

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.

That's true! But I wonder... ***Do we live like it's true?***

Because here's the thing... Scripture is clear: **the powers of darkness have *not* overcome the light of God**. However...

What good is light if we don't recognize the darkness around us?

That's the problem we see in today's passage. We've got some priests that were just going through the motions. They dressed themselves for their religious role, but **they lived as if God didn't exist**.

We know that happens today too. Some people deny any kind of spiritual reality. They say the world is only physical.

[SLIDE 1] Yard Sign

Have you seen the yard signs that say: 'Science Over Fiction'? I read that as a backhanded way of saying religious beliefs are on the same level as fairy tales. **It's an outright denial that a spiritual reality exists.**

But despite the yardsigns, the materialistic worldview is losing steam. Many people are *feeling* the darkness, but the problem is they tend to 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. And some people are now turning to artificial intelligence to be their spiritual advisors!

Even Christians are doing this! Their Facebook posts tell me that much.

So I have to wonder: How much have we been desensitized to the spiritual darkness around us? I suspect it's more than we realize.

You know, when I was younger, one of my favorite songs was “Welcome to the Jungle” by Guns N’ Roses. It’s one of those songs that can pump you up for anything!

But when I got older and actually paid attention to the lyrics, I realized the song is literally describing a place where you could find whatever sin or addiction you want — that’s the jungle — it’s a place where prostitution and drugs are on every corner.

And the singer is not only welcoming you into the jungle, but he’s also going to enjoy watching you suffer and die.

Now, as Christians, **who does that sound like to you?!** (The enemy that lures, traps and destroys!)

But again, for years I was *totally unaware* of what I was taking in as I listened to that song.

That’s what spiritual desensitization does: It blinds us to what’s actually going on beneath the surface.

And so I would say that...

[SLIDE 1A] The greatest spiritual threat we face is becoming so desensitized to darkness that we no longer recognize the evil around us.

And...

[SLIDE 1B] If we’re unaware of spiritual darkness, we’re not going to do anything about it.

That’s one of the enemy’s greatest tactics. He would love for us to stay quiet, stay distracted, and do nothing.

But we know from passages like Ephesians 6 that we’re called to stand firm and fight against the spiritual forces of evil.

Again, how do we fight an enemy that we don’t recognize?

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 what "the jungle" had to offer.

Look at verse 12...

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

Scoundrels?! I don't think I ever use that word, unless I'm talking about Star Wars - when princess Leah called Han Solo a scoundrel. And Han said, "Scoundrel... I like the sound of that!" But if Han only knew Hebrew...

The Hebrew phrase that gets translated as scoundrel is *bene beliyya'al*, which means:

[SLIDE 2a] "sons of worthlessness"

We might think: *Well, Eli should have known better. You don't let a couple of teenagers be priests!* 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!

They served as priests under their father, Eli, for decades. They were legitimate descendants of Aaron — which was a requirement for Israelite priests. And as priests, they would've known God's Word.

And so the point here is that they knew what they were doing. They were grown men and seasoned priests, and yet the text says that they were "sons of worthlessness." Basically, they were good for nothing / useless. And if that's not bad enough...

Verse 12 says that they had no regard for the LORD! The Hebrew phrase literally says: *"They knew not Yahweh."*

That's crazy isn't it?! How can you be a priest in the House of God for decades and *NOT* know the LORD? Well, these guys proved it's possible - and the text gives us an example with verses 13-17...

[SLIDE 3] Eli's Sons Illustration

On the left, you see what God *actually* commanded in the law.

1. **Offer the sacrifice to the LORD.**
2. **Burn the fat first** — that part *always* belonged to God.
3. **Then** the priest received his portion — ***after*** the Lord's part was honored.

That was the order that God commanded. The priests were to follow it by the letter. That was their act of worship and obedience to the LORD.

But Eli's sons didn't follow any of that...

On the right side of the slide, you see what *they* did instead:

1. **They invented their own method:** This “three-pronged fork” thing was a man-made practice. It's not what God commanded in Scripture.
2. **They demanded raw meat *before* the fat was sacrificed...** before *anything* had been offered to God.
3. And when people refused, they took God's portion **by force**.

