that view, of course, the OT in the bible is not really true. It's just projections of people's imaginations, or literary expressiveness, or the artifacts of anthropology. It will read to you like an episode of Star Wars. "Long ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." Probably more popular, though, is the idea that God does exist, but he is accepting, tolerant, passive, and what we might call the perfect gentlemen. He would never stick his nose in your personal life and business. He's happy with whatever attention you see fit to throw his way. But he knows your busy, so he's not demanding about you spending time with him or serving him. But He is that best of all friends, because even though it's not quite stated like this in the Bible, he's always there for you...that is, if you need him. He loves you no matter how you treat him. He is happy for you to think of him in any way that's easiest for you to stomach. And if your life and loves are contrary to his word, well, his word is just a matter of interpretation, right? So the Bible will just have to adapt or die. And God understands. After all, he's the one who created the world the way we found it, right? So, it's all good.

Of course, we wouldn't like it very much if people treated us like we treat God—always putting their interpretation on our words, assuming we're irrelevant to them, or supposing that we should just be happy they acknowledge our existence. But what would happen if we actually read the Bible and took it at face value, for what it says it is, the word of God? And what if we asked what it teaches us about God, Jesus, and how we should respond to His truth? That is our endeavor this morning, as it is every Sunday. And today, as we come to 1Sam 3, we find that God is actually edgy. He speaks sharply. He has high expectations of our worship and respect for Him. He is patient with our disrespect, but he will not always take it sitting down. But I hope we'll also see that God's sacrifice of Jesus can atone even for our own sacrilege against Him. And I hope we'll see that the gospel is all the more valuable in light of how we have offended God in the way we've treated Him and His truth. It all starts with a little boy.

STORY

3:1 *"Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli."* Samuel is just being faithful, even though obscure, insignificant, and lowly. He's serving, ministering to the Lord. Samuel's orientation is vertical, theological, Godward. He's living his life toward God. And he's doing this in Eli's presence, under Eli's direction, even though Eli is so passive and permissive with his own sons that it's disqualifying. But Samuel is ministering to the Lord, and only in the presence of Eli. Samuel serves God, no matter what Eli and his sons are doing.

"And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision." "Those days" were the waning days of the judges—bad days, dark days, immoral, chaotic days, days when religious people were being anything but godly. The church had become all but indistinguishable from the world. You could even make the argument that the church looked worse than the world. When God sees the church acting like that, he withdraws and gives the silent treatment. But in a context of divine silence, Samuel is serving by obedient faith in what God has already said.

2:2-3 *"At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was."* The fact that Eli is going blind explains why Samuel is lying down with the ark in the temple whereas Eli is sleeping in his own place. And here, you might wonder why the text is talking about a temple before David is even born. Wasn't it just the tabernacle at this point? And if so, is this a case where the history is not historical? That's a fair question, because the word temple occurred back in 1:9. That's where Hannah went to pray. But this temple is not a mistaken reference to Solomon's

temple. We don't get any mention of when or how this one in Shiloh was built. But 1:9 assumes this building has doorposts and 3:15 says it has doors.

The short answer here is that this was a mini- or pre-temple like the ones archeologists have found elsewhere from the Canaanite period. Those temples had one main room, a niche where the ark would have been kept, a courtyard around that main room, and then outer rooms around that courtyard for the priests on duty. So there's nothing inaccurate about the mention of a temple here.¹ In fact, this is the house, the temple at Shiloh, that God was talking about in Jeremiah 7 when he said "*Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel.*"

So Samuel is in the main room because he can see what he's doing. Eli is out in an outer room because his eyes are no good at night. So Eli's blindness is physical; but it's significance is spiritual. Eli is the blind leading the blind. There was no frequent vision, and even if there were, Eli wouldn't have seen anything in it; he will be painfully slow to see what God is doing with Samuel. Eli's physical location is also suggestive. Eli is physically and spiritually distant from God, whereas Samuel is physically close to God, and is about to become spiritually close to God as well. Eli is spiritually blind, and that is why God appears to someone with eyes to see. All this is happening in the wee hours of the morning, probably before the sun came up, when "*the lamp of God had not yet gone out,*" the lamp that burned all night.

