HUDSON'S HOPE CHAPEL

Listening When God Speaks

July 5, 2026 · Series: Small Stories, Big Faith · Luke Hughes-Bunger

Main Passage: 1 Samuel 3:1-21 (ESV)

Big Idea: Sometimes God's Word feels distant, and people seem spiritually dull. When this happens, the right response is humble listening and faithful obedience.

Introduction

The famous image called *His Master's Voice* shows Nipper the dog listening closely to the horn of a gramophone.

The image became powerful because people understood the idea right away. A well-trained, devoted dog knows his master's voice, even when that voice comes from an unexpected place.

That picture helps us enter 1 Samuel 3.

This passage is about listening. But it is not mainly about technique, private impressions, or trying to hear something mysterious. It is about the mercy and authority of God's Word.

In a spiritually dark season, the Lord speaks. Samuel does not recognize the voice at first, but he is taught the posture every servant of God needs:

"Speak, LORD, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9).

That sentence is simple, but it is not shallow. It is the language of surrender. Samuel is not asking God to speak so that he can decide whether God's Word is useful, comfortable, or convenient. He is placing himself under the authority of the Lord.

That is the posture this passage calls us to recover.

A Dim Season Needs the Word of the Lord

The passage begins with a serious diagnosis:

"The word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision" (1 Samuel 3:1).

Israel is in the period of the judges, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes. By 1 Samuel, the problem has reached into the priesthood. Eli's sons are corrupt. They treat the offerings of the Lord with contempt, and Eli does not restrain them as he should.

But religious activity has not disappeared.

The tabernacle is still there. Priests are still working. Sacrifices are still being offered. Samuel is still serving. There is structure, routine, memory, and religious language.

But the word of the Lord is rare.

That is a warning for us. It is possible to be around the things of God and still grow dull to God Himself. It is possible to know Christian words and still stop listening with humility. Spiritual dullness usually does not arrive all at once. It often comes quietly through small compromises, neglected Scripture, and resistance to correction.

But verse 3 gives hope: "The lamp of God had not yet gone out."

The season is dark, but not hopeless. God has not abandoned His people. He is about to speak.

God's people do not live by religious momentum. We live by the Word of the Lord.

This matters for ordinary Christian life. We can keep busy, keep showing up, keep using Christian language, and still become less responsive to God. The warning is not only for people outside the church. It is for anyone who has learned how to be near the things of God without being tender before God.

The mercy is that God still speaks through His Word. When Scripture exposes our drift, that is not God pushing us away. It is God calling us back.

A Listening Servant Learns to Recognize God's Voice

The Lord calls, "Samuel!" Samuel answers, "Here I am!" and runs to Eli because he assumes Eli has called him.

This happens three times.

Samuel is willing, but he does not yet understand. The text says, "Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him" (1 Samuel 3:7).

Eli eventually realizes that the Lord is calling Samuel. So he tells him what to say:

"Speak, LORD, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9).

That sentence is the heart posture of the passage.

Not, "Speak, Lord, and I will evaluate."

Not, "Speak, Lord, and I will decide whether Your word fits my plans."

Not, "Speak, Lord, as long as You say something comforting."

But, "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears."

This is humble readiness before God.

Samuel does not summon God. Samuel does not master a technique. Samuel is called by grace, instructed to listen, and placed under the word God gives.

For us, this means we open the Bible with humility. We come to gathered worship expecting God to address us through His Word. When Scripture corrects us, we do not explain it away. We obey what we already understand before demanding clarity about everything else.

Spiritual health begins with ordinary attentiveness to God's Word.

That may look ordinary, but it is not small. It may mean reading Scripture with the question, "Lord, what are You showing me?" It may mean listening to a sermon for yourself before applying it to someone else. It may mean receiving correction without defending yourself right away. It may mean taking one step of obedience instead of waiting until you feel ready for ten.

The servant's posture is not complicated. It is humble.

A True Word Must Be Received and Spoken

Samuel's first prophetic word is not easy.

