

1. Limitless possibilities when you walk with God

2. Set the scene.

Shiloh was the place where the tent of God was. It was a mobile version of the Temple.

Its key elements were a large courtyard where the priests slaughtered and sacrificed animals; then in the middle a large heavily covered box like structure consisting of two rooms. The first was entered by the priests and had a lamp stand and an altar of incense.

The inner room contained only a wooden box or Ark of God exquisitely carved and covered with gold.

Above it was a gold statue of two cherubim. There was no light in that space except for the light of the presence of God. No one entered this room except the High Priest and that only once a year.

At the time of these events, Eli was the High Priest and Samuel was a boy dedicated to the Lords by his parents.

The implication of the story was he slept in the outer of the two special rooms.

To get the full context, you do need to read 1 Samuel 1-2 for yourself. In fact it would be good to read on through 1 Samuel in the next three weeks as we are dipping in and out of the story.

3. READ 1Samuel 3:1-21

1Samuel 3:1-21

3 The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

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

Samuel answered, "Here I am." 5 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.

6 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."

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

8 A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’”

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.”

Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

¹⁷ “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.”

¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

¹⁹ The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

4. In what tone of voice do you think God called Samuel was it
Samuel (angry)
Samuel (begging)
Samuel (playful)
Samuel (authoritative)
Samuel (quietly)
Samuel (distant)

In some ways your answer will reflect your knowledge of God. And that is a key point in this story. **What kind of God is YHWH?**

They is a back story of a long past when Israel was rescued from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, the desert and triumphantly overran Canaan. There were stories of great men and woman who rescued the nation when they were attacked by superior forces. But they were tales of past glory.

Here in the religious centre, there was the twice daily sacrifices and people coming for the festivals but God was simply the label on the door. Shiloh was like many churches today, a historic monument with quaint but irrelevant rituals. Eli's sons saw the possibilities of making it good for themselves.

God calls Samuel.

Samuel has no expectation of God speaking, so he assumes the voice was that of Eli.

God is patient and waits for the penny to drop in Eli's mind.

God uses Eli to direct Samuel to himself. You need to read chapter 1 to get a hint of Eli's role. He is used by God even though he is not exactly the perfect example of a High Priest. Our leaders are not perfect but God uses sinners saved by grace to speak to us. Listen to what God says through those who share this platform, even though you will know our weaknesses.

Moving on, did you get the point about God calling Samuel? He knows his name! And he knows yours as well.

4a. He knows your name!

That is amazing! There are over 70 billion people in the world and God knows everyone of us by name. And he knows what we are. Our sins, our worries, our strengths and our successes. He knows your name!

But there are two sides to a relationship. God knows your name, he knows you better then you know yourself. But do you know God?

5. The writer puts it this way:

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

Notice there are two sentences here Samuel did not know the Lord and the reason was that God had not revealed himself to him. The point I am stressing is that you can't know God unless he chooses to reveal himself to you. The tragedy of Samuel's circumstance is that , even though he was in the centre of the worship of YHWH, even though he was living with the High Priest Eli who was meant to have a close relationship with God, no one knew God. The story of Israel is one of individuals knowing God and encouraging everyone else to follow. Moses, Joshua, the judges, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, the later prophets each knew God and led people to follow him. But that was not God's intention.

Jeremiah writes of a day in the future and says this: Jeremiah 31:34 *No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

It is quoted in Hebrews 8:11 because in Jesus and the kingdom of God, it is fulfilled. Jesus knows God because he is God and when we receive his salvation through faith in him, we know God.

This is spelt out by Jesus in John 17:3 *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

He has already said that those who believe in him will have eternal life, now he defines eternal life as knowing God.

5a. Do you know God?

The other way of putting that question is has God revealed himself to you?

Has this 'being a Christian business' taken a step further into actually receiving Jesus as Saviour and Lord?

But the story of Samuel lifts off when God calls him.

Are you waiting to hear from God? Or have you given up and go about the Sunday ritual of worship and teaching because that's what we do?

6. STOP and LISTEN!

We can't manipulate God. We have to wait for him to speak. The Holy Spirit comes as and goes when he wills. The message this morning is to be ready and willing when he calls you. He will call you to follow him, I am certain of that. But are you listening?

The problem with the people of Israel was that nobody was listening to God.

7. Respond: *'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'*

I have already pointed out that to listen we need to stop.

Secondly we need to understand our relationship with God.

Lord – Servant

We speak a lot about the fact that God has called us to be friends rather than servants. We, rightly, rejoice in

the fact that we are adopted into his family and are therefore sons and daughters of the living God. But there remains an important element in our relationship with him that he is Lord and we are his servants. That means

God knows what is best for us.

Listening means obeying.

His will not mine.

7a. God knows what is best for us.

The serpent in the garden of Eden suggested God didn't actually have what was best for us and sin entered into our world as Eve, then Adam tried to go it alone. They listened to other advice. And we are totally bombed out with advice on what to do. Every way you look there is advertising, face book, twitter, websites just brimming with wonderful advice. Samuel's script begins with God knowing what's best. In his case the news was initially totally gloomy. His mentor and family was to be swept away because of blasphemy in the family. Listening does not mean nice news automatically but it will be good news. God's primary message to us is that he loves us. He calls us to turn from sin – thinking we know better than him – and receiving his salvation by grace through faith in him.

7b. Listening means obeying.

When God speaks to us he calls us to obey. Jesus put it as a proverb.

He who ears to hear, let him listen.

Having ears is not enough, nor just listening for our entertainment. We must respond in faith and obedience.

7c. His will not mine.

Samuel never had a choice, from birth he was dedicated to God. He lead Israel for many years and anointed two kings in his time. He may have wanted a nice place on the coast with a vineyard and fig trees and so on. But that never happens. Instead he is taking responsibility in leading God's people and directing them. And he , we will find, is faithful in that task. Not always sure what God was up to, Not always happy with the way things were going, but faithful. He holds God's people in his heart.

Jesus spoke about our response in a number of parables.

For example:
Matthew 21: 28

²⁸ *“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’*

²⁹ *“‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.*

³⁰ *“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.*

³¹ *“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”*

“The first,” they answered.

Or the parable of the Sower. Where Jesus examines other reactions to hearing God’s word.

8. So this morning’s word comes as a series of questions

8a Do you know God?

8b Are you listening?

8c Are you hearing?

8d Are you responding to God's word?

So our next song is a conversation you may have with God not only as you sing it but as you live each day.

*I, the Lord of Sea and sky...
Whom shall I send?*

We reply:
*Here I am Lord
Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night
I will go Lord
If You lead me
I will hold Your people in my heart*