

Who you gonna call?

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Date: 07 June 2026

Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 00] The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days, the word of the Lord was rare. There were not many visions.

! Samuel answered, here I am.

And he ran to Eli and said, here I am. You called me. Eli said, I did not call. Go back and lie down. So he went and lay down.

Again, the Lord called Samuel. And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, here I am. You called me. My son, Eli said, I did not call.

Go back and lie down. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. A third time, the Lord called Samuel.

[1 : 11] And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, here I am. You called me. And Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, go and lie down.

And if he calls you, say, speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. So Samuel went and laid down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, Samuel, Samuel.

Then Samuel said, speak, for your servant is listening. And the Lord said to Samuel, see, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle.

At that time, I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about.

His sons uttered blasphemies against God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, the guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.

[2 : 27] Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell him my vision. But Eli called him and said, Samuel, my son.

Samuel answered, here I am. What was it he said to you? Eli asked. Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you.

Be ever so severely if you hide from me anything he told you. So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, he is the Lord.

Let him do what is good in his eyes. The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.

The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. And Samuel's word came to all Israel.

[3 : 30] It's real. Let me pray. Almighty God, we thank you again for your word, the Bible. And as we sit under it now, I pray that you'd speak to each of our hearts.

I pray that whatever's going on in life, that you'd speak to us personally. But I also pray that you'd speak to us as a body, and that we would be built up, that we'd be edified and nurtured and nourished by the food of your word.

And so we ask for this in the name of Jesus. Amen. So as you see, we're continuing in this series, In 1 Samuel. And last week, we saw the fall of Eli and his sons.

This week, we see Samuel commissioned, set apart as a prophet, one who will bring, who will speak God's word to the people. And we see Samuel responding to God's call.

Now, perhaps you remember this when you were weak, or as a parent, this is probably now you, those of us who were parents.

[4 : 36] But you remember being called in for your evening meal. For us, it was being called in for tea, but I know as a Yorkshire man, elsewhere, calls that, gets that wrong, calls it dinner.

But it's true, isn't it? And perhaps, at this time of year, as the evenings get lighter, or kids get older, they generally stay out for a bit longer.

And so now, the point is, you have to try, if you don't shout their name, you have to try, hunt them down. Where have they got to? Where are they hiding? And it's easier, most of the time, to just shout from the front door.

And see how long it is before they come running. Why do kids come? To the front door. Two reasons. They know the sound of the voice that is calling them.

They know it's the voice of their parents. And the second reason is, you normally shout them by their name. They know the voice, and they know it's their name being called.

[5 : 37] In our passage, we see God calling Samuel. But both things are not true, are they? They know the way a parent normally calls in this passage.

Because Samuel knows it's his name, but he doesn't know it's God's voice. And we read, up until that moment, he didn't know God personally.

It says, verse 7, Samuel did not yet know the Lord, it had not been revealed to him. Samuel's, and the point here is, there's a bigger picture at play within the history of Israel.

Samuel's not knowing of God's voice is actually a mirror of what is happening in the nation. We read that. Verse 1, how does it all kick off for us?

We read, second sentence, click over the page, 273. In those days, the word of the Lord was rare.

[6 : 40] Israel had got used to God not speaking. And so they'd got used to him not calling. They had forgotten what his voice sounded like, and in many ways, they did not know it.

What we see in Samuel is just that, but that is all about to change. Everything we see in this passage is not just true for Samuel and Israel at that time, but it's also true in our world.

It's true for us as individuals. It's true for the church and for our world. It's that we, just like Israel, needed to hear God's voice. We need to know, as the church, and the world needs to know God's voice.

He needs to know when he's calling, needs to know when he's speaking to us individually. But equally, you know, as a body, we need to know when God is speaking, and the world needs to hear God calling them.

And what it means to follow that calling. That's what we're going to be thinking about this morning, is thinking through that kind of the calling on our lives.

[7 : 52] Because the truth is, actually, that God is calling each one of us. But we have even more reasons to respond.

Because we don't... You see Samuel here. Samuel waits for a voice in the dark. We don't have to wait for a voice in the dark. But we can actually rest in that God has already called us, as a people, to follow his son.

God already has called... He doesn't just call one person to be a prophet, but he calls all people to put their trust in him. Sometimes, when we hear the language of calling, we think that it...

