

Speak Lord, Your Servant Hears

By John R. Gibson

Those things “written before, were written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4) and I can think of few, if any Old Testament texts that better illustrate for us what our response should be to the word of God. Let’s think together about some important principles found in this story from the life of God’s prophet.

Though we are not given an age, Samuel was quite young and had not yet been called to be a prophet. However, because his mother had promised him to the Lord, Samuel was dwelling at the tabernacle in Shiloh with Eli, judge and high priest in Israel. Though in many respects he was a good man, in the second chapter a man of God, i.e. a prophet, had charged Eli with honoring his sons more than he honored God. This prophet had gone on to say that Eli’s two sons would both be killed on the same day. Though this man of God had been sent to the high priest, it was unusual in that day for God to provide a prophetic revelation (3:1). With that background, let’s watch the events of chapter 3 unfold.

Both the aged priest and his young assistant were lying down when the Lord called out to Samuel. Mistakenly thinking Eli was calling for him, Samuel ran to him, but was told to lie back down because he had not called him. When this happened three times, Eli realized it was the Lord calling out to Samuel, so he instructed him to answer if it happened again, “Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.” Of course, the Lord did call out to Samuel again and this time he did not run to Eli, but invited the Lord to speak to him. When the Lord spoke to Samuel it was to tell him that Eli’s house was to be punished in a way that would cause the ears of Israel to tingle. And Samuel was not simply told that Eli’s sons were wicked, but was told that Eli was being held responsible for failing to restrain his sons.

The next morning Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the message he had been given from the Lord, but when Eli realized this he instructed Samuel not to hold anything back. With this encouragement the young man gave the grim word to Eli and received an incredible response from the aged priest—“It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him.” The chapter closes by noting that with this appearance of God Samuel became established as the Lord’s prophet. What a story, but let’s think about some things we can learn from it.

“**Speak, Lord!**” While we should not expect the Lord to speak to us in the same way He spoke to Samuel, He has delivered to us His inspired word (2 Timothy 3:16) and it is imperative that we develop a strong desire to hear this message (1 Peter 2:2-3). Let’s not allow this precious message to sit on a shelf, but let’s get the Bible out and allow the Lord to speak. When class is in session or the word is being proclaimed from the pulpit, let’s have real interest in hearing the Lord speak.

“Speak, for Your **servant** hears.” While we must first have the desire to listen, the attitude with which we listen will determine the profitability of our hearing (or reading). Will we listen for entertainment as was done to Ezekiel (33:30-33) or will we listen as humble servants eager to do the will of our Master (Matthew 7:21; James 1:21-25)? While we cannot do the Master’s will without first listening to Him and learning what He would have us do, the reality is that many people are listening as anything but obedient servants. Let’s not ever be guilty of calling Him Lord without committing ourselves to doing what He says (Luke 6:46).

“Please **do not hide it from me.**” Though Eli failed to properly deal with his sinful sons, you

could not ask for a better attitude toward God's message. Though Samuel was afraid to tell his mentor the bad news, Eli implored him not to hold back anything. How do we listen to God or how do we want our instructors to convey the message? Are we ever like those of Isaiah's day whom implored the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things" (30:10)? Do we ever avoid reading certain portions of Scripture because we know in advance it will challenge us to change our lifestyle? What Eli recognized and we too must be cognizant of is this—God's message is not going to disappear and we are not going to escape our accountability to it if we ignore it. It may pierce to the depths of the heart (Hebrews 4:12), but better to deal with the pain now than in the judgment (John 12:48).

"It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him." While it is not easy to ask someone to give us the cold, hard facts, it is even more difficult to accept them without any excuse-making or attempts at self-justification. It is tempting to become angry with the messenger when the message is unpleasant, but like David's simple "I have sinned" when the prophet Nathan rebuked him in 2 Samuel 11, Eli offered no excuses for his failures, was not angry with Samuel, and accepted the fact that the Lord was going to bring judgment. Can we have the same spirit and not be angry with the messenger or the One who is the source of the message?

Are we listening? Are we listening as servants? Are we listening for all of God's word and not just the pleasant parts? Are we willing to acknowledge it is as being from the Lord and His right to say it?

"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." James 1:21-25

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