

Pastor Keith E. Wiens

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Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Epiphany 2

### LISTEN! GOD IS CALLING!

I really like the story we heard today about the boy Samuel. God was speaking to him, but Samuel didn't recognize the voice of God. He had to learn how to listen to God.

The story, though, raises a scary question for me. What if God speaks to me and I don't realize that God is the One who is speaking? Have you ever had thoughts like that?

You probably have had the experience of answering the telephone and the caller starts talking without any kind of introduction, and you don't recognize the voice. The caller assumes you know who is calling, and you are too embarrassed to ask who it is. And meanwhile, the caller keeps talking and you get more and more puzzled. Has that ever happened to you?

Well, what if God calls you and you don't recognize that it is God who is calling?

It can happen. It happened to Samuel. And it can happen to people today. Fortunately, God doesn't play games with us. God speaks plainly, and gives us people like Eli to help us.

I have had a number of Eli's in my life - people who have helped me recognize the voice of God and have taught me how to listen when God speaks.

Bob Bertram was one of those people. He helped me understand that God speaks two very different kinds of messages - law and gospel. On the one hand, God speaks law. The law teaches us what to do and how to live. On the other hand, God speaks gospel. The gospel is the good news of what God is doing for us through Jesus Christ. Two very distinct messages. Both come from God. Both are needed.

Bob helped me listen for these messages. When reading the Bible, he taught me to ask - is it law or is it gospel that I am hearing? When listening to a sermon, he taught me to ask - is it law or is it gospel that I am hearing? Even more, he instilled in me a hunger for the gospel. We tend to like the law. The law of God is like those popular self-help books which help us make our lives better. We like the law because it helps us live better and shows us how to please God.

Bob taught me, though, that the gospel is what is really powerful. That is because the law can't help us turn our lives around. We can make an improvement here or there, but we can't make the really big change. We can't change our heart, and that's what God wants. And that makes the gospel really sweet, because the gospel is about how God reaches out to us through Jesus Christ and loves us and forgives us, when we are at our worst. And that's what changes us. The gospel works on the inside and gives us a new heart. The gospel has the power to turn our lives around.

I was a lot like Samuel, hearing the voice, but not entirely understanding what I was hearing. Like Eli, Bob Bertram helped me listen to God. Do you have an Eli in your life? Let's go back to the story. Samuel didn't recognize the voice of God because he thought Eli was calling him.

There are many voices calling out to us, as well. Especially today, with all the electronic devices that give us far more information than we can process. Books, blogs, movies, podcasts, radio, television - with so many voices, how can we hear the voice of God? Does God speak to us in the middle of night, as happened with Samuel? Does God speak to us through a powerful movie? Does God speak to us through an email? No wonder we get confused, as Samuel did.

Samuel needed a guide, and so do we. We need something that will tell us, "this is from God," or "this is not from God." We need a standard by which we can determine if a message can be trusted as coming from God or not.

Well, God has given us such a tool. We call it the Bible. The Bible is very powerful and helps us have faith in God. That's why we call the Bible our Book of Faith. Like Eli who guided Samuel to know which voice was the voice of God, so the Bible is our guide.

God gives us people like Eli and God gives us the Bible - two powerful tools which help us hear what God is saying.

Once, people in an African village purchased a television set. For weeks all the folks gathered around the TV morning, afternoon, and night watching the programs. Then after a couple of months the television was turned off and never used again.

A visitor to the village asked the chief, "Why do you no longer watch television?" "We have decided to listen to the storytellers," the chief answered. "Doesn't the television know more stories," the visitor asked. "Yes," the chief replied, "but the storyteller knows me."

There are many voices clamoring for your attention. But how many of those voices know you? Wouldn't you rather listen to the voice of One who knows you and loves you and is committed to help you?