

Title: Help, We Need a Priest!
Text: 1 Samuel 2:27-36
Theme: Our failure to save ourselves
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: We need what only God provides

Read Text:

1 Samuel 2 begins with promise, but that promise is set against the rest of the chapter and the rest of the chapter is dark. If you really take the time to think about what is actually happening here, it is very dark and for many it can open wounds that have festered or awaken memories that you may want to suppress.

One of the reasons why we can trust the Bible is because God does not sugar coat the truth. Even though an Israelite is recording this history the history is not flattering, it is sad. In fact, it is depressing. Now, in the New Testament era, there is no such thing as an office or a position of a priest. There were priests in the Old Testament, but that position back then pointed to Christ, who fulfilled that role and rendered it obsolete. But, the role of an Old Testament priest was to represent the people of God to God. He was supposed to take the sacrifices brought by the people and offer them to God in accordance with God's law. His job was to know God's law, teach God's law to the people and then help them follow it. When the priests failed to do their job, as was the case in Israel, it had disastrous consequences many of which we can relate to.

We see the result in the nation as a whole. The people were not faithful to follow God's law and were looking more and more like the nations around them. If something did not change, there would not be a people of God. In this text we are on the ground and at what is supposed to be the center of this nation. When we stop to see what is going on we realize part of the reason why this nation is so fragmented, so vulnerable, so violent and evil. The spiritual leadership of the nation is corrupt. The priests who were supposed to represent the people to God and in some ways represent God to the people were awful. They were corrupt. They were abusing the system they were entrusted to follow. They were misrepresenting God to the people.

In verse 11 and in verse 21, we are given a snippet of hope. But, the rest of this chapter reveals just how desperate the times really were. In the days of the judges, God would send a leader to bring some relief. Now, he sends a prophet. Verse 27 describes him as a "man of God." The point is clear. God would not be mocked and God will carry out his plan. And yet, why did God bother to send this prophet who warned Eli of the coming judgment? Again, one of the dominant themes of the Bible is this: even in wrath, God remembers mercy.

1. **The amazing mercy and generosity of God.** (27-28)

There is this perception (misperception really) that God in the OT is old, cranky, angry and prone to temper tantrums that wipe out large swaths of people in floods for fire and brimstone and that God in the NT is young, gentle, loving and extremely patient and perhaps even tolerant

of sin. I certainly hope that you are disavowed of that nonsense. This text is a very good example of why that is simply not true. Look at verses 27 and 28. Look at the grammar. You should notice that the man of God is not a raging lunatic whose face is red and neck strained as his voice is screaming. The man has been sent by God and is saying what God has said. And God asks Eli a question. In fact, he asks him two questions.

“Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh?”

What is a question designed to do? And yes, I just asked you a question. I asked you a question because I want you to engage. I want you follow along. I want this to make sense to you. I want you to connect the dots. That is what God is seeking to do with Eli. Eli, think with me. Did I reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? The answer is what? Yes! What is the house of Eli’s father? What is God referring to? Do you see it now? God is referring to the tribe of Levi. Both Moses and Aaron were from the tribe of Levi. The entire exodus operation happened with a focus upon the tribe of Levi. God used two brothers from the tribe of Levi to pull off one of the most incredible series of events in the history of the world. This first question is in many ways a summary of the first part of the book of Exodus. God used Moses and Aaron to lead the children of Israel out of a hopeless and terrible situation. God did this! God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush, then multiple times in Egypt through the plagues, then at the Red Sea, and then at Sinai. Eli, don’t forget that. God did this. This is what God did for the house of your father. God is not just powerful, God is good. God is merciful. God is generous with his mercy. The second question goes a little deeper.

“Did I choose him (your father – Levi/Aaron) out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me?”

The worship life of the people of God is enormously important because it is reflection of what we really believe about God. In the OT the worship life of Israel is centered around the tabernacle/temple and the sacrifices. In the NT the worship life of the church is centered around Christ and the gospel. In glory the worship life of the people of God will be centered around the throne of God. How we worship expresses what we believe and it helps shape what we believe. Therefore...

Eli, think about the weight and significance of this. The entire priesthood is the heart of the life of OT Israel. The tabernacle life ordered the life of the nation. The sacrifices were the means by which their sin was forgiven. The holy of holies was the throne room of God on earth. The tabernacle itself is what made Israel unique. The Sovereign God of the universe lived with them. Out of all the nations of the earth, God chose this ragtag group of slaves to be his people and out of all the tribes he chose the tribe of Levi and the line of Aaron to be his priests in that nation. The ephod is the colorful linen garment that covered the torso of the high priest. It had 12 onyx stones set in it. Each stone had one of the names of the tribes etched in it. When the high priest wore this into the holy of holies, he was representing the entire nation of Israel. He

was the mediator between God and his people and as such his work, his ministry, his offering was a preview of Christ. When we sing the song, "Before the throne of God above" we sing the words, "my name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart." Jesus is our perfect high priest who did it all. He offered up the perfect sacrifice, which was himself. He now stands on our behalf before the Father and intercedes for us. Eli was supposed to be a preview of that and all the high priests and kings and prophets so that when Christ came, the people would know what to expect. The means by which Israel could be forgiven of their sin depended on the high priest doing his job. That is an enormous weight and responsibility. Then comes the statement.

