

11/30/25 - Order of Worship

Red = Slide Change

Purple = Sound Person Note

Green = PC Person Note

Blue = Note for Speaker

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **Welcome!**
- **Today's Sermon**
 - Part 4 of Seeking God's Kingdom - Ready and Listening
 - Advent - Week 1 - Hope
- **Women's Breakfast** - Saturday, December 6th, 9am at Joe on the Go - Sign up sheet on the Welcome Table
- **Hymn Sing** - We're hosting a Community Christmas Hymn-Sing, here at Refton, on Sunday, Dec 7th at 6:30pm. Feel free to invite your friends, family and neighbors! We'll worship together by singing through the Christmas story. There will also be light refreshments.
- **Sonshine Visitors** - (from Lisa Wiker) Sonshine Visitors has been making contact with six shut-ins throughout this past year. We would like for them to feel our thoughts and prayers in a tangible way this year at Christmastime by donating funds to purchase Christmas gifts. Your contribution would be greatly appreciated! Just simply drop your donation in our "Christmas House" located on the Welcome table or you can designate an amount on your offering envelope to "Sonshine Visitors". Checks may be payable to "Refton BIC Church". Please have your donations to us by December 7th so that gifts may be mailed or delivered by Christmas. Thank you for your kindness in remembering our special friends!
- **Connect Cards** - place them in the offering boxes

PRAYER

ADVENT READING - Troy, Deb & Bonnie Herr [check livestream level]

WORSHIP (3 Songs)

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

SCRIPTURE READING - Courtney Bender [check livestream level]

MESSAGE - Seeking God's Kingdom | Part 4 | Ready and Listening

PASTORAL PRAYER

RESPONSE SONG

MESSAGE - Part 4 - Ready and Listening

I wanted to start out this morning with a test... just for fun!

Here's how it'll work: I'm going to read you a paragraph about the impact Star Wars has had on our culture. And as I read it, I want you to decide if I wrote it, or if it's written by Artificial Intelligence?

[SLIDE 1] Star Wars Image

Here we go...

"The original Star Wars trilogy didn't just entertain people—it reshaped the cultural imagination. Its mix of mythic storytelling, groundbreaking effects, and unforgettable characters gave audiences a shared language of heroism, hope, and redemption. It influenced how movies were made, how stories were told, and how fans connected—becoming a cultural touchstone that still shapes generations."

Did I write it, or AI?

It's AI!

I asked ChatGPT to write a paragraph about how the original Star Wars trilogy shaped our culture, and this instantly appeared on my screen!

Now here's the thing...

I've been working with AI for months. I'm used to it. I can usually tell if an article is written by AI or not. There are some dead giveaways:

- **The overuse of the emdash** — (which I know you couldn't see)
- **The three point rhythm built into the sentences (too perfect):**
mythic storytelling, groundbreaking effects, unforgettable characters; heroism, hope, and redemption; how movies were made, how stories were told, and how fans connected
- **The way AI sets itself up:** "The original Star Wars trilogy didn't just entertain people—it reshaped the cultural imagination."

Once you start to notice the patterns of AI, you can't unsee it.

Why does this matter?

Because knowing someone's voice doesn't happen by accident...

[SLIDE 2] We only recognize someone's voice after we've spent intentional time with them.

In other words: The more time we spend with someone, the more we become familiar with how they speak... or in this case, how they write.

This process of learning to recognize someone's voice is exactly what's happening in 1 Samuel 3.

Sure, Samuel grew up learning how to serve the LORD. But he's never physically heard God's voice until this moment.

Why? Because...

[SLIDE 3] 1 Samuel 3:1b - ...In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

Remember where we are on the biblical timeline: We're near the end of the time of Judges when everyone did as they saw fit. Rather than seeking God's kingdom, they did whatever they wanted to do.

Well, everyone *except* for a faithful few...

