October 3/4, 2015

Spiritual Leaders Need to Be Humble Followers

Courage to Lead Series

I Samuel 3:1 - 4:1a

Pastor Bryan Clark

On one hand it would be a true statement to say, "Leadership is leadership," whether you're leading a church, whether you're leading a football team, or whether you're leading a business. There are principles of leadership that are true across the board. It would also be correct to say, "Leadership is leadership," whether you're an atheist, whether you're an agnostic, or whether you're a Christian but it would be equally true to say that there *are* distinctives that must define a Christian leader.

One of the non-negotiable distinctives of Christian leadership is that to be an effective leader, you have to learn to be a good follower. There will never be a day as a Christian leader where I'm ever the boss, where I'm ever running the show. The very essence of what it means to be a Christian is to be a Christ follower, which means an effective Christian leader must be defined by a humble, obedient heart to follow.

So the question is: *How do we raise up a generation of those who will be effective leaders because they've learned how to be faithful, obedient followers? And how do we assess ourselves? How are we doing in this area of being a faithful follower?*

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 3. Again, we're defining leadership in very general terms, so it includes everyone. Leadership in its simplest form is *influence*. We are called as Christians to be stewards of the gospel, to influence others for Christ. That is, *leadership* whether you're a student, whether you're a CEO, whether you're a parent—wherever you find yourself, whatever context you find yourself in—our calling is to influence others, which is leadership. If you're visiting with us this morning, we're engaged in the study of 1 Samuel. We find ourselves in chapter 3.

> **Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.** (*NASB, 1Samuel 3:1)

Again, it's worth noting that Samuel is referred to as the **boy** Samuel. That's obviously a very important point because that description continues to be consistent. There's no way to figure out exactly the age of Samuel here, but I think if you put together a few things, my best guess would be somewhere around the age of ten—nine, ten, or somewhere around there. So this isn't a grown man. This is a *boy*! But this is a boy in leadership school who is about to change a nation.

The second part of verse 1 is what we refer to as an editorial comment. In learning to study a Hebrew narrative, one of the keys is in learning: *What do I look for*? One of the most significant things you look for are editorial comments. An editorial comment is a comment made by the writer that is not necessary in order to tell the story. In other words, it's not just a detail in the story, but it's something *other* that is necessary in order to understand the theological point. In other words, the writer is saying: *By the way, in order to understand my point, you need to know this*. So, in terms of a Hebrew narrative, they're red flashing lights because they're always one hundred percent of the time a hint in terms of: *What is the point of this story*?

What it tells us is that the **word from the LORD was rare and visions were infrequent.** If you think back to the days of Moses, for example, God often intervened in significant ways—you had the pillar of cloud by day and the fire by night; you had miracles; you had the manna. You had the giving of the law at Sinai. There were so many ways in which God made Himself evident to His people.

Now during the period of the Judges, the people have wandered far from God. They're involved in pagan idolatry. Silence equals judgment. The period of the Judges is about four hundred years. So by and large, with a few rare exceptions, God had been silent. It would be fair to say that generation after generation after generation had grown up *never* knowing a word from God. So that's an editorial comment. This is the context into which this story happens. Verse 2:

> **It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim *and* he could not see *well*), and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God *was*, that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, lie down again." So he went and lay down. The LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again."** (Vs. 2-6)

So we're told Eli's lying down. We're told his eyesight is fading, all but gone. In last week's text we were told he is a very old man. Now that may be a necessary detail as to why Samuel *runs* to Eli. He's old; he's basically blind; he'd be quite vulnerable; but it also might serve as somewhat of a metaphor. We were just told that **the word from God was rare and visions were infrequent**, and now we're told that Eli—whose family is on their way out—his eyesight was all but gone which is kind of this metaphor that Eli has lost his vision for God, and God's calling of what the nation could be. One of the reasons I think that's the case is that the very next line tells us that, also, the lamp was still lit, but growing dim.

Now this is a literal fact. In the temple area there was a lamp. It would be filled with olive oil each evening in order that it would burn all the way through the night, and then be refilled in the morning. It was meant to burn twenty-four hours a day. So this would tell us in our language, this is the middle of the night, a little bit toward twilight. It's still burning, but it's growing dim. But again, it may be somewhat of a metaphor to say that the light of God's presence had not gone out completely, but it was growing very dim. **The word of the LORD was rare, and visions were infrequent** which just gives us a little hint that something really big is about to happen.

