



# THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

When John Calvin, one of the heroes of the reformation, began preaching in Geneva in the 1540s, the city experienced an incredible change. Calvin had made it his aim to preach six times each week, systematically through the Bible. People had been oppressed, weighed down by the indulgences of the Catholic church; but with Calvin's emphasis on reformation doctrines, doctrines that taught that God's saving work was by his Word, a new light had dawned. In Geneva, the motto of the reformation was the Latin phrase "*Post Tenebras Lux*" – "After Darkness, Light."

At key moments in human history, at the darkest moments, God has chosen to break through the darkness and bring light. And the way that he does that is by the calling of his Word. God's Word is powerful to change a heart and a nation. His Word is able to create out of nothing to make something. And as 1 Samuel begins, Israel is slouching towards darkness. The period of the Judges had seen a slow and steady decline towards darkness.

But as 1 Samuel begins, there is hope. God will create something new, and he will do that by the call of his Word. How does God create something new in dark days?

## **See the Power of the Word (1 Sam. 3:1)**

As the book of Samuel begins, it is during the days of the judges. Everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes. Things are so bad in Israel that even the priests are using their service in the tabernacle for self-serving purposes. Eli, the high priest, is unwilling to correct his self-serving sons, Phineas and Hophni.

Things are so bad that when the favoured woman Hannah comes to pray in the temple, she cannot get a sound out of her mouth, only moving her lips. When Eli sees this, 1 Sam. 1:12ff tells us that he thought she was drunk! The high priest can't even recognize someone praying! And the reason Eli can't even recognize a praying woman is that the Word of the Lord had been rare in those days – there was no frequent vision of God. His eyes, we are told in 3:2 are dim. The eyes had not seen the glory of God and mouths were not speaking about his grace and goodness. Oh, they had the law. They had the stories and history from Moses and the Exodus. But he hadn't dealt with the evil of his sons, let alone his toleration of evil in his heart. God was just a little piece of Israel – he had been reduced to formalities and rituals.

But in the midst of Israel's spiritual decline, God is about to do something new. As 1 Samuel begins, Elkanah, whose name means "God creates", and his wife Hannah have a miraculous child. Out of an empty womb, God will hear the prayers of Hannah. She gives birth to a son, Samuel – whose name means "God hears" – and begins to create something new.

God has chosen to create anew since Phineas and Hophni are evil and wicked men. They will die and be removed from the priesthood, and the Lord promises in 1 Sam. 2:35 that he will raise up

## **The Story of Everything – Call: 1 Sam. 3**

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a faithful priest, one who will do what God desires, and he will build him a sure and faithful house. God will create something new. Just like he spoke at creation, he will speak again. God will create a vision of himself; a new creation. He will speak. Eli's physical and spiritual sight may be dim, but the Word of God will prevail.

What happens when there is a famine not of bread, but of the Word of God, is that people don't see clearly. They judge right and wrong by what feels right. They ignore their consciences. They become self-serving. But when God speaks, he speaks to put things right, to make things new. And in a day of darkness and dread, we need to see that the way that God calls is by the power of his Word.

### **Hear the Call of the Word (1 Sam. 3:2-10)**

From chapter 2 through chapter 3, what we have is a hearing problem. Eli hears about his sons – they steal from God by taking some of the offerings for themselves, and they have sexual relations with the women who are serving at the house of God. They're selfish and pleasure seeking. When Eli hears about these things, he rebukes his sons, but they do not hear their father's rebuke (2:23-25).

But Samuel is different. Samuel, the boy whose name means "God hears," has a unique encounter with God that changes the course of his nation's history.

What makes Samuel unique is that he, like Samson, was dedicated from birth to be a Nazarite. A Nazarite had to commit to do three things: not have a razor ever touch their head, never drink strong drink, and not touch anything dead. Unlike the priests who were to wear a head covering, a Nazarite's hair was to be like a crown; a priest could drink alcohol, but not in the service of the Lord, and to purify themselves from contact with the dead to be in service to God. A Nazarite's refusal to drink alcohol and not touching the dead was to be a reminder that they were to be priests to God in all of life, and that the whole world should be holy to them. Samuel had been dedicated as a Nazarite – someone who was to live like the whole world was holy, even though everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. Samuel had been dedicated to God by his mother, and so he was being raised in the service of the Lord.

As we meet the boy Samuel, we discover that it is nearly morning. The lampstand oil has been burning all night, and the boy is sleeping in the tabernacle – in the Most Holy Place. He is by the Ark of the Covenant. He is in the place where the High Priest is to go once a year. Because he did not yet know the Lord, God is gracious because he's going to do a new thing.

And what God does is he calls to Samuel. But when Samuel hears the voice, he mistakes it for Eli and goes. This happens a second, and a third time. Eli, so dim and slow, having so little

exposure to the voice of God, finally clues in: God is calling Samuel! So he tells Samuel what to do: say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.”

In these short verses, the word “call” is used 11 times. God is calling. But hard hearts don’t recognize him. God is calling, but the most spiritual man in Israel can’t figure out what’s going on until the third time.

