

## 1 Samuel 3

It is often said that God's church is always only one generation from extinction. Towards the end of his life, the great sixteenth century reformer Martin Luther - who had been a part of the greatest upsurge of spiritual life since the foundation of the church; the movement we call the Reformation - Luther mused that no work of God ever lasts more than 40 years at the most. He was deeply conscious that God needed to work again.

Amazingly God's church has never died but it has passed through periods of dynamism and life, and other periods of great weakness and morbidity. The first few chapters of 1 Samuel are describing the transformation of God's people from one of those weak miserable periods - the age of the Judges - towards what will be the greatest era in the whole of the Old Testament - the reign of King David.

We have started to see the stirrings of a fresh work of God. And those stirrings have been surprising. The book of 1 Samuel started with the phrase "there was a certain man..." An unknown man called Elkanah. And the story doesn't even really start with him, but with his barren and despised wife, Hannah. She is a nobody. But she is a woman of prayer - even if those prayers are sometimes bitter and tearful. And she is a woman of incredible character. "If you give a child to me", she says, "I will give him back to you." God answers those prayers. He gave her a child - Samuel.

In the ordinary course of things Samuel should not become a leader. If you want to be a leader in Britain today, you need to have gone to a private school, preferably Eton. Or at least you need a professor for a father.

But that is not the way that God works amongst his people. Hannah's prayer that we looked at last week captured that. He raises up the humble and puts down the proud. Of course all states of society suffer from pride, and humble people can be found from all backgrounds. Hannah's deep joy stems from the fact that God is not interested in background or social status, he looks on the heart - he blesses the humble.

Today in 1 Samuel 3 we are going to see the next stage in this story. Hannah's role is complete. Her little boy Samuel, is now centre stage. It is not by accident that 1-2

Samuel bears his name – he is going to be a great man. What is it that will make him great?

This is a deeply pertinent question for us as a church, and particularly for many of you here. This church is a young church. What God does with you will shape the church of the next generation. The last thirty years of God's church in this country have actually been incredibly exciting. Contrary to what the newspapers say, the living parts of the church in this country have grown, and strengthened, and borne wonderful fruit over the last thirty or forty years. But what about the next thirty years?

I want to show you four things from 1 Samuel 3 that we need, if God's church is going to thrive.

The first is the word of God

1. The word of God

1 Samuel 3 opens with a very interesting scene. The old priest, Eli, is on the way out.



**1 Samuel 3:2**

You might expect the story to contrast this fading old man with bright young Samuel – and in some ways it does. But that is not the first comparison that is made.



**1 Samuel 3:3a**

Is that just a simple record, telling us it was night-time? A lamp burned in the house of God every night until dawn. Or is there a symbolic contrast here? An old man is fading – but not the light of God.

This chapter is actually all about God and his word. It is the rarity of the word which begins the chapter.



**1 Samuel 3:1b**

It is the inbreaking of the word of God which shapes the story.



**1 Samuel 3:4a**

Samuel's spiritual awakening will be through the word of God



**1 Samuel 3:7**

Samuel's growth will involve him becoming a faithful minister of the word of God



### **1 Samuel 3:19**

[Samuel] let none of [God's] words fall to the ground

And Samuel's ongoing relationship with God will be through God's word



### **1 Samuel 3:21<sup>1</sup>**

For us who have the final written word of God our experience of God's word will be somewhat different. We have the privilege of reading this book [Bible]. But this, and numerous other passages like it, reminds us that there is always a subjective dimension to hearing God too. You can read the Bible from beginning to end and be no different. Only if God, in his mercy and grace, opens your eyes does his word really live. Here in 1 Samuel 3 this subjective experience is at the forefront.

So our first lesson: if the word of God is not heard, believers fade away, and the church dies.

This is why we are unashamed about setting the teaching and proclaiming of the word of God centre stage in our life together. There is much more about the Christian life than the word of God. In the same way that there is much more about a car than its engine, much more about a flower than its roots, there is much more about a person than their heart. Cars, flowers, people are glorious things but if you neglect their engine, root, heart they seize up, wither, die. I say to you, your usefulness to God will be in direct proportion to your commitment to reading, digesting, living out the truths of the word of God.

Of course, reading the word of God can be a dry boring exercise. Absolutely! But if the water from your only tap slows to a dribble, you eagerly preserve every drop, you try to find out what has gone wrong with the plumbing, you don't walk away and conclude that you don't need water. Pray to God that he would make your bible reading live. Develop regular habits. Search the scriptures. Commit yourself to doing what it says. Ask God to speak as you read his word.

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<sup>1</sup> In the book of Acts in the New Testament Luke describes the expansion of the church as the progress of "the word of God". See Acts 6:7, 12:24, 13:49, 19:20

Every new work of God is driven by the renewed hearing of his word.

But there are three others things that are vital in this chapter to the establishment of this new work of God.

The first is servant-heartedness.

## 2. Servant-heartedness

Hannah had given her son Samuel into the care of the priest Eli. And in verse 1 we read



**1 Samuel 3:1a**

He served in a junior role. That discipline learned early becomes a central element of the story.

Eli, and Samuel were sleeping in the temple.



**1 Samuel 3:4-5**