

# 1 Samuel 2:12-36

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[0:00] It's 1 Samuel chapter 2. So turn to page 272. We're reading from chapter 2 from verse 12. Now just before we read it, I just want to bring you up to speed if you've missed a few sermons before now.

So last week we looked at Hannah's song after God has answered her prayers, she's got peace, and then he's given her a child. And we saw that really this song, Hannah's song, it's kind of what we saw in that verse earlier, that Jesus is about God exalting the humble, but humbling those who have lifted themselves up.

It's the lens that we read the whole, actually one of the whole lens that we read the whole of the Bible, but it's particularly so in this book. And what we see is the contrast between those brought low, that need humbling, the proud, that've, you know, got made too much for themselves, and those who are lifted up high by God.

Throughout 1 Samuel, there's always somebody on their way down, and there is always somebody being lifted up. Today, as we read it, what you're going to see is that we're going to meet two new characters, and what you're going to see is that when we read it, you'd expect these two to be models of holy living.

They're going to be Eli's sons, they're priests like their father. And if you hear of a priest, you know, when you think of a priest or a minister or someone like that, someone in spiritual leadership, there is kind of a certain expectation, isn't there, that they're going to be whiter than white, an example of how to live, but what we see is they're anything but that.

[1:37] What we get, what we're going to see is a twist to what we'd normally expect, and the religious elite, the priests, the ministers of, the kind of Jewish ministers, are the ones on the way down, and it's the humble who are lifted up.

One thing I want you to notice as we read it, it kind of reads this kind of narrative like a courtroom drama. The first half is all narrative.

It's like the evidence is being presented by the narrator. You know, you're going to get Eli and his sons, the contrast with Hannah and her son Samuel, the corrupt versus the faithful, and we hear it all, but then in verse 25, I want you to notice, the living God steps in, and he steps in like the judge in the courtroom drama, and he delivers his verdict on the corrupt, the scoundrels, and on the faithful.

Let's read it together. So, 1 Samuel chapter 2 from verse 12. Okay, let's read. Eli's sons were scoundrels.

They had no regard for the Lord. Now, it was the practice of the priests, that whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot.

[3:06] Whatever the fork brought up, the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. But even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, give the priest some meat to roast.

He won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw. If the person said to him, let the fat be burned first and then take whatever you want, the servant would answer, no, hand it over now.

If you don't, I'll take it by force. The sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.

But Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year, his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.

Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord. Then they would go home.

[ 4 : 13 ] And the Lord was gracious to Hannah. She gave birth to the three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord. Now, Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

So he said to them, Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons, the report I hear spreading among the Lord's people is not good. If one person sins against another, God may mediate for the offender. But if anyone sins against the Lord, who's going to cede for them? His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death.

And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people. Now, a man of God came to Eli and said to him, This is what the Lord says.

Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestors' family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh? I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar to burn incense and to wear an ephod in my presence.

[ 5 : 34 ] I also gave your ancestors' family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites. Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling?

Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?

Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares, I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever. But now the Lord declares, Far be it from me, Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.

The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age, and you will see distress in my dwelling.

Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age. Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar, I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

[ 6 : 48 ] And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be assigned to you. They will both die on the same day. I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind.

I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always. Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread, and plead, Appoint me to some priestly office, so that I can have food to eat.

This is God's word. Let's just pray together. Almighty God, we thank you for your word, the Bible, and we know sometimes when we read it, there are challenging passages.

There are things perhaps that we don't understand, that seem strange to us, and yet every word is the word of God. Everything is there to build us up, to help us, to help us to understand more about you, about ourselves.

And so I pray for each one of us that you'd give us open minds, open ears, and hearts to see, to know, and to understand what it is that you have to say to us as individuals and to us as a body, as a people.

[ 8 : 07 ] So we ask for that in the name of Jesus. Amen. When people do great things and achieve great things, it's right, isn't it, that we show them honour.