We're told that Samuel is in the temple—now just a word about this: The actual temple was not built until the time of Solomon. We've got to go through Saul; we've got to go through David to get to Solomon, and then the temple is built. What they had at this time was the tabernacle , basically a tent version of the temple (a portable version). It had settled in Shiloh, and it appears they had built some permanent structures around the tent, and they're simply referring to it as the temple. One of those would have been dwelling places. That's where Eli is staying and that's where Samuel is staying. We're also told that Samuel is where the Ark of the Covenant was. I don't think that implies that he's sleeping right next to the Ark of the Covenant. If the tabernacle was set up correctly, the Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be in the Holy of Holies, separated by a curtain, a place where nobody entered except the High Priest once a year. But knowing how messed up things at the temple were with Eli's sons, anything could have been true at this time. However, the language is a little more generic. It just is telling us that the Ark is there.

One of the techniques you'll see in Samuel is that the writer throws in things in passing that become major factors in the next chapter. So we were introduced to Hophni and Phinehas by just an introduction. It isn't until the next chapter that we find out they were pagan idolatrous priests. Now the Ark of the Covenant is thrown in. We know it's there. The Ark will become a major issue in the next chapter so that's probably its role in the text. The LORD comes to Samuel and speaks to Him. Samuel responds with the words: **Here I am**. It's one word in Hebrew. It's a significant word. It was a word used to describe a slave's response to a master. When God called Abraham for Abraham to take Isaac, his only son, up to the mountain to sacrifice him, Abraham responded with this word: *Here I am*. It's a term of complete obedience, which is a significant part of the chapter. It also says that Samuel didn't wake up, rub his eyes, grumble a little bit, and meander down the hall. The text says he **ran**. Again, in a narrative that uses very little descriptive details, that's a very important statement. He **ran to Eli**. It's a reflection of his obedience, his desire to obey like a servant would a master, even in the middle of the night. He *runs* to Eli. Eli says, "I didn't call you. Go lay down."

One of the mirrored statements (as we call them) you'll see is that every time Eli says, "Go do this…" it's followed by, and Samuel went and did that. "Go lay down…", and he lay down. "Go to bed," and he went to bed. It was almost a robotic obedience. Whatever he was told, he did. He was learning to be a humble, obedient follower, and the text is certainly making that point. So this happens twice, and then we pick it up in verse 7 with another important editorial comment:

> **Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him.**

This is another editorial comment. It doesn't advance the story. It's just a detail we need to know to get the point. The text is saying that Samuel didn't *know* Yahweh. He didn't *know* the LORD yet. It doesn't mean he didn't know *about* Him. He didn't *know* Him in a real and personal way. Again, the word of the Lord was rare; Samuel had never heard it himself. It is interesting that the text says "**yet**". Clearly there's a building of the tension. *The word of the Lord was rare. Samuel hadn't heard it yet.* Something big is about to happen!

One of the features, then, of verse 7 in the text would help us to answer this question: *If Samuel, as a young boy, didn't yet know the* LORD, *who was he obeying?* The answer would be: *Eli*. He had been to the school of leadership and learned you submit and obey and follow those in authority over you, which would cultivate within him a heart to do the same with God. It's the foundation that would make him a great leader in Israel. Verse 8:

> **So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.** (Vs. 8-9)

So it happens a third time. Eli's starting to figure it out. He gives Samuel the response, "This is what you say." Verse 10:

> **Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning**

his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." (Vs. 10-14)

God comes this time and stands before Samuel (quite a remarkable statement), probably in bodily form. So, this time, He *appears*! He calls out to Samuel, and Samuel responds almost exactly as Eli told him. "**Speak, for Your servant is listening**." Now what he leaves out is, "Speak, *LORD,* (Yahweh)", because that is what Eli said. So there's a lot of discussion about why he left that out. I suppose we could discuss that the rest of the morning. Was it fear? Was it disbelief? Was it intimidation? Was it humility? But if you go back to the text itself, what we're told is that Samuel did not yet *know* Yahweh. It may simply be a reflection that he'd never *heard* God. He'd never *seen* God. So he just simply responds. It's reflective of the fact that he'd not yet actually heard from God. But that is all about to change.

God responds, and He tells Samuel something that must have been extremely difficult to hear. Imagine being a ten-year-old boy, and Eli has become your father figure. When Eli responded to Samuel in the middle of the night, he said "my son". It's a term of endearment. Eli's sons had rebelled and walked away and laughed at their dad. But now, here's this young boy who loved Eli and was this humble, obedient servant. There's a relationship now between them.