But this is how God makes things new. In dark days, in hard times, he speaks. And his voice speaks an effectual call. People may not know his voice, but he will speak and break through the darkness. His word will accomplish his purposes. He will give a revelation of himself. And when God does that, there is no dimness about the greatness of being in his presence. Samuel may sleep next to the Ark of the Covenant and be near to the presence of God, but it isn’t until God speaks that Samuel hears God and he sees clearly.

This is what happens with the call of God. You can know a lot about God. You can know details about him. You can even work for him. But do you know him? Has he made himself known to you? I remember studying a concept in mathematics. I was working through a formula, trying to get it. I had read the concept over and over. I had done the problems in the text. I could get the right answer sometimes, but I didn’t know why or how it worked. But then, as I was sitting there, it was like a lightbulb went on. I could see something clearly. The concepts made sense. I understood how the formula worked. And suddenly, the math problems that had been so challenging now made sense!

In a greater way, this is what God’s revelation of himself is like. You can see and know things about God. You can even be near to holy things like the Ark of the Covenant. You can hear sermons. But it just doesn’t make sense. It seems boring. But then, when God speaks and creates something new in your heart, what happens is you see and hear things in a fresh way. It’s all clear. Your sin isn’t just a little problem – it separates you from God. And God’s grace isn’t just something we sing about as amazing – it floods your heart, overwhelms your soul, and changes your desire. Suddenly you don’t just hear God’s voice, you respond: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

### **Obey the Call of the Word (1 Sam. 3:11-21)**

When you hear the voice of the Lord, you know that you have to obey. Samuel gets word that God will punish Phineas and Hophni because they treat God like he doesn’t matter. And this word causes Samuel to lie awake until morning. He can’t sleep. He knows that it’s a serious thing to sin against God, and he’s troubled by what will happen. So when he wakes up in the morning, opening the doors of the Most Holy Place, Eli asks him what God has said.



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Samuel is afraid – these are tough words. But Eli says that there will be a curse on him if he doesn't speak up. So Samuel gives Eli the bad news – his sons will die for their sins.

This is the hard work of being a servant of the Word. And Samuel wears the crown of the rule of God – uncut hair – as a reminder that there may be no king in Israel, but God rules not by might but by his Word. And when his Word is spoken, it is to be obeyed. There is comfort and terror in the Word of God. There are things that God says that should cause us to have a healthy fear and respect of him, and there are things to mend our broken souls. We should fear sin – it can and will destroy us; we should find comfort that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and will do justice to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all of our wrong doings.

The Word of the Lord is like a centrifuge. A centrifuge is a rapidly spinning machine that uses force to separate substances of different densities. As it spins, one substance will rise, the other will fall. And this is what the Word of God does – he speaks and he separates darkness and light. He exposes sin, and he shows grace. And when we hear the call of that word, it should cause us both terror at the darkness in our hearts and draw us into the marvelous light of his mercy and grace.

Samuel doesn't just speak sugary sermons – he speaks the whole truth. The reason he does this is that the Word of God cannot be bound. It becomes like fire in the bones. And the Word of God will separate darkness and light. It will expose sin, but it will also bring the healing of forgiveness to those who confess and turn away from their sin. The Word of God creates – and in the dark days of the judges, Samuel is the last great judge of Israel, that last great military leader who leads not by the sword, but by the Word of God. And all of this is so we would...

### **See the Glory of Christ – John 1**

Just as God's word came to Samuel and called him, so the Word comes to us. John tells us in his Gospel that the Word that was with God and was God, the Word that created everything we see – that Word became flesh and tabernacle among us. That word spoke, separating the darkness from the light. Some people hated this Word because he exposed their evil deeds. Others were drawn to the light because the True Light had come into the World.

This is what Jesus does. He's more than a good moral teacher. He's doing more than showing you how to be a good person. He is showing you the inner darkness of your heart so that the Word became Flesh would not only be the Word that creates the universe, but would create a new heart in you – a heart that would hear his call, walk in his ways, and obey his commands. This Word not only came to dwell and live and walk among us, this Word also came to be pierced by the darkness so that the word of darkness would forever be destroyed when he comes and speaks his Word into our hearts. For the Word that he speaks into our hearts is a



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creative word – the God who said, “Let there be light!” has shone the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:4, 6).

We believe strongly in the reformational nature of the Word of God here at CBC. This Word is our light, life, and hope. It is what we base our ministry upon. It is what we build our ministry out of. It is what we come back to. When I look back at the 11 years that I have been here, I can’t help but be amazed at what God has done. And after yesterday’s AGM, I had someone send me an email that said these words that sum up 1 Sam. 3 so well:

CBC Ilderton teaches the Word clearly and without apology. When that happens, lives are changed and people become more and more like Christ. Needs are met at the deepest level. There will be growth. When the Word is taught, it is amazing how there is always something for everyone, regardless of where they are at in their spiritual walk. It is beautiful to see how God takes His Word and builds His church.