

Samuel's Rise

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[0:00] So for today, we are going to continue in our series in 1 Samuel that we've started out. and last week we opened up and we got to peer into the life of Hannah, kind of this extraordinary woman and her story of her longing that gets fulfilled that she then gives back to the Lord.

And if you didn't hear that, I encourage you to go back and listen. And now this week, we're really going to jump into the events around the early life of that son that she gave up, from whom we get the name of this book, Samuel.

And the great thing about the story of Samuel as it opens is it's really going to show us something useful about what it means to become a man or woman of God.

Because if you're unfamiliar with the Bible or this story, you might mistakenly think that in the Bible, what you see is God selecting these incredibly special or holy people because they are special and holy and then he gives them to us to emulate.

But when you look at their lives, even those who are chosen, even those who are anointed, you see there is this process by which they become what God intends them to be.

[1:17] And that's part of the big idea for today is there is a process behind this. So we're just going to dive right into the Scripture day, picking up from last week in 1 Samuel 2.

But interestingly, the first thing we see in this section is not Samuel and what God is growing in him. God gives us a stark contrast to the path that he is on.

So here we go. 1 Samuel 2, verse 12 says this. Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. Some versions say the sons of Eli were scoundrels.

And if I can just let you know there, the Bible doesn't use that harsh a language that often for a person. They did not know the Lord. The custom of the priest with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come.

And while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. And that the fork brought up, whichever was brought up, the priest would take for himself.

[2:23] And this is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man whom was sacrificing, Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.

And if the man said, Let him burn the fat first and then take as much as you wish, he would say, No, you must give it now. And if not, I will take it by force. Maybe I should help you out a little bit here. So that's not something we see a whole lot in our day, but here's kind of what's going on, right? So as part of this sacrifice, this isn't just a provision. This is a sacrifice that's being made for the Lord. And part of what God had set up in that is as they were bringing these sacrifices of meat, it was really to the Lord, but the priest was allowed. So you would come and you would bring the sacrifice, and it would burn up the fat, which was considered like the choice part of the meat.

And really what that was intended to show is just we're giving our best to God. But then God would make provision for the people who serve them by letting them thrust in this three-pronged fork, and you would pull out what would be meat that you could eat.

[3:34] It was your provision, right? It was all these symbolisms of bringing your best to God and God taking care of his people. But what the sons of Eli were doing, and the reason it was so wicked, is that not only were they not letting that process happen, so they were partaking in the sacrifice when the fat was still on there, which again to us just seems like sort of a trivial thing, but literally what they were doing was profaning the name of God.

They were saying, we will eat the choice stuff. And to just kind of let you know that this wasn't just an oopsie, like maybe they were ignorant or something, the text tells you that they would actually

have people there that if you were an Israelite and you knew how this was supposed to go, they would actually force you to give them the meat, you know, before the fat was burned up. Because some people would notice that and say, well, at least if you're going to do something weird, let me at least do this. And they would say, no, you give it to me now raw, and I will do with it as I wish.

And if anybody resisted, they hit them with force. And that's why in verse 17 it says, thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt.

So as we open this segment of 1 Samuel, the first thing we encounter are men who, though they hold positions that should commend them to the community as righteous people, priests before the Lord are actually wicked people, which tells us something that most of us probably, unfortunately, already know to some degree in life, which is you can't judge spiritual maturity by a title.

[5:20] So I wish it were not so, but the world is in fact full of charlatans, liars, people who put on a costume and pretend to be something they're not.

Putting on the robes of a priest, calling yourself a pastor, holding up a degree from seminary, being declared anointed, posting spiritual social media or TikToks, none of those titles, none of those accomplishments make you righteous.

And I'm sure all of us have encountered someone in our life who had a spiritual title or a position in a church who just didn't live like Jesus. They said things that were wrong.

They led people to destruction. And you know, all of that is really true, but I'm actually, what I'd really encourage us to do today is to not get too hung up there, to not get discouraged by that, because this is really one of those places, if you're not careful, you can get really cynical or bitter about the things of God.

Look, it is true, indeed, there are snakes in church clothing, but that doesn't mean there aren't actually good leaders. It doesn't mean there aren't fellowships, there aren't people who, though they're not perfect, love Jesus and strive to follow Him.

[6:49] It doesn't mean a people can't be, if I can be a little cheesy, a city of grace. It doesn't mean a people can't strive to be that and let the community around them feel that.

But a title alone doesn't tell you much. And so the Bible wants you to know you shouldn't be fooled by that, and it tells us the God who sees everything isn't fooled by that either.

