

“Why Samuel?: Three Patterns of Life Considered”

1 Samuel 2:11-4:1a

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Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service

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The next four Sunday mornings we will continue to look at the first portion of First Samuel.

Back in May we looked at 1 Samuel 1:1 through 2:11. You may recall that we saw there how God was at work during a dark time. He opened Hannah’s womb in response to her faithfulness, leading to the birth of Samuel, whom she dedicated to the service of God. In that passage we also heard Hannah’s song, proclaiming that the Lord, Yahweh, the God of the Bible, would act in history to bring down the wicked in power, and raise up the humble and faithful who are poor and powerless.

And then she leaves her son Samuel, a young boy at that point, with Eli the priest, to serve in the tabernacle. And that is where we pick up now in 1 Samuel 2:11.

Almost anyone reading this book, from the original audience, to a Jew centuries later, to a Christian today, would know that Samuel would be a key leader in Israel – a prophet, a judge, a quasi-priest, instrumental in establishing the monarchy in Israel. And so, a reasonable question a believer of any period might bring to the text is: Why Samuel? Why was Samuel chosen for this role? Israel had judges before Samuel, they had a high priest, and heirs to the priesthood at the time. So why was Samuel, a relative outsider, chosen by God to be elevated to this important role? It’s a good question, and so as you hear our text this morning, I’d encourage you to listen with that question in mind.

And as in the past, I will read “Yahweh,” the covenant name of God found in the Hebrew text, in the places where the English translation tradition has replaced it with the title “the LORD” in all caps.

With all that said, please listen carefully now, for this is God’s word for us this morning ...

^{2:11} Then Elkanah [that is, the husband of Hannah] went home to Ramah. And the boy [that is, Samuel] was ministering to Yahweh in the presence of Eli the priest.

¹² Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know Yahweh. ¹³ The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, ¹⁴ and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. ¹⁵ Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, “Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw.” ¹⁶ And if the man said to him, “Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish,” he would say, “No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force.” ¹⁷ Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of Yahweh, for the men treated the offering of Yahweh with contempt.

¹⁸ Samuel was ministering before Yahweh, a boy clothed with a linen ephod. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, “May Yahweh give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of Yahweh.” So then they would return to their home.

²¹ Indeed Yahweh visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of Yahweh.

²² Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ²³ And he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. ²⁴ No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of Yahweh spreading abroad. ²⁵ If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against Yahweh, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of Yahweh to put them to death.

²⁶ Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with Yahweh and also with man.

²⁷ And there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, “Thus says Yahweh, ‘Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? ²⁸ Did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel. ²⁹ Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?’ ³⁰ Therefore Yahweh, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever,’ but now Yahweh declares: ‘Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. ³¹ Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father’s house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. ³² Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. ³³ The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men. ³⁴ And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. ³⁵ And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever. ³⁶ And everyone who is left in your house shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and shall say, “Please put me in one of the priests’ places, that I may eat a morsel of bread.””

³ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to Yahweh in the presence of Eli. And the word of Yahweh was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of Yahweh, where the ark of God was.

⁴ Then Yahweh called Samuel, and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵ and ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down.

⁶ And Yahweh called again, “Samuel!” and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know Yahweh, and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ And Yahweh called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that Yahweh was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Yahweh, for your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ And Yahweh came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.” ¹¹ Then Yahweh said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹² On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”

¹⁵ Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of Yahweh. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ But Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹⁷ And Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.” ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, “It is Yahweh. Let him do what seems good to him.”

¹⁹ And Samuel grew, and Yahweh was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of Yahweh. ²¹ And Yahweh appeared again at Shiloh, for Yahweh revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of Yahweh.

4 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

So, we said that the question an attentive reader of any era would likely bring to this book is: “Why Samuel?” Why was Samuel chosen for this role and not someone else – someone already in a role to do it?

And to answer that question, our text shows us three patterns of life: The pattern of Hophni & Phinehas, the pattern of Eli, and the pattern of Samuel. And from that, an answer emerges to that question, and along with it a set of questions for our own lives as well. So, let's consider the three patterns our text puts before us.

The first pattern we see is the pattern of Hophni and Phinehas. We learn a lot about Hophni and Phinehas in this passage – so how would we summarize the pattern of their lives?

Dale Davis points out that the first thing that should strike us as we come to our text is that right before it is Hannah's song. Hannah's song spoke of the arrogant, mighty, and wicked – those who contend with Yahweh ... and now in Hophni and Phinehas we meet them! [Davis, 29-30]

In Hophni and Phinehas we see lives lived in the pattern of sinful seizing – sinfully seizing, grasping at, that which God has not given them. And we see it come out in a number of ways.

