

## GOD CALLING YET

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

**Date:** 19 March 2023

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 3:1-19

“Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. <sup>2</sup> 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*), <sup>3</sup> 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*, <sup>4</sup> that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, “Here I am.” <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> The LORD called yet again, “Samuel!” So Samuel arose 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.” <sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for Your servant is listening.” <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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.”

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Then Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>17</sup> 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.” <sup>18</sup> 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.”

<sup>19</sup> Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail.”

Samuel is a name we hear very often. A lot of our sons are named Samuel, even my son’s middle name is Samuel. It’s a name we like to give our children because of the legacy it holds – Samuel was called to be a prophet of God, and how beautifully he did all that the Lord asked him to do. And it says that Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail.

Samuel’s birth was an interesting birth. His mother Hannah was barren for many years. She prayed for a son, and nothing happened. Her husband Elkanah loved her a lot. In fact, when she would cry when visiting the temple because his other wife Peninah had children, he would comfort her. But she would cry out to the Lord. At one point, Eli saw her crying and thought that she was drinking and questioned her. But she said, “No, I am not. I’m crying to the Lord asking Him to give me a child.” He replied, “May the Lord grant you this petition this time next year.” And that’s how Samuel was born. She had said, “When I get this child, I will give him back to the Lord.” And she was true to her word;

when he had been weaned, she gave him back to the temple where Eli was and Samuel served there. Every year, she would go to the temple, take a robe that she had stitched and give it to him, and he would wear that as he ministered with Eli there.

Then one day God decided to step up His usage of Samuel. Hitherto, Samuel was doing little things around the temple – cleaning things, keeping things intact, and so on. It seemed that the Lord was saying, “It’s time for you to inherit all that I have in store, and what I want to do through you.” So, one night the words, “Samuel, Samuel” punctuated the night air. Samuel didn’t know who it was. The Bible says that he did not know the Lord at that time, and so he went to the only one he knew who could call his name. And he said to Eli, “You called me?” And Eli said, “No, I didn’t. Go back and sleep.” And God called a second time, and again he goes to Eli. Then Eli realizes that it is the Lord who is calling, and he says, “Samuel, if you hear that voice again, say, ‘Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.’”

That’s what Samuel did when he heard his name again the third time. God gave him such a heavy word, and yet Samuel received it. It was something that would happen to Eli, his mentor’s house. His sons had done terrible things in the name of the Lord. They had defiled the priesthood, and God’s anger and judgment was coming upon them. He chose Samuel to bring this word to Eli, who quizzed him and asked him what the Lord had said. Samuel tells him and Eli accepts it and replies, “It is the Lord. Let Him do what He needs to do.”

Reading this passage, a few things got my attention:

1. The persistence with which God called. He didn’t give up after the first time saying: I guess Samuel is not listening. I’ll find somebody else. No! He called again and again until He got his attention. It reminds me that God is the same with us as well, that He continues to call. Sometimes we take a long time to answer that call. We’ve heard God calling, but we shush it and move on, trying to do what we are doing. God calls again and again and again. God is persistent because God already had this scripted out in Samuel’s life, that this was the function that he would fulfil while he was on earth. As He has for each one of us. Whether that gets accomplished or actualized is a different thing. It depends on our obedience, but God continues to speak to us and say, “I have a plan for your life, and He calls us to respond to that plan and actualize it.
2. It was so good that Samuel had Eli around him. He couldn’t make any sense of what was going on, and it was Eli who understood, who discerned that God was trying to get Samuel’s attention, and moved him in that manner. It struck me that God uses people around us to help us to understand some of the things that He has planned for us; somebody who will come alongside and say: Hey, this is what it seems God is calling you to do, or gifted you to do.

I remember when we were answering the call on our lives. It was a major shift because we were in business and I had to get out and answer the call. I was conflicted as it was a difficult decision. We had two little children at that time. The pastor of the church that I attended was a wonderful man of God, Rev. Fred Ray. He came alongside of us. He was there all the way through, saying, “I understand what God is doing. He’ll be faithful”, praying with us every step of the way. And God has people like that in the church around us as we try to understand what His call is; what He wants from us.

