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LIFE LESSONS – 1 SAMUEL: When We Don't Listen' 1 Samuel 2:12-36

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you here this morning. If you are a guest with us, thanks for joining us on this Lord's Day. We would love the opportunity to get to know you more. You can help us connect with you by texting the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mount Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword, a link will be sent back to you and that will take you to a short form. When you submit that form, it notifies me, and I look forward to following up with you.

Or feel free to swing by our information center located in the fellowship area. There we have a gift we would love to put in your hands as a way of saying thank you for being our guest today. We are thrilled you have chosen to worship with us today.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are in a teaching series we've called, "Life Lessons." We are studying the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. So far, we have looked at Hannah, Samuel's mother, and her prayer for a child. God blessed Hannah and gave her Samuel. As a part of her prayer, Hannah vowed to give Samuel back to The Lord for His service. Last Sunday we saw that fulfilled.

Today, we turn our attention to Eli, the priest, and his two sons. So, I want to invite you to turn with me in your copy of God's Word to 1 Samuel, chapter 2. We are going to examine verses 12-36 this morning. The title of this morning's message is, "When we don't listen to God."

And let me just say that if you have missed any of this series so far, you can catch up by listening to previous messages. You can find our messages, along with my notes, on our website at trinitytx.org/sermons. Or you can subscribe to our podcast, "Hope for the Broken," anywhere you listen to podcasts.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Warning Labels

You know, we see warning labels everywhere we turn. We are warned about products, warned about side effects of medications, and even warned about the weather. Some of those warnings are helpful, while other warnings seem humorous and go without saying.

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For example, this is a warning label for a commercial washer. **Show washer graphic**. Do NOT put any person in this washer. You know, I never thought about doing that until now!

What about this one. **Show hair dryer graphic**. Do not use while sleeping. Never knew that was possible!

What about this warning label? **Show hanger graphic**. Surely, this hasn't happened before. Right?! We are used to warning labels and warnings in general.

I want to issue a warning when it comes to our passage of study this morning. This passage of 1 Samuel has some strong judgment cast down as a result of Eli's sons refusal to listen to instruction. The overarching lesson for us is that danger lies ahead when we choose not to listen to God.

We are going to approach our study this morning by looking at a comparison and consequences, then at a couple life lessons.

MESSAGE:

So, let's first begin by looking at...

1) **The Comparison.**

In verses 12-26, we have a comparison between Eli's sons and Samuel. Eli is the priest of the day in charge of the ongoing at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. He had two sons that were his presumed predecessors. There was just one major problem. 1 Samuel 2, verse 12. *"¹²Now the sons of Eli were **worthless men**. They did not **know the Lord**."*

The word translated as "worthless men" in my bible means a person who openly practices lawlessness. In the original language, it means sons of Belial [Buh-lie-ul].ⁱⁱ It means sons of the devil. Instead of doing the work of The Lord in the tabernacle, they were doing the devil's work, wolves in sheep's clothing.

The verse tells us that they didn't even know The Lord. They had to know of The Lord but did not know Him personally. Jesus warned the religious leaders of His day that they never truly knew God. As a result, the two sons of Eli practiced lawlessness. That is, they were spiritual abusers. There were two major sins these men committed.

Let's look at them. Picking up in verse 13. *¹³The **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, ¹⁴and 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.*

The Law of God was very descriptive as to how to handle sacrifices. When someone would come to the tabernacle and present a sacrifice, a portion was to be given to God, a portion given to the priest, and a portion was kept by the person bringing the sacrifice. Now, according to the Law, the priest was to receive a portion of the breast and the shoulder. But, somewhere down the line, the custom changed.ⁱⁱⁱ The new custom became that priests would take a fork, stick it in the boiling meat, and take whatever the fork brought out of the pot. While this was the custom, it was not what was prescribed by God's Law. But Eli's sons took ever more liberties.

Verse 15. *¹⁵Moreover, 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.**" ¹⁶And 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." ¹⁷Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt.*

The first sin of Eli's sons was...

A) **Stealing** from God and the people.