- People like **Ruth**, a foreigner that said to her Hebrew mother-in-law, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."¹
- And people like **Hannah**, Samuel's mother. When faced with deep pain, she ran to the LORD in prayer. She didn't run to her husband... she didn't even run to any of the priests... she ran to the LORD in prayer.

Again, that's key, because at this point in history, most of God's people were running away from Him. That's why the Word of the LORD was "rare." It's not that God wasn't speaking. It's not even that there weren't any true prophets. There were the faithful few (we saw one last week).

¹ Ruth 1:16

But for most of Israel, God's Word fell on deaf ears.

But that was about to change...

[SLIDE 4] 1 Samuel 3:2-3 - One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

Okay, so what we're about to read happened at night. I was thinking earlier this week: **Have you ever noticed that some of the most important events in scripture happened at night or while it was dark?**

- God's promise to Abram happened at night under the stars (Gen 15:5)
- Jacob wrestles with God at night (Gen 32:24)
- The Exodus Passover happened at midnight (Ex 12:29-31)
- God appeared to Solomon in a dream at night (1 Kings 3:5)
- The birth of Jesus is announced at night (Luke 2:8-11)
- Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane at night (Mat 26:36-46)
- Darkness covered the land for 3 hours during the crucifixion (Mat 27:45)
- The tomb was found opened and empty very early in the morning, while it was still dark (John 20:1)

Again, a lot of the events in Scripture when God intervened happened at night or when it was dark. I think that's interesting because...

[SLIDE 5] In the places where we feel darkness the most, we can find comfort in knowing that God is already at work.

That's especially clear in 1 Samuel 3...

Last week we saw how corrupt Eli and his sons were. They were priests at the house of God, and yet chapter 2 says they *despised* the LORD! That was evident through their *actions*.

And yet, despite the spiritual darkness that was growing, the LORD showed up with a plan to restore His people. **That plan started at night with one faithful young boy, quietly serving in the presence of God.**

[SLIDE 6] 1 Samuel 3:4-5 - Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call you; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

Let's pause here for a moment and paint a picture of what's going on...

It's the middle of the night.

Everything outside the Tabernacle is dark.

The entire courtyard is silent.

Outside the Tabernacle, somewhere near the entrance, was Eli's tent. Eli was getting older. At this point he's nearly blind, but still able to perform his duties. But now, after a long day, Eli was sleeping in his usual place.

[SLIDE 7] [Picture to showing Samuel by the lampstand]

Inside the Tabernacle - the place where the ark of God was kept - the lamp of God is lit, but just barely. And in that dimly lit room, you can see a young boy curled up near the lampstand.

That's Samuel. At this point he might be around 12 years old... Maybe younger.

Samuel's job was to make sure that lampstand continued to burn all night. But it was also his job to tend to Eli. At this point, Eli is old enough that Samuel took on the role of a caretaker.

So, it wouldn't be unusual for Eli to call for Samuel in the middle of the night if he needed something...

Maybe he needed some water, or some help getting up? Whatever the reason, this was the kind of thing Samuel did many times.

That's why when Samuel heard his name, he immediately got up because he naturally assumed it was Eli. But Eli said he didn't call him. Maybe Eli figured Samuel was dreaming? So he just told him to go back to bed.

I also wonder what Samuel was thinking? Maybe he thought Eli was dreaming and called him in his sleep? Or maybe he figured Eli's age was starting to show?

Whatever they thought, this happened three times! And each time, Samuel immediately got up and was ready to serve.

But on the third time Samuel came out to Eli...

[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 3:8-9 - ...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.

Now, I have to admit, I struggled with this part.

Because last week we saw that Eli *allowed* horrible acts of sin to take place right under his nose at the Tabernacle. Not only that, *he participated* in some of it!

It was so bad that a true prophet of the LORD came to deliver a message: Their sin had corrupted the priesthood at Shiloh and damaged the spiritual life of God’s people. And because of that, judgment was coming to Eli and his family... and, as we’ll see next week, to Shiloh itself.