I'm thankful as a nation, we're not the only one, most nations kind of do this, but nations across the world normally have a way of honouring people who've served their country. The obvious one that we have in the UK is, you know, for military service.

We've got medals that are particular for certain acts of service. We've also got MBEs, knighthoods and the like. I wonder, perhaps, the most famous medal in the military is one we'll all have heard of, the Victoria Cross.

And when you read the stories, if you ever go and read why someone received that, you know, you can't believe. It's the courage, the bravery, the wanting to put themselves above others, sacrifice, you know, put themselves in danger for the sake of the nation or for the rest of their squadron.

Now, the strange thing is, particularly about the Victoria Cross, the medal itself is not actually that impressive. It's only one and a half inches high and you'd think, oh, maybe it's made of gold or

some precious metal.

[ 9 : 26 ] No, it's made of copper. Made of copper alloy and it's got a little crimson ribbon at the top. So, if you didn't know it and you saw that, you'd be like, well, it's made of copper and it's got a little tiny ribbon on.

What's this? The medal itself is not that impressive but the significance it carries is. The honour of receiving this little piece of copper shaped into that particular medal is weighty.

It is weighty with honour. That medal, if you had one, it's not tossed in a junk drawer, is it? But it's treated with care, profound care or even reverence.

Pride of place in the house. Pride of place on the veteran's uniform when they go out for a parade. And if you saw anyone wearing it and you knew what it was, you would instantly want to know what they did.

You might even want to thank them for their service. But imagine this. Imagine a veteran who's received it, comes back one day and finds his son in the back garden with his Victoria cross and he's using it to scrape mud off his boots.

[ 10 : 37 ] If that happened, you wouldn't be surprised if there were fists flying. What do you think you're doing? Do you not have any idea what this medal means to me, what it meant to be awarded this?

That illustration, that example, is kind of exactly what we're going to see unfold in this chapter. Because we've got these two men that we're introduced to. We read their priests, Eli's sons, their sons of a priest, they've been handed the most honourable position in the whole culture, the whole society.

They've been entrusted with being in the very presence of God out of everyone. And instead of treating this position of honour with respect, they treat this position like a piece of plastic thrown in a junk drawer.

and quite frankly, when you read it, you know, you just realise they're a disgrace. They're a disgrace to the position they hold, they bring dishonour to their families and to the Lord who they represent, to the people.

You look with me, verse 12, we kind of have a narrator explaining the whole picture. He's kind of, and as I mentioned, it's like a courtroom scene. He's presenting it as evidence. He's, straight up, first verse, Eli's sons were scoundrels.

[ 12 : 02 ] They had no regard for the Lord. Verse 15, we see how they speak with God's people. They've sent, you know, they've got servants and who they send to get and they go, give the priests some meat to roast.

You are, except boil meat from you, but only raw. Like, give us the best bits. We're not just accepting any part of the animal. Give us the best bits. We're the priests. Verse 16, they say, the people who are bringing it tell the priests how they should be doing stuff.

You know, verse 16, you've got, if the person said to him, you know, let the fat be burned first and then take whatever you want. That's how they should have done the sacrifices. Priest servant answers, no, hand it over now.

If you don't, I'll take it by force. It's spiritual extortion. It's using power and position to treat God's people like a piece, to treat God's people like a piece of plastic.

They're literally robbing God and threatening his people and they're using their position as a weapon. Verse 17, the sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.

[ 13 : 17 ] They treat this heavy, weighty honour as something lightweight, greedy and to please their own appetites. And at this point, you think, just wait till their dad gets hold of them.

They're in for some trouble. I tell you, you know, just like the veteran coming home to, his son using the Victoria Cross to scrape his boots, you think, there's going to be fist flying when he hears about this.

because their sinful abuse of power doesn't stop there, does it? Verse 22, now Eli was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and they've been stealing and how they slept with women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

What's he going to do? What's dad going to do? Surely he's going to throw the book at him. No, he said to them, sons, why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours.