First, there's the way they treat the sacrifices.

With the historical distance we have from the sacrificial system we can mistakenly think of their sin in this area as a technical error. But to them, and to any Israelite of their time, Hophni and Phinehas's sin was bold and blatant. Let's take a closer look at it.

It appears that the sacrifice being described here is the peace offering [Jordan, Lecture 2; Davis, 30]. We learn in Leviticus 7 that in the peace offering the worshiping family comes to the tabernacle, they make their sacrifice, the fat of the sacrifice is to be burned as an offering to God, the breast is to be given to the priests in general, the right thigh is to be given to the priest who assisted with the sacrifice, and then the rest of the meat is to be eaten by the family themselves – it's a sacrifice in which the worshipers eat the meal together and fellowship together in God's presence as part of their worship. The rules are actually pretty straightforward, and they combine honor towards God, provision for the priests, and a meal of celebratory worship for the worshippers.

What we see in our text is that Hophni and Phinehas were not only taking what was theirs according to the law, but they were brazenly, even violently, seizing what rightfully belonged to the worshipers, and what rightfully belonged to God.

In 2:13-14 we learn that they were stealing what was rightfully the Israelites. The peace offering was meant to be a time of fellowship and celebration – where God's people enjoyed God's good gifts, his presence, and their time together as God's people. And in 2:13-14 we learn that Hophni and Phinehas had a custom of sending other temple workers to seize a portion of each family's feast, and to bring it to them.

This wasn't a technical misstep on their part. They were stealing from the worshiping Israelites. And worse than that, they were using their religious authority to do it. An Israelite would have rightly and clearly seen it as an act of theft when Hophni and Phinehas sent their temple servants to each of their peace offering feasts, with their forks, to plunge them into their cooking pots.

Hophni and Phinehas were using their priestly position to steal from God's people.

And they didn't stop there. They were also very obviously using it to steal from God. That's what we see in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 2.

Here we see Hophni and Phinehas send their servants to take for them the fat portions which the Israelites were commanded to offer to God. And worse than that, they threaten to use the priestly workers as their hired thugs, to violently seize the fat if the worshipers don't give it to them. Again, this is not a technical variation on Leviticus 7, it is a high-handed sin.

The closest analogy I can think of is, if one day, during the time in our service where the tithes and offerings were collected, if Pastor Rayburn and I walked up to your pew and demanded that you hand your tithe over to us, rather than putting it into the offering plate. You might protest, you might remind us that the offerings are meant to be divided up in a specific way, with portions serving God's kingdom in various ways. You might remind us that we will get a predetermined portion in our compensation, but that other portions will go to God in different

ways. And then imagine Pastor Rayburn looks at you and says, “You are going to hand that over now, or we are going to take it.” And imagine I look at your pew and say “You know, you’ve got a lovely family here with you this morning. I’d hate for something to happen to them. I’d sure hate for any of them to get hurt.”

If we did that, no one would think it as a minor thing. But that’s basically what Hophni and Phinehas were doing! They were seizing what belonged to God. And not only that, they were threatening to act in violence against worshiping families if they did not hand it over!

In how they handled the sacrifices, Hophni and Phinehas’s pattern was one of sinful seizing. They seized what belonged to those under their spiritual care. They seized what belonged to God. They were greedily grasping at what God had not given to them.

And as they did with the sacrifices, so they did with the women who worked at the tabernacle.

1 Samuel 2:22 tells us that it was widely known that Hophni and Phinehas slept with “the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.”

It’s important for us to note that the problem here was not that women served at the entrance of the tent of meeting, but with how Hophni and Phinehas treated them. We learn in Exodus 38:8 that from the beginning of tabernacle worship, under the ministry of Moses, women served at the entrance of the tent of meeting. We don’t know exactly what role they played, but they had some sort of role of service or ministry there – something distinct from the priests, elder, and Levites, but something that fit in with the tabernacle ministry as a whole. So, their presence was not new or a problem. The problem was Hophni and Phinehas treating these women as if they were there to serve them, instead of there to serve God – more than that: they acted as if the women were theirs to do with as they pleased. The women were there to serve God. And rather than defending and protecting what was God’s (as priests were supposed to do), they plundered what was God’s. We don’t know exactly what that looked like, but knowing human nature, and knowing Hophni and Phinehas’s character based on how they handled the sacrifices, we can begin to imagine how they used their power in these situations.