3. Samuel didn’t resist God. It was a huge call for somebody who didn’t know the Lord, to hear the Lord and then to say, “Okay, I’ll walk in that calling.” It was a choice to be obedient to

God. I was reminded that God still calls, even today. Maybe He's still incessantly knocking on some of your hearts' doors and saying: I've been trying to get your attention for a while now. Here's something that only you can fulfil. In My scheme of things, the script that has your name up in heaven, this is the plan, and that's why I'm calling you so that you can accomplish and fulfil that plan.

The question for us as we look at this is: Are we answering the call? The call of God is not a one-time thing. We got into ministry, and that was not the end of the call. The call keeps getting fine-tuned as we move along. God keeps showing us what He wants us to do. Maybe the call on your life is not as dramatic as Samuel's. God isn't calling you in the middle of the night and waking you up by saying your name. maybe it's not a Damascus-like experience as Saul had. Or maybe like Peter, Andrew, James and John, He's not saying: Come, follow Me. But in your spirit, in your heart, you know that He is calling, that He is pointing to a work that you know you can accomplish. I wonder whether you answered it, or you're dithering.

There are many reasons why we don't answer the call. Sometimes the call is not very clear to us, and it could be for so many reasons. It could be just what we are into at that time, the time is not right, it's causing static in our communication. Maybe we're too busy to listen to what God is saying. Maybe we're upset with God for something that happened in our lives, and so we put a hold on God.

When we look at the sixth chapter of Isaiah, at the point where the seraphim comes and touches his mouth and says, "Now your iniquity has been removed from you." Then he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Who will go for Me? Whom shall I send?" and he responded. Maybe there is some impediment which doesn't allow the call to be clear to us.

The other reason could be that we feel that we are not equipped at that time. I don't have the wherewithal. I don't know how to do what You are asking me to do. Beloved, that is never a problem for God. God is able to equip you. When God calls, He already knows that you are able to do what He is inviting you to do. When Moses brought out these excuses, He just asked Moses: Moses, what do you have in your hand? Moses replied: A staff, Lord. And God said: That's all I need, just you and that staff. I'm there, I'll take you.

It's the same with us, beloved, whatever He has laid on your heart, He'll equip you. He'll give you what it takes to accomplish it. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens. God doesn't want us to rely on our strength alone for in it, we are inept. But in our obedience, God is able to work. In fact, Paul would say, "In my weakness, His strength is made perfect."

Imagine God is saying: I'm calling you. Just show me what your weakness is because I want to work through that. But we say we're not equipped, and He says to bring it to Me and I'll use it, because My strength in the midst of your weakness is powerful. Or maybe we feel that that ship has sailed a long time back. Lord, I heard Your call, and I said: No. I've moved on. God doesn't move on.

Many years ago, I was preaching something along these lines. And I could see one person in the church, so restless. At the end of the service, I walked up to him and said, "God really got your attention today, didn't He?" and he said, "Oh Pastor, you have no idea, but that ship has sailed. He called me a long time back and I said no. I was not going to move from here. That's over." Then I told him that when he got home he should read Romans 11:29 which says: For God's gifts and His call are irrevocable. So whatever He has been asking of you for years, God is still calling. Maybe that particular thing is over, but God is still calling you for something else. Each of us is peculiarly put together, strategically put together, amazingly put together for a particular purpose on earth. God is still calling.

The time of Samuel was a terrible time – people were going astray, they were not being led well, the people who were supposed to do priestly duties were not doing it. They were exploiting the people. And we look at Israel's history – all through you'll see that God is calling them. They come and then they fall over and over again. There is so much evil that is rampant. Fast forward 3000 years – it hasn't changed. Look at the evil that is rampant today. Look at the issues that we have today, and look at the choices that our young ones have to make. Look at the truth that has got completely wiped out by lies. In fact, today we are at a point where we don't know what to believe.