No, my sons, the report I hear spreading around the people, it's not good. You're expecting a flying or a rage. Perhaps you remember what Jesus did when he went to God's, into the present, the temple, which was where God's presence was and when he saw the temple being disregarded, he threw everyone out and he flipped the tables upside down.

[14:46] Is that what we're going to get here, you think? And it's not. We get weak leadership. We get weak parenting. It's passive and it's gutless.

Don't get me wrong, it would have been hard, but what should Eli have done? He should have thrown them out. Bottom line, he should have kicked them out. Get out. Their priestly days should have been over, full stop. And you have to ask, don't you? Why didn't he? Why didn't he? We know why, because they're his boys. Eli's sin and his son's sin are the exact same disease, but with different symptoms.

The sons try to secure honour through power, extortion and abuse. Eli tries to secure it through people-pleasing and idolising his family.

[15:52] Verse 29, God, even in the, kind of, when we flip to the verdict, God even says to Eli, why do you honour your sons more than me? Now, the truth is this, isn't it?

We all want honour. Do we not all want to be honoured? We all want significance. And the problem, what we see is that Eli and his sons go to any measure to get it.

They go to any length to be honoured and to have significance in the world that they live. And as I say that, what it should make us realise, okay, perhaps we don't go as far as these two, but there's a desire in all of us to want to have significance.

There's a desire in all of us to be respected and to be honoured. And there is times when, in all of us, where we'll try to secure it for ourselves and for those that we love.

And at times, there's, we will, all of us, try, it'll take its place above honouring the living God. The living God cannot just be a lightweight accessory to your life.

[17:14] You know, as I was prepping this this week, I realised that there was a lot of Eli in me because there is every temptation in me, both as a parent but also as a minister to lead passively.

Even, what I'm going to say about this, don't say the hard thing, you'll offend people. Avoid the conflict, keep the peace, honour the comfort of the church and their families because then there's no chance for them to kind of get upset with me.

Honour them. It'll be easy if you do to honour the comfort of you sitting here more than the holiness of God. Do you know, and the truth is, I have to fight that every single week when I get to talk because I have to fight the desire that says, don't say that in case it upsets or offends someone.

If I stay silent, I'm just doing what Eli did. I don't know which it is where you can see yourself as Eli or his sons.

For lots of us, we might feel like Eli. Maybe we're, you know, we're not all leaders in the church but lots of us who are parents, like Eli, we love our children, we love our kids.

[18:42] We're desperate for our kids to have significance and to be a success and to be secure in their friendships and have a happy life and we all want that. But if the pursuit of it causes us to put them above honouring the Lord, if we want them to have significance and to be secure and not miss out on stuff for the honour of Jesus' name, we do them a disservice.

Now as I say that, perhaps, probably, maybe, you might feel a little bit content but today there is an opportunity.

There's an opportunity with the Word of God right here today. What if rather than treating God lightly, what if you could honour Christ and give him the greatest weight in your life and in your family?

What if you could do that today? In verse 27, the judge steps in and he lays it all down and perhaps the high point of his verdict is in verse 30.

You see what he says? I think it comes halfway, quite far down the verse, near the end of the verse, verse 30, he says, those who honour me I will honour but those who despise me will be disdained.

[20:09] Now if you're here today looking in, appearing in on Christianity and maybe you're still thinking it through about what it all means to follow Jesus and as we've said all this, you might be thinking, why does God demand my honour and respect and adulation above all else?

Why is that the case? If we behaved like that wanting all that honour and respect, we'd be labelled as needy and having an ego. Maybe, is that kind of what we should just label God?

He's just got perhaps too big of an ego. Well, to understand why the living God isn't some insecure dictator demanding applause, we kind of have to look briefly at the original language.

It's that word for honour. As I've mentioned, it means weighty. Well, the reason he deserves all the honour is because the living God is the most weighted being there is.

He's the creator of all things. You just remind yourself of that, that the living God made you. He made you. The reason your existence, you know, the reason you sat here today, the reason you're here at all is owed to him.

