September 26/27, 2015

Leaders God Honors

Courage to Lead Series

1 Samuel 2:12-36

Pastor Bryan Clark

It's a sobering thing to know that we are called as the people of God to be stewards of this gospel of grace, this amazing grace that has so transformed our lives. To influence others for Christ, to lead others to Christ is to rightly represent God to the world. We might say that leadership is a sacred trust, where God trusts us to rightly represent Him to the world. So it's worth noting in our text this morning that it tells us there are spiritual leaders whom God honors and there are spiritual leaders whom God despises. What makes the difference? Well, that's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 2. This morning we are going on with our study of 1 Samuel. The text doesn't really connect with baptism lest you wait for thirty minutes trying to figure out how does this connect with a baptism service? It actually doesn't; we're just going on in our study of 1 Samuel, then on to the celebration of God's grace.

Last week when we ended the story, it was with verse 11 of chapter 2—"**But the boy** (referring to Samuel) **ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest**."

So as far as we can tell, everything's going fine. Samuel's been left at the tabernacle, dedicated to the Lord and everything's fine, which is why then the opening of verse 12 is so abrupt.

> **Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD and the custom of the priests with the people.** (*NASB, 1 Sam. 2:12-13a)

We were introduced to Eli's sons last week—Hophni and Phinehas. All we found out was he had two sons and those were their names. So it's actually quite shocking when we read verse 12 and find out that the priests operating in the tabernacle were **worthless men**. Now this is the same charge that Eli made of Hannah—it's the same Hebrew word. Although he was wrong in his assessment of Hannah, this is God's assessment of Hophni and Phinehas. The Hebrew phrase basically, literally, means sons of Belial. It's basically saying they were just pagan to the core. Even though they were God's priests—spiritual leaders—they didn't know God. They were pagan. They were in it for themselves. They didn't know God or His ways.

> **When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw." If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force." Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD .** (Vs. 13b-17)

Now to understand what's being said here, you have to appreciate this wasn't a modern culture where, if this church was unfriendly, you go down the street to the next church. This was the old covenant. The presence of God was housed in the tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies where the Ark

of the Covenant sat. In order to worship, in order to bring offering, in order to connect with God you had to go to a geographic location—to Shiloh—and you had to follow through on the requirements of bringing a sacrifice. Therefore if this was corrupt, as it was, you couldn't go down the street to another option. This was actually hindering their ability to worship and connect with God, so this was a serious offense. Now there are all kinds of things in the Old Testament about how this is to be done. We really don't have time to go into all the details; it's enough just to say that the priests, Hophni and Phinehas, were totally disregarding the procedure. Everything that was to be done had imagery, had foreshadowing; it had purpose and theological meaning. But they were just recklessly disregarding all that, and they were in it for themselves.

Now one of the ways the text makes that point of kind of this chaotic in-it-for-themselves environment is when we're told in verse 14 the detail: **He would thrust it into a pan or a kettle or a caldron or a pot.** If you remember last week I mentioned Hebrew narratives do not typically have much detail. We want them to read like a John Grisham novel, but they don't. Often they're very limited in detail. So we wonder then, why is it necessary to have so much detail about what the meat was in. But the point of the text—the technique that's being used there—is to say it didn't matter what they brought it in. It was just a chaotic environment and they were stabbing the fork in whatever was there and taking the meat for themselves. It's kind of meant to create this chaotic, selfish environment. The people understood that this wasn't the right way to do it, so they would object and say, "You can't do it this way. You know you have to follow the procedure." And basically the response is, "We're going to do it this way and if you don't like that, we're going to beat you up. We're going to take it **by force**." So there's a heavy level of spiritual abuse that just reflects this time of the Judges, the condition of the nation. This is the tabernacle, and they're as corrupt as can be. So the nation is in a very bad place.

