

1 Samuel 3:1-4:1 | “The Return of the Word”
Preached on October 10, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

We will once again be in 1 Samuel this morning, so turn in God’s Word to 1 Samuel 3, and we will be covering all of chapter 3 today. *[pause]*

For my beginning illustration, I have an example from several different topics, so if one doesn’t connect in your mind, maybe another will.

I have examples from topics such as: food, sports, hunting, politics, and movies.

I know people here who enjoy each of those things, so maybe one will help make a connection in your mind. *[pause]*

The truth that I want to illustrate is this: hope often follows the return of something great.
 [REPEAT]

Maybe you love your food, well I know many people who get hopeful when they hear of the return of the McDonald's McRib.

Now I’m sure some people in here will question the ‘greatness’ of a McRib, but needless to say, for some people, the return of the McRib brings them hope of a great meal to come. *[pause]*

What about our sports enthusiasts out there?

Don’t you get hopeful when a star player returns to the team after an injury?

Of course, it brings hope of some more wins for the team. *[pause]*

Hunters, I *definitely* know you are out there.

What gives you hope? Isn’t it the return of deer season?

The return of deer season means another chance to get that buck this year, or fill your freezer.
[pause]

Movie lovers, if you have watched the Star Wars movie, “The Return of the Jedi”, you know what I mean.

The return of the Jedi Order after the defeat of the Galactic Empire brought with it a new hope for the galaxy. *[pause]*

And finally, for those who love politics, you know the feeling when your political party returns to the presidential office or to control of the House or Senate.

There is a new hope that arises, as you are hopeful that policies may soon turn to be more in line with what you want. *[pauseeee]*

Hope often follows the return of something great.

So also, we will see that truth in our passage this morning with powerful clarity.

Yet the return found in this story isn't something trivial like a McRib or a movie plot.

This return isn't something concerned with recreation like hunting or sports.

And this return is not something that only brings an imperfect and questionable hope like a new person in political office.

But this is concerned with the return of the Word of the Lord, which brings with it unshakable hope. *[pauseee]*

If you remember from previous weeks, God provided humble Hannah with a son, Samuel.

Then Hannah dedicated Samuel to lifelong service at the Tabernacle.

That's why in our story we will find that Samuel is ministering to the Lord under Eli.

Eli is the high priest at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was, and so young Samuel is under his tutelage, helping with different tasks and "learning the ropes," so to say. *[pause]*

Yet there's one more thing important to remember from previous weeks - God had just prophesied to Eli that his family line would be decimated.

They would be judged for the wickedness they were doing in their priestly roles, especially his "worthless" sons.

That will come into play in our story for this morning. *[pauseee]*

So let's consider first: the story itself, for it has great historical significance for the nation of Israel.

I'LL READ CHAPTER 3, and the first verse of chapter 4, as it connects with this passage. *[pause]*

In the first couple verses, we are told some introductory details before it dives into the content of the story.

First, we are told that "the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision."

This is critical for the story, as I'll bring out later. *[pause]*

We often think that all throughout the Old Testament, God was audibly speaking and giving visions, but that's simply not true.

There were large swaths of time that God wasn't audibly speaking throughout the Old Testament.

And it often meant that it was a time of God's displeasure.

For when God removed his Word, it often meant that the people had turned away from the Lord.¹
[pause]

And so we are told that the Word of the Lord was 'rare' or 'precious' at this time.

It was so rare that it was precious when it happened, for it was a valuable thing. [pause]

We are also told that Eli's eyesight is so dim that he couldn't see, and his dim eyes sort of symbolize his lack of spiritual discernment.

We have seen evidence of this 'lack' in a couple places already. [pause]

So Eli is lying down somewhere and Samuel is lying down where the ark of God was.

This all happened before the lamp of God had gone out.

That is, this happened during pre-dawn hours, for the lamp was to be lit from evening to morning.² [pauseeee]

After these details, we enter into the bulk of the story.

In verses 4-9, we find God calling Samuel three times, in a very well-known section.

God calls out Samuel's name, Samuel thinks that Eli is calling him, so he runs to Eli and says, "Here I am, for you called me." [pause]

This first time is sort of believable for both sides, right?

Sometimes when you are sleeping, one person will think they heard something, and so Eli tells him pretty much to go back to sleep, for he didn't call him.