[ 21 : 19 ] We talked about honourable acts that deserve a medal is that not an act that deserves a medal? Your honour that he made you? You're sat here today because of him? That act alone deserves all our honour and praise.

If it wasn't for him, you wouldn't be here. It's true. The living God says, he doesn't have to do any of this, by the way, but he states, if you honour him, he will honour you.

But if you make him a lightweight accessory, things won't go well and that judgment is not a divine tantrum. The reason, it's not because, it's because God is, he's holy, he's unchanging and he's always right and he won't be mocked.

The truth is, you have been honoured by God in ways that the rest of the creation has not because you're made in his image. The living God crowns each of his, he crowns the whole of humanity with significance and honour and yet we treat him like a cheap piece of plastic.

Eli tried to secure honour by keeping the peace. His son's taking it by force. But the principle here says we don't have to steal honour. If we give God his proper honour and wait, he will honour us.

[ 22 : 40 ] Okay. There's a lot been thrown at you there. But here's where the rubber hits the road.

If all these things are true, every single one of us at one time or another have put other things before God. Just like Eli and his sons. If that is what we've done, we, you think of the verse, if that is what we've done, then what should we expect?

We should be expected to be dishonoured by him. That's what we should expect, right? If we read it. But, there's a huge but here.

We haven't finished God's verdict. Verse 35, look what he says. He says, I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and mind.

I will firmly establish his priestly house and they will minister before my anointed one always. Now, before we go to that verse, I just want to take a little bit of a pause here because, as your minister actually, this promise is incredibly practical for how we deal with the church today.

[ 23 : 58 ] When human leaders fail us, when they use their position to abuse and extort like the sons or when they passively look the other way like Eli, we do not have to tolerate it.

We don't tolerate that in the church. But also, we do not have to walk away from the faith. There are countless examples like it in the church, horrendous abuses happened and then brushed under the carpet.

We don't tolerate that. but we don't have to walk away from the faith. Why? Because the church doesn't belong to a human minister or pastor. It belongs to the faithful priest that is promised in verse 35.

Its loyalty is to Christ Jesus alone. He's our only leader who will never abuse his power, who will never brush anything under the carpet but will treat everything with complete righteous judgment. where Eli and his sons failed us, failed them, Jesus succeeded. A faithful priest, you'll have heard me talking about what this means before, a priest is a middleman, someone who stands between us and God.

[ 25 : 10 ] Eli asks the question back in verse 25, if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? You see why he's asking that? If the priests, who are the middlemen between God and the people, if they sin against the Lord by dishonoring their position, who's going to be their priest?

Who's going to be their middleman? Who will represent them before God? Who's going to pray for them? Well, verse 35, God ends the answer, I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to us in my heart and mind.

Jesus is the middleman. He's the faithful, perfect priest that Eli needs, that his sons need and that we need. We need him to represent us before God and we need him not just to represent but to be the exact representation of the living God to us and he can because he's the God man.

Fully God and fully man. The perfect priest, the perfect middleman, perfectly representing us before God and perfectly exact representing God to us and in his life he perfectly would honour his God, his Father.

With every part of his life with every part with what Eli and his sons lacked. But this faithful high priest will go one step further.

[ 26 : 33 ] Instead of we see accepting offerings from the people like Eli and his sons did, this priest is different. He as the priest would offer himself as the substitute for sins.

The verse gets flipped. If the verse is true for Jesus then what happens to him is kind of strange. Jesus honours God.

So you read the verse God, Jesus honours God, you expect him to be honoured. And yet he's the one who's treated as one who is disgraced in the eyes of men. He becomes the Victoria cross that's treated like a piece of junk.

Not thrown in the junk drawer but his body a throne on the scrap heap. His life is considered worthless and he does all that. He takes all the punishments for the times we have dishonoured him and in exchange we receive the honour he should.

The honour that he earned for himself he gives us and so we're honoured by God the Father even though we've dishonoured him. It's an exchange and it's that that sets us free.

