

Title: Post Tenebras, Lux (After Darkness, Light)
Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-21
Theme: A faithful prophet says all that God says
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmnt: A faithful prophet is under the word that he speaks

Read Text:

God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. There is no dark side, no shadow, no bait and switch, no gotcha. God is transparent, open-handed and up front. Here it is. There is no fine print, secret agenda or hidden clauses. Therefore, God is truth. He does not lie because he cannot lie. It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6.18). He not only cannot lie; he is never inclined to lie because there is no reason for him to lie. God is good. *"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!"* (Psalm 106.1) Everything that God says and does is good. He never has to clean up a mess that he made. He is good. We get ourselves into a bind and we are tempted to lie or we do lie in order to get out of the mess that we made. God doesn't get himself into a bind. He never makes a bad deal. He never makes a bad promise. He is never at the mercy of a broken-down supply chain or labor shortage.

I was part of project once where a contractor guaranteed the price of the job and put it in writing. When the job was done, he went back on his word and charged significantly more. When asked, "what about your word, your guarantee?" He said, "sue me." In his eyes, I was nothing. He could step on me without a second thought knowing that humanly speaking, I couldn't do a thing. The legal cost of taking him on would be out of the question. He was too big. But God, who is infinitely bigger would never do that and cannot do that, because his very essence is light and truth. He never uses his power to bully his way. Neither does God ever make a bad promise. Sometimes we make a bad promise.

"If you do that, I will never speak to you again." "If you do that, I will never forgive you." "If you do that, I will cut you out of my life, and out of the family. You will be dead to me." "I'm out of here, and I'm never coming back." I talked with a man for a long time who was in that predicament. He had made a rash statement like that and thought that he had to keep that bad promise because he had made that promise. I pointed out that there's no virtue in keeping a bad promise. The problem was, the sin was, making a bad promise. What he needed to do was repent of the sin. Repent of making the bad promise. Eventually he realized that, praise God. But God is never in a bind, having made a bad promise. God is light. God is truth. God is good. God makes promises and the promises that God makes are good and for our good. He keeps them. God's word is God's character going on record. God is light, truth and goodness. God's promises reflect all that as well as his righteousness, justice, mercy, grace, wisdom, power, and sovereignty.

God communicates his Word through his messengers. God entrusts his Word to messengers to record everything that he wants them to write down and say everything that he wants them to

say. *“For no prophecy was every produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Peter 1.20) Therefore, if a messenger, or a prophet was going to be faithful, he had to say it all. He had to say everything that God said and he could not change it. He had to be willing to say the good stuff and the hard stuff. But, the hard stuff is necessary. The hard stuff is from God as much as the good stuff is from God. In fact, the hard stuff is actually part of the good stuff. God tells us the hard stuff so that we will stop going down a bad road. In Ezekiel 33, God explains his warnings. When he says (like he did to Eli in chapter 2) that judgment is going to come to you, it is so that you will repent and change, because if you do, then I will withhold the judgment. But, if the prophet (or preacher) doesn't say the hard stuff, then he is not only unfaithful, but his audience has no motivation for repentance and change. If I, because I want you to like me, am unwilling to address the hard stuff, then you legitimately have reason not to like me. But, the story of the human race is that many people would rather you lie and tell them what they want to hear than to tell them truth and what they need to hear. This issue is what separates the good from the bad, the pure from the evil. Satan will not tell you the whole truth, up front. He lies by only telling you what you want to hear. God tells you the whole truth, up front. He tells you what you need to hear, which is not always what you want to hear. This is obvious as far back as the Garden of Eden. God gives Adam and Eve the whole thing, but a tree. And he tells them the truth. Don't eat from the tree. God said, “No.” Satan, lied. He tried to use an eraser and replace God's “no” with his own “yes” and in doing so, painted God as an insecure tyrant, which is actually what Satan is. Adam and Eve found out too late, of the consequences of listening to Satan's lie. Jesus came and died because we are sinners who need forgiveness. If people do not know about their need, they will not be motivated to trust Christ.

The Old Testament was full of blessings and curses; promises and warnings. People liked the blessings, of course, but did not like the curses. You could be a popular “preacher” if you only told people about the blessings in the law. But, a faithful prophet would say it all. In Eli's case, he knew God's law, but he would not follow it. Verse 13 says that “his sons were blaspheming God, and he (Eli) did not restrain them.” The picture we have of Eli is that he was unwilling to say what had to be said, to draw the line and make the difficult decisions. If you refuse to listen to what God reveals, God will stop talking. If you disobey what God says, his Word will have little effect.

