

Are you Listening to the Word of the Lord?

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Graham. Before we dive into that passage, let's just pray together. Let's pray. Father, this evening we come to a familiar passage to many of us, but Father, I pray that we would look at it afresh.

That we would see how this passage written thousands of years ago is still just as applicable to our lives today as it was back then. Give us soft hearts and open ears that we may learn from your word.

Lord, I pray that I would decrease and that you would increase. In Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder if many of your parents when you were growing up had a phrase that you just can't get out of your head.

So when I was growing up, I remember my dad stressing the importance of listening by saying that God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason. We had to listen twice as much as we speak. And I'm not sure I quite got that.

I was quite a naughty child. But anyway, listening is of vital importance in our everyday lives. Listening is the foundation of building relationships. I wouldn't be a good husband if I didn't listen to my wife, Sabina, at all, would I?

[1 : 19] Listening is also important because sometimes whether you listen or not will be the deciding factor between life and death.

So if you go whitewater rafting and the instructor hands you a life vest and explains how to be part of the team as you maneuver this boat down a winding river.

He tells you which part of the waters to avoid and what to do in the off chance that you fall in. If you do not listen to his instructions and if you do fall in the water, your chances aren't very good.

Or what about flying? The air hosts always give their safety demonstration and they purposefully ask all people on the flight to remove headphones and pay attention for those few minutes.

My wife and I were flying just a few weeks ago and we could see people chatting, listening to music and even watching movies during this safety demonstration. And we were sitting in the exit aisle.

[2 : 22] So we got the extra chat from the air hostess. She came over and made sure that we knew how to open the door, how to open the door, how to make sure people could get out properly.

And if we didn't listen during that 20 seconds, then if the plane did go down, we would not be very popular people. Or even listening to doctors advice, medication, treatment plans or a diagnosis.

It's expected that you'll listen. And if we don't listen, then we could be putting ourselves at risk or prolonging an illness. Listening is vitally important for everyday lives.

But how often do we fail? Do you ever catch yourself zoning out in a conversation? Maybe you've just asked a question and the person has just started their response and your mind is already a million miles away.

And you're staring at them blank in the face. What about in church? How easy is it for us to stop listening during a sermon? During the reading of God's word, during the singing, it's easy to switch off to the lyrics that we sing.

[3 : 35] Or in a prayer, when we focus on the pew in front of us, instead of agreeing with the petitions that the person is leading us before our living God. Listening is vitally important for our everyday lives.

And this evening, the question I want us to ponder is, are you listening to the word of the Lord? The word of the Lord has all of the answers that we need.

Tells us about God, how we can be made right with him. And it tells us how we should live in a way that is pleasing to him. But we need to be willing to listen to and submit to what it says.

The word of the Lord is available for everyone to read. The word of the Lord is challenging. It is transforming. It is glorious.

And it is truth. But there is a tendency in our world for people to neglect the word of the Lord. For it to be absent in people's minds and hearts.

[4 : 41] And that is what we will see this evening. But the word of the Lord is active. When people listen to and submit to the word of the Lord, things change. Lives are transformed.

And people glorify and praise the one true God. The word of the Lord causes action. It moves people and it transforms the reader.

Are you listening to the word of the Lord? Keep that question in the back of your mind as we look at this passage together. The first thing that we see in this passage is when the word is absent.

Verses 1 to 10. When the word is absent. Now you're probably thinking that the wording of this title isn't really correct. Because at this point Israel had the law.

And that is perfectly true. But the reason I say that the word of the Lord is absent. Is because even though they physically had the law with them in Israel.

[5 : 40] They didn't listen to it. The word of the Lord was physically present in written form. But it was absent from Israel's heart and Israel's mind. Verse 1 gives us the setting that Samuel is in at this stage of his life.

Samuel is described as a boy who is ministering before the Lord. Meaning that he was fulfilling some form of duties under the supervision of Eli. Samuel at this point probably would have been around 12 years old.

And the situation that he is ministering in is spiritually dire. In those days, verse 1 says, the word of the Lord was rare.

There were not many visions. The word of the Lord was absent because people had no regard for it. They didn't care for the law.

Each did what was right in his own eyes. God did not reveal himself to the people and they were not seeking his face.

