

[00:00:00] *hope: Welcome to the Hope Church Glasgow Sunday podcast. We pray you encounter God's love afresh today. Find out more about us@hopechurchglasgow.org or find us on Facebook and Instagram. Now, please enjoy this week's podcast.

[00:00:18] Mark Spybey: Good morning, good to see you and welcome from me. And if I don't know you, an extra special welcome. My name's Mark. I'm one of the leaders here at Hope Church.

And this is a very special book to me. This, like, you can probably tell what it is. It's a Bible.

No surprises when church, but this one's particularly special.

There's nothing quite like a paper Bible, is there? You know, like, we all like to read our Bibles on phones these days, but I think, I still think there's nothing quite like a paper Bible. And this one is especially special to me because if I turn into the first page, it's got written in silver ink on the inside. It says, two marks on your fifth birthday. Love from mummy and daddy.

There you go.

I could read out the date as well, but, you know, then you.

Yeah, I'm not particularly precious about that, but anyway. But yeah, nothing like a paper Bible. Today I'm going to be speaking from the story which includes a boy called Samuel, which is also particularly close to my heart because Samuel is one of my middle names, actually.

And I think.

I think since the days that I first had this Bible, this story has been particularly close to my heart.

So just to give us a little bit of context for this, then, okay, so where are we in the big story of the Bible today?

So we are after the days of Moses. So if you remember Moses, you know, Moses was the one who received on behalf of the people, the commandments. And there was this whole kind of agreement, this covenant wasn't there between the people and God. And as part of that, there was this tabernacle, a tent.

And then later on, which is like after where we're going to be today, we get to like David and Solomon and the temple, which was, you know, that physical building, a special place for God to meet his people. But based on my understanding, I think this is right at the time of this story, there was a place called Shiloh, which is where essentially that tabernacle, that tent which had been given through Moses as a special place for meeting with God, was kind of, as it were, parked in this place called Shiloh. And this place was kind of known as the house of God. And people would come to Shiloh from other parts of Israel, you know, maybe like once a year to make an offering to worship God.

And in this house of God in Shiloh, there was a priest called Eli. And priests were the guys who were kind of a bit like, kind of go between, between people, you know, the regular people of the day and God. And there was this guy called Eli who was a priest there. And there's a beautiful scene at the start of the book of Samuel in the Bible with a woman, Hannah. Now, Hannah was really sad because she wasn't able to have children, and she was desperate to be a mum. She wanted to have children. And we see her there and she's pouring her heart out to God. And Eli, this priest, he ends up coming over and praying for her.

And as part of this scene, Hannah says to God, look, if I am able to have a child, I'm going to give this child. I'm going to dedicate this child to God. And then a few months later, she's gone back home. She becomes pregnant. She's delighted, and she's pregnant. And the child that she's pregnant with is Samuel. Right, okay.

So she's pregnant with Samuel. And she thinks, okay, how am I going to honor my kind of commitment to God to dedicate this child to him? And she says, okay, actually, I'm going to take him back to Eli, the priest in Shiloh. I'm going to ask Eli, will you effectively raise this child? Like, can he be, like your apprentice, basically, and live in the house of God and grow up in that way? And so that's the context of this story that we're going to read.

Now, I've asked a couple of people to help me tell this story. So hopefully, Saffron and Jacob, if you could just come up, that would be really helpful. Maybe Saffron, you can go on this side, and jp, you come on this side. So here we have, in fact, Samuel and Eli, in case you were wondering, you know.

So, okay, let's go into this. So you've got your bits to read in a moment. Okay, so I'm going to jump in this if you want to follow along. It's in 1 Samuel, and it's chapter 3. And I'm just going to jump in from the beginning of that chapter.

It says, in those days when the boy Samuel was serving the Lord under the direction of Eli, there were very few messages from the Lord, and visions from him were quite rare.

One night, Eli, who was now almost blind, was sleeping in his own room.

Samuel was sleeping in the sanctuary where the sacred covenant box was.