Now that the stage is set, the action begins in v.4, and it would be comical if it were not tragic. "*Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. And the Lord called again, 'Samuel!' and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*" Samuel doesn't know any better, so he thinks it's Eli. But to his credit, Samuel is awake, available, and attentive. It even says he ran to Eli. Samuel is ready to serve no matter what time it is. And the text excuses him from guilt in v.7—the word of the Lord had never been revealed to him, so he didn't yet know the Lord in this way. God had never introduced Himself to Samuel by a prophetic word, so when God called him, Samuel didn't assume it was Eli. Besides, verse 1 opens by remind us that Samuel is still a boy.

But because of Israel's sins and Eli's negligent "ministry", it's been a long time since the last word from the Lord...and Eli has gotten rusty. Does he think Samuel is dreaming, or hearing voices, or just paranoid or something? That's the question—what is Eli thinking? The episode has to happen 3 times before Eli finally catches on; but Eli is the one who's supposed to know better. Talk about Jesus calling.... This is what happens when God actually shows up to the church of a self-serving preacher or the quiet time of a poorly taught Christian. Clueless. But notice what Eli calls Samuel in v.6, "*I did not call, my son.*" Eli had two biological sons, but unbeknownst to Eli, Samuel is about to become the spiritual son Eli never had. Well, old man Eli eventually catches on, and remembers just enough to tell Samuel how to respond if God calls him again. "*Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.*" Invite his word, recognize his authority, acknowledge your servanthood, and listen up. Meanwhile, all this repetition is whetting our own appetite for God's word. "Come on, out with it already! What's God going to say!?"

¹ Joyce Baldwin, *TOTC*, 65-68.
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V.10 “*And the Lord came and stood...*” This time God didn’t just call. He came. This is no longer a bare voice; it’s also a vision.² “*The Lord came and stood, calling as at other times.*” That will get his attention, especially when God repeats his name, “Samuel! Samuel!” Now Samuel’s wide awake. “*Speak, for your servant hears.*” And with the prongs in place, God now sets the gem.

V.11-14 “*Then the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.’*” God throws Samuel into the deep end of the pool. The word God speaks will scandalize every Israelite who gets wind of it. It’s the kind of word that will make people say to each other, “No way! God would never do that to his own people!”³ Samuel’s first sermon will be a word of judgment, not hope, for an audience of one—his own mentor, who is old enough to be his grandad. Eli has in fact committed the unforgiveable sin. From a position of authority, He was complicit for decades when his own sons took God’s offering for themselves, took God’s name in vain, and took liberties with women. These are long-standing, often-repeated, high-handed sins, so much so that they characterized the priests of all people. But don’t miss how perfectly the punishment fits the crime. The priests extorted God’s people, so God would demand recompense from their own hand. They embezzled God’s sacrifices to fatten their own bellies, so those same sacrifices would avail nothing for the forgiveness of their souls. If you despise God’s sacrifice in the body, then He will deny you the benefit of it for your soul. Eli had spoken better than he knew in chapter 2—“If someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Back in vv.15-18, all this laid heavy on the young man’s heart as “*Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, ‘Samuel, my son.’ And he said, ‘here I am.’ And Eli said, ‘What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.’ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, ‘It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him.’*” God called Samuel, and Samuel thought Eli had a word for him. Now Eli calls Samuel, and it is Samuel who has God’s word for Eli. Eli puts Samuel under oath—tell me the truth, boy, the whole truth, or so help me I’ll pray down a curse on you. Out with it.” And in typical Bible fashion, the text records Samuel’s obedience both positively and negatively. Samuel told him everything, hid nothing. And for the first time in 3 chapters, it looks like Eli says and does the right thing.

But Eli has always been a hard guy to read. He makes Samuel swear to tell him everything God said, but when he hears it, what’s he do? For someone who just heard that neither his sins nor his sons would ever be forgiven, he seems oddly calm, even casual... After a lifetime of throwing up his hands and saying “what am I supposed to do? boys will be boys,” it looks like he’s doing the same thing here: “what are you gonna do? God will be God.” It’s hard to tell if this is submission or apathy; piety or self-pity; acceptance, or excuse. Typical Eli—under-reaction masquerading as righteousness; passivity impersonating piety. It’s just the kind of ambiguity you’d expect when you’re dealing with a self-deceived priest. Even God’s sovereignty serves as nothing more than an excuse for Eli to do nothing. Poor Eli. He can’t do anything about anything, and it’s never his fault.