[6 : 45] During times of flagrant sin throughout history, God's silence was an indication of his displeasure with his people. And this is the situation that Samuel is ministering in.

The leaders are spiritually corrupt. God's people weren't listening to God. They rejected him. The book of Judges describes the spiritual climate in Israel at that time.

And it was as cold as the chicken that sits in my freezer. Israel was caught in a cycle of sin. The people sinned and rebelled against God. They were called back and for a short time they obeyed. But then they plummeted back into the depths of their sin. And this cycle goes on and on through the whole of the Old Testament. When Israel was obedient to God and to his law, times of blessing came.

The people were at peace. Peace with God. And people sought to know his will. But in times of disobedience, everyone turned their backs. Each looked to his own fields.

[7 : 56] His own family. His own land. His own house. His own heart. And had no thought for God at all. For his law or for his plan.

And in times like this, God was silent. The word of the Lord was rare. The word of the Lord seems absent. But notice the contrast that this book draws out between Samuel and Eli and his sons.

In the midst of this dark period of disobedience to God and deficit of his voice. The priests. The ones who should be leading the worship of God.

The ones who should be setting an example of godly living. The ones who are supposed to be teaching the people the ways of God. Inviting them to come and worship their creator.

Have turned to the desires of their flesh instead. Chapter 2 outlines how Eli's sons committed horrifying acts against others for their own physical pleasure.

[9 : 01] How they disregarded God's law and threatened worshippers so that they could get their fill of nice food. These priests were not serving the Lord but they were serving themselves.

And they had made a mockery of the priesthood. And Eli was silent. He did not rebuke his sons. Once he called them out.

But he didn't really follow it up. He didn't chastise them for their actions. But he remained quiet.

Even when someone came and predicted judgment on him.

His family and his family he did nothing. This lack of devotion and disobedience. Is contrasted with that of Samuel.

The boy who in the first chapters of this book is always characterized by ministering before the Lord. Eli's depicted as an old man who was weak and could barely see.

[10:03] And this lack of sight is both physical and spiritual. But Samuel is raised up and depicted as a humble, servant-hearted, devout young teenager.

And you can see Samuel's obedience, can't you? When in the middle of the night this 12-year-old boy hears his name and gets up because he thinks it's Eli calling.

I don't know many 12-year-olds who would do that. But Samuel is so obedient. So willing to serve. That he gets out of bed.

No hint of hesitation. No hint of resentment in his voice. And no annoyance when three times Eli says, I didn't call you.

Even in the middle of the night, when we are at our weakest, Samuel has amazing obedience and a tremendous servant heart.

[11:03] Samuel was ready to learn, ready to serve and ready to obey when he is called upon. And the author is building up the tension in this story by using repetition.

Like the countdown at the beginning of a children's sports day race. Ready, steady, go. As each child stands on that starting line, eager to hear that word go, they're jumping, ready to start the race, eager to see how they do.

And so the author of 1 Samuel is building the tension as the Lord calls Samuel. And we're supposed to be sitting at the edge of our seats.

Ready to see what's coming. Ready to hear what the future holds. And ready to hear the Lord speak. This marks the beginning of something new. Something different in the nation of Israel. Something's going to be different about this boy. He hears and obeys. He has an attentive ear and he wants to serve. This boy will not become a priest whose main objective is to serve himself.

[12:08] Or whose desire is to gain rather than to give. This young man is being called by God and Eli realizes that. The third time Samuel runs into his room in verse 9. But after the second time Samuel runs to Eli, we have a little comment from the author in verse 7.

And it says this. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. This is an interesting comment which gives us a picture of Samuel's life.

But this does not mean that he did not believe in God. This does not mean that he had no faith. But it means that he had not yet been given a prophetic revelation of the Lord.

As he would receive that very morning. Samuel had not yet experienced the call of the Lord. But that would all change soon enough. Eli realizes that Samuel is not just playing a trick on him to wake him up in the early hours of the morning.

As those 12 year olds love to do. But he has come to the conclusion that God is calling on him. It took a total of three times for the high priest to realize that God was calling.

[13:26] Shocking. But Eli says to Samuel. Go and respond and say speak Lord for your servant is listening in verse 9. And the Lord comes and reveals himself to Samuel.

