

1 Samuel 2.12-2.36: The Antidote to Corruption

This morning we are going to look at a very sad topic: that is the topic of corrupt spiritual leadership. Corrupt spiritual leaders have been a plague on God's people as long as time has existed. And although God is sovereign over all situation and events, dealing with corrupt spiritual leaders is especially difficult because it's not only a blemish on the people of God from the outside - unbelievers scoff at us - but it's a tragedy for those on the inside who have had their view of a trusted person shattered. What we're going to see this morning is very corrupt leadership and through it, how we can identify and evaluate corrupt leaders.

Last week we looked at the amazing grace of God in the life of Hannah. Hannah prayed to God - she even made a vow to God - pleading with God to give her a son. God did and Hannah's response of joy and thankfulness is truly amazing.

This morning we switch from the beautiful high point in her life to the corruption that was going on at the Tabernacle.

Just by way of refresher on the OT sacrificial system: what most of us are familiar with when we think of the sacrificial system is the Temple where the Jews would sacrifice in Jerusalem. But we have to understand that the Temple only existed later in Jewish life. The first temple was built by King Solomon - only 950 years or so before Jesus.

From creation to David the sacrificial system slowly developed. From Adam through Abraham through the early life of Moses, most of the sacrificing seems to have been done by the head of the household literally on a backyard altar of some kind. If you think of Job or Noah or many of the OT characters before Jacob and his sons go down to Egypt, a lot of times they simply sacrificed to the Lord on their own altars. These men interceded for their families.

The altars in the OT were fairly primitive. They were generally a pile of rocks that were stacked up in the shape of a table. And although we have no record of any laws governing these sacrifices prior to God giving Moses instructions in Exodus and Leviticus, we do see glimpses that God had probably given some kind of commands concerning these sacrifices. When Noah brings animals into the Ark before the flood, there is a distinction made between clean and unclean animals. Usually we think the animals went into the Ark 2-by-2. But actually it was 2 of every **unclean** thing. They went in 7-by-7 of the **clean** things. Why did he need more clean things? Because when he gets off the Ark he's going to sacrifice the clean animals and if there's only 2 of them they're going to go extinct. So apparently God had revealed a distinction very early on in human history, and that distinction was in relation to sacrifices.

We know that the sacrifices were usually about atonement. They covered for the sins of God's people. Job - who may have lived around the time of Abraham - says he sacrifices because, "'It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually (**Job 1:5**).'" So Job was sacrificing to atone for the sins of his children. He was the priest of his family. And he did this regularly.

Fast forward to Moses. Through Moses, God delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt, all 2 million of them. Brought them to Mt. Sinai where he gave them the OT Law. I know most of you know your OT history, but isn't it interesting that a massive portion of the OT Law is dedicated to the issue of the Tabernacle and the sacrifices that happen there. You couldn't just come to God and worship however you wanted. No, God regulated who could offer the sacrifices, how they were offered, how often, and what type, where they were offered, the building they were offered in.

So the sacrificial system went from relatively scattered through Israel to centralized in one place. And it went from the head of the family acting as the priest to a centralized system of priests who were not only from the tribe of Levi, but specifically from the family line of Aaron within the Levites. It was very structured, very organized. And just as God had established high moral expectations of his people, he expected those who would serve as priests to live out those moral qualifications. Why was that?

Because the Tabernacle was the holiest place on the planet. This was literally where God's special presence dwelt among his people. God is omnipresent, present everywhere. But at the Tabernacle he was especially

present. His presence in the Tabernacle and later the Temple is called his Shekinah glory - his special dwelling glory. It's just like God is everywhere now, but especially resides in believers through the Holy Spirit; in the OT God dwelt **among** his people.

This was the holiest place on the planet. And it had become utterly defiled. Sadly, it was defiled by the very people who were entrusted to make it sacred. Eli's sons were false prophets. They were false teachers. Interestingly, we often think of false teachers and false prophets as those who teach bad theology. And that is certainly the case. Bad theology, depending upon what it is, will lead people to hell. But there is another category of false teachers: those who are morally corrupt. Those are even more dangerous because while they may have a thin layer of good doctrine, underneath it all is a life of sin and corruption and immorality.