² Tsumura (NICOT, 178-179) agrees, citing McCarter (AB, 98).

³ Ears will tingle elsewhere in 2Kgs 21:12 “Jerusalem will become a prey”; Jer 19:3 disaster on Judah like a broken flask.

We return to a refreshing clarity in vv.19-21. “*And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba [N to S, like NY to LA] knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.” And that wraps a nice bow on it. We began with word and vision being rare in v.1. And by the end of the chapter, God is appearing, regularly, to Samuel in, Shiloh, by the word of the Lord. God is back, and He is cleaning His house. Judgment begins at the house of God.*

POINT

God addresses our self-serving worship by His word through His prophet.

GODWARD APPLICATIONS (What does this text teach us about God?)

Despise God’s word long enough, and He will make you go without it. When you read chapter 1 about how Peninnah aggravated Hannah for being barren, and chapter 2 about the corruption of the priests, it’s no wonder that we read in chapter 3 “*the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.*” Why would God send his word when they’ve only ignored it, despised it, disobeyed it? The modern assumption is that freedom from God’s word is the blessing. No friend. The absence of God’s word is not the blessing; that is the curse. God says that man lives not on bread alone but on every word that comes from his mouth. And so when we are without His word, it may be a feast for the flesh; but it’s famine for the spirit. That’s what God Himself called it through the prophet Amos. “*the days are coming, declares eh Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, not a thirst for water, but of hearing of the words of the Lord*” (Amos 8:11; cf. Ps 74:9; Pr 29:18; Mic 3:6-7).

There was a famine in Eli’s day, a famine after Amos’ day, and if you despise the word long enough, there will be a famine in your own heart. It is sadly true that congregations often bring a self-imposed famine on their own churches still today. **2Tim 4:3-4** *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*” All too often, congregations get just the kinds of teachers they want and deserve, and yet when they endure the effects of a famine of hearing the words of the Lord, they blame everyone but themselves. Church, if you want to feed on God’s words, then do not despise the word he’s already sent, even if it seems scandalous.

God’s word is often scandalous, even to His own people (11). “*I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.*” Every ear of everyone who hears it. God’s word makes humanity incredulous, incensed, irate, outraged, appalled. God’s word makes everybody say, with all their heart, “No way! Surely God would not do such a thing! Surely God is not THAT sort of God who would do THAT sort of thing to THOSE sorts of people. If that is God, then I choose atheism as the moral high-ground.” And to that God says, read it and WEEP. Tingle your ears off.

Friend, whether you are a Christian or not, don’t ever assume you know what God would or wouldn’t do, if that assumption is based merely on your own feelings, experience, personality, or culture. If you think God is too sensitive to offend you, too timid to upend “common sense” or too tolerant to contradict shared human wisdom, then you are wrong about Him. God realized beforehand that people’s ears would tingle when Jesus says “*No one comes to the Father except through me.*” Everyone’s ears tingle when God says your sins are so bad they can only be atoned through the blood of His Son Christ Jesus. Everyone’s ears tingle when God says that Scripture is God-breathed, inerrant, and the only final authority for life and doctrine. Everyone’s ears tingle when God says that He created mankind MALE and FEMALE, in His

image; that marriage is between one man and one woman for life, that all sexual activity outside the biblical marriage bond is immoral and damnable, that the Ten Commandments are still God's expectation for our lives, and that He will send Jesus back to judge the living and the dead, and that those who don't repent will burn with eternal conscious torment in hell for all eternity, and that the sacrifice of Jesus will only be applied to the souls of those who repent and believe in Him. Every ear in America and in the world tingles and burns at those things. That word is an irritant in our ear canal, and we will do anything to itch it way. Yet to each one God says, I knew they would; still, you'd better believe it all, because God will act when our worship takes His name in vain.