Perhaps we think about purpose, or... The reason, you know, what's our life going to be all about? And sometimes, that can be an area of life where many of us struggle.

What's my purpose? What's my identity? What am I supposed to be doing? Maybe there's a particular niche thing that I'm called to. Maybe you struggle with that. And you think, what is my purpose?

[9 : 03] Why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing? Well, today, if you struggle with that, sometimes you sit and ponder. Today, we get an answer that we... You don't have to wait and sit around.

Because there is a clear way that the Word of God tells us today. And the purpose of your life. Which we work with what we want to explore.

The first thing that I want us to dive into, maybe, perhaps you might consider the principle of the passage, it is this. That God's promise, His covenant, in His covenant promises, He faithfully promises to call, always call a prophet to speak to His people.

We're going to see it first. You know, God has promised from very early on, He promised to be a speaking God and to speak through people. That's what prophets are. They're people that God speaks through.

You know, hundreds of years before, at the time of Moses, when all the law was written, there's a book in the Bible, Jude, and in chapter 18, God makes this promise to Moses.

[10 : 11] He says this. He says to Moses, I will raise up for them a prophet like you, like you Moses, from among the Israelites, from among this nation.

And he says, the prophet I'm going to raise up, he says, I'm going to put my words in their mouth, and he, the prophet, will tell them everything I command. He's going to say, I promise I'm going to do that.

That's my promise to you. And so, when we read verse 1, that God's word has been rare, it should make us wonder.

Because how is God keeping his promise, if it's part of his promise to keep his covenant promises, which he always is, God always keeps his promises, he's bound by his own word, the promises he makes, he's bound by the word he said there, the thing that he promised, he is bound to raise up someone to speak to them.

What might seem peculiar to us, is kind of, it's not what you would expect, isn't it? That he would choose a young boy, a youth. Samuel, probably would have been about 12 years old at this point, this is the person that he's going to call.

[11 : 24] In the ongoings of the temple, amongst everybody else, Samuel would have been in love with it. You know, he's the young lad who has chores, you know, he would have cleaned the temple, do the menial jobs, you know, the reason he's in the tabernacle, asleep, is because, sleeping in there, is probably to keep the lamp, from going out.

You know, it would have been a tough shift, to keep that going. But even in that, there's picture language, more than all the way through.

Because we get a picture, of what this is really all about. You see what we read, what's the difference? Well, even there's tiny little details, going on, all the way through.

You see Eli's eyesight? Eli's eyesight is going. It's going physically, he's struggling in his old age. But that is a picture, of his spiritual eyes, also familiar.

Remember all the mess he's made, in the past chapter. And it's a picture, that as his eyes fade, his spiritual eyes are fading, and Eli himself, will soon be on the picture.

[12 : 36] Eli, where is he? He's away from the presence of God. Where is Samuel? He's near. The lamp not going out, is true, not only with the flame itself, but it's not a flick, it's flickering.

But through Samuel, this lamp of God, will continue, to be made in the presence of God. Because through him, Israel, Israel, is going to brightly shine, once again.

By the end, of our reading, look with me, verse 20, you go from the word of God, it's rare, verse 20, all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, recognised that Samuel, was attested, as a prophet, and the Lord.

All Israel, would know, that God, is speaking to them again. Like parents, calling out to their children, to come home, for their evening meal, with a voice they recognise, and their name heard, loud and clear.

God, through Samuel, will call to Israel. I mentioned, when we bring this story, into our own lives, that language of calling, we misunderstand, and it can, land us in a bit of bother.

[13 : 54] Because as I mentioned, we read of Samuel's calling, especially, he's going to be a prophet, also the heard, last chapter, you've got Eli, he's going to be a priest, and we're tempted, to think that calling, like in inverted commas, is a kind of special purpose, of our lives.

And as I mentioned, you think, you know, what's my special purpose? Do I have a special calling? Is there a job that, you know, I'm just suited for? And if I do, then what is it? And how do I know? I'll discover what it is. Now, don't get me wrong, in many ways, it's good to ask those questions, about life. But the problem is, we can over-spiritualise the answer.

It's good to pray, ask for wisdom, and guidance 100%, but it can, it can cause, a kind of spiritual paralysis, when you wait, for this some sort of, mystical confirmation, of, you know, oh yeah, what our life should be about, before, and what it does is, if whilst we're waiting, for the answer, it actually stops us, from actually doing anything.

