

**Reading:** 1 Samuel 3:1- 4:1a

**Theme:** The Call of God.

It is often said that the darkest time is before the dawn, just before the sun rises and gives its light. As D-day was in progress Winston Churchill said *“It is not the beginning of the end, but it is the end of the beginning.”* He realised there was still a long way to go before victory could be achieved. Here in the passage we read we have the beginnings of a dawn about to rise, the beginning of the end of the dark and ignorant times of the judges when people did what they wanted to do. In spiritual terms we would call this a time of revival starting – when God’s word would have a powerful effect on the nation and its people and they would turn back to God, asking and looking for His help. In this case it would result in national events that would lead to unifying of the nation and the appointment of a king.

This passage, at least the start of it, is familiar to so many people as it is a lovely narrative of young Samuel’s call by the Lord to be a prophet. I want approach this passage from the angle of revival in the nation and apply it to us as a church and as individuals. I have 4 things I want us to note:

### **1. Revival Approaches.** (v1-10)

As a nation Israel should have been close to God, knowing His word, having His prophets to tell them God’s desires for them, but it was not the case v1b or as AV says *“God’s word was precious”*!! There was a real famine in the land - not of bread, but of hearing and having the word of the Lord taught and come through visions, prophecies and the like at that time.

Coupled with this was that the sons of Eli the priest were wicked, ungodly men and the people were turning away from the worship of the Lord. Things were in a sorry state. Probably many were

bemoaning the fact and others were ready to write off the worship of the Lord as a thing of former generations and this tabernacle worship was a thing of former generations and carried on by a load of weirdoes and hypocrites. Sounds a familiar sentiment in our days as Christianity and the Church seem such an irrelevance. There are confusing signals from churches and their leaders; many write off Christianity as irrelevant and dead, but refusing to lie down! Certain traditional types and styles of worship are looked on as past hope.

We are to view things differently – yes from a human point of view things may seem hopeless for Christianity, but we are to view things from heaven’s perspective with spiritual eyes, for the Lord is building His church throughout the world and He will not abandon His work and He has His purposes to work out – both in the time of Samuel and now in our time! Revival was needed then and is needed now. In this chapter it was approaching, was on its way sooner than anyone imagined and through it God would call and turn the nation back to Himself. The first signs of it were unrecognised as it was only the desperate tears and prayers of a barren woman – Hannah and the birth of her son Samuel and her giving him over to the Lord and His service in thankfulness. Sadly that incident had been buried under a deluge of things going from bad to worse nationally over a period of some 12 to 13 years. That’s what would have continued to happen - except God dramatically stepped into history once again and things changed.

Revival was approaching and its coming was heralded by the call of God to a 12 year old boy to be His prophet. It is a lovely story and is glorious in its simplicity and yet it heralds the start of a great work of God in the nation. Eli and Samuel were asleep in the tabernacle. It was late, possibly it was coming up to midnight and the lamp of God was still burning (*the great 7 branched lamp*

*stand – the Menorah, which was lit at evening and allowed to burn out by morning [Exodus 27:21; Leviticus 24:3]*)

Samuel was at his post, doing his duty. Even though Samuel was about 12 or 13, Eli, old Eli, relied a lot on him. As yet Samuel did not know the Lord (v7), which probably does not mean that he did not know the Lord at all, but that he did not know the Lord speaking to him in the way He was about to – for v1b. Three times Samuel gets up and goes to Eli. Perhaps Samuel thought the old man was calling out in his sleep, but he nevertheless went to him. We know it was the Lord calling Samuel and eventually Eli recognised it too. Eli, although an old man with many faults and weaknesses, still had his spiritual faculties about him and realised it was the Lord calling the boy (v8b) and so he wisely and lovingly instructed Samuel.

