

# 1 Samuel 2:27-36

Intro May 4, 2008 God's Meddling Mercy

For the past 2½ years I have had the privilege to be a part of a group of pastors in southeastern Wisconsin who meet once a month. In the business community these are called tech or professional development groups. Not just an organized grip session, it provides an atmosphere for seven pastors to sort through issues with like-minded men. Each month a different topic is suggested by each of the pastors to be explored. This week it was my turn and my issue touched on what John Harris presented a few minutes ago. "How can we engage our culture by impacting our community?" The format of the group is simple; they ask questions of me, withholding advice until the end, not easy for pastors to do.

After a few minutes the leader of the group tried to bring some focus on this topic and redirected the question raised. If Cornerstone is going to reach our community, perhaps we should first consider what are our strengths, so he asked: "What is Cornerstone good at?"

I could have easily mentioned the quality, Christ-honoring music that is presented each week. My mind may have gone to the community that is found here in the Shepherd Groups.

Perhaps what we do best is theology, engaging the heart and mind in seeking to know God.

But that is not what I blurted out. Without missing a beat, when asked: "What's Cornerstone good at?" I simply said SIN!

I know that is not something to be proud about. I don't think that would work well on a brochure or a sign outside. But as I said it, the words rang in my ears, causing embarrassment, but also a sense of relief having said those words...because they are true.

Fortunately, the story does not end there, but that acknowledgement is critical. What do we have to offer anyone who walks through these doors? Lives lived pure? Sorry, that's never been any of us. But what we offer are lives muddled by sin, called by God, redeemed by the Son and being made holy by the Spirit.

What we offer to our visitors are sin stained souls, distressed marriages, troubled teens, anxious and confused parishioners, So with that in view, we can come to God's Word assured of our standing, seeking His grace, knowing that each passage speaks to everyone seated here this morning.

God's condemnation of sin is clear. His judgment against our breaking His law is certain. The effects of our failures are seen daily in our relationships within our homes, in our jobs and in our church. So what are we going to do about it? I want you to hear what was said to one man who had failed so much and so often in his life that God's judgment against his family could not be prevented. Yet, in God's harsh discipline ring words of hope, for sinners like you and me, hope that not only we may be changed, but that we may be agents of change in a world that needs a change.

The scene is set for change in Israel. Hannah prayed for a son and vowed to give him back to God. When Samuel was weaned, she gave him to Eli, the chief priest at the temple in Shiloh. Two weeks ago we saw the condition of the home to which Hannah entrusted her young son. Eli's two adult kids, Hophni and Phinehas were priests in name only. They stole from God and His people the meat for sacrifice and they stole the women who served God at the temple. Eli's fatherly failures are made clear as he confronted his boys selectively and without consequence. So that now, a man from God, a prophet, paid a visit with some words and actions from God. At a time when, according to 3:1, God's Word was rare, here is a time it was heard loud and clear. This is something we need to hear, just as Eli had to hear

READ 1 Samuel 2:27-36

We are good at sin, God is good at discipline, and God is gracious at intervening.

## **WE ARE GOOD AT SIN vv27-29**

### **Our sin rejects God's glorious gifts in the past 27-28**

God's starting point is with the covenant, with his promises, within the context of grace.

Three times in this section God rehearses what he has done for Eli

*I revealed, I choose, I gave* – this is the heritage that Eli received from his family.

Eli is in a long line of priests, from the time of Aaron to that day. Stretching back to the exodus when God, by his own sovereign grace rescued Israel. Out of all Israel, it was his family that was given the honor to be the mediators, the go-betweens standing before God, representing God's people.

God's choice of that line resulted in his family receiving sacred duties. Those duties (v28) included: offering the sacrifices (pointed to their sinfulness and need for a redeemer), burning incense – (prayers lifted up before God), wearing the ephod, (a vest illustrating the discernment of God's will for his people).

For their service, God gave the line of Aaron, the priests who offered sacrifices, special rights to meat offered in sacrifice. They were allotted choice portions. For their privileged position among God's people, for the work they were called to do, they have some great perks.

But Eli rejected all of that. In his turning a blind eye to their stealing of food and enjoying the meat with Hophni and Phinehas, he participated in their rejection of God's glorious past. This is not just the breaking of some external law, like the law of gravity as though sin is dropping a rock on your foot is a reminder that the law of gravity cannot be ignored. Sin is not *just* a violation of a universal maxim.