"I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel."

I entrusted the life and means of worship to the house of your father and this has come to you. Do you realize what you have? Do you realize the incredible mercy and generosity that has been shown to you? No other nation on the earth at that time had the word of God. They did not have a means for their sins to be forgiven. They had no hope. Israel did. God spoke to them. God revealed himself to them. God delivered them. God led them, provided for them and he lived with them and through the sacrificial system made it possible for them to live near him without being consumed by his justice.

These kinds of questions are good for our souls, aren't they? We are so prone to take God for granted and to be casual, even apathetic and unmoved by him or disengaged in our worship of him. Is the fact that God rescued you from your sin, from your slavery, from your hopelessness become old news? Has the coming of Christ to this earth, the condescension of the Creator to a zygote, a fetus, an infant, a toddler, a child, a young man, and a man, who would live in obscurity, work laboriously in poverty, would be overlooked and marginalized in Nazareth, treated as a 2nd class member of the despised Jewish people under the oppression of Rome, only to be rejected and crucified in order that your sin could be paid for, so that you would not be condemned to pay for your own sin. Has the wonder and the weight of that become almost meaningless to you?

Eli and his sons lived next to the Tabernacle. Eli went into the holy of holies on the day of atonement and poured the blood of the sacrificial animal on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. And yet, somehow being that close to God in distance did not cause him to take God as seriously as he should. There was no awe of God. In fact, his response and his sons to all of this is inexplicable.

2. The inexplicable response (29-30)

The man of God presses it home. In view of this sacred and critical ministry, why then do you scorn **my sacrifices** and **my offerings** that I commanded? This is personal to God. He calls them "my sacrifices and my offerings" although if we were in Israel back then, we would have been tempted to think of what we were offering as our sacrifices. The truth is, everything that we have is the Lord's. Our voice belongs to him. Our songs belong to him. Our hands, mind,

resources, job, all belong to him. The offerings that Israel gave actually belonged to God anyway. Eli's sons were worthless men (v.12). They did not know the LORD. They knew about God, but they did not know him. They did not love God or treasure him and therefore though they participated in the rituals and ceremonies, they did not truly worship him. It was empty ritual, ceremony, habit, sentimental tradition. In reality, they worshipped themselves. There was no heart, no faith, no belief! They were hypocrites of the highest order. They used the worship of God and the deeply meaningful religious life of God's people as a means of fattening themselves and indulging their own pleasure. As you learned last week, they had no fear of God, no respect for God's law, and had no qualms about taking the choicest pieces of meat from the offerings in order to gorge themselves on it. And they got their dad to indulge with them. C'mon dad, it's ok. Here, have some of this. This is good! I know you want some. Eli fattened himself along with his sons at the expense of taking God seriously. Hannah's role as a mom centers around God and her costly worship of him. Eli, the high priest's role as a dad, centered around his sons and himself. And while his sons took the lust of the flesh and indulged with women and not only food, Eli had no moral authority to warn his sons about that sin because he had so compromised his own integrity with them. Eli knew the truth and to some degree respected the truth. But, in the moment, he failed to take it seriously. He became casual with the holiness of God. Brothers and sisters, God is never casual about his holiness. God is incredibly merciful and generous with his grace, true. But he is never casual about his holiness. Therefore, his grace is not cheap, nor should his mercy be taken lightly. Eli is spiritually dull with Hannah and with Samuel as we will see. In the next chapter, God speaks directly to Samuel. God does not speak directly to Eli. In this text and in the next, God speaks to someone else instead of Eli. (more on that next week)

Eli made a choice to honor his sons above God. By giving in to what his sons wanted instead of disciplining and disciplining them, Eli contributed to their scorning of God and to the destruction of their lives. Did he love his sons? Sure, but his love was an idolatrous love. He chose them above God and had to bear part of the blame for their evil. Eli is such a pathetic man. He failed his sons. He failed the nation. He failed God. He failed because he failed to take God's word seriously. As the rest of the story of Eli's life plays out, we see a man who resigns himself to his "lot in life." This is the path that he has chosen and he acts as if he is now powerless to change. This is my bed and now I have to lay in it. He is apathetic and lethargic. But he did not have to be.

Every one of us, every single one of us could be Eli because every single one of us can look at our lives with regret. Regret can lead to remorse or it can lead to repentance. Remorse without the gospel is self-centered pity. Repentance with the gospel is Christ-exalting forgiveness. Perhaps you have been an indulgent parent and you realized that you failed to press upon them the importance of God, the gospel and the church and you allowed all sorts of things to get in the way. Perhaps you gave away your mind, heart and body to some lusts of the flesh and you can look back at wasted years in the desert of addictions. Perhaps you just did nothing but work and tried to accumulate as much money as you could and along the way, you wasted your life on toys and stuff. Every one of us can look at our lives with regret. Why did God send this man of God to Eli? Why does God do this sort of thing? Why did God send the prophets? It was to

warn them. And every single time, someone took God's Word seriously and repented, God forgave.

