

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 4 Issue 26

June 26, 2005

The Death of a Son

Apostasy and Its Attributes, Part 5

God asked His people:

Isaiah 1:11-13, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations. . . .”

Toward the end of the 7th century BC, Jeremiah recorded these words:

Jeremiah 44:22, “So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day.”

Malachi 1:10, “Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.”

Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 11:30, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”

It should be obvious from these passages that there can come a time in the life of a sinning individual or people when God says, “Enough! Enough sin! Enough arrogance! Enough of your insubordination. Enough of your flagrant disregard for My word!”

In fact, the passage at which we are looking this morning is an example of this.

Recall that Eli has been serving God in the office of the High Priest now for many years. And while the record shows that he never actively participated in rebellion, nevertheless we do know that his time as High Priest was spent endeavoring partly to please himself. And so, though his dreadfully wicked sons

rebelled against and abused God's worship, nevertheless Eli did not rebuke them.¹ Instead he turned a blind eye to their sin all the while benefiting on the side.² And so God in our passage this morning essentially says, “ENOUGH!”

And yet, how do we know that the message of this passage is God's word? All that we see here is an unnamed “man of God.” How is it that we accept this man's message as coming from the mouth of the Lord?

Now, we are going to turn our focus to a text in which God authenticates the message of this passage. We are going to look at the proof that everything God has said here is true! And yet to do that, let me first give you an introduction to prophetic signs.

Introduction to Prophetic Signs

1 Samuel 2:34, “And this shall be a sign³ unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.”

The word used here for *sign* is the most common word in the Hebrew for *sign*. It is found seventy-nine times in the Old Testament and is the equivalent of the Greek, σημειον semeion and δυναμις dunamis — both of which are translated in the New Testament as *sign* or *miracle*.

In the Bible, signs — or more literally, testifying signs — play a very important role in the outworking of God's kingdom. Let's review a couple of facts.

1. God created this world and placed man in it that the Lord might have a love-relationship with us.⁴
2. Adam and Eve rebelled against God such that they turned their backs on the Lord⁵ at the cost of death.
3. God in His grace would not allow us to die in our sin. Instead He promised Adam and Eve that there would come a time when a Savior would arise and Himself pay the penalty for man's sin.⁶
4. Until then, God would reveal His word and will to His people through prophets and men of God — teaching them what they needed to know that they once again might enjoy a love relationship with Him.⁷

In fact, the Bible that is in your lap is a collection of the special revelation that God has given His people throughout time. Now this raises a very important question: When God willed to reveal a message to His people through a prophet, what is it that would verify that the word being spoken was actually from Him?

Anyone can claim that God has spoken — in fact, today many claim that God speaks to them. I have heard “The Lord told me to do this.” “The Lord told me to go here.” “The Lord laid this burden on my heart.” “The Lord laid this message on my heart.” Etc.

In what way does God authenticate His word and so distance it from any and all supposed “revelations”

¹ Compare 1 Samuel 3:13

² Compare 1 Samuel 2:29

³ אָיִן ‘owth

⁴ Compare Genesis 3:8, John 17:3, and Revelation 21:3-4

⁵ Compare Genesis 3:1-7 and Genesis 2:14-17

⁶ Compare Genesis 3:15

⁷ Compare Hebrews 1:1

from Him?

When God gave His word, He always provided a sign that would testify to the authenticity of His message.

Deuteronomy 18:18, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.”

Deuteronomy 18:21-22, “And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.”

The point is that every message of revelation from God was accompanied by signs or testifying miracles which served to authenticate the message given. These signs could be miracles, supernatural occurrences, natural events occurring at a specified time, predictions, and the like. For example read Matthew 9.

Matthew 9:2-8, “And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.”

Christ's miracle/sign played a great role in His message that He has the authority to forgive sin. And this authority was attested to by His performing the miracle. The miracle testified to the validity of His message.

In fact, we see it a little closer to our text.

1 Samuel 12:17-18, “Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.”

How do we know that what Samuel is saying here really is God's will? The testifying miracle came true!

