

## **Every Cloud Has a Sovereign Lining**

1 Sam. 2:11-36

(preached 3/18/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

### **Introduction**

During World War, American B-17 planes would make runs dropping bombs on German cities.

Well, in the book “The Fall of Fortresses,” a navigator on one of those American bombers, Elmer Bendiner tells a story of one of their missions.

His plane was on mission to bomb the German city of Kassel.

While in flight, the plane’s gas tank was hit by German anti aircraft fire from the ground.

Incredibly, the plane did not explode and was even able to make it back for a safe landing.

Once they landed, the crew saw the hole in the gas tank, and the pilot asked the ground crew to retrieve the unexploded shell for a souvenir of their good fortune.

After closer inspection, the ground crew found not 1 but 11 unexploded shells in the gas tank of that plane.

Well, news of the incident spread and military intelligence arrived trying to understand what happened.

So, they carefully took each shell apart, and to their surprise, none of the shells contained an explosive charge.

They were all duds in a sense.

However, inside one of the shells was a note written note in German but in Czech.

The note simply read “This is all we can do for you now.”

The clear explanation was this...

Germany used slave labor in their military factories.

Many of the workers were Jews who had been captures in Czechoslovakia.

And apparently, a worker or a team of slave laborers had decided that the best way to bring about their freedom was to sabotage the weapons they were making.

They were not able to lead a revolution.

They were not able to assassinate Hitler.

They were not able to escape.

So, they used what means they had to destroy their opponent.

And in this case, they simply left out the explosive charges that were part of the anti aircraft shells.

And if you read about WW2, there are other examples of malfunctioning German weapons, vehicles and other military supplies...

That were built in faulty ways.

And the point of that is this....

The quiet work of these men in factories saved the lives of others and eventually led to defeat for their enemies.

And though this isn't the perfect comparison, I think this relates to how God works at times in the world.

Now, obviously God is not limited in what He can do.

He is not like the slave labor in the German factory.

God is free to work as He chooses.

But often times, God works quietly to bring about His plan.,

We don't see grand displays of His power all the time, but rest assured, God is going about His business at all times.

Often I think we desire God to work in grand ways, and we get sinfully frustrated when HE doesn't.

But we must resist to temptation to think that God doesn't care.

Because we know He cares for His people.

We know He doesn't abandon His people.

And we must hold on to those truths even when things look really bad from our perspective.

Now, in our passage tonight in 1 Samuel, we are going to see a really bad situation in Israel.

The sons of the priests who work in the tabernacle of God are evil men.

They steal from the worshippers who come to worship at the tabernacle.

They even commit sexual sins with women at the tabernacle.

It is a dark day when those who are supposed to be closest to the Lord are the ones committing incredible sins.

Yet against that backdrop of sin in the tabernacle,  
we are going to see God working in a quiet way.

In the middle of the sins of these priests, we are  
going to see little bitty Samuel at the temple as well.

And here is going to be a reminder that God is still at  
work.

Yes, there is sin among the priests.

Yes, Israel sees the sins of the priests...

But No, God has not abandoned his people or his  
tabernacle.

He is raising up the next generation who will be a  
faithful man of God.

That is the big idea of the verses that we will  
examine tonight in 1 Samuel 2:11-36.

We will take this long passage in bite size chunks...

So, let's begin with this first section in verses 11-  
17...

## I. The Sons of the Devil (11-17)

*<sup>11</sup> Then Elkanah went to his home at Ramah. But the boy ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest. <sup>12</sup> Now the sons of Eli were <sup>[f]</sup>worthless men; they did not know the LORD <sup>13</sup> and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. <sup>14</sup> Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. <sup>15</sup> Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw." <sup>16</sup> If the man said to him, "They must surely <sup>[g]</sup>burn the fat <sup>[h]</sup>first, and then take as much as <sup>[i]</sup>you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force." <sup>17</sup> Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD.*

When it comes to fried chicken, I will only eat a wing or a breast.

I have no desire for the dark meat found in a thigh or a leg when it comes to fried chicken.

However, I will eat a leg and thigh if the chicken is grilled.

Some people have a definite preference for dark or white meat when it comes to chicken.

And people at a covered dish will go to battle over a breast or a thigh.

Now, when we consider the verses we just read, you need to be reminded of this...

