

Broomfield



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A Biblical Call

The Attributes of a Prophetic Call, Part 1

General vs. Special Call

James 1:27, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Galatians 6:1-2, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

1 Timothy 2:1, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.”

2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

Whether it takes the form of teaching, praying, visiting, counseling, or rebuking, each and every one of us in Christ have been charged with ministering to the body of Christ. And truly, part and parcel of body life is recognizing that there is a general calling that rests upon us all. Specifically, we are called to do that which is necessary in order to build up the body of Christ.¹

God did not purchase us so that we could sit around the house being happy all day. Indeed! God saved us for a purpose — and part of that purpose is the caring for the body of Christ.

And yet having said this which is not to imply that there is no such thing as a special calling from the Lord. In Galatians we read that God had set Paul apart from his mother’s womb that he might preach the gospel.² In Romans Paul states, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance [irrevocable]” (Romans 11:29) implying that there are special callings given to individual Christians.

We also read of a variety of different callings found in the apostolic church.

¹ Compare 1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:11-12

² Compare Galatians 1:15-16

1 Corinthians 12:28-30, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?”

Truly as citizens of the Kingdom of God, each of us are candidates for a special calling from the Lord. That call may be the call of a missionary, teacher, elder, deacon, an evangelist, or marriage.

And this raises an important question: How do I discern a special calling from the Lord? And more specifically how do I know if I or someone else has been set apart to a special calling?

Attributes of a Call

1 Samuel 3:2, “And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see.”

1 Samuel 3:4, “That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.”

In the first two chapters of Samuel, the story of two families have been portrayed- alternating between the godly — Hannah and Samuel — and the ungodly — Eli and his sons. In our passage, these two lines intersect as Samuel — not Eli's sons — is called into the prophetic ministry and given his first message: a message of judgment on account of Eli's sin!

This constitutes the attributes of a prophetic call. Now while some of what we will learn from this chapter is germane only to the call of a preacher — or one who forth tells the word of God — nevertheless much of what we learn from Samuel's call is applicable to every special call to ministry. And thus any special calling by which we might be charged has its attributes set forth here.

Let's begin by looking at the context of a special calling from the Lord.

The Context: Service

1 Samuel 3:1, “**And the child Samuel ministered³ unto the LORD before Eli.** And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.”

We saw this word *ministered* in connection with 1 Samuel 2:11. Recall that there primarily are two words in the Hebrew for serve: 'ebed and sharath. The first term references the menial service of a slave. And while it is not limited to the work of a slave, it generally references that which is low or indistinguishable. The second term generally refers to a higher category of service, and so is used of the personal service rendered to an important personage, usually a ruler — as in Joseph in Potiphar's house.⁴ Or it refers to the ministry of worship on the part of those who stand in a special relationship to God — such as a priest.⁵ And so the verb designates either a high rank on the part of the servant or a special relationship in which the servant stands in respect to the master.

³ שָׂרַת sharath

⁴ Compare Genesis 39:4; 2 Chronicles 22:8; Esther 2:2; 2 Kings 4:43; 6:15; 1 Kings 19:21; Exodus 24:13; 33:11; Joshua 1:1

⁵ Compare Psalm 103:21; Exodus 28:35, 43; 1 Chronicles 6:17; 16:4, 37

Now of the two words, it is the second word used here that continues to be used of Samuel. It is first used in 1 Samuel 2:11 when he was but a young child, and now here where he is described as a boy⁶ — which actually could be used of a new born up to the age of 12.⁷

The point that we derived when we first considered Samuel as a minister of God is that though a young child Samuel was NOT relegated to menial labor on account of his age. Neither was he thought of as being too young to serve Christ. RATHER, he was charged with some of the more serious activities as a servant of God — activities with which he diligently labored.

This constitutes the context from which arises the call of God to formal service. It is not from indolence, slothfulness, or inactivity but rather from the soil of active labor in the Kingdom of God. When Samuel was called to the ministry of a prophet, he was serving!

This is such an important point when we consider the call of God in our lives. You see, I have discovered that there are two general approaches to ministry in the Kingdom of God. I call these either the military approach or the farming approach.

