

Sunday, July 30, 2023

First Lesson: 1 Samuel 3: 19-20

Second Lesson: Joel 2: 28-29

Sermon Series: Revivals that Move Mountains Week 4

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- We are continuing with week 4 of our 8-week sermon series called “Revivals that Move Mountains.” This is a sermon series that is designed to get our minds, hearts and bodies refueled, renewed, re-energized and refocused on the work of the ministry that is always before us;
- Therefore in unpacking the role in which revivals have played in the scriptures, I would like to use *author Geoff Waugh’s book Revival Fire*, that I mentioned last week; in which we now have a slide for just in case you would like to take some notes, that reveals *9 commonalities that these revivals shared*;
 1. They occurred in times of moral darkness and national depression.

2. Each began in the heart of a consecrated servant of God who became the energizing power behind it [*only 1 spark*].
 3. Each revival rested on the Word of God, and most were the result of proclaiming God's Word with power.
 4. All resulted in a return to the worship of God.
 5. Each witnessed the destruction of idols where they existed.
 6. In each revival, there was a recorded separation from sin.
 7. In every revival the people returned to obeying God's laws.
 8. There was a restoration of great joy and gladness.
 9. Each revival was followed by a period of national prosperity.
- Therefore, today's goal will be to look at the revivals that are occurring in both of our lessons today; see how these commonalities might reveal itself to us, **with the hope that** they make speak to our situation today.

- Therefore in looking at our first lesson of 1 Samuel this morning, we may witness point number 2 from the list that I just read, coming into fruition, in which the consecrated individual that would be the spark of a revival in his community would be Samuel.
- And so just to clarify what it means when the author names that a revival begins with an individual who is consecrated, in this case, we are naming an individual or individuals, **who have been set a part to do God's work.**
- In our first lesson, **the individual who has been set apart to do God's work is Samuel.**
- To help me to tell the story of Samuel's revival, I would like to glean from a recent trip that I took with *Justice in Action* in Hebron Kentucky; for I am seeing many parallels between the two.
- For as I reflect on the new insights and revelations that I have made as a result of attending this training conference; similar to Samuel, **the persons who I am identifying to be consecrated,** with the charge of helping to lead our communities of Lincoln Nebraska and

the Lancaster County *into becoming not just justice in words, but justice in action*; it would be the community organizers of *Justice in Action*— Beth Graverholt and Olivia Butts.

- For the role of the community organizers in this justice coalition we have established roughly a year ago, are to be the first-line leaders, that are here to help guide and equip us pastoral leaders, who serve over the partnering congregations that are associated with *Justice in Action*, **to help us to lead our flock**, into living out what it means *to do justice to love mercy and walk humbly with our God. (Micah 6:8)*
- In many ways, Samuel too was a leader called to do a similar task.
- For Samuel had reached an important period of his life.
- For although Samuel was described as a child, there is no definitive indication of his age.
- The original word may refer to one of any age between an infant and an adult of forty years (cf. 1 Sam. 4:21; 2 Chron. 13:7).

- Josephus refers to Samuel as twelve years of age (*Antiquities* V. 10. 4).
- Either way, **the word of Jehovah** was precious in those days; for there was no frequent vision (v. 1).
- **The word of the Lord** and the vision which Samuel witnessed, as recorded in this chapter, were so infrequent during this period in Israel, that Samuel was immediately recognized as a prophet.
- When I think about our local community organizers here in the Lincoln/Lancaster County, I can't help but think about the enormous vision they have been tasked to revive, with the hope that in this vision, pastors will then be open to learn how to equip and encourage our own communities to consider that together, we can do something to help fulfill it.
- For towards the conclusion of our conference, us leaders of *Justice in Action*, had the privilege of visiting the ***National Underground Railroad Freedom Center*** in Cincinnati...for which I have to publicly thank Kim Ebers for suggesting that we go to this museum.

- For just as we concluded our conference together, **it was this particular field trip that suddenly made it apparent** to all of us, why such a vision for justice and freedom from oppressive systems was a vision **that we must not let go of.**
- **It suddenly became apparent** why the trainers over the past few days at our justice conference, kept insisting that we keep cultivating our stories of impact and concern for the broken communities that surrounds us.
- For similar to the African Americans, who were enslaved, and therefore risked their lives by way of the Underground Rail Road, to seek freedom to Canada; simply because **such a vision of justice was not optional for them.**
- Within our own communities of today, where we are beginning our second year of seeking mental healthcare reform and criminal justice reform, for our very own neighbors in our backyard...**such a vision of justice is not optional either.**

- For there are people whose basic survival, hinges upon the will of the people to not to let this vision of justice dissipate.
- However, it seems as if we live in a time where similar to when Samuel was called, there are no frequent visions anymore.
- It seems that as a society, we have become desensitized to all of the brokenness that surrounds us;
- Mainly because I suspect that there is so much of it...I'm still talking about brokenness— -
- For our housing crisis **reveals the level of brokenness we are in;**
- Our over populated local prisons **reveals the level of brokenness we are in;**
- The lack of accessible mental health resources **reveals the level of the brokenness we are in;**
- **And this list goes on and on and on...**
- Hence why this is a long way of naming that we need the Samuels of the world to rise up to the call of catching

hold of a vision that desperately needs to be revived and prioritized.

