

1 Samuel 3:1-10

One of the most important topics for couples who are planning to get married to **focus** on, is the topic of **communication**. I'm sure that most of us are **aware** of the **importance** of communication in an individual's life, but that's true even **more so** in **married** life. Good communication is **vital** for a healthy relationship between husband and wife. Think about how many **frustrations** and **arguments** have been caused by a **lack** of communication. One spouse says **one** thing and the other spouse **hears** something else - or worse yet, maybe isn't even **listening** at all. This morning, our text **focuses** on the topic of **communication**. But we're not going to hear advice about communication between a husband and wife in a marriage; rather, we're going to hear about **God's** communication with His **people**. Today's lesson on communication can be summed up very simply with the sentence - **When The LORD Speaks, Listen!**

Right away in the first verse of our text, we realize that these words tell us about a time when communication between God and His people was at a very **low** point. We read, "*The word of the LORD was **rare** in those days. Prophetic vision was **not common**.*" This text comes at the time in Israel's history at the very **end** of the period of the **judges**. In the Book of Judges we can see a very definite **pattern**. God's people would **rebel** against the LORD, and follow after other **gods**. As a result, things would get really **bad** for them - **so** bad, that they would **return**, and call out to the **LORD** for help. In answer to their pleading, the LORD would send a **deliverer** (known as a **judge**), and the judge would **rescue** the people in an **amazing** way. Nevertheless, it wouldn't take long before the people would again rebel **against** the LORD, and the same cycle would **repeat** itself. This happened time and time again, and the people never seemed to figure out that their problems always **began** when they turned **away** from the one true **God**. I'm sure there were also a few **faithful** people that remained in the land during those times, but they were **few** and far **between**. So, it's not at all **surprising** that, "*The word of the LORD was **rare** in those days.*" This **lack** of God's Word was a part of God's **judgment** against the people's **unbelief** and **rebellion**.

But our text for today marks a critical **shift** in Israel's history. Starting with the prophet **Samuel**, the LORD was going to begin **speaking** with His people on a much more **regular** basis. Samuel would become the **first** in a line of **resident** prophets who would **constantly** bring the Word of the LORD to His people. It all began with the **LORD** in His **mercy**, deciding that He was going to speak to **Samuel**. Our text reads, "*Now it happened that Eli's eyes had begun to grow **dim**, so that he could not **see**. Once when Eli was lying down in his place and God's*

lamp had not yet gone out, Samuel was lying down in the Lord's temple, where God's ark was. The Lord called Samuel." Now at **first** when the LORD called, Samuel didn't even **recognize** His voice. We're given the **reason** for that in verse 7 of our text. There we read, "*Now Samuel had not yet **experienced** the Lord's presence, that is, the word of the Lord had not yet been **revealed** to him.*" This was something **new** for Samuel, and although he didn't recognize the LORD's calling at **first**, it wouldn't take very long before Samuel would know the LORD's voice **very well**, as he served God as a faithful **prophet**.

We are living in a time which is **very different** from the time of our text. In reality, the Word of the LORD isn't **rare** for us at all. We don't have to **wait** for the LORD to send us a **prophet** like Samuel so we can hear His Word. Especially here in America, we have God's Word in **written** form available to us **constantly**. Year after year, the Bible is the number one selling book in our country by a wide margin. It's the one book that we have at least **one** copy of in our house, if not two, or three, or even **more**. So, in **our** culture, the Word of the LORD is **not** rare. We have the **opportunity** to **read** and **hear** the LORD's Word every day of every week. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer people are actually **listening** to that Word as they read and hear it.

So, in spite of all the Bibles which people have on their shelves or coffee tables right in their own homes, there are many times when we can sadly say that the Word of the LORD **is** rare in people's lives. It's not that the LORD has **withheld** His Word from us. But rather, it's that people often withhold **themselves** from His Word. That happens when people don't **open** their Bibles and **read** them. It happens when they neglect making use of opportunities to **worship** God. Or even when they **do** come to worship, they don't actually **hear** the Word, because they're **disinterested**, or they get **distracted**. So, God's Word just gathers **dust** in their lives. The question is, how long can the Word of God be **neglected** or **ignored** before God decides to **withhold** it from us, as He did from His **Old** Testament people during the days of their rebellion?