We're just waiting, and hanging around. When will I know, what my specific purpose is, in life? And, wouldn't we all love, what Samuel gets? I'd love a voice, in the middle of the night, that plans it all out.

[15 : 13] Big, much, make life much easier, wouldn't it? Big decision, just clearly right there. Imagine if you were, told, you know, exactly who you should marry. Be easy.

Where you should live, you've been on, that house right there, that's the one, that you've got to put your money on. That job right there, apply for that one. You definitely get it. This is, don't apply for any of us, just apply for this one.

Save so much time, with all the job obligations, that we don't get. We're going to have to make, any important decisions ourselves. Pressure off. Because we don't have that voice, we can somehow, we somehow end up with this kind of restless, like, discontentment.

Well, what should I do then? When? How will I know? And the longer those emotions go on, if you're ever left in that place, what do we feel? More anxiety.

We start to overcomplicate things. We start to look at the signs, or special words, from God, just to give us clarity, and we'll, oh, maybe, this was connected to this, and making connections, where there never was anything.

[16:22] That's one side of the struggle, that we see, in this passage, that maybe it connects with us. But, and maybe you're at, maybe that's where you're at, this morning, but, there's also the problem, with Eli, isn't it?

Remember, from last week, Eli, we see it here, Eli, because of his actions, comes under God's judgment. I mean, imagine this, you see this here.

You really wouldn't want Samuel's first job as a prophet, would you? First thing, as a newly commissioned prophet, he's 12 years old, is to go and tell the man, who's watched over him, since he was knee high, this terrifying word of judgment.

See what he's got to tell him? The Lord tells him what he's got to say. You know, this is it. For I told him, this is God speaking about what he said to Eli, for I told him, that I would judge his family forever, because of the sin he knew about, his son's blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them.

Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, the guilt of Eli's house, will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering. That's Samuel's first job. The very next day, you imagine delivering that message.

[17:39] Verse 18, Eli kind of helps him along, and insists that he has. Samuel tells him everything, and hides nothing. And then Eli says, I don't know about you, but it feels like kind of a strange reaction.

Eli, he's the Lord, let him do what stood in his eyes. I think that's kind of strange, because, you know, this is the priest of God's people, and he just accepts it.

He's the Lord, he can do whatever he wants. They just, when I read that, there's kind of a dark resignation to it. Wouldn't you expect the priest of Israel to know God's character?

Yes, God does judge wickedness. But that, he's merciful. He's forgiving. This is the same God, when Israel was a mess, and God was going to say, he was going to take out all of Israel, and Moses prayed to it, and God relented from destroying them.

This is Eli, who spent all day, in the temple, worshiping God, who spent his time, reading, and memorizing, and knowing the law. Surely he would know, that God was merciful, and forgiving, and if he repented, if he came, and asked for forgiveness, that it would be granted.

[19:04] But there's nothing. There is a depressing, hopelessness, to Eli. He's failed in his calling, as a priest, but then he assumes, that that's it.

God is done with me, there's nothing I can do about it, I just have to accept my Lord. Here's the point we have with this, where Eli is at right now, is represented, where the whole nation's at.

You can imagine, that's true, right? If the priest, has forgotten God's character, who spends all day, worshipping, and studying God's word, what chance, does regular, Israelite have, of knowing God's character?

Eli's depressing, hopelessness, was the exact same temptation, Israel would have felt, because they, believing, they were a lost cause. As much as we might be discontent, looking for a special purpose, equally, we might fall into Israel's, and Eli's trap.

We might believe, that God, isn't calling us, or, that we're not getting the answer, because, or he won't call us, because, he still, hangs on, to our past, failures.

[20:29] That we've let him down, just one too many times. Like Eli, we lay down, in the dark, away from his presence, we keep it, at a distance, and we think, he'll never come near.

That our sin, has disqualified us, from ever hearing him, personally, again. And it's spiritual, failures. It's like hearing a parent, calling you in, but staying hidden, in the shadows, because you assume, there is no way, they could be calling you.

You assume, the invitation, must be for the other kids. The women, and we get trapped, between the anxiety, of not knowing the future, and perhaps, the despair, of our past, failures.

We need a prophet, who can rescue us, from the blood. This is the gospel we need.