Sin is relational as it is against other people and against God. For that reason it is a personal violation. Sin repudiates God's goodness to us. As people who profess faith, who lay claim to being sons and daughters of God, our sin spits in the face of all God has done for our family and us.

Previous grace makes present sin all the more lurid. So what has Christ done for you?

- We live in a land and at a time with wonderful temporal benefits. We are at ease. Even in the midst of an economic slump or a time of uncertainty, we are blessed with prosperity.
- We have freedom to worship, so that we may read, learn and grow as we believe best.
- We have a completed canon, God's Word, truth written down, given to us in which we can rely.
- We have 2000 years of God's faithfulness from one generation to another, standing on the shoulders of godly men and women who have fought and died for the faith so that we may have confidence to profess what we believe.
- Many of us have parents, grandparents, who likewise have contributed to our faith, so that while we wrestle with our sins, God graciously kept us from other life wrenching pains.

In light of all that, how often have we squandered our inheritance of grace in disobedience?

I must never forget that in my sin, I reject all that God has given to me to this point.

### **Our sin rejects God's glorious gifts today 29**

In light of all that, now God zeros in on Eli's sin. For all God has done, why in light of grace do you scorn the sacrifices and offerings?

The word scorn carries the idea of kicking something off, giving the boot to a pesky dog nipping at your cuff, shaking off dung stuck to your heel. God's grace, forgiveness of sins, all the benefits of belonging to Christ is nothing but a nuisance to be punted from your life.

He scorned God, kicked him aside as he honored his sons more than God. The sweet reasonableness, the gutless compassion he showed to his two sons, allowing them to continue as God's servants, is his crime. Eli violated the first commandment, there was a god of family harmony he worshipped. What was to be given to God, he took for himself and enjoyed with his two boys. He rebuked them, but never removed them from their posts.

We are so good at scorning God's grace in our lives, worshiping at the altar of harmony.

The pangs of guilt are shaken off as we lie to please a manager or co-workers. We turn a blind eye to what our children do, not wanting to appear too strict, keeping family peace. We can be adept at excusing our actions, oddly thinking that we preserve God's gracious working in our homes by withholding the compassion of God's standards. Rather we are called to remember what God demands and what He has done through our lives and not reject, scorn His Law.

## **GOD IS GOOD AT DISCIPLINE vv30-34**

### **God disciplines us when we take him lightly 30**

What was promised to his line is now withdrawn. Covenant obligations are attached to covenant promises. When we reject the obligations, the promises, blessings are removed.

The words used here describe the nature of God's response: honor, despise, lightly esteem.

The Hebrew *honor* is the same word as glory, having substance, weight or importance. To honor God is to give him his due, to treat Him as carrying weight in your life. When we honor God, he responds in kind. But to despise, pictured by lifting the head, turning the

nose up, (like a child turning away from veggies), receives from God the same response. When we treat God as insignificant, we are disregarded as important.

This simple principle was a powerful reminder to the Scottish athlete Eric Liddell during the 1924 Olympics in Paris. As England's hope for a medal in the 100m all of Britain was infuriated when Liddell refused to run on the Sabbath. Instead he opted for the 400m, a marginal event for him. On the day of the race an American trainer slipped a piece of paper to Liddell who was vilified for his refuse to promote his own country's hope for gold. The paper contained a quote from 1 Samuel 2:30, "Those who honor me I will honor." Liddell ran with that piece of paper in his hand. He not only won the race but also broke the existing world record with a time of 47.6 seconds finishing 15 feet in front of the silver medalist.

As moving as that story is, we often see ourselves in Eli more than Eric, we know our calling is to honor God, but we despise him far more commonly. For that reason it is no surprise that we experience God's discipline in the form of God withdrawing his blessing.

### **God's discipline withdraws God's blessing 31-34**

For Eli discipline comes in the withdrawal of blessing in having his lineage continue to serve God as chief priests. No longer would his descendants live long enough to be elders in his clan. Although such events would be fulfilled after he dies, he will see evidence of God's judgment in the death of both his sons on the same day, an event described in 4:11.

There is a loss of privilege, but not a removal from God's people. God's discipline does not expunge sinful Eli, but removes blessings as a reminder of God's fatherly displeasure. There are consequences to sin. God will discipline us to train and restore us as we are in His family.

When God disciplines us it is in the context of the covenant. We have a mistaken view of how Christian community operates.