Thankfully even **then**, God didn't **completely** remove His Word from His people, and in our text for today He was ready to start speaking to them **again** through the words of a prophet who was still a young **boy** - through **Samuel**. But as I said earlier, at **first**, Samuel wasn't able to **recognize** the Word of the LORD. That's where the **older** and **wiser** priest, Eli, could **help**. But it even took **him** a while before **he** realized what was happening. Our text concludes, "*The Lord called Samuel for the **third** time. So he got up and went to Eli and said, 'I am here, since you called me.'* **Then** Eli realized that the **Lord** was calling the young man.

So Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down, and if he calls you, say, **'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'**' So Samuel went and once again lay down in his place. The Lord came and **stood** there and called as he had the **other** times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, **'Speak, for your servant is listening.'**" And from that time on the LORD **did** speak to Samuel, not just **once**, but time and time again. Through the prophet **Samuel**, the LORD would start bringing His message to His people on a regular basis once again.

We need to understand that being a **prophet** was not something that was **easy** for Samuel. Some of the things the LORD told him to speak were very **difficult** messages. In fact, the very **first** message Samuel received was a message of **destruction** for the family of his mentor, **Eli**. Eli had become like a second **father** to Samuel, and yet, Samuel had to **tell** him that God was going to **judge** him and his family, for the horrible actions of Eli's **sons**, Hophni and Phinehas - actions which Eli **knew** about, but didn't attempt to **correct**. Later on, Samuel would **also** have the difficult job of telling King **Saul** that his **kingdom** was coming to an **end**, because he had **disobeyed** the LORD. Nevertheless, Samuel **spoke** these messages, as **difficult** as they were, because he **knew** they were messages from the **LORD**. But Samuel **also** had the privilege of speaking many **wonderful** messages from the LORD, as well as actually **anointing David** to be the **next** king over Israel - the **greatest** king in their entire history, as well as a predecessor of the **Messiah**, Jesus Christ.

Eli's advice to **Samuel** is the same advice I would offer to **you** today. When the LORD **speaks** to you in His Word, say, "*Your servant is listening.*" We need to realize that we aren't only servants of **God**, but we are also servants of His **Word**. God's Word has **authority** over our lives. Our sinful **nature** and our **society** don't really want to **hear** that. **Nothing** is supposed to be our **master**. **We** are supposed to be in **control**. So our **natural** inclination is to **read** and **hear** the Word, but when it says something that doesn't seem **right** or **logical** to us, then we'll just **ignore** it.

That's a **bad choice**. In fact, it shouldn't even be an **option** for us. Instead, just as **Samuel** had to **speak** those **difficult** messages when he received them from the LORD, we need to **listen** to **all** of God's Word - the **Law** as well as the **Gospel**. That means that when God's Word exposes **sins** in our lives which we are particularly **fond** of, we can't just **brush it off**. We need to **listen** to our God and His Word, turn **away** from those sins in **repentance**, and **rejoice** in the **guidance** and **protection** which the LORD **provides** for us.

Both the Law **and** the Gospel are **important** messages. God wants us to **know** that our sins **separate** us from Him. He wants us to **know** that if we continue to **hang on** to those sins, they will **destroy** us. But God **also** wants us to **know** that when we come to **Him** with our sins, He will **forgive** us through His **Son**. He wants us to **know** that Jesus lived a **perfect** life in our place, and that He **died** on the cross to **pay** for our sins. God wants us to **know** that through **Jesus** we have **eternal** life. He **wants** us to know these things - and we **do know** them. We **know** them because we have heard Him **speak** those words to us in His **Word**. We've heard it **preached** here in church. We've read it in our Bibles at **home**. We've studied it in **Bible** class. We've **heard** it, and we know that it's **true**. So **When The LORD Speaks, Listen!** - because His messages to us are **always** messages which we **need** to hear, and they are messages which we also **love** to hear.

My prayer today is that throughout this new year, our lines of communication with God will remain **clear**. First of all, let's always recognize **where** God speaks to **us** - in His **Word** and **Sacraments**. Secondly, when we hear Him **speaking** there, let's always **listen** to His message - whether it comes from His **Law** or from His **Gospel**. And finally, after we've **listened** to His message, let's always **respond** to it with our **own** words in **prayer**. That will **complete** the one circle of communication which is most **vital** in our lives - communication with the one true **God** - communication which will strengthen our **faith**, and bring us into an ever closer **relationship** with our Savior. Amen.