

Session 3: Glory to God Alone

New City Church Retreat

September 24, 2017

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

(Jude 1:24)

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

(1 Corinthians 10:31)

1. Sermon from 1 Sam 1-4

Text 1: 1 Samuel 4:1-22

Prayer

Good morning. So far this weekend we have meditated at length on four major principles of the Reformation: Scripture alone, Faith alone, Grace alone, and Christ alone. This morning we wrap up with the final *Sola*, the one that is the necessary conclusion of all that we have discussed and all that is contained in Scripture: glory to God alone.

The principle is very simple. Since God has made everything and without God nothing at all would exist, God deserves all glory, praise, and honour. Since our hearts were in foolish rebellion against our Creator and we were totally incapable of perceiving our sinfulness and therefore God reached out to us to provide us with His own spoken word through the prophets and apostles, God deserves all glory, praise, and honour. Since we were dead in our transgressions, but the Son of God looked favourably on us, His enemies by nature, and determined to become a human being in order to do the impossible and save our wretched selves by letting cruel and wicked men shed His blood, God deserves all glory, praise, and honour. And since, finally, God’s love toward us was so great that He forgave our sins, gave us His own Holy Spirit, adopted us as His own children, and promises us eternal life in a new creation paradise, God deserves all glory, praise, and honour.

God has done everything. The only thing left for us is to give God the recognition he deserves. When we sing the truth of Scripture in our worship, we glorify God. When we treat other people with the dignity due to one made in the very image of God, we glorify God. When we use well and care for the money, resources, community, and environment that God has given us, we glorify God. And that is what this morning is about. If we perceive God in a right and orthodox way, then we must be transformed inwardly. Our disposition must be such that everything we do in life is oriented toward God’s glory.

I am going to begin this morning by camping on 1 Samuel 1-4. The life of Eli the high priest provides a potent and terrifying counterexample to our principle ‘glory to God alone.’ Eli is the foremost political and spiritual leader of Israel and yet he has no idea at

all who God is, and the results are devastating. He has a way of looking religious without rendering glory to the one who made him. If you're looking for the message of this sermon, it is this: we cannot afford to be like Eli; if we fail to give all glory to God, then we fail to make God known to those who need to know Him.

First, some historical context. The book of Samuel follows the book of Judges. After God brought the Israelites out of Egypt with powerful miracles through the leadership of the prophet Moses they spent a generation in the wilderness. When Moses died the leadership of all twelve tribes was passed on to Joshua, and it was Joshua who brought the people across the Jordan river from the East into the land of Canaan. When Joshua died the leadership passed to a series of chieftains we call judges. These judges were unlike our modern systems of government. It was their responsibility to protect the people by leading them into battle. It was up to them to provide spiritual leadership for the people to make sure they did not adopt false religion. And, of course, it was their job to hear and decide cases of conflict that arose among the people, hence the name judges.

We read in 1 Samuel 4:18 that Eli judged Israel for forty years. So Eli was both high priest and judge of the people of God. The responsibility that this man carried was enormous. And yet, since he had the one true God to call upon for help, he had no reason to be afraid.

The main location for our text is Shiloh where the sanctuary of God had been since the time of Joshua (cf. Josh 18:1). This sanctuary, called the Tabernacle, was designed to be easy to move with the people as they went through the wilderness. Its specifications were given by God to Moses in Exodus 25-27 and it was the precursor to the temple that Solomon would later build in Jerusalem. Associated with the Tabernacle are extensive rituals of sacrifice and intercession. It was the place where God's presence could be accessed on earth by the mediation of the priests, the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses.

In our passage, it is Eli that is the priest of this sanctuary. It was his solemn duty to mediate the blessing of God to the people and to keep people from profaning God's holy place. There was not another person in all the world who had more responsibility than Eli to make sure that God is glorified above all else. However, if we read 1 Sam 1-4 carefully, it is abundantly clear that something is terribly wrong in Israel and that that something begins in the heart of Eli, its priest.

