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This Sunday at Magdalen Road Church we continued our series in First Samuel. This week - chapter 3 - we saw God raising up a prophet for himself by calling the young boy Samuel, speaking to him and giving him an initial task.

We noted how this was one of those iconic passages in the Bible in one sense very well known but often not very well understood. This is not a chapter primarily about the fact that God speaks to children, or even how he calls people into ministry, but rather primarily a chapter about the word of the Lord coming again to Israel. This is evident as you compare 3v1 with 4v1 - the passage transitions...

We split the passage into 2 halves:

Because God is good:

- ***his word comes with grace (v2-10)***

We noted how God is very kind and patient as he condescends himself to speak to Samuel. Three times in the night God calls out to Samuel and it's only at the third time that Eli realises what may be happening. We noted how in a similar way God is patient and kind with us as he perseveres in speaking even though our hearts might be hard and our ears deaf.

We noted how Samuel's identity changes halfway through the passage - up until v8 he is always called 'the boy' whereas from here onwards his role and label is now that of prophet.

Because God is good:

- ***his word comes with justice (v11-18)***

Samuel's first job as a prophet is to take a difficult word from the Lord to Eli,

his quasi-father (by temple adoption). Because Eli's sons are scoundrels and as we saw last week in chapter 2v12 and have been selfishly abusing their priestly position for their own gain, so they will now face the righteous anger of God.

Eli accepts this word from the Lord via Samuel, seemingly having already been warned. We don't know why he hadn't done something about the Lords prior warning but we do know the outcome is now certain. This will be seen in later weeks.

Following Samuel's first job as the Lord's mouthpiece to Eli, so his fame and notoriety amongst Israel increases. This concludes at the end of the chapter as all of Israel have heard of him and that he speaks a very word of God.

We then briefly traced the theme of 'the word of the Lord' coming to his people and saw this culminating in John 1v14 as the word became flesh, and also Hebrews 1v1-2 where we see Jesus is God's final word. God's perfect communication with his people is as he sends himself, taking on flesh and bringing the perfect message from God. Where we read passages before Jesus and feel dissatisfied, so Jesus is the answer we are looking for! God has finally and forever spoken.

Here are some questions to help your group begin to grapple with this passage, as always tweak as needed.

Why is the word of the Lord such an important theme in the Bible? What does God's word do?

What do you remember from last week about the context of Samuel? Why is it an important time for the nation?

What do you make of Eli as a character in this account?

Why does God provide a prophet before he provides a king?

How do you see God's patience in this section? How do you see God's justice in this section? Why are both aspects such good news?

Why do you think we struggle to listen to the word of God? Whether as individuals or a church or even churches in a broader sense? How can we help each other prioritise listening?