

1 Samuel 2:11-36 | “A Tale of Two Families”
Preached on October 3, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 2, and we will be covering a larger portion this morning, as we will tackle verses 11 through 36.

Continuing our study in 1 Samuel, today we will be looking at Eli’s wicked sons and the prophecy about the downfall of Eli’s family line. *[pause]*

Back in chapter 1, we saw Hannah’s faith, and how God had blessed her with a child, Samuel.

The beginning of chapter 2 was Hannah’s praise-filled prayer to God in response to His work.

And now in the rest of chapter 2 it’s focused mainly on Eli and his sons, but it also gives us insights into Samuel, who is growing up.

Let’s READ VERSES 11-21 to see some of what is going on. *[pauseee]*

Back in January of this year, something astonishing happened.

The company, Gamestop, which was on the decline for years in the stock market, suddenly was on a meteoric [meedee-or-ik] rise in the stock market.

In just a few weeks in January, Gamestop’s stock rose an astonishing 1900 percent.¹

Now there were unique reasons for this, and those reasons are besides the point that I’m making right now.

But needless to say, Gamestop’s stock was on the rise, and at the same time, there were stocks on the decline. *[pause]*

So you know with stocks, you have that chart that shows trajectory?

Well if you looked at it in January 2021, you would see Gamestop rising, rising, rising, while there were others declining and declining. *[pause]*

You see this very often with companies.

One company is on the rise, and concurrently, another company is struggling and may soon go bankrupt.

Well in our story this morning, it’s like we are looking at one of those charts showing trajectory.

But instead of stocks or companies, we are seeing families.

One family is rising and rising, while simultaneously, another family is plummeting.

¹ <https://investmentu.com/why-did-gamestop-stock-rise/>.

And it's not in the stock market or business world, but it relates to the blessing and judgment of God. *[pauseeee]*

What we will do this morning is first look at the story, and then go on to look deeper into its meaning...So first...

The Story - Samuel and his family on the rise and blessed, Eli and his family on the decline and judged.

If you look at this whole passage, what you see is the contrast between these two families.

You see a major contrast between Samuel and Eli's sons, as well as a contrast between Hannah and Eli.

The structure of the story actually brings this out in a vivid way.

The writer will go back and forth between Samuel and his family, and Eli and his family.

So what you will see is that while Eli and his sons are getting worse and being judged, Samuel and his family are growing in godliness and being blessed. *[pause]*

Look at how the descriptions of Samuel are interspersed in the story.

In verse 11, before anything is said, we are told that Samuel is ministering to the Lord.

Then all of a sudden, the story goes right into speaking about the wickedness of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

So while Samuel is ministering to the Lord, Eli's sons are treating the offering of the Lord with contempt. *[pauseeeee]*

To understand what Eli's sons were doing wrong, it's helpful to know what they *should* have been doing.

In Leviticus, God said exactly how sacrifices were to be done and what the priests were to do.

The priest was supposed to burn the fat of the sacrifice on the altar, and then God said that the breast and right thigh of the animal was to be the priests.

This was a way of providing for the priests.² *[pause]*

But here in the story, we find Eli's sons deviating from the way that God commanded.

Instead of burning the fat, and then taking what God set aside for them, they were going in as the meat was boiling and taking out whatever they stabbed with a fork.

² See this information in Leviticus 7:28-34.

Moreover, we are told that they would even go in before the fat was burned and require that the offerer give the meat raw instead of boiled.

And the reason for this seems to be that they wanted the meat roasted instead of boiled.

So in essence, they were taking *more* meat than they were commanded and *before* the time that they were allowed. *[pause]*

They were not only taking away parts of what was to be sacrificed to God...

...But they were taking away from the one offering the sacrifice because the offerer was allowed to take and eat the rest of what was left over with his family. *[pause]*

This was a major misuse of the priestly office.

They were exploiting the people and dishonoring God.

In fact, even the worshippers offering the sacrifice were more godly than the priests!

For when the priest would require them to give over the meat raw, the person would say, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish." *[pause]*

The people who were sacrificing were trying to sacrifice according to God's law, but the priests weren't allowing them to!

