

Speak Lord, Your Servant Hears

(Back to School Reflections from 1 Samuel)

I. Introduction

A. *Tale of Two Cities* begins, “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times”

1. Dickens may well have been describing this time of year—
 - a. For our students who must start back to school, it’s the worst of times.
(Especially those who had Dickens on their summer reading list... and didn’t)
 - b. But for Mom, it’s best of times! *(Celebration next Tuesday in Ladies class)*
2. I have no school children at home, but this is the worst of times for me too
3. Lynn also goes back to school— and school-teachers have a very hard job
Let me see if I’ve got this right. You want me to go into the classroom with those students and fill every moment with a love for learning. You want me to modify disruptive behavior, observe signs of abuse, and check backpacks for guns. I’m to teach them good study habits, citizenship, sportsmanship and check their heads for lice. I’m supposed to raise their self-esteem while recognizing potential antisocial behavior. I am to focus my time and attention on the students while attending faculty meetings, committee meeting and staff development on my own time. I am to purchase luxury items like pencils, paper, tape and glue for children who can’t afford them out of my on pocket on a salary that qualifies my family for food stamps in many states? And I’m supposed to do all of that without praying in school?
4. So this is the worst of times and the best of times—football season!

B. Israel was having the worst of times as the book of **1 Samuel** opens

1. These were hard times **nationally** because of total failure of leadership
 - a. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, acted as the priests of the people
 - 1) They “were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord” (**3:1**)
 - 2) Text goes on to show how they used their power to extort money
 - b. Israel was a loose confederation of tribes held together by faith in God
 - c. But the faithlessness of the sons of Eli was tearing that faith apart
2. There were hard times **personally** in the life of a woman named Hannah
 - a. Hannah’s husband Elkanah had a second wife named Peninnah
 - b. Although Hannah was the favored, Peninnah had all the children
 - 1) Hannah’s heart broken, and her rival-wife taunted her because of it
 - 2) So the book of **1 Samuel** begins with Hannah’s desperate prayer
3. The new school year starts Tuesday, a new year full of new possibilities
 - a. We want to ask God’s blessing on our students for this new school year
 - b. Today we’ll let the opening chapters of **1 Samuel** speak to our students
4. But we’ll begin by letting them speak to us—they’ll read the story for us

II. Hannah's Prayer (Reading: [1 Samuel 1:10-11](#), [1:12-14](#), [1:15-16](#))

- A. We begin with Hannah's fervent prayer for a child— and Eli's mistake
1. We could make several points from Eli mistaking Hannah as drunk here
 - a. We could take it as a much needed warning not to jump to conclusions
 - b. Professor taught prayer must be out loud (“*act of worship*”), but Hannah prays silently (*another thought prayer must be silent so Satan can't hear*)
 - c. One guy argued that true prayer or worship must make us look drunk! (after all, Paul says, “*Do not get drunk on wine... be filled with the Spirit*”)
 2. One of this is the point here— point it that we must rely on God in prayer
 - a. Hannah suffered because of the emptiness because she had no child
 - 1) Was it value of culture on motherhood or was it Peninnah's taunt?
 - 2) Or was it simply the deep desire to share her love with a child?
 - b. Elkanah didn't understand, “*Don't I mean more to you than ten sons*” ([1:8](#))
 - c. Hannah had no where to go with the desire of her heart except to God
 - 1) Prayer was born of desperation, of “bitterness of soul” and tears
 - 2) There was no formula or expectation—just pouring out heart to God
- B. God wants us to share our deepest struggles ([1 Pet 5:7](#), [Ps 55:22](#), [Phil 4:6](#))
1. We may make a political issue about not being able to pray in school
 - a. When I was in school, we began each day with the Lord's prayer
 - b. Schools now have a time of silence (*you can pray silently, like Hannah*)
 2. **Students:** the point is that you can pray *anytime* you want in school
 - a. God does not want you to be anxious or afraid—he wants you to pray
 - b. Prayer isn't only for mealtime, bedtime or church-time—it's for all times
 - 1) Try it Tuesday— if you are a stressed or worried or uncomfortable
 - 2) Close you eyes, take a deep breath and tell God what's on your mind
 3. Hannah's prayer had a big impact, both on her life and the life of Israel
 - a. She had a son named Samuel who become the last judge of Israel
 - 1) He would lead Israel through one of the most difficult time in history
 - 2) He would anoint King David (*Hannah first to mention anointing*, [2:10](#))
 - b. Hannah's prayer changed things; you prayer can change things as well.

