

1 Samuel 3-4

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Date: 24 April 2022

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[0 : 00] 1 Samuel 3 and 4. It's on page 2 to 7. Have you ever wondered what it would take for God to withdraw his presence from us as a church?

! What would it take for God to withdraw his presence from us as a church? Israel didn't have to wonder because in the Old Testament, in the book of 1 Samuel, it's set close to about 1,100 years before Christ, it is describing the rise of the prophets and the rise of the kings.

It's a time when Israel needed a king after God's own heart. The end of the previous book, a big book says, In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Everything was imploding. It's a total breakdown. So no matter what system God had put in place, the people of Israel managed to ruin it. There were the God-given gifts of family and priesthood, the ark, the tabernacle.

And they were only as good as those who actually operated in them faithfully. So take Eli for an example. Before he was a priest, he was a father. And he is identified as a father who fails to discipline his children.

[1 : 18] So if you look at chapter 3 in verse 13, it says this, Eli is a mixed character.

He clearly wants what God wants. He just can't follow through and make it happen. He's like many of us who've got good desires, but it never seems to turn into action. He's got two sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

And they are, I quote, described as worthless men. And they did not fear God, or literally they did not know God. And it won't be the last time in the Bible that you get someone in the role of church leader that actually has no relationship with God.

How's that for a character reference? Worthless and didn't know God. And we know that their sins were really clear, and they stuffed their faces with sacrifices that were offered to God.

So there were a number of sacrifices in the Old Testament which were permissible to share with God as it was offered. Part of it was given to God, and part of it was shared with the priests.

[2 : 34] And the fat portions, the best part of the meat, was always offered to God. But Hophni and Phinehas, they wanted that bit as well. And they made themselves fat on the sacrifices.

In fact, these guys stopped the Israelites sacrificing because they wanted the meat cooked their way. My kitchen, my rules. And Hophni and Phinehas wanted it medium rare.

And on top of that, they slept with the women who were in the tabernacle. They turned God's house into a house of prostitution. I think that's probably as bad as it can get, isn't it?

It's hard to think of things getting any worse. Probably offering up your kids in pagan sacrifices. But this is the pits. Here is the place of worship. There was to capture the holiness of God.

They were to be set apart, holy, righteous, just. And what did they do? They turned it into a place of contempt. They trampled on his holiness. So instead of leading God's people in the way of holiness and righteousness, they led them in the way of sin.

[3 : 36] And we know that. But Eli did confront them, didn't he? Eli did wrap them over the knuckles. So why is he getting in trouble for the sins of his kids? Look what it says in chapter 223.

223. Why do you do such things, boys? For I hear of your evil dealings from all of the people. It's well known. No, my sons. It's not a good report that I hear the people the Lord is spreading about. If somebody sins against a man, God will mediate for him. But if somebody sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? I think Eli is making a slightly artificial distinction.

David will later on say against you, only you have I sinned, Lord. And he committed adultery and committed murder. But be that as it may, Eli is warning them, isn't he?

He's saying, boys, you are entering into unforgivable sin territory. He confronts them. So what's the problem? I'll tell you what the problem is.

[4 : 40] It's the problem of modern parenting. He failed to restrain his kids. It's all talk without action. It is word.

Words without consequences are empty. So look at Proverbs. Well, you can listen to Proverbs 29, verse 15. Now, to be fair, Solomon hadn't come on the scene yet.

And he's not written Proverbs 29. Be that as it may, his truth is still there. He says this. The rod and reproof give wisdom. But a child left to himself, a child undisciplined, brings shame to his mother.

And so children who are left to themselves have parents who won't discipline them when their kids are cruel to other kids. Who won't discipline them when their kids are disrespectful to adults.

Who will automatically side with the kids against the school. Or the authority figure. That is a child left to themselves or herself.

[5 : 44] A policeman said to me recently, not Ollie or Aaron. You know that the first time some kids hear the word no is when a policeman is pushing their face into the dirt.

That's how they got there, isn't it? Being undisciplined.

And finally, reality bites them. A child left to themselves. You see, love involves more than talking.

And the opposite to talking is not shouting. And so it is consequences, not anger, shaped behavior that is fed on the gospel. And Eli issued no consequences.