But then it happens a second time, and I can just imagine Eli being sort of frustrated, for he just wants to sleep, and here is Samuel interrupting him once again.

And Samuel is probably thinking, "I *definitely* know someone called my name, this is weird, it had to be Eli."

But the reason why Samuel doesn't recognize what is going on is because verse 7 tells us that Samuel didn't yet know the Lord, the word of the Lord hadn't been revealed to him. [pause]

Samuel didn't have personal experience of the Lord by which he could recognize the Lord's call.

¹ See Amos 8:11-12.

² See Exodus 27:20-21.

No prior vision or voice had been given to him, for he was not yet a prophet. *[pause]*

So after two times, Samuel goes back to lay down once again, and it happens a *third* time!

God calls his name, and Samuel goes to Eli. *[pause]*

Obviously, Samuel *knows* he heard something, or else he wouldn't dare go a third time to interrupt his boss' sleep, after doing it twice already.

I know I would be thinking something like, "OK, I heard my name now a third time, there's no one else nearby other than Eli, so it **MUST** have been Eli.

Maybe he's testing me to see if I'll always obey his voice? Uh, I don't want to bother him, but I *for sure* heard my name."

And so he goes to Eli, and that's when Eli puts two-and-two together.

He knows undoubtedly that he didn't call Samuel, and this didn't happen just once, where you could say it was simply Samuel thinking he heard something, so it must be the Lord.

That's when Eli tells him to go back, and he tells him that when the Lord calls, to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." *[pause]*

Samuel goes back, and that's when God calls a fourth time and he uses Samuel's name twice.

And he also "came and stood," indicating that this was an appearance of the Lord.

And so Samuel responds, and then God gives Samuel a prophetic statement of doom against Eli. *[pauseeee]*

What started out as sort of a child-like story, has now turned dramatically as Samuel is told about a jarring judgment against his boss.

It's such a frightening judgment that "the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle."

God is going to fulfill all that was spoken previously to Eli, and he will punish Eli's house forever. *[pauseeee]*

Why such judgment?

Because Eli knew about the iniquity going on and didn't restrain his sons for blaspheming God.

It was a high-handed, intentional, serious sin, and yet Eli knew about it and didn't restrain his sons.

That's a big deal, and God doesn't take it lightly. *[pauseeeee]*

Can you imagine young Samuel at this point?

It's the first time ever that God has audibly spoken to him, and the first time is this severe message of judgment against the man who was training and raising him. *[pause]*

So Samuel lays until morning, and I highly doubt he slept at all.

He opens the doors of the house of the Lord, probably indicating that it was morning time, and he's fearful of giving the vision to Eli.

Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you be afraid of giving such a message to your boss?

But Eli essentially makes him tell him by pronouncing a serious oath if he doesn't, and Samuel tells him everything. *[pauseeee]*

At this point, you would think that Eli would respond in anger or something like that, but he accepts it.

He says, "It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him." *[pause]*

I think at this point he realizes that God is going to do it no matter what, so he accepts it.

What can he do when God declares with absolute certainty his demise?

All he can say is, "It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him." *[pause]*

He understands God is in control and will do what he deems right. *[pauseeee]*

After this, we are told of Samuel's popularity and increasing credibility as a prophet of God.

In fact, God spoke through Samuel and every word came true.

This made Samuel become not just a regional prophet, but a national prophet.

And in verse 21, we are told that the Lord appeared again at Shiloh because the Word of the Lord had come to Samuel. *[pause]*

The point is that the Word of the Lord and presence of God was back.

Like Samuel opening up the doors of the house of the Lord, so a new era was opened up, as the Word and presence of God returned. *[pause]*

What started out in this chapter as the Word being rare, now the Word is common, as it's coming through Samuel to the people.

This is a big change!

This is a great thing for Israel, for it means they can hear from God and get guidance and truth from Him.

A new era has begun with Samuel being called and raised up to be a prophet.

God's presence and word makes a huge difference, for they could remember the days of Moses and Joshua, where God was present and spoke through his prophet. *[pause]*

That's the historical significance of this story, but as we bring it to our day, what does this story teach us? [pause]

Well the story is permeated through and through with talk of the 'Word of the Lord', so it teaches us first that...

I. The Word of the Lord is authoritative, true, and certain.

We see this especially in the prophecy against Eli.

Eli can't help but submit to the authority of the Word against him.