The sins of Hophni and Phinehas were sins of seizing. They were sins of grasping at what was not rightfully theirs. Of plunging their forks in other’s pots and acting as if God’s things and God’s people were there for them to take as they pleased.

And this pattern of sin was not new. In some ways it is the pattern of sin from the very beginning. Adam and Eve were given the fruit of every tree in the garden except one. And what did they do? They seized the one fruit not given to them. All sin has shared in this pattern in some way ever since. It is overt in the case of Hophni and Phinehas – it hits us right between the eyes. But we do it too, don’t we? Hopefully not as brazenly and unrepentantly as Hophni and Phinehas – but we are not free from this pattern. Where do you see it in your life?

What, in your heart, or your words, or your actions do you grasp at – do you long to seize if only you could, whether God has given it to you or not?

Maybe it's more esteem from others you want to seize. Maybe it's more wealth. Maybe it's more power. Maybe it's more prestige for you or your family. Maybe it's a sexual union with someone God has not given to you. Maybe it's your time or money that God or your family or someone else has a rightful claim to, but instead of giving them their due, you cling to it for yourself.

What is it for you that God has not given to you, but in one way or another you grasp at it and long to seize more of it for yourself?

How do you walk in the pattern of Hophni and Phinehas in thought, word, or deed?

Our text is clear: there is no place for the pattern of Hophni and Phinehas among God's people. Where do you need to confront their pattern of life in your heart?

So ... sinful seizing: That is the first pattern we see in our text. It is why Hophni and Phinehas will be torn down by God rather than raised up. And it will lead to us being torn down as well, if we embrace the same way of life.

But that is not the only problematic pattern our text puts before us.

The second pattern it shows us is the pattern of Eli.

In 2002 the sexual abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church became national and then international news. The individual cases in which priests had sexually abused boys were horrifying.

But what also horrified the public was not just the actions of those abusive priests, but the inaction of those with authority over them. In case after case those in authority who learned of the abuse did nothing substantial to deal with it. Often abusive priests were merely moved around. The pattern that emerged, and which struck the greatest blow to the Roman Catholic Church's moral credibility was that rather than fulfilling their calling to serve those under their care, the hierarchy of the church had followed a pattern of sheltering sin – of sheltering sin itself by either inaction or by actively protecting abusers. As their pattern of sheltering sin has been exposed, many in authority in the Roman Catholic Church have fallen.

Last fall the stories began to break about sexual harassment and assault in the entertainment industry. Again, the individual stories of those who harassed or assaulted those they had power over were terrible. But along with those stories came the refrain again and again that such behaviors by specific men were open secrets in Hollywood. Many knew about it, but for years no one did anything about it. They chose to shelter sin rather than stand up for what was right. And in the months that followed, at least some have faced some consequences for their action or inaction.

Last December *The New York Times* ran a story about the history of sexual harassment in two large Ford plants in Chicago. The story told of two massive lawsuits brought against Ford – one having to do with harassment in the 90s and another having to do with harassment more recently. Again, in both cases, what is shocking in the stories these women tell is not only how they were

harassed, but their claims of how many supervisors and even union representatives failed to help them or even actively obstructed them when they tried to report what happened. Those supervisors and representatives chose to shelter sin rather than serve those under their care.

This past January Larry Nassar was sentenced to between 40 and 125 years in prison for sexual abuse he perpetrated on girls as a doctor to gymnasts. Rachael Denhollander became the face of the over 100 women who said they had been abused by him over the last 30 years. But as details emerged it came out that reports of his abuse were made as early as 1997. Larissa Boyce claims that when she went to her gymnastics coach at Michigan State University, the coach did not believe her even when another gymnast shared a similar story. Instead, she warned Boyce there could be consequences for everyone if she filed a report against Nassar, and she required Boyce to return to Nassar. Though the details of what happened are disputed, according to Boyce, the MSU coach chose to shelter Larry Nassar's sin, rather than protect the girls under her care.

This is a pattern that has been exposed again and again in a variety of settings. And the Evangelical church is not immune from such patterns. Similar patterns of sheltering sin have been exposed in a range of Evangelical churches – patterns of leaders sheltering sin when they should have been protecting the abused and exploited. Ross Douthat, a conservative Roman Catholic, and Peter Wehner, a member of a PCA church, have each written op-ed pieces in *The New York Times* about these patterns in some churches, and the fact that God seems to be exposing them. Al Mohler, the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has also recently written on God's exposing judgment on his own denomination in this area. In the past month pieces have appeared in *Christianity Today*, *The Washington Post* and *The New Yorker*. In these different pieces the stories told vary, but the concern, the focus, is not just on the individual cases, but the pattern of failing to protect those who need protection – the pattern of sheltering sin rather than serving those under their care.