What did Eli need to do? He needed to step down his sons from the priesthood. They were going to do what they were going to do, but not on his watch. And not in the tabernacle of Israel.

[6 : 52] Now, why did he go soft on them? And again, the diagnosis, and you've always got to get to the heart of issue, is there in chapter 2 and verse 29. It tells us, why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling?

And honour your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest part of every offering of my people Israel. By the way, Eli died as a fat man.

And he probably fed off the sins of his son. But here the issue is this. Can you see it? You honour your sons before me. You honour your sons before me.

Nothing has changed. Eli's failure is our failure. Honouring our children. By degree. Honouring our kids more than we honour God. Loving our kids more than we love God.

Being more concerned with what our kids think of us than what God thinks of us. Wanting the approval of our children more than the approval of God.

[7 : 52] And so it's when a father and mother say, no, God's word, God's law, and God's people are our priority.

It's when a parent draws lines on things like Sunday sport. Who say, no, no, no, as a family we will seek God's kingdom first.

Here and everything else falls into place after that. Because you teach your children at that point that there's something far more important than sport.

There are things which seem so, so important that six months later you can't even remember what they were. That are here today and gone tomorrow. So I think it is time for us as parents to repent.

And I speak to myself. To repent of wanting your children to be your best friend. I think we have to repent of that. I think it's time to repent of wanting to rescue our kids from the foolishness of their actions.

[9 : 03] There are times when children have to feel the pain. To repent of always blindly siding with our kids against authority figures or schools.

I'm not saying that if your child comes home and says that they're being molested. You've got to believe that one. You've got to work from there believing that. But you know what I'm talking about. You know there's been a huge shift in our culture.

So 30 years ago in a school, parents would have sided with the school ordinarily against their children. But now we know teachers will tell you, isn't it, that parents ordinarily will side with their kids against the school.

It's not that the school doesn't get it wrong. It sometimes does. But we also know that our children get it wrong, don't we? Because foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.

And so the classic mistake of children's and youth worker is this, isn't it?

[10 : 03] When the children's worker or the youth worker starts off by thinking, I'm going to be the cool kids leader. I'm going to be the leader who is friends with all the youth.

And what you have is within about two weeks, absolute chaos. And so the rule is this, isn't it? If you start wanting friendship, you'll get no respect.

But if you start requiring respect, well, in fact, they'll eventually love you as a leader. Proverbs is so helpful, isn't it? Proverbs 19, verse 18. Discipline your son, for there is hope.

Do not set your heart on putting him to death. It's why we discipline our children. Sometimes that means physical discipline when they're young.

Never on the face. Never in a disrespectful way. But it doesn't take very long, does it, until physical discipline is irrelevant. Screens are where the real pain is, aren't they?

[11:08] That's where the real pain is. Well, in our home. And so as parents, for those of us who are parents, we issue a small quota of pain now, so that they can avoid a large quota of pain later in life.

It's like what the policeman said, do you remember? The first time some kids hear the word no is when a policeman is pushing their face from the dirt. They didn't have a small quota of pain growing up. And so now they have a large quota of pain later on.

It's why we have church discipline. There are times when elders have to say, if you want to continue down that track of sinful behavior, and you want to still claim the name Christian, then you can't share in fellowship with us.

If you want to continue down that track of sinful behavior, and you want to claim the name Christian, then you cannot share in fellowship with us. One of those three is going to have to go.

And we pray that it is to repent. You see, there are consequences, aren't there, in guarding the holiness and the purity of the church. So for us as leaders, there is a standard that the pastoral epistles map out.

[12:26] And if you violate them, you need to step down from leadership. I've known of people stepping back from leadership to put things right. It's how we love the leader. It's how we love the kids and the youth.

It's how we love the congregation. It's how we love God. It's how we preserve the holiness and the church. So all talk, no action, is unloving to everyone. And Eli was condemned for not restraining his kids.

But Eli is not just a dad who didn't bring his kids up in the right way. He's actually a priest in the tabernacle of God. This was Israel's unique privilege.

God had allowed his name to dwell in no other holy place than the one given to Israel. And these priests marked out as one tribe amongst many, and even within that, certain houses amongst the Israelites had the privilege of being the go-between between God and his people.