The Military Approach

The military approach is so named because in the military, advancement in rank occurs based upon seniority, service, and training. Thus for example, a man who goes to college and then enters the military doesn't begin as a mere private or corporal, but he is commissioned a Second Lieutenant. Thus, by virtue of his education this individual is placed in a position of leadership with very little other training.

The idea in the Military Approach when it comes to ministry is that a person is first placed in a position of leadership, and then it is expected that he will lead.

The Farming Approach

Contrast this to the farming approach. Here leadership is not based firstly on position, education, or even leadership credentials. Rather, it is based upon whether a person evidences the fruit which makes for a position of leadership.

And thus- for example- when it comes to voting on an elder in the church the vote in this context is a vote of affirmation as opposed to a vote of determination. In other words, the ones who vote are asking: Is this man a shepherd? Has he demonstrated the heart of a shepherd? Has he loved the flock? Has he cared for my soul? Has he poured his life into my life?

Now of the two approaches, it is the later that is the practice in the Kingdom of God by virtue of passages like 1 Samuel 3. Again, Samuel's call did not occur in a vacuum. He already was actively serving in the Kingdom of God. And it is in this context, gifts find a person out AND SO DOES GOD'S CALL.

⁶ The term for boy here is *na'ar* which in the Hebrew comes from a word that means to growl, cry, scream, roar, or agitate. Clearly the Hebrew view of a child was not one of innocence and sinlessness. The word used of a young child came from the same word used for ones who agitate, stir up, or roar at people.

⁷ Josephus indicates that Samuel was 12 at this time (*Ant.* 5.10.4). While this is not authoritative nevertheless it does indicate the view of most Jews in Christ's day.

Leaders Discovered

Again, how we need to hear this.

First we need to hear this as future servants. I can't tell you how many times I have come across men and women in the church waiting around to be recognized as leaders. You approach them and say this: Hey you want to oversee the book table? Or perhaps, Do you want to minister in the realm of finances? Or do you want to take charge of the food closet? Or a host of other important areas of service. And they say, "No I don't feel called to this or that?"

But then you ask, "Well, what then do you feel called to?"

And they say, "An elder." "A leader in this church."

Listen, the chief mark of a leader in the body of Christ is that first he is a servant⁸ which means that he will willingly do anything and everything as the need arises — nothing is beneath them. Secondly, he is a shepherd of souls. Anyone can rebuke, get behind a lectern and attempt to teach and make good or bad decisions. Yet the leader based upon Scripture is the one who has a passion for the souls of God's people.⁹ He doesn't just care for the easy ones, but he cares for the difficult one, the mean ones, and the inconsiderate ones. Show me how a man responds when wronged (Is he a shepherd? Does he long to see the offender grow in grace? Is he concerned for their soul? OR is he only concerned for his own welfare and vindication?) and I'll show you a shepherd.

Indeed! Leaders, preachers, teachers, missionaries and the like are not made, they are discovered.

Second we also need to hear this as we look to the future of this congregation. Invariably when it comes to congregations choosing God's chosen leaders, the one placed forth for leadership typically is the one who has proven himself to be a good business man. Or the one who has excelled in life. He is the refined, good looking, self-confident, in control of life type of guy.

However there are many a congregation suffering under the leadership of men like this. And we must guard our hearts and minds at Broomfield Presbyterian Church. We must not allow any man into leadership who is not both a servant and a shepherd. We must not care — in the sense of primary importance — what they've done in the business world, what their resume says, or how they look. What must be of prime importance to us is whether or not they have a passion for the souls of God's people. Have they demonstrated that passion? And is that passion a characteristic of their life?

Are they — like Samuel — actively engaged in the ministry of God's Kingdom? Or are they waiting around to be called?

The Word of the Lord

The first characteristic of a call to ministry is that of active service in the body of Christ. With that, notice the second context out of which God calls a man to formal ministry: One of need.

1 Samuel 3:1, "And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. **And the word of the**

⁸ Compare Matthew 23:11

⁹ Compare 1 Peter 5:1-4

LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.”

