

## 1 Samuel 3 Hearing is Believing

We together here are gathered for a purpose. But what is that purpose? The starting place for the church is God. Some of you say of course preacher, but do you who say of course really believe this? When we say this we are seeking to dethrone self. What does that mean? It means that church is not so much about us as it is about him. How many of you have ever shopped for a church? Or how many of you have known people who have shopped for a church? What was your starting place for “shopping”? Was it your preferences, or was God the place you began? At Oxford, we are interested in building disciples and part of our initial discipleship process is an Engage Membership Class. The class is designed to serve as a launching point for ministry in our church, this is how you become a covenant member, how you get plugged in to serve as a minister of the gospel, how we seek as a community to proclaim the gospel. At each class I share this quote from C.S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity* with those interested in joining our church:

“But you must regard it as waiting, not as camping. You must keep on praying for light: and of course, even in the hall, you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house. And above all you must be asking which door is the true one and not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling. In plain language, the question should never be: ‘Do I like that kind of service?’ but ‘Are these doctrines true: Is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this? Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere tastes, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?’” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

Though we may suggest that we believe that the starting place for the church is God, often times we function like the opposite is true - like we are the starting place instead of God. The starting place for the church is an awareness of God. Not self-awareness, but an awareness of God. So then the starting place is not with our feelings or our perceptions but with who God is. What do we know about Him? He is the Creator and redeemer of all things!

There was a very provocative and influential philosopher named René Descartes in the 1600’s who has been hailed as some as the father of modern Western Philosophy (modern in the 17th century?). He sought to come up with the foundational thought of all thinking, so he very profoundly came up with this: “I think, therefore I am.” Now think about what he is thinking about. When one says such a saying indicating that he thinks such a saying is the foundation of thought, what (or who) is the foundation of such thinking? Self. This is not the way that Christians think. Christians do not think with selves as the center. The Christian way of thinking is: “God is, therefore we are.” What does this mean? The place we begin is faith in God not certainty in ourselves. Apart from faith in God it is impossible to please him, isn’t this what Scripture says? *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* How does faith come? *Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.* (Hebrews 11:1, 6; Romans 10:17). In a world dominated by self, the Bible begins not with seeing but with hearing. In sight you can interpret what you see, but in hearing you are not left to yourself in interpretation, but dependent upon what you are told to guide interpretation.

These verses in Hebrews are not just isolated Scriptures, these scriptures are telling us what God demands from us. To show that, I want us to turn to one of my favorite Old Testament passages, 1 Samuel 3, and learn that the Bible, contrary to what is normative today, demands Hearing is Believing.

Read Text

2 Truths today from this text to show us that hearing is believing:

### **1. God is Forming His People by His Word (1-10)**

We are the community of His word. This community is made up of individuals, but individualism is not the champion of our thought. We say this mainly because as Christians we know that we are not the center of our thought. As Christians we are taught to take every thought captive and place it under the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). If we are doing this then we are constantly yielding to the Spirit's work in our life to bear witness to Son to the praise of the Father (John 15:26). So even in our thinking of our selves we are to remember him who lovingly created and redeemed us, the one who gave us life and hope.

Some of you think, wait just a minute, in this passage that you just read to us the Lord comes to Samuel, individually! Doesn't God love us individually? Doesn't Scripture say that God leaves the 99 to find the 1? If God loves us individually and personally, why then place such an emphasis on community? God does love us individually and personally but not so that we can be the end of ourselves. If this were true who would the attention of our salvation really be on? How could it not be ourselves? That God is concerned for us individually should leave us humbled, but often times I am afraid it is coupled with the message of individualism in our times leaving us incapable of seeing God apart from ourselves! If we aren't careful, we can start to believe that God is dependent upon us.

Let me ask you a question. Would God be God if he chose not to create? Would God be God if he chose not to redeem? Sure! But aren't we glad that God chose to do these things? Most of us, though we treasure it, do not believe "all that matters is our personal relationship with Jesus" to its fullest extent. Some of you know those who do. These are the guys and gals that have a personal relationship with Jesus and choose to keep quiet about it, they choose to stay in a boat fishing on Sunday, or keeping someone's kids, or at home with their favorite gospel channel playing while they kneel by their bed praying instead of engaging in community. I had a friend of mine in college who named his bed the Word. We would meet him on Sunday at the dining hall and ask him, "Where you been John?", and he would say, "Man I been in the Word. We would all think that he was some super spiritual person, until we found out that he had named his bed the Word! Suddenly he wasn't too spiritual, instead we found out that he was just lazy. But, if Christianity is all about a personal relationship and we mean that, we evangelize this way, we talk this way, then who's to say that my friend John was not wrong? Samuel helps us.