So just a Quick comment before we go any further, it's always really interesting in a Bible story to think about why have we been told what we've been told. Like, there's lots of things we could have been told about this night. We could have been told what they were wearing for pajamas. We could have been told, did they remember to brush their teeth that night? We're not told any of that stuff, but we are told some specific things. We're told that there were very few messages from the Lord at that time, and that's the context. So we're kind of being teed up to be like, it's unexpected, it's unusual to hear something from God. And then we're specifically told that Eli was almost blind. Again, it's like this sense of, like, the senses being dulled or like, not working properly, a kind of sense of loneliness and isolation. So that's what we're being kind of given here as a context for this story.

Okay, so you're both asleep. Okay. And it says, before dawn, while the lamp was still burning, the Lord called to Samuel, and he ran over to Eli and said,

[00:05:59] *hope: you called me.

[00:06:00] Speaker C: Here I am.

I didn't call you. Go back to bed.

[00:06:06] Mark Spybey: I don't know if there's any parents here, but, you know, I'm sure a lot of us have had that moment, right? It's like, I definitely didn't ask you to come. Go back to bed. Okay. I think a few of us know that moment.

Okay. So, Sam, we went back to bed. Very obedient child. Excellent.

The Lord called Samuel again.

The boy did not know that it was the Lord because the Lord had never spoken to him before.

So he got up and he went to Eli,

[00:06:39] *hope: you called me.

[00:06:40] Speaker C: Here I am, my son. I didn't call you. Go back to bed.

[00:06:45] Mark Spybey: Again. Solid parenting. Reinforcing the message. Consistency of approach. I like it. Yeah, Very good. Okay, here we go. Verse 8. The Lord called Samuel a third time.

So he got up and went to Eli, and he said, you called me.

[00:07:02] *hope: Here I am.

[00:07:03] Speaker C: Go back to bed. And if he calls you again, say, speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.

[00:07:10] Mark Spybey: And there you go.

I actually missed the line which said that Eli had realized that it was the Lord who was calling the boy. Very important, very important verse I missed. Apologies. But there we go. Okay.

Then the Lord came, and he stood there as he had stood before, and he said, samuel. Samuel.

And this time it's not on your paper, but see, can you remember what Eli told you to say?

[00:07:34] *hope: No.

[00:07:36] Mark Spybey: What did you say to say?

[00:07:37] Speaker C: Eli Samuel, my boy.

[00:07:39] Mark Spybey: No, no, you need to repeat that line there.

[00:07:42] Speaker C: Go back to bed. And if he calls you again, say, speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

[00:07:46] Mark Spybey: So what did he say this time?

[00:07:48] *hope: Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

[00:07:50] Mark Spybey: Very good. So you were listening second time.

Okay, so. And then the Lord spoke to him. And actually, I'm not going to read the whole of this message. It was actually a pretty, like, terrible message or pretty hard message.

And it was all about how actually Eli and especially his sons had been doing some awful things, actually, and God was not at all happy with that. And there was going to be consequences

around that. Okay, but we're going to pick up in verse 15, which. So Samuel's back to sleep. And it says Samuel stayed in bed until the morning, and then he got up and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli about the vision. Well, he would be because of what it was. Yeah. Okay, but then what did Eli do?

[00:08:38] Speaker C: Samuel, my boy.

[00:08:41] *hope: Yes, sir.

[00:08:42] Speaker C: What did the Lord tell you? Don't keep anything from me.

[00:08:46] Mark Spybey: And then it says, Samuel told him everything and he didn't keep anything back.

And after hearing it, Eli said, he is the Lord.

[00:08:55] Speaker C: He will do whatever seems best to you.

[00:08:59] Mark Spybey: Yeah. Thank you. Thanks, guys. Okay, you can take your seats. Thanks, guys.

There's lots to love about this story, isn't there? I love Samuel's obedience. I love the upside down nature of the fact that, you know, Eli was the priest. He was the one who we might expect to hear a message from God, but it was actually Samuel who ends up hearing.