And into this cauldron of sin and evil and hatred, God looks to His church and He says: I'm calling you! Will you stand up? Will you be counted? Can I count on you to speak a word? Can I count on you to write something? Can I count on you to bring something, a lyric, music? Can I count on you to shine in your office space? Can I count on you to live with integrity? Can I count on you to take an unpopular decision, but one which is right? God looks around and He says, "Yes, yes! My church will," and He calls Samuel, Samuel. I wonder whether you hear your name as He calls out, as He looks at His creation that is so far removed from the pristine way in which He created it. He's made the way through His Son. He now counts on His church, you and me, to answer the call on our lives.

One other question that we ask is: How can I be sure? Good question, because sometimes it is taking an awkward step, a difficult step, an inconvenient step. In my experience, I found that God always confirms His word, both from within and from without. He confirms His word from within and there's a deep sense of unrest that there's something that needs to be. It's a gnawing feeling that you can't let go. Even if you try and suppress it, you know that you are suppressing something. Because when we don't do God's will, His peace goes away. So there's within us, this unrest, this conviction that here's something God wants to do.

But He also brings people around us who will confirm that. I remember my own call. I always say I was like a tanker. Tankers need a huge amount of sea to turn; they don't turn on a dime. God slowly turned me, because if He had told me that He immediately wanted me to get into preaching and pastoral ministry, I would have run as far away as I could. I've always said that is a holy calling and I will not get into that. In fact, when He placed that on my heart, I said, "Lord, no! Anything you want me to do in music, I'll do, but this, I'm not sure of." You will not believe it, but when I was in seminary, just finished doing a church music degree, and people would randomly come up to me and say: You know Cecil, music is fine, but I think you should get into preaching and pastoral ministry. I was like a deer caught in the headlights. But it kept happening through different situations. Beloved, allow yourself to look at what's going on around you. Listen to the people who are around you and maybe, they will confirm something that God has already started in your heart. He's calling us today, even now.

In Exodus 2:23-25 it says: <sup>23</sup> Now it came about in *the course of* those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of *their* bondage rose up to God. <sup>24</sup> So God heard their groaning; and God saw the sons of Israel and God took notice of them."

God's eyes are still upon His world. He still sees the evil, the injustice, all the things that are wrong, that are happening. And then His eyes begin to look around for the Moses, the Samuels, those who will say "I'll go!" albeit after some amount of persuasion in the case of Moses. In fact, God's burning bush has now been transferred to our hearts. He lights this fire within us and says: There's something more that you ought to be doing, that you're not doing.

I wonder today whether He's speaking to some of us here. I wonder whether He's been knocking on your door for some time now, and you're saying: Lord, I'm busy. Let me finish this work, let me pay off this loan that I have. Lord, wait! I'm not ready. I wonder whether the Lord would say, "I'll take care of that. If I'm calling you, that becomes My responsibility. All I want from you is for you to say yes." When God calls us, it's like this whole birthing process. There's a conception, then there's a period where God prepares us for what He wants us to do. That's the birthing when that happens. But there's always a period between conception and birth. That's gestation. That's factored into God's creation everywhere you look - with humanity, with animals, everywhere.

Maybe God is just saying: At the conception stage I want you to say 'Yes, I'm ready', and then allow Him to do what He needs to do to get you ready for the time when He wants you to do something. What normally happens is that we jump the gun. The moment He talks to us about something He wants to do, we jump in and do it; it's half-cooked, it's not ready. So maybe the call today is just to say: Lord, I heard You. I know that You are calling me for something. I don't know what it is, but I'm ready.

I love this beautiful hymn that captures this so well. (Daniel Schutte, 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,  
Give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my word 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  
Till their hearts be satisfied.  
I will give my life to them.  
Whom shall I send?

Then the chorus says:  
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.

God's heart breaks for all that is happening around and this question is eternal, this side of eternity.  
Who will go for Me? Who shall I send?

Church, if there are some of you here who are saying, "God You spoke directly to me. Lord, I know what you are asking of me, and I'm ready to do it." I want to pray for you. But also, if you know that God is calling you for something, but you don't know what and you are saying, "Lord, at this point, I'm just saying I'm willing to your question: Whom shall I send? Who will go?, I'm saying here I am. If that's your response, both of these scenarios, I'd like to pray for you in closing.

Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*