God's law in Lev 7 said that the priests were entitled to the breast and thigh of some of the sacrifices presented to God.

It was how the priests and their families were compensated for serving the Lord.

God allowed the priests to take a portion of what God's people brought to Him.

However, the sons of Eli, who was the priests at the tabernacle were not content with what provided for them.

So, they would take whatever they wanted from those who brought their sacrifices to the temple.

In these verses, we know that families would often cook the leftovers of their sacrifices to feed their families in preparation for the journey back home.

Well, Eli's sons, -Hophni and Phineas-, would go to these meals or send a servant to the meal and take along a big fork.

Then the fork would go into the cooking pot and whatever it brought was taken for the sons to eat.

They would even take meat that was still uncooked from the people in verses 15-16.

If the worshippers refused to give it, they would be threatened by the priests' servants.

This is clear theft.

But what makes it worse is the fact that these were priests of God.

It is one thing for someone to steal for you but when it is someone who should be trustworthy...

It is incredibly hard to swallow.

Unfortunately, we live in a day where extortion, embezzlement, bribery are all common in the world...

And even worse, they are often committed in the church by pastors and leadership.

I did a quick internet search of pastor embezzlement and it turned up 1000s of examples.

Then I narrowed it down to pastor stealing from the church in SC.

And that search even turned up example after example.

And it is an incredibly sad day in the church when those trusted betray the people of God by stealing from them.

That was the situation in Israel in 1 Samuel 2.

However Galatians 6:7 reminds us of this great truth...

***<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption,***

And let me admit this...

At times, I have the heart of James and John.

Remember when Jesus entered a Samaritan village and was rejected?

What did James and John ask Jesus?

Lord, can we send fire down on this whole village?

Jesus immediately rebuked them for such an idea, but at times I understand their words.

At times, we want a thunderbolt from heaven to destroy people.

Here are two men deserving of such judgment, yet God chooses not to destroy them right away.

Instead, He offers a glimpse of what He is doing in the next section of 1 Samuel...

And we move from sons of the devil to....

## **II. Son of Devotion (18-21)**

*<sup>18</sup> Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD, as a boy <sup>[l]</sup>wearing a linen ephod. <sup>19</sup> And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.*

*<sup>20</sup> Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, “May the LORD give you <sup>[k]</sup>children from this woman in place of <sup>[l]</sup>the one she dedicated to the LORD.” And they went to their own <sup>[m]</sup>home.*

*<sup>21</sup> The LORD visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the LORD.*

Most Sunday afternoons were road trips for me as a little kid.

My Dad’s sister lived in Greenville, and we would go visit her.

It was only an hour drive, but it might as well have been a trip to California for a 5 year old.

We would often stay past supper and that made the trip home seem even longer.

I was tired and ready to get home.

Well, there were a small group of houses about 5 miles outside of Whitmire

But for me, when we passed those houses in the car, it was a ray of hope that we were almost home.

And here in 2 Samuel 2, we see God show this ray of hope to Israel.

It is a dark time.

Sexual immorality and theft are happened in and around God's tabernacle.

Yet, all hope is not lost as long as this little boy is around there ministering to the Lord.

Hannah would even bring him clothes when the family visited Shiloh.

Eli must have also found comfort in this little boy.

His sons were a lost cause, yet here was a little boy filled with promise.

Eli even blesses his mother and asks God to give her more children because of her acts of dedicating Samuel to the Lord.

God even answered the prayer and gave Hannah more children, 3 sons and two daughters.

This is the sun peeking through the clouds after days of clouds and rain.

This is hope.

It is amazing how the presence of children are a shot in the arm to a church or even a family that is going through trouble.

Seeing the next generation is the promise that there still be a chance for success and victory.

But as soon as the hope appears, the chapter returns to the darkness of the sins of Eli's sons.

In verses 22-25, we go from the son of devotion back to...

### **III. The Sons of the Devil Part 2 (22-25)**

***<sup>22</sup> Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. <sup>23</sup> He said to them, “Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? <sup>24</sup> No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear <sup>in</sup> the Lord’s people circulating. <sup>25</sup> If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death.***

Two good principles for us to see here...

One, Eli does not sweep the sins of his sons under the rug, which is commendable.

Unfortunately, families often conceal the sins of other family members and that is never good.

It is good that Eli took notice.

Two, it is even better that he took action.