And so it is in the passage before us. Accompanying the message of woe and warning with regard to Eli's rebellion was a testifying miracle to authenticate the genuineness of this message. See the questions we naturally ask are these:

- Who is this unnamed “man of God”?⁸ (cf. 1 Sam. 2:27)?
- How do we know therefore that he doesn't “have it out” for Eli? Maybe Eli ruled against him at some point. Maybe Eli rebuked him just as he did Hannah.⁹

⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 2:27

⁹ Compare 1 Samuel 1:14

- How do we know that all that this supposed “man of God” proclaimed to Eli wasn't fabricated?

Ah... but herein we read a very important element to this prophecy: This man of God gave Eli a sign — a testifying miracle — which would prove the validity of his message! If and when this “sign” came to pass, Eli and all of us would know that indeed this passage is God's will with regard to apostasy! And that brings us to the sign of Eli's apostasy.

The Sign of Eli's Apostasy

1 Samuel 2:34, “And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.”

So much for the “Openness of God” — you know that heresy that recently has been passed around suggesting that God is changeable and ever changing. That tomorrow is not set. And that God is just as much in the dark as are we with regard to what is going to happen in the future.

In contrast to this heresy, we read here that God had indeed ordained the death of Hophni and Phinehas.¹⁰ In fact, it would be this bitter providence that would serve as the marker of authenticity — the testifying sign — for the prophetic word given to Eli!

Now as ones who look back upon this history — who know that indeed Hophni and Phinehas did die the same day¹¹ — we derive the incredible conclusion that all that we have seen, discussed, and fellowshipped around these past weeks (the jots and tittles of this passage) is true!

Accordingly, behold the soil of apostasy.¹² Apostasy arises in the context NOT of want, hardship, and persecution; but in the greatest and most glorious privileges of the Lord. So every one of us who have enjoyed blessing from the Lord, beware! Apostasy is but a moment away!

Behold, how apostasy manifests itself.¹³ It takes lightly the things of the Lord. It gives preference to man. It uses ministry for personal gain. Brothers and sisters, this just isn't my opinion. By virtue of “The Sign” this whole passage has stamped across it, “God's Word!”

Behold the cause of apostasy.¹⁴ It is the futile thought and desire that something other than God can satisfy one's soul. It is the thought that something other than God is worthy of your affection and is higher than God. It is abandoning God as the fount of life and seeking refreshment from the things of this world. It is looking down on the promises of God, and opting rather for the protection, provision, and nourishment of another individual. It is not neglecting God, but holding Him in contempt. Contempt either on account of a familiarity with the things of the Lord or on account of the passing pleasures of sin. It is taking God lightly!

Behold the consequences of apostasy.¹⁵ It results in the loss of privilege, familial devastation, compromised worship, and personal devastation. We know that all of this is God's will and disposition with regard to apostasy because the supernatural sign that was given to authenticate the message came to

¹⁰ Compare 1 Samuel 2:25

¹¹ Compare 1 Samuel 4:11

¹² Compare 1 Samuel 2:27-28

¹³ Compare 1 Samuel 2:29

¹⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 2:30

¹⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 2:31-33

pass!

Let us be very careful — guarding our heart quite closely. What we have here is NOT good advice, BUT the unchangeable, unalterable word of God!

And yet, it might be tempting to conclude that this passage contains God's word and will with regard to apostasy for Eli — and him alone. Yet Scripture will not allow us to conclude this. For God has given us another SIGN that testifies NOT ONLY to the validity of this message BUT ALSO to the validity of every message that God has given in His word.

The Sign of All Apostasy

Throughout His earthly ministry, Christ had a “credibility” problem with regard to the Jewish leaders of His day. The Jews — assuming that they represented a genuine religion of Yahweh — couldn't figure Jesus out. If God sent a Prophet wouldn't he be sent to the one's God loved? Doesn't it stand to reason that the Lord would work through His own established religion?

And yet, far from coming to the religious leaders of Judaism and seeking their favor, Christ questioned,¹⁶ rebuked,¹⁷ opposed,¹⁸ and said that they were of Satan.¹⁹ This was because the Judaism of Christ's day was not Old Testament Judaism, but Mishnah Judaism and hence apostate Judaism. And so, a frequent request made by the Jewish religious elite to Christ was ”Show us a sign! Give us a testifying miracle that proves your authority!”

