

**Sermon preached by Pastor Robert Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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PROFIT FROM THE PROPHET

1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a

How many of you remember the movie The Perfect Storm? It is based on the true story about the *Andrea Gail*, a fishing boat out of Gloucester, Massachusetts, that was lost at sea during a major nor'easter. The ship's captain, Billy Tyne, played by George Clooney in the movie, took the boat far from shore to get a bigger catch of fish. He was far enough away from the other boats to catch the radio traffic about an approaching storm. His instruments failed to pick up its size and enormity until it got close.

Because of his lack of information, he thought the storm to be small and manageable, and decided to ride it out. The "Perfect Storm" was a big one, actually a convergence of a hurricane and a nor'easter. When he did receive word, it was too late. Tyne and his crew of six perished and the *Andrea Gail* was lost. One wonders what may have happened if the crew had gotten word about the storm earlier.

Today, we will consider how God has revealed Himself by giving us His Word at the right time, so that we might profit. We will look at 1 Samuel 3.

For many of us, this Old Testament narrative is familiar. The story is straightforward: While Samuel was asleep, God called him. Samuel mistook the voice for that of Eli the high priest. Only after three times did he understand that the voice was the Lord's.

He was calling Samuel with a message of impending judgment on Eli and his sons. After some fear and hesitation, Samuel tells Eli what God had said.

That is an interesting story, but what does it have to do with us? Is there anything we can learn that can grab us in the midst of our daily lives? I believe there is. As we go along, I want you to see: 1) that God was silent; 2) God broke His silence; and 3) God spoke. Let's unpack this passage and see what this it says.

GOD WAS SILENT

The chapter begins with this extraordinary statement: "In those days, the word of God was rare, there were not many visions. That's a strange thing to say, don't you think? The word of God was rare in Israel. What does that mean?"

It means that the Lord wasn't speaking to His people. There was very little, if any, revelation from God since the time of Moses. God was silent. There were no visions; that's the way God tends to speak to prophets. There was a divine silence.

Lack of God's revelation can be disastrous. Proverbs 29:18 tells us that "*Where there is no revelation the people cast off restraint.*" That is, without God's Word, we sin rampantly. We go

our own way, pursue our own desires, go after our own wants. Since God's ways are not our ways, without His revelation, we are like sheep without a shepherd, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.

Why was the Word of God rare in Samuel's time? Perhaps God's judgment came because of Israel's sin. The event described in our passage comes at the end of the 400-year period described in the book of Judges. That part of Israel's history ends with these ominous words: "*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit*" (Jdg 21:25).

When left to their own devices, with the prophetic Word of God being a rare commodity, they did whatever suited their fancy. They forgot their heritage and failed to honor God; instead they worshipped pagan gods. They ignored their responsibilities to each other as God's covenant people.

Every part of Israelite society seemed to be affected. Even the sons of Eli, the high priest, Hophni and Phinehas, committed horrible acts of immorality, unkindness and faithlessness in their priestly duties. And Eli the high priest tolerated their behavior. God was silent and the people lived without restraint

That is often the pattern of God's dealing with His people. In Amos 8:11-12 there is a prediction of another time of silence.

"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land -- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it."

God was silent and it was a terrible thing indeed!

GOD BROKE THE SILENCE

But now God breaks the silence! He begins to speak again to His people. That is just what He did through Samuel; the Lord reveals His Word to Samuel who is the new prophet.

Can you imagine what that was like? The Lord was fulfilling a prophecy of long ago, the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15: *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like [Moses] from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*

Samuel was the first of a long succession of prophets like Moses – Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. God called prophets throughout the Old Testament all the way to Malachi. In the New Testament, the line of prophets continues through John the Baptist until it is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

This moment was a turning point in Israel's history. Things changed! Beginning with Samuel, the word of God would no longer be rare in Israel. God would reveal Himself more and more as redemptive history unfolds, until it reaches its objective, the death, resurrection and glorification of Christ.

When we think of a prophet, we often think of people foretelling the future. Yes, prophets would often tell of God's future plans. But more importantly, they were God's spokesmen who would reveal to Israel what God wanted them to know about His character, His holiness, His hatred of sin, His justice, and His mercy. The words of prophets should be heeded.

Listen to the rest of the promise in Deuteronomy 18:

“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death” (Deuteronomy 18:18-20).

Prophets were a big deal in Israel because they succeeded Moses in His prophetic role as the Law-Giver, communicating God's ways. They brought God's Word, reminding Israel when they had strayed away from God's law, warning them of God's judgment. Through prophets, the character of God is revealed.

That's what we see in 1 Samuel 3, God revealing Himself. In this case, they were words of judgment to Eli. God would no longer tolerate the sins of Hophni and Phinehas. Nor would He tolerate Eli's failure, as the spiritual leader of Israel, to demand holiness in the priesthood. Through Samuel, God revealed Himself as a holy God, whose anger against sin burns hot.

Through Samuel, God revealed Himself as one who does not sit idly by, ignoring disobedience and sin. He is a God of judgment who hates sin; a God whose anger against sin would be so great that He'd send His own Son to atone for sin's consequence.

Because of this, we see in the calling of Samuel the grace of God. At a time of disobedience, when Israel and their priests did what was right in their own eyes, God acted with sovereign grace to restore His people. He broke the silence – not Eli, not Samuel. God initiated Samuel's calling as a prophet.