He goes to his sons with reports of their sins.

Again, this is admirable.

The Bible is clear that we need to go to a brother in sin and call him to repentance.

So, Eli did two things really well here, but he made a critical error.

He saw, he confronted, but he did not go far enough because he still allowed his sons to serve in the tabernacle.

The right move would have been to confront and remove his sons until they showed repentance over their sins.

But Eli didn't do that.

He stopped short of doing that, and it is going to lead God to taking more action in just a few verses.

Lesson for all of us....

Sin in leadership must be dealt with immediately and decisively.

Grace abounds for the sinner who repents of his sin.

People commit sins and if they show repentance, restoration is available.

But it does take time, and if the person is a highly visible servant of the Lord...

He needs to be removed to protect the purity of the God that he represents.

Church discipline is not about getting rid of sinners; rather is about protecting the purity of the church by calling for their repentance.

Then notice one other truth here...

God stopped up the ears of the sons...

The end of verse 25 says that they wouldn't listen to their dad for the LORD desired to put them to death.

People try to clean this verse up like they try to clean up the verse that says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

But we must accept the verse for what it says.

The sons did not listen because their fate was already determined.

Years of stealing from God's people and committing sexual sins with women at the tabernacle had hardened their heart to God.

In fact, verse 12 says that they did not KNOW the Lord.

And their lives proved that.

And now here they are being called to repentance by their own father, yet they are unable to hear because their death is already determined.

People have trouble with such teaching.

Some accuse God of refusing mercy.

Others wonder how much sin they can commit without being hardened too much.

The point of this is not to make us angry at God or push the limit of trying to find where we push God over the edge.

The point of this is to make us tremble before a God who has the ability to make the wicked unable to repent.

And that is where the sons of Eli find themselves.

Their car is headed full speed toward a cliff, yet they have no idea that the brakes don't work.

That is a scary place to be, but that is the place where they are.

And it is the same place where men and women who have rejected the gospel for countless years find themselves.

We always pray that God would open their ears, but according to this verse and others....

There comes a time when their blindness and deafness do become permanent.

Yet from that dreadful truth, we are taken back to the place of hope in verse 26....

As we move from the sons of the devil part 2 to the....

#### **IV. Son of Devotion Part 2 (26)**

***26 Now the boy Samuel [o]was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men.***

We are again reminded of the contrast between Eli's sons and Hannah's son.

Here is verse 26 we see a boy growing in favor who stands in contrast to the sons of Eli who are growing in sin.

God is getting more pleased with Samuel and less pleased with Hophni and Phineas.

Men are thinking more and more of Hannah's son and less and less of Eli's sons.

And then we arrive at this final section of chapter 2...

We have seen the sons of the devil and the son of devotion....

Let's close with the.....

## V. Sentence of God (27-36)

Verse 27...

***27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Did I not indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in bondage to Pharaoh’s house? 28 Did I not choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I not give to the house of your father all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel? 29 Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the <sup>[v]</sup> choicest of every offering of My people Israel?’***

God begins his judgment of Eli and his evil sons by reminding them of the great privilege that they had of serving in his tabernacle.

What verse comes to mind?

Luke 12:48, Jesus said....

***“From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”***

Eli and his sons enjoyed much privilege and priests at the tabernacle...

Yet they had abused that privilege and honor for their own sinful gain...

And Eli must also have had taken some part in the theft of food because the prophet of God tells him..

***“You make yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering.”***

Certainly, implying that Eli had taken part in the stealing sacrificial meat as well.

That should come as no surprise.

Often the sins of the father show up in the sons.

Maybe the sons had watched their father do this when they were little.

Who knows, but it would not be a big leap to assume that Eli had been a model of thievery for his boys?

And then we see this incredible charge against Eli..

***“You honor your sons above me.”***

That is a clear reference that Eli did not go far enough in his rebuke of his sons.

He only spoke to them, but he refused to remove them from their roles as priests.

That is a stinging charge, but one that is committed often today when parents put their kids above God on their priority list.

Why didn't Eli remove them?

Maybe it would be an embarrassment to Him.

Maybe he even enjoyed watching his sons sin.

Maybe he was benefitting from their sin.

Regardless of the reason, it is a horrible choice to choose ours kids over our relationship to God.

We love our children.

We point them to the gospel.

We teach them to obey God.