So, the custom changed from what was prescribed in the Law, but Eli's sons took it even further. They didn't want boiled meat. Who does?! They wanted the raw meat so they could take it for themselves and grill it up the way they like it.

Furthermore, they wanted the meat before any of the fat had been burned. That's where the flavor is. So, Eli's sons not only wanted raw meat, they took the best cuts. They wanted the picanha from Texas de Brazil. That was supposed to be for God.

We are also told that if the people objected to this process, Eli's sons would take it by force. So, not only are they stealing the portions designated for God,

but they were spiritually abusing the people. And that is why the sin of these young men was great in the sight of The Lord. So, the first grievous sin of Eli's sons was stealing. The second sin was...

B) **Sexual Immorality.**

Skip down to verse 22. *²²Now 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.*

These worthless men were also seducing the women in the tabernacle. They had turned the worship place of God into a night club. More spiritual abuse and sexual abuse, really.

Let me just say, if I may, that abuse of any kind is not okay. And there is a special kind of lowness for those that would abuse people spiritually. Unfortunately, though, there are many church leaders in our day and time that use their positions to take advantage of people. And what happens in these circumstances is that people are hurt by the Church. And I know that in a room this size, there are some of you that may have experienced spiritual abuse. If that's you, I want you to know that it doesn't go unseen by God. Just as these worthless men's sin was great in the sight of The Lord, so too is the sin of those who may have spiritually abused you.

It is also important to point out that Eli's hands were not clean either. While he was not actively carrying out these actions, he enabled it. Let's look at that beginning in verse 23. *²³And he [being Eli] said to them [his sons], "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. ²⁴No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. ²⁵If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.* Couple things here.

First, the reason why we are going to see Eli judged is because he didn't do what he should have done. He slapped his sons on the wrist when he should have fired them. He failed to do what needed to be done. This is what we have described as the character of Eli and his sons. Compare that to Samuel.

Samuel was the complete opposite. Verse 18. ***18Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy clothed with a linen ephod.*** ***19And 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.*** ***20Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, “May the Lord give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the Lord.” So then they would return to their home.*** ***21Indeed the Lord visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord.*** Skip down to verse 26. ***26Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.***

The first descriptor for Samuel is that he was ministering before the Lord. This gives us a picture of the purity and service of Samuel.^{iv} When Eli's sons were in the ministry for what they gained, Samuel was in ministry for Who he served.

The second descriptor we have in this passage is that Samuel was clothed with a linen ephod. This was a sleeveless garment that was reserved for Levitical priests.^v So, Samuel is not only serving in this capacity, but he is recognized for priestly service. In other words, he has the right reputation. And the robe that Samuel's mom would bring him every year was a longer outer robe also worn by priests.^{vi}

Verse 26 is an interesting verse to me. It shows us that Samuel grew not only in maturity but also spiritually. It is to say that Samuel stood out in a very corrupt environment. That resulted in God using him in a powerful way. The words used to describe Samuel are the same words that describe Jesus. Luke 2:52 says, ***“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”*** Samuel was a Christ-like servant-leader.

So, we see the comparison between Eli, his sons, and Samuel. Now, let's look at the...

2) Consequences.

I have said this a few times. My childhood Pastor had a saying about consequences. “If you eat fat greasy foods, you'll be a fat greasy dude.”^{vii} Every choice has a consequence. A cause and an effect. Consequences can be negative or positive.

In the case of Eli and his sons, there is a negative consequence for the abuse they were dispensing. But on the other hand, positive consequences awaited Samuel. Eli's sons wouldn't listen, and they received judgment. Samuel was obedient, and he received a blessing. Let's look at the consequences for...

A) Eli's sons.