So essentially they were saying: “*We don't care what God commanded. Just give us what we want.*”

And that's the point the narrator wants us to feel that **they didn't care...**

They didn't care because *they didn't know* the LORD.

This is why the text says...

[SLIDE 3A] 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 *despised* the offering and they *despised* the LORD.**

Talk about hating your job! Why stay at a job you hate? Maybe there's a bunch of reasons. But, whatever the reason, **Eli's sons abused their position as priests at the expense of the people they were supposed to serve.**

They embraced the darkness. *But Samuel!* Samuel's faith and obedience to the LORD shined a light in the 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 *the* contrast the narrator wants us to see:

- Eli's sons were grown men, seasoned priests...
and the LORD was not with them.
- Samuel was a little boy, a rookie priest...
and the LORD was with him.

One household was spiritually dead. The other was spiritually alive. One despised the LORD. The other delighted in Him.

That's a pretty stark contrast... But it's not the only thing we're meant to see...

Eli let it continue to happen...

[SLIDE 5] 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, so Eli's sons weren't just breaking the rules for the offering, they were sleeping with women who were dedicated servants of the LORD. They worked in a sacred space by the entrance of the tabernacle!

And you know, we might be tempted to say that it takes two to tango. But that's our modern assumption. This wasn't about two consenting adults. These guys used their position of authority to *take* these women by *force*.

In fact, one commentator put it this way...

[SLIDE 6] “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. They embraced the jungle as their dad just stepped back and let it happen.

To be fair, Eli 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? ...because as we’ll see in a bit, Eli wasn’t innocent either!

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

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 2:26 - And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people.

Notice there’s an intentional contrast here...

The writer spends a lot of the page talking about Eli and his sons — seasoned priests — going against everything they represent. But then we’ve got a quick mention of young Samuel, not only growing physically, but also spiritually in the LORD.

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.

And there’s a takeaway for us...

If we’re like Eli — turning a blind eye to sin — we’re allowing darkness to grow. But when we live what we profess, people see it. They can’t miss it.

[SLIDE 8] When we point people to Jesus, we’re pushing back the powers of darkness.

Think about it like this...

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

Ordinary moments become spiritual warfare when we speak truth instead of choosing silence. Because every time we give credit to the LORD, we're pushing back the powers of darkness.

For example...

- Someone says, "I don't know how you're handling everything so well."
We could shrug and say, "Yeah... I'm not sure."
Or we could say, "Honestly, it's the strength of Jesus that holds me up."
- Someone says, "Wow — that was lucky!"
We could just smile and nod.
Or we could say, "That wasn't luck. That was God."
- Someone opens up and says, "I don't know what to do."
We could just talk in circles with them...
Or we could ask, "Can I pray with you right now?"

Again, even in the normal, mundane moments of our lives...

When the people of God choose to speak the truth of Jesus, darkness loses ground.

But Eli was just going through the motions.

He was supposed to be a man of God - yet he ignored the darkness.

So the LORD sent a real man of God...

[SLIDE 9] 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 a key point...

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've heard from God, didn't.

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

Check out what the LORD said to Eli through the man of God...

[SLIDE 10] 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 now we have confirmation that Eli was indulging in the same sin his sons were committing.

That's probably why, when Eli rebuked them, they didn't care.

Why listen to a man who's doing the same thing you're doing?

And notice — the LORD accuses *all three of them* of “scorning” His offerings. The “you” here is plural.

The Hebrew word is *ba'at* — it means to *kick* or *despise*. I once had a '92 Chevy Blazer that caused me a lot of headaches... so imagine me kicking the tire out of frustration.

That's *ba'at*. It's treating something (or Someone) with hatred or contempt.

And so, because of their scorn, the Word of the LORD came down hard on Eli's family. Look at verse 30...

[SLIDE 11] 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. It was a promise that was meant to last *forever*. But because of their sin, God is taking that promise back.

But wait a second! We might be thinking:

I thought God doesn't go back on His promises?

That's true. God never breaks His promises.
 But here's a truth that we can't afford to miss:
God does not honor those who despise Him.