But this morning, I want us to think just about a couple of things about Eli and what his role in this story was. I mean, firstly, I find it very reassuring that, that actually God gives him effectively three chances to get this right, doesn't he?

And, you know, we don't actually know what would have happened if he didn't, you know, figure out on the third time. The way the story is put together, it kind of gives you the idea that he would. God would have just kept on going and there would have been like, you know, four, five, six, seven times until they finally understand what's going on.

But, you know, what did Eli do? He actually, when he spoke to Samuel in the night on that third time, he prepared Samuel for an expectation of hearing God.

You see, he ultimately trusted that if God wanted to speak to this boy, Samuel, then he could and he would. And, you know, he could have been like, actually, what I'm going to do is next time, Samuel, that God's speaking, I'm going to come and listen for you, or I'm going to actually go and camp out in your room with you so that when. When this happens, I'll be there and then I'll be able to hear what God said and I'll be able to, you know, help you figure it out. But, you know, he actually trusted God, didn't he? And he trusted Samuel. That that could be an interaction that was. That was going to be possible and that Samuel would be able to hear what God had to say.

Now, we don't actually know really, do we? What happened in verse eight when it. The bit I mistyped reading, the very important bit in the center, really, where it says, Eli realized that it was the Lord calling the boy. What did that look like? How did Eli suddenly figure out that this was God speaking to Samuel?

He doesn't tell us. But I love the fact that he wasn't just annoyed with this boy the third time he's come in the night. Like, he could have just got really angry and annoyed. Like, I've told you twice already, like, how many times do I need to tell you? But he was still able to somehow be

receptive and listen in that moment, you know, as if something clicked inside him, as if we might even say God spoke to him. Have you ever thought about that? The fact that in the center of this story about God speaking to Samuel, it feels very much to me like there's this moment of God speaking to Eli, but then Eli has a choice in how he responds, and he chooses to lean into faith and the risk, actually, of raising Samuel's expectations.

And then I also love how Eli interacted with Samuel the morning after, Samuel had this kind of difficult message actually to bring. But Eli doesn't let him get off the hook, does he? He's like, Samuel, tell me. Tell me what you've heard. I want to know.

And the response isn't cynical. There's not sort of unbelief in there, you know, Let me just read that. He says his response is actually simply to say, he is the Lord. He will do whatever seems best to him.

And I kind of just hear in that, this sense that he wants to hear God through Samuel. He wants to.

You know, he's desiring to hear God in this way. And there's a real kind of humility in that.

Now, obviously, for us, as we hear God through one another, we're called to test, aren't we? And especially test against Scripture and what the Bible has to say, not just to blindly accept what we hear from one another.

[00:12:41] Speaker C: But.

[00:12:41] Mark Spybey: But we can still have that desire to hear God from another. We can still have that humility of approach that, yes, we can hear God through others and we want to.

And so although this isn't really a story about Eli hearing God, actually, maybe he was very much acting like a priest in this story because he was enabling a connection between God and people, wasn't he? He was actually enabling Samuel to hear God and doing such a good job.

So what about today?

Are we living in a world of very few messages from the Lord?

Well, there might be many actually in the world who would say that, who would feel that way. And maybe it actually feels that way to some of us here this morning.

And that's a big topic which I'm not going to explore in any detail now, other than just to say that my conviction is that we actually live in incredibly blessed days where we have the full revelation of God in Jesus and we live in the days in which the Spirit has been poured out. When Peter stood up on that day of Pentecost, he actually said, he quoted from Joel where it says, God says, I will pour out my spirit on everyone. Your son and daughters will proclaim my message. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Yes, even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days and they will proclaim my message.

We live in such privileged and blessed days, friends.

And yet I still believe that we need Eli's and we need to be Eli's for one another, people who are encouraging one another to invite the Lord to speak, nudging each other into places where we're going to hear God and then intentionally drawing out from one another what God has said.

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