- Furthermore why Samuel was such a powerful spark within this revival, was that he was not afraid to call upon the clergy of his community; in this case Eli, to inform the priest in our story as I put it into my own words...**WE**

NEED YOU!

- Yes this was the unsettling message that Samuel had for Eli...
- For Samuel came onto the scene to hold Eli accountable, by essentially letting him know that his house was not in order.
- For just giving a little more background as to why Samuel was called in the first place, the research that I have done reveals that from the closing words of the book of Judges and the opening chapters of 1 Samuel, we know that the Israelites were both leaderless and disconnected from God.

- The closest thing they had to a national leader therefore was the priest Eli, who with his sons, runs the shrine at Shiloh.
- The Israelites' political, military, and economic prosperity, therefore depended on their faithfulness to God.
- So allow me to paint the picture; the people brought their offerings and sacrifices to God at the shrine, but instead in this instance, the priests made a mockery of interaction with God.
- And we see this evidence in (1 Samuel 2:12, 17)"Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels...for they treated the offerings of the Lord with contempt".
- Thereby revealing that they were untrustworthy as human leaders; not to mention they did not honor God in their hearts.
- For worshipers found in this instance, that those who should have directed them toward an experience of worship—were instead stealing from them.

- Thereby placing into context what Samuel was called to do in his revival, if we go back to the list of 9 we have been reviewing; it would be to address # 1, 3 , 5 and 6;
- To name that #1; Eli and his sons were in a place of moral darkness thereby leading the people into a place of moral darkness; #3 Samuel was therefore bringing Eli back to the Word of God, by unapologetically denouncing this family business they had going on; #5 there was therefore an implicit charge for Eli to get his house in order and handle his corrupt sons; so that #6 could therefore occur, the house of God could thereby be separated by their sin so that the vision could therefore be restored.
- Tying this to the role of the community organizer, in many ways, this is the powerful reminder that each clergy person is being tasked to place before the people;
- To get the house of God back to the vision of what it means to love God and love our neighbor;
- To invite us as the Church, to do whatever preparation and reform needed, to be able to see the kingdom that is

before us, and be equipped to respond to it without resistance or hesitation.

- *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, “I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me— - yes this Church is the vision we are called to fulfill! (Matthew 25:35-36)*
- Furthermore, this would be the takeaway of why Justice in Action is something for us to really lean into it;
- For the community organizers; our Samuels of today is saying to us WE NEED YOU;
- And bringing in our second lesson; we are seeing another revival that will have to occur within us as the community, for us to be able to really step up to the plate and say...HERE WE ARE.
- For I seldom if ever preach from the book of Joel;
- For Joel is declared to be **the son of Pethuel**. That is all we know about him.
- For Pethuel means “persuaded of God.”

- Joel means “Jehovah is God.”
- A dozen other men in the Old Testament have the same name.
- Of the time of Joel’s prophecy, we have no definite data. The fact that he mentions neither idolatry nor the Assyrians and Chaldeans, would indicate that he prophesied either at an early age, i.e., before 800 b.c., or at a much later period, i.e., following 500 b.c.
- Early scholars favored the former date, while later scholars generally favor the latter date.
- However with what little we do know about Joel, this did not stop a powerful revival from occurring within the community.
- For Joel was still one of divinely appointed prophets called by God, to deliver a message of warning and repentance, to the southern kingdom of Judah after the nation was divided.
- Furthermore, there was a powerful message that Joel had given to the people that we heard in the lesson read;

- A message that essentially named that **God was going to pour God's Spirit on all the flesh;**
- **Thereby revealing to us all, what it will try take for a communal revival to occur within a community.**
- For the term flesh is something my earlier ministerial context in Wichita would always talk about.
- For although in the Bible, the word "flesh" is often used simply as a description of the fleshy parts of an animal, including that of human beings, and typically in reference to dietary laws and sacrifice.
- **The term flesh** spiritually also refers to our corrupted bodies;
- For when Paul names in 1 Corinthians 15:53; a passage that is familiar to many of us as it is often read during a service of internment which says; *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality;* in this declaration, there is an understanding that **as humans, we are corrupted.**
- **As humans, we are flawed.**

- **As a people**, our fruits of the Spirit are underdeveloped and need growth;
- For as a people, **we lack** love, **we lack** joy, **we lack** peace, **we lack** forbearance,
- As humans **We lack** kindness, **we lack** goodness, **we lack** faithfulness, **we lack** gentleness and we self-control.
- For anyone who will profess otherwise, my short statement would be...**pray for them...**
- For this is the confession that must come forth **if we wish** to be revived;
- This is the level of self-awareness that must surface, **if we wish** to rise to what it means to be a beloved community;
- For the heart of what Joel is prophesying to this community, is that the **only way** we will grow;
- **The only way** we will improve,
- **The only way** we will accomplish what it means to really love God and neighbor;