Turn with me to 1 Sam 4:17. (*read 1 Sam 4:17-22*)

Eli's life ends on a devastating note, bringing shame and suffering to his family and to Israel. His poor daughter-in-law, before dying in childbirth names her son Ichabod. This name is made up of two Hebrew words, 'i meaning either 'no' or 'where' and *kābōd* meaning 'glory.' For the rest of his life this poor boy bore the name 'No Glory' or 'Where is the Glory.' His mother named him this saying, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." (1 Sam 4:22)

The word translated 'departed' is the same word used for going into exile. The Philistines, the longtime enemy of Israel had taken the single most sacred religious item that Israel possessed. The ark spent all its time in the most holy place of the sanctuary. It was the place where God's *kābōd*, His glorious manifestation, was centralized. It was from above the ark of the covenant that God would speak directly to Moses. No one was

supposed to ever look at it. When they took down the Tabernacle to move it to another place the priests were supposed to take down the veil which separates the holy place from the most holy place and cover up the ark with the veil (Num 4:5). Otherwise no one was supposed even to go near the ark. Only the high priest could enter beyond the veil and that only once per year on the Day of Atonement. Every time the high priest did so he risked his very life. Before entering he would spread a cloud of incense to hide the glory of God, because one look at the glory would cause him to drop dead (Lev 16:12-13). He would enter with the blood of a bull sacrificed to make atonement for his own sin, because the place he was approaching was just too holy for sinful humans.

And yet, look how Israel treats the ark of God in verses 3 and 4. (*read 1 Sam 4:3-4*)

When Israel was at war and losing, the people went down to Shiloh, grabbed the ark of God, taking Eli's sons, the priests Hophni and Phinehas with them, and took it back to the battlefield. And Eli said not a word in protest.

Where is the glory? I will tell you. Read verse 18 with me. (*read 1 Sam 4:18*)

“And he died because he was old and heavy.” In Hebrew that is “old and *kābēd*.” The word ‘glory’ is a noun *kābōd* and the word ‘heavy’ is an adjective *kābēd*. In fact, the Hebrew word for ‘glory’ means literally ‘weight.’

So, where has the glory gone? It has gone onto Eli's fat thighs. After a lifetime of accumulating God's glory for himself Eli has become fat and heavy. If you think I'm being overly creative, then turn with me to 1 Sam 2:27. (*read 1 Sam 2:27-34*)

First Samuel 1-4 plays on the words ‘light’ and ‘heavy.’ The unnamed prophet brings an oracle of judgment from God to Eli saying to him “you have given glory – that is, considered weighty – your sons above Me with the result that you fatten yourselves with the best parts of Israel's offerings.” And don't be fooled, continues God's message, “those who treat me as weighty I will treat as weighty, but those who despise me will be light-weight.”

This is fully consistent with what Jesus says Himself in Matthew 23:12: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” We need to have clear double-knowledge. In the face of almighty God, we are nothing. God is glorious and we are puny. But if you start to think that you yourself are something special, then eventually God will set you straight.

The word play between glory on the one hand and heaviness on the other is motivated by the way that Hophni and Phinehas have been abusing their influence. As priests it is their job to regulate the sacrifices and make sure everything goes according to God's instructions. When it is all over it is their God given right to take a portion of the sacrifice to eat. You see, the priests were not given any property in Israel. Instead, they had the privilege of living off the best of Israel's produce.

But the sons of Eli were arrogant and worthless men who did not know the Lord and they brought dishonour to God because they broke God's commandments and mistreated God's people. Read with me starting in chapter 2, verse 12. (*read 1 Sam 2:12-17*)

Not only were they rude, but they contravened a basic rule of sacrifice in Israel: no one eats the fat. Over and over again the book of Leviticus stipulates that ALL the fat must be burned on the altar. Leviticus 3:16-17 summarizes: “All fat is the LORD's. It shall be a

statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.”

“All fat is the LORD’s.” It is very simple. And yet the peasants had to correct the priests. And when they tried, they were bullied by these godless men.

In addition to that, Hophni and Phinehas were guilty of the worst kind of fornication. They who were supposed to keep themselves most pure among the people were having sex with the women who serve at the entrance of the sanctuary (cf. 1 Sam 2:22). And Eli knew everything.

Eli does make a half-hearted attempt to rebuke his sons in chapter 2, verses 23-25, but they had gone far beyond the realm of rebuke. Their crime was far worse than that of the fellow caught gathering wood on the Sabbath who was stoned to death at God’s command (Num 15:32-36). The Sabbath is holy, but the sanctuary of God is most holy. Eli’s sons had profaned the sanctuary and the offerings of God and were bringing dishonour to God’s name. What they were doing every day had the practical consequence of leading people to think that God is one way when actually He is very different.

Later in our story God speaks to the boy Samuel, again delivering an oracle of judgment against Eli. Turn with me to 1 Samuel 3:10. (*read 1 Sam 3:10-14*).

The word translated ‘blaspheming God’ in the ESV is the opposite of glorifying; it means literally ‘to treat or consider light.’

So, Eli was guilty and his fate was sealed. The LORD would not tolerate Eli’s shameful behaviour and would even make him and his entire family an example for all generations to follow. In verse 3:14 we read perhaps the most terrifying words in all of Scripture: “Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.” You do not treat lightly the name of your God.

