

Silence Is Not Golden

1 Sam. 3:1-4:1

(preached 3/25/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

Apollo 13 was a near disaster for NASA.

The mission was supposed the 3rd trip to the moon, but when an oxygen tank exploded, the mission was changed.

And now the mission became an attempt to save the crew and get them safely back to earth.

After much calculating and improvising, the plan was to re-enter the earth's atmosphere and splash down in the Pacific Ocean.

However, the difficult part of re-entering the atmosphere in that day is that there would be no radio contact with Apollo for 3-4 minutes.

The year was 1970, and the story was picked up by every news station in the world.

People followed the entire flight watching live through their TV sets at home.

They could every word that was spoken by the ground control and by the astronauts.

Then the moment arrived when the communication was cut off.

Scientists on the ground estimated that the silence would last around 4 ½ minutes..

However, 5 minutes passed and still no word from the astronauts.

5 minutes 30 seconds and still nothing.

The anxiety turned to fear for most people who assumed at the 6 minute mark that the Apollo had exploded.

Finally, at 6 minutes and 6 seconds, the voice of Jack Swigert came over the radio letting the entire world know that the crew had survived re-entry.

At 10:07 am, Apollo 13 landed in the Pacific Ocean.

Looking back over the events of that flight, the director on the ground, Gene Kranz, described the 6 minutes of radio silence as...

“The toughest 6 minutes that he has ever had.”

I can't imagine what the families of the astronauts went through in that time of radio silence.

The whole nation was on the edge of their seats, and they thought of hearing nothing made it even worse.

We are a people getting more and more used to instant communication.

Today's generation has no idea what it was like to write a letter to a loved one who lived in another part of the world or was at war...

And then waiting days, weeks or even months to hear back from them.

Now, we get concerned when someone doesn't answer our calls right away.

We are people so dependent on communication.

We read papers...

We watch news shows.

We surf the internet.

We get calls, texts, we read Facebook.

We love hearing, seeing and reading about others.

And I am not being critical of that.

I take part in that, and in many ways, it is a blessing to have the technology that we have...

But when we think about communication, let's take a minute to think about how God communicates to us.

When God created the world and put man into His creation, how did he communicate with Adam and Eve?

Well, Genesis says that he walked in the garden with them..

Before sin, he communicated with them face to face.

Once sin entered the world, face to face communication was not the preferred method, even though God still communicated with man verbally.

He called to Abraham.

He talked to Moses.

He spoke His words to his leaders in various ways.

Visions, dreams, signs, the spoken word.

God used various ways to communicate to His people.

Then God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to speak to the world...

And that was the focus of Jesus' ministry, he communicated God's Word to the world.

God then used the disciples to communicate His word to the world.

And you have the sum of what God has communicated to the world in your hands tonight.

The Bible is the final word of God.

Now, we live in a day and age where people say that God still speaks to them and gives them fresh words of revelation.

Christian book stores are filled with preachers, teachers and speakers who feel sure that God is speaking directly to them.

I would certainly disagree with their claims and I think the Bible disagrees with those claims, but...

Some of those people are certainly believers and it is an issue that I simply have to agree to disagree with them about.

However, how God communicates with us today is not the focus of the passage that we will look at tonight.

The focus of the passage is how God communicated with Israel in the days of Samuel.

First, we need to remember that the Bible was still incomplete at this point in history.

Israel had copies of the law that God had given to Moses, but the rest of the Bible was yet to be written.

So, Israel was still very dependent upon hearing from God at this point in her history.

I have talked about it before, but I am an instruction dependent man.

When I put something together, I need instructions.

I pull them out of the box first.

I inventory my items, and I start with step 1.

I am instructions dependent person.

And that was certainly true of Israel at this point in history.

They needs a word from God, but it was the time of the judges and God had gone silent.

Maybe the people's sin has caused him to stop speaking as judgment upon their disobedience.

But whatever the reason, God had limited his communication with the people of Israel.

If this was the Apollo 13 mission, this period would have been the six minutes of no communication with the astronauts.

So in chapter 3, God is going to break the silence.

Eli and his evil sons are passing away and Samuel is going to become God's prophet to the nation.

I entitled this message, "Silence Isn't So Golden," because sometimes not hearing a word is far worse than hearing all the noise.

As we journey through chapter 3, we will see how God breaks through the silence in Israel.

In verses 1-9, we will see..

THE STRUGGLE TO HEAR FROM GOD.

In verses 10-14, we will see....

THE TIME TO LISTEN TO GOD ...

And then in verses 15 to chapter 4, verse 1, we will see..

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SPEAK FOR GOD.

So, let's begin by reading a few verses in chapter 3 of 1 Samuel....

I. The Struggle to Hear from God (1-9)

Verse 1...