They would even intimidate them by stating that they would take it by force if they didn't give it over.

This was a great sin in God's sight! *[pause]*

Here was a person desiring to offer a sacrifice to God in the right way out of a right heart...

...And the very priests who were supposed to be allowing this to happen and making sure it happened were the very ones distorting the sacrifices and taking advantage of the people. *[pauseeee]*

To understand just a snippet of how bad this was, it would be like if you came to church with a certain amount of money to give to God in the offering plate.

But let's say that before the offering was taken, I came up to you and told you to give me half of what you were about to give to God.

And when you said, "No, that's not right, this belongs to God, I want to give this all to Him."

In response, I said, "I'll just take it by force then."

And to parallel what they were doing, imagine that I wouldn't do that just to you, I'd do that to every person who gave.

That's sort of the idea of what was happening here.

They were using their spiritual positions to bully people into supplying them with extra meat from their sacrifices.

You see, meat back then was a very luxurious food, so it was highly prized, and that's why the priests wanted it.

They were fattening themselves off of the people's sacrifices to God. *[pause]*

The ones who were in spiritual positions were robbing both God and man in the sanctuary. *[pauseeee]*

This great sin and wickedness that they did was not just some surprising, rare character flaw, but it was because they did not know the Lord.

They disregarded God and did not pay attention to Him.

They did not honor Him, but turned away from Him.

And we even find in verse 22 that Hophni and Phinehas were sleeping with the women serving at the entrance of the tent of meeting. *[pause]*

These guys were truly "worthless men".

They were wicked, and the Hebrew words used are literally, they were "sons of Belial." *[pause]*

Belial was a term of derision and even Paul uses it in a way which seems to refer to Satan.³

It's like the author is calling them sons of the serpent, sons of the devil - totally wicked and worthless. *[pauseeee]*

So you have this grim, sin-filled picture of Eli's sons, but notice how right after this, it goes right back to Samuel.

Samuel is described once again as ministering before the Lord, clothed with a linen ephod. *[pause]*

Here is little Samuel doing what he's supposed to do in the Tabernacle, following God, all the while, Eli's priest sons are doing this utter wickedness in the Tabernacle.

In fact, it even shows us that it's not just Samuel doing what's right, but Samuel's family is remaining faithful and they are blessed.

Elkanah and Hannah, Samuel's parents, are faithfully coming each year to sacrifice, and annually Hannah makes this little robe to give to Samuel. *[pause]*

³ See 2 Corinthians 6:15.

By giving this robe, Hannah seems to be encouraging and supporting Samuel's work in his priestly role.

And the result is that they are blessed. *[pause]*

Eli continues to pronounce blessing on them, and God keeps allowing Hannah to conceive more and more children.

And to top it off, we are told that Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord.

That is a statement of God's favor towards Samuel. *[pauseeee]*

So what happens next?

Well, we have Eli rebuking his sons for their wickedness in verses 22-25.

He kept hearing all about the scandal of what they were doing with the women serving at the tent of meeting, so he decides to rebuke his sons.

He explains that he's heard about what they are doing, it's not good, it's evil dealings, and he says....

“If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?” *[pause]*

He seems to be using courtroom imagery here.

If someone sins against another person, then God is the judge and mediates between the two, but if you sin against God, the judge and mediator, who is there to intercede?

He's trying to convey to them how big of a deal it is to sin directly against God. *[pause]*

Yet what we find is that this rebuke is ignored by the sons.

They don't listen to their father because it was the will of God to put them to death. *[pause]*

Did you catch that?

They didn't listen *because* it was the will of God to kill them.

Now that's intriguing, isn't it?

This isn't an instance of God just being mean, for we know God is always good.

Instead, this is an instance where God gave them chances upon chances to repent, but they didn't.

And now God is ultimately giving them over to their sin, and specifically, giving them the consequences of their rebellion. *[pause]*

Let me tell you, one of the worst things to happen to someone is for God to confirm them in their rebellion, like he did with Pharaoh's hardened heart.⁴

You do not want God to give you over completely to your sinful self. *[pause]*

We see in Scripture that there is a point at which God gives *some* people over to their sinful selves, and this leads to utter destruction, as they are hardened.