This idea of spiritual abuse just reminds me that after thirty-some years in ministry myself, I am very aware of how easy it is to use a position of spiritual leadership for personal gain. It actually, sadly, happens all the time. Over the years I have met with hundreds and hundreds of people who for years, some of them decades, have avoided God and walked away from the church, and it roots back to a story where they were spiritually abused by someone they thought represented God. It was so hurtful; it was so confusing; it so messed up their view of God, oftentimes they would walk away for years and even decades, trying to sort out: where is God in all this? It's a very serious thing. Verse 18:

> **Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD , as a boy wearing a linen ephod. And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the LORD give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the LORD ." And they went to their own home. The LORD visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the LORD . (Vs. 18-21)**

You'll notice the way this text is organized is that it's back and forth between two scenes: basically the scene of Eli and his sons and the corruption there, and the scene of Samuel and Hannah and Elkanah, basically representing the end of this corrupt leadership and the emergence of new leadership that God will put in place. So the text just goes back and forth and back and forth requiring the reader to make this comparison between the old and the new—that which God is rejecting and that which God is raising up.

But we're reminded that Samuel is but a boy. This is just the beginning of the story of the raising up of a leader that will change a nation. When it talks about **Samuel was ministering before the LORD as a boy wearing a linen ephod**, a linen ephod would have been an undergarment worn only by the priests. So the text is telling us that even though Samuel is a very little boy, probably preschoolish in his age, he's already wearing this linen ephod which signifies that he has been chosen to be a priest. God is raising up the next generation that will replace Eli and his sons. Another way the text makes that point is when his mother brings him an outer garment. So every year this is a mom who loves her son and spends part of her time making him a garment every year as he continues to grow. But notice the text says **a little robe**. It's just a subtle way of reminding us this is a *little* boy, 4, 5, 6 years old, living in a very corrupt, evil environment. I mentioned last week that this part of the story helps us understand how much faith Hannah had in God. Can you imagine entrusting an impressionable little boy 3, 4, 5 years of age into such an evil, abusive, corrupt environment? But this is where Samuel is growing up. So you've got the Samuel story as a little boy growing up, and the Eli and his sons' story going on.

Eli then blesses Elkanah and Hannah and basically is asking God to honor Hannah and her faithfulness by giving her more children because she dedicated Samuel to the Lord. And the text tells us that's exactly what happens. God honors Hannah because of her honoring of God. He gives her three sons and two daughters. So you already see kind of the tension starting to play out here. Verse 22:

> **Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. He said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD'S people circulating. If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death. (Vs. 22-25)**

So we're told that Eli is **very old.** Maybe that's reflective of this idea that Eli and his time is coming to an end, and God is raising up a whole new priestly family. Eli is old and now he *mildly* rebukes his sons. We find out now not only were his sons completely disregarding the process for the priests at the temple and using what was being brought at great cost to the giver for their own personal gain, but they're also involved in sexual exploits where they are having sexual relations with the women that came to minister at the tent of the tabernacle. Sometimes you hear people talk about religion and religion is all about sex and money and power—and oftentimes that is true, and it's nothing new. It goes back thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago. So here's the same old story: Eli's sons using their position and power. It's about money. It's about sex. It's about power. And so he rebukes his sons, but his sons just kind of laugh their dad off. They really couldn't care less what he has to say, and the text ends with the reminder that God is going to deal with them. He's going to judge them because they're despising the offering of the Lord.

The response of the sons to their dad reminds me a great deal of Genesis 19 when the angels come to Sodom to warn Lot that their God is going to destroy the city, and Lot seeks to warn his sons-in-law of the impending judgment and his sons-in-law laugh and they stay in the city. It's the same idea that Eli had no spiritual authority in his sons' lives and they just simply ignored him. Verse 26, we go back to Samuel:

> **Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men.**

So again, this back and forth thing is the point of the text: *Out with the old; in with the new*. Verse 26 is interesting because it is almost verbatim what you find in Luke chapter 2, verse 52, in what is said of Jesus as a boy growing up. It is a reminder that Samuel is but a shadow of the ultimate fulfillment, the ultimate High Priest, the One who would be the ultimate mediator between sinful men and a holy God, and that is Jesus Christ Himself. So you kind of have this shadow of one come to call his people back, which is a shadow of the One who would ultimately come to pay the price for sin. I also think it's worth noting that, again, it's the *boy* Samuel. There is this constant reminder that he's not an adult overnight, but we're talking about years and years and years. As a matter of fact, we're told Hannah brought this **little robe** year after year after year after year. Here again he's referring to the *boy* Samuel. So this isn't a quick fix. This is probably a couple of decades of: *Out with the old; in with the new*—of God raising up a godly priest who would call the people back to God.

