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The Word That Is Near

I Samuel 3

Intro: In **Deut 30**, Moses instructs Israel on how 2/b restored 2 YHWH's favor & blessing after they have rebelled against Him & His Word & have suffered judgment for it. Of course, the solution is repentance but the particulars (the "road map") are clearly laid out in God's Word. In **vs.11-14** Moses describes 2 them the nearness of God's Word. The road map 2 repentance, the pathway 2 restoration w/ God isn't in some far off, unattainable place; its right here, accessible, w/in easy reach & it has always been that way. Today, in **ch3**, we'll be looking at the nearness of God's Word to Samuel & 2 Israel. But, b/4 we consider the nearness of God's word, let's 1st take note of the rareness of it.

1- revelation- vision: 1 of the ways YHWH communicated His word 2 a prophet. In these days, YHWH wasn't speaking His word thru prophets except on rare occasions (**2:27-36**). So, if the word **of YHWH** was rare it was b/c the word **from YHWH** was rare. Simply put, if a word doesn't come **from** God, there w/b no word **of** God. Man is incapable of coercing, manufacturing, manipulating or producing a word from God, only God can give it & there's nothing man can do 2 change that. No, the word of God is His gift to His people & in that day it was seldom given.

Why was YHWH so silent? Consider the state of the nation at that time: the divinely appointed & anointed spiritual leadership was completely corrupt & God's people were generally not obeying His laws anyway, so why should God say anything new 2 them? What would be the point? When there is open resistance 2 the clearly established revelation of God, why would He give them any more? No, YHWH wasn't speaking 2 Israel b/c Israel stood under His wrath. In fact, the absence of the word of God was an unmistakable sign of the judgment of God. YHWH w/drew the light of His word & allowed Israel 2 wander in the darkness she apparently preferred.

This isn't the only time this happens in Israel. In **Amos 8:11-12**, YHWH announces judgment on Israel by a famine but not the kind they were familiar with. The judgment was a famine of "hearing the words of the Lord." It's bad enough when our rebellion forces us 2 walk in darkness but a silent darkness is unbearable! King Saul will experience a similar spiritual desperation at the end of his life (**I Sam 28:6, 15**). Not how Saul equates the absence of God's word 2 the loss of God's presence. Was this an accurate assessment? No, God had not abandoned Saul or Israel but Saul had abandoned God & was only seeking Him b/c he was in trouble, but the Lord didn't answer him. Spiritual app: it's a clear sign of God's grace when God's Word is given free course among God's people.

Now, some may think, "The word of God can't be rare anymore b/c we have His complete Word in writing so we don't need 2 worry about that." Wrong! What makes the word of God rare? It can be b/c God's not frequently giving it (as in Eli's day) but it can also be rare b/c of problems on the receiving end. The Word of God can still become rare when his people have no ears 2 hear it. We can have the Bible & still suffer from deafness; thus the word is rare. Starvation doesn't always come from the absence of food; it can come just as surely from a lack of appetite. The reality of God's word – written, preached, welcomed = evidence of God's grace 2 God's people. We can't neglect it.

2-3- time- author goes 2 a lot of trouble 2 set the scene. The 4 phrases used here reveal that this even occurs in the middle of the night (physical darkness) but they also allude 2 the spiritual darkness of the times. Eli's spiritual eyes were as dim as his physical eyes. The lamp of God was the only source of light in the holy place & the priests were 2 keep it burning always. The lamp was also a symbol of the light of God's truth given 2 the world thru His people Israel. Sadly, the light of God's word was burning in those days but God's own High Priest could barely see it.

What follows is so comical, 1 could almost expect 2 see it written as an Abbott & Costello comedy skit.

4-6- call- appears 11Xs in **4-10**= theme of **ch3**. It's believed Samuel's around 12 here & he seems eager enough 2 serve but why is he so slow t grasp what's going on? Why does he keep missing the point? Vs. 7 gives the reason:

7-know- Note: this statement **explains**, it doesn't **blame**! The meaning here is completely different from that of **2:12**, where Eli's sons "did not know the Lord." Theirs was a refusal 2 acknowledge the Lord where Samuel's is simply a lack of experience. Samuel hadn't yet had any direct experience w/ YHWH, he had no previous practice at receiving YHWH's word so it's not surprising YHWH's call confused him, he was on untraveled ground. What is surprising is how long it took Eli, YHWH's own High Priest, 2 catch on 2 what's really going on. When he did, everything clicked!

8-10-Samuel- What does this passage teach us about Samuel? He had a heart 4 service & what a faithful servant he was! If Eli was calling, even in the middle of the night, he would run 2 Eli & see what he might need. Sure, he was mistaken in thinking Eli was calling but he was right in what he did. He may've yet needed the finer points of theology explained 2 him but his heart was in the exact right place 2/b used by God. Jesus says in **Lk 16:10**, "He who is faithful in what is least is also faithful in much." Even in his ignorance of God, Samuel was ready 2/b used by God.

What does this teach us about Eli? He was more concerned about getting his sleep than hearing from the Lord! Granted, Eli gives young Samuel some great advice, as a good mentor should. He clues Samuel into the fact that it could very well be YHWH calling his name & even gives him the proper words 2 use in response 2 God's call. But, after he gives Samuel all this good advice, Eli rolls over & goes back 2 sleep! Now, imagine you're rudely awoken in

the middle of the night & discovered that God is speaking in the room next 2 yours. Would you say, "Oh, just tell me about it in the morning," & the roll over & go back 2 sleep? No way! The God you worship, the God you serve, the God you say you love is speaking in the next room & you don't have the desire 2 hear what He might have 2 say? Eli's reaction betrays his spiritual age: he's too tired 2 hear from God. He'd rather roll over & get a good night's sleep then hear about it in the morning. Eli knew the right thing 2 say but didn't have the heart 2 follow his own advice.