For almost 1,000 years, the European continent lived in the dark shadow of religious ceremony and ritual. The Word of God was buried under papal edicts and church traditions. What had been revealed was rejected and the result of that was evident in lives that had no gospel fruit. The gospel appeared to be lost. In 1500, the famine of God's Word was not in the giving, but in the receiving. There were very few actual believers and therefore there were very few preachers. But, guys like Wycliffe, Hus, Savonarola, then Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Simons discovered what God actually said. Instead of relying on traditions, they started studying and then preaching God's Word. In some cases, translating and distributing it. The result was profound. The more they preached, the more people listened and the more preachers, God raised up. Today, we look back and say, *Post tenebras lux* (after darkness, light). God was speaking again. It is not that he was revealing new truth, but the Spirit was lighting the flame of

truth in the hearts of people. 1 Samuel 3 is like the lighting of the flame of God's Word. The people were in darkness.

1. **Are you in a position to hear the Word of God?** (1-3)

"The word of the LORD was rare in those days." This means that functionally, there were basically no prophets. The people had basically stopped listening, so God, stopped talking. But, then came Samuel. To those who visited the Tabernacle, he was nothing to note. He was a servant, an errand boy tasked with menial tasks. He does whatever is asked of him. But the LORD knew.

The writer gives us actual detail that symbolizes the setting. Did you notice it? There was no frequent vision. There was very little from God that was revealed for one to see, and even if there was, Eli was not in a position to be able to see it. His own eyesight had begun to grow dim. There is no shame in that, it happens, expect this did more than describe the consequences of aging. The dulling of his physical senses symbolizes the dulling of his spiritual ones. Eli did not take God's Word to heart. He would be replaced by one who did. Eli was lying down in his own place. Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark was. Again, that, in of itself is not unique, but the picture is clear. Samuel is in a position to hear the Word of God. The lamp of God had not yet gone out. The lamp in the tabernacle had enough oil to stay lit from the evening to the morning. This means that Samuel is sleeping in the tabernacle, and it is not too far from dawn. The light is about to come. After darkness, light.

Are you in a position to hear from God? I am not talking about dreams, visions and voices, although God has used those from time to time. I am referring to the normal means that God uses to speak. He uses preaching. I do not say this because I am a preacher. I want you to understand that handling God's Word and proclaiming it is both awesome and terrifying. While God could use and does use various ways to expose people to the gospel and grow his children, the primary means is through the Word of God that is declared in faithful explanation and faithful proclamation, that is, faithful teaching and preaching.

Romans 10.13 is a great promise. "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

But, then comes the question in the next verse. How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? How are they supposed to hear? How are they going to hear about Christ and what he has done? Then comes the next question. "How are they to hear without someone preaching?" Someone has to preach. Someone has to get up and declare it all. Well, how is that going to happen unless the preacher is sent? Wow! Do you see that? Preachers aren't just called, they are sent. They are raised up in churches and sent out by churches because those churches want other people to hear God's Word. In verse 17, we read, faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." One of the evidences of a church that has positioned itself to hear from God is the burden for raising up preachers to be sent out. That is the fruit of a people who have a hunger to hear from God. Do you come to church to hear God's Word? I know that so many of you do. Let's all be that way. Pray for yourself. Pray for

your family members. Pray for the preaching. Pray that we hear God's Word so that he will graciously keep lighting our hearts with it and spreading the flame of the gospel to others. Beloved, come to church faithfully to hear God's Word. If we don't have his word, we will be in darkness. Eternal life is at stake.

2. Observe the patience of God. (4-9)

While Samuel was involved in the work of the Tabernacle and certainly knew about Yahweh, he had no direct experience with God. God had not yet spoken to Samuel, like he would to certain prophets. For every prophet like a Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Amos, the word of the Lord came and there was a first time for each of these guys when it came. In some cases, the prophets had other prophets who were also being given revelation and were recording it and declaring it. In Samuel's case, he was a young man and the word of the Lord was rare. So, v.7 is not a mark against Samuel, it is simply explaining the setting. Notice, how patient God is. He calls Samuel, and Samuel, thinking it is Eli, runs to find Eli. This happens again and it happens a third time. Samuel does not have a category in his thinking yet that this could be God talking to him. You have to hand it to him; the kid was certainly responsive. 5 times he says, "Here I am." (vs. 4, 5, 6, 8, 16) Three times he got up and presumably woke up Eli. Eli seems a little slow to catch on, but finally does and gives good counsel to Samuel. If you hear this voice again, say, "Speak Lord for your servant hears."

In 2 Peter 3, Peter said that God is not slow to keep his promises. He doesn't mark time the way we do. In fact, he is patient because he doesn't want anyone to perish. He wants them to come to repentance. He gives a lot of time for people to repent and he desires that. But, there is a point at which there is no return and the day of the Lord will come like a thief. It will be sudden and it will be overwhelming. So, here we see how patient God is with Samuel and how patient he has been with Eli. But, time is up. Now Eli was wondering what this was about. The Lord had given Eli a hard message through the man of God in chapter 2. Would this be more of the same? Beloved, do not view the patience of God as the apathy of God. God is not apathetic about the sins of others and he is not apathetic about yours. You may be going down a wrong road without any apparent consequences. It won't stay that way.