- Is by none other than **being open to God's Spirit being poured onto us.**
- And so this is where I would like to share a little bit more about my experience at the justice conference, for my biggest aha moment that occurred to me for why such a Justice training was necessary for us to attend in the first place, **was simply so that God's Spirit could fully be poured onto us.**
- For if I am honest, I initially entered into this training experience, with more of my flesh, **with about a mustard seed** of God's Spirit.
- For I initially missed the first day of the conference because I and another member of Justice in Action Judy Hart, was held in Chicago due to weather, for 12 hours.
- For both her and I were on the same plane, and once Beth our community organizer realized that we were in the same situation; Beth text me and said verbatim, "Judy is also in Chicago for awhile. Can I give her your number so you can connect?"

- My fleshly response was, “Sure! I will be doing some busy work not to be rude for my doctoral work and other stuff during my wait.” I know...I know...but again....I was more flesh and little Spirit.
- Beth’s response: “Ok, I think she’d just like to know if you’re able to get on a plane at 1 or not, etc.”
- Church family, we did not get onto that plane until like 9pm or later.
- Furthermore, what I love about Judy, who is so wise and beautiful and my new best friend...she gave me space....
- Its as if Judy already understood my flesh to Spirit ratio ; either way, I found myself drawn to Judy this entire trip.
- For we Ubered together, we went to the beauty supply store together, we ate together.....
- We ended up sitting next to one another when we finally got onto the plane together;
- We laughed together...We shared intimate stories together;
- I couldn’t get enough of Judy and Judy couldn’t get enough of me....

- And then over the course of the week, it was as if God's Spirit then extended to the entire group of 8 of us, for how I know this, is because we had severe weather challenges returning home as well.
- For a couple of us left the conference a little earlier, but there were six of us that were supposed to fly out of Charlotte to Omaha; on the last flight of the evening.
- And lo and behold, we almost missed our connecting flight, as we were delayed from our first flight from Cincinnati.
- We were so delayed in fact that the boarding of the plane was complete;
- Now I was the one sitting towards the front of the plane.
- Our connecting gate was well out of reach;
- The plane was scheduled to take off at 10:55pm, I was the first to get off of the plane and it was 10:46pm....
- And God's Spirit said to me when the doors finally opened...**run**....
- Run** for not just yourself,

- **Run** for your team.....**for we cannot, in fact we will not be stranded in this airport all night long.**
- **So I ran with all of my might;** with one of the sayings in my head guiding me that was said at our conference....Justice is a marathon, not a sprint!
- Well this church family felt indeed like a sprint....but in the aftermath I realized that this was a strong indicator of what our running pace needs to be when doing the work of justice.
- For my shopping bag during the run, its handle had broken and I was also pulling a carry-on with me.
- By God's Spirit, the items did not fall and I was able to hoist the shopping bag under one arm, while pulling my bag with me and **I just keep running,** all of the way from gate D something towards gate B12..for we were supposed to arrive at gate C17, but we had to move to a further terminal.
- Either way, I know it was nothing but the grace of God, that got me to the counter and by God's grace the plane was still there...but the doors of the plane was closed.

- The desk clerk looked at me and I looked at her, and she immediately could see the exhaustion on my face and the sheer panic.
- I shared with her, “there are 6 of us who are supposed to be on that plane, two who are wheelchair bound...”
- I said to her I know your policy, and I know that the plane is still here...can you please have mercy on us for this was a situation out of our hands.”
- The counter clerk called the staff on the plane, and since I was there, they agreed to let me on, but she informed me to call your team and call them now, because they need to be here now or they are not getting on that plane.
- So I just stood there and waited for a couple of moments,
- I waited** because over these past 5 days, these individuals became my family.
- I waited** because for me, I also intuitively knew that I was not going to get onto that plane, until I was certain

that they would let all of us on that plane....and you know what they did.

- **They did** let all of us on the plane...
- In fact the two senior members of our group not only got on the plane, they were advanced to first class....**and most importantly we all made it home together.**
- Church family, in 5 days, this conference gave us all the intentional time to allow our flesh to be consumed by God's Spirit.
- For in 5 days, not only did our teams story become a story I cherished and valued as much as my own, I know that this was the case for the others as well.
- For in five days, all of us leaders at this conference formed a similar bond; (share pictures)
- It was a bond that could not have occurred on day 1....
- It was a bond that could not have been broken by day 5...
- Thereby painting a powerful vision for us to consider, that in 5 days, if this particular group can be immersed by God's Spirit, where shared interests are formed and

cherished, what would it look like if as a community we spent real time doing this on a regular basis.

- Perhaps this is how we become more than Justice in Words...perhaps this is how we become Justice in Action.
- Thanks be to God!