Now, here we have Eli... an elderly priest that’s not only growing physically blind, but also spiritually compromised. So my question is: **How is it that *he’s the one who suddenly realized Yahweh God was speaking to Samuel?***

I think it’s because Eli isn’t a villain or a hero in the story. Eli is a real, spiritually complex person.

He’s a perfect example of someone who knows enough to identify God’s voice, yet is unwilling to obey God’s voice. It’s the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. Eli knew *of* the LORD, but his heart showed that he didn’t truly follow the LORD.

1 Samuel 16:7 says that the LORD looks at the heart. Eli’s heart was spiritually dull, but again, he knew enough about the LORD to recognize that it was the LORD calling Samuel.

So he tells Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” **Check out what happens next...**

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 3:10 - The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

There’s something amazing that happens here. The LORD speaks to Samuel... that’s amazing enough! But did you notice the other detail...?

The LORD *came and stood there!*

This isn't a metaphor. It's not a dream. The LORD was physically there in Samuel's presence, calling his name.

Not only that: **I think this was *Jesus* calling to Samuel!**

I know the text doesn't say the name *Jesus* - but this passage is what bible scholars call a “preincarnate appearance of Jesus”. This happens all over the place in the Old Testament...

- Genesis 18 - The LORD *appeared* to Abraham
- Genesis 32 - Jacob *literally* wrestled with God
- Exodus 3 - The Angel of the LORD *speaks* as God Himself
- Judges 6 - The Angel of the LORD *appears* to Gideon and is *identified* as the LORD

I could go on!

But here's the thing: **God is consistently described as *invisible* and *unseen*.** In fact, Exodus 33:20 says that NO ONE can see the LORD's face and live.

But... again, we've got all these examples of people literally *seeing* Yahweh God? Even Jacob said he saw the face of God and lived. So what's going on here?

Thankfully the New Testament writers help us out:

- John 1:18 — The Son reveals the Father
- John 10:30 — Jesus and the Father are one
- John 14:9 — “*Anyone* who has seen me has seen the Father.”

- Hebrews 1:1-3 — The Son is the exact representation of God and the One who speaks on His behalf

Therefore, it makes sense that **the physical appearances of Yahweh God in the Old Testament are the Son, Jesus!**

Think about that!

JESUS is calling Samuel's name!

JESUS is preparing a young prophet!

JESUS is bringing light into the darkness of Israel!

And what did Samuel say when the LORD, Jesus, called him by name?

He said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

To be ready and listening in Hebrew thought was to be ready for action. Samuel was ready to obey the Word of the LORD.

Here's what the LORD said...

[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 3:11-12 - And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end.

[SLIDE 11] 1 Samuel 3:13-14 - For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, 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.'"

In other words, God was about to bring the full weight of His judgment on Eli's family. Because, even though they knew their sin, they refused to stop. That's why the LORD declared that no sacrifice would ever cover their guilt.

Imagine being young Samuel and you now have to deliver this message to your spiritual leader... the man who raised you and taught you everything he knows. He's basically your spiritual father! And you're just a lowly servant.

And yet the LORD chose you to give him a message of judgment against his entire household.

No wonder Samuel was afraid to tell him!

But Eli pressed...

[SLIDE 12] 1 Samuel 3:17-18 - “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “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.”

This is a tragic moment.

Eli was warned in chapter 2. Time has passed before chapter 3. Eli continued in ministry. Samuel continued to grow and minister before the LORD. And all the while, Eli never once turned from his sin. **He had every opportunity to repent...** and that's the tragedy...

Eli and his sons *could have* responded to God's judgement. But instead, Eli's sons continued in their sin, and Eli did nothing about it. He was spiritually numb.

He reminds me of what Jesus called the Church in Laodicea: Lukewarm. In the book of Revelation, Jesus told the Church in Laodicea that they were neither hot nor cold. In other words: They were useless!

They had become spiritually complacent and apathetic. They're indifferent to God's will. That's "lukewarm."

And over time, the lukewarm person tends to grow hard hearted. Not in a hostile or violent way... but more in a worn-out and spiritually dull way.