How do you think Eli should have responded to this? Certainly with repentance. I imagine tears, I imagine someone else throwing himself onto the ground and tearing his garments apart, crying out to God with bitter anguish, “Forgive me!” I imagine something more like David in 2 Samuel 12 after Natan exposes David’s terrible sin against Uriah and Bathsheba. Starting in verse 13 we read: (*read 2 Sam 12:13-23*)

So David repents, he seeks God, he worships. But does Eli repent? Not at all. In response to the judgment of God he says only this in 1 Sam 3:18: “It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him.” In modern speak: “whatever.” Except that it is a “whatever” baptized in pious sounding language, as though Eli is submitting to the will of God. The truth is that Eli is indifferent to God and this indifference is manifest throughout our narrative through its consequences.

Let us consider three such consequences. The first, spiritual blindness.

Whenever reading Old Testament narrative it is a good idea to pay attention to any details mentioned in the text, even if they seem irrelevant. The scholars who have spent the most time working out the devices of Hebrew narrative teach that Old Testament stories are very economical. The narrator intrudes as little as possible, meaning that it is left to us to interpret the significance of actions and words spoken. This is consistent with a culture that puts a high price on developing wisdom. Furthermore, detail is sparse. Try to reconstruct the scene of any Old Testament story and you’ll see what I mean. What were

the colours of the walls? What did the air smell like? Was the evening buggy? There is no room for irrelevant detail. These texts were composed to be easily recited out loud for a listening audience.

So, it is probably relevant that Eli's eyesight is mentioned more than once in our short passage. Let's start with chapter 1, verse 12. As you know, Hannah was barren and was praying her soul out (cf. 1:15) at the sanctuary and Eli was sitting there by the doorpost. The text reads: (*read 1 Sam 1:12-15*)

He thought she was a drunkard. Eli, the head of Israel's religion, can't tell the difference between praying and drunkenness. This is the first sign of spiritual blindness.

The second sign is the fact that the text tells us twice about Eli's physical blindness. Turn to chapter 3, verse 1: (*read 1 Sam 3:1-2*)

Now, read chapter 4, verse 15: (*read 1 Sam 4:15*)

Why tell us about his physical blindness? This is not the only passage that connects blindness with spiritual ignorance. The book of Isaiah and its reuse in the New Testament has much to say about blindness. The key passage is Isaiah 6:10. When God brings judgment against the people for their hardened disposition towards Him, God does something terrifying: He closes their eyes. Listen: "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

When Jesus came people were supposed to recognize him on the basis of passages like Isaiah 42:6-7 speaking of the Servant of God: "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."

And what was Jesus doing during His ministry? Opening blind eyes. Listen to what Jesus says to the men sent by John the Baptist. Poor John is in prison and he wants to know whether Jesus is the real deal. Matthew 11:4-6 says this: "And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (Matthew 11:4-6)

But there were many who were offended by Jesus. Matthew 11 leads into the fateful moment in chapter 12 where the people decided to kill Jesus. Those people who think they can see most clearly – the religious leadership made up of priests, scribes, and pharisees – are blind in the way that matters most. That is why Jesus quotes our Isaiah 6 passage right at the moment when he begins to use parables in the gospel of Matthew. Matthew 13:12-14, immediately before the parable of the soils, says this: "For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matthew 13:12-13)

Those who do not perceive the realities of God are characterized through blindness. Isn't it peculiar that although unable to see Eli has perched himself in 1 Sam 4:13 by the road

watching for some sign of the ark? He does not even know that he is blind! And when word came by the messenger in verse 14, is it coincidence that Eli is the last one to find out? Or, back in chapter 3, what do we make of the fact that it took Eli three times to realize that it must be God's voice calling Samuel?

It is not coincidence. Those who do not honour God in their hearts are condemned by God to spiritual blindness.

The second consequence is related. God does not speak to one such as Eli.

Recall that in chapter 3, verse 1 it says that "the word of the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent." Was the word of God rare during Eli's lifetime because God got tired of speaking? I don't think so. The word of God does come, twice in fact, in our short passage. The first time it comes by the hand of an unnamed 'man of God' (1 Sam 2:27). The second time it comes to a boy serving at the sanctuary (1 Sam 3:4-14). Never does it come to Eli directly.

And one has to wonder, does Eli ever try to talk to God? No one prayed to God in chapter 4 when the Philistines defeated Israel the first time. They just acted. They thought they could manipulate God. They thought they could reproduce what Joshua did at Jericho just by taking the Ark to war with them, as though it were some sort of talisman. Never mind that Joshua did what he did because God told him explicitly what to do.