Samuel's prophetic ministry, shadows the arrival, of Jesus Christ, whose words, give life, but more than that, whose very life, tells us, whose very life, is prophetic, speaks to us, about what God is like.

[21 : 47] I've said it before, if you want to know, what God is like, the first place, to look, first place to look, is at the life, of Jesus. And God, is still a speaking, calling God, but now, he calls us, through his son.

Not only, do Jesus' words, speak, and not only, does his life, speak, but also, his death, speaks to us. His death, calls, answers, to us.

His blood, speaks to us, calling, and telling us, that there is a way, in which we can be saved. But the blood, of Jesus, speaks in different words, to us, than what Samuel, speaks to Eli.

The call, from Calvary, is not a word, of condemnation, judgment, or punishment, but forgiveness, and everlasting life, and peace.

And it's more, than just a word, telling us, that salvation, is possible. It's more, than just a, hypothetical theory, or formula. It's the actual, payment for our sins.

[22 : 57] Samuel's first job, as a prophet, was to speak, a word of judgment, to deliver bad news. But Jesus, absorbs the bad news, because he's judged, in our place. His blood, speaks an everlasting word, for your future.

Because every, every sin you've done, all your guilt, can be atoned for. Can be paid for, by God, at a cost to himself, in the same way, as a son.

And the truth is, you know, God didn't change, from Eli, to them. The God of the Bible, is the unchanging God.

He's the same God, same yesterday, today, and forever. And so, he's always been, the God of mercy, and grace. It's his character. And you wonder, if only Eli, had remembered that.

If only Eli, had heard the voice, of Samuel, instead, and instead of just, hearing it, and accepting his lot, if he'd heard, that kind of like, as a word of discipline, and instead, turned, and ran, and repented, thrown himself, on the floor, would Eli, have had his sins, atoned for them, realize, that he wasn't, just a lost cause?

[24 : 14] In a time, when we might feel like Eli, there are things, we've done in the past, where even a memory of them, sends a shiver down the spine. And it might even be things, years ago, or maybe in the last week.

We play it back, we think, how could I have been that stupid? And we feel like, kind of self-condemnation. And you might even think, as it comes in your brain, imagine, what would everyone think, if you're saying you?

I don't deserve to be here, sat amongst this group of people. Maybe I should just accept, that you know, that's my law. Why would God want anything, to do with me?

Well, like Eli, maybe, we might need to remember, what God's character is like. It might seem like, that God should punish you.

And the truth is, that we are deserving of that. But if you're feeling like that, or if you ever have done, this is the best news. We don't have to think like it.

[25 : 20] We don't have to lie down in the dark, thinking that God will stay far away, that you've missed your chance. His presence is closer, than your own breath.

It's because of Jesus' blood. The light is not flickering, and nearly going out, it is burning brightly. Jesus' blood speaks of that, a word for today, for tomorrow, and for all of your days to come.

God promises to be always, with those who turn to him. We don't have to be an Eli, resigned to judgment. There is no sin too big, that Jesus' blood can't cover.

It sins. It redeems. And it pays to be uttered. So how should we respond, when we hear God calling us?

Well, let's allow, a 12 year old boy, to teach us. Hearing the living God, called him for the first time. He recognizes his name, but the voice, not familiar.

[26 : 22] And we understand, from that, Samuel's misunderstanding, don't we? It's obvious. If you were playing out, and you heard your name, you would run to your own front door.

You'd think, it's time for me to come in. And so Samuel, naturally goes to the only person, who would be calling his name, in the middle of the night. His mentor.

Thus far, the Lord calls Samuel, he runs, he says, here I am. Verse 5, you know, he ran to Eli, and here I am, he called me. Eli says, I think, I don't have to do with it. You go back and, go back to

sleep.

Happens again, verse 6, the third time, verse 8, this time Eli realizes, on the third time, what's going on, and tells Samuel, go and lie down. And the next time, you hear it, it's him.

Answer like this, speak, Lord. Your servant's listening. Fourth time, he comes, Samuel, Samuel, we hear that, the beauty of Samuel's obedience, to the mentor, in mirroring, what he's told him to answer.

[27 : 27] But he teaches us, how we respond to God's call. Speak, for your servant is listening. Samuel, is the example to Eli.

But he's also the example, to Israel. Israel. He will be the one, that brings hope to them. God will bring hope, to Israel, through Samuel. He will bring hope, that God hasn't forgotten them.

