

Sunday Sermon: January 21, 2018

Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Sermon Theme: It Take Faith to Follow

1. To Trust 2. To Listen and Hear 3. To Do What The Lord Says

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

² *One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ 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. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel.*

Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ 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.

⁶ *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."

⁷ *Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.*

⁸ *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. ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ *The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"*

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

There are many places around Las Vegas where you can go hiking. You can find a park that has some trails, you can go to Lone Mountain and hike up that, or you can go to Red Rock or Mt. Charleston and attack some of their trails.

There is really one basic rule in hiking. STAY ON THE TRAIL. This is very important. That trail will lead somewhere. That trail has a destination. But we get into trouble when we're looking at the map and it doesn't look right, or it seems to be taking too long, or maybe we just don't think we are on the right trail.

If we start to question that we are following the right trail, we can quickly get ourselves into trouble. Instead of staying on the trail, we can leave the trail or try to take some other trails and hope they are the right ones.

It takes faith to follow the trail, especially if we have never been on it before. It takes faith to trust that the trail has the destination we want and that we haven't made any wrong turns even if it seems like a long time. It takes faith to follow when we don't know what is around the next corner or where the destination is. Faith to follow the trail can be the difference between danger and safety. This is true in many places in time. Nowhere is this more true than in our spiritual life with our God.

Like a hiking trail, we know the destination that God has in mind for us: heaven. But we may not know the path through this life that he will lead us on to get there. We do not know how long our path is, or what kind of twists and turns it has. Still, God is there with his promises, "Continue on the path I give you. Stay on my trail and I will see you through."

This morning we look at a young man named Samuel. We will see that Samuel needed faith to follow the path that God led him on. Samuel needed faith to trust in the Lord, to listen when God spoke and heard what the Lord said, and to follow God and do what the Lord said.

The lesson of Samuel starts with his mother and father. His father's name was Elkanah and his mother's name was Hannah. Hannah had not been able to have children. This was a problem because Jewish society prized children above many other blessings. If a woman did not bear children, it was often thought that God was punishing her for some reason.

This caused Hannah a lot of problems, a lot of sadness in her life. It was so hard on her that while her family was in Shiloh to celebrate the Passover, she went to the temple to offer a special prayer asking God to help her with this problem. In her prayer, she made a vow to the Lord, that if he would grant her a son, she would dedicate him to the work of the Lord. Her prayer was so intense, so emotional, that when Eli the priest saw her, he thought that she was drunk.

God heard her prayer and answered it. Hannah and Elkanah had a son. But Hannah did not forget her vow. She named her son Samuel which means “the Lord hears” and, when he was old enough, she brought him to the temple and dedicated him to the work of the Lord. They left him at the temple to serve there.

Samuel was raised by Eli the priest. Eli taught Samuel all the ways of the Lord and the ways of the temple and Samuel became a great help to Eli. He was faithful in service to the Lord, just as his mother had wanted.

But, there was a problem. Not everyone was as faithful to the Lord as Samuel. Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phineas, who were also priests. They did not observe the Law of the Lord when it came to worship or his temple. They abused their position of authority and used as a license to sin and to lead others into sin as well. Eli failed to stop his sons in these things. Because of this great wickedness and sinfulness of the priesthood, the Lord has largely pulled away from them. We see in the first verse of our sermon text, **In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.**

When you were growing up, who had the most influence on you? I think most of us would answer that our parents had a big influence on us, but we might also answer that there were other people who influenced our lives as well. Brothers and sisters or maybe our group of friends might also be on our list of those who influenced our life in a big way. What about those influences? Were they always good?

Most of us have to admit that there were times in our life when the bad influence of peer pressure or friends got us to dabble in sex, drugs, alcohol, shoplifting, or other petty crime. Maybe we saw how much “fun” our brothers and sisters were having. We saw that they got away with something and then we knew we could get away with it too. Maybe we wanted to fit in with our friends, so instead of refusing to do something sinful, we did it too.

It would have been very easy for Samuel to follow all the bad influences around him. These sons of Eli would have been much like older brothers, maybe even uncles to Samuel. They would have been people that Samuel looked up to. But they were also the bad boys who made sinful choices and were not sorry about those choices. Another bad example was Eli, who failed to stop his sons in their sin. Samuel, would have learned that he could get away with some of the same things if he wanted to.