But we never elevate them over our devotion to the Lord.

Because when we do, we commit idolatry.

And the sin of idolatry has consequences...

Look at the first consequence of Eli's sin in verses 30-33..

*<sup>30</sup> Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the Lord declares, 'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. <sup>31</sup> Behold, the days are coming when I will break your <sup>[a]</sup>strength and the <sup>[r]</sup>strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house. <sup>32</sup> You will see the distress of My dwelling, in spite of all the good that <sup>[s]</sup>I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever. <sup>33</sup> Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar <sup>[t]</sup>so that your*

*eyes will fail from weeping and your soul grieve,  
and all the increase of your house will die <sup>[u]</sup>in the  
prime of life.*

The first consequence of not dealing with the sins of your sons is this...

Your family tree will be known for people dying before their time.

Charles Darwin, a man responsible for the theory of evolution which denied that God created the earth actually had a family tree of premature death.

Darwin had 3 children die before the age of ten..

And many of these other children suffered from lifelong health problems...

And you probably know families where there seems to be a lot of people who die in the prime of life.

Many people have pointed to the Kennedy family of political fame.

From 1941 to 2011, eleven people from the Kennedy family under the age of 50 have died in accidents or assassinations.

Obviously, there is no way to tell that these were judgments of God upon those families...

But it was certainly a judgment of God upon Eli's family tree here in 2 Samuel...

Unfortunately, that was not the only consequence for Eli...

Look at verse 34....

***34 This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phineas: on the same day both of them will die.***

This may have simply been a result of the God's judgment on the family tree..

But I see it as a second consequence because it hits so close to Eli's heart.

He is going to lose both of his sons on the same day.

God answer to Eli placing his children above God is that God is going to take his children away.

Sure, Hophni and Phineas are judged for their own sins.

God has already determined to put them to death, but he will do it on the same day.

As a reminder to Eli of siding with them instead of siding with God.

Once again, a clear reminder to all of us that our first loyalty is to the Lord.

Our love runs deep for family but our deepest love is reserved for God.

And now Eli will pay the highest price for loving them more than God.

He will watch them die before their time.

Yet, God doesn't end this chapter on a depressing note.

Rather, we are reminded that God's purposes are not changed by evil men.

God will continue the line of priests to Israel..

Verse 35...

***35 But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always. 36 Everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a <sup>[v]</sup>piece of silver or a loaf of bread and say, "Please <sup>[w]</sup>assign me to one of the priest's offices so that I may eat a piece of bread.""***

Given the context, a lot of people see this as Samuel.

However, others who see at Zadok, a priest who is installed years later during the reign of Solomon.

Samuel is more known for his service to God as a judge and prophet.

Therefore, I think it is a look into the future when the priests will not be known for sin but for righteousness....

And that seems to fit more with Zadok in 1Kings 1 and 2.

Either way, this a reminder that God's plans are not frustrated by stubborn disobedient people.

Rather, God is a God who is constantly at work despite man's desire to frustrate his plans.

It is said that every cloud has a silver lining.

The better way to think of that is that every cloud has a sovereign lining.

Because God is at work even in the darkest of situations.

## **Conclusion**

We became professional air travelers while in seminary.

We flew across the country 7 times while at seminary...

A couple of those times with a baby.

And most of those times through Los Angeles Airport where it is extremely busy.

That is why I call us professionals.

Anyway, it is incredible what happens every time you take off.

IT can be raining, snowing, sleeting, windy on the ground...

But you eventually climb through all the clouds and what is true about every flight...

You see the sun if you get high enough out of the clouds.

Pilots have perfect sunshine everyday.

And that is a good way to think about God's work at times.

We see the clouds.

Hophni and Phineas were clouds in their theft and sexual sin...

But the reality is that God was shining brightly above those clouds...

He was raising a new generation in the boy of Samuel.

His plans were coming to pass.

His purposes were being accomplished.

Even his justice was prevailing as he was going to deal with the sins of the priests.

And often times, we can't see the sun for the clouds.

And we even wonder if the sun is still in the sky at times.

Yet, we need to rest in the fact that God is always behind the clouds.

He is working for His people.

He is working to protect His people.

HE is working to provide for His people.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked.

But also don't be discouraged for God is at work.

And he is causing all things "to work together for good to those who love him and to those who are called according to his purpose."

Let us pray.