As Ross Douthat points out, we seem to be living in an age where God is revealing that pattern of sheltering sin in the very people who should have been putting a stop to it. The pattern has been exposed in a wide range of places: from Hollywood to the Roman Catholic Church, from factory floors, to elite college sports, to Evangelical churches and institutions.

And it's the very same pattern we see in our text in the life of Eli.

I'm always wary of preachers too readily tying a Biblical text to current events – of them finding some superficial link between the text and an item in the news in order to try to make the text seem more relevant.

But sometimes a text truly is relevant to current events.

Let's be clear about at least part of what we see in Eli in our text this morning. Here we see a man whom God is going to judge, because through his inaction he knowingly sheltered those under his authority who (among other things) were using their position to sexually exploit the women who were under their authority. That pattern sounds awfully familiar in our culture today. And the Bible has something to say about it. Those who, whether by actively protecting them, or through simple inaction, sheltered those whom they knew were exploiting the

vulnerable and powerless, they are those who walk in the pattern of Eli. And God does not look kindly on those who walk in the pattern of Eli.

We see Eli do good things in 1 Samuel. We see the loving way he treats Samuel. But that will not turn away God's wrath. Eli sheltered sin – he tolerated those under his authority as they stole from God, as they stole from worshipping Israelites, and as they sexually exploited the women who came to the temple to minister there. And God promises to judge him.

Eli wasn't a powerless old man. First, he was Hophni and Phinehas's father, but that was only the beginning. He also was their high priest, and so he had ecclesiastical authority over them – he could take action to put them under church discipline. On top of that he was their boss – they worked for him. He had the authority to remove them from office! We also learn in 1 Samuel 4:8 that he was a judge in Israel. That meant he had civil authority over them as well! There were multiple ways Eli had authority over Hophni and Phinehas to confront them pointedly, and multiple ways he had authority to put their sin to a stop even if they did not respond rightly to his confrontation.

What does he do instead? Instead we see a relatively soft confrontation with no teeth, and no action taken to put things to a stop when they fail to repent. Eli seems to try to coax them rather than command them. [Jordan, Lecture 2]. He takes no action to expel them from their priestly office or to act from his civil authority as judge [Davis, 35-36; Firth, 69].

And Eli had many opportunities to act more decisively. Even after Samuel delivers his prophecy to Eli, Eli could have repented and taken action. Instead he responds with what one commentator calls "pious resignation." [Alter, 19]. But that is not the kind of piety God wanted. He wanted repentance.

Why did Eli do this? Why didn't he take action?

It would seem that Eli allowed what was comfortable, and easier, and what he wanted to be true to shape his actions. It was hard and uncomfortable to take action against his sons. He wanted to believe that such harsh action wasn't necessary. We can imagine he came up with rationalizations for his inactions. And our text seems to symbolically hint at a decline in Eli's spiritual vision and insight as he did so [Leithart, 48 n.9; Jordan, Lecture 3].

We also get the impression that while Eli was not committing the same acts as Hophni and Phinehas, he *was* benefiting from them. In 2:29 the man of God seems to include Eli in those whom he says have been "fattening" themselves on God's sacrifices. When we learn in the next chapter (in 4:18) that Eli was "heavy," we are surely to consider that while he may not have taken the fat portions of the sacrifices himself or outwardly approved of them being taken ... they still seemed to have somehow ended up in his stomach quite often. [Leithart, 51; Davis, 36 n.9]

And so, though Eli has not committed the acts of Hophni and Phinehas, he is rightly held responsible for them. God is right to say to him: "you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings [...] and honor your sons above me." (2:29)

Eli's pattern of life was that he sheltered sin. Through protection and inaction from his place of authority he allowed evil men to continue to operate – men whose sin he had the authority to a stop. Instead he sheltered them from the consequences of their sin. And for that, he is judged.