The story of Manasseh blows my mind. Manasseh was the king of Judah. His father was Hezekiah. Manasseh was a terrible king. He was extremely evil, immoral and violent. 2 Kings 21 said that he led the nation of Judah to out-sin the nations around them and the nations around them were really bad. He set up idols in the temple. He sacrificed his son. He offered up his son in an offering of fire. He used fortune tellers and mediums. But, we read in 2 Chronicles 33, that toward the end of his life, he repented. What good would that do, right? And what happened? God heard him and the Bible says, "Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God." (v.13)

Eli looked at his sons and was remorseful, but he did not repent. You can be sorry and not repent. You can be sorry and feel remorse and pity and feel sorry for yourself, or you can look to Christ and realize that he is a bigger savior than you are a sinner. Christ is your hope because only Christ is your payment. If you are just sorry, your sorry will never pay for anything.

Look at verse 30. God made a promise. He promised that the line of Levi through Aaron would be the line of the priests who "should go in and out before me forever." How can God keep that promise when the priests are so wicked? If God does not judge their sin, then God would be the indulgent parent, like Eli, treating his own Word flippantly, but if he rightly judges the priests, then it looks as if the very thing he promised will not happen. Two things to remember. 1) God is never trapped. He is never between a rock and hard place. The cross is the ultimate example of that. How can we be right with God when our sin has polluted ourselves so much? And how can people live with God forever if we cannot pay for our sins? How can God forgive our sin without making it appear that our sin is not really a big deal? What looked like a predicament to us was never a predicament to God. 2) God is sovereign and will carry out his plan. We are responsible to take God seriously and not presume upon his plan as an excuse for our sin. I think that it is possible that Eli thought that. I am the priest. I am in the chosen line. Instead of the promise of God being a motivation for holiness, the promise was an excuse for complacency and indulgence.

If you respond to the promises of God with complacency and indulgence there is something fundamentally wrong with your understanding of God.

3. **The grievous and necessary consequences** (31-34)

The next four verses are detailed warnings to Eli about what is going to happen. Eli's sin will have consequences that will continue to demonstrate that God is serious about his word. In our study of 1-2 Samuel, we will see this prophecy fulfilled. Eli's sons die on the same day. Years later, 85 of Eli's descendants are killed and many years later, Eli's line is replaced by another.

The fact that Hophni, Phineas, and Eli were close to the things of God did not mean that they were close to God. The privilege of being close to God's work has often had a blinding effect. So many times people think that because they are part of some ministry, they have taught a class,

led a small group, went on a missions trip, served on a board or committee that they have earned points with God. Doing things for God is not the foundation of our standing before God and not the basis for our acceptance. Remember what Jesus said about the person who said, “Lord, lord, did I not cast out evil spirits in your name and do so many other things?” If all of our talk about grace does not make us gracious and holy people, then perhaps we do not actually understand the gospel of grace?

When people who are charged with being faithful fail in that charge and refuse to change, God will set them aside and raise up someone else to carry on his cause. That is both a warning and a promise. The warning is not only to not to be presumptuous, but it is a warning to think rightly about our alliances.

My grandparents were members of a church, the church, the only church that was in their town. It was a town that their ancestors had founded, so the church was part of their family. It had lost the gospel years before and had become a false church. When I would visit my grandparents, my grandma wanted me to go to church with her so I could see her friends and other relatives. It frustrated her when I stopped going because it was such a bad church and instead would drive by myself to where I would hear the gospel. I couldn’t understand why they stayed. One day, she asked me to go for a walk with her and we walked to that church and went inside the sanctuary. She showed me the large table that was used for communion and showed me the little inscription on the nameplate fastened to the table. This table had been given to the church on the 50th wedding anniversary of her parents. She pointed to that and said, “that is why we go to this church.” I could have pointed to a Bible and said, this is why I don’t. Brothers and sisters, God does not choose sentimentalism over faithfulness to his word. Neither should we. As heavy as this text is, it does not end on a warning, but on a promise.

4. **Yet, there is hope.** (35-36)

God will raise up a faithful priest. And this faithful priest will do according to what is in the heart and mind of God and this faithful priest will have a sure house and he will go in and out before my anointed forever. This prophecy is fulfilled in the immediate sense in the early days of Solomon, but in the ultimate sense in Christ.

In fact, the story of Judges is how the people need a king and the story of 1-2 Samuel is how they get one, but they still need a better one. This text is the story of how they need a good priest, and while they get one, they still need a better. They also need a prophet. 3.1 says that word of the Lord was rare in those days. They needed to hear from God. We need a perfect prophet who will tell us the truth, a perfect priest who will offer a perfect sacrifice and a perfect king who will protect us and rule forever. It all comes together in Christ and it stays together – forever. Like priest, like people. Like people, like priest. As a people, demand God’s Word. Expect to hear it. Pray to hear it with your ears and your heart. Pray for those who teach it, explain it and proclaim it. Embrace it. Follow it. It tells us how much we need God and then shows us all that God has done.