

*The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the Word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual 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. Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 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. 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." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel a third time, 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. 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. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."*

Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 SS 1/15/12 1 Cor. 6:12-20 Jn. 1:43-51 Ps. 1; 119:XIII-XIV  
Hymns: 126, 16, 296, 290

### **GOD SPEAKS, AND WE LISTEN**

Speak, O Lord, Thy servant heareth, to Thy Word I now give heed;  
Life and spirit Thy Word beareth, all Thy Word is true indeed.  
Death's dread power in me is rife; Jesus, may Thy Word of Life  
Fill my soul with love's strong fervor that I cling to Thee forever. (TLH:296:1)

Fellow redeemed in Christ,

"Does the Bible really say that?" "Is that really what that passage means?" Have you never wondered about something the Bible teaches? Simply what we think, or what a pastor thinks, or what a church teaches is not going to resolve our questions. We all need to know for ourselves what GOD says IN HIS WORD. Our text this morning reminds us that **GOD SPEAKS, AND WE LISTEN**.

We're told, "*The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli.*" Eli was the High Priest, and Samuel was his young apprentice. The Lord was preparing Samuel to be a prophet. There had been prophets before. Moses referred to himself as a prophet (Dt. 18:15). But it wasn't until the time of Samuel that God first spoke in Scripture of the formal order of the prophets (1 Sam. 10:5; 19:20). In his training under Eli, Samuel did such things as helping with the sacrifices and prayers, watching the Ark of the Covenant, and opening the temple doors in the morning. Samuel also served Eli himself, who was old and couldn't see well and needed help with certain things he couldn't do any more.

We read, "*In those days the Word of the Lord was rare.*" Our text explains: "*there were not many visions.*" In those days God didn't give many visions or revelations to His people because: 1) there hadn't been many faithful prophets to whom and through whom God could speak, and 2) the people of Israel had been so disobedient to God and hadn't wanted to hear what God had to say. One commentary notes:

It was a gloomy time of spiritual poverty in the nation of Israel, a time marked by apostasy as well as prophetic inactivity. The (lack of prophecy from God) was no

doubt a chastisement for the (people's falling away from God). The spiritual leader, Eli, the High Priest, was old and weak. Care of the sanctuary was in the hands of Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas, (whom Scripture refers to as) "*wicked men...who had no regard for the Lord*" (1 Sam. 2:12). Their conduct was scandalous, even for that depraved age. They regarded God's ordinances as something they could use for their own advantage. They took, sometimes by force, parts of the sacrifices before they were offered to the Lord. Their open immorality was notorious. The unblushing frankness concerning their vices led others into sin and brought the sanctuary services into contempt. (Sermon Studies on the Old Testament, Series B, NPH, p. 73)

*"In those days the Word of the Lord was rare."* How terribly sad! From the people to the priests, there was a lack of love and respect for God and His Word. God's judgment was a long period of silence during which the people received almost no messages from Him. This reminds us of the Lord's warning in the book of Amos about a famine of His Word. It stands as a warning to us. People want to be their own gods, running in every direction away from God and the Bible. Isn't it amazing how people will listen to some so-called 'newly discovered book of the Bible,' or The Da Vinci Code (which claims, among other things, that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, and they had children)! But the same people don't want to hear what God says in the Bible.

We need to watch ourselves that we don't take God and His Word for granted. If those who have received God's Word and known about Him ignore what they have been given, and there is no repentance, the Lord will eventually take His Word away and send the Gospel elsewhere to people who will take it to heart. Martin Luther saw this happening in his beloved Germany already during his own lifetime. Look at the famine of God and the Bible in Europe. Europe has all those big, beautiful cathedrals, which for centuries in the past were filled with worshipers, but are now nearly empty on Sunday mornings. Did you know that many of the cathedrals in England are no longer being used for worshiping God, but instead are being used to train circus performers and rock climbers? What spiritual emptiness. Look at the growing indifference toward, and outright defiance of God and the Bible right here in our own country!

One night the priest Eli and Samuel were both in their beds in the temple complex, Samuel being right by the Ark of God. It was through the Ark that God made His presence known to His people. Often it was near the Ark or above it that God revealed Himself directly to them. The stage was set for the Lord to speak to Samuel.

*"Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' 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.'"* This happened twice. Samuel didn't realize it, but God was speaking to him. The Lord was speaking to Samuel because Samuel was a faithful believer. God had chosen Samuel to be a prophet to bring God's Word to His people.

Being a believer, Samuel already knew the Lord by faith. When we're told, *"Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord;"* our text explains what this means: *"the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him."* That is, Samuel had not received a direct revelation from God before that day. Although God's people had been so unfaithful to Him, God had not forsaken them. He raised up a faithful prophet, Samuel, and faithfully restored His Word to His people. The people didn't deserve it, but God is a God of

grace. Scripture promises, *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy”* (Ps. 103:8).

We sin every day. All too often we do what we know we shouldn't do, and don't do what we know we should! We often ignore and rebel against God's Word. We don't deserve it, but God is still a God of grace to us, too. He continues to raise up His faithful pastors and teachers to bring us His Word. Through His Word, God keeps turning us to Him.

The Lord called Samuel a third time. A third time Samuel came to Eli, thinking it was he who had called. *“Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, ‘Go and lie down, and if He calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.’”* Eli did the right thing in telling Samuel to listen to God when He speaks.

*“So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there”* (revealing Himself to Samuel in some visible way), *“calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for Your servant is listening.’”* Samuel did the right thing in following Eli's instructions, and listening to whatever God had to tell him.

*“Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening.”* It does NOT say, *“Listen Lord, for Your servant is speaking.”* WE don't tell God the way things should be, GOD tells us the way things are. We don't sit in judgment over what the Bible says, subjecting the Bible to our reason or feelings, ignoring or defying or attempting to explain away parts of the Bible we don't want to accept. The psalmist says, *“Your Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path”* (119:105). When God speaks to us in the Bible, He does the talking, and you and I do the listening.

The Bible says, *“The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”* (2 Tim. 3:15-16). The Bible is our salvation. The Bible teaches us about Jesus, who died on the cross to save us from our sins. Speaking about the Bible, the psalmist says to God, *“All of Your Word is truth”* (119:160). All of the Bible is the truth from God, giving us wisdom and guidance for every area of life. Why take the Bible for granted, or defy it, or try to explain it away, when the Bible is our salvation and our life!

*“Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening.”* God's long period of silence to His people before Samuel came had ended. And to His faithful servant Samuel, and through Samuel, the Lord once again gave His Word to His people.

We can all learn from Samuel's example. When you have questions about what the Bible says, are you sitting down with your Bible and studying all the verses you can find about it so that your questions are answered by God's Word? Jesus promises us, *“If you continue in My Word, then are you truly My disciples; and you shall know the truth”* (Jn. 8:31-32a). Receive what the Bible says in a believing heart. Respond to what God says in His Word with humility. Place your faith and trust in all that the Bible says. Obey the Word of God. **GOD SPEAKS, AND WE LISTEN.**

Precious Jesus, I beseech Thee, may Thy words take root in me;  
 May this gift from heaven enrich me so that I bear fruit for Thee!  
 Take them never from my heart till I see Thee as Thou art,  
 When in heavenly bliss and glory I shall greet Thee and adore Thee. Amen!  
 (TLH #296:4)