God will act when our worship takes His name in vain (13). In v.13, the reason God punishes Eli is "*Because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.*" God considers a violation of the second commandment an implicit violation of the third. If you worship him your way and not his—if you despise His way in favor of your own, or if you worship Him only for what you can get out of it for yourself—then he considers that blasphemy. That is, he will consider your worship a misrepresenting of his name and a disparaging of his reputation. And God will not take that sitting down. Everything God does, He does for His own glory, so that all creation will recognize how significant and magnificent He is. And he says, "my glory I will not share with another." So if we honor ourselves in worship instead of honoring Him, like Eli and his sons, then God takes that as Grand Theft and Defamation. Friend, know the God you are dealing with, and treat Him accordingly. This is real. He is here, and He is not to be trifled with, because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And he appears to us by His word.

God appears to us by His word. Verse 21, "*And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.*" The reason God appeared was to speak. And the way God revealed Himself was by speaking. The same was true for John in revelation when he remembers with us, "I turned to see the voice." How do you see a voice? I don't know. But that's what it says. And the same is true today. You want to meet God, fellowship with God? You want to be taken up into his intimate counsels? You want to know him? You want to see Him? You're doing it right now. You want God to appear to you? You see him now in Scripture, do you not? There's this great scene in Prince Caspian when the unbelieving Dwarf finally meets Aslan, and Aslan roars at him, and the believing little girl says with a smirk on her face, "Can you see him now?" The truth is we cannot bear the sight of Him. And that is why *the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, as of the only begotten son from the Father...* (John 1:14). And that leads us to gospel applications, where we ask....

GOSPEL APPLICATIONS (How does this text testify to Jesus and the gospel?)

Jesus rebukes all kinds of people for self-serving worship. We might read this text, hear this sermon, and go away thinking, "This is exactly why I stay in the New Testament with Jesus, because the OT God seems so judgy." But Jesus is not squishy on self-serving worship. He confronts a Samaritan woman for worshipping a god she doesn't know in a place God didn't choose (John 4). Jesus takes Jewish men to task for attempting to worship the right God in the wrong way (Mt 15). And the risen Christ rebukes Christian churches for loveless worship, immoral living, lukewarm devotion, and idolatry (Rev 2-3). The Jesus of the New Testament is no more lenient with self-serving worship than the God of the OT. In fact, the pre-incarnate Christ is speaking in unison with His Father in 1Sam 3, agreeing that self-serving worship really only amounts to worshipping self. Jesus condemns worshipping God simply for what we can get out of it. We worship God for God Himself, and for what God has put into it, which is the blood of His Son, sacrificed for our sacrilege.

Jesus died for our sacrilege. Don't forget, Jesus actually died under the same charges that the Eli's sons were guilty of—blasphemy. Jesus was falsely charged with blasphemy, when in fact his accusers were the ones guilty of that very charge. "*He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need?*" (Mt 26:65). They utter blasphemy in the very act of charging Jesus with blasphemy! The Jews thought Jesus was the one taking God's name on himself in vain, when in fact they were the ones despising God's Son and Sacrifice. Friend, if your worship of God has been loveless, lukewarm, self-centered, or even immoral, Jesus' death can atone even for those sins. He died under the sentence of blasphemy that your sacrilege deserved. God raised Him from the dead to vindicate him of that false charge, and to clear you of the guilt you rightly deserved. Jesus ascended to God's right hand, accepted by the Father there forever, to prove that God accepted his sacrifice on your behalf if you turn and trust in Him. And one day Jesus will return to forever perfect our worship....

Jesus will return to perfect our worship (Rev 19:6-8; Eph 5:26-27). Jesus will see to it that His church will be as a bride adorned for her husband. And we will be part of that innumerable throng of believers, our voices contributing to the "*great multitude like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.* Jesus is working toward that goal even now, *having cleansed us by the washing of water with the word, so that on that great day he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish* for Him, for His worship, His glory, His praise. That alone should motivate you to worship God for what He has put into it, not simply for what you can get out of it.

EVANGELISTIC APPLICATIONS (How does this text call/warn unbelievers to repent?)

To despise Jesus knowingly is to reject the only sacrifice that can save you. Eli and his sons despised God's sacrifice, took God's honor for themselves, and took God's name in vain. You cannot do these things without repentance and expect salvation. And that reasoning is not muted in the NT. It is amplified, because now the sacrifice is not just a cow. It is the Christ. Heb 10:26-27 *If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.* Friend, be very careful what you do with the gospel of Jesus once you've heard it. If you despise the only sacrifice costly enough to pay for your sins—Jesus—then there remains no other sacrifice for you. You cannot trample Jesus' blood underfoot for a lifetime and then expect that same blood to cover your sins. Yes, there was a thief on the cross, so there is hope to the day you die. But there was only one thief on the cross who repented, to show that he is the exception, not the rule, and therefore you should not wait to the day you die.

