

GOD IS STILL CALLING

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Scripture: 1 Samuel 3: 1-21

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

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), 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, that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." 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. The LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel rose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. 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. 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.

Then the LORD came and stood, and called as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." 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. In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 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. 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."

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. Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." He said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him."

Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. All Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. and the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

Shall we pray together?

Heavenly Father, we bring these words before You, Lord. they are from Your word and we invite Your Holy Spirit to come and touch our hearts and our minds and our intellect and our understanding. Help us to understand what it is that You have for us on this particular day in this year, Lord. speak Lord, for your servants are listening. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Samuel is quite a common name. a lot of the children that we know are called Samuel. In fact, Ranjo's middle name is Samuel, and we call Samuel because Samuel has such a distinguished record in the things that God called him to do. At a young age hearing the voice of God, listening to Him, and then being one of the prophets who brought God's word with such clarity to the children of Israel. Samuel!

And yet, his call was so interesting. We know that his birth was an incredible birth. His mother Hannah, when they came for the offering, used to weep because she was barren. She had no children and her husband Elkanah would comfort her. But this barrenness stayed over her and made her cry out to the Lord/ and one day, Eli saw her crying and he thought she was drunk, and he asked her. She said, "No. I am crying because I have no children." And Eli told her, "At this time next year, you will have a child." And she then promised to give this child to the Lord. When the child Samuel was weaned, she brought him and handed him over to Eli, and he began to serve in the house of the Lord from that time. Every year she would come and visit him and bring him a robe that he would wear and serve with Eli, doing everything that was needed.

Those were the early days of Samuel, until this point when he's lying down and he hears his name being called, "Samuel, Samuel," and he gets up. The bible tells us that he didn't know the Lord yet. And so he runs to Eli and says, "You called me?" And Eli says, "No my son, I didn't call you. Go and lie down." And then God calls again, "Samuel, Samuel!" and again he gets up and he runs to Eli and once again Eli says, "I didn't call you, my son. Go and lie down." Then he is called a third time and this time Eli realizes that God is the One who is calling. And he says, "Son, when you hear your name, say, 'Speak Lord, Your servant is listening.'" And sure enough, God calls and Samuel answers and says, "Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening." And God speaks a pretty hard, harsh word to a young boy, Samuel, almost preparing him for all that being a prophet in Israel at that time would entail; that there were hard messages that needed to be given to the people. So at this young age, God tells him what He is going to do to Eli and his family.

The bible tells us that Samuel got up the next day, opened the doors, but Eli called him and said, "What did the Lord say?" So Samuel tells him, and Eli accepts it. God had rebuked him because he had failed to rebuke his sons even though he knew that they were doing evil in the sight of the Lord.

What can we learn from this narrative that we have just listened to? What can we appropriate in our own lives? Can we say: This is for me today?

1. The persistence of God.

God kept calling. It wasn't like He called once, and then when Samuel went in the wrong direction, He said, "Oh, I guess he's not going to listen to me." He called again and again. God's call on us is persistent. When God decided that Samuel was the person that He wanted to use as a prophet, He made sure that Samuel understood that He was calling.

2. Have people around who are able to guide you.

The bible tells us that Samuel didn't know the Lord yet. So he went immediately to the one person who he thought could help him understand this calling, because he thought Eli was calling him. After the first and second times, Eli realized that it was God and made sure that he turned Samuel in the right direction. Even though it can be confusing when you don't know the Lord, don't know where this voice is coming from, it is good to have people around who are able to say, "It's the voice of the Lord calling you to something."

3. Don't resist the call.

Samuel didn't in any way resist. He didn't say, "Oh, who am I? I'm not a grown-up. I don't know you. I don't know this." He just accepted what God wanted him to do. He grew in stature and became the prophet that was listened to by all of Israel at that time.