It seems to me one of the things that we, as Christians, get really good at is complaining. We see what's happening in the culture; we listen to the news; there's so much that frustrates us and we can get really good at just complaining. And we have a tendency to think if I'm sitting in my living room and I'm getting really angry because of the issues of the culture, that means I'm taking a stand, and somehow we convince ourselves that's going to change something. You can sit in your living room and be angry for thirty years and you don't change a single thing. As a matter of fact it's just a distraction from being about what God has called us to. So here's my suggestion:

Rather than complaining, do something! Again and again and again, how God has brought about change in the world is raising up a generation of those who will seek Him, that will lead a nation back to God. Every weekend we have over a thousand children and youth on this campus. This is the next generation! They're the church of today; they're the leaders of tomorrow. I can't think of a more effective way to change the culture than to invest in the next generation whom God may use to call a nation back to Himself. That's what God is doing with Samuel over a period of many years —raising up new leadership in order to change a nation.

Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him... Now this would be a prophet. It's an unnamed man who's going to speak, "Thus sayeth the Lord." Now almost all of the time in the Old Testament when a prophet knocks on the door, it's not good news. He's not likely there to say, "By the way, you have won the Readers' Digest Sweepstakes!" He's there to say, "You are in so much trouble!"

> **Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Did I *not* indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt *in bondage* to Pharaoh's house? Did I *not* choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I *not* give to the house of your father all the fire *offerings* of the sons of Israel?'** (Vs. 27-28)

So he's going back with Eli and saying, "Isn't it true that I called out your family line to represent Me as My priests, to carry out this function, this very sacred responsibility in the tabernacle, to be the mediator between the people and a holy God?" And of course the answer is, "Yes." This was their holy, sacred calling. Verse 29:

> **'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded *in My* dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?'**

So the question God is asking is, "*Then why do you despise My offering? Why do you **kick** at My offering*?" That would be a Hebrew phrase basically meaning you despise it; you devalue it; you just kick at it. It has no value to you. So why do you do that? And then he pinpoints the sin of Eli. The sin is Eli is **you have honored your sons above Me**. In other words, because Eli, in the name of their calling to be God's leaders was not willing to deal with the sin of his sons, then he was honoring his sons over God. It also implies that maybe Eli had gotten used to enjoying the spoils of his sons' sin. We find out that Eli's fat and maybe his fatness is a result of having lots of meat to eat because of the sin of his sons; and so he's kind of included in that rebuke as well.

> **"Therefore** (in light of this) **the LORD God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the LORD declares, 'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house. You will see the distress of *My* dwelling, in *spite* of all the good that I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever. Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar so that your eyes will fail *from weeping* and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life. This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die. But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always. Everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and say, "Please assign me to one of the priest's offices so that I may eat a piece of bread." ' "** (Vs. 30-36)

Basically the prophet from God is saying that, "I made a promise to you that your family line, your lineage, would endure in this priestly role, but it was a promise with a condition and you have violated the condition. You have used your position for personal gain. You have despised the offering of the Lord." The key statement is "**I will honor those who honor Me, and I will despise those who despise Me.**" Therefore Eli and his family are out and God will raise up Samuel and his lineage and they will call the people back to God.

The sign will be on the same day the two sons, Hophni and Phinehas will die, and that will be the sign of God's judgment. Then the text tells us something very unusual. These kinds of statements throughout, especially the Old Testament, are very unusual. God says, "What I want from this new priest, what I want from a spiritual leader is someone who will do **what is in My heart and soul**." That's a very unusual phrase, but God is saying, "This is what I want. I want someone who knows Me deeply enough that they know this is what's in the heart and soul of God, and that matters more than anything else as we seek to rightly represent God to the world.

The focal point of this part of the text is that line when God says, "**I will honor those who honor Me, and I will despise those who despise Me.**" This raises the question: *What might it be in our life today that we are at risk in honoring over God—things that become more important to us than what's in the heart and soul of God. The obvious one to start with would be the calling of spiritual leaders to deal with sin in their own family*. Over the years there's been far too many pastors and elders who are so quick to point a finger of judgment at everyone else's sin, but are unwilling to deal with sin within their own family, even to the point of covering it up and hiding it in order to save face. Woe to those pastors and elders who cover the sin of their own family in order to protect their own spiritual reputation!

