

God's Concern for Integrity

Intro

- Two Humbling Reminders
 - Redeemed Sinners
 - It must always be said that every person who steps up here to teach is just as much a sinner as anyone else.
 - We are all sinners who have been redeemed by the grace of God. In fact, it will be more accurate for me to introduce myself this way: **I am Tolu, a recovering sinner.**
 - **So if there is anything here that impacts your heart in that it draws you closer to God, it is not from me, it is from God.** Pay attention to the movement of God upon your heart
 - Pride and Humility
 - One of the consistent themes that runs through the bible narrative is that **God opposes the proud but gives more grace unto the humble.**

- You find phrases like this in Prov 3:34, James 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:5-6
- **If you are wondering why, it is simply this: pride by its nature is a rejection of God.** It consistently pushes God to the side and excludes him from its dealings. By so doing the proud set themselves as enemies of God
- **The proud say in their hearts, not necessarily with their lips, that there is no God.** We say this through our actions, through our beliefs and how we order our lives.
- Pride is a real and intent filled preference for my way or any other way, apart from the way of God. Whereas humility is a real and intent filled preference for the way of God
- **The humble know their own inadequacies.** They know that there is no hope to be found in themselves or in the arm of flesh. The humble throw themselves at the feet of God. They come to the end of themselves and know that they need God
- As we walk through today's passage, please do the following
 - **Be on the lookout for sightings of pride and humility, both in the text and then in our own hearts**

- Be on the lookout for sightings of hope, sightings of grace and of the coming Messiah

Context

- Our story today picks up in the time of Judges, with Samuel being known as the last judge of Israel.
- What came to characterize the latter part of this time period is the following phrase from Judges 17:6 and Judges 21:25
 - ***25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***
- What is interesting though is that at this time, **Israel had no human kings**. So what is the scripture referring to? We know that Israel's true king is God. **And so the idea then is that Israel had basically rejected God**
- **Essentially, this time period is marked by great moral apostasy**, where everyone did what they felt was right in their own opinions, which is eerily similar to our time

- If I am being honest, there are times I act exactly this way, where I do what is right in my own eyes - ***what I want, when I want it, and how I want it.***
- In rejecting God and elevating their desires and opinions above that of God, Israel was headed for great disaster...unless God stepped in

Recap So Far

- The narrative of 1 & 2 Samuel (this was originally one book that was split into two) starts up raising a very tense question: where is God in this twisted, moral apostasy? How will God bring about his rule? Who will he use to accomplish his purpose?
- The answer to this comes in the form of an unknown normal, every-day family. We are introduced to an infertile ordinary woman named Hannah who is deeply distressed by her condition - probably because of the shame of being infertile.
- This grieving, barren Hannah is actually a representation of fruitless and rebellious Israel. God intervened on behalf of Hannah and Israel through the

birth of a little and innocent child, named Samuel. The birth of Samuel signals the end of Hannah's infertility and Israel's apostasy.

- What we see, right from the beginning, and this will play out not only through the book of Samuel but also throughout redemptive history - that **"God is the kind of God who works, not through the mighty and popular, but rather through the weak and helpless, through nobodies"** (Tim Fox), and in our chapter through a particular nobody named Hannah
- It is true that barren Hannah is a representation of barren Israel. If we extract this, we will come to see that barren Hannah is a representation of all of God's people throughout the ages - with our struggles against sin, our own depravity and the brokenness around us, of which we are both victims and victimizers
- What then is the solution? The birth of Samuel signals a new phase in God's overarching plan of salvation. In the immediate context, it signals the end of Israel's apostasy. But the true fulfillment of this imagery of birth will be fulfilled in the person of Christ - the one who will truly bring an end to our apostasy, reconciling us to the father through his own sacrifice

- At the beginning of chapter 2, Hannah offers this wonderful poetic prayer that underscores the truth that God works through weak, helpless people to bring about his purposes. This is in complete opposition to how our world operates today.
- Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1 that “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong...so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” This is exactly the message of Hannah’s poetic prayer.
- A good summary for Hannah’s prayer is *“God opposes the proud. but gives more grace to the humble”* (James 4:6)
 - For example, in verse 1, Hannah rejoices greatly in the Lord...why?
Because of God’s salvation.
 - When we hear the word salvation, we often have this warm and fuzzy feeling. This is accurate and the posture of our heart should be one of gratitude to God because of his mercies and grace. Our gratitude though will be richer, if we do not forget that salvation means deliverance. It means we need to be delivered from ourselves.