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, ^[a]visions were infrequent.

This verse sets the stage for what we are about to read in this chapter.

If you remember, the setting of the opening chapters in 1 Samuel is still during the time of the judges in Israel.

The people are in what seems to be a never ending cycle of sin in the land.

We have met Eli, who was the priest at the tabernacle in those days.

His sons also worked at the tabernacle and engaged in theft and immorality there.

The land was in sin.

The priests were engaged in sin.

And verse 1 in chapter 3 is a summary of the Lord's communication to Israel in those days.

It was rare.

He wasn't speaking to his people in vision or dreams or coming to them with the spoken word.

In some ways, God was giving Israel the silent treatment...

But not like we use the silent treatment.

We use it for selfish reasons to carry out the revenge of our hearts upon others.

God uses the silent treatment to provoke people to return to Him and do good.

However, not hearing from God make it difficult to know when he actually was speaking.

Look at verse 2 and what follows

² It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well), ³ and 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, ⁴ that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, lie down again." So he went and lay down.

If you haven't been here, Samuel is the little boy who is now working at the tabernacle alongside Eli.

He was the answered prayer that his mother Hannah offered to the Lord.

Hannah then turned around and gave Samuel back to the Lord to serve in his tabernacle at Shiloh.

Eli was getting old.

Samuel was the reminder that God was still at work even though the people were in disobedience.

So, Samuel and Eli served and must have lived very near the tabernacle and possibly slept in the courtyard of the tabernacle.

And here they are one night sound asleep when the LORD calls to Samuel.

Samuel goes to Eli, thinking that he was the one calling of him.

At this point, it is safe to assume that Samuel is now a teenager.

The word used to describe him in verse 11 is the same word used to describe David when he killed Goliath.

Now when we consider a teenager being woke up in his deep sleep by his parents calling him.,.

We don't picture him jumping up out of bed and running to his parents.

We see him offering a muffled....”What?!” and then rolling back over.

But Samuel answers and then goes to what he thinks is the source of the voice.

He goes to Eli, who sends him back to bed...

The situation repeats itself again beginning in verse 6....

⁶ The LORD called yet again, “Samuel!” So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he ^[b]answered, “I did not call, my son, lie down again.” ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him.

Again, God calls to Samuel and he again goes to Eli only to be sent back to bed.

Then we read an interesting note in verse 7...

Samuel did not yet know the Lord.

What does that mean?

Well, it means that Samuel lack understanding about God.

He obviously knew who God was; he served in the tabernacle.

He was just lacking the understanding that in those days, God spoke directly to his people in an audible voice.

He simply heard a voice and thought it was Eli calling him.

He never even considered it to be God who was calling to him.

Verse 8....

⁸ So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ And Eli said to Samuel, “Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Finally, after 3 tries, Samuel gets understanding.

God is the One who has been calling him.

It is also true that it took Eli 3 times before he understood it to be God.

Since hearing from God was rare in those days, it took some time to realize that God was the one who was calling.

A few years ago, a number of government officials in Union were convicted of corruption.

Taking bribes, kickbacks, a list of other illegal activity.

The FBI and SLED conducted the investigation that led to the arrests and convictions.

Well, I know a guy who was a contractor for county work who was interviewed by the FBI.

He said that he was sitting on main street in his truck and the phone rang.

The person on the other end said, "Mr. Smith, this is the FBI. We need to talk to you."

Well, he told me that he said, "Ok, which one my friends put you up to this?"

That he started laughing and saying, "very funny" and simply hung up the phone.

The phone immediately rang again.

This time, the voice on the other end said, "If you look out your driver window, we are parked across the street in a black Suburban."

We have government tags on the front and back of our vehicle.

I am about to hold the phone out of the window.

Then we will pull out and you follow us.

He said, “I stopped laughing, said “YES SIR” and followed instructions.”

But the misunderstanding was normal.

How often does the FBI call.

And the reaction in 1 Samuel was normal.

How often has God been calling to his people.

And the lesson for us here is not to be listening for God to speak audibly to us.

We live in an age where God speaks through his written word.

I tell people frequently....

If you want to audibly hear from God, read your Bible out loud.

The lesson for us is this...

God was patient with Samuel by calling to him 3 times.

He was not frustrated or aggravated because Samuel lacked the necessary understanding at this point.

He simply kept calling until Samuel responded...

And that is what we see in beginning in verse 10...

We move from...

THE STRUGGLE TO HEAR FROM GOD..

To..

II. THE TIME TO LISTEN TO GOD (10-14)

Verse 10..

¹⁰ Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for Your servant is listening.” ¹¹ The Lord said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹² In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. ¹⁴ Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”

The content of what God told Eli was that HE was going to judge the house of Eli.