"But isn't it God's job to forgive everyone no matter what?" God owes no one the forgiveness of Christ's cross (v.14). The cross is sufficient for any and all who will ever turn from sin and trust in Christ. But it is only applied to those who actually turn and trust. God is not the one who sinned against us; we sinned against him...so if we remain in our sins, he reserves the right to judge us rather than to forgive, because that's part of what it means to be God. God is love. But that does not mean that love is God. It is not my idea of love that determines who God should be. It is God's character and nature that determine what the character and nature of love should be. This is why all love is not love, because God is love, and this God is a God who makes distinctions. He accepts worship based on who He is, not based on who we are. God doesn't look at you and say, "well, based on her culture and background, based on his favorite sins and inclinations, based on her relationships or the way he feels like he's wired..." No. God

determines the terms of our engagement with him. And the terms are the same for all of us, because GOD is the same for all of us. God does not save us by obligation. He saves us by sovereign grace and mercy, neither of which by nature is ever earned or owed. No one ever has a right to mercy. But you can apply to God for it. You can ask for it. You can approach Jesus for it with a heart broken over your sins and a head ready to unlearn what you thought you knew about God. And whoever comes to Jesus repenting of their sin and self-definition, he will not cast out. If you want to learn how to do that, we want to help you.

PERSONAL/CHRISTIAN APPLICATIONS (What's this text call me to trust, feel, or do?)

Obey what you know, and God will give you more to understand and obey. Despise what you already know, and God will take it away. This is what we learn about God just in v.1. This is why there was no frequent vision, because no one cared to look at it, and most people were as blind to God's word as Eli. Now here again, we might think that the OT is judgy, so why preach it when Jesus is easier listening? But Jesus Himself said in Matt 13:12 *"To the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."* If you receive God's word, his intent is for you to obey what you know. The more you do that, the more he will give you of Himself to know and obey. God is a rewarder and an incentivizer. You multiply your 2 talents or 5, and he'll double it to you. But if you bury the one, he'll take it back. Friend, what are you doing with what God has given you to know of him? If you despise his word, then even the little you have of it will be taken from you. God's word is not to be neglected or changed. It's not like a hot plastic that you can inject into your own molding and shape for your own use. The word is the mold, and you are the plastic. It shapes you, not the other way around.

To whom much is given, much will be required (Lk 12:48). Who among us does not think that Eli and his sons are especially guilty because of their position as priests? We all recognize this. We are revolted by the hypocrisy. But isn't this just to say they deserve more of God's wrath because they sinned against more knowledge of God? Look at how close Eli was to God, and yet how far, far away. This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. What to me are all your sacrifices? Who cares that Eli was at the temple all the time—what good did it do him? He didn't let it change him at all. And how many professing Christians come to churches just like this one, week after week, enjoying the conversations, cooing over the children, closing their eyes as they sing the songs, and go away no more obedient to Jesus than when they came in? Enjoy your experience here at the church...and know that for all you hear, you'll be held accountable.

Passivity is not piety. Men, brothers, I'm talking to you. You don't respect Eli very much right now, do you? Then don't be him in your home, your neighborhood, your church, your office or school, your job site, your manufacturing plant. **Complacency is complicity.** Eli was complacent. Sin was happening on his watch, under his roof, right under his nose. He knew and did nothing. He honored himself. God judged him complicit. God condemned Eli's sins of omission just like He condemned Eli's sons' sins of commission. Where was Adam when the serpent approached Eve? Nowhere to be found. Man of God, your Creator put you here on this green earth to cultivate and keep your part of the garden. Serve and protect. Grow and guard people and things. So whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your heart. You are made to image God's creative care, deliberate initiative, and faithful responsibility. You take initiative to serve the people around you so they grow. You take responsibility for things. You bear the burden. You were born for this. So what that other men are lazy and self-serving and leave you to finish the job? Don't develop the habit of excusing yourself from responsibility. Don't just throw your hands up and say "What am I supposed to do?" You know better than that. Don't complain; care and correct. Don't whine; work. Try. Love. Take responsibility for the people and things around you. Pick up the other

man's slack, brother. A do-nothing approach at home and at church will do damage. Neglect always breeds decay in relationships, organizations, just as in gardens and buildings. Eli didn't commit all his sons' sins; yet he is just as culpable, because he didn't do anything about anything.