It's like some of the homes on the hills around California. Beautiful views, amazing square footage, fabulous amenities. But if you step inside there's a good chance you'll die. Why? Because the foundation is absolutely corrupted. They could slide off the hill into the ocean any minute.

That's Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli. They look religious, as priests they look like they are men of God. But they are utterly corrupt.

And what's interesting is that from **Chap. 2:12-3:21** there is a contrast between the corrupt sons of Eli and faithful Samuel. There is a back and forth that goes between them. Corruption from **2:12-17**, faithfulness in **2:18-21**. Corruption in **2:22-25**, faithfulness in **2:26**. Corruption in **2:27-36**, faithfulness in **Chap. 3**.

So what I want to do is walk through the corruption of these 2 jokers and let it serve as a way for us to identify those who pose as religious leaders but are not even followers of God. Not only so we can identify them, but also so we can diagnose our own hearts. And then at the end I want to compare them with Samuel and look at a true mark of a follower of God.

1) Corrupt leaders are worthless. Read 12

I have to tell you that sometimes in our politically correct society there are times when the Bible says something that is just so refreshing. These were worthless men. The Hebrew says they were sons of worthlessness.

Usually when we think of worthless, we think of someone who just isn't much help. It's not that they're bad, it's just that we don't view them as an asset. The Bible is just the opposite. To be worthless is to be morally corrupt and evil.

Prov. 19:28: A worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.

Prov. 16:27: A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.

Jesus: And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (**Matt 25:30**).

Worthless people are morally corrupt, evil, plot wickedness. In our politically correct age no one wants to call anyone worthless. That would hurt their feelings. Even some Christians fall into this, "Well, they're made in the image of God and have dignity and so on..." True, but there are worthless people. People who are made in the image of God and pervert the image of God for their own gain. Eli's sons are worthless - they are evil.

What's interesting is that Eli has a problem discerning who is worthless and who is not. He's already accused someone else of being worthless. **Look at 1:14-16. Read**

Here's Hannah at the Tabernacle saying, "Do not regard me as a daughter of worthlessness." It turns out she is one of the most virtuous women in the book. It's Eli's own sons at that very same Tabernacle who are worthless.

Listen, there is no respecting someone who is morally disqualified from leading the people of God. They are worthless. They are a hindrance to the people of God worshipping God. We often get a soft spot in our hearts, want to think the best of them. The problem is that they bring reproach on the Lord and his people. And God's people need to call worthless men for what they are.

2) Corrupt leaders do not know the Lord. Read 12

This is something that we need to keep in mind: There is no intimate relationship with God between Hophni and the Lord. Or Phinehas and the Lord. They use his name, they work in his Tabernacle just outside of his glorious presence. But they don't actually have any relationship with him at all. They go through the motions.

These are the same kind of guys who Jesus talks about in Matt. 7 where at the judgment they will say "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast demons, and do many mighty works." Look at all my works. Look at my resume. Look at me! And he'll say get out of here you workers of lawlessness. That's the key. Their lives were dedicated to lawlessness. Jesus goes on to say I never what? Knew you. Jesus doesn't care about your resume or what you've done for the Kingdom as though we're some great asset to the Kingdom.

True salvation is knowing that, all on my own I'm a liability to the Kingdom. I'm sinful, depraved wretch. George Strait once sang: If they knew half the things I've done they'd never let me in. And trusting that God in his own mercy has sent his Son to die for me. I didn't do anything, Jesus did everything.

False teachers - all those guys on TBN, the LDS guys who knock on your door, the JW's, every cult out there - they don't know Jesus. They claim to know him. They claim to serve him. Claim to believe in him. Claim that salvation is by faith, that Jesus rose again, so on. But they don't really know him. Just like Hophni and Phinehas didn't know him.

3) Corrupt leaders are greedy. Read 13-15

So what's going on here? What's going on here is that Eli's sons are greedy and glutinous. It wasn't wrong for the priests who served at the Tabernacle to eat from some the sacrifices the people brought. Actually that was God's design.

But when you read through the OT Law you see that there are basically 2 violations here. The first is that the priests were taking whatever part of the sacrifice they wanted for themselves. The second was that they were eating the fat.