He knows it's true and certain.

What God said, he would do. [pause]

And you also see this in the end of the chapter as Samuel becomes an established prophet.

As God speaks through his prophet, the people recognize its authority.

And it's certain and true, as none of the words fall to the ground; they all come to be. *[pauseeee]*

What a great reminder, what a great challenge - these are truths that we must submit to!

God's Word, the Bible, is authoritative in all that it says.

What it tells us, we must do. [pause]

Even when it says something hard to take, we would do well to say like Eli, "It is the Lord."

And when it tells us about possible suffering and trials, we should say, "Let him do what seems good to him." [pauseeee]

So often people see the Bible's hard teachings as something they can take or leave.

That's why they like to pick and choose which things they adhere to.

But the authority of all of Scripture should dispel that notion in an instant.

This is God's authoritative Word to us, and so we should live like it.

And like Samuel, even when it's scary to tell others the hard parts, we should share it all with them. *[pauseeeee]*

How do you respond when God's Word is hard to take?

Even though Eli figured the vision given to Samuel was bad news, he was determined to hear it, and to hear ALL of it.

May we always want to hear *all* of God's Word, for it's all authoritative, and none of his words fall to the ground.

It is true and certain.

It's promises will all be fulfilled, and it's pages hold absolute truth.

Every word and every part is inspired by God.

So we should believe it, and shape our worldview and walk of life by its message. *[pauseeee]*

Do you live believing that the Bible is authoritative, true, and certain?

When it challenges you to do something that you don't want to do, what's your response?

That reveals if you truly believe it's authoritative for *your* life. *[pause]*

When there's a problem in your life or in the world, where do you go to seek answers?

That reveals if you genuinely believe the Bible is truth. *[pause]*

And when you think about the future, are you worrisome?

That may reveal whether you believe that the Bible's promises are certain. *[pause]*

What a difference it would make in each of our lives if we lived fully believing that God's Word is authoritative, true, and certain!

We would live lives, seeking to align ourselves and submit ourselves to His Word.

When faced with anything in life, we would go directly to the Word for answers.

And even through the hardest moments of our lives, we would cling to His promises, fully confident that what He says will come to be, for He is the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

We see another facet of the Word of the Lord in this passage, and it's that...

II. The Word of the Lord is powerful, necessary, and timely.

Growing up, I was a lot quieter and so I didn't say too much.

So when I was in high school, I worked for a clothing store, and my co-workers made up this saying about me.

They said, "When Matt Brown talks, people listen!"

They made it up because I talked so very little so that when I did talk, people wanted to hear what I had to say. *[pause]*

Well it comes to God's Word, when God speaks certainly people listen, but also when God speaks, people are *transformed*. *[pause]*

We see that with Samuel.

Here was a young boy just going about his business, serving in his priestly tasks, and he didn't even know God intimately.

And all of a sudden the Word of the Lord enters into his life, and he is completely transformed into an established prophet, who knows the Lord.

That's the power of the Word!

It's powerful! It's transformative! *[pause]*

An example of this is Saul, also called Paul.

In Acts 9, Saul is on his way to persecute more Christians, God speaks to Him, and he's forever changed.

So that is the transforming work of God's Word. *[pause]*

The Word of the Lord takes us from people who don't know the Lord to people who know God in a personal relationship.

As Peter says, "you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."³

His Word breaks into our lives and changes us forever, making us his children. *[pause]*

And just like Samuel, it's all because of God's initiative.

It's all because God spoke to Him first, so God must speak to us first in the Gospel, which shows his all-loving initiative. *[pauseeee]*

Not only does the Word call us to become Christians by means of the Gospel message, but His Word also calls us to service.

We see that so very clearly with Samuel's call to service. *[pause]*

It was God calling him to service that led Samuel into his new role.

Likewise, God calls us to service through His Word.

³ 1 Peter 1:23.

We hear the Great Commission from Him⁴, we hear the command to love one another,⁵ and so much more.

We get our marching orders from His Word, which calls us to service...

...And like Samuel, when we hear his call, we should obediently say, "Here I am." *[pause]*

Those are just three words in response to God, but it shows someone who's basically saying, "Lord, I'm ready and willing to hear from You, and what You want me to do."

Everytime we open up God's Word, we should be saying to God, "Here I am, for you called me."

"Lord, what would you have me do?"

