

Called To Faithfulness

Pastor Matthew Ude

1 Samuel 3:1-10

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1 Samuel 3:1-10 NKJ Then the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; *there was* no widespread revelation. ² And it came to pass at that time, while Eli *was* lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, ³ and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the LORD where the ark of God *was*, and while Samuel was lying down, ⁴ that the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" ⁵ So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down. ⁶ Then the LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ (Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor was the word of the LORD yet revealed to him.) ⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. Then he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, `Speak, LORD, for

Your servant hears." So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears."

Our text tells us that the word of the Lord was rare. Why? Because Eli and his sons had failed in their duty to serve the Lord. Eli's sons Hophni and Phineas failed through a blatantly sinful lifestyle which was an open despising of God's word. Eli failed because he did not deal with this problem as both a father and as the high priest. The result was that the people had a poor opinion of God's servants and stopped coming to the tabernacle. God's solution was to remove Eli and his sons and put in their place one who would faithfully teach his word.

At the beginning of our text the word of God was rare but by the end of chapter three we read:

1 Samuel 3:20-21 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the LORD. Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

What a joyful result!

The account of Samuel shows us an example of both the joy that comes to God people when his called workers are faithful, and the sorry state of affairs when his called workers are not faithful.

Our epistle reading reminds us that Jesus "ascended on high . . . and gave gifts to men." Paul goes on to explain that those gifts are the people whom Jesus has sent to preach and teach his word. Paul doesn't specifically mention Christian Day School teachers, but it is clear that he is talking about everyone who is called to teach his word and that certainly includes teachers and Sunday school teachers as well. All of God's called workers are meant as a gift to his church.

Samuel certainly was such a gift. Hophni and Phineas were not.

The question today is what are we? Those whom God has called and given as a gift to this congregation are we going to be a gift like Samuel or are we going to be like Hophni. What does God's calling require of us? What does it look like to be faithful to that calling? God shows us an example of faithfulness in the life of Samuel.

Faithful means dedication in your work and in your life.

Hophni and Phineas' failure was not in a lack of fulfilling their duties. They were there at the temple. They were offering the offerings. They were doing those things that priests were supposed to do. The problem wasn't that they failed to do their job. Their failure was in the blatant and open sinfulness with which they lived their lives.

To receive a call means not just to do your job from 8am to 3pm it means to serve the Lord with your whole life.

Jesus tells the young man, "**Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.**" Luke 9:60. In other words serve the Lord with your whole life.

Paul reminds the young timothy that those who called into the ministry "**must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.**" 1 Timothy 3:11

Those whom the Lord calls to the ministry are not being asked to do a job, they are being asked to serve the Lord and his people. Faithfulness to such service means dedication with your whole life.

Faithfulness requires first listening to God's word

God keeps calling "Samuel" but Samuel not recognizing the voice of God keeps leaving and going to find Eli.

Eli must teach Samuel to recognize and listen to God's voice. A calling as a teacher begins with learning to listen to the voice of God.

You can be a teacher without God's word. You cannot be a Christian day school teacher without God's word. You cannot serve the Lord as one of his ministers without the Lord. You cannot shepherd his lambs without his word.

The first thing that Samuel had to learn was to sit still and listen to God's word. Called workers have a lot demanding their time and attention. Most of us probably have a lot, even too much to do. There is not enough time to get it all done. We must prioritize. Sometimes we must leave things undone because we don't have enough time for them. The one thing you can never leave undone is taking the time to sit, like Mary, and listen to God's word.

Nathan was also a very great prophet like Samuel, but made the mistake of failing to listen. You may remember how he told David to go ahead and build the temple of the Lord

without checking with the Lord first. Later that night the Lord told Nathan, "No I don't want David to build my house."

It is easy to assume that we know what we are doing. It is easy to think that we have a handle on it, but only when we start by listening to the Lord, in prayer and devotion can we be certain that our steps will not falter.

Carpenters have the saying "measure twice, cut once." In the ministry you should "listen twice speak once."

There is a lot you have to do in the classroom and at home, but it must begin where Samuel began, sit and listen to what the Lord has to say first.

Faithfulness as a called worker also requires you to speak the whole word of God.

God had a rather serious message for Samuel. Samuel who was only a young boy at this point was to go to Eli the high priest. You and your sons are going to die because you would not listen. Samuel learned at an early age to speak the full message of God, the good and the bad.

Many of you know that I'm a big fan of the TV show "the office." But there are certain episodes that I can't watch. Scott's Tots is one. That is an episode that just makes you want to cringe.

There are parts of God's word that we would really like to skip over, but faithfulness as a called worker requires teaching all the word of God, not just the parts that we like. There are things we are called to do that we may like to skip, but faithfulness means doing even those things that are hard.

As a teacher it is not your responsibility to show up at people's houses telling them that God says they are going to die. But there are going to be times when you have to speak hard truths to students and sometimes also to parents.

At such times we have God's promises

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Genesis 26:24 do not fear, for I am with you.

Faithfulness requires not just doing those things that are easy but also those things that are hard or we really don't

want to do. We can go forward in faithfulness trusting the Lord's promise to be with us and bless us.

Finally faithfulness requires a lot of forgiveness and patience

In the ministry there is a lot of whining, a lot of complaining, a lot of stubbornness, a lot of mistakes and many other sinful behavior. All of this takes a lot of patience and a lot of forgiveness. But I'm not talking about the kids but the called workers. I'm not talking about how you need to give a lot patience and forgiveness but about how God needs to have a lot of patience and forgiveness. It's true that you need to have a lot of patience with the kids, but what you need even more is a lot of patience and forgiveness from the Lord.

What a wonderful thing then that our God is full of patience and forgiveness for us.

Psalm 145:8-9 The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.

Samuel would never have made it through his life as a prophet without the Lord's grace and mercy.

Scripture records many examples for us of God's patience with the great prophets of the past.

We remember Elijah giving up and running away into the wilderness and God's graciousness with him there. We think of the apostle Paul and Jesus' forgiveness to him who at first was murdering the Christians. We meditate on Jonah who was told to go to Ninevah and tried to run away instead.

It is only God's forgiveness through Jesus and his patience which makes the ministry possible for sinful humans like us.

Paul tells us that Jesus first descended to die for our sins. After he ascended and established the ministry. It is only because of his death and the forgiveness that flows through it that sinful humans like us are able to serve as God's called workers.

We are made faithful through God's gracious faithfulness.

Jesus ascended on high and gave gifts to his church. You are one of those gifts. Strive for faithfulness that your ministry may be like Samuel's. But don't trust in your striving. Trust in

God's grace. His grace alone can make you a faithful servant.
Amen