- We rejoice in God's salvation, not in the false notion of 4 steps to a better you or 5 ways to living your best life or you've somehow always had what it takes to succeed. Or this idea that you define what is truth, and truth is relative.
 - We rejoice in God's salvation because we know we are not enough. We are sinful, needy people, in such a broken and twisted world, need nothing less than God's rescue. (Tim Fox)
 - We are the ones who need crutches to stand - that crutch being the cross.
 - We rejoice in the salvation of God for we are the weak, helpless ones whom God gives more grace to
- By the way, the themes in Hannah's prayer is exactly what will play out in the rest of the book of Samuel, and throughout the pages of redemptive history
- Please keep this in mind as we study this passage together.
- Again, chapters 1-2 introduces us into this tension of where is God in the midst of Israel's apostasy? How will God accomplish his purposes?
- God answers that question by reminding us that he takes particular delight in working through weakness and vulnerability - eg a newborn baby, and

ultimately those who see they are weak and are in need of deliverance, of a salvation that this world cannot offer with its false substitutes of career success, wealth, false gospels of self esteem, prosperity, and self-idolatry.

Text

- Our text today is from 1 Sam 2:12-36

Observations

- I would like to organize my thoughts around five headings, which are
 - False Worship
 - The Cuddling of Sin
 - When God cleans house (Judgment in God's House)
 - Hope in the midst of Judgment
 - Implication: A way of life

False Worship (vs 12-21)

- In this passage, the author sets up a contrast between the sons of Eli and Samuel by how they live their lives. We see this contrast in verses 11-12, 17-18, and 25-26 of 1 Sam 2
- Why this contrast? It is to show the issue of **false worship**, regardless of the position we occupy, outward appearances, social standing, etc.
- And we see this issue in verse 12, where the bible says **the sons of Eli were worthless men**, and then it gives the reason: **they did not know the Lord**
 - This should make us pause as the sons of Eli were supposed to be priests, those who are to lead others unto God
- Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, had become **so settled and bold** in their dishonoring of God, that they committed their **atrocities publicly** and used their servants to do their bidding.
 - Note that this is always the effect of continued sin - **the heart and conscience becomes seared.**
- To better explain the sins of these men, let me take us back in the laws of God about offering

- In Lev 7:28-36 and Deut 18:3, God provided a way for the priests to share in certain meat offerings since the priests were not supposed to work and be solely focused on leading others in worship before God
- Symbolically, the fat is first to be burned as an offering unto God. It was a way of giving God the best of the offering. In addition, there were certain parts of the meat that should go to the priest
- **By their actions, the sons of Eli elevated themselves above God. They did so by taking out of the meat first, before it was offered to God - before the fat was burned as an offering to God**
- You get the sense that this was **not a mistake or one-off situation** but something they had been doing consistently
- Later on in verse 22, we get to hear that these sons of Eli “**lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.**”
- Now, why is the author giving this information about women serving at the tent of the meeting?
 - At the heart of God is the **reconciliation of sinful man to a Holy and Righteous God**. God established the tent of meeting as a way to invite people into true worship of God

- Exo 33:7-11 describes the tent of meeting as the center of true worship, the meeting place with God's manifest presence
 - And it is the women who were serving at this tent that the sons of Eli were having illicit sexual relations with
 - Not only were the sons of Eli blatantly dishonoring God, by their continued actions, **there were probably also leading people away from true worship of God.**
 - Since they are "the priests of God;" by acting without integrity, they were basically saying there is no real God to be worshiped here
 - And this is indeed a grievous sin
- The bible says in psalm 14:1 and psalm 53:1 that
 - *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.*
- **The sons of Eli were saying in their hearts,** which shows up in their actions that "there is no God." How do we say with our hearts that there is no God? Through our actions.