This is where some of us might struggle. Someone might say:
"Yeah but Scott, I thought once we're saved, we're always saved — isn't that God's promise?"

Well, here's the thing...

The promise of salvation belongs to people who actually believe... people whose faith produces obedience. It's not about being perfect. But it is about having the kind of faith in Jesus that shapes how we live.

The promise of salvation doesn't depend on a childhood prayer we repeated but never truly lived. And we see this with Eli and his sons. They *claimed* to be God's servants, but their lives revealed what was really in their hearts.

And so, we — the Church — we can't afford to fake our faith like Eli and his sons. They truly *despised* God... and the consequences were serious.

[SLIDE 12] 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 13] 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, right?
 But the text already told us...

[SLIDE 14] 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.

Again, seems harsh, but...

We have to remember that they had been committing these sins for years. Eli's sons had been serving as priests for decades. And it was no secret that they were repeatedly sinning against the LORD. They didn't care.

And so God's judgment didn't just come out of nowhere. If anything, God was really patient with them. But even though He was slow to anger, He doesn't leave the guilty go unpunished (Exodus 34:6-7).

Remember what Hannah prayed? "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up." I actually wonder if Hannah saw the sins of Eli and his sons? Because her words are clear: (2:10) "Those who oppose the LORD will be broken."

This is where God in the Old Testament sometimes gets misunderstood as an angry and vengeful God. But the fact is, God doesn't enjoy judgment.

For example, in Ezekiel 33:11, the LORD says...

[SLIDE 15] Ezekiel 33:11 - "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."

God is patient. He would've preferred Eli and his sons to turn from their sins. But rather than obeying, they kept kicking God's Word to the curb.

So what now?

God had just announced judgement on Eli's entire priestly line. But if Eli's priesthood is over, who's going to lead God's people?

Israel still needed a faithful priest! They needed someone who actually cared about God's will... Someone who would listen and obey the LORD.

And that's exactly where this next promise comes in. Check out verse 35...

[SLIDE 16] 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.

This is one of those promises of God that's fulfilled in a couple different ways.

First, God did eventually replace the priestly line — Eli's family died out and God ordained a new family of priests.

But His promise of a “faithful priest” also points forward to Jesus! Because Jesus was the perfect and faithful High Priest! He's the One who perfectly does “what is in God's heart and mind.” He's the ultimate “anointed one.”

And the LORD said that He would firmly establish His priestly house, and they would always minister before the anointed one...

But who's the “priestly house”? 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 17] 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 (Rev 1:6). And Jesus Himself is our great High Priest! (Heb 4:14-15, 6:19)

So think about this...

[SLIDE 18] Every follower of Jesus is a priest. [This means that] **We're called to represent God to the world — right here, right now.**

And what do priests do?

Peter tells us...

[SLIDE 19] 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. That's our purpose on this side of eternity.

Which means...

If we ignore the darkness around us... if we ignore our priestly calling...
We're not any better than Eli and his sons.

They embraced the "Jungle" — the place where they could indulge in any sin they wanted. But real priests don't run into the jungle to *join* it. Real priests run into the jungle to shine the light of Jesus.

And so here's the truth for us as priests today:

[SLIDE 20] Darkness *must* be confronted with light.

That's been the heartbeat of this entire passage. Because when the people of God choose to speak the truth of Jesus, darkness loses ground.

That might sound scary... like, *"What are you asking us to do here Scott?"*

But here's the good news: Jesus already conquered the forces of darkness. Paul said Jesus **disarmed** the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them (Col 2:15).

But Jesus didn't disarm them so we could sit back and relax. He disarmed them so we could advance His Kingdom into places where darkness still thinks it's in charge!

Remember what Jesus said to Peter? He said: "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and **the gates of Hades will not overcome it**" (Mat 16:18). This means that the Church is called to advance against the spiritual forces of evil! And when we stand firm in the name of Jesus, evil has no chance.

And so I hope today's scripture and message encourages all of us to step onto the battlefield as lightbringers and peacemakers...

Let's stand in the strength of Jesus...

Let's not shy away from pushing back the darkness! Because...

[SLIDE 21] As long as the world still has darkness, we're called to shine the light of Jesus on the battlefield.

Let's Pray