III. Hearing God's Voice

A. **1 Sam 3:1**- *"In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions"*

1. It's easy to think that prophets and miracles happened all the time
 - a. God didn't often speak in a burning bush! (*Miracles by definition are rare*)
 - b. **Judges 21:25**, *"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit"*
 - 1) Maybe it wasn't that God didn't speak but that no one was listening
 - 2) Everyone was too busy doing what was right in their own eyes
2. But then Samuel does hear God's voice (**Reading: 1 Samuel 3:4-6, 3:7-10**)
 - a. OK, there are a few things different about Samuel hearing God's voice
 - 1) **First**, Samuel heard God's voice audibly (*it evidently sounded like Eli*)
(*When you talk to God, it's called prayer; if He talks to you, it's schizophrenia*)
 - 2) **Second**, he heard God when he wasn't listening for Him (*was asleep*)
(*Some follow this pattern when I'm preaching—take a nap, listen for God!*)
 - b. This isn't a model on how to hear God; it is a reminder for us to listen
 - c. Like in Samuel's day, there aren't many in our world listening for God

B. Scripture is clear that we have the responsibility to hear God's voice

1. **Psalm 95** is a familiar pastoral hymn that has inspired hymns (**95:1-2, 6-7**)
 - a. But the tone changes dramatically when it speaks of hearing God (**7b-9**)
 - b. There is an urgency and accountability in call to hear God's voice
 - 1) Hebrews writer quotes this three times (**Hebrews 3:7, 3:14, 4:7**)
 - 2) The point of all these quotations is the urgency of hearing God
2. Like prayer, listening to God is not something we are to save for church
 - a. OK, God's voice doesn't boom from rafters (*tho' he could if he wanted*)
 - b. He speaks through his word. He speaks through the counsel of others
(*Remember, it was Eli that taught Samuel; God works speajs through others*)
3. Why does God speak to Samuel and later through Samuel? (**1 Sam 2:26**)
 - a. This statement is familiar because it is later used of Jesus (**Luke 2:52**)
 - b. Samuel was dedicated to God as a child, and he grew to love God more
 - 1) Students, learn as much as you can at school (*gotta go, might as well learn*)
 - 2) The most important thing you can learn ever is to know to God
 - c. **Note:** One person God chose in all of Israel was a child who loved Him

IV. Hearing God Isn't Easy (Reading: [1 Samuel 3:11-15](#))

- A. When God speaks to Samuel, what he says is not something that's easy to hear
1. God tells him that he will judge the family of Eli because of sin
 - a. His sons would be punished because of the abuse of their power
 - 1) Eli himself would himself be judged because he did nothing to stop it
 - 2) This had already been predicted to Eli earlier in the book ([2:27-36](#))
 - b. Samuel would spend much of his life as a prophet and judge
 - c. It is doubtful any message was as painful as this first one about his mentor
 2. If we listen to God, sometimes we are going to hear hard some things
 - a. That is the way it was with people who listened to God all through Bible
 - 1) Noah listened to God and heard about a flood and ark ([Gen 6](#))
 - 2) Abraham heard God command him to offer his son Isaac ([Gen 22](#))
 - 3) Moses heard God's voice command a return trip to Egypt ([Exo 3](#))
 - b. We know how the stories turn out, but they didn't when they heard God
- B. We must listen to God, but that doesn't mean that it will be easy
1. Students: God just may ask you to do some very hard things
 - a. It may mean doing the right thing when everyone else is doing wrong
 - b. It may mean saying "No" to things when everyone else says "Yes"
 - 1) Taught Sermon on Mt at camp—turn cheek, tell truth, love enemy
 - 2) One student from NY, "*Do that stuff at my school, ya'll get killed!*"
 2. Following God's voice is never easy, but it is always the right thing to do
 - a. It turned out OK for Noah, Abraham and Moses—it will for you too!
 - b. But know this in advance—following God will never seem easy
 3. Will all of our students please stand. Will all of our teacher's please stand.
 - a. We want you know that our prayers are with you during this new year
 - b. God with God as we pray His blessing over you ([Shepherd's Blessing](#))
- C. There is an interesting expression at the end of this story ([1 Samuel 3:19](#))
1. God doesn't let his words "*fall to the ground.*" They all come true.
 2. They will all come true for you as well, if you are listening to His voice.