Eli already knows this.

God had issued a similar judgment against Eli in chapter 2.

Eli’s refusal to rebuke his sons has led to consequences.

All of Israel is about to witness the consequences come to Eli’s house.

In verse, we see another chilling verse when God declares that there is no sacrifice that will be able to pay for the sins of Eli's house.

The level of evil in Eli's home had moved beyond forgiveness through sacrifice or offering.

This would be a dreadful judgment against anyone but it will "tingle the ears of Israel" because that would be the judgment against the house of Eli....

Who was a priest who served in the tabernacle.

If the chapter stopped here, there would be no problem.

God is now speaking to Samuel.

The silence has been broken.

Eli's house is under judgment.

A new day has dawned in Israel.

All is well.

Samuel is honored that God would speak to him.

It is all working out.

But then we move to verse 15...

We have the struggle to hear God, and the time to listen....

But finally we see....

III. The Responsibility to Speak for God (3:15-4:1)

Verse 15...

¹⁵ So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ Then Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹⁷ He said, “What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you.” ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him.

God tells Samuel the truth and his first duty is to share that truth with Eli that his family is under judgment.

The truth is that his days are coming to an end to serve the Lord in the tabernacle.

His sons are beyond the point of forgiveness.

The fate of his family has been sealed.

Judgment is coming, and it is not a pleasant judgment.

Now, Eli makes the task a little bit easier by telling Samuel to not hold anything back.....

He wanted the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

And Samuel obediently offers every last detail.

Eli pretty much knew what was coming.

This was more of a test of Samuel's obedience to share God's word with God's people.

It has been said over and over that the Christian has but two tasks in the world.

To comfort the afflicted with the truth of God's word.

But to also afflict the comfortable with the truth of God's word.

There is a conflict in every believer's heart.

We love the truth.

The truth has moved us to repent and believe upon the Lord.

We have been saved by the truth.

And we are called to share the truth of the gospel with the world.

But the saying is so very true...

"The truth hurts."

And we find our hearts in conflict.

People need the truth but the truth is never received well.

Look, the gospel is offensive to the world.

Telling someone that they are guilty before God and headed to an eternity in hell is not a way to get invited to Christmas dinner..

But it is the calling upon every believer in the world.

We comfort the afflicted...

We point people to the hope found in Christ...

But we also afflict the comfortable...

We tell the unbeliever who thinks that “Life is Good” that life is not good without Christ.

We identify with Samuel.

We have the privilege of knowing the Word of God, but we also have the responsibility to share that truth with the world.

And we do it graciously and lovingly, but we must do it.

It is the calling upon our lives.

And there is no more rewarding thing on this earth than to share the truth of the gospel and watch God save a soul.

The gospel truth is a blessing to us but we always need to feel the burden to share it.

Let's finish up this chapter by seeing Eli's reaction to what Samuel said...

At the end of verse 18, we see an incredible statement by Eli....

“And he said, “It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him.”

What an incredible description of God’s sovereignty!

That truth will get you through any valley.

Let God do what seems good to him.

We must give credit where credit is due.

That was an excellent response by Eli.

He is bowing to the sovereignty of God.

But there is another reaction to Samuel’s willingness to share the truth with Eli..

And it is found in the final verses of chapter 3...

Verse 19...

¹⁹ Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words ^[c]fail. ²⁰ All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. ²¹ And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. 4 Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

How does God reward obedience?

He offers more blessings.

Samuel was faithful to share the truth with Eli and God continued to reveal more truth to Samuel.

Dan to Beersheba is a way to describe all of Israel.

The entire nation listened to Samuel, who was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord.

Conclusion

I want to end this chapter with the words of Eli ringing in our ears...

He told Samuel..

“What is the word that God spoke to you. Please do not hide it from me.”

Imagine if a cure for cancer were discovered in Swiss laboratory.

Scientists had finally uncovered the silver bullet for cancer.

Yet, they refused to go public with it.

Instead, they got paid every week, went home, and simply enjoyed life.

And let's say that someone uncovered their cure years later..

And realized that they had known about this cure for years, yet it was too much trouble to take it to market...

Or it would take too much of their time to explain it to the world.

Well ,the nations would be in an uproar.

They would persecute these men.

They would call for their lives to be taken ,since they knew a cure but failed to let others know.

The same is true for every believer who hold the cure for the death sentence of sin, yet is simply too lazy to act...

Or too unconcerned to share the truth.

I want us to remember the words of Eli....

“Please don’t hide it from me” when new encounter unbelievers.

It is not love to let them die in their sins.

Actually, if you know the cure, it is considered cruel tot let them die in their sins without at least offering the cure.

We can’t make them take it, but we should surely offer it.

Amen.

Let us pray.