

MAY GOD BE EXALTED

I Samuel 3:1-20

Intro

When I started to do my research into the passage for this morning I ended up stumbling across a biblical commentary that was masked as a sermon.

Here's what I mean: even though the author intended it to be inspirational, I ended up getting bogged down in how the author had picked apart the passage. He talked about how this particular piece of Samuel could be equated to something a political hack job, where those who followed in the footsteps of Samuel were trying to shine as bright a light as possible on their mentor, while Eli was shown to be rejected (albeit for the actions of his sons, something that Samuel, later in his life, also has a little bit of a problem with).

I read those words and I thought, "Okay, that's the human stuff. I know that exists in the scriptures, because even though the Word of God is God breathed, it still was breathed through the sinful vessel that is humanity. So that's the human; now where is God?"

As I thought about that question, I began to think about what these events must have felt like for Eli.

Eli was probably no more than what we would consider middle aged. He wasn't that old. Beyond that, he was a good and Godly man. His name literally means (and in Hebrew, the names of the people mean a whole lot) means "God is exalted".

His sons were not.

They were, by all accounts, evil and contrary to the will of God. But Eli did follow; he was faithful.

And now here, in this story, Eli comes face to face with the future that is about to be unveiled: that Samuel, the young teenager whom he has been mentoring, and is standing before him now, will become the next prophetic leader of the people, taking his, Eli's, place. He sees how God is moving and how that movement is not advantageous to either himself or his family.

And yet, his response, which we will hear in verse 18, is very true to his name, for God is exalted. The scripture reads this way.

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. ⁶ The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD

had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." ¹¹Then the LORD said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. ¹²On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."

¹⁵Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." ¹⁷Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." ¹⁸So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him."

¹⁹As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

"May God Be Exalted"

Following the will of God can be difficult and at times flat out scary.

Those feelings, however, get amplified exponentially when the way that God is calling us is not the way that we, personally, would have chosen. It's in those spots that a couple of different options have arisen scripturally.

First off, we can fight God, which can manifest itself in a few different ways. We can run away (think Jonah of 'Jonah and the Whale' fame), we can act as if God isn't calling (even though we know God is (think of the Israelites questioning whether or not they should head into the Promised Land, after all even though God said the land would be theirs, it was filled with a people who were like giants), or we can say, "no, I reject this direction" (which is what Israel was seen to do time after time after time throughout the Old Testament, to the point that their country, their holy city of Jerusalem, and their place of worship were destroyed).

So we can fight God. It's part of our sinful makeup and all people through all generations have example after example of how they tried to fight God. So that's one option.

The other option is to, believe, and know that we are in the hand of a loving God, and that we must trust in God to the point that God, and not the person who we see in the mirror, is the One who is exalted in how we live.

As I read the story of Samuel from Eli's perspective, I had to sit back in absolute awe and wonder. Here was a man of God who trusted in God so much that even though he knew that

Samuel's ascension would mean his downfall, he was still willing to say, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him."

Some people may read that statement with a sense of sarcasm and defeat, basically, "Well, there's nothing I can do about it."

I don't.

I read that statement as someone who took what he believed, took what he taught, to heart, and therefore that meant that Eli was willing to allow God to move as God would move.

He didn't run.

He didn't pretend like it wasn't true.

He didn't act like the Word of God was a lie.

He believed. Eli let God be exalted ... even though he knew that it would be extremely difficult and painful for he and his family. He let God be exalted.

We think about that in the abstract, about letting God be exalted, and we're okay with it, because in the abstract it's out there; it's something that isn't affecting us directly. In fact we profess it every week in worship as we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done". That's what we say we want to have happen in our lives.

The thing is, when the rubber hits the road and Spirit of God begins moving in a direction that comes into conflict with what our wants are, there are a whole lot of times where the last thing that we are thinking is about how God will be exalted: instead we're worried about how our interests are going to be protected.

If you have ever been in that place where it feels like you are coming into conflict with God's will, let me ask you this question: why do you think God's going to throw you overboard to be lost forever? Why does it have to be God or us? Why can't it be God and us?

I think it can when we allow God to be exalted, because when that happens God takes care of us and ultimately elevates us to a place of peace and fulfillment that we could not attain on our own. Because isn't that what we are looking for all along? Peace and fulfillment?

I'm not sure if it's today's world, or if it's always been the case, but there is a general feeling that most people are out create their own sense of peace and fulfillment and do so by protecting themselves, doing whatever they can to benefit themselves. This is a sentiment that flies in direct contrast to the sort of response that Eli exhibits...and that we have felt in our own lives in a variety of ways (for example, the levels of generosity that are exhibited by so many people when a need is expressed).

It was out of these understandings that an experiment was created by economists that wanted to discern if people would give freely, be altruistic, if there was no discernable need. Typically, these experiments took on the form of games. One was called Dictator.

In this game, a small pool of money is divided between two people, but only one of them gets to decide how the money is divided (thus the name: the "dictator" is the only player who matters.).

The original Dictator experiment went like this: Person A was given \$20 and told they could split the money with some anonymous Person B in one of two ways: (1) right down the middle, with each person getting \$10; or (2) with Person A keeping \$18 and giving Person B just \$2.

This is brilliant in its simplicity because you have a one- shot exchange between two anonymous parties. Generosity could not be rewarded, nor could selfishness be punished, because the second player (the one who wasn't the dictator) had no recourse to punish the dictator if the dictator acted selfishly. The anonymity, meanwhile, eliminated whatever personal feeling the donor might have for the recipient.

So the Dictator game seemed to go straight to the core of our altruistic impulse. How would you play it? Imagine that you're the dictator, faced with the choice of giving away half of your \$20 or giving just \$2.

The odds are you would . . . divide the money evenly. That's what three of every four participants did in the first Dictator experiments. Three out of four!

I know: it caught me off guard as well. But from my place of faith, I am able to see those results as the whispers of God's Spirit (yup, we did talk about that last week) still speaking to us and working through us so as to respond in ways that seem to be contrary to what we too often hear of in the world.

Peace and fulfillment when we listen to those whispers, even when those whispers call for us to do something that may seem to lean upon us in a negative way (by the standards of the world).

As I think about Eli and what he was faced with as the Spirit of God began to move, I think he stood up in faith, yes, living out what he professed to be true: that God was holy, Almighty, and worthy of all devotion and praise. But even beyond that, he listened to the still small voice he heard, and affirmatively responded to it.

Through Eli, God was exalted. We should live in that light, and when the Spirit of God begins to move in a particular direction, to trust in God. Let us let God be exalted so that in everything we are, God is glorified. I have no doubt that as we are able to do this, God will care for us as the chosen sons and daughters who we have been called to be.

Let God's will be done! Let God be exalted!

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, we come to You as a people who have been chosen by You to be called to service. But we all know that following that call can be, to say the least, extremely difficult. We ask that You might give us the strength of faith to not only accept who we are by hearing our call, but to ultimately allow You to be exalted through all we say and all we do. Lord, let it be so. Amen.