God speaks and his servant listens. The person that you would least expect to become the mouthpiece of God. The boy who ran the errands for the priests.

The boy who you'd easily look over if he was in a crowd. He is the one that God has chosen fit to reveal himself to. Was this because Samuel was anything special?

Well in a sense yes because he was obedient and was ministering before the Lord. When others were serving themselves. But no because he's just a little boy. There's no mention of any special gifts.

And yet God graciously steps in. And calls him. The only exceptional thing about Samuel. Is his God. In this time of silence.

[14:32] In this time of disobedience. Where people no longer hear. And no longer care. For what the Lord has to say. God steps in. And calls Samuel. Are you listening to the word of the Lord?

Now this is a very specific call to a very specific person. For a very specific purpose. We shouldn't read this passage and expect to hear an audible voice calling us to special tasks.

But we do find ourselves in a similar spiritual situation as Samuel. The UK probably has more Bibles in it than it has ever had.

Edinburgh is full of church buildings. Scottish history is full of stories of how God has worked wonders in this land. But where do we stand today? Bibles sit gathering dust in coffee shops.

Untouched for years on people's bookshelves. Or in the unpacked boxes from that house move 20 years ago. Church buildings are being turned into shops and event venues.

[15 : 44] And those that do still have a church family. Some of them are struggling to keep the doors open. Walk down Prince's Street on a Saturday midday. And listen to some of the conversations that are going on around you.

And you will not have to guess how far our nation has wandered from our God. We live in a time of spiritual barrenness. In a world that has forgotten God.

And in a world that mocks those who are faithful. A world that uses Jesus' name often but never in terms of praise. But rather as a curse word.

Our country is spiritually dry. And this is not only the case for Scotland. There have been times like this before.

Times where God's word appeared absent. The page in our Bibles that separates the Old Testament from the New Testament did not pass overnight.

[16 : 42] It was a 400 year period during which the Lord was silent. He did not reveal himself to his people. Until one day. A man stood in the wilderness and said.

That one would come after him who was greater than he was. And then on the bank of the River Jordan. We see God in the flesh calling people in Mark's gospel to repent and believe the good news.

This is the call that every single person needs to hear. God has revealed himself to us in the flesh. In Jesus Christ. And in the pages of the Bible.

Will you listen to his call? Will you accept his offer of forgiveness of sins and the opportunity for you to be made right with God.

And to have the assurance of an eternity spent with him. Do not take this calling lightly. It was costly.

[17 : 44] Jesus died on a cross to make it possible. He paid the price that we could not. He died the death that we deserve. So that we could be part of God's family.

But the main point of this passage is not Samuel's call. And it's not us. The main focus of this passage is God himself. As we read through it.

Maybe you saw some of the characteristics of God. God is patient. God is gentle and God is kind. God does not chastise Samuel for not recognizing his voice.

God does not get frustrated because Samuel thinks it's Eli calling. God doesn't just say, Samuel, wake up. Understand what's happening. But God is patient.

Gentle and kind. And as Jesus stands on the bank of the river Jordan and calls people to repentance. We see God's patience. Because he's making it possible for the world to be forgiven.

[18 : 51] He's giving a window of time for us to repent. We see God's gentleness because God isn't shouting, repent and believe the good news from a cloud in the sky.

But God stepped into our world. Was tempted and tried just as we are. And he cares for our souls. He does not want people to suffer punishment.

But is waiting patiently and lovingly for people to come to him. And we see God's kindness because the thing that separates us from God.

Our big problem, our sin, our wrongdoings, our corruption, our filth, our rotten core. Was taken up by God himself on the cross. In God's great kindness, he pardoned our sins so that we can be made right with him.

This is the call that is ringing out of the word of the Lord. Are you listening? And are you telling others? The second thing that we see in this passage is when the word is active.

[20 : 02] Verses 11 to 4.1. When the word is active. So in the midst of this horrible situation of disobedience and apparent absence of God's word.

The Lord steps in and delivers his message to Samuel. But this is not a detail to be overlooked. Nor should it be taken lightly. I think far too often we don't consider the importance of God's word.

We don't stress the sheer privilege it is for us to be able to hold this book in our hands. And say that this is God's word.