We continue reading a little further down in 1 Samuel. Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all of Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

So again, sin upon sin. And he said to them, why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons, it is no good this report that I hear from the people spreading abroad.

If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.

[8:03] Now like that last line, I know might be a little stark to us, but that's actually a pattern you're going to see over and over in Scripture, because the Bible makes it pretty clear, spiritual decay is a process.

It's interesting because, you know, when we started reading this passage today about Eli's sons, it says, they were worthless men. They were scoundrels.

And in one way, as the narrative plays out, and we read of the wickedness they're doing, we kind of think, that makes sense. This passage and this verse makes all the sense in the world because this is justice against the evil that they've committed.

But I've also been around long enough to know that in a crowd of this size, for some of us, reading that and reading how it was the Lord's will to put these men to death makes you a little uncomfortable because you think, you know, even if they did bad things, it kind of seems like God had it out for them.

Like he started by calling them wicked and now it's his will to put them to death. How were they supposed to make it if God hated them? The truth is, the Bible makes it pretty clear, no one is holy.

[9:22] You know, there's this theological concept called total depravity, which sometimes people, I think, mistakenly think is kind of a church doctrine that means people are rotten to the core.

I mean, it sounds really bad, right? Like you're totally depraved, but it actually doesn't mean that and I actually think it kind of lines up with what you experience in life because you know, as you meet people along the way, whether they're followers of Jesus or not, people are all over the map. Like you've met people who claim the name of Jesus, who again are wicked as a snake, and you've met people who know nothing about Jesus, who are mean, and some who are kind, and all across the spectrum.

And so what this doctrine is trying to get at is people aren't actually as bad as they could be. That's not what it means. What it's trying to communicate is sin has permeated every part of our lives in some way, and you have to recognize it.

[10:23] You know, I would argue the picture that the Bible gives for sin is a lot like cancer. Jesus actually used the example of leaven and bread.

I think that was an example the people in his time could understand, but I think we would understand something they didn't, which is how cancer moves and works because here's the thing, cancer is cancer. Like it is the same deadly malformed stuff whether it's very small or very big. But the truth is, when it's really small, you might not even notice it. You can look like you are completely healthy.

You can live your life largely unimpeded by the fact that there's this nasty thing inside your body. But if it's allowed to grow, if it's not dealt with, it'll take over everything, which is why we try to deal with it as early as possible.

So when you hear Christians say some things like, hey, you know, all sin is sin, what we mean, or if I may, what we actually should mean by that, is not that every sin is the same in weight and impact and badness to the world.

[11:40] Okay? Stealing a candy bar is not the same as stealing someone's life savings. Like those have drastically different impacts. But the heart that steals is made of the same thing.

I think that also helps you understand when Jesus says things like, hey, if you lust in your mind after someone, that's the same thing as if you're committing adultery.

And he doesn't say that because lust in your mind is actually of the same form and impact to a life is adultery. One is stage one cancer, one is stage four cancer.

But it's made of the same thing. If you are angry at someone, that is not the exact same thing as if you murder someone. It is a good thing if you stop an angry heart before it actually assaults someone or murders them.

But what Jesus is getting at is the stuff that makes it up is the same thing. And you can kind of roll from there with it, right? Helps you understand why he says things like, look, if you had a diseased hand that was getting ready to disease your whole body, it would be better for you to just get rid of it than to let it plague everything.

[12:59] Okay, so why is that important here? Because the pattern you see in Scripture and frankly, the pattern you're going to see more times in this book as we go through it is that this decay into wickedness always starts with somebody not taking their sin seriously.

It always starts with them hardening their heart against some warning that God gives them.

Because if, no matter how much God shows you, you're not going to listen.

And no matter how much the pursuit of your own will destroys you and hurts those around you and you still say, I'm going to do it my way, if you keep doing that and keep doing that, eventually, you go from the one hardening your heart to the one who gets hardened.

That's how it went with Pharaoh in Exodus. It says, Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart. Or Pharaoh let his heart be hardened by something outside.

And then eventually, you see this terrifying change to, the Lord hardened his heart. And this actually happens to the house of Eli. We're not going to read it today, but in verses 27 through 36, God sends what is just known in the scripture as a man of God to let Eli know that even though his house, his house was chosen, his lineage was chosen, anointed, promised to be priest, and he says, Eli, because you have not stopped this.

[14:36] Notice he said something, but he didn't stop his sons. He says, because of that, your time of being priest is over. A title doesn't make you a person of God, and spiritual decay is a process, and it can happen to anyone.

But praise God, that doesn't have to be the way of it because these verses in Samuel show us another path. There is another way for those who would hear the voice of the Father.

