

MESSAGE - Part 3 - Light Up the Battlefield

If I were to ask you what the spiritual state of the world is right now, what would you say? You might quote scripture and say that *everyone has sinned*. You might say that ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, we've lived in a sin-saturated world.

All of that is true, but I wonder... ***Do we live like it's true?***

Because here's the thing: I think we would all agree that Scripture is clear: the powers of darkness have *not* overcome the light of God. However...

[SLIDE 1] We're not going to use the light if we don't even realize it's dark.

That's been weighing on me lately. Some people deny spiritual darkness even exists. They say the world is only physical. Have you seen the yard signs that say: 'science over religion' and 'fact over fiction'? That's an outright denial that a spiritual reality exists.

But thankfully, the materialistic worldview is losing steam. It seems that now, many people *feel* the darkness, but the problem is, they look for light in all the wrong places.

Some chase after self-help gurus who promise peace without Jesus. Others dabble in New Age teachings like witchcraft — that's something that'll come up later in this series. And, if you listened to the latest BIC Life Podcast episode, you know that some people are turning to artificial intelligence programs as their spiritual advisors!

I bring this up because people are clearly seeking spiritual answers. And the Church can't afford to sleep on this. *We* have to show them the true Light of the world. That's *our* calling as followers of Jesus.

I'm sure you would agree, because we see the darkness everyday! And, biblically speaking, ***we already know there's a spiritual problem***. We know from Ephesians 6 and many other passages that we're called to stand firm and fight against the spiritual forces of evil.

But, if we're honest, do we *really* live like that?

Are we actually doing anything about the spiritual darkness in our world?

That's the problem in today's passage. The guys that were appointed as priests in the house of God weren't fighting against the darkness. They were embracing it. Look at verse 12...

[SLIDE 2] 1 Samuel 2:12 - Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD.

Scoundrels?! What a word. Unfortunately, that does nothing for me — it just makes me think of Han Solo.

The Hebrew phrase is *bene beliyya'al*, which means: “sons of worthlessness.”

We might think: *Well, that's why you don't hire a couple of kids to do priestly work!* But Eli's sons weren't teenagers. They were probably closer to my age since the text says Eli was very old (2:22) — no offense to my parents or those of you that have kids my age!

I'm just making the point that **Eli's sons knew better**. They were grown men and seasoned priests! They were legitimate descendants of Aaron — which was a requirement for Israelite priests.

So, they knew God's Word... They served as priests under their father, Eli, for decades... and the text says that they were “sons of worthlessness” — which is kind of funny if you think about it... because Samuel probably wrote these words. He had firsthand knowledge of their uselessness!

But not only were they worthless, they had no regard for the LORD!

In Hebrew, literally: *“They knew not Yahweh.”*

That's crazy isn't it?! How can you be a priest in the House of God for practically your entire life and *NOT* know the LORD? Well, these guys proved it's possible - and the text gives us an example...

In verses 13-17 we're told that it was the practice of the priests to get their share of the meat that was sacrificed. They'd use a three-pronged fork and plunge it

into the pot while the meat was being boiled. Whatever came up was to be their portion. By the way — that's a made up tradition. It's not in the scriptures! So already they're corrupting God's instructions.

But it gets worse. The priests would also send a servant to demand a portion of the meat before it was even cooked. They wanted it raw. That might not seem like a big deal... but actually it's a huge slap in the face to God!

The meat was to be cooked first and the fatty parts were to be an offering to the LORD. But these guys were forcefully taking the meat before it was cooked — basically saying: *We don't care about God's commands. Just give us what we want, or else!*

Again, *they didn't care, because they didn't know the LORD.*

This is why the text says...

[SLIDE 3] 1 Samuel 2:17 - This sin of the young men was very great [exceedingly great] in the LORD's sight, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt.

So this wasn't just a small failure... This was an act of outright rebellion against Yahweh God. They literally despised the offering and they despised the LORD.

Eli's sons embraced the darkness. *But Samuel!* Samuel shined like a light in that darkness. Look at the next verse...

[SLIDE 4] 1 Samuel 2:18, 21 - But Samuel was ministering before the LORD—a boy wearing a linen ephod ... the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.

This is a "light shining in the dark" moment. Samuel served the LORD. Unlike Eli's sons, this little boy KNEW the LORD. And by the grace of God, Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD. That means the LORD was with Samuel... and not Eli's sons.

And there's a pretty huge takeaway here...

[SLIDE 5] Even when God's house is covered in darkness, God always raises up a light.

