1 Samuel 3:1 The boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days. Prophetic vision was not common.

The other day on my social media pages a cartoon came up that caught my attention. It was the cartoon of a man kneeling in prayer under the clouds and the caption read, “Lord, please just talk to me!” The next picture was of the same man, still kneeling but looking up because coming out of the clouds was a hand holding a Bible. There was no caption. I liked that. I liked that because that cartoon showed a truth that I dearly and deeply believe: that the Lord today communicates with us through his Holy and written Word!

The Bible is called the Word of God. Jesus is called the Word of God. The Word of God is the complete revelation of all that you need to know for achieving eternal life and salvation. The Bible is clear and concise in all that it says even though the world will tell you that you are foolish for thinking so. I believe the Bible is God’s holy, inspired and inerrant revelation that reveals God to us. There are those who don’t believe that….actually the majority of the world doesn’t believe that. In the USA that is your right and privilege to not believe, but at the same time remember it is my right and privilege to believe. I won’t stop you from not believing and you, give me the courtesy of not trying to stop me from believing. You want to discuss things? Awesome. But we will do so with respect and honor for each other.

It is clear that even Jesus believed in the importance of the Word, the written Word. When speaking of the rich man and Lazarus, when the rich man from hell asked that someone be sent to his brothers to warn them the answer given was: **“They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.”** On Maundy Thursday evening as a part of his preparing his disciples Jesus told them: **“If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word…The word that you are hearing is not mine, but it is from the Father who sent me…The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you.”** Note that it is the word that is key. Jesus is the Word. The Holy Spirit will remind of and give them his Word. And also note that later on in his High Priestly prayer for all believers Jesus states, **“Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.”** Even the resurrected Jesus in speaking with the Emmaus disciples, explained all that took place based on Moses and the Prophets and all that was said in Scripture concerning himself. The Word, the written Word is the means through which God works.

I am grateful for that. I am grateful because finally, if everyone and anyone can claim that “God told me this” and “God revealed that” and the favorite of such false teachers, “The Word spoke to me,” then we could never ever be sure of what is what. Such people invariably and regularly go against what is found clearly and concisely in the Bible, as if the written Word is nothing compared to the inner, personal word God supposedly gave them. Frankly, I just don’t grasp how people who claim to believe in God can’t grasp that God can and did give a precise and concise revelation of himself and his work.

All this talk of the Word of God brings me back to our text. Samuel was called by the Lord. He was a prophet of God that God personally spoke with and gave revelations to. As the history of man unfolded, that’s how God chose to work until He revealed all in his written word. What a joyful thing and thank goodness for the ministry and prophetic work of Samuel in fulfilling and carrying out the purposes and directions of God. But in this text for today, do you know what struck me as important? Yep, our highlighted text and its implications. Our theme will be: **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD.**

The deep sadness that the words of our text cause are vast. They make a simple statement and yet a very profound statement on what the condition of Israel was like at this time. Simple words that say so much. Let the depth of those words sink in. **“The word of the Lord was rare in those days.”** That statement leads us to ask a very important question. “What in the world was going on so that the Word of the Lord was rare?

Let’s start right at the top. The religious leadership. Eli was the High Priest at this time but we know that Eli was very old and it is clear that Eli was not really up to the task of this role of leadership and direction. Eli had two sons, the eldest slated to be the next High Priest, but it is because of those sons that we know Eli was having problems. It was not a problem of personal faith for Eli, but rather a problem of letting the things of the world interfere with his faith.

Because Eli’s sons were wicked. They did what was contrary to the law of God. Scripture tells you that they treated with contempt the offerings of the Lord and this was very grievous. Just as evil and wicked was the fact that Eli’s sons, supposedly priestly, godly material, were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. No wonder the Scripture says of these sons: **“Now Eli’s sons were wicked scoundrels. They did not know the Lord.”** In other words, they were absolute unbelievers! Just think, that was God’s pronouncement of these men!

It was Eli’s job to correct, rebuke and stop these false priests. But he did not. Oh, he gave them a light weight rebuke, but in truth Eli did nothing. This would bring God’s judgment on Eli. Eli and his family would lose the High Priesthood and down the line, lose their lives. Eli’s problem? These were his sons, his precious children, his flesh and blood, gifts from God and the center of his heart. That was the problem. The things of this world, his children, became more important than the Word of God. God’s Word was clear on what was right and what was wrong and evidently as they grew up, these two boys decided that the Law, the will of God, did not apply to them. I think their father taught them that. Eli didn’t see to it that his sons were brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And now we have wicked scoundrels before us. And still, Eli can’t uphold the word of the Lord and stop his sons from their wickedness and evil.