The word of God is so important. So that little comment in verse 11. That the Lord said to Samuel is no small matter. This is the God of the universe.

The creator of the heavens and the earth. The one who set in motion the grand plan of salvation with all of its intricacies. The God who has always been and the God who will always be.

[21 : 08] Speaks to a little boy. Speaks into the spiritual wilderness that is the nation of Israel. And has a message for Eli and his family.

But Samuel's first message from the Lord is not a nice message of deliverance. It's not a message of God's favor. But it is a prediction of judgment that will come upon Eli and his family.

And all of Israel will hear it. In verse 13. It says that Eli's sons will be judged for their actions of blasphemy against the Lord. And Eli will be judged because he knew of their sins.

And he did nothing about it. The sons are being judged for their lack of religious leadership. And Eli is being judged for his lack of household leadership.

Eli's sons are misusing their position as priests. And they are cursing God. They are serving themselves, not God. And they are making a mockery of the priesthood.

[22 : 11] The problem with these priests. Is that they are purposefully and in full knowledge.

Walking in sin. They are working against God. Later on you can look to Leviticus 4.

Where we see the laws concerning the sin offering. God had given guidelines for sacrifices that would atone for the unwitting sin. Both of the priests and for Israel.

But there is no sacrifice for those who are consciously walking in sin. Deliberately living against God's word. This shows us how serious God takes sin.

Under the new covenant. The punishment for such sins is not death. And by that I mean that God isn't going to strike anyone down. For their sins. For their actions. But if people live their lives in complete unrepentance.

And disobedience. And disobedience. Like thousands upon thousands of people are doing in Edinburgh this evening. Then on that final day when God comes to judge the world.

[23 : 16] They will be eternally under his punishment and judgment. That should move us to act.

To tell people of the call of Jesus.

To repent and believe the good news. Because conscious rebellion and sin against God will lead to God's judgment. I don't want anyone to suffer that judgment.

Sin and disobedience are not to be played with. Nor are they to be trivialized. Because God is just. And therefore he must judge rightly.

And sin must be punished. Eli's sons are punished for their sins and lack of religious leadership. Eli is punished because of his lack of household leadership.

As the father of these men. Eli was the one responsible for bringing them up in the Lord. For teaching them the ways of God. And correcting them according to God's word.

[24 : 24] But that doesn't seem to have happened. Instead he's letting them live in their sin. And the one time he did try to call them out in chapter 2. They didn't listen. But his rebuke was almost half-hearted.

Even though he is the father. The one with the authority and responsibility to act. He didn't follow it through. But instead let it continue as it was.

He was knowingly letting sin live in his family. And so he wasn't living according to God's word. He was not instructing his family as he should.

And he was allowing a mockery of the worship of God and the priesthood to continue. Parents play an important role in the lives of their children.

And the parents bear a responsibility to bring up their children in the knowledge of the Lord. Parents teach your children about God and his word.

[25 : 25] Teach them about Jesus. Use Jesus name every day in your house. Instruct. Guide.

Advise them according to God's word.

And most importantly pray for them every single day. And pray with them every single day. If we don't have children.

Pray for the children in our church family. Pray for the parents in our church family. Who are raising children in a world that is far from God. But I don't want you to walk away from this passage this evening.

Thinking that if your children aren't Christians. That you've done something wrong. That is not what this passage is saying. You have not failed as a parent if your child is not a Christian. Eli's sons are judged for their own decisions.

And they are responsible for their own actions. But Eli is being judged because he didn't correct them and let it continue. Each is being punished and held responsible for their own actions.

[26 : 33] And then we have Samuel. This 12 year old boy who has just received the word of the Lord. Marvelous. But now his responsibility is huge.

Daunting almost. He needs to go to his boss and basically his mentor. And tell him that God's going to punish him and his sons. I wouldn't wish that on anybody.

But God's word is true. Samuel is called in. And regardless of how comfortable the messenger feels about it. It must be proclaimed faithfully. Samuel is called in by Eli.

And put under an oath to tell him what God has said. And Samuel conveys this message faithfully. Does not hide anything. He doesn't sugarcoat it.

But tells Eli everything that the Lord had said. But Eli had heard this message before. And in verse 18 we see a declaration of who God is.