This verse uses two phrases/words that were part and parcel of the prophetic office. First, the phrase *the word of the Lord* is used in the context of revelation. This is a very important term because it is a technical term for the revelation given to the prophets and thus it is described as infallible, inerrant, authoritative,¹⁰ effective, perfect, sure,¹¹ eternal, true, and pure.¹²

Thus, we conclude that when God gives His word — when revelation is given in any form — there is no such thing as “non-authoritative revelation.” Every message that could ever be given by God is on par with the rest of Scripture — and thus authoritative and binding!

Visions

The second term used here is *visions*. This is not distinct from *the word of the Lord*, but in fact it is explanatory. From this and many other passages we learn that when God gives revelation, it always is in the form of a vision or, its corollary, a dream.

Numbers 12:6, “And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.”

This is the account when Miriam and Aaron began complaining against Moses, and so God invited all three to come to the “tent of meeting” where He gave the contents of this passage. Now would you notice the manner that God indicates when it comes to revelation in the Bible: God speaks to the true prophet in two ways: In a vision, and/or a dream. Don't miss it! Visions and dreams are the normative¹³ means by which a prophet receives the word of the Lord.

And thus we read these verses:

Isaiah 2:1, “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz **saw concerning** Judah and Jerusalem.”

Daniel 7:1, “In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel **had a dream and visions** of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters.”

Amos 1:1, “The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he **saw concerning Israel** in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.”

Micah 1:1, “The word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, **which he saw concerning** Samaria and Jerusalem.”

Habakkuk 1:1, “The burden which Habakkuk **the prophet did see.**”

¹⁰ Compare Psalm 19:7, Proverbs 30:5, Matthew 5:17-18, and James 2:10

¹¹ Compare Isaiah 55:10-11, Psalm 19:7,

¹² Compare Psalm 19:8-9

¹³ It is obvious in this text itself that God has at times spoken in a way other than visions and dreams. The contrast here is how God usually speaks to prophets and how He spoke to Moses. However the point that is being made here still stands. Even with Moses, the revelation was objective. This as we'll see in a moment in Jeremiah 23, is in contrast to the claim of the false prophet (theirs is subjective).

Revelation 1-2, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, **to shew** unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, **and of all things that he saw.**”

Throughout the Bible when the gift of Prophecy is exercised, the mode of revelation is in the form of VISIONS and DREAMS! This is important because in Scripture false prophets are said to speak out of their own hearts.

Jeremiah 23:16, “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.”

In contrast to **seeing a vision or dream**, the false prophet claims to **feel an impression** from the Lord. Thus they say things like this: The Lord laid this on my heart. Or God told me in my spirit. Brothers and sisters when you hear this language, run! The man or woman is not a prophet! They ought not to be feared.¹⁴

Obvious Need

Now with this brief introduction to the prophetic manner in which revelation is given, would you notice what this text says about Samuel's call — and all calls for that manner — the call of ministry always arises out of the context of need!

1 Samuel 3:1, “And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; **there was no open vision.**”

God calls a prophet to speak His word when there is a need for that word. God raises up a preacher to proclaim His word when there is a need for it. And God raises up men and women to serve the homeless when there is a need for the ministry.

This is the second characteristic from which arises the call to ministry: An Obvious Need!

Once again this is such an important message today! In our business-minded-churches where growth is predictable and manageable because it is manufactured, there is the tendency to busy ourselves with a lot of things. NOT because of a recognized need BUT because it is believed that “activity is godliness!”

And so a common statement made by someone visiting a church today is this: Tell me about your evangelizing program. What about your mission's committee? What programs do you have in place for my children?

Family of God, once again we've got it wrong. There is nothing holy about a mission's committee. There is nothing godly about a youth program. While it sells the church and may bring in followers, the mere existence of such stuff does not make a church effective or faithful.

The norm for ministry is need!

¹⁴ Compare Deuteronomy 18:22

Years ago I was serving in a church where we had a surplus of \$60,000 dollars. So I began asking fellow shepherds outside of our congregation what they thought we should do with it. These are some of the answers:

- Hire an assistant pastor realizing that staff generates growth.
- Hire a youth pastor so that families with children will stay.
- Put your money toward advertising.