[ 27 : 47 ] it sets us free. It sets us free from the exhaustion of trying to secure our own significance. It sets us free from trying to secure our own honour.

It sets us free from trying to secure significance and honour for our children because God honours with the same honour that he's given his perfect son.

those who honour me I will honour but those who despise me will disdain. We're honoured because Jesus gives us his perfect record of honouring his father.

how do we live in light of the cross? We've focused on Eli and his sons but we've left out two sort of the golden nuggets haven't we?

Hannah and Samuel. The two in the story that couldn't be more different. Full of honour for God.

Why? Because they've been changed by his grace. If we want an example of how to live in light of what Jesus has done in light of having received honour from our maker that we didn't deserve look with me.

[ 29 : 01 ] Now there's no real drama with them just a picture of faithful living. Verse 18 Samuel was ministering before the Lord a boy clothed with a linen ephod and his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice and Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say may the Lord give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the Lord.

So they'd return home. Verse 26 Now the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the Lord and also with man. What we see in Hannah and her son is the new way of honouring the living God.

And if they had reason to honour him we have more. We have more because this side of the cross when we put our trust in Jesus we're filled with the spirit of God and empowered by him to honour our father.

Earlier on I mentioned the what if. What if we could honour Christ and give him the greatest weight in our lives and our families. God now that doesn't need to remain a suggestion.

But with Christ it becomes more than just a possibility it becomes a reality. We who've trusted in Jesus have received his honour the ultimate honour and now we get to live as a people set free from that striving for honour and significance.

[ 30 : 29 ] Because we know that the only honour we really ever need is that of the living God that has been given to us by grace. Can you see how that might set you free? What it might look like practically in your life?

That out there in the world you don't have to fight for respect. You don't have to fight for status or even get upset if you're not given it at work or by whoever you come across your path.

You don't have to worry about your kids if they miss out on things when it clashes with church because it's good for them to be here and honour the Lord. Because you and we as church Christian families have the honour of Christ.

You don't need to work to get more of it, you have it in full which frees you from trying to earn it. The world will tell you to earn your own honour and it will bring fear into your life so that you do what you

think you have to secure it.

Jesus says put that way of life down. It's a rat race and it won't do you any favours. The world tells us honour is earned by how we live.

[ 31 : 36 ] Jesus says honour is given by who we trust. Jesus earned the ultimate medal of honour. He gives the honour God has for him and it's worth so much more than perhaps we will ever realise.

The most honourable moment will happen when we meet him face to face. That's the biggest moment that will happen. Can you imagine it? Can you imagine the multitudes of heaven gathered before the throne?

They're singing it's louder than you've ever realised and then there's a moment and everyone hushes. Jesus has something to say and it's this.

He calls out your name and says well done good and faithful servant. That is where we're headed as each and every day God is at work in us growing and preparing us for that honourable day.

If you're still here this morning and thinking through about what it means to follow Jesus Christ can I invite you today that this honour and respect that we all crave can be yours. It's not beyond you.

[ 32 : 52 ] The Lord Jesus offers this honour and respect that you can receive this to anyone, to everyone who will call on his name and ask for it.

Not because of anything that we've done but because of everything that he's done. If you're exhausted by trying and attempting to earn your own honour and status you can come today free of charge and the living Lord Jesus will give you the honourable position of a place in his kingdom.

let me pray. Almighty God there are times when we consider the good news of Jesus and it seems almost too good to be true and it beggars belief how this is the reality to which you've called us all.

we know we struggle with this every day. We fight to be significant and recognised and honoured and respected all the time and yet here you say we don't have to fight for it.

We give the honour of the one whose opinion is the only one that matters the God who made us.

And so I pray that you would work it so in our hearts that that would sustain us and keep us going and help us to not be worried about life but to trust that you've got it covered.

[ 34 : 38 ] And so bless us, have mercy upon us and give us the grace we need to keep living in light of the good news. We ask for this in his name. Amen.