And they alone were the ones that could offer sacrifices on behalf of Israel. What a privilege. They represented God to his people as the authorised teachers of his word. They were the ones that could stand in his presence and speak on his behalf.

[13:42] And so not surprisingly, when you come into the New Testament, the teaching ministry of an elder requires the same principle. So what are the requirements of an elder? 1 Timothy 3, verse 4.

He must manage his family well. What does that look like? What does it look like that a man manages his family well, see that his children obey him? That's really interesting, isn't it?

I would have thought it would say this. See that his children feel loved by their dad. Which, of course, is true. In fact, it's a necessary requirement of it.

But requiring submission and issuing consequences and discipline is a mark of a father who will love their children. It's not the only way that you express love, but it is a critical way.

And the temptation for Israel was to trust the gifts of God and not the giver. So the temptation was to think that... Poor, poor, poor John.

[14:47] When he's speaking about an elder and discipline, he's like, that's all right. We've all had evenings like that. No. So the temptation for Israel was to trust, wasn't it, the gifts of God and not the giver.

The temptation was to think that somehow the blessings of family and tabernacle worship and the ark, that these were sort of automatic blessings and somehow how he behaved was irrelevant. But Samuel will say to King Saul later, to obey is better than to sacrifice.

God is saying, I don't play games and I don't play religious games and I love that about our God. At the center of the tabernacle, the tabernacle is like a portable temple until the temple is finally built

by the son of David, Solomon.

And it had to be movable because the people of God were on the move and the heart of the tabernacle was the ark of the covenant. It's essentially a box that carries the Ten Commandments. It was gold-laden. There were, on the top of the box, there were two angelic figures, cherubim, and it's described as the footstool of God. It's the place where God would speak.

[16:00] It's not the ark in the flood. I did a Bible study with someone and for about 20 minutes they thought that the ark they were carrying on their back was Noah's ark. It's not that, all right? It's the ark of the covenant. All right?

And so picture the ark being carried on the shoulders of people with poles. On occasions it was taken into battle with God's people because here was God.

God who was represented. It's the footstool of God. God is on his throne and God goes into battle. He would fight for his people. But what they discovered is that the God who would fight for his people will fight against them.

Chapter 4, we didn't read it. I hope you will read it. But it's the account of Israel having 4,000 of them killed in a defeat by the Philistines. And at that point it should have been the very point when it brought them to their knees in repentance.

But what it did was provoke more sin, more superstition. You know what superstition is?

Superstition is when you put your trust in someone other than God. And these worthless priests think to themselves that the things of God are a game.

[17:12] And the ark of the covenant is a lucky charm. And they decide to bring it into battle with them because that will win the victory for them against the Philistine. And you've got this tragic picture of the ark being brought into battle from Shiloh.

The holy ark of the covenant next to these godless wretches, Eli's sons, treating it like a rabbit's foot. A bit like sometimes people wear a cross and they treat it like a lucky charm.

It's the same kind of dishonoring element that's there. But this time God will fight against his people. And the result of taking God lightly, chapter 4 verse 10, So the Philistines fought.

And Israel was defeated. And they fled every man to his home and there was a very great slaughter for, just look at the figure, 30,000 foot soldiers of Israel fell.

How many? 30,000. And the ark of God was captured. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas died. And that teaches you and I today that God will not be treated like a fool.

[18:26] 30,000 Israelites taken out in one hit. The sons of Eli dead as a doornail. And Eli himself would die, all prophesied by the way.

And the ark of the covenant captured under the sovereignty of God. God will go off to fight his own battles. He doesn't need Israel. You'll see that next week with the capturing the ark.

The glory of the Lord departs and it is all captured. In the name given to Eli's grandson. Eli's grandson is born and his name that he's given is called Ichabod.

Which means the glory of God has departed. God has left the building. God has vacated the tabernacle. He's vacated the promised land.

It's a really scary image. God's people without God. It's a really scary thing. Don't you hate it when people get what they've been asking for? Don't you hate it when you get what you've been asking for?

[19:29] So God is saying to these Israelites, okay boys, you want to live without me, then be without me. And Hannah was right in her prophecy in chapter 2 verse 10. She said that those who oppose the Lord will be broken.