Samuel did not seek it, nor did he recognize God's voice. Verse seven says the he had not yet known the Lord. There is nothing to suggest that Samuel had done anything special to receive this calling from God. God was patient and called out three times before Samuel responded! Here we see the Lord's grace by revealing His patience and longsuffering. And in His grace (or perhaps His judgment), Eli, the wayward high priest, was the one who helped Samuel see that God was calling.

But Samuel was not the only recipient of God's grace. Israel received the benefit of God's breaking His silence. Look at verses 3:21 and 4:1: as God reveals Himself to Samuel, He is revealing Himself to Israel. Even while they are still disobedient, doing what was right in their own eyes, God gives them His Word.

This is such a contrast to the start of the chapter! At one time, God's word was rare. Now God is regularly revealing Himself through a prophet. What an example of God's great compassion! He chose Samuel to be the first of His many spokesmen after Moses.

God breaks His silence and speaks to His people through His word to Samuel, all because of His grace.

GOD SPOKE

So what happened when God broke the silence, when He spoke His word to Samuel? Verse 19 says that none of Samuel's words fell to the ground. This is an allusion to the test of a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:22:

If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

Samuel's words were reliable; they were understood as coming from God. His words were God's Words and thus, they should be valued.

What does the Lord reveal to Samuel? God is going to judge the house of Eli because of the wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas; Eli did nothing to restrain his sons from their evil ways. Samuel was, at first, reluctant to tell this truth. But Eli knew that judgment was coming.

In chapter 2 we read that Eli was told that his sons would die and a faithful priest would come, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I believe that is why Eli pushed Samuel into revealing what the Lord told Him. He wanted to see if Samuel was the faithful priest, the promised prophet. Sadly, Eli did not cry out to the Lord for grace.

And the all important standard for a true prophet was met. Chapter 4 describes a battle with Israel's enemy, the Philistines. Israel was defeated, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and the Ark of the Covenant was stolen. Upon hearing this news, Eli who was blind and ninety-eight years old, fell and broke his neck. The prophecy was fulfilled.

The rest of Samuel's life is the story of God speaking comfort and warning through him to the people of Israel, culminating in anointing David as the king of Israel. God revealing His heart through Samuel the prophet was a blessing for Israel.

CONCLUSION

Do we prize God's speaking to us? Are we excited that God loves us enough to reveal Himself to us! How much we should as He speaks through His written Word and through the preached Word. We should read and study, ponder and pray over the Scriptures every day. If this is His address to us, we should crave His word?

Without God's revelation, we are left powerless. Like Israel, we are without restraint and we go astray. We desperately need the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 teaches us that God's word transforms lives:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hearing God's Word is not always comfortable, as we saw with Eli. But God's Word is always transformative. The Word reveals the character and nature of God. It shows His holy and awesome judgment; His deep and everlasting compassion. It forces us to our knees in obedience and reverence as we accept His grace. Or it produces shame when we refuse His grace.

Do you value the Word of God? Do you seek to know and understand Him as you read and meditate on Scripture? Do you profit from the prophet and the apostles through whom God spoke? Most of us struggle with building the habit of the Bible into our lives. I know that I do! Here's a simple tool to help you get into the Word of God. It's called the Word Hand.

[Note: Illustrate the Word Hand by raising one hand and point in succession to each finger to represent one of the points below. End by pointing to the thumb to represent meditation.]

Hear the Word. Read the Word. Study the Word. Memorize the Word.
Mediate on the Word

Hear, read, study, memorize, and mediate. That's how we can get a grip on God's Word!

We said earlier that Samuel was the first in a long line of prophets, culminating in the one true "prophet like Moses," Jesus Christ – the prophet par excellence. Here the Word comes in its ultimate and final form. In Jesus Christ, God forever breaks His silence.

Listen to the words of Hebrews 1:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (Hebrews 1:1-3).

God spoke through His prophets, but now speaks through His Son. God has made Himself known through Christ.

Jesus is the heir of everything.

He is the exact imprint of God, He reveals God because He is God.

Jesus is who keeps the world held together

God did everything needed to be done to purify us from our sins. Jesus has done everything to restore us and then, He sits down at the right hand of God.

Do you want to know the character and purposes of God? Do you want to know what God is like? Come to know Jesus.

God reveals Himself to us by giving us His Word, even in our sin. What amazing grace that is! He gave His written Word from those through whom He spoke. He gives us His Word so that we might know His ways and live for Him. Do you want to know the character and purposes of God? Do you want to know what God is like? Come to know Jesus. He is God.

The opening words to John's gospel are "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" A few verses later John writes "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" Jesus is the Word and He became a human being!

The Father gave us His Son, the living Word, so that God's presence, His life, His Word would dwell in us. Through the Word, He has given us everything we need for life and godliness so that we might profit by knowing and obeying Him. For that reason, we should treasure the Word.

There is a story about Susannah Wesley – the mother of John and Charles Wesley, who wrote many of our hymns. She and her husband Samuel hoped that their first son, also named Samuel, would grow up and become a minister. However, as the young boy developed, he never talked. His parents assumed he was deaf and mute. One day, he couldn't be found anywhere around the house. Susannah rushed outside and called his name. Though he was a deaf-mute, her motherly anguish pushed her to cry out. After a while she heard the boy say "Here I am Momma!" From that day on, Samuel spoke normally. How much Susannah valued that word from her son.

Are you profiting from the prophet?

Are you daily getting to know God's written and living Word?

Like Susannah Wesley who valued her son's words, do you value God's Word? . . . Do I?

We can only by the grace of God who gave us His Word.