What does this teach us about God? It reveals 2 us the character of **YHWH**. Can we not see the kindness & gentleness of God in His dealings w/ Samuel? This is something new & quite unfamiliar 4 Samuel (not in his wheelhouse) & **YHWH's** about 2 do something radically unique in His dealings w/ Israel that's been a long time in coming & yet, **YHWH's** apparently in no big hurry. There's time 4 Samuel 2 get up 2 speed. We don't hear God heaving a sigh of exasperation or berating Samuel 4 being so dense or hollering b/c he "never gets anything right!"

God knows that some things take a lot of time & patience & just like Samuel, He's willing 2 give us time 2 understand Him. God's not holding a stopwatch over us, threatening 2/b done w/ us if we don't wise up in a hurry. No, God adjusts His instruction 2 our condition. **Jesus** said as much 2 the disciples in **Jn 16:12**, "***I still have many things 2 say 2 you, but you cannot bear them now,***" so they had 2 wait 4 the Holy spirit 2 teach them when they were ready. God is not some gruff, impatient drill sergeant screaming at us 2 shape up or ship out! He's kind, patient & understanding!

11-18- Immediately, Samuel is faced w/ the dichotomy of being a prophet of God: the glorious privilege of receiving a word from God & the dreadful responsibility of sharing that word w/ its intended audience. You see, **YHWH's** word came 2 Samuel but it wasn't 4 Samuel! It was an ear-buzzing word confirming the judgment against Eli as given by the "***man of God***" in **2:27**. **YHWH's** about 2 set in motion His announced judgment of Eli's house from start 2 finish b/c Eli's sons continue 2 treat **YHWH** & His Law w/ complete disregard & contempt & Eli refuses 2 restrain them. Thus, they have placed themselves beyond **YHWH's** grace & forgiveness. This was a message of judgment – of severe, irreversible judgment – imagine a young boy being given responsibility 4 that!

No sooner is Samuel called 2 the prophetic task than he finds out how difficult & heart-rending that task can be. Of course, there would be no problem if Samuel didn't have 2 pass on this word but he knew better & he dreaded having 2 tell Eli. Obviously, there had grown a deep bond of affection between these 2 & Samuel knew this spelled the end of his mentor. Thankfully, Eli gave Samuel an out (of sorts) – he placed Samuel under a curse if he failed 2 divulge everything **YHWH** had spoken 2 him. Under that threat, Samuel held nothing back.

This spiritual reality hasn't changed a bit in our day. I realize that every Sunday, I'm going 2/b speaking things your flesh really doesn't want 2 hear. How do I know? Most of the time, my flesh doesn't want 2 hear it either! But it is particularly taxing in the 1-on-1 setting when people come 2 you expecting you 2 fix their problems & I have 2 tell them, "**You** are the problem!" Now, I don't set out 2 ruin a person's day but I do realize, if they don't get right w/ God 1st & soon, they're going 2 have a lot more ruined than just their day.

Faithful obedience 2 God's Word does exact a heavy toll at times **but** it will also provide an equally great reward...

19-21- God's plan 4 Israel is beginning 2 unfold. Samuel, acting as God's official prophet, is the 1st step of that plan. Samuel is **YHWH's** provision 4 directing His people thru a time of confusion & upheaval, but not just in his lifetime. Samuel's actually just the 1st in a long line of "official" prophets; he's the father of the prophetic succession. No longer will the prophet be just an occasional visitor, he'll be an established presence in Israel. w/ Samuel, there's now a "prophet in residence". Now, the word of God is no longer a rarity as **YHWH** repeatedly appears & reveals Himself 2 Samuel "***by the word of the Lord.***" Now, that word will now be coming 2 all Israel; something that hasn't happened since the days of Joshua. Still, carrying that word is both an immense privilege & a terrible responsibility. What if Israel refuses 2 hear? Worse yet, what if we refuse 2 hear God's word as spoken thru His Son Jesus?

Ch1 asked the question: "**Does God hear when we speak?**" The answer: "***Samuel – heard of God***" or 2 use Hannah's words, "***B/c I have asked 4 him from the Lord.***" **Ch3** ask the same question in reverse: "**Does anyone hear when God speaks?**" Our response should be the same as Samuel's, "***Speak (Lord) 4 your servant hears.***" He made himself available 2 God's Word, he received God's Word & was obedient 2 God's Word. Can we say the same? Are we like Samuel in our pursuit of God's Word or more like Eli: "***I'll wait 4 Sunday 2 find out what God has 2 say 2 me.***"

Saul's perception of God's presence in his life was directly related 2 his handling of God's Word. Saul rejected the authority of God's word over his actions & God rejected him as being king. Saul refused 2 adhere 2 God's direct commands & God refused 2 hear Saul's desperate prayers, thus, Saul's perception of God's presence vanished.

"**Well, Jesus promised He would never leave us nor forsake us & besides, I would never reject God's Word.**" Yes, Jesus promised 2 never leave us but He never guaranteed we would always perceive His presence & come 2 think of it, neglecting God's Word produces the same sense of loss in our lives as rejecting it does. In the dark times in which we live, we can't afford 2 turn a deaf ear 2 what God has revealed 2 us concerning Himself. We need 2 know Him 4 Who He really is & then allow that knowledge 2 come alive in our lives – become incarnate in us. It's the power of the Holy Spirit working thru God's Word that brings transformation into our lives, it affects us. But, its not until God's Word becomes real in us, begins 2 take shape in our lives that we start 2 affect those around us.

For those who don't know the Lord yet, good news: Apostle Paul says the word is near you right now **Rom 10:5-13!**