You want to go it alone? Then alone you should go. And as the glory of the Lord departs, not just the tabernacle but the promised land and the people of God.

Now why is that? It's because God is very jealous for his glory and God will not allow himself to be blasphemed by these godless wretches in the heart of the life of Israel.

And I think one application for us is this. This is the reason why you will never find joy in a state of disobedience.

You will never find joy in a state of disobedience. And it's because God loves you. You'll never find joy in a state of disobedience.

[20:32] I'm distinguishing a state of disobedience from when you fall into a sin. I'm talking about a state of disobedience and God will not allow you to experience the joy of your salvation.

And I think the hard thing as an elder is sometimes people try and tell you that they are. It's impossible. Because my experience and your experience is that God kind of just withdraws that blessing from you.

He's done that many times to me. He does it to get your attention. I'm no more and no less in union with Jesus Christ but my experience of Him does change.

Well the sons of Eli they flaunted God's word and they died. And the son of Hannah proclaims God's word as hard as it is. Here's Samuel.

The son of Hannah that godly woman is a young boy in the tabernacle serving alongside Eli. And at night he hears God speaking to him. And he finally twigs it's the Lord and the word that is given to Samuel is that judgment is coming on Eli's house.

[21 : 47] And so the question that you have in chapter 3 is will this young child be able to speak a word of judgment against the old priest? Will he soften the blow and the temptation?

That's there isn't it? Well certainly Eli is encouraging him to do the right thing. Look at verse 17. 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. What will Samuel say? Will Samuel pass on what God has told him?

Will he hide what's been revealed? Same temptation you and I have when you get into that conversation about Jesus and you're asked this kind of conversation somebody recently said to me what you're saying to me Paul is if I don't believe in the Jesus of the gospel then I'm going to hell. Yes. We can say couldn't we at that point 50 words that will sort of cloud the issue. It's really tempting when you're put on the spot like that to withhold the truth.

[23 : 02] But verse 18 Samuel cuts it straight. Samuel told him everything and the rest is history. Hide nothing from him. And then Eli said he is the Lord let him do what's good in his eyes.

To give Eli credit he does want Samuel to be God's prophet. And that is why Eli is a mixed blessing. But this is love isn't it? Samuel had not held nothing back.

Because Israel and a future king must know that God alone is king. That's a big point in one Samuel. And the only way God is going to be king in Israel is if God's messengers God's prophet will refuse to add or take away from that word.

They're not in a position to manipulate the word of God and if God is to rule Israel the house of Israel and the kings of Israel they must live under his word undiluted. But his word must not be tampered with.

Okay what are we to do with this? Remember our three questions? And I want to keep coming back to them as we go through one Samuel. What is this section teaching us about God? It's a big section kind of the end of chapter 2 3 and 4.

[24 : 14] There's many things but the big message I think that spans the three chapters is that God is a very holy God and that it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.

The 30,000 dead bodies were a testimony to that. The sons of Eli being carried out in a body bag were a testimony to that.

The fact that God revealed himself physically removed himself physically from the people of Israel is a testimony to that.

And so you do not want to meet God unforgiven. You do not want to stand before God with just your sins between you and him.

In 1 Samuel 2 verse 25 there's a question raised it says this if anyone sins before the Lord who will intercede before them?

[25 : 17] There was no sacrifice for the kind of sin that Hophni and Phinehas were doing. Meeting God unforgiven is a nightmare that will never end.

Like it or hate it this is what God is like. God is uncompromising in his holiness and you cannot fudge it with him. You cannot pretend with him. He is impeccably holy.

He cannot do anything but punish sin and God is not going to budge on this. And so that's why we ask the second question what is this passage teaching us about the Lord Jesus?

because we're about a thousand years before him right? The prophets don't only declare words of judgment but also words of hope and oh what a promise this is because it's one of the hundreds of verses predicting Jesus.

Look at verse 35 of chapter 2. And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and in my mind and I will build him a sure house and he shall go in and out

before my anointed forever.

[26 : 33] Now understand we're in the rise of the prophets the rise of the priests the rise of the kings. By the time you get to Jesus you find and you discover that Jesus is the prophet the priest the king.