Sound like today’s world? Religious leaders, so-called ministers of God who can’t seem to stand upon the truth and wonder of God’s Word. They are more concerned with the world. What will make people happy? What will keep people in the church? They yield and compromise the Word of God. The end result is that Jesus is nothing more than some feel good message of love and the souls under their care are basically taught, “Do whatever you want because God loves you. The things of the world, the ideas of the world have become more important than God. And our text, should you look around at today’s religious world, tells the truth of what I see going on in so many churches: **“The word of the Lord was rare.”**

Let’s go to the next level. The people. Not the people of the world but rather let’s talk about the people who were supposed to be the children of God and heirs of eternal life. At this point, they were failing at this calling they had. They failed to hear the teachings of the Lord and follow them. They failed to focus on the meaning of the sacrifices and the grace and love of God portrayed in them. But with bad religious leaders you can bet the majority of the people are going to be false believers. Think about it. If the religion you follow is false to God then how do you expect the followers to be true to God? So the people, those who were to have been God’s children and a light to the world, they would much rather follow the world. They didn’t have time for the Temple and hearing God’s Word. They had business to do. The cabin to visit, the outing to take, parties to do, or sleep to gain…the list is endless. The ways of the world! By the way, I have always marveled that in our English language the words “word and world” are so close in spelling. Just one letter difference between Word and world and yet what a vast difference it is. For when you measure God’s Word against this world, in truth they are opposites! The lesson: Just one little thing and the word is gone.

Such is our world. Did you hear the lesson of our Epistle reading? You do realize that that reading was a warning against following the world and its ways rather than following the Word. It is so easy to get wrapped up in food or clothing or money or sexuality or so many other things of this world. We are warned not to! We are cautioned and pleaded with to not love the world and the things of the world. But we get into the world anyway. We make the world and its ways our measure rather than the Word and its ways our measure.

And what is the words measure? Now before I tell you, I want you to take a moment and actually, in your mind answer that question. What do you think the Word of God is all about? What message are you getting from the Word that you hear at your church? What message are you getting in your own mind as you either listen or determine not to listen to the Word? What do you think God’s Word is all about?

In Samuel’s day, that word was about helping to carry out God’s plan and purpose for his people and their salvation. God working with Samuel to get people to grasp the importance and wonder of his Word and promises. Samuel did a great job, but the people still didn’t care and I think that was because they couldn’t answer, “What do you think the Word is all about?”

How did you answer? If your answer had anything to do with how you live and how you obey and follow God then you don’t get God’s Word. If your answer is about how God demands this and that and we had better obey or else, you don’t get God’s Word. If the focus of your answer is making the world a better place for you and all, then you don’t get God’s Word. If your answer is anything short of Jesus and his redemptive work given by grace through faith, you don’t get God’s Word.

It’s true, God’s Word is about his saving love for us. Love so deep that even though we are rotten sinners who can’t meet the demands and commands of the Law, God wants to save our souls. So God the Father sent Jesus to atone for us. That’s right, we are sinful through and through, not a hope of eternal life to be found in our very own selves. But God took care of our short fall. He sent Jesus. Jesus came for the expressed purpose of being our Savior by dying on the cross and paying for our sins. All that Jesus and God the Father ask is that you believe and trust what God declares. Believe and trust because He is God. The God who paid for your sins. Believe that. And this God gives you his Holy Spirit to guide and help in our sinful lives. All too often God in love, for our sake, has to drag us to the cross to see the blood of the Lamb that takes away our sin. God working to help us grasp our forgiveness as we understand that Jesus died for our sins and that we have new life because Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim eternal life, through Him.

So, are you a sinner? Yes! Do you just chase after whatever sin you want and like and, well, Jesus will just have to die harder! That’s not faith. When we understand our sins are forgiven in Jesus, truly forgiven, our hearts are changed. We don’t chase sin. We don’t think sin doesn’t matter. We keep our focus on Jesus and his grace as we stumble and bumble along in life simply trusting Jesus as the answer of grace and love. I don’t chase the world, I stumble after Jesus. I think of his great cost and I marvel that it was done for me, for all of us. That is life changing. It is not the world that moves and guides me. It is the Word. The beautiful and precious Word that proclaims again and again God’s forgiveness in Jesus and the gift of eternal life and salvation.

I pray that that the Word of the Lord is not rare in your life. God has given his son for you to be your Savior from sin. Jesus gave his all that you might be holy and precious and a saved child of God. It is the Word, the gospel of Jesus that moves and motivates and brings forth the promises and will of God in our lives. Don’t let the Word be rare in your life. Hear it. Believe it. Contemplate it. Marvel in it and grasp that at its core is our precious Savior Jesus, the living Word. Dear people, the Word is important! Amen.