May we be like Samuel who when he hears, he runs to serve in humble obedience. *[pauseeee]*

God's Word is powerful, it changes people and calls them as Christians and as servants.

Do you remember and rely upon this power as you talk to people who don't know Christ?

Do you remember and rely upon this power to transform your life?

It is truly transformative! *[pauseeeee]*

The Word of the Lord is also necessary and timely. *[pause]*

The situation in Israel wasn't too good, for it was the time of the judges.

Everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes⁶, and the priests were exploiting people, and showing contempt for the sacrifices to God.

What was needed was a transformational change, and that's precisely what the Word of the Lord brought.

God provided his word through his prophet at just the right time, as the people desperately needed it with the threat of the Philistines looming. *[pauseeee]*

The Word is needed, it's necessary - do you believe this?

When it really gets down to the nitty-gritty situations of life...

...People think that the Word of God is nice to embroider on their pillow or hang on their wall, yet they act like it's irrelevant and ineffective for the situation they are in! *[pause]*

⁴ See Matthew 28:18-20.

⁵ See John 13:34.

⁶ See Judges 21:25.

But we need to know that with the chaos of the world, and the threats all around you in life, the Scriptures are what is needed to change people and situations.

And you know what? It's always timely because it is timeless truth, which is ever relevant.
[pauseee]

You need to realize this!

God's Word is necessary to live a godly life, it's sufficient to deal with the issues of life, and it's always relevant and timely for your life. [pause]

As Israel needed God to speak and change their situation, so we need to hear God speak in His written Word and it will transform people and situations. [pauseee]

This should lead us to be in the Word even more so in our personal lives.

But this should also lead us even more so to be under the regular preaching and teaching of His Word. [pause]

What a privilege that we have to meet in freedom and to share this Word!

What a privilege that we have where the Word isn't rare in our day, but it's fully here in the Bible that we hold today.

Won't you remember that the Word of the Lord is powerful, and needed, and timely?

And putting ourselves in submission to it, may we say like Eli told Samuel to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." [pauseeee]

This passage shows us one more thing about the Word of the Lord, and it's this...

III. The Word of the Lord brings news of judgment, but also hope.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I've got bad news for you and good news. Which do you want to hear first?"

I don't know about you, but I typically choose the bad news first, so that way at least it will end on a good note.

Well the Word of the Lord brings both bad and good news, and so like I like hearing it, let's go with the bad news first. [pause]

In this passage, the Word of the Lord brought bad news, news of judgment to Eli.

This judgment wasn't arbitrary meanness of the Lord, but rather, it was deserved judgment for sinning against a holy and good God. [pause]

Eli and his sons had plenty of time to repent, they had plenty of time to change their ways, and to stop showing contempt for the Lord.

That's grace right there for God to give them that much time, yet they chose to continue in their sin.

And as we know from Scripture, "the wages of sin is death."⁷ *[pauseeee]*

Sin against a holy God is a big deal, it deserves death.

And that's what Eli and his sons deserved, for they were sinning against the holy Lord without any repentance. *[pauseeee]*

So often we see sin as a light matter, like a mistake, but we must get back to the ugly, disgusting, rotten nature of sin.

It is rebellion against God, the Creator. *[pauseeee]*

We often look back at the Old Testament examples of God killing people on the spot, and we think, "Wow, that's harsh..."

But if you think about it, it's simply showing the truth that sin deserves death, and this hasn't changed in the New Covenant period.

God may not strike people down as much, but when someone dies without turning to Christ, they receive the same penalty as these Old Testament examples: death.

The Old Testament people may have died a little younger, but the result is the same. *[pauseeee]*

The Word of God brings a message of judgment, so we must not neglect to talk about it.

It's all over the place, in fact, it is a part of the Gospel message! *[pause]*

So often the thing nowadays is to shy away from talking about sin and judgment, as if it was something that can be tossed to the side, if desired.

But when someone does that, they are not giving the full truth, but a half truth, and more than that, they are distorting the Gospel message!

And when you distort the Gospel message, that has eternal ramifications for people.

You lessen sin, you lessen the glory of Christ.

You lessen judgment, you lessen the need for a Savior.

For why would I need Christ, if judgment for my sin isn't a thing? *[pause]*

⁷ Romans 6:23.

You know, we like to share John 3:16 very much so, *and we should*, but what comes after John 3:16?