3. God will speak to those who are willing to listen. (10)

1 and 2 Samuel are full of politics and power and right here, there is a shift, a changing of the guard. In verse 9, Samuel needed Eli to tell him what to do. Eli gives to Samuel the weapon that will, in a sense, bring down his own house. From a political and power position, Samuel is now ascending and Eli starts to fade away. In verse 9, it was Samuel who needed Eli and by verse 17, it is Eli who needs Samuel. Throughout these books we will watch the rise and fall of kings and the people jockeying for power around them. We will see the drama of loyalties, and attempted coups. President Biden has been in office for less than one year and already there is speculation about who is coming next. If President Biden chooses not to run, he will immediately be dead in the water since his power will be viewed as waning instead of waxing. But kings are kings for life and the power of a king is generally more absolute than that of a president. At this point in

the story, we do not know how Samuel is going to fit into all of that. It won't be long before we will that he is the one who raises up kings and sets them down. From that perspective alone, these books are full of intrigue, tension and plots. It is fascinating. But right here we see the heart of it all and it is true to this day. The real power behind all power is the Word of God. All other power is under God and is accountable to God.

In these books we see that Samuel is the first of 3 men who rise from obscurity to prominence. None of them are born into power, but are no-names who find themselves in authority. How they handle that authority (and how anyone handles authority) is reflected in how seriously they take God's Word. God will speak to those who are willing to listen and will use their lives to carry out his plan. Samuel is a testimony to that and by the end of this chapter, the entire nation is beginning to realize that the years of darkness are being challenged by a return of the Word of God.

When you look at the history of God's people you see that when there are a people who are willing to listen to God's Word that God is faithful to send them someone who will declare it. Last Sunday I prayed over some of our children. Part of the urgency that I feel in praying for our children is the need for a generation of Samuel's who are willing to listen and then, willing to declare God's Word. Those who are willing are few and it comes with a cost.

4. **God's Word is a blessing and a burden.** (11-18)

I remember hearing this story as a child. I remember thinking that if I ever heard a voice like this in the middle of the night, that I would know what to do. I would say, "Speak Lord, for your servant hears." It seems to me, that as a child, that is where the story ended. It was tender, wonderful, even quaint-like. How sweet. God is talking to a boy and this little boy learns to listen to God's voice. However, that is not the rest of the story. In fact, what God is says is not sweet. It is likely shocking to Samuel. He lay until morning. (15a) How could he go back to sleep after hearing what God had said. The house of Eli was going to be wiped out. Hophni and Phineas had been blaspheming God and Eli did not restrain them. He knew about their sin (v.13), but he failed to address it. *"Therefore, I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."* There is no atonement for those who refuse to repent. The point of no return was passed. The line was crossed. Samuel was told that the fulfillment of this was imminent. No wonder he couldn't sleep.

Now Samuel was in Eli's shoes. He knew what the truth was and he knew that the truth would be hard for Eli to hear. The word of God is a blessing but it is also a burden because most people do not want really want to hear it. They will applaud you, support you, and laugh at your jokes and stories as long as you tell them what they already agree with. But, it is a very lonely feeling to be the one who points out the blind spots and confronts those who are going the wrong way. Prophets and preachers are very human. It is very natural to want to be liked, included and affirmed. But there are times when all of that has to be let go of because something greater is at stake. In the morning, it wouldn't be long after Samuel had opened up the doors to the Tabernacle. He was likely trying to stay out of sight since the text says that he

was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. Eli was probably afraid to hear it, although you can tell by his language that he knew that it was not good news. Here was the making of a prophet. He was given God's Word and he spoke it, all, no matter what.

5. **God's Word will do God's work.** (19-21a)

There is a scene in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, during the siege of Gondor, where it is almost as bad as it could be. The city is about to be overrun, the terrible steward, Denethor is preparing to cremate himself and his son. But a close up of the little tree that sits in the courtyard reveals a flower. The tree that appeared to be dead, was actually alive. Chapter 3 begins in darkness and ends at dawn. The Word of the Lord is coming back to the land. It is coming back because God has raised up a boy, a young man who will listen and who will speak it. It will not make for him an easy life, but this prophet will become a king-maker and will help change the course of history – forever. This prophet will be so faithful that the Lord will not let any of his words fall to the ground. He will be so faithful to speak God's Word that his word will be viewed as being God's Word. That is the blessing of a prophet and preacher who says what God says, nothing more, and nothing less.