Verse 27. ***27And there came a man of God*** [We know very little about this man. We don't know his name or where he is from, or what role this man plays. But we do know that it is a man of God. This is a common title in the Scripture given to a prophet speaking on behalf of God. This man of God came...] ***to Eli and said to him, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? 28Did 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. 29Why 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?’ 30Therefore the Lord, 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 the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. 31Behold, 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. 32Then 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. 33The 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. 34And 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.***

This is the harsh consequence dealt out to Eli and his sons. To Eli because he did not deal with his sons' sin appropriately. To the sons because of their actions. Eli and his descendant will be cut off from being priests and they will die in the prime of their lives. God even said the two boys will die on the same day.

This is the consequence of not listening to God. Contrast that with the consequences given to...

B) Samuel.

Verse 35. ***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."* We see the blessing given to Samuel.

You know, God always has a Samuel. Even in our day and time. The Lord is looking for men and women who will listen to His voice and be obedient. Samuel will grow up to not only be a priest, but a prophet and the one who will anoint kings.

So, we've taken a look at the comparisons and the consequences between Samuel and Eli and his sons. Now, I want to talk through a couple life lessons we learn from this biblical account.

LIFE LESSONS:

First lesson, ...

1) We reap what we sow.

The consequences dealt out in this passage are directly related to what these men sowed, what they put into ministry. Eli's sons hardened their heart toward their own sin. As a result, God removed their ministry. But in Samuel we see a pure heart in service to God. That resulted in God's blessings.

Galatians 6:7-8 says, ***7**Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. **8**For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.* I think it's important to point out that this is not Karma here. The implications are much greater here. It's talking about living a life of obedience to God knowing that God is the one that will not be mocked.

Yes, God is a God full of mercy, grace, love, and forgiveness. But he is also a God of holiness and justice. And God had given Eli, Hophni and Phinehas more

than enough time to repent. But they did not. And that resulted in God's judgment. They reaped what they sowed.

The same is true of Samuel. He lived a life of purity in dedication to God. The same can be said of his parents, Elkanah and Hannah. And what came about as a result of living godly lives? Hannah had more children, and Samuel ascended to leadership in the nation of Israel.

As Christians, a people who have embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior, we should desire a life of holiness, not a life lived in the flesh. We need to sow seeds in the Spirit, not in our flesh. The reason this is vitally important to us is because a person will reap what they sow.

You know, this has been a sobering message for me. Because when you think about the characters in this passage, who are they? They are leaders of the tabernacle, leaders of church. This has hit me right between the eyes. On one hand you have the abusive, sinful leadership of Eli and his sons and on the other the pure, humble leadership of Samuel.

While this passage speaks to us all, it speaks to leadership within Jesus' Church. It certainly challenges me, convicts me. In fact, we discussed this with our elders this week. We, as leaders, cannot harden our hearts to sin. And the truth is we are all sinners. Right? We will never shed our flesh until we get to glory, but we cannot become so calloused toward sin that we become accepting of it. A verse that has really stood out to me this week is what the man of God said to Eli, ***those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*** I feel the weight of this as a leader in The Lord's Church. But it does apply to us all. We will reap what we sow.

The second life lesson is...

2) The Importance of Discipline

I think the lesson in it for us as parents is to not follow the example Eli set in raising kids. He had a very hands-off approach to discipline. Yes, he called out his son's sin. But they obviously had very little respect for what their father had to say. And Eli, I know it would be terribly hard, should have fired his sons. They needed to be relieved of their duties. And I think that had his sons received that disciplinary action, it would have resulted in the boys coming to

their senses. But Eli didn't discipline them. As a result, the consequences didn't come from Eli, but they did come from God.

Parents, it is vitally important for us to realize the role of discipline in raising godly kids. We are not our kids' friends. That's not our job. Now, I think there comes a time when we've done our job in raising them that our kids become our friends. But in the formative years of their life, our kids need discipline.

Ephesians 6:4 says, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but **bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.***" The idea behind the command to, "bring them up," is to nurture them, to give them what they need for life and godliness.^{viii} The way to do that, according to this verse, is by providing discipline and instruction. Discipleship, which is what we are called to as parents, happens through the vehicle of discipline. Discipline is another word for training.

I want to press in a little here. Often when we think of discipline, what is the first thing that comes to our minds? Usually spankings, time-outs, and groundings. But that's not discipline, that's punishment. The charge in Ephesians 6 is to train them, not just punish them.

