

1 Samuel 3:1-20

A Theophany

Are you familiar with the term theophany? If you are, I'm impressed. If you are not, you were like me. I say were because very shortly you will know what the word means. Our text is a story of a theophany. Which is a manifestation of God to a human being visibly, audibly, or via visions and dreams. Theophanies are distinguished from epiphanies in that epiphanies are the result of theophanies or other divine revelation. When one reads of a theophany, and there are many in the Old Testament and several in the New Testament, make note that something is about change. It is a signal that one thing is coming to an end and a new thing is about begin. In our text this morning the reign of Aaron's bloodline (represented by Eli and his sons) in the priestly order is coming to an end, and the beginning of Samuel's bloodline in the priestly order is starting. Also, the scarcity of God's word is coming to an end and the beginning of the prevalence of God's word via the prophet Samuel is beginning. So, what are we to take away from this theophany? I'm glad you asked. Three things. **First, we learn that God has no problem going quiet for a time, leaving His people to fend for themselves. V1** "Meanwhile, the boy Samuel served the Lord by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the Lord were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon." Imagine having this word and no one to open it up for us. Imagine God's Holy Spirit being taken away and we are left to our own individual interpretations of God's word and God choosing not to intervene when we are in error. Leaving us to map out our own way. Imagine having very, very few places to go to receive a word from the Lord. What despair! This was the scene in Israel during Eli's day because of the corruption of the priestly order brought on by Eli's son's, Hophni

and Phinehas, and Eli's failure to deal with them. People rarely heard from the Lord. They had a high priest, temple worship, but God seemed to be absent. When God goes quiet, unrepented sin is often the culprit and things get really bad. Has God gone quiet in your life?

Lam 2:3 "All the strength of Israel vanishes beneath his fierce anger. The Lord has withdrawn his protection as the enemy attacks. He consumes the whole land of Israel like a raging fire."

Psalms 74:9-11 "We no longer see your miraculous signs. All the prophets are gone, and no one can tell us when it will end. ¹⁰How long, O God, will you allow our enemies to insult you? Will you let them dishonor your name forever? ¹¹Why do you hold back your strong right hand? Unleash your powerful fist and destroy them.

Isa 55:6-7 "Seek the Lord while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near. ⁷Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the Lord that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously.

Second, it is very possible to be in the presence of the Lord and not know Him. V2-10 ²One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had gone to bed. ³The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God. ⁴Suddenly the Lord called out, "Samuel!" "Yes?" Samuel replied. "What is it?" ⁵He got up and ran to Eli. "Here I am. Did you call me?" "I didn't call you," Eli replied. "Go back to bed." So he did. ⁶Then the Lord called out again, "Samuel!" Again Samuel got up and went to Eli. "Here I am. Did you call me?" "I didn't call you, my son," Eli said. "Go back to bed." ⁷Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before. ⁸So the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. "Here I am. Did you call

me?” Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. ⁹ So he said to Samuel, “Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went back to bed. ¹⁰ And the Lord came and called as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel replied, “Speak, your servant is listening.” Samuel, who has been raised in the presence of God literally, under the authority of the high priest Eli did not recognize the voice of the Lord. He did not know God. He participated in temple life; he was taught the ritual of the priesthood and yet he did not know God. I do not believe this is solely the fault of Eli’s family predicament that resulted in the word of God and visions from God being rare in that time. These certainly were contributing factors. But I am convinced that primary reason was timing. Until God decides to make himself known to one, no religious instruction, ritual and/or preaching on earth will open one’s eyes, ears, and heart to Him. Many a person have been in the church all their lives and still do not know God/Jesus Christ. This fact does not discount the need for faithful teaching and preaching of God’s word/Christ’s gospel. Rather, it makes clear the critical nature of such. For the prophet of our day is charged to relay the word of God as printed in these pages, for these words are God’s voice.

John 6:43-45 ⁴³ But Jesus replied, “Stop complaining about what I said. ⁴⁴ For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up. ⁴⁵ As it is written in the Scriptures, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.”

Matt 7:21-23 ²¹ “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. ²² On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in

your name and performed many miracles in your name.’²³ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’”

2 Tim 3:16 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” **ESV**

Our final takeaway. Not every word we receive from God will be a word of comfort. V15-21 ¹⁵ Samuel stayed in bed until morning, then got up and opened the doors of the Tabernacle as usual. He was afraid to tell Eli what the Lord had said to him. ¹⁶ But Eli called out to him, “Samuel, my son.” “Here I am,” Samuel replied. ¹⁷ “What did the Lord say to you? Tell me everything. And may God strike you and even kill you if you hide anything from me!” ¹⁸ So Samuel told Eli everything; he didn’t hold anything back. “It is the Lord’s will,” Eli replied. “Let him do what he thinks best.”¹⁹ As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable. ²⁰ And all Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. ²¹ The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh and gave messages to Samuel there at the Tabernacle.” We should not expect to be comforted by God when we are in sin. When we willfully remain in states of disobedience to God’s word. What we should expect is a discomfoting word that will hopefully lead us to repentance before it is too late. Let us learn from Eli how to respond to God’s word regardless of its demand upon us. Eli received a discomfoting word by way of Samuel concerning the demise of his entire family and legacy. He does not despair but accepts the good and perfect will of God. And as hard as it was for Samuel to give the word he did, with

encouragement. Let me say this, we, like Eli, should encourage those charged with receiving the word of God on our behalf to discharge it indiscriminately and we should not assume they find pleasure in doing so. Like Samuel, it is hard to deliver a word you know will discomfort those you love, but you must when called to do so. The last thing the people of God should want is the watering down of God's word. Let us learn from Israel on this fact.

Lamentations 3:31-42 “For no one is abandoned by the Lord forever. ³² Though he brings grief, he also shows compassion because of the greatness of his unfailing love. ³³ For he does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow. ³⁴ If people crush underfoot all the prisoners of the land, ³⁵ if they deprive others of their rights in defiance of the Most High, ³⁶ if they twist justice in the courts—doesn't the Lord see all these things? ³⁷ Who can command things to happen without the Lord's permission? ³⁸ Does not the Most High send both calamity and good? ³⁹ Then why should we, mere humans, complain when we are punished for our sins? ⁴⁰ Instead, let us test and examine our ways. Let us turn back to the Lord. ⁴¹ Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven and say, ⁴² “We have sinned and rebelled, and you have not forgiven us.”

Jer 5:30-6:2 “A horrible and shocking thing has happened in this land—³¹ the prophets give false prophecies, and the priests rule with an iron hand. Worse yet, my people like it that way! But what will you do when the end comes? **6** “Run for your lives, you people of Benjamin! Get out of Jerusalem! Sound the alarm in Tekoa! Send up a signal at Beth-hakkerem! A powerful army is coming from the north, coming with disaster and destruction. ² O Jerusalem, you are my beautiful and delicate daughter— but I will destroy you!”

Heb 12:5-11 “⁵ And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, “My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline, and don’t give up when he corrects you. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.” ⁷ As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? ⁸ If God doesn’t discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. ⁹ Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn’t we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? ¹⁰ For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.” A theophany. How has the coming of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the supreme theophany, changed things for you? In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.