This is only after repeated displays of grace, and repeated times of complete rejection of God, though.

And eventually, God says, "OK, you get what you want."

And what that person wants is the way to destruction, so that's what they will receive. *[pauseeee]*

This is of course only an unbelieving person who can do this, since you can't lose your salvation, but it's a reminder that we each need to persevere in the faith. *[pauseeeee]*

This is a serious and grave matter, and we must be aware of this reality, and so as the author of Hebrews says, "today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..."

...Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."⁵ *[pause]*

I exhort you this morning, don't spurn the gracious calls of God!

Don't keep following the path to destruction and keep rejecting Him!

If you have never actually (from the heart) turned from your sins and turned in faith to what Jesus did on the Cross, don't harden your heart anymore!

You don't know if or when God will confirm you in your rebellion, so if God is softening your heart today, turn in faith now!

Repent of your sins, and believe in what Jesus Christ did on the Cross, dying for your sins and rising again so that you can be forgiven and given eternal life.

And if you do that, God promises that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."⁶

Turn in faith and find life in the arms of the Savior. *[pauseeee]*

May we *all* be open to God's merciful calls to turn away from our sin, for they are truly *merciful* calls. *[pauseeee]*

⁴ See Exodus 4:21, 7:3, and 9:12.

⁵ Hebrews 3:7b-8a, 13.

⁶ Romans 10:13.

So we saw the section where Eli confronts his sons, and now notice once again how a description of Samuel is placed right after this and right before the prophecy against Eli.

In verse 26, it says, “Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.”

This is more evidence that the writer is trying to make a clear contrast between little Samuel growing in favor with God and man...

...While Eli’s sons are growing in wickedness and definitely NOT growing in favor with God and man.

And while Samuel’s family is faithful and being blessed, Eli’s family is wicked and as we are about to discover, they are about to be judged.

We see that in verses 27-36. *[pause]*

A man of God, which is a title for a prophet, comes to Eli and pronounces a prophecy about Eli’s family line.

He first explains the grace and privilege that God showed to Eli and his ancestors. *[pause]*

Aaron’s line was chosen to be the priestly line, and they were to be the ones taking care of incense burning, wearing an ephod, and sacrifices.

Yet here is Eli scorning the sacrifices and offerings, and honoring his sons above God.

So as a result, judgment is coming to Eli’s family line. *[pause]*

There won’t be an old man in his house, revealing that each person will die young and by the sword.

And the last remaining man in his line will be left only to weep his eyes out.

In fact, the prophet says that the sign of this prophecy is that his two sons will die on the same day.

And in the end, those from his house will become beggars, asking for bread. *[pauseeee]*

I mean talk about judgment! Eli’s family line will be decimated. *[pause]*

So while Hannah is being blessed with more and more children, demonstrating life in her family line...

Eli is promised that his children and family will be cut off in death, except one person left to weep his eyes out. *[pause]*

Samuel and his family are on the rise and blessed, while Eli and his family are on the decline and judged.

Talk about completely different trajectories at the same time. *[pause]*

That's the story in a nutshell, but what about the meaning?...

The Meaning - Those who honor God will be honored and those who despise God will be lightly esteemed.

In verse 30, we find this meaning brought out by God Himself.

God is pronouncing judgment on Eli, and He says, "those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

This is a very important truth to remember, and did you also notice how this story relates to Hannah's prayer right before this?

This story is showing Hannah's song in full color.

Remember the things that Hannah brought out?

She says, "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread."

That's what will happen to Eli's family - they were fattening themselves on the sacrificial meat, and soon they would beg for bread. *[pause]*

She also said that, "The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn."

That's what happened with Hannah's family and Eli's family.

Hannah was barren but now is fruitful, while Eli's family had a lot of people but it will soon be marred beyond recognition. [pause]

The Lord truly "kills and brings to life."

He makes poor and makes rich; brings low and exalts. *[pause]*

Hannah was needy, as she was barren and called out to God for help, but now she's lifted out of the dust, out of the ash heap, so that her son would become one who anoints kings.