But here there is a looking forward to the future when a priest unlike Eli and his sons will come who will do it right and that's partly fulfilled in Samuel yes partly but Samuel will put his sons in charge and they are disastrous and then he dies and we're back to square one.

No Samuel is not the ultimate solution Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment and so what you discover is in the prophecies in the Old Testament you have a partial fulfillment which is soon after it's predicted and then there's an ultimate fulfillment in Jesus he is the priest we need a high priest who is totally without sin who has been tempted in every way as we are but never failing and never falling into sin not just for three weeks or three months or three years but 24 7 from womb to tomb perfect a priest who never dies who lives forever to intercede like Samuel and like Samuel Jesus grew in favor with the Lord and with his people and Jesus is the one in fact God says he will do according to what is in my heart and mind there will be one who will get it right and all of us fall short one way or another but there is a priest and there is a prophet and there is a king and there is a perfect son who will match

God's perfect law with perfect obedience obedience and Jesus is that perfect high priest who offers that life of perfect obedient worship to his perfect father to make us the word is perfect to give you a clue so let's try it again he is the perfect high priest offering that perfect sacrifice on the cross to the perfect God to make us amen and God has provided his son to protect us from his holy wrath God has provided his son to protect us from his holy wrath and so we are safe in him and so I am telling you tonight on the basis of the word of God there is nothing that Jesus can't forgive so run to Jesus and if you don't know Jesus tonight run to him because you do not want to die in your sins you cannot stand between you and your sins and God you will not stand a chance and you must let him be your go between he is the promised priest he can do it and that's good news isn't it that's good news for us as parents who feel like tonight after hearing what I said earlier we could do much better there's not a parent in this room who wouldn't put up their hand and say I have failed as a parent in many ways

I've done things of which I'm really glad but there are many things I've done which I wish I hadn't and so I run to the saviour and I say thank you Jesus for saving me for being a father like Eli and isn't it how we as sons and daughters feel tonight in the way that we've dishonoured our parents that we run to Jesus because of that because we know that we've dishonoured them and we've not heeded their rebukes and we've cursed them in our hearts or by our lips to their face or behind their back and isn't this what every leader in every church needs to hear especially the fallen ones we all need to hear it because we're fallen but I can tell you there are some pastors and elders who are really fallen I could take you within 10 miles of here to a pastor who has shipwrecked their ministry to ones who shipwrecked their ministry by women or by money by alcohol nothing has changed since Eli's day but in

[30 : 44] Christ Jesus you are a priest and I think it's one of those doctrines we don't get quite clear that Jesus is our high priest yes but we as the people of God we are the priesthood of all believers and so what that means is we can approach God the throne of grace with confidence on behalf of others and on behalf of ourselves and as priests we assemble in this temple not the building not the brooks and mortar we are the temple of God it's the people of God so 1 Corinthians tells the church you are the temple of God so my body is the temple of God because the Holy Spirit resides in me but collectively together we are the temple of God because God's spirit dwells in us corporately so in new covenant language we are the priest we are the temple and we are called as God's people to offer prayers and sacrifices of thanksgiving and so how is it with that framework that we show contempt to the holy things of

God and I want to say at the very least and the most obvious one I think is the sheer neglect of gathering as the assembly of God by failing to make the gathering of God's people a priority and a habit of not being involved in God's building project by not thinking that the gathering of God's people together is a big deal now the people that need to hear this sermon are not here so if you're watching this on YouTube and you're in YouTube land and you finally get round to this sermon on a Thursday afternoon while you're running I'm talking to you alright our problem in London is not really a financial issue I think that's an easy one to fix it's not a financial budget but it is our time

budget and time in London is our most expensive commodity and you are whether you want to admit it or not you are very deliberate on where you spend your time and how you spend your time and for some gathering together as the

Lord's people is not sufficiently high enough a priority and you teach your children by that and where you put the people of God in your life you model to your children that's why some of you are such an enormous encouragement to me and so tonight we run to the throne of grace to our beautiful Jesus our perfect high priest who offered the perfect sacrifice the perfect God to make us perfect so we can live out what we are and obey and give him the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in his assembly he died on the cross so we could gather and praise his name let's do that