Now, our kids have to know that there are consequences for getting out of bounds, even painful consequences. Know what I mean? But in those times, remember, we are not just punishing bad behavior. Instead, we are reminding them that sin is costly and it robs us of joy. And when we take that approach, regardless of the punishment we deal out, we are using it to train our kids. We are teaching them to way toward God's best for them.

Listen, accountability is a great thing. We need to learn to appreciate being held accountable. When we do, we learn to take ownership of the choices we make and consequences they bring.

Think about the "man of God" that confronted Eli. While we don't know this man's name, we can be sure that the man knew who Eli was. Can you imagine being given the assignment to confront the priest?! It had to be extremely difficult given the nature of the message to be delivered. Right?!

Accountability is almost always uncomfortable for both the person being held accountable and the person delivering the accountability. But it is oh so

necessary, isn't it?! The bible says in Proverbs 27:6, "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*" I think Eli's sons being held accountable for their actions would have prevented a lot of hurt and pain.

We need to be a people willing to hold our brothers and sisters accountable but also a people ready to receive accountability. In the end, it is always a blessing.

Two life lessons. We reap what we sow and the importance of discipline.

CONCLUSION:

We are going to have a time of response. And I want to charge us with a couple things during this time.

Our study this morning pointed out that Eli's sons did not know The Lord. They had to have a knowledge of God in order to serve in tabernacle leadership. But there is a difference between knowledge of and actually knowing someone. We know the President of the United States. But do we really know him? The same can be applied to our knowing God.

Do you have a relationship with Jesus? Do you know of Him or do you know Him? Better yet, does He know you? If not, or if you have questions about that, you come this morning. Our elders would love nothing more than to share with you how you can have a relationship with Jesus. Just come and say three words, "I need Jesus."

For others of us in the room, our response time should center on our heart. Have you grown calloused to sin in your life? Are there areas of your life where we need to repent?

Following our time of response today, we are going to participate in The Lord's Supper, Communion. Scripture tells us to approach the table only after examining our heart. So, in this time of response, I want us to ready our hearts to receive communion.

I'm going to pray, we will stand and sing, but let's respond. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

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- ⁱ Works consulted in preparation for this message: Robert D. Bergen, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel, Vol. 7*, B&H Publishing: Nashville, 1996; Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel*, Holman: Nashville, 2016; Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2003; Nick Clevely, “1 Samuel 2:12-36: Eli,” article published by Covenant Grace Baptist Church, September 4, 2016, accessed online: <https://www.covenantgracebaptist.church/sermon/1-samuel-212-36-eli/>; Unknown, “1 Samuel 2:12-36: Eli’s Sons Contrasted with Samuel,” published by FaithLife Sermons, accessed online: <https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/10581-1-samuel-2:12-36-eli%27s-son%27s-contrasted-with-samuel/>; Troy Rackliffe, “Life Lessons Message 2,” sermon preached at Glade Community Church, Daniels, WV; James Hammack, “1 Samuel 2:12-36,” article published by Sovereign Grace Church, June 11, 2020, accessed online: <https://mysovgrace.church/seeing-jesus-in-1-samuel/1-samuel-212-36/>; Skip Heitzig, “Expound: 1 Samuel 1-2:25,” message taught at Calvary Church on Wednesday, May 12, 2021, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/314/sermon/4569/play>; Skip Heitzig, “Expound: 1 Samuel 2:22-4:22,” message taught at Calvary Church on Wednesday, May 19, 2021, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/314/sermon/4571>.
- ⁱⁱ Strong’s Concordance, 1100.
- ⁱⁱⁱ FaithLife.
- ^{iv} Ibid.
- ^v Bergen, page 79.
- ^{vi} Ibid.
- ^{vii} Bro. Lou Brown.
- ^{viii} Connor Bales and Todd Kaunitz, *Gospel in the Home: Turning Chaos Back into Order*, Lucid Books: Houston, 2016, page 103-104.