Instead, the Lord worked in Samuel a faith which followed him. Instead of following the sinful example of Eli’s sons, Samuel walked in the way of the Lord. Twice in chapters 1 and 2 we are told that Samuel grew in stature and favor before God and man. He listened to the Lord and followed the Lord. In these chapters, those words are contrasted almost immediately with the wickedness and sinfulness, the lack of faith and the lack of following, of Hophni and Phineas and Eli himself.

As we heard already, the Lord had turned his back on the wickedness that he saw. He did not appear to these wicked priests or speak to them, as he had before. He did not speak to them because they would not listen and speak God’s Word faithfully. Yet, Samuel was the exception. God was going to speak to Samuel and the faith which the Lord worked would listen to the Lord.

It’s important to remember that when Samuel awoke and heard the voice, he had no reason to think that it was anyone other than Eli who was calling to him. He had no reason to think that this time was any different than the many other times he had answered Eli’s calls.

Yet, when he runs into Eli’s room and asks what he can help with, Eli says he never called.

A second time a voice calls Samuel. He again runs in to see what Eli might need. Again, Eli says he did not call and sends Samuel back to bed.

It happens a third time. Finally, old Eli understands that this is the Lord calling to Samuel. He tells Samuel that when it happens again he should tell the Lord he is listening.

Imagine what kind of faith that would have taken. The voice of the Lord is rare. He is not calling out to Eli or anyone else, he is calling out to a young man who is little more than a servant boy in the temple. Yet, Samuel has the faith to follow the Lord and to listen when the Lord spoke.

Eli actually gave Samuel a great piece of advice, Shut up and Listen. Over the many years of his ministry the Lord would speak to him and through him. Samuel would be the Lord’s representative in times when listening to the Lord would be needed. There would be many times that the Lord would speak to Samuel, and these world would not be pleasing to the ears the people. He would listen to the Lord and deliver his Word to the people, both good and bad. He would carry with him the truth of the Lord and he would speak that truth even when it wasn’t convenient.

The Lord worked faith in Samuel which listened to the Lord, that faith also allowed Samuel to follow the Lord by doing what it was the Lord asked him to do.

The message that God gave to Samuel must have been difficult for him. The Lord had judged Eli and his family and he would no longer stand for their wickedness. Samuel's first words from the Lord as the Lord's prophet were words of judgment against the people who had raised him. The Word of the Lord would get no easier for Samuel. He would have to stand in opposition to all of the people when they demanded a king against the Lord's will. He would have to go and tell Saul that the Lord had rejected him and that he would no longer speak to him. Then he would have to go and anoint another king. Yet, the faith that the Lord had worked in the heart of Samuel allowed him to do all of these things. He followed the Lord by trusting in him, by listening to him and then by doing what the Lord told him to do.

The faith that the Lord worked in Samuel's heart is the same faith that the Lord works in our heart. Don't get me wrong, I doubt that God will speak to us directly, but he definitely speaks to us in his Word. How many of us do not know our way to heaven? How many of us do not know what sin is? How many of us do not know what God asks of us in our lives? This is God speaking to us, showing us the path, he wants us to follow.

The fact that we know these things shows us that God is already working faith in our hearts which listens when God speaks, but what about the other two. Do we have a faith that trusts and does what the Lord asks us to do?

Yet, even though we know these things, how many times do we refuse to trust, refuse to follow, refuse to do what the Lord wants us to do. Our own sin gets in the way of faithfully following the Lord's path for our life. We follow the path of someone or something else. This is when we get into trouble and fall into sin and possibly unbelief.

Samuel is a good example to us of a simple faith that trusted in the Lord, that listened when the Lord spoke to him, and then did what the Lord asked. This is a simple formula for our faith. Trusting in our Savior as the only way to heaven, motivates us to listen when he speaks in his Word, then we joyfully and gladly put that Word into action.

May we have a faith that follows where the Lord leads. May we come often to listen to the Word through which the Holy Spirit builds us up in faith and may we never lack the courage and strength to always do what the Lord asks us to do in that Word. Amen.