- **It is our consistent actions, over time, that truly reveals what we believe.**
- Their lifestyle and false worship can be summarized with that damning phrase *“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*
- The natural question to ask here is this: **Is my relationship with God that of false worship? Is my way of life similar to the Sons of Eli?**
 - Please note that I am not talking about sins we struggle with. **The fact that we feel remorse when we sin, and the fact that we struggle with sin is evidence of God’s work in our lives.**
 - The Christian is one who truly struggles with and against sin. **For if you do not struggle, you are either perfect (which is not true) or your conscience is seared and you are likely not a Christian**
- So what I am saying is this: **where are we living so boldly in sin without any remorse or any hint of repentance**
 - **Where do we say with our actions and hearts (not necessarily our lips) that there is no God?**

- This section of the passage (vs 18-21) ends by showing us a different way of life.

It describes Samuel as ministering before the Lord

- Please note that **this is not a one-time practice for Samuel but a way of life**
- For Samuel, his actions were depicted with respect to honoring God while the sons of Eli did the exact opposite - they consistently dishonored God with their actions, not necessarily with their lips
- As the story progresses, you might wonder what Eli is doing about all of this mess that we are seeing? This leads to our next observation

The Coddling of Sin (vs 22-26)

- As one would expect, Eli has heard of his son's practices since they acted brazenly. Eli confronts them about sexual immorality with those who are serving at the tent of meeting
- Eli rightly rebukes his sons and points to the fact that if a man sins against God, who can intercede for such a person?

- However Eli is complicit in that his rebuke either comes too late or is too light.

We see no evidence that Eli moves to remove his sons from their position of authority.

- **We see no real conviction in Eli. Why do I say that?** If Eli understood the enormity of their actions, and **was convicted** of it, he would remove his sons from their position as priests.
- **Eli, by coddling their sins and his own sin, was also dishonoring God.**
- **Perhaps Eli cared more about the shame that comes with removing his sons as priests than God's honor**

- This is a sobering point for me
- I can't claim ignorance when it comes to sin, and the question I have to ask myself is:

- **Where am I cuddling sin in my life?**
- **What am I more concerned about that is elevated above God?**

Is it marriage or a family or a successful career?

- **What do I fear above God**
- Do I seek to be truly repentant?

- **Is my repentance limited to showing remorse** or is there real conviction behind it?

- The sons of Eli do not listen to their father“ *for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death*” (1 Sam 2:25)

- Don't get too distracted by that as if it means God simply planned to kill them.

The right way to look at that is that they had long hardened their hearts and continually rejected God, and their time of judgment is near

- Right at the end of this section, we get the phrase
 - *26 Now the young man Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man.*

- I will come back to this verse later but for now, again we see the contrast to Samuel, and we see that his life in reference to the Lord, the presence of God

- And so the time has come for God to address the lack of integrity in his house

When God Cleans House (vs 27-36)

- If we go back to Hannah's poetry of praise, we might feel like God's judgment will be against non Israelities, but that is wrong because judgment usually starts with the house of God. And God is about to clean house
- In the story, a man of God appears who brings prophetic Judgment **against** Eli, and the accusations from God goes like this:
 - **God says I have made myself known to you and have shown you mercy** in making you my priest. In addition I have provided for you and your family. You are not lacking, therefore...
 - **Why do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings** that I commanded
 - **Why then do you ... honor your sons above me** by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel
- At first you might think it weird that God is laying these charges at the feet of Eli but consider the following
 - Eli is the priest of God, and the patriarch of the family. He is responsible for what goes on in the family.