In 1 Samuel 2, verse 18, it says, Now Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy clothed in a linen ephod, and his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year as she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

Before I read the rest of it, can we just admit together that that's fresh? Like, I don't care how manly a man you are. That is a precious scene. Like, you think about the scene of this mother who gave up her child, and then every year, because again, she's not close to him, she's at the house making him a little robe that he takes to her, that she takes to him every year.

And you know what that shows me? I mean, these are like just little side pieces that God gives you in Scripture. That tells me that this is not the stoic hands of a mother who is just like, it was good that I give my son to the Lord.

[16 : 09] Like, God knows that we are flesh. He knows our hearts. He knows how he made us. And so when you give something to the Lord, I want you to know he doesn't take that just like, that's exactly what you should do.

Like, he knows what this sacrifice cost her heart. And he is not upset that she still loves the son that she gave into the hands of the Lord.

It's kind of a precious image. We read on, and then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, may the Lord give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the Lord.

And so they would return home. And indeed, the Lord visited Hannah and she conceived and she bore three sons and two daughters. The Lord just continues to be gracious to Hannah.

But now for her son and the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord. And then we're going to jump down to verse 26 because it says the same thing. Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.

[17 : 23] Now as we said earlier today, this is really kind of the biggest key today. The thing I really want you to take away because while you certainly can't judge spiritual maturity by a title and while decay is a process, praise God, spiritual growth is also a process.

Now another little side road here before we get into talking about how this works because I think it's interesting to think, we get confused I think in the Christian life sometimes about how and why God works in some ways.

And one of the things I think we need to acknowledge is there are actually a lot of things in the Christian faith you can be given in an instant. You can receive salvation in an instant.

You know when we were talking about sin it's actually such a pernicious thing because there's all these elements to it not only is it like a cancer that's rotting you from the inside it's also a crime. So I mean it's like you got drunk and you went out and had a car accident and damaged some property and it hurts you and so now you're injured but also you owe a debt.

[18 : 35] And that debt demands justice. And one of the things that the Bible tells you is that justice has to be paid but you can get that payment in an instant. You can be made justified just like that because Jesus has paid that price.

That can happen today. If you want that debt forgiven that doesn't have to be a process. And part of that is a transformation.

It's not just a debt paid. It says if you want to know how to change your heart of stone that's making the rest of your body into stone if you want to know how to stop that if you want to know what the cure looks like you can have that cure start today.

You can have his spirit today. You can receive salvation in an instant. You can receive a calling in an instant. I bet many people in this room can tell you stories and would testify to something they're doing for the Lord that there was just a time and a place that they knew that God called them into it. They didn't know where and they didn't know how but they knew that God had called them to a place or to a ministry and they didn't have to go a whole life they knew that God had called them and by the way that's not just church ministry stuff God puts all kinds of good and right callings on our life.

[19 : 59] One of my favorite characters in history stories is about the Scottish Olympian Eric Lydale and if you don't know who he was it's all kind of dramatized in that 1981 movie Chariots of Fire right so he's a Scottish Olympian but he's also a man of God and a missionary and so as you look in his personal journals you see that he knew very early that God had called him to a mission and a ministry and a very specific place to go to China but interestingly he also didn't see any conflict in being a world class athlete like we always think about that like I'm going to have to kill this thing to do this thing and as we've seen in Samuel sometimes God does ask you to walk away from a path

or give up something but they're not mutually exclusive he actually believed that he was called to both and like the movie tries to sum it up with this quote kind of pulling from his journals where he says you know what I know that I was made for a mission

I was made for China but I also know that God made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure you can get a calling in an instant you can receive a spiritual gift in an instant this is basically the beginning of the book of Acts right the disciples are gathered together in this room because Jesus said you're going to need some power and they're waiting after Jesus ascends to heaven and they get it it says the Holy Spirit shows up and in this instance he shows up his tongues of fire coming down and they instantly start speaking other languages and the people around say man I can hear them speaking in my language now you can study for years to learn a language and that's a good thing that's part of how God does stuff but sometimes God gives you something unearned they were just given a gift and God used it to grow his church and look we should certainly celebrate the times that God does something extraordinary you know there's a lot that's probably been said over the years about like what is an actual revival like what constitutes a revival in a society but I think that whatever you think about the word it is certainly evident if you look at church history there are just these moments where God shows up in a very special way usually in response to people having desperate prayers and prayers that would not be unfamiliar to our ears they thought like if you look at some of the revivals through history they were things like the next generation is gone and if we don't we have no way to reach them and if God doesn't do something the flame that was passed to us will go out