Do you know the advice that we took? It came from a man who had been in the ministry many, many years. He said, “Put your money as a church toward the needs of your ministry. If you need a youth minister, then call one. If you need a homeless shelter, then pay for one. But if you don't perceive any needs yet, then put your money in the bank and collect interest!”

This was wise advice in light of the precedent found in our text! And yet personally or individually speaking, what does this mean?

When it comes to discerning a call, the question is, “Do you see a need?”

In other words, if you see it, that is a good indication that God is raising you up to fulfill it!

How many times has it been said in a church, “We need a youth ministry, or men’s fellowship, or outreach?” If you see it, consider yourself called!

Now, that doesn't mean you walk the path of a maverick and do what you want. Rather, you submit to the leadership. However what a joy it would be in any church to have ministers coming out of the woodwork saying to their pastors, “Look I think we need this in this church. Do you agree? And if so, can you help me fulfill this calling?”

Ordinary

The third context of ministry is that is ordinary.

1 Samuel 3:2-3, “And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep.”

This passage references the seven-branched lamp stand¹⁵ which was filled with olive oil, lit at twilight¹⁶ and kept burning “before the Lord from evening till morning.”¹⁷ Hence for the menorah of our passage would still be burning and would indicate that God's call to Samuel occurred in the wee-hours of the morning. And this pictures a typical morning in the life of Eli and Samuel. Eli was lying down in his usual place of sleep just off the main room of the temple in Shiloh.

The purpose behind the indication of Eli's poor eyesight is to let us know that time has passed since

¹⁵ Compare Leviticus 24:2, 4

¹⁶ Compare Exodus 30:8

¹⁷ Compare Exodus 27:20-21

chapter 2.¹⁸ Eli is getting older, and so is Samuel. Soon when Eli is blind¹⁹ all the warnings of 1 Samuel 2 will come about. Until then, we are left to wait and watch Eli decline and Samuel grow!

Samuel in contrast slept on the ground in the presence of the ark.²⁰

Now on no particularly special morning after no particularly special day, the call of God came forth and summoned Samuel to Himself! From this we see the third and final context of the call to ministry — the mundane, the ordinary, the unexpected!

Again, this is another important principle found in Scripture and perhaps the reason why determining a call is so difficult. In answer to the question, “Why do you believe that you are called to a pulpit ministry?” we’d expect to hear great and fantastic stories and Providences which speak of the miraculous. And yet such is not the norm.

Recall the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18-20, “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Do you remember the only command? It is not, “Go!” But, “Make disciples!”

The other statements give us the “How?” Translated more literally as you go, teaching and baptizing. The point is that fulfilling the Great Commission doesn’t occur as we sell our possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and then GO! But rather AS WE GO about the mundane business of life! This is the soil out of which arises a call to ministry!

And thus when it comes to official calls to ministry, we discover that Amos was pastoring the flock when he was called. Matthew was raising taxes. Micah was farming. Peter and Andrew were fishing. The shepherds were simply out pastoring their flocks. Daniel was faithfully serving a foreign king. In other words, if you are waiting around for a supernatural event, it will never come. If you are waiting for the time to be right, it will never be. And if you are waiting for the feeling that you are worthy, you’ll always be waiting.

The call of ministry — as a general principle occurs in the realm of the mundane! It is given to people who would consider themselves to be ordinary!

Thus, if you are one this day who considers yourself quite ordinary, however you are faithfully working out the general calling that has been placed on your life — the calling to care for this body! — don’t be surprised if someday the summons goes forth, “Whom shall I send?”

¹⁸ It also indicates, by extension, Eli’s spiritual insight. As the priest aged, not only did he lose his eye sight, but also his ability to discern spiritual things. Evidence of this is seen in v. 13.

¹⁹ Compare 1 Samuel 4:15

²⁰ The text is showing us here that Samuel was indeed close to the Lord- not just physically, but also spiritually. Recall Uriah’s devotion to the King as he slept near to the King’s bed (2 Samuel 11:9) So also we read here of Samuel’s devotion to the Lord. Of all Israelites, Samuel indeed was closest to the Lord’s throne (cf. 1 Samuel 4:4; Numbers 7:89).

May the Lord grant us the grace to recognize this call such that we might say, “Send me!”

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About the Preacher

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