The Lord tells Samuel that judgment is coming on Eli's house. Eli's sons have treated the worship of the Lord with contempt, and Eli has not restrained them.

Samuel is afraid to speak the message. That fear is understandable. Eli is the old priest who has raised him in the house of the Lord. Eli is also the one who taught him how to answer when God called.

But when Eli asks, Samuel tells him everything and hides nothing from him.

That is costly obedience.

Samuel is not called only to hear the word privately. He must speak the word faithfully.

God's Word is not only comforting. It is true. Sometimes the Lord's mercy comes as warning. Sometimes the faithful word exposes sin, names what we would rather hide, and refuses to flatter us.

Eli's house shows us that religious privilege does not make sin safe. Being near holy things does not excuse disobedience. Familiarity with worship does not protect a hard heart from judgment.

The Lord's Word must be received, even when it humbles us. And the Lord's Word must be spoken, even when it costs us.

This does not give us permission to be harsh. Samuel is not proud, combative, or eager to confront Eli. He is afraid. But faithfulness means he does not hide what the Lord has said.

Truth should be spoken with humility, grief, courage, and love. That is especially important in families, friendships, and church life. The goal is not to win an argument. The goal is to honor the Lord and seek the good of the person in front of us.

Path to Christ

In a season when the word of the Lord was rare, God raised up Samuel as a faithful prophet.

But Samuel is not the end of the story.

Samuel points beyond himself to Jesus Christ.

Samuel receives the word of the Lord. Jesus is the Word made flesh.

Samuel speaks a hard word of judgment. Jesus bears judgment for His people at the cross.

Samuel is established as a faithful prophet in Israel. Jesus is the faithful Son whose word will never fall to the ground.

The gospel makes this passage clearer. The problem is not merely that people need better listening habits. God's people are drifting in darkness. Sin is being tolerated. The priesthood is failing. The Word of the Lord is rare.

And the mercy is that God speaks.

Finally, He speaks by sending His Son.

In Jesus, God says both the hardest and sweetest thing: our sin is serious enough to require the cross, and His grace is deep enough to provide it.

This is why the sermon does not end with Samuel as our main example. Samuel's servant posture matters, but Samuel cannot save us. Samuel can speak the word of judgment, but he cannot bear it for us. Jesus can.

At the cross, the holy judgment of God and the mercy of God meet. Jesus bears the judgment His people deserve so that sinners can hear the voice of the Shepherd and live.

Application and Conclusion

The final call is not merely, "Listen like Samuel." It is, "Listen to Christ."

He is the Master's voice we must recognize above every other voice. He speaks grace and truth. He exposes sin, bears judgment, calls His people by name, and leads them into life.

If you are spiritually dull, wake up to the mercy that God still speaks.

If you are weary, take heart that the lamp has not gone out.

If you are confronted by God's Word, receive it as mercy.

If you are unsure where to begin, begin with the servant's prayer: "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears."

And above all, listen to Christ.

Practical next steps:

Begin the week by reading 1 Samuel 3 again slowly.

Pray Samuel's prayer before you read Scripture: "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears."

Ask one concrete question: "What obedience is God's Word calling for today?"

Then take the next faithful step.

Discussion Guide Questions

1. What stands out to you from the opening image of *His Master's Voice*?
2. Why is 1 Samuel 3:1 such a serious spiritual diagnosis?
3. How can religious activity continue while people become dull to God's Word?
4. What hope is suggested by the phrase "the lamp of God had not yet gone out"?
5. Why does Samuel not recognize the Lord's call at first?
6. What does "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears" teach us about humility before God?
7. How can we avoid turning this passage into a vague lesson about private impressions?
8. Why is Samuel's first prophetic word difficult to speak?
9. What does Eli's house teach us about the danger of tolerated sin?
10. How does Samuel point forward to Jesus?
11. Why is Jesus greater than Samuel?
12. What would it look like for you to listen to Christ more faithfully this week?