

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Lessons from the life of Samuel: Devoted to God (1 Samuel 2:21, 26; 3:19-20; 4:1a)

It may be well at the beginning of our talk today to look at the meaning of the word “devoted” and its corresponding noun “devotion” We use the word in general conversation; sometimes we hear it said that a wife has been devoted to her husband throughout her life. We mean that her husband has been her priority in life, she has put his wellbeing first. We need to ask ourselves, if we are Christians, what has first place in our lives? More important, **who** has the pre-eminent place?

Samuel was born at a sad time in Israel’s history; nothing much had changed since the time of the Judges. Throughout the book of Judges the solemn refrain occurs, *“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25).

Devotion is like a pearl shining against a dark background. It is striking that in the small book which lies between Judges and 1 Samuel, the book of Ruth, we find a family situation in which there were godly hopes and aspirations. This little book is a love story because Ruth, the Gentile stranger, became the wife of Boaz (Ruth 4:13), a mighty man of wealth (Ruth 2:1). The fruit of the marriage was a son called Obed (Ruth 4:13-17). Samuel became the link in the chain because eventually he anointed David, the king of God’s choice, in the house of his father Jesse. The book of Ruth closes like this, *“And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David”* (Ruth 4:22)

Hannah a godly woman

Hannah, who became the mother of Samuel, comes before us very early in 1 Samuel (1 Samuel 1:2). She appears as a very godly woman, but there was a sorrow in her life which she found hard to bear; she had no children (1 Samuel 1:2-5). She was one of two wives; the other wife, Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:2) did have children. To add to Hannah’s sadness, Peninnah provoked Hannah severely (1 Samuel 1:7). Nevertheless her husband, Elkanah, loved Hannah: *“but the LORD had shut up her womb”* (1 Samuel 1:6).

Every year when she went up to the house of the LORD, being under great pressure, she wept and did not eat (1 Samuel 1:7). Her husband tried to comfort her but to no avail (1 Samuel 1:8). Christians often find themselves in trying circumstances, difficult to understand. Maybe someone who is listening today is under a burden. We have all been there at sometime in our lives; we pray and it just seems there is no answer. We are inclined to blame circumstances but that wasn’t the case with Hannah, was it? We have just read that it was the LORD who shut up her womb (1 Samuel 1:6).

However, it was her custom each year to go up to Shiloh, to the house of the LORD. She was a woman accustomed to praying; in this she is an example to us in our day. Do we avail ourselves of this great privilege? On one occasion we read that, *“She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore”* (1 Samuel 1:10). She got very little sympathy from the aged priest, Eli, who saw the expression of her sorrow as the result of strong drink (1 Samuel 1:13-16). Had he had priestly discernment, he would have shown more sympathy.

At the end of this visit to Shiloh we read, *“And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew his wife; and the LORD remembered her”* (1 Samuel 1:19). This must have been a great joy to Hannah. We remember, earlier on in this book, that Hannah had promised to give her child to the LORD all the days of his life. Hannah called his name Samuel which meant “asked of God”, saying, *“Because I have asked him of the LORD.”* (1 Samuel 1:20)

Referring to our subject of devotion, we must first of all consider Hannah’s devotion. However long she had waited for an answer to her prayer we are not sure, but her commitment to the promise she had made was sure. The next time the family made their yearly journey to Shiloh we read, *“But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever”* (1 Samuel 1:22). *“And when she had weaned him, she took Samuel up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young”* (1

Samuel 1:24). Hannah kept her promise at great cost to herself; her gifts were in no way meagre; what she gave was with her whole heart.

Hannah's prayer

1 Samuel 2 contains Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10). It is full of thanksgiving, giving the LORD all the credit. We must never forget this important element in our prayer life; it is easy to take all for granted. Let's listen to some words of the Apostle Paul in the letter to the Philippians, *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"* (Philippians 4:6). We should not forget to do this. Hannah had great faith; we can understand her having misgivings in sending Samuel to Shiloh where he might come under the influence of the two sons of Eli the priest, Hophni and Phinehas (see 1 Samuel 2:12-17). They were very wicked men (1 Samuel 2:12); they were priests but we are told that they knew not the LORD (1 Samuel 2:12). They were bullies; they made sure they got their own way. However, we do not really know whether this concerned her or not; Scripture does not say. But it does say that she came to visit him each year and always brought along a new little coat (1 Samuel 2:18-19). Although she could not be near her son, she was aware of his needs and she kept abreast of his growth. Happy are those parents today who follow her good example!