Doesn't John 3:18-20 come? And what does that passage say?

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”⁸ *[pause]*

There is judgment for not turning to Christ in faith, in fact, people are already condemned unless they believe. *[pauseeee]*

The Word of the Lord brings news of judgment, this is a part of the Gospel message.

We are judged and under the declaration of condemnation because of our sin against God, yet praise God that's not the end of the story!

There's good news, for the Word of the Lord not only brings news of judgment, but also of hope and life. *[pause]*

In love, God made a way for sinners who deserved death to receive forgiveness and life.

“He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”⁹ *[pause]*

Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again so that we no longer stand under judgment and condemnation, but we stand forgiven and declared righteous.

This is the good news that the Word of the Lord brings us, and what good news it is!

God does not abandon us in judgment, even though he would be perfectly just to do so, but he reaches down in grace to save sinners through Christ.

He gives us hope amidst darkness!

The Word of the Lord is truly grace for sinful people!

Even the fact that God speaks to us is grace, but more than that, he speaks to us and tells us of how we can be saved through His Son. *[pauseeee]*

⁸ (Italics is mine.)

⁹ John 3:16.

The truth is, all of Israel at the time of the story we are reading deserved continued darkness, yet in grace, God raised up Samuel and started speaking through him.

This showed His people that he wasn't going to abandon them, but he was reaching down in grace.

He took the gracious initiative to reveal Himself to sinful people, for the Word went from rare to common in 1 Samuel 3. *[pause]*

It may have been dark during this time, the lamp of God may have been dim, but it had not gone out - there was hope!

So also...

The Word has broken through the darkness and has brought us a new dawn in Jesus!

The difference maker in the story in 1 Samuel 3 is the Word of the Lord.

The Word authoritatively and powerfully transformed Israel's situation, as it brought a message of judgment, but also hope.

The Word went from rare to common and changed the trajectory of Israel from despair to hope.

So also, the difference maker hasn't changed over time, it has always been the Word.

For as John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..."

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."¹⁰ *[pauseeee]*

We were sinners, groping in the darkness, but God in grace sent the Word, Jesus, to bring us a new dawn.

Truly as Matthew says, "the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."¹¹ *[pause]*

It's the Word that changes everything!

And in 1 Samuel 3, the Word of the Lord and the new prophet who God spoke through were different, but in Jesus they become *one*.

The Word *is* the new prophet, the new and better Moses.¹²

¹⁰ John 1:1, 4-5, 14.

¹¹ Matthew 4:16.

¹² I'm referring to Deuteronomy 18:15-18 here.

So because of Christ, we are no more longing for God to speak because it's rare, for Christ has come and God has spoken through His Son.

As Scripture says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."¹³ *[pauseeee]*

After many years of silence, Samuel broke onto the scene as God spoke through Him, bringing a new dawn...

...So after 400 years, God broke the silence through Jesus, the great and perfect Prophet, who came onto the scene to bring a new dawn.

And in verse 21, we are told that God revealed Himself by the Word of the Lord, and that's what he did in Jesus, the Word has revealed God to us.

And when Samuel received the Word, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord, so Jesus opens the doors of the house of the Lord so we can enter and experience God's presence! *[pause]*

The Word has broken through the darkness and brings a new dawn in Jesus, have you trusted in Him?

Turn from your sin and trust in Him alone to save you! *[pause]*

And for those of us who have received hope and life in Jesus, may we always keep this truth in mind...

For His Word breaks through your darkness and brings hope even now as you hear and cling to His promises. *[pause]*

Maybe you are facing some dark moments right now, or will face some in the future.

Remember the hope and light that you have because of the Word becoming flesh.

He brings hope of a new dawn to every situation.

Because even when we are rejected by others, we are accepted by God.

Even in our sufferings and trials, God is doing something good in us.¹⁴

Even in our death, it is gain, as we get to be in the presence of the Lord.¹⁵

And even when we have nothing in this world, we have everything in Christ.

What do we have to fear?

¹³ Hebrews 1:1-2.

¹⁴ See James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:6-7, & Romans 8:28.

¹⁵ See Philippians 1:21-23.

We don't have to live as those who have no hope,¹⁶ for even in the darkest moments, the light shines.

So hold onto His precious promises, and let's keep going back to the Lord, saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

¹⁶ An allusion to 1 Thessalonians 4:13.