Session 3

June 18, 2023

ELI AND SAMUEL

1 Samuel 2:22-26; 3:7-10, 15-18

One of the most famous quotes from the 1994 hit movie *Forrest Gump* is "My mama always said life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." And so it was with Eli, the priest at Shiloh. At times, he was righteous. His blessing of Hannah, Samuel's mother (1 Sam. 1) is a wonderful story of compassion. On the other hand, Eli's sons were so wicked that the Bible calls them "worthless men who did not know God" (1 Sam. 2:12). While the Bible has much good to say about this priest of Shiloh, there is evidence that Eli knew all about his son's immoral deeds and did little—or nothing—to stop them. Eli's life was a bit like Forrest's box of chocolates: you were never quite sure what you were going to get. Fortunately, God found enough good in Eli to use him in the life of Samuel, his successor. The drama plays out in three scenes.

A failed father (2:22-26). It's heartbreaking for any father to see his children stray from God's best. Eli's "worthless" sons—Hophni and Phinehas—had done much to mock the Lord's law, their own father, and the very people they were called to serve. Eating the best meat given in sacrifices (1 Sam 2:12 ff) was bad enough. Yet here, their father confronted them for sexual immorality at the door of the tabernacle. From Eli's statement we know that they knew they were wrong, Eli knew all about it, and the people of Israel knew all about it. It was scandalous behavior in every way, but for priests to commit such sin in the very place of worship was particularly damning (v. 25). By this time, Eli was very old, his sons were very wicked, and their disregard for his attempts to rein them had to be very heartbreaking. But "by contrast" (v. 26), we see Samuel as a rising star. While the son's of Eli were falling from grace, Samuel was growing in it. For reflection: *Being a godly parent doesn't guarantee producing godly children. What advice would you offer parents who are dealing with wayward kids?*

A faithful priest (3:7-10). Verse 7 picks up the story of Samuel on God's third call to him (see vv. 4-6). That Samuel "had not yet experienced the Lord" means that the boy—as of yet—was unaware of both his calling and God's method of extending it. After this third time, Eli realized that it was the Lord speaking. This was no doubt a bit humbling to Eli, God's priest. In his shame and because of his pride, it would have been easy for Eli to shrug it off and leave it for the boy to figure out. But Eli's faith was still sound, and his duty was to assist the child in acquiring the wisdom and ways of God. For reflection: *Notice how important it is for the elderly to help equip the young to serve the Lord, and then move aside (at the appropriate time) to let them do it. Why do you think so many "well-seasoned saints" have trouble letting younger people take positions in the church?*

A forbearing servant (3:15-18). The next morning left young Samuel in a quandary. He had responded to the Lord, just as Eli had instructed, and the Lord presented him with a message, just as expected. Unfortunately, the message was one of coming judgement against Eli and his sons (see vv. 11-14). There is some trepidation here, as Samuel quietly opens up the doors of the tabernacle in preparation of the day's services. He is no doubt hoping that Eli would ignore the previous night's interruptions. Simply stated, "He was afraid to tell Eli the vision" (v. 15).

Hence, young Samuel had his first encounter with what commentators refer to as "the prophet's cross;" the bringing forth of unwelcome news to those whom the prophet loved and honored (see Jer. 15:10; 17:15 ff et al). Here, old Eli does what is right and asks for the truth (v. 17). And young Samuel did what was right as well and gave it to him (v. 18). Eli's reply in verse 18 is a lesson in itself: "He is the Lord. He will do what He thinks is good." <u>For reflection</u>: *Eli was no role model priest, yet God used him to prepare one of His choicest servants. What applications can we draw from this story?*