I think another obvious one from this text would be the danger of honoring our own family over God. You say, "Wait a minute, what do you mean by that?" I think when my generation was growing up we were about success; we were about money; we were about stuff; we were about climbing the ladder, and many in my generation—the Baby Boomers—neglected their families for the pursuit of money and stuff and power and position. A lot of kids grew up in that and felt the loss of that. What often happens then is the pendulum swings too far the other way, where the family becomes so much the focal point, it becomes an excuse to be selfish and consume all my time and my energy and my resources on just me and my family. It's very easy under the umbrella of family values to be very selfish and self centered. I would suggest to you it's not helpful to your children to convince them that they are the center of the universe, because eventually those kids have to grow up. In a generation where everyone gets a trophy, there comes a day when suddenly they realize life doesn't work that way. There are a lot of young adults that cannot figure out how to function in life because suddenly life slaps them across the face and it's not what they thought it was going to be because they were indulged growing up in so many ways. It is possible that in our selfish consumption, our family can actually be a point of idolatry where this is more important to us than what's in the heart and soul of God. The best thing my kids can see from me is my heart and passion for God. That's the best thing I can do for them.

But there might be other things that we honor over God. We might honor our business over God. We might honor our bank account over God. If you're involved in a sexual relationship outside of marriage, you're no different than Eli's sons. You're honoring pleasure over God. Maybe you're in middle school or high school and you're affected by your peer group and your peer group keeps talking you into doing things that you know are displeasing to God. At that point you are honoring your peer group over God. Maybe you're so desperate for the culture around you to like you that you're willing to compromise the truth of God's Word in order to be more liked and accepted by the culture around you. You are elevating the culture and honoring the culture over God.

To rightly represent God to the world, to be serious about this sacred trust of leadership, nothing can be more important to you than doing what is in the heart and soul of God. And that presupposes you know God; you know what God wants, and there's nothing in your life more important than that.

I suppose a practical question would be, "But how does that happen? How do we raise a generation like that and how do we do that in the most practical areas of our lives?" That's a very good question which we shall answer next week.

> *Our Father we are thankful this morning that You have called us to be stewards of this life-changing gospel of grace. But, God, if we're going to take that seriously, nothing can be more important than being true to what's in Your heart and soul. Lord, help us as Your children to rightly represent You to the world. Lord, may this baptism service this morning remind us again how much this matters. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2015 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

Sept. 26/27, 2015

Leaders God Honors

Courage to Lead Series

I Samuel 2:12-36

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. We are simply defining leadership in this series as influence. What are your areas of influence?

2. What would it mean to honor God in those areas of influence?

3. What are some areas in our lives where we might honor something more than we honor God? Practically speaking, what would that mean?

Bible Study

1. Read I Samuel 2:12-36. Notice the way the text is structured going back and forth between Eli and his sons and Samuel. What is the point of structuring the text this way?

2. What is happening at the Tabernacle in Shiloh? Could the Israelites just choose to go to another town to worship? How would you describe the actions of Eli's sons? Have you ever been spiritually abused and if so, what was the effect on your view of God and your Christian walk?

3. Why is Eli rebuked? What is the message for us today? What might we be honoring above God?

4. Review all the statements describing Samuel from 1:1-2:36. What is God up to? How could Samuel grow up in such a shameful environment and yet have such an obedient heart toward God? What do we learn from this as it relates to our own culture?

5. There is strong emphasis in this text that while Eli and his sons were dishonoring God He was busy raising up a leader who would honor Him. This change happened slowly as God raised up Samuel year after year. What do we learn about how to change a culture? What would bring about more change in our culture today, more complaining or investing in the next generation that God is raising up among us? Which is easier, complaining or serving?

Application

1. The call to spiritual leadership is the call to do what is in God's heart and soul. What does that mean for you? Can you even begin to know what is in God's heart and soul without really knowing Him? So what might be your first steps?

2. Are there areas of your life where you are honoring something above God? What are those areas? What is necessary to honor God in those areas?

3. What are some practical things you can do to be more like Hannah and Samuel and not end up like Eli and his sons?

Copyright 2015 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.