Prov 29:2, "*When the righteous flourish, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan.*" That is not just true of governments rewarding righteousness and having righteous people in power. It's true of God's people in the church, and your family at home, your student life in the classroom, and your company at work. That's about the righteous actually flourishing in doing good works, taking responsibility instead of evading responsibility, being an example rather than making an excuse. Are you flourishing, and helping others flourish, in this kind of responsible righteousness? Jesus took responsibility for your sins and failures. He picked up your slack. He flourished in righteousness, not so that you could slack, but so that you could flourish in righteousness like He did. Is responsibility borrowing trouble? Yes it is, from a worldly perspective. But isn't that just what Jesus did when he left His father's side to come into the world and make our sins and problems his own? Brother, praise God you ain't dead yet. Repent of your passivity now. However little breath is left in your lungs, flourish in righteousness while you still can. Don't evade responsibility. Take it. This is why Jesus redeemed you, so that you—even you—would be able and eager for good works. You are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that you would walk in them. Fear God more than man (v.15-18). Overcome fear of man with fear of God.

Youth is no obstacle to God. Eli was the supposedly venerable old man. His sons were the hot shots. But who did God send to speak his word? Little Samuel. John the Baptist leapt while he was still in the womb when Mary approached with Jesus *in utero*. Children, look at me. I said it last week and I'll say it again now. Your youth is no obstacle to God. Ask God in prayer to bless your reading of His word. Ask him to give you understanding and mercy for your sins in Jesus Christ. Ask Him to give you a heart submissive to good teaching and to the right authority of your parents. Ask him to set you apart for his service. Ask him to make you useful to Him in whatever you do. Ask him to teach you how to please and honor Him.

CHURCH APPLICATIONS (How does this text shape our life together a church?)

Be ready and available to serve God at God's house (v.4-10). Look at little Samuel in the temple. It's early—4am 5:30 maybe, sun's not even up, lamp has not yet gone out. He hears God's voice 3 times, thinks it's Eli, and he's running out of his bed saying "Here am I," to obey a man he must know is not a model of virtue or integrity. Is this how you respond when you are called to serve and sing, to listen and love, to give and pray in God's house? Do you say "Here am I"? Or is it more like, "where can I hide?" Brothers and sisters, we need more members like Samuel. "Here am I," faithful, available, teachable. Samuel knew he wasn't much to look at. But such as he was, he would be ready, alert, and available in God's house. No vanity. No false humility. No hesitation. Just self-forgetting faithfulness.

God's ambassadors must speak all God has said, even to powerful people, no matter how unpopular to them (17-18). This is for public preachers. It's also for personal evangelists. We proclaim both salvation and judgment; both comfort and conviction. Both faith and repentance. We cannot simply front all the benefits and hide all the costs of following Christ. Yes, we should be patient, winsome, kind, we should show perfect courtesy to all people. But that doesn't mean we lie to them. And this is why we cannot think we're preaching the gospel unless we call people to turn from their own sins and trust in Christ. And if we do, then God will uphold the faithful words of his faithful servants.

God is faithful to uphold the words of his faithful servants (19-20). *“The Lord was with Samuel and let none of his words fall to the ground.”* Now there is a uniqueness to that for Samuel and for every OT prophet that’s special and unrepeatable. God does not uphold our words to the same degree or in the same way as He did Samuel’s words. But we can be confident that if we are speaking God’s word, He will uphold His own word as we speak it faithfully, and this is one great encouragement to our evangelism.

CONCLUSION

Friends, if we want to worship the true God, then the only way to do that is through the one sacrifice of his only Son Christ Jesus. Jesus has paid the price for all our sacrilege. He suffered the punishment for our profanity and desecration of God’s worship and name. Eli’s sons persisted in treating God with contempt, his word with derision, and His sacrifice with selfishness. What about you. How have you been treating God?