And lest we feel too sorry for Eli, we can imagine what it would be like to sit under his ministry. Imagine being the Israelite who comes to the tabernacle to celebrate the feast of the peace offering only to have Hophni and Phinehas's servant show up to seize part of their meal, and for Eli to know about it and have power to stop it, but he does nothing. Or consider trying to make your offering to God only to have a thug threaten to beat up you or your family if you don't give to Hophni and Phinehas what was supposed to go to God, and again, Eli knows of it, and could remove them from office, but does nothing. Or imagine if you (or your daughter, or your sister) were one of the women who came to the tabernacle to serve, and imagine experiencing or having them experience the harassment of Hophni and Phinehas as they tried to sexually exploit or take advantage of them, and Eli knew it was going on, and did nothing to stop it, even though he could have.

Then how would you feel?

When we think about it, the sin of Eli is heinous. God is right to judge him. But his sin, his pattern of life, is also not unique.

It's a pattern of life that we see being exposed in every sector of society right now: from Hollywood to factory floors to local churches. God is indeed bringing down a number of Elis. It's heartbreaking and horrifying to learn of such sin, but it should be encouraging that just as he did in our text, God is exposing and judging it today as well.

Hopefully in our own lives our sin is not as heinous as Eli's, but we must look closely to examine if we see that pattern taking root in our lives as well. I pray that it's not in the full-blown pattern we see in Eli. We don't have the same power Eli did. Yet I think we often succumb to his pattern in small and maybe even large ways.

Here's one small way some of you might relate to: If you are on social media, and some politician has a scandal or a moral failing reported, it's usually painfully predictable how different friends you have will respond. You know that while those who already didn't like the public figure will probably condemn them, some of your friends who like that politician or celebrity will find some way to come to their defense, no matter how damning the evidence presented and no matter how pathetic the excuses they come up with are.

Now that might be a somewhat small thing ... but let's recognize that it is walking in the pattern of Eli. It is a way to downplay, and ignore, and on some level shelter sin when it would be convenient for us to do so. And we all can be tempted to do it. And most people see through it. And it can do real damage to our witness when we do it, because we can honor our political tribe or our theological tribe more than God when we do that.

But there are other ways that are more consequential.

We can shelter sin in our children. When they are little, we can fail to provide the instruction, and example, and discipline they need to repent of their sin, and by doing so we shelter their sin. Or, when they're older, when they sin against someone else and consequences come from beyond us, we can be tempted to defend our children no matter the wrong they have done – sheltering their sin rather than lovingly but firmly confronting it.

Or in our jobs or other institutions we may know of wrongdoing ... but we also know the cost of confronting it, and we see the benefits of just leaving it alone, and so we look the other way – we shelter sin.

Or simply consider how you respond when you are confronted with a story you don't want to be true – whether in the news or in your personal life – when someone you know or love or respect is accused of wrongdoing, or an institution you love is accused of wrongdoing. Is it just me, or in those situations do you find the story you don't want to be true to be the most difficult to believe, and any alternative that is more palatable, no matter how implausible, suddenly seems more believable to you? Of course, we always need to weigh the evidence when any accusation is made – that's not what I'm calling into question. I'm calling into question how easy it is to doubt stories we don't *want* to be true. People do it every day. And we're tempted to do the same. And that has some connection to the pattern of Eli. It's a temptation in certain situations to shelter sin. Chapter 2 verse 22 of our text says that Eli “kept hearing all that his sons were doing” and *then* he spoke to them. One wonders how many times Eli had to hear it before he considered that it might be true. How many worshippers did he doubt at first? How many women serving at the tabernacle did he disregard at the beginning? Our tendency to doubt that which we don't want to be true is a habit of the heart in the pattern of Eli.

We could go on and on about where we might see this pattern. If you look, I suspect you will see it in your heart as well. Our text this morning is clear: there is no place for the pattern of Eli among the people of God. God will not tolerate it. He will tear down those who walk in Eli's way of life. And in our text, we are given warning. Where do you see that pattern in your life? Where do you need to turn from it?

So, we see the pattern of sinful seizing in Hophni and Phinehas. We see the pattern of sheltering sin in Eli. Our third pattern comes from Samuel.

It is in Samuel that we see the pattern of sacrificial service.

We encounter Samuel in our text as a young man, and we are shown again and again how he refuses to seize what has not been given to him, he refuses to shelter sin. Instead, whenever we see him he is serving.

First, it's worth noticing the temptation Samuel might have felt to seize power and control at the temple, but his persistent refusal to do so.

Samuel was serving under the flawed leadership of Eli and the corrupt priesthood of Hophni and Phinehas. He saw their sin. But rather than trying to overthrow or supplant them – rather than trying to seize power, he serves.