That must have been hard for the old high priest – Eli was about 80 – to realise that the Lord was speaking to this child and bypassing him! Yet he is, with all his faults, a man of God and he encouraged and taught Samuel to respond aright. I wonder how young Samuel felt as he went back to his bed after that bombshell! When the Lord does speak again, Samuel answered and was ready to listen. Probably Samuel leaving out the word “*Lord*” in v10 was out of humility or shock as he cannot take in that the Lord would speak to him, a mere child! Yet the Lord did speak to Samuel and called him by name 5 times (*in v4, 6 & 8 & when he was ready to listen, twice v10*).

Would we want God to speak to us in this way? Would we be ready to listen to what He would say to us? Are we ready, expecting and longing for Him to speak to us through His word as we read it regularly at home, as we hear His word preached at church? If we do not expect that, then most often we will go away

from God's word read or preached with our expectations fulfilled! Yet if there is this longing and expectation for God to speak to us through His word – read or preached, then we will come with prayer for such, with a right attitude and longing to meet with God and we will read and listen carefully to say what He would say to us through His word read or preached.

It may be God will speak to us as if by name and address our own particular need and situation at that moment in a way we were not expecting. It may be that the Lord would be speaking to and dealing with us, leading us to serve Him or even to trust Him as our Saviour for the first time. If the later is the case then we can be sure that He will keep calling us in His grace and not let us alone until He makes that call effective in our lives. That is why all of us when we come to read or hear God's word should pray *“Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”*

It could be that the Lord is calling someone here to serve Him, or to believe on Him and from the response God will bring about the revival our church and land needs. When the Lord puts His hand on us He leads us not only in the right way, but exciting ways that we cannot even begin to consider, sometimes those ways may not be pleasant as we see from this chapter.

## **2. Revival Brings Judgement** (v11-14)

Samuel was ready to listen to and obey what the Lord said, but what a shock he had when the Lord told him the message of judgement he had to deliver to Eli! Dear old Eli, his father or grandfather figure, his tutor, mentor, his friend and the one he loved! Samuel probably knew Hophni and Phineas were rotters, wicked men, but this judgement was a condemnation of Eli. The words of the man of God in 2:27-36 are echoed again. It was not that Eli had made mistakes as a father – all fathers and mothers

make mistakes, but that v13 – open sin, with the footnote suggesting “*blasphemed God*” and Eli did nothing about it.

People imagine revival is an easy and pleasant thing, but it is not. If the holy God was to come among us in power and in His holy presence He would break our hearts and devastate us. Our lack of love, our sin, our pride, our scheming, our coldness to Him and each other would be laid bare; as would our ease and contentedness within our Christian lives. Revival comes first as a refining fire to clean up and sort out **God’s people**, to make them sit up and be serious about God and the things of God before it affects a godless world. That is what v11 is saying in essence – all Israel would take note of this and begin to be serious with God.

We are not to provoke God to deal with us in this way, but sort ourselves out, by His help, following His instructions, so that if He does come in a mighty way among us, we will be, as far as we can be, a holy people ready and willing for the day of His power. Revival was to bring judgement, but it had not even got off the ground. How could Samuel be able to tell his beloved Eli? Would Samuel tell his dearest friend and teacher the solemn word from God? I mean he wasn’t specifically told to do so was he? Perhaps he could avoid the subject!

### **3. Revival Begins.** (v15-18)

The whole work of revival, humanly speaking, hung on young Samuel faithfully telling Eli what the Lord had said. If he had failed here, he would have been a failure and God could have raised up another man of His choice. Thankfully Samuel does not fail and the revival begins – from then on Samuel is marked out as a prophet and his sphere of influence grows from this point and all Israel knew Samuel was the Lord’s prophet (v20).

Notice some things about Samuel – he went and lay down – probably too troubled to sleep as he pondered the message he knew he had to tell Eli, for it was not revealed to him as private information only! Next morning Samuel went about his duty – he opened the doors of the tabernacle. He was not proud, arrogant or puffed up with the Lord having spoken to him and what he knew. God had truly met with Samuel and any true meeting with God should humble us and make us low in our own estimation and be willing to serve God and His people wherever and however. Samuel did not view door keeping as beneath him now he had had this encounter with and message from the Lord. He carried on his duties, even in the low and humdrum things of life and work. What a challenge to us all! How will we serve the Lord here?

