“CALLED”

We’ve been in the Gospel of John for the past few months, but today we are going to shift gears and look at the O.T. book of First Samuel. Somehow some way we will get back to John but for now anyway I feel like the Lord would have us move in a different direction.

A brief background: Israel partial obedience in taking possession of the Promised Land (they failed to drive out the godless Canaanites from the land). The result was that the people of Israel were negatively influenced by their godless, wicked neighbors and fell into the gross sin of idolatry (a clear violation of the 1st Commandment and failure to heed God’s warning to the people in Joshua’s day). Time and time again we are told in the Book of Judges that God’s people did “what was right in their own eyes.” God judged His people for their unfaithfulness to Him. He raised up foreign powers to rule over and oppress them. At some point the people would repent of their sins and cry out to God for deliverance. In His mercy God would send “judges” (leaders) to unite the people in rebellion against their oppressors and would deliver them. This cycle was repeated over and over again for more than 3 centuries. This is the historical setting as First Samuel begins…the tail end of what we call the period of the judges. The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, then, offer a bridge between the periods of the judges and the kings. Samuel himself is a priest and a prophet of God and served as the last of the judges in Israel.

In Chapter 1 Hannah, a godly woman, prays for a son. She vows that if God gives her a son she will dedicate the boy to serve God. Hannah does give birth to a son and names him Samuel. Fulfilling her vow when Samuel is 3 years old she takes him to the tabernacle at Shiloh and leaves him with the old priest Eli so he can be raised up to serve God there. In Chapter 2 we find out that Eli has two evil sons named Hophni and Phineas. God pronounces judgment on Eli’s sons – He tells Eli his sons will die and that Eli’s line will be set aside. READ 1 Samuel 2:28-35 from The Message. Of course we know that this “true priest” (“faithful priest” in the KJV, ESV and NASB) will be Samuel. With that let’s go to Chapter 3…

Samuel is now a young boy. He’s about 12 years old, so he has been living with Eli in Shiloh for about 9 years as Chapter 3 opens.

READ 1 Samuel 3:1-3

We just saw that Eli and his sons, acting as priests and thus the so-called spiritual leaders of Israel, have dishonored God. God is in the process of judging them for their moral failings. Is it any wonder, then, that during this period of time God rarely speaks His word to the people other than to render words of judgment? When God’s spiritual leaders do not deal with the sin in their life, God cannot really use them and speak through them the way He wants to. And therefore the people they are supposed to minister to suffer spiritually. That’s what is happening here. It is a sad time in the life of Israel, as was most of the period of the judges.

Let me point out that at this time the tabernacle (a portable place of worship where God manifested His presence) is stationed in Shiloh. The temple has not been built yet. That is still another 145 years in the future when Solomon would build it. So, technically, Samuel and Eli are lying down in the tabernacle (not the temple). The tabernacle is also where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and safeguarded.

One of Samuel’s duties is to keep the lamp of God burning, which includes through the night. This is per instructions in Leviticus 24:2. It is in the middle of the night when Samuel hears a voice and is awakened.

READ 1 Samuel 3:4-7

Who is calling Samuel? God. It is God who initiates the call to Samuel. Notice that God’s call is specifically directed at Samuel. But at first Samuel thinks it is Eli calling him. But, of course it was not Eli. You can understand that Eli might have been just a little irked at Samuel for waking him up in the middle of the night and he tells Samuel, “I didn’t call you now go back to bed.” This happens twice.

Verse 7 informs us of Samuel’s spiritual condition at this time. He had no doubt heard about God, but had not experienced God personally yet. No doubt this was due to the spiritual condition of Eli and his sons. So God goes to Samuel, a boy, and He speaks to him. God seeks Samuel out personally.

READ 1 Samuel 3:8-9

By the third time I’m sure Eli is wide awake and he realizes that when Samuel comes to him he must have been hearing God speak to him. Eli had probably experienced this at times in his own life. So Eli gives Samuel good advice. By the way this is correct response we make whenever God speaks to us (through His word or through the Holy Spirit): “Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.” I think it is a good prayer to pray before we sit down to read God’s word or as we make ourselves into the house of God. “Lord, speak to me. I’m listening to You.” So with this advice, Samuel goes back to bed and waits for God to speak again.

READ 1 Samuel 3:10.

The fourth time God calls Samuel He calls his name twice and, of course, Samuel is ready and offers the correct response. I find it interesting that here in 1 Samuel 3:10 when God calls Samuel He says, “Samuel, Samuel!” When He called out to Abraham back in Genesis 22:11 (as he is about to plunge his knife into Isaac) God says, “Abraham, Abraham!” And when God called Moses from the burning bush out in the wilderness in Exodus 3:4 He said, “Moses, Moses!” In each case it is a personal calling and there is a clear sense of urgency in God’s voice.

READ 1 Samuel 3:11-16.

Samuel’s first message to deliver as God’s servant is a tough one! It is a message of judgment and dread. The message Samuel has for Eli relates to God’s message to Eli in Chapter 2 (which I read earlier). God tells Samuel that Eli’s entire family will be cut off and meet a violent end. I want you to know something. Often the message that God wants us as teachers or preachers to deliver to the people is not an easy one. Often we are called to deliver hard truth to a specific audience that requires them to hear and to heed. This means that God’s messengers are not always going to be well-liked or well-received. Case in point: Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Paul, Stephen, and even Jesus Himself! But we are not called to be popular, rather, we are only to be faithful messengers of truth.

Well, Eli probably laid awake all night knowing that God was speaking to Samuel and was curious to find out what he told him.

READ 1 Samuel 3:16-17

I find Eli’s instructions to Samuel quite interesting. “You have been given a message from God and if you don’t speak that message God’s judgment will fall upon you.” Yet what did Eli do? READ 1 Samuel 3:13 again. He failed to speak to his sons when he was made aware of their despicable sins. He himself had failed to speak the word God would have had him speak…words of admonition and rebuke to his disobedient sons. Oh sure, we read in Chapter 2:23-25 where he finally did rebuke his sons, but by then it was too late and God had already marked them for destruction. If Eli had truly been a god-fearing loving father he would not have allowed his sons to get to that point.

READ 1 Samuel 3:18

So Samuel tells Eli everything God had told him. He faithfully says what he has been instructed to say. Samuel is obedient. Of course, God’s message for Eli is a tough message, but it is one that Eli had heard before. This time, however, Samuel’s message specifically states what will be the consequence of Eli’s and his sons’ sins. Eli submits to the judgment that God will render. He is not being fatalistic (“whatever will be, will be”). Rather, Eli recognizes the sovereignty of God in all matters.

READ 1 Samuel 3:19-21