Christians have often remarked that "God is no man's debtor". The first verse at the start of this talk says, *"And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters"* (1 Samuel 2:21). When God gives, He gives liberally! These children would, to some extent, replace Samuel in the home. This is something like the Lord's promise in Matthew 19:29: *"And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters...or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life."*

Samuel's growth

The first two verses given at the head of our talk concern Samuel's growth. Let's read them: *"And the child Samuel grew before the LORD"* (1 Samuel 2:21). *"And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men"* (1 Samuel 2:26).

Thinking of 1 Samuel 2:21, 26, we cannot miss the importance given to Samuel's growing. 1 Samuel 2:21, 26 refer, of course, to his physical development. He was a normal child, growing up from year to year. God takes great interest in His servants; He had a special role for Samuel to fill. As we have already said, it was an extremely dark day in Israel morally (see Judges 21:25). We have talked about Hannah's devotion and similar devotion was to characterise Samuel. So we come to the conclusion that growth is of great importance.

When the Lord Jesus was here, very similar words were recorded about Him. These are found in the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus is seen in perfection as a man. Let's read from Luke 2:52, *"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"*. In the same chapter we read of Him as a babe (Luke 2:1-38), then as a child (Luke 2:39-40), further on as the boy, twelve years old (Luke 2:41-51). In Luke 3:23, He is said to be thirty years old. That was at the time of His baptism (Luke 3:21-22).

Returning to Samuel, let's look again at the verse quoted at the beginning of our talk, *"And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with man"* (1 Samuel 2:26). We have said a good deal about physical growth, but what is of greater importance is spiritual growth. We do not know his age at this particular time; he is still described as a child, but the LORD had His eye upon His chosen servant. It is very obvious as we read of the future life and actions of Samuel that he matured quickly and fulfilled his place as a prophet of the LORD. He was greatly valued by the nation at a time of spiritual depression. What was needed was a servant who was marked by devotion and a steadfast purpose, one who was not easily diverted from the task in hand.

Let's move away in thought from those far distant days and focus our attention on the year 2004. I trust that this talk today is heard by true believers who are saddened by the apathy and lack of reality that exists. In the profession of Christianity the line of demarcation between the church and the world is so badly blurred. The Bible does not have the place it used to have in this country. One of the problems is that people have no time to read; we don't live in a reading society - entertainment is provided by the flick of a switch. Our talk is about devotion today; are we prepared for the cost? The Apostle Paul was a striking example of this, *"For to me to live is Christ..."* (Philippians 1:21). He really meant that Christ was his reason for living. There is a need today for Christians, both young and old, who are ready to give themselves with a whole heart to the Lord.

We will return again to the subject of spiritual growth. Samuel started well. Many of us start well but grow weary. We have already called attention to Samuel's on-going growth. This matter of spiritual growth is given a good deal of attention in the New Testament. It is abnormal for a believer to be stunted in growth. The Apostle John writes of believers in a family setting in his first letter, 1 John, to Christians living in his day. He divides God's family into stages

and refers to spiritual age: fathers, young men, and little children (see 1 John 2:13). This is a normal progression in any family situation.

Nourishment

As parents, we are aware of the need for good nourishing food for the natural well being of our families. Many ailments are caused by food which does not contain the right nutrition. So growth and suitable food go hand in hand.

Referring again to the letter written by the Apostle John, he gives a very clear indication as to the right kind of food for Christians. Listen to what he says to the young men, "...I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14). The expression "abideth" gives the impression that the Word of God had a firm hold in their lives. Are we feeding on the right kind of food? Is the Bible our constant chart in life?