It made me think about God's call on our lives, on your life and mine. Sometimes the call that God has on our life is not a very distinct call. It's not like we hear our names being called in the night. Nor is it like a Damascus experience like Saul had, where he was thrown down and had this blazing light

shining on that road to Damascus. Or where Jesus just went up to Peter and said, "Come, follow Me." Sometimes for us, and more often than not, God's call on our life is more subtle – at least the way we see it. It's not like lightning that comes and strikes and says, "I'm calling you." And yet I do believe that God is calling us even today for the work that He has in this world. It's possible that you may have heard God's call and you have come up with reasons why you can't pursue it, why you can't respond to it, why you're not obedient, why it's not God calling.

I'm going to give you some of those reasons because I think today's word is so very powerful, so very strong for you and for me, that we need to pay heed. I feel strongly in my spirit, that more than ever in this time, God is calling you and me for particular things that He needs us to be doing, that He needs His children to answer His call, that when he calls us, we say, "Speak Lord, for I am listening."

REASONS WHY WE MAY NOT RESPOND TO THE CALL

- **The call is not clear**, that we are confused. We hear something but we're not sure among the myriad voices or situations or circumstances that we are in, that this could be God calling. As I thought about that, the Lord took me to the passage in Isaiah ch. 6. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. And in Isaiah's encounter with God, it tells us that when he saw the holiness of God, he said, "Woe unto me for I am a man of unclean lips." And then the angel came and touched his lips and said, "Your iniquity is taken away from you." And then it says, "Then he heard the voice of the Lord."

And I wonder, beloved, whether there is some unconfessed sin, whether there is some engagement with things that are not going according to God's will and God's way that is prevalent in your life, that is preventing you from hearing God clearly. Whether the line has a lot of static because there is harboring of sin in your life? I wonder whether today, God is saying: Deal with it. You know My word that says, "If you confess your sin, then I am faithful and just and will forgive you. I want you to confess because that will make My calling clear to you." So, think about that! if that's where the Holy Spirit is prompting you, then begin to think about getting that sin out and confessing it and asking God forgiveness.

- **We feel we are not equipped**. I don't have the wherewithal that so-an-so has or the other people have, or the people in the bible who are called. I'm not them. I'm not spiritual. I'm not this, I'm not that. If you remember when God called Moses and Moses was dithering, all God said was, "Moses, what do you have in your hand?" and Moses said "A staff." That's all that God needed. Whatever it is that Moses had, God was able to work through that and Moses' obedience. Maybe beloved, God is saying to you, "I don't need anything more than you have right now. I'm willing to equip you. All I need is for you to say, 'This is all I have Lord, and You have my 100% obedience to You. I'm willing to say yes.'"
- **You feel that boat has sailed**. I heard God calling and I didn't respond to it, and now I've gone on with my life. I've settled into something that has a rhythm and a cadence to it that I'm fine with. But every time you talk about the call of God, I always think back to that time. But hey, that's gone.

Beloved, I'd like to remind you as I've reminded you many times in the past, of the verse in Romans 11:29 that says, "God's gifts and God's call are irrevocable." And so, if you've heard God calling you many years ago and you didn't answer it, there's still time to say, "Lord, I didn't. I walked away." And just like Jonah, God can still draw you back into His plan, into His

scheme and say: I can still use you because My gifts and My call are never taken away. They are irrevocable. God's call on you is still there. Maybe today's the day for you to say, "Lord, I went somewhere else. Instead of going to Nineveh I went to Tarshish. But Lord, here I am today. I submit to you. What You want in my life, may it happen."

- **How do I know for sure?** I'm not sure. I sense it but I'm not really clear that God is calling me. May I share from my own life how I felt God's call getting crystallized? God not only confirms within but He confirms without. This feeling within that you're saying – I can sense God that You want something for me, but I don't know; I'm feeling uneasy about it. It is also confirmed from without.

