



©2021 Ginger Hertenstein

SERMON TITLE: The Power of Honoring God's Truth

SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 2:12-24, 3:1-18

DATE: October 3, 2021

View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

The Bible expresses strong opinions about good and evil. In fact, the Bible influences much of our thought about good and evil. Today we hear about people like Hophni and Phinehas on our newscasts. They were priests and we expect them to honor God's truth, yet Scripture defines them as scoundrels. The Bible pulls no punches. The Bible hides no secrets.

Watch out if you are a scoundrel! It is written, "[The LORD] will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail" (1 Sam 2:9).

Well, these young men treated the Lord's offerings with contempt. They intimidated the cooks and stole the meat offering before it was even processed. The meat was sacred because it was part of the sacrifice. Hophni and Phinehas also slept with the women who volunteered at the temple—we call that sexual assault in 2021. These were not good people.

Their elderly father heard complaints about their actions. He was told they would be judged by God. However, he did nothing, except talk: "What you are doing is not good." He did not put a stop to their behavior or remove them from office.

1. Do you think they qualify to be punished by the local authorities?
2. Do you think they qualify to be cut off or punished by God?
3. Do you think evil should be judged?

Don't we want to say, "There outta be a law." But Priest Eli turned a blind eye.

He was all talk and no action. His sons were "wicked." This biblical word means "they had no regard for the Lord." They had no "knowledge of God."

Knowing God means entering into fellowship with God, and acknowledging God's claims on your life. It is belief—accepting Jesus; and it involves action—doing what Jesus teaches.

Juxtaposed to Eli's sons was Samuel, a young boy preparing for ministry. His mother had kept her promise to God and left him at the temple to be tutored. He was growing up there. So let's hear the state of things. READ 1 Samuel 3:1-9

Did you catch the nature of the culture?

- Messages from the Lord were very rare.
- Visions were quite uncommon.
- Eli, the priest, was almost blind.
- And we know that shenanigans in the temple—abuse of authority, theft, moral failure—were going on with his sons.

What conclusion do you come to about the culture? It sounds darker than today.

In the midst of the darkness, though, did you catch a tiny thread of light? We are told, "The lamp of God had not yet gone out."

No matter how dark things seem there's a thread of light, a silver stream in the temple of the Lord and Samuel is sleeping there.

Have you ever heard nothing but silence when life was tough? Have you felt the darkness? No matter how dark life seems to you, look for that thread of light from God, because God is always near, no matter what your circumstances are.

We learned last week that Samuel was no ordinary boy. Hannah and Elkanah visited him once each year. Enough years had passed that Hannah had borne five more children. He was probably twelve by now, perhaps even older.

We are talking about secondary people in the Bible and how, though seemingly insignificant, they did marvelously significant things for God. Today we look at Samuel's early years as he was mentored by the elder priest, Eli. Eli knew God and had been a priest for many years, even though his family members had deep problems.

Do you have a spiritual mentor? Do you have someone who is mature in the faith with whom you can discuss your spiritual questions? Do you have someone you trust when things are rough?

Samuel had his family, who provided a strong spiritual foundation, and also Eli. Eli had some shortcomings. He was not able to stand up to his sons and kick them out! But Eli also possessed a tremendous depth of understanding about God.

This might have made life difficult for Samuel.

Difficult times are necessary for individuals, and also for churches and nations, in order for us to hear and receive God's

Word and perspective. Isn't it interesting that our nation's hard time began in 2020. How's your 2020 vision? We have been given opportunity to right our perspective, should we set our minds to it.

Samuel knew nothing about the Lord. How did Samuel get from knowing nothing to knowing something? How do you get to the place where you can hear God's voice? It takes someone who has experienced God to lead someone else to God. So let's read about it. READ 1 Samuel 3:10-18

Samuel slept in the tabernacle at Shiloh. It was the only temple at that time. It was a complex of buildings but Eli and Samuel stayed in the temple. This area had two rooms. The Holy Place, held the Lord's lampstand and Table of consecrated bread. Samuel slept there. The second room held the Ark of the Covenant, which contained Aaron's staff, a golden jar of manna, and the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments—the people's covenant with God.

The chest had an atonement cover where God promised to have Divine mercy and grace. All of these things are symbolic, which I will explain during Communion.

I want to ask two questions:

1. Why was Samuel living there?
2. Why was the message he heard so appalling?

We are going to take the second question first.

The difficult message Samuel heard scared him. How terrible to have to share it with a man who was your elder and overseer. But Eli knew differently.

Eli knew that God pulls no punches. God speaks the truth. God lets us "SEE" ourselves. 2020 VISION. **Only when we see our mistakes clearly can we choose to correct them or not.** The Psalmist writes:

"Lead me in your truth, and teach me" (25:5a) and
 "O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me;" (43:4).

God is light and God is truth. Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32).

A prophet's number one job is to relay the truth God reveals to him. Samuel would have to speak the hard truth to leaders and kings again and again. Eli knew this.

Why do you need to know the truth?

1. Do you want a doctor who refuses to give you the bad news?
2. Do you want a teacher who excuses what you don't know on the exam?
3. Do you want a coach who gives you a trophy even though you missed half the practices?
4. Do you want a bank who does not give you your correct balance?
5. Do you want bathroom scales that lie? (we might answer yes to this one!)
6. Do you want a government that has no standards or crooked judgment?

"You will know the truth and the truth will make you free," Jesus says.

Ask God to lead you to the truth. It's powerful. Ask God to send out his truth so you and I can learn and practice it. **Glossing over it will cost you your soul.**

Finally, why was it necessary for Samuel to live in the temple with Eli and his terrible sons instead of being nurtured at home with his mother and father? Isn't this a bad circumstance; a less than fair bargain that Hannah made with God?

Let this story help you.

A girl lost her eyesight at the age of two months and then her father died. She and her mother moved in with her grandmother. They mentored the girl, much like Eli raised Samuel. They helped her memorize the Bible. By the time she was fifteen, she had memorized all four gospels, the Pentateuch, Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and many Psalms. These caring women helped her see when she could not see. At age eight, the child began writing poetry. It was set to music. She grew up and lived to be 95, writing all of her life. **Fanny Crosby** wrote over 8,000 hymns.

She wasn't able to live life in normal activities as other children. So Christian relatives taught her to know and hear God, which led her to her purpose.

Sometimes adversity is not the worst thing. Here's what Fanny Crosby said:

"It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me."

Her relatives said she certainly would not have been able to memorize like she did had she not been blind.

Adversity often seems to have no point. But in the vision of God it points us the right way. Are you seeing the value of investing yourself in God's truth? The truth will set you free, Jesus said.

Trust God for the truth. Listen to God's stories. Learn from them.

AMEN