



## Sermon: Sunday, January 21, 2024

# “Samuel’s Experience of God’s Presence!”

**SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 3:1-10** <sup>1</sup>Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. <sup>2</sup>At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <sup>3</sup>the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” <sup>5</sup>and ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. <sup>6</sup>The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” <sup>7</sup>Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup>The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup>Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’ ” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. <sup>10</sup>Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” <sup>11</sup>Then the LORD said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.

### Introduction: Prophet Samuel

The bitter cold continues. Did you all have a good week? Today is the third Sunday after Epiphany. Today’s text describes the scene in which the Lord calls Samuel.

Samuel was a religious and political leader in ancient Israel. He also played an important role in the transition of Israel from the tribal society of the judges to the monarchy. He established Saul as the first king of Israel, and appointed David as the king of Israel after Saul.

Samuel's mother, Hannah, made a vow that if God gave her a son after being barren for a long time, she would dedicate him to God. As a result, when Samuel reached the age of weaning, he was entrusted by his mother Hannah to be raised by priest Eli.

As time passed, the time came for the priest Eli to decide on a successor. In fact, if things were to go according to nature, one of Eli's two sons, Hophni or Phinehas, should become Eli's successor as priest. However, Eli’s two sons not only did not receive respect from the people, but they also did not fear God (1 Samuel 2:12-17). So, the mind of Priest Eli, who must select a successor, is in confusion. The story in today’s text is set in this situation.

### Body: Samuel! Samuel!

According to verse 3 of today's text, Priest Eli was old enough to be blind. In the text, Eli lays down on his bed to sleep, and Samuel also lays down next to the Ark of the Covenant of God. At that time, the Lord called Samuel (1 Samuel 3:4). However, Samuel thought that the priest Eli had called him, so he ran to him and said, **“Here I am.”** However, Eli tells Samuel to go back to sleep since he did not call him. According to today's text, after this happened to Samuel two more times, Priest Eli realized that the Lord had called Samuel. Eli said to Samuel; **“Go, lie down; and if He calls you, you shall say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”**



After this, while Samuel was sleeping, he heard a voice calling him, ‘**Samuel, Samuel.**’ God called Samuel the fourth time. Samuel responds as Eli the priest had taught him: ‘**Speak, for your servant is listening.**’

This is Samuel’s experience of God’s presence described in today’s text. In fact, experiencing God’s deep presence in our lives is important for us to remain steadfast in the process of sanctification and achieve spiritual growth.

We must remember that John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, fulfilled his mission as an evangelist through a deep experience of God’s presence. On May 24, 1738, John Wesley woke up at 5 in the morning, read the Bible, and that evening, feeling depressed, decided to attend a small meeting of Moravians in St. Oldersgate, London. John Wesley confesses his conversion as follows:

**“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”**

Coming back to today’s text, what happened in the ‘**house of God**’ in Shiloh at that time? Also, how did Samuel experience God’s presence?

To understand today’s text, we must know that there are many places in the Bible where God calls a specific person with his voice. In Genesis 15:1, the Lord says, “**Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.**” In Exodus 3:4 the Lord called Moses: “**Moses! Moses!**”. A similar story appears not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. In Acts 9:4, we see the Lord calling Saul, “**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**”

So, what is the reality of this divine calling? The experience of God’s presence is a literary metaphor for the ultimate and absolute experience. Our irresistible, absolute experience of God gives us confidence that the call was God’s. Abraham, Samuel, Moses, Paul, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley had this experience. We must know that this experience is also possible for us, and we must also strive for it.

However, such experiences do not often occur in our religious life. Why is this so?

It depends on whether we have ears to hear God’s call or not. That is why Jesus said in Matthew 11:15, “**He who has ears, let him hear.**” Also, Revelation 2:7 says, “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**”

However, just because we are smart, have a lot of knowledge, have great character, and are kind does not mean that we can listen to the word of the Lord well. We must remember that Jesus was frustrated because even his disciples could not understand his words.

So how can we experience God like Samuel, who heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘**Samuel, Samuel!**’? I don’t know everything either. However, the Bible and Christian tradition speak of how we can experience God’s presence. We can learn from those who first experienced the presence of the Lord.

There are countless people in Christian history who experienced the presence of the Lord and were converted. I encourage you to meditate deeply on Paul’s conversion. Chapter 9 of Acts describes the conversion of Paul, who was persecuting believers of Jesus. While Paul was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians, he suddenly saw a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**’. (Acts Chapter 9). From then on, Paul transformed into a person who spread the gospel of Jesus, whom he had persecuted, throughout Europe. Paul became, as he put it, a ‘**new creation**’ and became an evangelist of the gospel. Paul also came to see the world and his own life in a completely new direction. This experience is the ‘**experience of God’s presence**’ and the ‘**experience of salvation.**’



## **Conclusion: Deep Religious Experience**

Now let's summarize today's message. In experiencing God's presence, we experience 'holy fear' and 'awe' toward the Lord. Additionally, this deep experience of God makes the time and space of our lives new every day.

Therefore, a Christian's daily life may be monotonous, but there is always something new in that monotonous daily life. However, life without a deep experience of God inevitably becomes boring. As a result, we become dependent on money, alcohol, drugs, gambling, and other things that relieve our physical boredom.

A deep experience of God is not achieved through a mystical experience without worrying about or exploring the truth. This is not possible only through professional study. Of course, the Bible does not explain in detail the process of reaching God's experience. Please remember, before Moses experienced God's calling, he spent 40 years seeking in the Midian Desert. Paul, St. Augustine, Luther, and John Wesley likewise had such times.

There is no easy or fast way for us to experience God deeply. Therefore, we must worry about the truth, hope to experience God's presence, and follow the path given to us. Additionally, we must learn from our ancestors of faith in the Bible and church history who experienced the presence of God.

Through this process, we can, without realizing it, enter the experience of God's presence pointed out by 2,000 years of Christian spirituality. I hope that, like Samuel who heard the voice of heaven in today's text, our experience of God will become deeper and richer in our lives.