Indeed, God guards the feet of his faithful ones (like Hannah and Samuel), but the wicked (like Eli and his sons) are cut off.

God honors those who honor him, and esteems lightly those who despise Him. *[pause]*

Consider, first, the honor side.

What is it that they do, which God recognizes as a good thing? *[pause]*

Those who honor Him humbly trust Him.

That's what you see with Hannah, especially.

Hannah humbly called out to God, realizing that her only hope was the Lord.

She trusted him, understanding who her God was, and who she was.

He is the Lord of hosts, and she is a servant. *[pause]*

That's the main quality of those who honor God, they humbly trust Him, and they show that trust in their lives.

They recognize that only God is due honor, and they give him honor.

And what's the result? God honors this.

He gives life and blessings. *[pause]*

Those who give God deserved honor, receive *undeserved* honor in return.

We don't deserve anything from God, yet he desires to give undeserved blessings to those who trust Him. *[pauseeee]*

Those who honor God will receive honor.

This isn't some rare truth that happened one time in 1 Samuel, but we see this even in how God relates to us in the New Covenant era.

We honor him by trusting him in faith, and the result is honor.

Remember when we studied 1 Peter? This came out a couple times.

In 1 Peter 1:7, it says...

“the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and *honor* at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” *[pause]*

Faith in God honors him, and the result is the life and blessings of praise, glory, and honor when Christ returns. *[pause]*

And then one more example is in 1 Peter 2, where Jesus is called the Cornerstone, and it says, “whoever *believes* in him will not be put to shame. So the *honor* is for you who believe.”⁷
[pause]

Honoring him and receiving honor from God is not “works salvation”.

⁷ 1 Peter 2:6b-7a (italics is mine).

It's simply believing in Christ, and we aren't put to shame, but we receive honor and life.
[pause]

If you think about it, all Hannah did was trust God and call out to him in prayer.

This wasn't some list of thousands of good works that led to blessing, but humbly calling out to God as her only hope.

This is faith! It's believing God, and trusting that He is King, he deserves honor, and He has what you need. [pause]

Samuel, also, just lived as someone ministering before the Lord. [pause]

So may we honor God with our lives!

May we act like He is truly on the throne!

May we live in humble dependence upon a good and giving God!

And what blessings He gives out of his goodness! [pause]

He gives life to those who trust in Christ's work.

He gives the honor and blessing of being accepted, adopted as a child, and justified in His sight through Christ's blood.

And someday we will receive the honor and blessings in eternity, as we will be with Him forever, giving Him praise for all that He has done. [pauseeee]

Will you honor Him in how you live?

Will you live a trustful, God-dependent life as you go through each day?

Will you submit to Him as the God who deserves all honor? [pauseeeee]

That's the honoring side of things, but what about the *despising* side of this truth?

Those who despise God will be lightly esteemed. [pause]

What does despising God look like, according to our passage?

Well it's the opposite of the honoring side, of course.

It's not trusting God, but rejecting Him and His ways.

It's honoring something above God, as well.

We see this in Eli's life, as well as Eli's sons' lives. [pause]

For Eli, he seems like a not too bad of a guy, who's sort of a little too timid, right?

Well actually he's more than that.

God gives us the issue with Eli in verse 29...

We are told that Eli scorned the sacrifices commanded by God for his dwelling!

We are told that Eli honored his sons more than God, and the way he does this is that he and his sons fatten themselves on the choicest parts of the offerings. *[pause]*

This seems to imply that Eli actually condoned what they were doing for a while.

And it even seems to imply that Eli was eating all of this extra meat that they took, and a possible further hint of this is that we find that he was a heavy man later on. *[pause]*

And the nail in the coffin for Eli is his rebuke was way too soft.

You see, Eli was the high priest and so he was ultimately responsible for what went on at Shiloh.

And so Eli should have taken *drastic* measures to stop his sons from doing what they were doing.

He should have determined to stand up for the honor and holiness of God by giving rid of his sons out of the priesthood.