Imagine the first thing you hear from God is: *By the way, Eli and his family are out! As a matter fact, the ears of the people in the nation will tingle when they hear of this judgment.* This is a Hebrew phrase that means that judgment will be so severe it'll cause their ears to tingle. It's a strong statement. So here's little Samuel hearing this message. He's also told that God has already told Eli this. Eli knows this is coming. Then he goes back to bed. I doubt he slept!

So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." He said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him." (Vs. 15-18)

Samuel gets up in the morning and goes about business as usual. To be fair to Samuel, there's nowhere where God says, "Get up in the morning and tell Eli." As a matter of fact, it's just the opposite. He says, "Eli already knows. I already told him." But the text does tell us that poor little Samuel is afraid to tell Eli. Just imagine what this would be like emotionally for this young boy. Maybe he just didn't want to hurt Eli. But, we also know Hophni and Phinehas and their thugs had physically threatened people that didn't cooperate, so maybe he literally feared what might happen to him if he told Eli what he'd heard. Whatever, he's afraid; he says nothing. Eli comes along and says, "Listen Samuel, my son, please tell me everything." Now it sounds rather harsh because he says, "*Listen, my son, may it be done to you and more if you don't tell me everything*." That's a rather threatening statement, but it's also, "My son, please …" So there's this relational endearment along with Eli telling Samuel, "You've gotta tell me!" I think part of this is Eli teaching Samuel that to be God's prophet, to be God's leader, means you have to have the courage to lead.

Sometimes you have to do the hard things, and sometimes you have to say the hard things. This is like the school of leadership. "You've got to tell me everything." The text tells us that **Samuel told him everything and hid nothing**. Now if you turn that in on an English paper, you'd probably have it circled in red with a red "R", meaning "redundant". You don't need to say it twice. But it's a Hebrew technique to make sure we get the point. Once again, he obeyed Eli and he told him *everything* and hid *nothing*. Again, it's this reflection of his heart to obey, to do the right thing. Eli's already heard this from the prophet. It sounds like he's resigned himself that God is good and sovereign. Eli has failed as the leader and he's ready to receive his judgment. Verse 19:

Thus … That's a really important word right there. "Thus" *what*? Because Eli and his family are out, because Samuel has learned how to be a humble, obedient follower, it's time to transition that—Samuel to Eli; Samuel to God; Samuel to Yahweh. It is time for his call to step up and change a nation. That's the "thus" there. He's been in the school of leadership. He passed. Now it's time to move on.

> **Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again** (the language here is again and again and again) **at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.** (Vs. 19-21)

We start the story with, "The word of the Lord was rare." We end this scene with, "The word of the Lord came to Samuel again and again and again." Everything Samuel proclaimed as a prophet came to pass. It did not fail. Deuteronomy 18 tells us that a true prophet of God is right one hundred percent of the time. As a matter of fact, that Deuteronomy text says that, "If a prophet is wrong once, put him to death because he's a false prophet." So now, after four hundred years of mostly silence, suddenly God is speaking through this young boy that God is raising up to be a prophet in Israel. And from Dan to Beersheba, from north to south, all of Israel is "getting it" that something big is about to happen. *God is raising up a prophet among us*!

We'll pick up the story from that point next week. But for us today, what does this story tell us? What are we supposed to learn from this? There are a couple of very simple applications:

One is an understanding that to raise up a generation of effective leaders for God, it will require that they grow up in a school of leadership where they learn to be humble, obedient followers. So where is that most likely to happen? Answer: At home. This is a great text for parents, to understand that *this is my mission as a parent.* It is really important to understand that my mission as a parent is not just to protect my kids. It is to *prepare* my kids to fulfill their God-given calling, which means they must grow up in a school of leadership where they learn to listen and obey the voice of God, to do all that is in the heart and soul of God.

This is a great way to think of parenting. When your kids are really young, it's about just kind of managing them so they don't hurt themselves. But, as they start getting a little bit older and begin to think and process, and relationships begin to develop, it's about understanding the need to create a trust/love relationship to where, when I as the leader ask you to do something, I expect you to respond with a humble, obedient heart. And so I need to think: *What do I need to do to cultivate that*? It's not about being the boss. It's not about stepping in a room and telling a kid what to do. It's not about somehow making them conform to the rules. It's about a relationship of love and trust where they willingly choose to respond in obedience and humility.