- Eli knew what his sons were doing and yet he partook of their stolen meat.
 - Eli knew the irreverence of what his sons were doing, rightly rebuked them but was unwilling to act to remove them
 - In 1 Sam 3: 13, God says the following about Eli
 - *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.*
- Some of the questions we can ask from here are
 - **In what ways am I elevating others above God?** This could be a spouse, kids, friends, family members, etc
 - **Whose approval** do I crave so much that I am willing to dishonor God?
 - **Do I avoid rejection** so much that I am okay with dishonoring God?
 - In what ways am I elevating myself above God and consistently rejecting his grace?
- The story progresses with God pronouncing judgment on Eli and his household. The fulfillment of this prophetic judgment comes in waves
 - 1 Sam 4: Eli and his sons die

- 1 Sam 22:6-23....85 members of Eli's descendants die
- Eventually Eli's line is displaced by the line of Zadok in 1 Kings 2:26-27, 35
- I want you to note that the central theme of this judgment is **being cut off from the presence of God**. It is almost as if God is turning his back on Eli and his lineage
- Now if we step back for a bit, we are no different from Eli or his sons. All of humanity has sinned against God. The bible in Rom 3:26 clearly says *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*
- **If God is the righteous judge, which he is, and he pronounces this judgment on Eli and his household, what then is our hope?**

Hope in the midst of Judgement (vs 35)

- One of the merciful things about God is **his heart that is so inclined towards mercy**. And so, right in the midst of this proclamation of judgment, we see the merciful heart of God shine through. Verse 35 says

- *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.*
- Who is this faithful priest that God speaks of?
 - You might think the faithful priest is Samuel, but Samuel is a judge and more of a prophet.
 - Some theologians believe the priest referenced here might be Zadok, who was installed as priest during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 2:26-35) and was the priest when the temple was built
- But we know that both Samuel and Zadok are at best temporary fulfillment of this promise because they are ordinary men who have *"have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*
- However the true fulfillment of this promise is one who will be both **priest** and God's anointed, the one we call Jesus, the Christ
 - 1 Samuel 1:26 says
 - *26 Now the young man Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man.*

- Now the phrasing of this verse sounds oddly familiar. Well in the gospel of Luke, chapter 2 and verse 52, it says this
 - *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*
- **Luke is pointing us back to this story of Samuel, helping us to see that the faithful priest of God is Christ Jesus.**
 - And Christ will go on to be the atonement sacrifice for our sins, to ensure our reconciliation with God
 - **I hope you also see the deliberate and sovereign hand of God,** where God throughout all ages is working out a plan for your good.
- Just as Eli rightly rebuked his sons saying
 - *25 If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?"*
- The correct answer to this question is Jesus Christ. **It is Jesus who mediates between us and God - because Christ is both God AND man.**
- We all have sinned and deserve judgment but Christ took on our judgment. **Judgement day came early for Christ.** It came in the form of the cross, and of

separation from God (recall that this was the main theme of God's **judgment** against Eli and his household). On that cross, **Christ suffered that separation from God for our sake.**

- The only righteous and holy person who deserves not to be **judged**, takes on the punishment that we deserve...so that we might have the reward he deserves..
- As long as we are in Christ, we no longer need to fear standing before the Righteous Judge of all. And this is what gives us hope and confidence. This is what we rest our **heads upon**.
 - We do not rest on our **good nature** because we are inherently not good.
 - We cannot rely on **good works** for we only need to look at how much we mess up. Our righteousness is like filthy rags before the holiness of God.
 - In the words of puritans “**Even our tears of repentance need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb**”
 - We cannot rely on **our abilities nor societal standing nor wealth.**

- All of these are **artifacts of this dying and transient world**. They mean nothing before the judgment throne of God
- **All we have and all we need is to rest on the finished work of Christ. This is what strengthens us**
- Due to the sacrifice of Christ, we know the following
 - We have peace with God.
 - We have been adopted into his family by grace through faith. We are sons and daughters of the Most High
 - God is with us! Emmanuel!
 - Time will not permit me to share with you the funny and embarrassing experiences I have had with turbulence.
 - I have this aunt in California who knows of my experiences, and so when I am about to fly, she reminds me of a truth by simply saying “Emmanuel.” And this does wonders for my soul, beyond turbulence or flying.
- And so with the above truths we truly can face anything

A way of Life

- As we wrap up, I have one major application for us.
- We have talked quite a bit about sin and dishonoring God but I want to make a distinction here.
 - The sons of Eli, were consistently in sin with a seared conscience. They basically did not care about God's will nor his presence.
 - This is not the same as me and you sinning, being convicted and struggling with sin.
- **The Christian Life is an ongoing struggle between your old and new nature.** On this side of eternity, we all will continue to struggle with sin.
 - Struggling with sin is not a bad sign, but a good one. It means you are in the fight! **Be concerned if you don't struggle with sin.**
 - **If you do not struggle with sin, then you are either perfect or you are not a Christian.**
 - **The mark of a growing and maturing Christian is this struggle with sin.** Being convicted of our sinful ways is evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit in us.