[27 : 34] And that God will do what is right in his own eyes. Now the question is. As I was studying this week. Does Eli say this in a submissive attitude to God's will.

Because he's recognized who God is. And he says that God will do what is right. Because he is the right judge. Or does he say this in a shrug of the shoulder attitude of.

Meh. So be it. We don't know. Commentators argue both perspectives. But regardless of which it is. God's punishment will be fulfilled.

God has spoken. And it will come to pass. And then in verses 19 to 21. We see that Samuel is recognized as a prophet. A mouthpiece of God.

And all of his prophecies are fulfilled. God's word is coming back to Israel. They are listening once more. People are realizing that God is speaking.

[28 : 36] Changes are afoot. And the Lord's word will change the lives of these people as they listen. Are you listening to the word of the Lord?

God's word is powerful. It is the living word that is applicable. And just as transformative and challenging for us today. As it was for Eli back then.

God's word is active. It convicts. It guides. It teaches. And it rebukes. And the difficult question that I want to ask us all this evening.

Is do we listen to the whole word of God? Do we listen to the whole of the Bible? Or do we just focus on the bits that we like? Are we selective readers?

Are we selective hearers? God's word is the thing that should shape how we live for God. And that means thinking through the easy bits and the more difficult bits that we struggle with.

[29 : 38] Because we want to grasp everything that our creator has revealed to us. This means having a humble and submissive attitude. Humble because we need to accept that we are wrong and God is right.

We need to be reminded of our dependence on God. And we need to be submissive because we need to come under the authority of his word. Even if the world would tell us something else.

Even if our friends and family would tell us something else. God's word is our authority. God's word determines how we live our life. God has spoken to us through his written word.

And through the living word. Hebrews chapter 1 verses 1 to 3 says this. In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets.

At many times and in various ways. But in these last days. He has spoken to us by his son. Whom he appointed heir of all things. And through whom also he made the universe.

[30 : 49] The son is the radiance of God's glory. And the exact representation of his being. Sustaining all things by his powerful word. And after he provided purification for sins.

He sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. In the past God spoke to his people through prophetic speeches. And visions delivered by prophets.

People set apart as mouthpieces of God. Now God has spoken to us through his very own son. God in the flesh. The one who is over all things.

And through whom all things were made. He is the living word. And Jesus shows us and embodies the glory of the father.

God's divine presence and splendor. And he sustains all thing by the power of his word. And Jesus being the very living word of God.

[31 : 49] God himself died on the cross. Making purification for sins possible. And he is now seated at the right hand of the father. Majesty. As Hebrews describes him.

In heaven. The Bible is God's word. In it we have a revelation of who God is. Written down for us to see and read.

In it we have the historical accounts of the life. Teaching death and resurrection of Jesus. And his call in the beginning of Mark's gospel. For people to repent and believe the good news. God's word is active. Will you listen to it? Will you submit to it? And will you glorify God as creator and sustainer of this world? The one who lovingly forgives a rebellious people like you and like me. The God who patiently calls us back to himself. Regardless of our transgressions. God is gracious and loving. God is revealed.

[32 : 54] And God is glorious. Are you listening to the word of the Lord? We have two ears and one mouth for a reason.

Listening is of vital importance. And listening to the word of God. Is not like just listening to another person speak. But we are listening to God himself. And I pray that each of us this evening.

Will be able to say like Peter did. When Jesus said to his disciples. Will you desert me too? Can we say like Peter. Where Lord shall we go?

You alone have the words of eternal life. The word of the Lord is not always easy. But will we listen to.

And submit to it. Let's pray. Let's pray. Eternal God and loving heavenly father. We thank you that you have not left us in the dark.

[33 : 57] That you have not left us in this world to our own devices. But that you have revealed yourself to us. Through your son. And through your word. Father we pray.

That as we read your word. In our own personal lives. As we read it here in church. As we read it in various meetings of this church. Father I pray that your word would convict. That your word would rebuke.

That it would challenge. That it would transform. And that it would lead us all to live lives. Which glorify you more and more. Because that is what you deserve. Father we praise you this evening.

And we thank you for your word. Help us listen to it. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[34 : 59] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.