They don't bother to try and ask God what God's will is, and so God doesn't tell them. That is why things had to change. That is why God promises in chapter 2, verse 35 that He will raise up a faithful priest to do what is in God's heart.

Those who do not honour God in their hearts are indifferent to God's will. They don't ask to know God's will and God does not speak with them.

The third consequence is most disastrous of all. It affects the people around us. If we do not give God the glory, then no one will know God.

Have you noticed how peculiar it is that the people closest to Eli, the very same people who serve in the sanctuary of God every single day, do not know the LORD? Eli's sons don't know the LORD: chapter 2, verse 12: (*read 1 Sam 2:12*). Samuel, who ministers to the LORD (3:1) and even sleeps inside the sanctuary (3:3), does not know the LORD: (*read 1 Sam 3:7*).

All of Eli's actions point back to himself. He takes the glory that belongs to God and he hoards it, and the result is that no one near him gets to know who God is. They don't see from Eli's actions how glorious God is. They don't know that God desires relationship with them. They don't know that God is holy, or that God is wise, or that God is a mighty saviour. They don't know!

Those who hold on to God's glory prevent others from seeing God as God is.

In all of this Eli is put to shame by Hannah. Hannah is a simple woman, but she knows who God is. Give her just a little text and she fills it with her prayers and with her song of praise.

My prayer for you is that you learn proper humility before God; that you learn to give God the glory that is His alone. Israel had experienced the glory of God in the Exodus when He delivered them out of slavery in Egypt with signs and wonders, with a mighty

hand and outstretched arm. And what about us? We have received a more perfect salvation in Jesus Christ. When we were slaves to sin the Son of God worked a second Exodus for us and it cost Him His very life. I tell you now, there is no God like our God.

When you and I learn to praise God in our every action, God not only gets what is due to Him, but the world gets to see it. If we do that, people will flock to the true God.

Prayer

Let us end with Hannah's song:

Text 2: 1 Sam 2:1-10

2. The legacy of the Reformation: giving glory to God through everything

(a) The Priesthood of All Believers

Text 3: "So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:1–10 ESV)

The Reformers were zealous for the glory of God. They took seriously the idea that with the coming of Jesus all believers become a holy priesthood. We have received abundant grace, but now we have the responsibility of priests. Unlike Eli, we must devote ourselves to God's glory. Only then are we effective priests in mediating God's blessing to a world ignorant of His glory.

What you will find liberating about the Reformed approach to the priesthood of all believers is that the Reformers sought first of all to break down the traditional partition between the sacred and the profane. They were convinced that clerical and monastic vocations were no more holy than those of the mother, the artist, or the farmer. All vocations are holy if pursued with the conviction that all glory belongs to God.

(b) Glory to God in All of Life

Text 4: “As regards the gospel, they [the people of Israel] are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 11:28–12:2 ESV)

As priests, what are the sacrifices we bring. Paul says bring yourselves. The Christian life is not easy. It involves sacrifice. Jesus says in Luke 9:23: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Denying ourselves is the other side of double-knowledge. We know that we are unworthy to claim God’s glory, so we humble ourselves, and we do it every day.

The Reformers believed that we could bring every single part of life before God as a kind of sacrifice, the essential part being that when we do something we do it with our hearts eager to glorify God.

From Reformed pulpits went out the idea that God could be glorified not only in the affairs of the Church, but also in the family, in our work, through just government, through our creativity – everything we do can be oriented to God’s glory.¹

We are the heirs of the Reformation. We have the Scripture to guide us and we have confidence in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

For the rest of this session I want us to consider how all that we have read and heard this weekend makes a difference in our lives.

If the kingdom of God really has come near and is “like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up” (Matt 13:44) what are we going to do? Should we not, like that man, in our joy go and sell everything that we have in order to go and buy that field?

1. Cf. Terry L. Johnson, “*Soli Deo Gloria - 2*,” in *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004).

3. Discussion: How can New City Church Toronto give glory to God this year?

Divide up into groups of 3 to 5 people Begin with prayer and then discuss practical actions that we can take this year to give glory to God by giving God our best with a pure heart. Be sure to submit your ideas so that we can keep talking about them and vote on them in the coming weeks. Some examples to get you started are

- starting a new prayer ministry after the service for those who need prayer
- starting our services on time at the advertised time
- begin reading Scripture systematically as part of our worship services
- host evangelistic events
- undertake evangelistic training

4. Conclusion: Worship God through Song