I remember the time when we'd come to the US, and we were following a music ministry. And I felt God saying that He was moving me into a pastoral role. I was so terrified; I didn't want it. I began to run from it. But this feeling within me became so difficult to contain. But then I would meet people just randomly who would tell me in conversation, "Hey, we really think that you should be a pastor. We think you should be preaching." And I would just look at them like a deer caught in the headlights, and think – My goodness! Why are you saying this to me? This happened repeatedly – 4 or 5 people would randomly say: You know, music is great but we really think that God's call on you is pastoring and preaching. Maybe you need to listen to your heart and say, "Lord, are you confirming it within me?" and then listen to people around you. Are they confirming it from around you as well?

- **I answered, but something is not right.** There's an uneasiness that has settled over me. Again from my own life – God calls us to take incremental steps. He doesn't give us the whole plan. In my life, I know that if He had called me when He did and said, "I want you to be a pastor and preach," I would have turned and run. But my heart was into music and God used that. I always say I was like this huge tanker; God gently moved it around slowly.

Maybe that's what He's doing to you today – that you answered the call, but where you are now is not very satisfying. Maybe God is saying, "I want to move you to the next step," but you're fighting Him. You're saying, "But Lord, You called me to this." Maybe you need to put that on the altar and say, "Lord, if this is what You're asking for, I'll hand it back to You, and You give me what it is that You have for me."

- **I answered, but it didn't work out.** I answered the call but it didn't work out, and so I just put it down to a wrong decision. I had a bad experience. I got hurt. And so I closed that chapter of my life. I've got some kind of work that I think I can do, and that's history.

I wonder, beloved, if that is really history in your life. I wonder whether God is still knocking on your heart's door. When you read Acts, there's an account where Paul and Barnabas are being sent out by the Holy Spirit. They go, and John Mark is with them as narrated in Acts 13:13. It's an interesting story that might help you as you think about what is happening in your own life.

Acts 13:13 Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

If you read the verses above it, you can see that they were called and sent by the Holy Spirit. And yet, at one point, John Mark decided to leave and it looked like he just decided: Okay, I'm going back to Jerusalem. But if you read in later verses, ch 15:37 Barnabas wanted to

take John, called Mark, along with them also. This is the second missionary journey. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia. That's how Paul looked at John Mark, as a deserter, one who was called and anointed by the Holy Spirit, sent into a particular place but decided to turn around and go back. But you also see that John Mark has come back. He came back and if you read on, especially in Colossians and Timothy, you see the amount of regard that Paul has for John Mark. The way in which he served made a mark on Paul. "He is a good person who has served us well," were Paul's words.

Maybe that's where you are, beloved, just like John Mark. You tried something and then walked away from it. And now you're in that place. You're saying, "I don't want to get there." But John Mark didn't allow himself to stay there. He reconnected with God and said, "Lord, I may have made a mistake there. But now Lord, show me what I need to do." And he continued on the path. I wonder whether that's what you need to do today – whether you need to connect with the Lord and say, "Lord, I have just been sitting and not engaging with you. But today I hear your voice. I can resonate with John Mark. He connected back with You, and I too want to reconnect with You." Because, beloved, as you and I know, there's no peace, no joy in not being under the perfect will of God.

I'm hoping that if God's call has been on your life and you have run away or disobeyed or dithered, that one of these reasons might sit with you and you're beginning to say: "Okay. I'm listening to You Lord." Why is this important today? I think the time is so, so right. More than ever I think in our generation we need men and women who will answer God's call because there is so much happening in the world today that needs to hear voices of clarity. Words of hope, streams of light that need to penetrate the darkness that is so seemingly overwhelming.

I love what Dr. Timothy Tennant, president of Asbury Theological Seminary, said. He made this observation. He said, "The pastoral work which will eventually emerge in the wake of COVID-19 will be immense. The focus during 2020 has been on physically protecting the vulnerable. We can all debate endlessly about the wisdom of the response to COVID-19, but we can agree that we have not even begun to fully grasp the full emotional, social, economic, and psychological toll of this pandemic. Listen to the toll. Aging parents isolated in nursing homes, restaurant owners who have lost their life investments, blue collar workers who are losing their homes, the emotional toll for many who have not been physically touched for almost a year, and the loss of education for many children who, for many reasons, have not been able to learn through zoom class technology, are just a few examples of the wreckage left behind by this global pandemic." And he ends by saying, "The church has an enormous opportunity to be an agent of healing and grace as we turn from the pandemic to the realization of the full toll of COVID-19."