Look back at Deut 18:1-8 for a minute. God had always intended that those who served at the Tabernacle would live off at least some portion of what the worshippers brought to the Tabernacle. Because they were serving at the Tabernacle, the priests couldn't go out and raise cattle or farm fields; they relied on the contributions of the worshippers. God had set that up. **Read 1-8**

So God is very specific about what they could eat. They get the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach and the first fruits of the crops. **Lev. 7:22-27** talks about how they got the breast and the right thigh of a peace offering. They got really good cuts of meat.

So what was wrong with Hophni and Phinehas? They were basically taking whatever they wanted to take. They turned the gracious provision of God at Tabernacle and turned it into an all you can eat buffet. They'd just reach in and grab whatever they wanted. God had designed that they got the best, but they weren't content with that. They wanted the parts that belonged to the people. They always wanted more. That was the first part.

The second, as I mentioned, was that they wanted the fat. Turn to Lev. 3 for a minute. We all know **John 3:16**. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever should believe in him should not perish but have eternal life." You know what **Lev. 3:16** is? The fat belongs to the Lord. **Read 3:16-17**

The priests were never to eat the fat. When they killed the sacrifice and cut it up, they were to be very careful to eat some things, burn other things in the fire, and throw out other parts.

Now, maybe you don't like fat in your meat, maybe you love the fat because it has flavor. But at least a little fat on meat is considered a good cut of meat. It gives it flavor. But God had commanded the priests to make sure

Read 4:7-10

In all of these sacrifices you'll see that the fat belongs to God. So what Hophni and Phinehas are doing is not only stealing the portions of meat from the people, but they are stealing the fat from God. This is greed on a massive level because the Tabernacle was **the** place people came to offer their animals to God. They couldn't go anywhere else. These guys had cornered the market and corrupted it.

2 Pet. 2:14: They have hearts trained in greed.

By the way, it seems as though even Eli had indulged in this practice to some extent. When Eli dies, it's noted that the man was both old and fat.

Look back at 1 Sam. 2. Read 15

I tried to figure out why they didn't want boiled meat but I couldn't find anyone who addressed the issue. My best guess is that boiling meat would allow some of the fat to rise to the top of the water, you could skim it off and offer it as well. I don't know for sure, but everything about this seems like they want to get it their way.

4) Corrupt leaders threaten and abuse who challenge them. **Read 16-17**

These guys were absolute thugs. The Tabernacle of the Lord had become a den of thieves. Feed their greedy habits and if not they'll just take it from you. There are no alternatives, no choice for the people. There was no leader will to stand up to these guys to stop them.

And what God says is that their sin was very great. Why was that? **Read 17**

The sin was great because they had treated the sacrificial system with contempt. The very thing that could bring people close to God, to give them fellowship with God in light of their sins, Hophni and Phinehas hated.

That's true of all corrupt leaders: they hate the offering of the Lord. What's the offering? They hate Jesus. When someone makes Jesus a means of gain, a means of increasing sin, they hate him, they are treating him with contempt.

There's a transition here back to Samuel. How he's doing in light of all of this. **Read 18-21**

We're not exactly sure what Samuel was doing in terms of ministering before the Lord. He was wearing an ephod, which was basically a religious vest, a vest that typically the high priest would wear but it seems that other priests would wear it as well. And there seems to be a contrast between Eli's sons and Samuel. Eli's sons are corrupting the people, Samuel is ministering before the Lord.

He's in the same place, around the same wicked people but he's doing God's work while they're ripping off God's people. In the mean time Samuel's parents are also portrayed as faithful, and we'll see in just a minute that Eli is not a faithful parent.

One other note to make before we look again at the corruption is that we're not given a time line here. It seems what the author wants to convey is that Hophni and Phinehas had been running this scam a long, long time. The little bit of information about Samuel's parents going up year by year is to show continual faithfulness in contrast to continual sin. These guys had been running this racket a long time. And **Vs. 22** seems to fast forward the clock into the future when Eli is old and Samuel is probably a young man by now. We don't know his age. In **Chapter 3:1** he is still called a boy, so he's probably not old enough to be married but not a young child either.

In any case time has marched on and the sons of Eli continue to become more corrupt.