And when he speaks, they should respond, like he does. We get, as New Testament, children of God, filled by his spirit, we get to respond, in the same way, to our prophet, to Jesus, when he speaks.

When he speaks, through his word, when he speaks, through his life, when he speaks, through the cross, when his blood, speaks to us, we simply get, to say back, keep on speaking.

Speak, for I'm listening, your sermon, is listening. Means when we, open our Bibles, that is Jesus speaking.

[28 : 38] When we gather, on a Sunday, and hear the sermon, Jesus is speaking. When we look, at the cross, and think of the blood, that pays for our freedom, and forgiveness, that is Jesus speaking, and calling you.

We don't have to wait, for a voice in the dark. We get to hear Jesus, and say hear us. Speak, and speak again, because, I'm listening.

We began, by thinking, alongside that, the calling, on our lives, we'd love it all, to be mapped out. But you see, that the calling, on our lives, is much simpler, to understand.

The calling, is simply, to follow Jesus, and his ways. Which, perhaps, that sounds, too simple. But actually, it frees us, to live, because it means, we can rest, in the not knowing, what tomorrow will bring.

It means, that instead of, worrying, and thinking, about life's, specific purpose, and you know, the plan, for the next 10 years, what we get, to live, is a calling, that thinks out, the plan, for the next 10 minutes.

[29 : 51] There's some brilliant, words, in Proverbs 3, that help us, to understand. Listen, listen to this word, probably some of us know, a lot of us will know, the writer, of the Proverbs, writes, trust in the Lord, with all your heart, and lean not, on your own understanding.

In all your ways, submit to him, and he will make, your path straight. You see, what that means, it means, that, we don't, we live, in the ways of our life, the ways that we live, in moment by moment, when we serve in Jesus, that's the thing that matters.

You can't serve Jesus, this afternoon, until this afternoon. You're called, to serve Jesus, now, in the immediate, in the present moments, of your life.

That's your calling. Serve Jesus, follow him, listen to him, for the right now, moments of your life. And if you don't know, what to do, speak Lord, I'm listening.

It's prayer. That's what he's doing, isn't it? It's what he's praying. Saints, God, speak Lord, I'm listening. It's prayer, ask for wisdom, ask for help. And if we live that way, every day, moment by moment, minute by minute, hour by hour, moment by moment, faithfulness.

[31 : 12] You know the big stuff in life? The specific purpose, the 10 year plan, the decisions we wish, were given to us. He'll work it all out. He will, what does it say?

He will make your paths straight. He'll guide and lead you with the what you're meant to do, when you're meant to do it, and how, just by living moment by moment, moment, faithfulness.

That's your calling. We get to live as servants, hour by hour, day by day, and leave the rest into God's hands. Amen. Amen. A child called in from the front door doesn't need to know the dinner menu for the next week.

They just need to drop what they're doing, run home, and what they need to eat will be ready. Jesus has opened the door, and he's spoken, and he's called each of us.

He doesn't give us a 10 year plan, but we get to say to him for the next 10 minutes, here I am. Moment by moment, living faithfully, asking this question.

[32 : 25] You know, this is the question. It was a gimmick in the 90s, but it's still relevant. What would Jesus do? What would Jesus do if he were in your shoes?

In the circumstances of your life, in the decisions you have, minute by minute, you say, what would Jesus do if he had my decision, my life to make, and that's what you need to do?

Jesus' blood speaks and calls to each of us that a debt is paid in full. There is no sin too big that Jesus' blood can't cover. It saves, it redeems, it pays to the utmost. And so this sermon, all of us together now, this moment is Jesus calling out to you today.

He's speaking to you right now to live moment by moment. And you might have heard him speak many times before, but every time you sit and listen, Jesus is speaking afresh.

Listen to your prophet. Listen to Jesus. But equally, like some of you have heard him speak, equally, this might be the first time you've heard him call.

[33 : 40] Maybe you've sat in churches before and there's been a call in there, but the word has kind of washed off you like water off a duck's back. But this time, maybe right now, it's different.

Well, Jesus is calling you today as well. Right now, he's calling you to follow and respond. In this moment, today, you can respond. Right now, you can place your faith in Jesus Christ to his blood, speech, forgiveness, and pay us for your freedom and for your eternal life.

You can respond by saying, well, here I am. I'm here, Lord. I want to be your son. I want to listen. Last part.