

**"SPEAK, LORD; FOR THY SERVANT HEARETH."**

– *I SAMUEL 3:6-14.* – *DECEMBER 14.* –

SAMUEL, the prophet, is one of the grand, strong characters of Old Testament times. The story of his early devotion to the Lord and his obedience and perseverance in well doing, constitutes a grand lesson, not only for young Christians, but also for those more advanced in years, including parents. As the story of Ruth gives us glimpses of a time of life of the Israelites such as is generally obscured by the records of wars and troubles, so also does the story of Samuel. He was of the tribe of Levi already consecrated to the Lord, and accepted. An insight into the deep piety of his parents is given in the first chapter of the Book. A child born under such circumstances of prayer and devotion to the Lord, could not, under natural laws, fail to be noble minded and religiously inclined. Would that we could impress this thought upon all Christians who become parents – that their children should be devoted to the Lord from the moment of conception! and daily prayer and effort should be made that the pre-natal influences might all conduce to the highest mental, moral and physical welfare of the offspring. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" asked the Prophet, and he answers, "Not one." Our expectation should not, therefore, be that the children even of the saints would be absolutely perfect; but we are to remember that the Lord accepts the heart, the intention, the will; and that agreeably to his arrangement of nature, the mind, the intention, the will of the parents may be expressed in their child. True, the imperfect mind cannot even grasp or picture perfect things, but it can approximate them, and in that same proportion it can impress that approximation of character upon the offspring. There is an old adage that "blood will tell" – that is, that culture and good breeding will be marked in the offspring. It is surely a fact that character will tell. Christians, thoroughly devoted to the Lord and seeking day by day to know and to do the divine will, and who are under the instruction of the holy spirit in the school of Christ and somewhat developed in grace and in knowledge of the truth,

whose minds are transformed by the renewing of the holy spirit, and their affections set upon things above, will surely mark and impress the spiritual qualities of their own hearts upon the natural offspring. Such children, well born and devoted to the Lord from conception, will, of course, in childhood be trained by the same parents in the ways of the Lord, in the ways of righteousness, of justice, of truth and of love. Thus begotten and thus trained, it seems very improbable that they should afterward depart from the way of the Lord, or that they should permanently remain transgressors, even though temporarily misled through temptation.

While the Lord has directed his children not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, nevertheless, where the yoking or marriage has occurred prior to their covenant with the Lord, he has arranged that the fruit of their marriage, their children, shall be accounted as the Lord's through the consecrated parent; and his blessing will accordingly be with the consecrated **[R3114 : page 360]** child regardless of the fact that one of its parents was an unbeliever. The Apostle clearly states this in I Cor. 7:14.

It is a serious error – and one into which some Christians have fallen – to suppose parentage to be dishonorable or sinful – some even claiming that "original sin" was of this sort. The Scriptures teach quite to the contrary, declaring that "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled." We are to remember, too, that the divine plan for the propagation of the race was arranged and the command to multiply and fill the earth was given before sin entered the world – before the disobedience in Eden. The Apostle severely reprimands those "forbidding to marry," and distinctly says, in his letter to Timothy, "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." – I Tim. 5:14.

Neither is this in conflict with his declarations in I Cor. 7, that "he that marrieth doeth well but he that marrieth not doeth better." In his

letter to Timothy he is speaking of the younger persons of the congregation; whereas in his advice in Corinthians he is addressing such members of the Church as had made a full consecration of themselves to the Lord, and were seeking to run in the race course toward the mark for the prize. And our advice to others on this subject should be strictly along these inspired lines. The advice not to marry will usually be found helpful to those who have made a full consecration of themselves to the Lord, who will find that they can accomplish more in the Lord's service free, as far as possible, from earthly obligations and division of heart. But for others who are not "new creatures," though moral and well disposed, marriage is the reasonable and proper expectation of life according to divine arrangement; it should not be hindered, but should be counselled as wisely as possible.

We are to recognize a difference between the consecrated parents of Samuel and their prayers for a son, and the proper prayers of consecrated people of the present time. Only since Pentecost have the Lord's people been privileged to be "new creatures in Christ Jesus," begotten of the holy spirit; and such seek and pray for spiritual rather than natural children; – by spending their lives as did their Master seeking to transform children of the first Adam into spiritual children of God. It is in view of this, and when addressing spirit-begotten ones, that the Apostle declares that "he that marrieth not doeth better," – because he will, generally speaking, find the unmarried condition most favorable to his new ambitions.