- Eli's sons were no longer struggling with sin. They had gotten to the point where their conscience was seared. **Sin had become their normal way of life.**
- **What then is the appropriate way of life?**
 - We have all been given the gift of life, and the gift of years.
 - The greatest opportunity we all have is being an apprentice or a disciple of Christ.
 - Said another way, **Life with God, union with the triune God is the greatest opportunity we can ever hope for. And this is what Christ came to present to us.**
 - **Our sinful nature, which at its core is rejection of God, holds us back from this opportunity of life with God.**
 - **In and of ourselves, we are helpless against sin.**
 - **Our only hope lies in the redemptive work of God, which has its fulfillment in Christ and what He has accomplished on the cross.**
- On this side of eternity, while we struggle with sin, **repentance must be an integral part of our way of life.**
- **Repentance before God must become our way of life**

- You might have noticed that, even in the face of God's proclamation of judgment, it is not recorded that Eli repents or is convicted of his sins.
- In 1 Sam 3:18, God reveals his judgment against Eli and Eli gives this unnerving response:
 - **18** *So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."*
- I keep asking myself, why not repent? Why not seek the face of God in repentance? Why take such a lackadaisical stance and say *"It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."*?
- Of course it is the Lord and in his Sovereign wisdom and love, He will do what seems good to him.
- So why this response from Eli?
 - Here I postulate **that pride might have been an issue.**
 - Pride isn't simply this idea that I am better than the next person; pride is a rejection of God. Pride is a real and intent filled preference for any other way apart from the way of God
- Whereas the humble person throws himself at the foot of the cross.

- We want to be the humble, and so, repentance must be our way of life

- The reformer, Martin Luther's first thesis reads thus "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent," he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance."

- It is from this statement that you might have heard this phrase - **All of**

life is repentance.

- Repentance is never meant to be a one-time inaugural activity; it is meant to be our continual posture, which highlights our broken and contrite heart.
- There is no true walk with the Triune God without repentance...unless you are perfect
- **If we are serious about our faith, we will continue to discover new layers of our un-surrendered self.**
 - **The depth of our depravity is quite deep...Yet his mercies and forgiveness is deeper still**
- **If we are to ever grow in our faith, we must take repentance seriously.**

Repentance isn't crying or showing remorse, although it can be accompanied

by these things. **Repentance is primarily a turning towards God, which leads to turning away from sin.**

- Repentance is a highlight of the humble as the very act of repentance is anti-pride. It is full of humility because it is an admission that I do not have what it takes and I can only rely on Christ to change me
- So here's a question for you:
 - **How often is deep, soul repentance part of your communion with God?**
 - **Do your sin patterns and habits even bother you anymore?**
 - Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:5 "*examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.*" Paul did not say examine yourself by the values of society/culture?
- What does repentance entail?
 - Turning towards God first, which then leads to turning away from sin
 - An awareness/acknowledgement of sin
 - Owning sin: taking responsibility for where we've failed
 - An appeal to the mercies of God
- No matter where you are, please know this, **God wants you in his family.**

- This is why he freely gave you and me the best gift he has.
- **The greatest gift that God gives is himself. He gave us himself in the person of Christ, AND sacrificed Christ so that we can be reconciled to him**
- Tim Keller has a saying that I find very helpful
 - “The gospel [of Christianity] is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”
- When we hold these two truths in our hands, then the following is true:
 - We are never too far gone from God.
 - We are comfortable to confess and repent before God - because we know he will always accept us. Nothing can separate the true believer from the love of God.
 - We are never too dirty for God.
- No matter where you are, no matter what you have done or are doing, please come back to God. His arms are wide open. Christ has already paid the price and all we need to do is to believe in Christ.
- Repentance must be our way of life.