We find Samuel serving in the temple. We might wonder: If Samuel isn't a priest, isn't he seizing a role not given to him by ministering in the tabernacle in the first place? The answer, actually, is no. We need to do a little digging to get at the answer to that question, though.

We learn in 1 Chronicles 6:22-28 that Samuel is a Levite. That's why he is able to minister in the tabernacle. More specifically, he is a Kohathite, and we learn in Numbers 3:31 that the Kohathites were assigned to care for "the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the vessels of the sanctuary with which the priests minister, and the screen." [Jordan, Lecture 1]

Samuel was a descendant of Kohath. And so, when we find him serving in the tabernacle, and being associated with the lamp and the ark, he is not seizing, but he's actually serving in exactly the way God called him to in the Scriptures.

His role will expand to become at least semi-priestly [Leithart, 49], but this would seem to flow from the combined streams of his role as a Levite and his calling as a prophet.

When Samuel hears his name called in chapter three, he responds like a servant, running to Eli and presenting himself. When he interacts with God he does the same thing. Even after receiving the prophecy, rather than getting up the next morning full of pride and asserting himself in the tabernacle, we read in 3:15 that Samuel got up and began serving in the tabernacle – began opening it up for people to come in. Again and again, we see Samuel acting as a servant. He refuses the temptation to seize.

He also refuses the temptation to shelter sin. It's easy to miss it, but after Samuel receives his vision, it is possible that he would have said nothing to Eli. Or that he would have softened the word of God when Eli asked about it. In other words, it would have been tempting for Samuel to shelter Eli from the judgment on his sins. But instead we read in 3:18: "Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him." Samuel did not shelter Eli's sin. Instead he served God, and in serving God he served Eli – by telling him what he truly needed to hear.

Samuel does not seize, he does not shelter sin, but he serves both God and those around him.

The result of Samuel's faithfulness is a bursting forth of God's word among God's people. As Firth puts it, our text "moves from a shortage of Yahweh's word [in 3:1] to an abundance [in 3:21 and following], all of which is centered on the person of Samuel" [Firth, 75]. Through his humble service, his refusal to seize or shelter sin, God's people begin to be renewed with God's word.

And so, as Hophni and Phinehas, and Eli give us warnings, Samuel gives us a trajectory: he gives us a pattern of life to aim for.

Where do you need to embrace the pattern of Samuel in your life?

Samuel does give us a trajectory, he does give us a goal to aim at with our lives, but that's not all he gives us.

He also gives us a glimpse of the Lord who helps us pursue that goal.

Because as we look at this text, as we consider both the warnings and the exhortations, we see our sin. We see our failure. We see where we have walked in the pattern of Hophni and Phinehas. We see where we have walked in the pattern of Eli. We see where we have failed to serve like Samuel.

And when we see that is when we need to remember that our Lord Jesus Christ, the greater Samuel, also came to serve and not to seize. He did not come to the world to plunder – to take that which already looked good to him. He did not come to cherry pick the perfect and take them off for himself. He came to serve. He came to serve those who would trust in him.

He came to forgive you and me when we confess our sins and cling to him in faith. He came to help us grow – to help us turn from our sin and selfishness and turn to a better, more beautiful way of living. He offers us his grace and help – the only question is whether we will take it.

But even as we remember that, as we remember that Jesus does not walk in the pattern of Hophni and Phinehas, we need to remember that he also does not walk in the pattern of Eli.

Jesus did not come to shelter our sin, or the sins of our families, our friends, or our institutions. He came to kill our sin, so that he might save us. And if we refuse to let him do that, he will confront us as he did Eli.

Your sin is not safe around Jesus. He will not wring his hands and do nothing as Eli did. He will take action.

And so, while you remember that Christ came to serve his people, to forgive and grow them, know also that he will never shelter your sin. And so whatever sin you are secretly holding on to, he demands it be dealt with. He demands that you bring it to him, that you bring it to the light, and that you turn away from it.

In our text we get a picture of what we far too often do, we get a picture of what we far too rarely do, and we get a picture of our Lord.

If we are attentive to this Word, then we know we need to grow – we need to turn from some things and turn towards others.

And if we are paying attention, we also know the one who will enable us to do that. We know the ultimate Samuel, who will serve us as part of God's people, just as Samuel did. Who will deliver the full Word of God to us, just as Samuel did. And who will open the doors of the house of God for us, just as Samuel did.

Let us go to him and ask him to do just that in our lives so that we too might resemble not only Samuel, but the one Samuel points us to.

Amen.

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