In fact, according to Old Testament Law, his sons should have been killed for what they did, yet he allows them to remain in office and continue doing what they were doing.

This is a man who honored his sons over God, for Eli would rather offend God than his sons! *[pauseeee]*

This is an important message for any parent.

Do you honor your children above God?

Would you rather disobey God to make your children happy, or would you rather obey God and honor Him and make your children upset?

We must stand for what God wants and honor Him above all.

Even if this means people are upset with us, we must do what is right in God's eyes. *[pauseeeee]*

Eli didn't honor God, and certainly Eli's sons didn't honor Him, either.

They had a lack of regard for proper worship of God, for they lacked a regard for God.

Instead of making sure proper worship happened, they actually took advantage of the peoples' worship of God.

They turned worship into a platform for self-indulgence.

They saw the sacrificial system as simply a way to satisfy their fleshly desires.

They considered proper worship of God worthless, and God deemed them worthless in return.
[pause]

They exploited others, and therefore lacked a love for others, and they did this because of an all-consuming love for self.

They didn't see God as ruling, important, or to be honored, but despised God in their hearts.

They used God and others for themselves, and as a result, disobeyed the greatest commandments of loving God and loving others. [pauseee]

This is the danger of a love of self above all, it takes advantage of others and uses them to get its own way.

It uses the things of God, not as a way to love and serve Him, but as a way to self-indulge.
[pause]

Like the pastor who manipulates people and preaches only to grow his bank account and fame, so those who abuse their spiritual roles despise God.

Like the person who simply uses the things of God to make themselves look better in the sight of others, those who do this despise God and show contempt for true worship of God. [pauseee]

Worship of God is not there for you to exploit and manipulate for yourself, it's there for you to worship the one true God, who deserves all worship.

And when you disregard God, you show contempt for Him, and this means God will have little regard for you.

You treat God as insignificant, and he will consider you insignificant.

If you despise God, you get what you asked for - no life, for God is the Giver of all life.

If you don't give God what He deserves, then you get what you deserve: death. [pause]

This is some weighty stuff.

What if I didn't honor God in my past? What if I don't honor God today or one time in the future? Am I doomed?

Well I have good news for you...

There was Someone, who though he honored God completely and never despised the Lord, was disdained.

His name is Jesus, and it wasn't because of his fault, for it was the shame and dishonor that we deserved. *[pause]*

You see, as sinners, we despised God, yet God in love, sent Christ the perfect Son of God, to receive all of the disdain of God that we deserved.

And he satisfied the wrath of God for our despising.

He paid the penalty for our despising of God - death - so that we could receive the honor that the Son of God deserves.

And he rose again. *[pause]*

Like Samuel, who honored God and grew in stature and in favor with God and man, so Jesus *perfectly* honored God and grew in stature and in favor with God and man.⁸ *[pause]*

We despised God and deserved death...

...But God considers us as showing honor to Him and will give us honor all because Jesus Christ perfectly honored the Father in our place and took our penalty. *[pause]*

So if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, your despising of the Lord in the past, present, and future has been paid for by Jesus.

God considers you now as someone who honors Him because when he looks at you, he sees Christ's perfect honoring. *[pause]*

And if you have never placed your faith in Jesus, then today can be the day of salvation by trusting in His dying in your place, and you will no longer be under the penalty of death. *[pauseeeee]*

You know, in this story, at one point Eli says, "if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?"

And I want to yell from the rooftops, "Jesus can!"

Jesus intercedes for us perfectly by shedding His blood for our sins because only God Himself taking on humanity could intercede for the sin that we committed against Him. *[pauseeee]*

What a truth to rest upon: Christ was despised, so that we wouldn't be disdained by God forever.

And in Him, we find honor because we are in union with Christ, and through Him, we are able now to honor God with our lives and we are motivated to honor him with our lives.

So today let's remember these truths.

⁸ I'm talking about Luke 2:52 here.

This week, let's honor the Lord as holy.⁹

Let's live lives honoring to God, rejoicing and grateful for the fact that Christ honored God perfectly for us.

⁹ An allusion to 1 Peter 3:15.