Samuel's gifts were in place even before the Lord had called him. This is how God works – by giving His people the necessary gifts to serve Him and His people. God does not call those who want position or influence, who want to be seen as leaders. God calls those who have the gifts, the love and heart to serve His people and help them – whether in ministry, elders or deacons, missionaries, Sunday school workers, children's work, encouragers, helpers etc. These gifts will be more evidenced as they are called or even thrust into situations and yet at the same time they are to be coupled with humility.

Samuel did not go running to Eli as soon as he had been spoken to by the Lord. Indeed Samuel was afraid – not terror, but afraid of hurting dear old Eli when he told him what God had said and Eli had to virtually force him to speak and tell him what the Lord had said. The message 12 year old Samuel spoke to Eli came with greater force because Samuel was not puffed up, was not even hard or harsh as he spoke the truth in love. I can picture Samuel holding Eli's hand, even speaking with tears in his eyes, perhaps

hugging him as he told him what the Lord had said. Samuel was affected by the call and message and it was with tenderness and sadness he told Eli the message.

So often we may be fooled by the caricature of the prophets as gleefully blasting people with the message of doom. No true prophet of God will do that – the true prophet and messenger of God, will always preach with tears in his heart, even eyes, especially if his message is a harsh and difficult one.

Those of us who preach and teach God's word are to bear this in mind and preach tenderly as dying men to dying men. Yes, we have to preach, expose sin, warn of God's condemnation of sin and speak of hell, but never in a harsh way as if we delighted in such. We are to speak tenderly even when speaking of hard things – it is our message and not our manner that is to cause offence. We are to have the love of Christ in our hearts for those we teach especially as we tell them of their lost condition before God.

We are to notice Eli's reaction (v18b) – Mathew Henry calls it "*Eli's pious acquiescence in it.*" – he accepts it in a godly and gracious manner. Eli does not blast and rant at Samuel. Eli took it as from the Lord and submitted to what God had said.

I am aware of my own inadequacies and shortcomings, but I try to bring you God's word week by week. I try and make it relevant and applicable to our situations, but I realise I do not always succeed! Maybe I do say things you resent from God's word – before you dismiss the messenger boy, I ask you to see if it is God speaking to you through what is preached. My authority is God's word and I try to bring that for our lives in the times we are living in, for there are eternal, ever-relevant teachings and principles for godly living at home, school, work, in society and all situations

we find ourselves in. Realise that I place myself under it before I preach it to you, as relevant for my life first and foremost. Do we listen to and receive God's word as we read it or hear it preached? To expect to hear God speak to us through His word will alter our attitudes and obedience to His word as it comes to us.

#### **4. Revival Develops.** (3:19-4:1a)

Samuel had been faithful and so the situation of v1 is changed and God's word was again taught the people realised it. For Samuel had ongoing revelations from God and all Israel knew he was a prophet of the Lord. I do not know if the Lord's message to Eli was known publically, but some 18 to 20 years would pass before it was fulfilled. Yet news soon spread that in Shiloh was a young man who was called and established as a prophet of the Lord and the Lord showed and made Himself known to Samuel and through him the Lord's word came and was known to all Israel (4:1a).

The Lord was with Samuel and the people recognised it. We need to let God's word so affect our lives that people will see the work of God in us and even own it.

The revival began to develop and spread – now people were not so taken up with Hophni and Phinehas - their sin and immorality, but with God and His word. This is what revival is about – God dealing firstly with His own people and then with others through His word and bringing them to live as He desires. We need such in our days – to know and live for our God and do exploits and provide that which society really needs. They want many things, but THE need of the day is God centred, God empowered preaching and living, that will confront people with the risen living Saviour. Pray that such ones would be raised up, that it would be so here through us with our witness as a church and as individuals.