When one walks through church doors, their acceptance is often predicated on agreeable behavior. If you behave well, you'll be accepted. If you keep your nose clean, dress like us, and are not too offensive to be around, we'll be your friends. Then next we expect them to believe. Your faith should look much like mine. As those mesh we call them to belong. So the order: behave, believe, and then belong becomes the way we operate. If, at any point your behavior or belief contradicts what is expected, we assume you don't belong, and out you go.

However, the biblical format takes place in the covenant. You enter this family and belong. Out of that belonging comes belief as you are trained. From right belief comes right living and behavior flows accordingly. Not much different in our homes. Our little children lack proper etiquette, their thinking is fuzzy. But we begin with their belonging. When their behavior contradicts what we desire, we don't oust them at that point. We speak to them from the foundation of belonging.

So what happens then when we, as members of this community, belonging to God's covenant people, transgress in belief or behavior?

We are called to repent as brothers and sisters as part of this family. If our behavior is such that we reeeaaallly mess up, does that sin dispel us from the family so that we no longer belong? Short of denying the faith or walking out from this family, the answer is no. What may happen, however, are negative consequences of our sinful choices. Those consequences are temporal loss of God's blessing here and now. Fathers, if you sin by treating your children as though their life choice matter little, don't be surprised if they rebel. Kids, if you mess around with your choices regarding sex, expect a lifetime of physical disease or emotional trauma. For any of us, if we tiptoe around the border of sinful choices with money, drink, leisure activity, God may well withhold some of the joys of this life you would otherwise have.

Yet, your standing as God's child is not withdrawn. As long as you are here, willing to be associated with fellow sinners like us, the good news of the gospel is that God, as a loving Father, will discipline you as a son. That means you are still a part of the family. See Hebrews 12 for more.

Fortunately we don't end with that, as our passage reminds us that we are indeed good at sin, God is good at discipline, but he is gracious at intervening in our messed up lives.

## **GOD IS GRACIOUS AT INTERVENING vv35-36**

### **God intervenes with a perfect priest**

There is a promise in v35. As much as Eli failed, God will raise up a faithful priest.

Some see Samuel is that priest, waiting in the wings, but his line likewise fails as his own sons failed to follow the Lord. We are given a clue in 1 Kings 2 where Solomon deposes the final descendent of Eli, Abiathar, who sided with rebellion against David. In his place Solomon installs Zadok who serves in the Temple and whose line remains through the exile in Babylon. In 1 Kings 2:27 we are told that this fulfills what was said this day to Eli.

But yet, even that points to a future fulfillment, as Zadok is not the perfect priest. All this was a shadow of what was to come, as the priesthood is abolished, for in time Christ comes as the perfect priest and the final sacrifice.

The author of Hebrews points to Christ as the perfect priest, the one who would be anointed forever, who would finally do all that was in God's mind and heart. For this reason in Hebrews we hear that...2:17; 4:14-16; 9:11-14; and 10:11-14.

Here is where we find the answer, where our fears flee, that while we are good at sin and God judges sin, his discipline is temporal, his promise to us remains without ever being withdrawn. For His own Son intervenes for us.

We need not fear God's wrath will crush us. We do not cower wondering if we can ever be accepted. For Christ, our High Priest and perfect sacrifice answers God's discipline, by becoming the one who is punished in our place. We may well reap the consequences of our failure to obey God's Law, but we will never be cut off from His grace as His children.

We know this is true for even Eli and his line, while disciplined for their sin, remained serving as priests. Even more so do we, the Eli's that we are. How so?

### **God intervenes with a priesthood**

God does not put us on a shelf when we sin or cast us aside, but He calls us to a new priesthood. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12. We are the royal priesthood, kings and priests serving under our Lord and High Priest, Jesus Christ. While we should be cast aside he has welcomed us in as his friends.

How does this affect us today? We must take seriously the call to holy living. Grace is not an excuse for more sin, but rather calls us to repent, to be clear and upfront about our failures, to agree with God when we displease him with our scorning the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

Priests serve as those who intervene between men and God. Each of us are called to that task as we stand before each other, confessing our sin, owning the truth about our lives that we need a savior...and His name is Jesus.

We are indeed good at sin. There is no doubt about that. If that insults you, then Cornerstone is not the place for you. But if you know all too well that while your behavior is not what God desires, your belief is never as perfect as it shall be, that you belong to this family of fellow sinners, saved by God's grace, called to serve him, trusting him to guide you to Christ who will change and transform your life to reflect his high calling to holiness.

That is why we have this table spread before us. There was a sacrifice for us made by our High Priest, Jesus Christ, of his own flesh and blood. He is present today in simple elements, set aside for this special use.