**HE LET NONE OF HIS WORDS FALL TO THE GROUND**

July 13, 2014

1 Samuel 2:12-4:1a

Key Verse 3:19 “The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.”

Thank God for blessing the summer Bible conference abundantly. There were many wonderful messages such as “Neither do I condemn you,” or “Live by the Spirit.” We were moved by many sincere testimonies. But if we do not hold on to God’s words, the word of God has no power. Several months ago, we studied 1 Samuel chapter 1, where we learned that Hannah dedicated her son Samuel to the Lord as soon as he was weaned. So the boy Samuel grew up in the house of God, away from his home and family, under Eli the priest as his surrogate father. Now, you might think that the house of God provided an ideal environment for the boy to grow up spiritually. But the environment there wasn’t all that good for Samuel.

**First**, Eli’s sons were wicked (12-17). Look at verse 12: “Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord.” Two particular things are recorded to describe their wickedness. One was their interception of people’s offerings for the Lord. Verses 13-17 give the details. When people brought their animal offerings to the house of God for the atonement of their sins, they burned the fat as an aroma pleasing to the Lord (Lev 3:3-5). This was what God had commanded his people. God allowed the priest to take his share of meat (breast) after the fat was burned off on the altar (Lev 7:31). But Eli’s sons sent their servant to take the meat before the fat was burned off. They wanted the meat with the fat which was tastier to them. Also they wanted to barbeque it rather than boil it. Look at verse 17. “This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord’s sight, for they were treating the Lord’s offering with contempt.” The other evil thing that Eli’s sons did was sleeping with the women who served at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, the sanctuary (2:22). They abused their positions as priests. They had no respect for God’s word and did not pay attention to him. They had no fear of God.

**Second**, Eli failed to discipline his sons (22-26). Look at verses 23-24. “Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the Lord’s people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?” In talking to his sons, Eli used general and hypothetical terms like, “Not a good report,” and “If a man sins against another man.” What kind of rebuke is this? Talking about a slap on the wrist for such terrible sins! Eli didn’t seem very angry. He was not furious. He did not rebuke them directly. He never said, “Repent and stop these wicked things!” He should have removed them from the priesthood immediately. Later, God rebuked Eli for “honoring” his sons more than God by “fattening” himself on the choice parts of every offering made by the people of Israel (29). (Perhaps Eli unknowingly enjoyed some of the fat his sons took (4:18).) God also rebuked Eli for failing to restrain his sons (3:13). He failed to discipline them. What was Eli’s problem? He was more worried about the bad report spreading among people and maintaining good terms with his sons than honoring God. What was the result? His sons did not listen to his rebuke (25). They had no fear of the Lord; they had no respect for their father. They didn’t listen to him. David Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the biggest church in Korea, failed to discipline his eldest son. When his son misused church fund, he did not stop him. He was convicted of crime. The judge told him to put all the blame on his son and walk free of responsibility, but he refused. It was hard because he loved his son. But he honored him more than he does God. As a result, he brought great shame on the church and on God’s holy name.

**Third**, “Those who honor me I will honor” (27-36). Eli failed to discipline his sons in a decisive manner. But God would not idly watch them doing wicked things in the house of God, as Eli did. The Lord decided to put them to death (25). God sent a messenger to Eli to remind him how God had blessed his family with the privilege to serve the Lord and how he squandered the blessings. God rebuked Eli for honoring his sons more than God when he failed to discipline them. God had planned to use Eli’s family line to minister before the Lord forever (30). But now the Lord declared: “Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your father’s house, so that there will not be an old man in your family line and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, in your family line there will never be an old man. Every one of you that I do not cut off from my altar will be spared only to blind your eyes with tears and to grieve your heart, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life” (30-33). This prediction was fulfilled when Solomon removed Abiathar from his position, ending Eli’s line (1Ki 2:26-27).

**Fourth**, God calls Samuel. 1 Samuel 3:1 describes the times of Eli and Samuel with these words: “The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.” What does it mean the word of the Lord was rare? God had told the Israelites to memorize the word of God on a daily basis and obey the word. They were instructed to write down the word of God on their foreheads and on the doors of their houses (Dt 6:7-9). But in Eli’s time, the word of God was rare. No one studied the word of God seriously. The young and old only paid attention to the things of the world, neglecting the word of God. They lived according to their own ideas and desires. “Everyone did as he saw fit.” Then they had no vision from God. Eli’s sons were an example of this. They were priests, but they ignored the word of God. As a result, they followed their sinful desires. Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision from God, the people run wild.”