Our attitude to the reading of the Word of God is very important. The Apostle Peter views this in a different way; he is not so much concerned with different stages of growth or age, but is concerned with desire and likens every believer to a new born babe with regard to the intensity of appetite. Let's listen to what he says, "*As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*" (1 Peter 2:2).

Those of us who are parents will no doubt remember when our children were very tiny. We may recall disturbed nights when the little one wouldn't be quiet until it was fed and satisfied. This describes the attitude the Christian should cultivate towards the Word of God.

Samuel the prophet

Let's think of Samuel as a prophet; he was this by God's appointment. He is referred to in the New Testament as the beginning of a line of prophets. The Apostle Peter tells us this. Peter was speaking of future days of blessing for the nation of Israel. Let's listen to what he had to say, "*Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those who follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days*" (Acts 3:24). The Apostle Paul also speaks of him as "*Samuel the prophet*" (Acts 13:20). So he is marked out for this service. We have already spoken of the breakdown of communication between God and His people. The aged priest Eli had little influence so Samuel was raised up as the prophet. The role of a prophet in Old Testament times was to be the spokesman between God and the people. There was the need for someone to fill the gap and Samuel was the man chosen.

This brings us to the third scripture referred to earlier in our talk, 1 Samuel 3:19. The first two were to do with Samuel's birth and infancy, also his early growth. We now think about his step into public service as a prophet. Let's look at that third scripture, "*And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground*" (1 Samuel 3:19). It must have been a great encouragement to Samuel to know that the LORD was with him. This was because Samuel was occupied in the service marked for him. It is equally important today for us, as Christians, to know what service the Lord has for us to do. This may give us a good deal of concern; it is a good thing if it does! The overriding matter is to commit it to the Lord prayerfully. We can rest assured if our work is of Him, we, too, will know His approval and presence with us. It is obvious that Samuel's service was helpful and just suited to the situation among the people.

There must have been great discouragement; the godly in the nation must have been yearning for someone like our prophet to help because his words had power. This isn't all, however. There was further cheer to the prophet; just listen, "*And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD*" (1 Samuel 3:20). It would mean increased responsibility but it would seem that he was equal to the task.

It is interesting to notice that, in the present day, there are prophets in the church. As we have considered Samuel as a prophet to his nation and that his words were highly valued, so in the Apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, prophets are referred to. Just look at what he says: "*And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers...*" (1 Corinthians 12:28). It should be pointed out that the day of the apostles has passed. Let's think of the function of a prophet now. We need to read from 1 Corinthians 14:3, "*But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort*". These things are always needed among believers. They have been put very simply:

- Building up,
- Stirring up,
- Binding up.

The work of a New Testament prophet, therefore is to help and encourage those who form part of a local church.

Samuel and Timothy

There is a remarkable similarity between Samuel and Timothy of whom we read in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul was Timothy's "father in the faith" (see 1 Timothy 1:2). Paul writes to Timothy to encourage him to read the scriptures, "*Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all*", (1 Timothy 4:15). In our days we must be whole-hearted. I remember many years ago being really impressed with 1 Timothy 4:15, it was while attending some Bible Readings on 1 Timothy. The words "*that thy profiting may appear to all*" really made me think. I don't know to whom I am talking to today, maybe a young believer attached to a company of Christians. May you know the cheer it would be for your fellow believers to say, "that young brother, or sister, is getting on well".

Samuel - a man of prayer

Samuel was a man of prayer. Later in the history of Israel, things got even worse. They turned to the most wicked idolatry which brought upon them judgement from God. We read about it in the book of Jeremiah. Let's listen, "*Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people: cast them out of my sight*" (Jeremiah 15:1). It says a lot for Samuel to be put alongside Moses who was one of the greatest intercessors Israel ever had.

Later on in Samuel's life he declares, "*God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way*", (1 Samuel 12:23). This is what devotion is about! Jesus spoke on one occasion about having a single eye. This is how He put it, "*The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body will be full of light*" (Matthew 6:22). It is a good thing to be assured as to the direction in which we are moving.

May the Lord help us in our day to give Him the willing devotion of our hearts!

Frances Ridley Havergal must have had this in mind when she wrote,

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days;
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

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