Born in response to prayer and consecration, Samuel was, doubtless, a remarkable boy; and his parents showed the sincerity of their prayer in the fact that he was early brought to the high priest at Shiloh and formally presented to the Lord's service. We read that this was when he was "weaned," but are not to suppose that it was when as an infant he was weaned from the breast; but, rather, interpreting the word on a larger scale we should understand it was when he was weaned from his mother, in the sense of being able to get along without her care: this was probably when he was from ten to twelve years of age.

We are often surprised that Christian parents, begotten of the holy spirit, do not manifest more of this spirit which actuated the parents of Samuel. Many seemingly consecrated people hold back their most precious possessions, their children, from the Lord, and incline to devote them to some worldly calling in life – medicine, law, industry. Whether their course is prompted by too great humility or by too great selfishness, it is not our province to determine; but seemingly they either have not the faith to believe that the Lord would accept their offering, or they cherish, perhaps but half consciously, a desire to see their children prosper after the manner of the world, and fear that their consecration to the Lord might in some manner blight their earthly prospects. What a great mistake! Do not such parents know that it is their privilege to present themselves to the Lord and all they have, including their children? and do they not know, too, that "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it"? (Prov. 10:22.) Can they not realize that it is better to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of wickedness? and that greater happiness would accompany a devoted life, even though spent in poverty, than could come through any other course, even though surrounded by every luxury? Have they not learned these lessons from their own experiences? and can they not apply them likewise to their own children?

Samuel ministered to Eli in the temple; that is, he served the high priest – who was specially the Lord's servant and representative – in his dwelling apartments which were close by the tabernacle, – for the temple was not yet built. Samuel's parents, in thus subjecting him early in life to the duties of a servant, were really putting him in a most excellent school. In our opinion it is a mistake to suppose that the early years of life – from ten to eighteen – should be largely spent in play; not only is the wisdom of bringing children early into positions of responsibility, and, more or less, of routine and drudgery exemplified in the case of Samuel, but it is also exemplified in the cases of many of the prominent people of this land today. Mr. Carnegie, whose fame is world-wide, entered early upon the drudgery of life as a telegraph

messenger. Mr. [R3114 : page 361] Edison, whose fame as an electrician is also world-wide, began life's drudgery as a newsboy. And thus it is in perfect accord with the experiences of today in worldly things that we perceive that the consecration of Samuel as a servant of Eli at an early age had probably much to do with the firmness and grandeur of his character when, subsequently, he became the Lord's prophet, and the last and the greatest of Israel's Judges.

Our observation is that there is no more common mistake made by parents than that of supposing their children could not understand or appreciate religious things properly at an early age – say twelve years. The experience of Samuel and our own experience and that of many others assure us that some of the deepest religious sentiments may be experienced as early as twelve years of age. This should be watched for by the parent and should be cultivated with much more care than they cultivate the tenderest flowers in their gardens. The flowers of veneration, spirituality, hope, faith, trust, in the child-mind need and should have tenderest care and watering and weeding and assistance. The parent by nature and by divine direction occupying a responsible position as gardener to these, must appreciate flowers in the hearts of his own family; and if he neglect his responsibilities he is culpable and will surely suffer, not only disappointment in respect to his children in the future, but suffer also in that he will be the loser of certain blessings in his own heart; because it is a part of the divine arrangement that he that watereth others shall himself be watered.

Public responsibilities and duties, and trying to save other people's children, can never excuse any Christian parent from his responsibilities toward his own children; nor can he shift his responsibilities upon Sunday School teachers. His neglect of duty will surely work to his own disadvantage as well as to the disadvantage of his offspring; and if in the past he has been negligent in this matter he cannot too soon rectify matters, though he will need to pray for and to seek to exercise greater wisdom necessary to overcome his past neglect.

The story of the Lord's first message to Samuel is beautiful in its simplicity. The boy evidently was accustomed to obeying the calls of Eli for various services at various times, and to this end had his sleeping apartments near by – Eli was advanced in life, about seventy-eight years of age. Three times the Lord called Samuel, and he answered, "Here am I," and went to Eli. It was after the third call that Eli instructed him to say, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

The record is that for a long time such a message from the Lord had been "precious," that is, scarce: Eli, although a good man, and sincere and faithful and kind in his dealings with Samuel, had been too lax in his dealings with his own sons, who were priests and had much to do with the services of the tabernacle, and who, therefore, in every sense of the word should have been pious and exemplary men. The Lord had already sent Eli a warning message respecting his sons who were profligate and open transgressors, not only in financial affairs, but also in morals. Eli should have realized his responsibilities and should have checked their wrong course and, if necessary, should have dismissed them from the service of the tabernacle even though they were his own sons; but in proportion as he had grown weak in mind and body, they had grown strong, self-willed and impious, and the old man seems not to have had the necessary strength of character to deal with them. The Lord's message delivered to Samuel was in respect to Eli's family and the punishment that should come upon them for their sins, which were much more grievous in view of the fact that they were the exemplars and instructors of the people.