Now the irony is that Christ gave many “signs.” In fact, every miracle that He did was a “testifying sign” proclaiming His true identity — that is how you translate the word δυναμις *dunamis* in the Greek New Testament. And yet, these blind guides missed it even though they loved the miracles Christ performed!

And so, because these religious leaders were ever seeing and yet never coming to the knowledge of the truth²⁰ Christ responded to their pleas for yet another sign in Matthew 12.

Matthew 12:38-40, “Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

What an incredible passage! And yet it raises a very important question: What is the sign of Jonah?

The sign of Jonah, as explained here by the Lord, referred to Christ's death and resurrection! And thus, do you see the sign that Christ gave to the apostate leaders of His day that verifies the word of the Lord? Do you see the sign that continues to testify to the seriousness of apostasy? Do you see the sign that ever and always is a mark of God's disapproval over rebellion against him?

¹⁶ Compare Matthew 23

¹⁷ Compare John 2:13-22

¹⁸ Compare Mark 7:9-13

¹⁹ Compare John 8:44

²⁰ Compare 2 Timothy 3:7

The sign is the cross of Christ! Indeed! The cross of Christ is not just the means whereby we are saved! It also is the declaration of God's righteous disposition when it comes to rebellion, sin, and apostasy!

In fact, this is the point that Paul makes in Romans 3:25. Speaking of Christ, Paul wrote this:

Romans 3:25, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [wrath removing sacrifice] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness [justice] for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

In this text, Paul is addressing a problem inherent in the gospel — a problem which you may or may not be aware of. If God forgives sinners, then we conclude that on the one hand, He is a loving and merciful God yet on the other, He must also be unjust!

See, God has promised that if you sin, you will die. Right?²¹ Well, if we don't die after we sin we can thank God for His mercy all day. But we must also indict Him for being untrue to His own word! This is a problem inherent in the gospel!

So do you know what God did?

He fashioned a way in which BOTH man could be saved from his sin AND God could be demonstrated as righteous. And that "way" was the cross. It served a twofold purpose. It not only secured our forgiveness before God but is also publicly demonstrated that God doesn't simply overlook sin, rather, He punishes it with death!

And so when we look at the cross, we behold NOT ONLY our forgiveness. BUT ALSO the SIGN²² that God is just and His word is true! It was not given simply to Eli, but to all God's children that apostasy is a big deal!

Our Response

How does one apply a text like this?

To answer this, I want to encourage you to place yourself in the shoes of Eli for just one moment. You have reared two boys that you have watched grow into men. You attended their ordination, and you remember the excitement and pride that you felt when you first beheld them wearing the garment of a priest. And while yes they have fallen short of God's standard, nevertheless you love them — they are bone of your bones and flesh of your flesh.

And yet you also have lived your Christian life struggling when it comes to "undistracted devotion" to the Lord. You love the Lord. But you also have found yourself embroiled in what has become a life-long battle against pleasing yourself. You know you should be more holy. You know that you should not benefit as you have from the sin of your children. BUT thankfully there is always tomorrow. Tomorrow, you will make a new start. Tomorrow your walk will be better.

But the day arrived when God said, "Eli! Enough!" No more compromise! No more excuses! The sin

²¹ Compare also Genesis 2:15-17 and Romans 6:23

²² Compare Matthew 12:38-40

you love so much will cost you your sons!

It reminds me of Solomon's warning in Proverbs:

Proverbs 7:21-23, "With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

Behold the horrible consequences of Mediocre Christianity!

You say, praise God this no longer happens. How thankful I am that my sin will not result in the death of a loved one. Oh but that is wrong!

What we read here — the sign of authenticity with regard to God's disposition toward sin — is applicable to us. Sin still results in the death of a love one! It still results in the death of a child!

Yet let us not miss it! The sin that we — with Eli — love and so take for granted, rationalize away, and think is no big deal has resulted not in the death of one of our sons, BUT in the death of God's own Son.

Thomas Kelly put it this way:

"Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load; 'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed, Son of Man and Son of God."²³

Let us behold the sign of all apostasy and its condemnation on account of our sins and yet let us turn to Christ and His forgiveness on account of God's love!

Let us conclude that Christian mediocrity comes at a high cost!

Let us respond with this God given response:

Hebrews 12:1b-2a, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."

²³ New Trinity Hymnal, Hymn 257

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 26, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.