God do something God our society is wicked and we can't fix it God shows up in those prayers and what I would simply say about that is like while God works and all the ordinary things it's evident to me that there are sometimes because of the prayers of God's people and because of just the good pleasure of his providence that God will show up and do in like five days what it usually takes like five years to do and it is good to pray for that it is good to long for it and when God brings it you should celebrate it but now hear me because this is really important you can receive salvation in an instant you can receive a calling in an instant you can receive a spiritual gift in an instant but you can only get character and wisdom wisdom and maturity with time and following

Jesus there is no picture in scripture of instant maturity I think one of the ways people actually get beat up in church life and ministry or in following Jesus in general is that somewhere in their life they receive a gift or they hear that call and then without any wisdom or preparation of any kind sometimes just out of a fervent and true heart but without heed for the danger they plunge into ministry or plunge into a mission field and they get beat to death or they wind up really hurting the people around them now look that doesn't mean Jesus ever calls you to sit around all right think back to what Jesus said to the first disciples he was calling what did he say he said follow me and I will make you fishers of men so it's kind of interesting right look something immediate follow me you need to do something right now leave those nets get up from that tax table follow me and then something that takes time

I will make you fishers of men which means when they followed when they dropped their nets that didn't mean they were not actually fishers of men at that moment Jesus said if you follow me I will make you fishers of men you aren't right now but you will be if you keep following me that is the pattern of how you grow into maturity and if you really need convincing it actually even applies to Jesus in Luke chapter 2 when it's talking about the period in Jesus life when he's growing from childhood into adulthood and all the things that God has for his son it says and Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man seems weird right that the one special God man would have to increase in anything but remember he was fully God and he was fully man he was human just like you and that means he follows the pattern of humans and humans are meant to grow as they grow and grow as they go and if that applies to

[26 : 34] Jesus there's just really not any world in which it wouldn't apply to us you know if you want to know a little bit if I could share a little bit of the secret sauce of who we hope to be as City Grace we unashamedly want City Grace to be a place that's more about maturity than gifting or calling and not to despise the others because you need gifting and you need passion and you want to move towards it but you cannot do it at the expense of maturity and look we might not always get that right nobody ever does and honestly it's a fun thing to say or it sounds noble but it will probably affect things like how fast we grow or how well known we are because the easy button is always going to be to preference skill or passion or charisma over maturity but there's danger in it now of

course there is grace in all of that like everyone in here is on a journey and look if you're going to wait for perfect spiritual maturity to get people involved in

God's work then just nobody's ever going to get involved right like like there are certainly different markers of maturity you look for like leadership positions like elder or deacon than you might for other roles in the church I mean even Jesus when he's calling his disciples you look at who he calls and you immediately get the sense that Jesus it feels like there's some risk in who you're calling here these are unpolished products that you have selected and that's all true we want to have that same grace nobody is who they're ultimately going to be but at the end of the day you can't substitute anything else for maturity and growing into maturity is a process even for an anointed prophet like Samuel lastly for today spiritual growth requires open ears and a willing heart we read on about Samuel it says now boy

Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli and the word of the Lord was rare in those days and there was no frequent visions and at that time Eli whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see was lying down in his own place 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 and then the Lord called to Samuel and Samuel said here I am and 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 and the Lord called again Samuel and Samuel rose and went to Eli and said here I am for you called me but he said I did not call my son lie down again now Samuel did not yet know the Lord and the word of the Lord had not been revealed to him said here

I am for you called me and then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy so Eli said to Samuel go lie down and if he calls you you shall say speak Lord for your servant hears and so Samuel went and he laid down in his place and the Lord came and stood calling as at other times Samuel Samuel Samuel and Samuel said speak for your servant hears Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle on that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house from beginning to end and I declare to him that I'm about to punish his house forever for the iniquity that he knew because his sons were blaspheming God and he did not restrain them therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever so

Samuel lay until morning and then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision but Eli called Samuel and said Samuel my son and he said here I am and Eli said what was it that he told you do not hide it from me may God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you and so Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him and Eli said it is the Lord let him do what he seems good to him and Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and he let none of his words fall to the ground and all of Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord and the Lord appeared again at Shiloh for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord now so so much we could unpack here right so many things you could this is like a packed story but I think two things really jump off the page here for the person who okay it's important but we can't fully unpack today and it's really this what we see in this story is that knowing how to recognize [32:10] God's voice is not automatic or innate you can and you should learn how to hear God better and if that stirs up anything in you like yes yes and amen cool how this is the part where I'm really going to disappoint you because I'm going to say can't tell y'all in one day gotta keep coming to church gotta keep coming to community group gotta keep coming to Bible study gotta find someone like he had Eli here who can kind of point you in the right direction because there are a lot of things you can learn about the how that can't be packed in one sermon but I will tell you this what is something you saw in Samuel there he was intrigued and he was determined keep coming back right there is something to the persistence of going back until you figure it out and so we'll leave that there for today a lot more we could say and will say in the coming years as you come to