In this case, it was Hannah and Samuel. And their light pointed to Jesus. And what did Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount?

We are the light of the world! We're supposed to let our light shine so that others can know the freedom Jesus gives — freedom from the sin and darkness that enslaves the world.

That's an empowering truth! God has entrusted us — His Church — with the most important truth there is. But again: *are we actually letting our light shine?* Or are we staying quiet? And trust me... I do this too...

I've had plenty of moments where I could have given God the glory and said something like: *"that's not coincidence, that's Jesus."* Or, *"Would you mind if I prayed for you about that?"* Or even just, *"Praise Jesus!"*

What I'm saying is this:

[SLIDE 6] Does our faith in Jesus impact our everyday language?

*Are we speaking out and letting our light shine?
Or are we keeping quiet?*

Eli kept quiet. And his silence didn't just cost him... It actually brought destruction to his entire household...

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 2:22-23 - Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours."

Okay, the text says Eli's sons weren't just breaking the rules of the sacrificial offering, they were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance of the tabernacle.

These were women who *represented* the holiness of God's house as they worked there! But Eli's sons took advantage of them. In fact, one commentator I read this week said this...

[SLIDE 8] "Uncovering the nakedness of the women was as much as ripping down the curtains of the tabernacle. Instead of guarding the dedicated virgins, the sons of Eli treated them as sacred prostitutes."¹

They were making the Lord's House no different than the pagan temples around them. And if that's not bad enough, Eli knew about this... yet he did nothing.

He did at least say something! He warned them about the seriousness of sinning against Yahweh God. But his words had no weight. They didn't listen. And why would they? Eli wasn't innocent either (we'll see that in a bit).

And so, instead of kicking them out of the priesthood, Eli turned a blind eye. His silence allowed the darkness to spread. But again, where darkness grows, the LORD sends His light...

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 2:26 - And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people.

Interestingly enough, Luke 2:52 uses this verse to describe Jesus growing "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." That's a neat little connection because it tells us that Luke saw Samuel's growth as a foreshadowing of the One who would come as the true Light in the darkness.

But before Jesus came, Samuel was a light in his generation. Look at the contrast here...

In one corner, we've got seasoned priests going against everything they represent. Notice how much time is spent explaining their sin. Then in the other corner, we've one quick mention of young Samuel, not only growing physically, but also spiritually.

That one, brief note, tells us that Samuel's character was being shaped by God's presence, and people were noticing. Not only that, they respected him for it.

¹ Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 47.

And there's another takeaway for us...

If we're turning a blind eye to sin, we're allowing darkness to grow. And people aren't oblivious... they'll know if we're just going through the motions or if we really believe the faith in Jesus we claim to live by.

[SLIDE 10] When we live what we profess, people see it. They can't miss it. That's what opens the door to push back the powers of darkness and point people to Jesus.

God also sees the intentions of our hearts. He knows if we're real or not. After all, remember Hannah's prayer? "The LORD is a God who *knows*" (2:3). He knows if our faith is real or just a performance.

He's also a very patient God. He wants us to turn from our sin and run back to Him. **But there comes a point in time when enough is enough.** And for Eli and his sons, that time had come...

[SLIDE 11] 1 Samuel 2:27 - Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is what the LORD says: Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestor's family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh?"

This is the "uh oh" moment for Eli.

The "man of God" isn't named, but we can tell from the Hebrew phrase that he's a prophet that actually hears from God.

And that's key...

Eli was a priest - maybe even the high priest at the time. He should've been the one discerning God's will. But because of his own sin, God sent an unnamed messenger from somewhere outside the temple.

That highlights the failure of the priestly leadership.
The one who should have heard from God, didn't.

But ... I'd say he's hearing it now!

[SLIDE 12] 1 Samuel 2:29 - 'Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me

by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?’

I alluded to this earlier, but here we have confirmation that Eli was indulging in the same sin his sons fell into. Maybe they even learned it from him? I’m not sure. But I do think that’s why when Eli rebuked them for sinning, they ignored him.

And here, all three of them are accused of “scorn” (the “you” is plural). The Hebrew word is *ba’at* — it basically means to kick or be despised.

The prophet may have had Deuteronomy 32 in mind — where Moses warned that Jeshurun grew fat and kicked, rejecting God. Now Eli and his sons are the living example of that warning. They grew overweight on the Lord’s offering (4:18), and in doing so, they rejected Him.

And so the Lord’s Words come down hard...