This is the kind of heart that knows the truth, but no longer moves toward God. It's the kind of heart that lacks the desire to actually do God's will. It's the kind of heart that grieves the LORD.

That's Eli.

So imagine this: Eli hears prophetic judgment from the LORD for a SECOND time. And this time it's coming from young Samuel... his protégé... the same boy that everyone could see was growing in favor with the LORD.

His sin is clearly exposed. His household is about to face God's judgment.

If we were Eli, how would we respond to Samuel in that moment?

Would we pretty much shrug like Eli and say:

"Oh well... nothing I can do about it now"?

Or would we respond more like David...

In 2 Samuel 12, when David's sins were exposed by the prophet Nathan, he responded very differently than Eli. David immediately said, *"I have sinned against the LORD."* Not only that, he fasted and spent nights in sackcloth. These were ancient Hebrew practices that showed someone was genuinely pleading for God's mercy.

**So, when confronted with sin and God's judgment,
David confessed his sin and turned back to the LORD.
But Eli did nothing.**

No repentance. No pleading with the LORD.

No tears. No fasting. No sackcloth. No turning back to God.

He simply resigned to God's judgment.

He *could have* confessed his sins! He *could have* found forgiveness!

And, I feel like *he had to* have known that!

After all, he was a priest! He *knew* the Word of God!

And it's not like the LORD's forgiveness is a secret in Scripture.

And yet, he did nothing.

Samuel, on the other hand, not only *learned* God's voice, he *obeyed*.

And because of that...

[SLIDE 13] 1 Samuel 3:19-21 - The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba [northernmost city in Israel to the southernmost = ALL Israel] recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD

continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

I love this!

The LORD *continued* to appear at Shiloh.

This means that the night the LORD visited Samuel wasn't just a once and done event. The LORD *regularly* made visits and *revealed* Himself to Samuel *through His Word!*

That tells me Eli was no longer Samuel's spiritual mentor. Samuel was now learning from the LORD Himself, Jesus!

In a world where God's people were far from Him, Jesus was breaking through the silence and darkness with His Word! And the truth is...

[SLIDE 14] God *still* reveals Himself through His Word. The question is whether we're listening like Samuel, or drifting like Eli.

But what do we do with this?

How do we know if we're like Samuel or Eli?

How do we recognize the LORD's voice today?

We learn God's voice the same way Samuel did:

By spending time in His Word and being ready to obey when He speaks.

Remember the point from earlier? "We only recognize someone's voice after we've spent intentional time with them." That's why we spend time in God's Word.

But it doesn't stop there: We also allow God's Word to reshape our hearts. But here's the great part: *We don't do this alone!*

Because the same Jesus who appeared at Shiloh, revealing Himself to Samuel through His Word, is the same Jesus who promised in Matthew 28:20:

[SLIDE 15] Matthew 28:20b - ...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

How is He *with* us?

Maybe not by standing next to us in a physical sense...

But when we give our lives to Him, **He's *with us* through His Holy Spirit *in us*!**

This is His Spirit that reveals truth and guides our hearts toward Him.

In fact, when we open the Bible, we could literally pray before we read:

"Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Because when we open Scripture, we're not reading from a textbook. **We're meeting with the living God!**

May His Word not fall on deaf ears.

May we be ready and willing to answer His call.

Even when life gets hard... may we be willing to press on toward Christ,² and at the same time, press against the gates of darkness with His strength.³

And may we seek His strength...

Because it's not easy following Jesus in a world that's saturated with sin.

It's a whole lot easier to be like Eli and just give up and fall into the pattern of doing nothing.

And so let's not be a people who merely listen to the Word. Ready to put God's Word into practice. And listening for how Jesus wants to use us to break into the darkness. Because we know He's called us as His Church to be world-changers and overcomers through His strength!

[SLIDE 16] 1 John 5:5 - Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

And so, the question for us is this: **Are we ready and listening for His call?**

Let's Pray

² Philippians 3:12-14

³ Matthew 16:18