Sadly this is happening in our generation as well. Quantitatively, we seem to have an abundance of God’s word. There are dozens of Bible translations. We have an easy access to the Scriptures via the Web, cell phones and tablets. Still, the word of God seems to be rare today. Many people neglect to listen to God by studying the word of God prayerfully. They would rather pay attention to wise men and women and their books and interviews. What is the consequence of this? In Eli’s time, there were not many visions from God as they neglected the word of God. Listening to God through studying his word and responding to his word is important for our relationship with God. To have a relationship with another person, we need to talk to him, listen to him and respond to him. This is especially true with our relationship with God. Amos 8:11 says, “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘when I will send a famine through the land-- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.’” In the absence of the word of God, many young people today are yearning for vision and hope.

**Fifth**, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (4-18). How did the Lord intervene? He called Samuel to raise him to be a shepherd for his people. One night, as Samuel was lying down beside the ark of God, someone called his name. Look at verses 4-6. Each time, Samuel thought Eli was calling him. So he went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” By this time, Samuel must have been a preteen or a teenager. But he was ready to serve the priest any time. He got up repeatedly in the middle of night to serve. But why did Samuel go to Eli each time? It was because Samuel had no personal relationship with God at this time. He was a faithful assistant to Eli the priest. But he had not met God personally. Verse 7 says, “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.” This time, however, God called him personally to train him and use him for his purpose.

The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place (8-9). Look at verse 10. “The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’” Samuel was ready to listen to God. The word of God was rare at that time. His people did not pay attention to the word of God. But there was one young man who was ready to listen to God. He didn’t hit the snooze button when God called him in the middle of the night. He heard the voice of God calling him and he said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

It is not easy to listen to God. Eli’s sons did not listen to God’s word. So they failed to listen to their father. Even Jesus’ disciples had a hard time listening to the Lord. Jesus taught them his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection again and again, but his word went in one ear and out the other. On the mount of transfiguration, God appeared to them and said, “Listen to him!” (Mk 9:7). How about us? We need to think about the importance of listening to God. Without listening to his word, we may not able to hear God. That’s why Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mk 4:9). We cannot have God’s vision if we fail to listen to him. We cannot listen to him if our hearts and minds are filled with many things of this world. How can we listen to God if we don’t have a time set aside to hear him? May God help us to listen to him through our Bible studies and prayers!

What can we learn about God who called Samuel? God had a shepherd’s heart for his people. He wanted to help them by calling a young man to be their shepherd and a Bible teacher. Our God is a compassionate and merciful God. Even today, God is eager to call a young man or woman to be his servant. God is calling us. Are we ready to listen to him? God may not speak to us audibly as he did to Samuel, but he speaks to us through the word of God, if we are willing to listen. God “reveals himself through his word” (3:21).

**Sixth**, he let none of his words fall to the ground (19-4:1a). What message did the Lord give Samuel? The Lord said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family--from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering’” (11-14). The Lord shared with Samuel his plan to judge Eli and his family. His sons’ sin of showing contempt to God and Eli’s failure to restrain them were serious. The guilt of Eli’s house would be never be forgiven by sacrifice or offering. This was terrible news for Eli. It was difficult for the young Samuel to hear the news and even more difficult to tell it to Eli who was his spiritual father. Samuel lay down until morning before he went to see Eli. He could hardly sleep. In the morning, Samuel opened the doors of the house of God. He was afraid to tell the vision to the priest. Eli sensed this and said to Samuel: “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.” Samuel learned a spiritual lesson that he had to tell the truth of God no matter how difficult it was. Eli, as weak as he was, did one thing right. He helped Samuel to tell the truth of God without compromise, no matter how painful it might be to the listeners.

Look at verse 3:19. “The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.” The text seems to be saying that God saw to it that none of Samuel’s words fell to the ground (failed).  God made Samuel a believable prophet before Eli and the people of Israel. But Samuel was speaking from God, so it was a matter of God’s Word not failing. God upheld Samuel, but Samuel also upheld God. None of God’s words “fell to the ground” in the hands of Samuel. Samuel did not become a great servant of God through one mystical experience with God. It was a sustained study and obedience of God’s word that allowed him to do great things for the Lord (4:1). Sometimes, we are excited to have a heart-moving experience at a Bible conference or revival meeting. This is good but it is not enough. We need a sustained Bible study to be a great servant of God. This is what Samuel did. God continued to reveal himself to Samuel through his word. Then all Israelites from Dan to Beersheba recognized him as a prophet of the Lord (19). God firmly established Samuel as a prophet and a Bible teacher. And 4:1 says: And Samuel’s word came to all Israel. This verse a sharp contrast to 3:1b which says, “In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.”

Let us study the word of God faithfully so that God may reveal himself to us and we may be used in his redemptive work as his prophets in our society where the word of God is rare.