Eli's experience with his wayward sons calls for our sympathy; yet doubtless in some respects, at least, he brought his difficulties upon himself by reason of his neglect of the early training of them in the ways of the Lord, in the ways of his righteousness. Doubtless he often looked at the faithful lad who ministered to him so patiently and industriously, and wished that his sons had been of similar disposition; but the time so to wish advantageously and profitably was long gone by; they should have been begotten in the spirit of consecration, and trained in

conformity therewith, and the Lord's Word for it is that when they were old they would not have departed from it. There is a lesson for parents here, too; the fact that the Lord's service is to be considered of primary importance and is to be defended even at the expense of their own flesh and blood.

In the morning Samuel hesitated to tell his kind master, Eli, the unfavorable message he had received of the Lord in the night; but Eli was anxious to know whatever the Lord had to say, and importuned until Samuel told him all. There is a good lesson here for the Lord's people – a lesson of humility and kindness; the lad might have felt puffed up to think that the Lord, who so seldom spoke to any, had now spoken to him; he might have felt himself honored and above Eli, in that the message spoke of the discomfiture of the latter; pride might have made him boastful and inconsiderate of the feelings of his master so that he would have taken delight in telling him of the calamities that would come, and how greatly he had been honored of the Lord. Samuel, on the contrary, exhibited the spirit of meekness, apparently not even considering the honor that had come to him; but, rather, sympathizing [R3114 : page 362] with his master he would have preferred not to burden his heart with the message of calamity.

The Lord is speaking now to some of his faithful ones through his Word, through his "knock" (Rev. 3:20), which tells us of his presence, through the signs which mark the incoming of the new dispensation: are any disposed now to be haughty and proud and boastful because the Lord has permitted them to hear his voice and to know something of his plan and of the calamities coming upon Babylon? Should they not rather be filled with humility so that self would be lost sight of entirely? Should not all favored of the Lord speak of the trouble coming upon Babylon sympathetically, with a disposition to assist to an escape, rather than a disposition to gloat over and rejoice in coming troubles in which present systems will be completely overthrown?

The Lord speaks in our day in a different manner from that in which he spoke in olden times: as the Scriptures declare, "God, who at sundry

times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." (Heb. 1:1,2.) The Word of the Lord is still precious and scarce in that it is not, at the present time, given to all, but only to a certain class; as it is written, "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear." The majority of mankind have no ear to hear at the present time, no eye to see the glorious beauty of God's plan. As the Apostle explains, "The god of this world hath blinded their minds" – earthly things, earthly ambitions, earthly hopes, earthly calls and voices, distract their attention, fill their capacity; but blessed are our eyes for they see, and our ears for they hear, and blessed shall we be if, like Samuel, when we hear the Lord's message we respond promptly, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Such as thus respond shall be taught of God – by the Word of his grace, – the words of the Lord Jesus, and the words of his inspired apostles – instructed and guided in the understanding of these through the holy spirit, through the various helps and channels and agents which the Lord is pleased to use – perhaps a tract, perhaps a book, perhaps a letter, perhaps a conversation, perhaps a sermon.

He who would continue to be taught of the Lord, must continue to listen for his voice, continue to be in the hearing and obeying attitude of heart. The difficulty with some apparently is that their own wills are not fully extinct, dead – that their consecration is not complete; hence while consecrated enough to wish not to disobey the Lord's voice, they have certain ideas of their own respecting what his voice should say, and they prefer to interpret his message in conformity to their own preferences: they will to do more or less their own wills, and will to hear the Lord's voice directing them in accordance with their own wills. This is a most dangerous situation and is generally accompanied by self-conceit and self-assertion and will ultimately lead far from the Christian's goal. Let each of us resolve by the Lord's grace that we will out of honest heart continually seek to hear the pure Word of God, and that with a desire to obey it as far as we are able.

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