

“Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening”

✧ **In midnight confusion (vv.1-7)**

✧ **In humble obedience (vv.8-10)**

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Lord, dear reflections of God’s grace in Christ:

It’s one of the sad facts of holy Scripture that the most involved church leaders do not naturally make the best parents. Full-time pastors and teachers miss this as easily as congregational officers. It is painful to admit failings in our families and marriages. But today the dear Holy Spirit reveals an ancient high priest and his young replacement who both missed the mark on parenting. Eli’s family would eventually lose the priesthood, but not before his two wicked sons died in battle, and Eli himself fell backwards off his chair, breaking his neck. Young Samuel grew up to have a son named Joel who with his brother **“turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.”** (1 Samuel 8:2f NIV) Your pastor comes from a broken home but one which also experienced miraculous healing. Family failures and successes all have one thing in common. It takes the Word of God to expose and diagnose the problems. And God’s Word alone brings true wisdom and healing grace. At a major turning point in the history of God’s chosen people of Israel we find the simple key in Samuel’s answer – at about age twelve: **“Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening.”** God’s Word can even turn on the lights ...

✧ **In midnight confusion (vv.1-7)**

The boy Samuel simply did not have a family life. He **“ministered before the LORD under Eli”** because his mother Hannah had vowed that if the LORD listened to her and gave her a son, she would **“give him to the LORD for all the days of his life.”** (1:11) The LORD heard her prayer, and Hannah named her son, **לַאֲמֵן** – *God hears*. But Hannah, you may remember, was the barren wife of Elkanah, whose rival wife had tormented her about not having children. Samuel lived in that polygamous home only long enough to be weaned. Perhaps at age three, Hannah took him as promised to Eli the High Priest. When she gave him to the LORD, Samuel’s new family included two depraved sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, who slept with women serving in the tabernacle. Such blasphemy the LORD will not endure.

Unfortunately, Eli did. In a way Eli was like husbands and wives who blame each other for their problems but fail to admit their part, much less deal with them. The reason Eli was so overweight according to the LORD was because he fattened himself on the offerings in the LORD’s house, offerings which his two wicked sons took by force, violating God’s law and the worship customs of His people. Even the way they treated God’s female servants like a prostitutes got little more than a mild rebuke. Eli was too much the “good buddy” and too little the father in his God-ordained responsibility to discipline his sons severely for their stubborn rebellion. Eli also forgot his place as the High Priest who had no choice but to remove such evil men from office. If they repented, good. That would save their souls from hell. But public sins like fornication and robbery should undoubtedly cost a man his office whether in ancient or New Testament times. Overseers are required by God to be **“above reproach.”** (1 Timothy 3:2)

And this was just part of the **confusion** of Samuel’s youth. The worst problem was this: **“In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.”** In those days no one could take the Bible off the bookshelf and study it because the Bible was still being written. God’s people relied on direct revelation from God which the Holy Spirit inspired to be written in the Holy Scriptures. Parents had to teach their children. Samuel’s reaction is understandable when he heard his name in the darkness. His servant-boy feet landed lightly on the floor as he hurried to old Eli, not once, but twice, and then a third time before Eli finally realized what was happening. The LORD God was calling to the boy. **“Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.”**

Eli's situation reminds me of a phone conversation with an angry father, too hard on the bottle to find any comfort in my attempts to help him with God's Word. Finally I had to tell him, "You know, God does not owe you an explanation. God has only one word for you." "What's that?" he demanded. "Repent. God's one word for you is 'repent.' Until you tell God you are sorry for your sins and accept His forgiveness, none of this will make any sense to you."

Isn't that the one word Eli needed to hear? Why was a young boy receiving revelations from God instead of him as the High Priest? The Holy Spirit explains in another place, "***This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.***" (Isaiah 66:2) If your life is terribly confused right now, if your marriage seems to be coming apart at the seams, if you're muddling along **In midnight confusion**, recognize the problem starts with us. Is your Bible gathering dust? Are cobwebs forming in your heart and mind from not thinking about God's Word? We ought to love God's Word with the intense desire of a woman getting her first diamond. Our sinful neglect of God's Word is reason enough for Him to turn out the lights on us. We've given God good cause to leave us completely in the dark like a car without headlights on a high mountain road. The season of Epiphany is a good time to admit this to ourselves. Our God says, "***In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.***" (Isaiah 30:15) And the beauty of the Epiphany season is the kindhearted invitation from God that can even come through a delinquent old priest like Eli. He told young Samuel what to say to end his **In midnight confusion**. Samuel was listening already. And it showed...

☆ **In humble obedience (vv.8-10)**

Let's get real about this. Why is it so hard for us to humbly obey like Samuel and say, "**Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening**"? Did you ever have a basement so dank and dark you did not want to go down there and find out what needed cleaning? Were you ever afraid to go in for tests because you did not like what the results might be? Our fears often outweigh our desire to be freed from worry and concern. Otherwise, there would be no need for government agencies like OSHA to force employers to make inspections and fix safety problems. No student would fail to study for a test or fear taking them because each would see the need for healthy evaluation of performance and a where to focus on weak points to overcome ignorance and misunderstanding. Something far worse than a fear of tests robs us of God's peace that comes **In humble obedience**. It is our lack of repentance, our rebellion against God.

When *the LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times*, Samuel answered, "**Speak, for your servant is listening.**" It's a good thing he came **In humble obedience** because the LORD really gave him an ear full. I can't imagine how afraid Samuel must have been to tell Eli the vision the next day. No doubt he looked up to Eli like a father in spite of all Eli's failings. Can you imagine having to tell your favorite coach or your best teacher that God had determined to destroy his family, that there was no way for them to rid themselves of guilt before God? It's hard to admit we need God's help.

Does God ever put sinners under such judgment today? Sadly, yes. "***A man reaps what he sows.***" (Galatians 6:7 NIV) Yet each of us thinks other people deserve it worse than we. "You tell 'em, Pastor!" echoes through our minds when someone else's sins are cast upon the fires of hell. But when we feel the heat of those flames brought too close to us, the natural survival instinct ignites anger like lighter fluid. What should the Pastor and elders do if members by their absence from worship, Bible class and Lord's Supper, despise God's Word and refuse to listen when the LORD is speaking through His servants in this place of meeting? Should young Samuel fail to tell old Eli the consequences of his sins today? Should Samuel stop listening to the Word of the LORD for fear he may have to say something someone does not like? Should he only tell the part of the story that makes people feel good?

"**Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening**" – **In humble obedience**. The best part of **Listening** is that God's law, His Word of threats and warnings, is given for a very loving purpose. It prepares the way for the Good News that all our sins of neglecting God's Word are also forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ. God help us heed the warnings and be here to hear the Gospel. Amen.