One of the things that I figured out early in my parenting is I began to think about how God parents us, what it means to be a leader, and to realize that using ultimatums on my kids is always a sign that my leadership has broken down. It'd be exactly the same in the marketplace. If I have to threaten Lincoln Berean employees to do what they're told, something has broken down in my leadership. That shouldn't be necessary. It's exactly the same with your kids. We need to move beyond, "Do this or else" (which is a threat), to cultivating a relationship where, "This is what I'm asking you to do, and I'm just expecting you to respond to me with humility and obedience." In order for that to happen, it takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of investment. It takes a lot of relationship. It takes a lot of listening. It takes a lot to get to the point where that level of relationship is possible. It's only when kids learn to listen and obey and respond with humility to their parents, their teachers and their coaches that they are going to transfer that to what it means to be a Christ-follower: *To listen to the voice of God and to respond with obedience and humility*. No need for threats; just do what I ask you to do. It's a great model to think through your parenting.

The other part of this text for all of us—for *all* of us—is to ask ourselves: *How am I doing right now as a humble, obedient follower?* The very essence of what it means to be a Christian is to be a Christ-follower. There will never be a day when I, as a Christian leader, am the boss. Never! At least there shouldn't be. What has to define me as a Christian leader is a heart of humility and obedience to follow Christ—because *He's* in charge! One of the ways that heart manifests itself in my heart is in my willingness to be obedient to those in authority over me every day.

Over the years I've met so many men and women that want so desperately to be a Christian leader, but they're simply unwilling to submit to those in authority over them. There are always conflicts; there are always strong opinions. They might even pull this card, "*I answer to no one but God!"* I don't know what Bible they're reading, but it's not *this* one! *This* Bible couldn't be more clear that part of your willingness to follow Christ is going to be made evident in your willingness to submit and obey those in leadership over you, whether it's your boss, your parents, your coach, the government, your spiritual leaders... In order to be an effective leader, you must also learn to be a good follower. Because, how you follow those in authority over you is a direct reflection of your heart to follow Christ. I guarantee you, if you have authority issues with the people in your life, you have authority issues with God. One of the best ways to sort out your authority issues with God is to begin to sort out your authority issues with those that are over you every day in the most practical areas of life. To be an effective leader, you have to learn to be a good follower.

> *Father, we are thankful that You are the perfect leader. God, You've also called us to be faithful, submissive followers of leaders that aren't so perfect. Lord, help us to understand that how we respond to those in authority over us today is a direct reflection of our willingness to submit to Christ. God, help us to be effective leaders as we seek to be effective followers. God, I pray that You would give wisdom and discernment to our parents that they would raise up a generation who will hear and respond to your voice, that they will be world changers. 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.

October 3/4, 2015

Spiritual Leaders Need to Be Humble Followers

Courage to Lead Series

I Samuel 3:1 - 4:1a

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What does it mean to be an effective leader? Is there a difference between a spiritual leader and any other leader?

2. Can you be an effective spiritual leader if you are unwilling to be a humble follower of the leaders over you? Why or why not?

3. What do you think of spiritual leaders who say they answer only to God? Does the Bible promote the idea of spiritual "lone rangers?"

4. If it's necessary to become a humble follower before you can be an effective spiritual leader, then what is necessary for the church to raise up effective leaders?

Bible Study

1. Read I Samuel 3:1-9. What are the features in the narrative that help us understand the big idea of this text? (Hint: Notice the editorial comments in verses 1 and 7, the repetition of the "calling scene" and the repetition of words that reminds us that Samuel is still a boy). What is the writer trying to emphasize?

2. In the times of Moses and Joshua God made His presence known in various ways. Name some of those ways? In I Samuel God is raising up a young boy from a godly mother to change a nation. What do we learn from this? What is the process for change in a community or city or nation? Why the strong emphasis on Samuel as a "boy"?

3. Read I Samuel 3:10-15. Why do you suppose God came to Samuel in this way to inform him of what was to become of Eli and sons? What was Eli's sin?

4. Read I Samuel 3:15-18. What do you think is the point of this part of the story? What was Samuel learning? What lesson did Samuel need to learn that Eli did not learn or obey?

5. Read I Samuel 3:19-21. What is required of a prophet of God according to Deut. 18:20-22? After 400 years of mostly silence, what is the nation realizing? Verse 19 begins with "thus." What is that referring to? What do we know was true in the Samuel story that lead to the "thus" of verses 19-21? What qualified Samuel to be a spiritual leader?

Application

1. Can you be an effective spiritual leader if you are unwilling to be an obedient follower? Why or why not?

2. Who are the people in authority over you now? Would others describe you as a humble follower? What is the relationship between how you obey those in authority over you now and how you obey and follow Christ? Is one relevant to the other?

3. Is it biblically correct for any believer to say, "I answer only to God?" Why or why not?

4. If you are a parent, how do you raise up spiritual leaders in your home? What would that look like in the most practical terms?

Copyright 2015 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.