Let me ask you a question to test how far down the hole of individualism you fall? What is more important, having a personal devotion life or listening to the word preached in a church with other believers? If you say personal over corporate then you have fallen trap to Cartesian Christianity where you become the subject. God has summoned us into his presence, we do not

summon him into our presence. Now don't mishear me. A private devotion life is indispensable for your growth in the LORD, but to what end? For your personal growth or for the growth of others? Think carefully how you answer. Remember what Christ said: It is more blessed to give than to receive, the Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. I hope that each of you are growing spiritually, individually, why? So that we can grow! Could you just imagine how healthy our church would be if each of us were pursuing Christ for all he is worth? How would we know if we were doing that? We would not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as is the habit of some.

Think with me. Theology is always done in community. Everyone here is a theologian. How do you know that you are interpreting a Bible passage if you are not interpreting the passage in a conversation with the community? People that don't do theology in community are the founders of cults! Do you see how dangerous this is? So if the choice came down to it and you wake up on Sunday morning and you realize, I have not had a quiet time all week, what should I do? What is the answer? Go to church!

Look at the story of Samuel closely. Think about what this individual Samuel has to do with the rest of us. First off notice that the story of Samuel has been handed down to the church. The stories in Scripture are for our benefit, not just your benefit but our benefit. Second, notice that Samuel is not in isolation but is a priest who will soon turn prophet. What do priest and prophets do? They serve the community of God. How do they do that? By the Word of the Lord. Next, look at verse 1. Samuel falls chronologically right after one of the hardest books in the whole of Scripture - Judges. The theme of judges is found at the end of the book: *In those days there was not king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* (Judges 21:25) God's call to Samuel is the confrontation to individualism.

Look at the way that Samuel answers the Lord. *Here I am.* This phrase becomes the capstone phrase for the way that God deals with his people. I want you to think about the difference between these two phrases: *Here I am,* and *I see.* One waits for more instruction and listens, the other, waits for the fulfillment, while the other has possession of whatever it is. Hearing is believing, seeing is possessing what we believe. Have you ever watched a silent film? How can we be certain of what is going on if we are not told? We may think that we see one thing but then we read the caption on the bottom of the page and what we read on the film determines the way that we watch the film. The same is true with the word of God. Word comes first so that in hearing we may have life. In hearing before seeing, we are dependent from some outside source to direct our life. Hearing and then seeing is what Christianity is all about - *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...* (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Which leads me to our next point from this passage:

## **2. God's People Hear and Heed His Word and Live (11-18)**

Hearing before seeing. Remember Adam and Eve. They received the word of the Lord, had heard what he had said, and then when they saw that the fruit on the tree was pleasant on the eyes and desirable to make one wise they took and ate, chose what they saw over what was

said. Here, God comes to Samuel and in so doing has a word of rejection for the house of Eli. Why? Chapter 2 tell us. 2:12 says, *Now the sons of Eli are worthless men. They did not know the LORD.* 2:22-26 says,

*Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.*

*Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man.*

The rejection reached the point to where there was no hope for them. Why? They placed themselves at the center instead of placing God at the center. They chose to go with their other senses instead of hearing. Look at 1 Samuel 4:12-22. This passage tells the story of the end of the house of Eli and caps it all off with the grandson of the house of Eli being named Ichabod - the glory had departed. What a legacy.

But God would be restoring the glory. How? Even in this story by putting his plan of sending the one born of the virgin's womb. Who was Samuel? Samuel was the anointer of the greatest King in the history of Israel - David. To David God said that he would have one of his offspring sitting on the throne for forever. From David's town, Bethlehem, Mary would bear forth the promised Son of David. Even in 1 Samuel God was bringing a way to restore the glory, but not just glory to Israel, glory to the whole world. How? By sending His Word who become flesh. John says of Him, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Israel was told not to set up any graven images. Why? They were to wait upon the image of the invisible God to come who would be the culmination of both hearing and seeing. This one who came says *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me* (John 10:27).

We have a choice today, a choice that we get to express. Will we be like the house of Eli with Hophni and Phinehas, or like Samuel who grew and the LORD was with him? Will you be the center of your thoughts or will God be the center of your thoughts. Are we listening to Him? Hearing is believing.

Don't withdraw into yourself, be a part of the community. Be hearers of the Word and doers of the word. Let's do it together as his people.