City Grace but beyond learning the mechanics of how to hear God there's also a second thing you see here which I think is a critical predisposition and that's you have to have a heart that is willing to respond to what is heard for Samuel to hear he didn't primarily need a technique or information he needed a disposition of the heart that was ready to hear he had to be willing to do what God says which is why the response he is given to say is speak for your servant hears it is a implication of I am ready to hear and obey and it's not that easy is it because even he has to be reminded of it so he's like speak and you know it's like this with us too God tell me anything you want tell me what

you want and what he hears is hard you're going to roll up in there and tell

Eli his time is done tell your boss he's out probably not what he thought he was going to get but you have to act on it and that's what the Bible tells us Samuel does and because he does that he sets a pattern of his life where it says he doesn't let any of God's words fall to the ground there's kind of this concept in modern Christian church life it's this idea where it's called putting your yes on the table and I've heard this at like 20 different churches over the years and like so many things unfortunately at times it gets co-opted to like manipulate or pressure people into doing something because the church is growing and we got to build the brand and all that right got it but at the core the heart of what it's saying is biblical because when you approach God if you want to grow if you actually want to hear your posture can't be okay so go ahead and tell me what you're going to say and then

I'll kind of weigh out like I'll decide like you can't go into it like that I mean it's really like that like the video of the rock right like you in or you out you know like that's kind of how it is it's a heart of trust that says God I want to hear you and I want to hear you so bad that no matter what you say if I know it's you the answer is yes whatever comes next whatever it costs me and if you're not quite there can I submit to you you can even pray and this is what I love sometimes is that I you can actually pray if you know in your heart that's not where I'm at you can say Jesus I am not there but I want to be I want to be at the place where I trust you so much that I can just say yes because I'm not worried about what you might take or might give I just trust your hand you can ask for that kind of heart and time of response and the band comes up today a couple of ways we can approach these messages that we've been given in the book of

Samuel here first if you're not a follower of Jesus if you if you joined us today and you wouldn't say you're a follower of Jesus first of all welcome we always treasure it when anybody that's made in God's image shows up and honestly I'm just going to go back for you to something that I said very early in this sermon which is that if you're here and you know you need something different today like you you know that you are far from God and you don't want it to be such look growth is a process but God's mercy is available right now you need it you are not immune to a process of decay the world is never going to get better on its own there is no evidence in history that stuff floats into goodness don't become a person that takes the path that makes you a scoundrel that where you look back over the works of your life and you say those were the worthless!

[37 : 47] works of hands that made bad choices you can receive salvation from that in an instant you won't be perfect today but you will be in the hands of someone who is never going to let you fall into that Bible says if you want your sins forgiven if you feel like you have a heart that needs to be changed if you want the record clean if you want the destiny!

of your life to be different it can start to be different right now today there's going to be a prayer on the screen there's no magic in the words it's just a way that if you want to say Jesus save me you can say Jesus save me if you want to come and talk to someone I'll be down front there'll be some people left of the stage if you want Jesus you can have him today if you are a follower of Jesus as we kind of prepare to take communion today I think this is just a good morning again to be a little corny let me just say to put your yes on the table or maybe to just say God help me to I do want to hear you and I know I'm not going to hear you if I keep putting the condition on it of speak first and then I'll decide you have to decide what the disposition of your heart is going to be so you can pray God help me to trust you like that or maybe it's just you need to ask God for the grace to act on the thing he's already put in front of you maybe there is a calling that you have been ignoring!

for too long that it's time to pick up and go maybe there is a hard conversation you need to have because love is like that sometimes it's time to ask Jesus to be with you maybe it's just again you need to get some skin in the game and start serving somewhere at this church or somewhere and you know it maybe you don't feel like you're!

worthy you're ready! that's all stuff you lay at the feet of Jesus just take some time and do that don't rush into that God I want to hear you speak help my heart to be in the place it can hear you and then when you're ready you can come to the communion table and we take these elements back and you can partake of them at your seat and what you're remembering here think about this when you see Jesus in the garden there has never been a more of a yes on the table and you see it in that whole prayer it wasn't man I'm excited for this it was God if there is any other way nevertheless this is what has to happen for the salvation of your people not my will but yours be done may may!

[41 : 01]