5) Corrupt leaders often turn to sexual immorality. **Read 22-24**

This is amazing for a couple of reasons. First of all, this is happening at the Tabernacle. Second, it appears to be common knowledge throughout Israel. Eli doesn't seem to know about this first hand, he keeps hearing about it from other people. To use the modern day vernacular: this is an open secret in Israel. Everyone knew what was going on at the Tabernacle.

That should give us pause. Nobody did anything about it. There were no heroes in the OT standing up to these guys. No one sought justice from the Lord. Why? Because the rest of the society was just as corrupt as they were. Sure there was Hannah and Samuel and some others.

And sometimes we get a little sentimental about OT times and think that things were more pure and righteous when people were ruled by the Law of God. It was a better time back then. And you know, if only our country was ruled by God's Law then maybe we'd be more pure. Things would be better.

What we need to understand - what Israel's history shows us clearly - is that God's Law did nothing to stop the depravity of the people. It didn't even stop those who were supposed to know it best. These guys went headlong into their sin.

Really, the only thing that stops depravity is the work of the Spirit in regeneration. It's God working inside of people to give them a knowledge of himself. These guys were miles from that reality.

6) Corrupt leaders won't hold anyone accountable. Read 23-25

Even though we might have something of a soft spot in our heart for Eli because he blesses Hannah and raises Samuel, it turns out he's just as corrupt as his own sons. Why's that? Because he won't do anything to remove them. He rebukes them. That's great. He should have removed them and stoned them to death with stones. That's what the Law called for in open adultery.

But Eli wouldn't do anything. And in that sense he becomes complicit in their sin. He is allowing their sin to continue. If you've got a friend who is robbing banks and you don't tell anyone at some point you become involved in the crime as well. This is what has happened to Eli.

He'll bring up the issue, he'll talk about how wrong it is, but there's no teeth. And so the sin is not curbed. It's like churches who know someone in ministry is corrupt and they just brush it aside and it keeps going on.

Corrupt leaders don't want to hold anyone accountable. They don't want to hurt feelings or rock the boat or make it uncomfortable. But leaders aren't called to make a bunch of friends. Leaders are called to show people the righteousness of Jesus. And sometimes it means removing those who are a hindrance to that goal.

We again see a little refrain about Samuel. **Read 26**

The last thing we need to know about corrupt leaders is that God will ultimately hold them to account.

Maybe not right now, maybe not in this life. But God sees and God will judge. **Read 27-36**

Wow. God does not ignore sinfulness. The man of God who comes to Eli is a prophet of some kind. Prophets were occasionally referred to as the man of God. And this one comes with a message of judgment on Eli and his house. We know that God does not take sin lightly.

Gal 6:7: Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Num. 32:23: Be sure your sin will what? Find you out.

God had set Eli in an honored place and in turn Eli honored his own sons more than God. Eli himself had fattened himself off of the people of Israel. And God would wipe him out.

The rest of Chapter 3 is the calling of Samuel into the priestly ministry. Eli is done, he is judged. Samuel will replace him. God will always raise up someone else in the wake of corruption.

How do we avoid becoming like Eli and Hophni and Phinehas? How do we avoid a facade of religiosity? I want to encourage you with one thing. It's something about Samuel that's mentioned here 3 times in contrast with these other three. **Read 2:21, 26, 3:19**

What did Samuel keep doing? He kept growing. In **Vs. 21** he grew in the presence of the Lord. That's not talking about getting bigger. He's talking about maturing. Growing in his knowledge about who God is. He's learning the ways of God.

Same thing in **vs. 26**. He grows in stature and in favor with God and man. That's actually an almost exact description used later in Luke's gospel of Jesus. So, yes, he's getting bigger, but that's not the main point. The main point is that he's growing in his understanding of who God is.

Interestingly, he doesn't even yet know Yahweh personally. **Read Chap 3:7.**

He has a knowledge of God and he's growing in that knowledge. But it's not until the Lord reveals himself to Samuel and calls him into service that he truly knows God in a personal way.

But nevertheless he grows. Listen, it's the old adage if you're not going forward you're going backward. There's no middle ground.

Phil. 3:14: I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Heb. 12:1: and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

2 Pet. 3:18: But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There's no loitering in our walks with God. There might be seasons of difficulty and strain and hardship. But even then we are called by God's grace to grow for his glory.

Pray