[SLIDE 13] 1 Samuel 2:30 - Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.’ But now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.’

This is the turning point. God had promised the priesthood to Eli’s family line—that was supposed to be a forever promise. But because of their sin, God is taking that promise back. Because God does not honor those who despise Him.

Hannah already told us this in her prayer. She said: “The LORD is a God who knows... He brings down the proud and lifts up the humble.”

But God wasn’t just taking the priesthood away from them. Things were much more serious...

[SLIDE 14] 1 Samuel 2:31, 33 - “The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age ... Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.”

[SLIDE 15] 1 Samuel 2:34 - “And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day.”

Seems kinda harsh...?

But the text already told us in verse 25 that...

[SLIDE 15.1] 1 Samuel 2:25 - His sons, however, did not listen to their father’s rebuke, for it was the LORD’s will to put them to death.

So what’s going on here?

- Why would the LORD *will* them to die?
- Does that mean God orchestrated their sin?
- Does this mean God is cruel?

We have to remember that their sin had been going on for years. They had been serving for decades. Their sin was widely known and repeated. And so God’s judgment didn’t just come out of nowhere.

If anything, God had been incredibly patient with them. That actually lines up with His character. Exodus 34:6-7 says that God is “slow to anger,” but He also doesn’t “leave the guilty unpunished.”

And so when the text says it was the LORD’s will to put them to death, that means God handed them over to the judgment they chose for themselves. It’s like Romans 1 says - God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts. And Romans 2 - They’re without excuse.

And as Hannah already pointed out, “The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.” I actually wonder if Hannah saw their corruption? Because her words are clear: “Those who oppose the LORD will be broken” (2:10).

And the fact is, God doesn’t enjoy judgment. In Ezekiel 33:11, the LORD says...

[SLIDE 16] Ezekiel 33:11 - “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”

God would have rathered Eli and his sons turned from their sins.

God is patient.

As Romans 2 says: **His patience is meant to lead us to repentance.**

But rather than obeying, they kept kicking God's Word to the curb.

But all was not lost! Again, when darkness abounds, God shines a ray of hope through His people. Check out verse 35...

[SLIDE 17] 1 Samuel 2:35 - I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always.

The "man of God" isn't talking about Samuel. Samuel was never the high priest - and because of his family line, he wasn't even eligible for the job. Samuel served as a Prophet and sort of an interim while Eli's family died out and a new priestly family line was created.

That new line was Zadok's family - they served under David's son, Solomon. That's the immediate context. But what's exciting is that this is a prophecy that points all the way to Jesus!

Jesus is the faithful priest. He's the embodiment of God's Will. And guess who the "priestly house" is?

That's us! The Church!

We're the ones who will minister forever in the presence of our King, Jesus!

The writer of Hebrews says exactly this...

[SLIDE 18] Hebrews 3:6 - Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Peter and John agree. Peter says that we're a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9). And John says in Revelation that we are made "to be a kingdom and priests" to serve God. And who's our High Priest? Jesus! (Heb 4:14-15, 6:19, etc.)

Think about that. Think about the gravity of our role as priests. I'm not talking about the guys that wear the little white collars. What I'm saying is...

[SLIDE 19] Every follower of Jesus is a priest. We're called to represent God to the world!

And what's our job as members of His house?

Peter makes it clear...

[SLIDE 20] 1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

That's our calling and purpose.

This is why darkness can't be ignored. If we're ignoring it, we're no better off than Eli and his sons. Darkness must be confronted with light.

You know, it occurred to me while writing this sermon that believers often say: "He fights my battles." Meaning Jesus fights for us.

And that's a truth rooted in the Old Testament. But it doesn't mean we sit back and watch. Jesus didn't die so we could relax.

Granted, Jesus already fought the battle and won.

Paul said that Jesus already disarmed the evil "powers" and "authorities." He publicly disgraced them by victory on the cross (Col 2:15).

But now He calls His followers to continue the fight as His lightbringers and peacemakers. He calls us to stand in His strength and be more than conquerors.

[SLIDE 21] Because as long as the world still has darkness, we're called to bring Light to the battlefield.

Let's Pray

(after prayer)

Our Brethren In Christ denomination just released a short video this week that speaks directly into what we've been talking about today...

The reality of spiritual darkness, but also the hope of what God can do through His people. It's about the UK, but it applies everywhere. Let's watch...

[SLIDE 22 - VIDEO] Celebrating Baptisms with the BIC Church in the U.K.

After the video - worship team leads in the closing response song