The church needs people beloved, men and women, you and I, who hear God's call and say, "Lord, I will respond to you because there is a world out there that desperately needs to know You." I look at the situation that we are in and I'm reminded of the last mile. The 'last mile' as you know is a term that is used in the corporate world for the last mile connectivity. It came about many years ago in the area of telecommunications and how, from the main exchange, they could get one wire that would then reach into your home so that you could have a landline. That was initially known as the last mile. Basically we've done everything and now we need to let this go out into every home. That begins to be the last mile.

And the last mile is still upon you and me. God has done everything – He sent His only Son for you and me; He died on Calvary. The work is finished, completed and He has given to you and me the authority and the message. We who have the good news inside us, wrapped and given to us as a

glorious gift from God, have we given it? Have we shared it with people around who don't have it? Have we fulfilled God's dependence on us as the last mile? The bible puts it like this: Anyone who trusts in Him will never be disgraced. Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord who gives generously to all who call on Him, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news."

In a world that is struggling, beloved, God is looking to His church, to you and me and saying, "I'm calling you! I'm calling you because there is a specific work that only you can fulfill. Will you hear Me calling you because I see the people who are hurting all around this world? Will you answer My call? Beloved, let it not be that we say, "Yes, Lord, I'm coming. But first Lord....." Like in Luke 9:59-62 – I'm coming Lord but first let me do this. I'm coming Lord but first let me finish this.... Let's get rid of that and say, "I'm coming Lord, here I am. Here I am, I've heard Your call."

I love this beautiful song that Dan Schutte wrote in 1979:

I, the Lord of sea and sky
I have heard My people cry
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night
I will make their darkness bright
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of snow and rain
I have borne My people's pain
I have wept for love of them
They turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone
Given them hearts for love alone
I will speak My words to them
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame
I will tend the poor and lame
I will set a feast for them
My hand will save.

Finest bread I will provide
'Til their hearts be satisfied
I will give My life to them
Whom shall I send?

And the answer beloved, that must be yours and mine –

Here I am Lord. Is it I, Lord?

I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if You lead me
I will hold Your people in my heart.

Two thousand years ago on the shores of Galilee, Jesus walked by a couple of fishermen, Simon Peter and Andrew, and He said, "Come, follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." He went a little further and He saw James and John and He said, "Come, follow Me," and they followed Him. And for two thousand odd years He has been calling men and women like them, and you and me to say, "Come, follow Me, for there is a world out there that needs to hear My message."

It's the last mile, beloved, from taking a glorious message of hope and connecting it with a world that is desperately shy of hope, who live in fear and desperation. And yet, our God says to us, "My presence is there. I give you My Holy Spirit to help you to traverse the difficulties of this age, of this world. I will bring you safely to me, but I need you. Are you hearing the Holy Spirit knocking on your heart's door and saying, "I'm calling you, I'm speaking to you?" will you answer? Will you say yes to God's call?

My prayer is that you would and I want to pray for you right now. But before that, I want you to do two things:

- If God has been speaking to you, I want you either right now to put up your hand or slip off your seat onto the floor and kneel there or stand up.
- Send me a letter and say "God is calling me" so that I can pray for you; I can help you if you need help. I can lead you through this time. If you're a member of another church, call your pastor and ask to meet with him.

Are you ready beloved? Get clear in your mind what God is asking of you and then respond to Him. Let me pray for you as we close.

Loving gracious heavenly Father. Thank you that you continue to watch over this world and see the hurt all around, see the desperation. Lord, You call. Us to do a work and we want to respond to You today and say, "Here we are Lord, send us." Would You do that Lord? hear the cries of everyone who is answering. Lord, touch them with great power with Your Holy Spirit. Seal this moment and Lord, provide the pathway for them to answer this call. In the powerful, beautiful, majestic name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.