

The Best Advice You Can Get.

<sup>1</sup> The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

<sup>2</sup> One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. <sup>3</sup> The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

<sup>5</sup> And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

<sup>6</sup> Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

<sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup> So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Advice is good. When we had our first baby, I remember someone advising me, "Tuck in your tie when you change diapers." Good advice. I also learned you should not give a nursing mother a broccoli hot dish. So, I tell new moms to avoid broccoli for a while. Some advice is lifesaving like when my dad told me to turn off the electricity before changing that light switch. It is good advice is to check your blind spot before changing lanes on the highway. If you were to give three bits of advice to your kids or grandkids, what would you say?

Today you will get a bit of advice. When the Lord started speaking to Samuel, Eli, the priest, advised him to tell the Lord to speak and then to listen to him. This is the best advice you will ever get.

*I. Let the Lord speak.*

Be careful of what you wish for. You may actually get it. We have an example of that in our text. <sup>1</sup> **The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.** Today God speaks to us through his Bible. Back then he spoke to his people through selected prophets. But God stopped speaking for a while. Why? That is what the people wanted. They didn't want to listen to God and his prophets so he stopped speaking to them.

This wasn't the only time. Hundreds of years later God did the same in the book of Amos. <sup>11</sup> **"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. <sup>12</sup> Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.** There is no greater punishment than for the Lord to stop speaking to us.

But God couldn't remain silent for long. He raised up Samuel to be a new prophet. God raised up other prophets before and after him. He sent the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, and Jesus spoke the Word to us and then raised apostles to go out and speak more. God moved some of them to write it down into the Bible we have today.

God is speaking to us more than ever before in all of history. The average American home has 4.3 Bibles. How many do you have? I counted 11 in my office. And there is a silver lining to COVID. According to surveys, there is a 24% increase of people reading their Bibles at home, though, sadly, 9% have cut back on their reading. 16% read their Bibles at least four times a week which is higher than before COVID.

But before we start cheering, I ask you, what percentage should be reading their Bibles at home? And these same surveys tell us that only 36% of Christians attend church once a month, not weekly, but once a month. And regular church goes is down since COVID, from 34% in 2019, not a number to brag about, to only 28% after COVID. God is speaking to us more than ever with Bibles in the home, the internet, even phone apps, but it seems like we are listening less. God doesn't have to stop speaking to us; we seem to be doing that well by ourselves.

But why? Well, there are many competing voices out there. Most try to imagine a world without God. Do we listen? And to make it worse, people seem to want God on their own terms, not his. It is more satisfying to hold grudges and hate our neighbor than to love him. We want to run to temptation and not run away from it. So we tune God out, or ignore many parts of his Bible, or ignore it altogether.

Other times we are distracted. We saw that in our gospel reading. Martha did a good thing. She immediately went to work to feed 13 guests who came to her home. But that good thing kept her from hearing Jesus speak God's Word. In fact, she got mad

when her sister listened to Jesus instead of helping her. Even good things can distract us from listening to God, not to mention bad distractions.

The Lord should stop speaking. That means he should take our Bibles away, close our churches, and let ... **men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.** But he won't. He can't. He has a gift he wants to share with us. He has some news that will change our lives forever. He speaks. Let's listen.

*II. May we humbly listen to him.*

He speaks to us today through his Holy Word. Can you imagine the chaos out there if this person claimed, "The Lord said this," and that person claimed, "The Lord says that?" To make it easy and clear, God did the best thing possible. He gave us his Word in written form in the Bible. He did that through Samuel in our text. He did that through Moses and Isaiah and Paul and John. They didn't make these things up. As it says in 2 Peter 1, <sup>19</sup> **And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.** <sup>20</sup> **Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.** <sup>21</sup> **For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.** It is clear and simple. God speaks through his Bible.

The best advice we can get is to simply listen. Three times the Lord called out to Samuel. Not knowing any better, Samuel thought it was his mentor, the priest Eli, who was calling him. Give Eli credit. He had his issues. He did not deal properly with his two sons, also priests, when they seduced women at the church, stole from the offerings and bullied people. Yet, he gets it right here. And what advice does he give? <sup>9</sup> **So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.** <sup>10</sup> **The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."**

Listening takes work. The experts say our brains go four times faster than spoken words. It is hard for our brains to slow down and listen. You have to work at it. Yes, we have to work at listening to God. It takes effort to resist distractions like doing something else Sunday morning. It takes effort to focus. It also takes humility. Samuel regarded himself as a servant before the Lord. I know next to nothing about plumbing, so if the plumber explains why there is three feet of water in the basement and how to solve it, I would do well to listen. I have to consider myself the novice and the plumber the expert. The same with the Lord. It takes humility. We have to regard ourselves as his servants. That means we don't hear what God says, we listen. Listening hears and then goes into action. So listen as humble servants and do what he says.

And what will we hear? He explains Jesus to us. When I work under the hood of my car, I inevitably get some engine grease on my hands. So I reach for the shop rag and whip it off and later use Lava soap to clean my hands before I do anything else in the house. Jesus is the shop rag we wipe our dirty sins on. He takes our sins, pays for them with his own suffering and death, so that we are clean before God.

It assures us in Hebrews 10, ... **let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.** As a pastor I get the privilege of announcing that your sins are forgiven in Christ every Sunday morning. But I need to hear that, not just once in a lifetime, but regularly so a conscience that still sees sin in my life is clean, and guilt is driven away. We need to hear that our sins are forgiven regularly.

Yet, we still live in a sinful world. Temptations are still very real. God is still speaking to us about that. You heard in our epistle reading earlier: <sup>12</sup> **Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.** <sup>13</sup> **Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** <sup>14</sup> **And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.** We ask God, "How can we live as your children in this world?" And he tells us. He tells us of a new attitude, one of compassion, kindness and humility. He tells us how to put that attitude into action as we patiently carry or endure each other's personalities, burdens, and annoyances. He tells us how to have a happier life as we forgive others as he forgave us. In other words, how to love, not with a selfish, worldly love, but with a love that is out of this world.

God may not advice on whether to replace or repair your hot water heater. He will not tell you which portfolios you should invest your money in. There are experts out there who can give you good advice on that. But he has some advice that is far better, advice that affects us for eternity, advice that affects us even today. So, like Samuel, beg the Lord to speak to you here and at home, and be a willing servant as you listen. Amen.