



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula  
3 Stanmore Bay Road,  
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.  
[www.ststephenswgp.org.nz](http://www.ststephenswgp.org.nz)

## Sermon

### ***Revelation and Morality***

**1 Samuel 3:1-10; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51**

17<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2021

© 2021 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

We are in the season of Epiphany which focuses on the revelation of Christ. Today our three readings all relate to revelation in some fashion. It is important when God reveals something to us. When you experience that, it changes you. Have you experienced that? What can we learn from these readings?

#### ***Samuel***

Let's start with the Old Testament reading. We need to understand something of the context around the reading. In the previous chapter we are told of the corruption of the priesthood of the day. Eli was high priest and his sons were priests. However, Eli was weak in his discipline and his sons were corrupt. In fact, it says, they "... were worthless men. They did not know the LORD."<sup>1</sup> They were both greedy and immoral. They stole meat brought for sacrifice taking the best cuts for themselves before they could be offered at the altar. They also took advantage of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. In their actions, they treated the offering of the Lord with contempt, offended the faithful Israelites and sexually abused women who were there to serve God. God had already sent a prophet to warn Eli that because of his sons' sinful behaviour judgement would fall on his house and both his sons would both die on the same day.

Then in contrast, we meet Samuel, still a young boy. You have heard the story of God's call to him and how he mistook it for Eli calling him - three times. That might help us understand that God's voice is usually not too different from normal thoughts and sounds we hear. If we insist that God will speak only in dramatic, powerful ways, we may miss what he says. Remember with Elijah, it was not through the earthquake, the destructive wind or the fire that God spoke to him, but in a still, small voice. I wonder how that fits with your experience of hearing God speak to you. I remember once travelling home from work and seeing three aircraft vapour trails in the western sky. With three great brush strokes they appear to form a giant letter "N" – illuminated orange by the setting sun. I looked at it and said, "Lord, that would be a wonderful answer, if I only had asked you a question." But, you know, most of the time God speaks to us gently, quietly and in a whisper very like our own thought voice, yet with a subtle sense that it is more than that.

With Samuel, the Lord called him by name three times. Then, something more wonderful happened (v10), the Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 2:12

This was not just a voice in Samuel's mind or ears but a vision too. It is a theophany, a manifestation of God. God met with Samuel, called him and commissioned him as a great prophet. There was a revelation to Samuel. There was also a message – a tough message - for him to deliver to Eli. It was a confirmation that judgement was about to fall on his house because of the blasphemy of his sons.

In the house of God, there was communication from heaven. In the house of God we may encounter the living God. In the house of God, God required purity and morality.

## *Jesus*

Now let's turn to the Gospel reading. Last week, we heard about Jesus' baptism. Today's gospel reading is a couple of days later. A few disciples start to follow Jesus, including Philip who excitedly tells Nathaniel that they had found the Messiah, ending with "and he comes from Nazareth." Well that does not impress Nathaniel: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" You can hear the incredulity in his retort.

Just think if you were telling your friend about Jesus and she responded like that? What would you do? Curl up and hide? Promise yourself never to open your mouth again? Hear what Philip said: "Come and see." Simple isn't it? The truth about Jesus is solid – it bears inspection. Believe in your message.

Nathaniel goes with Philip and Jesus surprises them by commenting on Nathaniel's character: "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false." Nathaniel is startled and asks how Jesus knows about him. His enigmatic reply is, "'I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.'"<sup>2</sup>

That breaks down Nathaniel's resistance. We are not told the detail of what had happened, but he was convinced. There was a spiritual revelation.

Have you ever had that sort of experience? I have, a few times – when someone has prophesied what they could not have known. In 1997, Helen and I with our son went to England for what we thought was just six months. Before we had decided, someone in our church told me that God was going to prune me. That didn't sound very nice! When we were in England, we had very clear guidance to extend our stay and then to remain indefinitely. Then I got homesick! As I grumbled and asked what we were doing there anyway, the Lord graciously sent a prophetic word through someone I met from outside my situation. Without knowing who I was, my thoughts or where I was worshipping, he told me that I was in England to be trained by Mike Clarkson (my vicar) in healing ministry. That dealt with my self-pity and homesickness. Then amazingly, on the brink of our leaving England to come back 10 years later, someone else prophesied to me that I had been in England to be trained and now I was being sent back to bear fruit. In the interim, I had learnt that the idea of pruning a grapevine is not only cutting off but also training of the tendrils to the shape one requires.

When God clearly speaks into your situation, it is stunning - transformative. It was for Nathaniel – he was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and more, the Son of God. There was revelation of Jesus.

From the start of this conversation until it flowers at the end, there has been something on Jesus' mind. Why did he make that odd reference to "an Israelite in whom there nothing false"? Then there is this peculiar remark in v51:

"I tell you the truth you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

The common factor is Jacob. His name meant supplanter; later renamed by God, Israel – prince of God. Jacob conned his brother, Esau, out of his inheritance even deceiving his blind father that he was Esau so he might receive his brother's blessing. He was full of guile! I wonder if Nathaniel might have been meditating on the account of Jacob when Jesus told him that he was an Israelite without guile?

The reference to 'angels ascending and descending' points to Jacob's ladder. You will remember the dream Jacob had of a ladder reaching to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. <sup>3</sup> When he woke, he

---

<sup>2</sup> John 1:48

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 28:10ff

said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!" He continued, "What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God, the very gateway to heaven!" (NLT)

For Nathaniel, the Lord was in that place and he had not been aware of it either! Pastor Bill Johnson, Bethel Church Redding, points out that in this passage the house of God and the gateway to heaven are synonymous. Jesus tells the disciples that they will see greater things: even the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man – on him! Jesus is the fulfilment of Jacob's dream. He is the ladder linking heaven and earth. It is 'on Jesus' that angels communicate between heaven and earth. It is Jesus who is the gateway to heaven, he is the house of God.

It becomes more and more explicit as we go through the New Testament that Jesus is the true temple the dwelling place of God. So in John 2:19 & 21: 'Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'" John explains, 'But the temple he had spoken of was his body.'

Then in turn when Jesus had ascended, he commissioned the Church as the new temple of God on earth. As Christians, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Together as the Church we are to be the dwelling place of God on earth. We (not the physical building) are to form a place where people can meet with God. Our calling is to be a 'gate' or a point of access for people to encounter Jesus and to experience the power of heaven, right here on the earth.

### ***Purity in the House of God***

In the Epistle reading there is a link to this idea of our being the house of God. The argument concludes:

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies."<sup>4</sup>

All we have said about being Christians, about being filled with the Holy Spirit about being temples for God's Spirit, about being a gateway to heaven – all of this is based on our relationship with God through Christ. He is our Saviour but he is also crucially our Lord – the one we are to obey. So Paul says you are not your own, you were bought at a price – therefore honour God with your bodies.

This reading starts with a series of statements which Paul refutes. We know that he is replying to a letter the Corinthian church has sent him with various questions and arguments in it. These are statements they have made which he says do not apply. He thus deals quickly with the argument that we have the right to do anything we like. No, we are to submit to our Lord and Saviour. He should dominate us not anything else.

Their other statement was that this material world does not matter because only spiritual things will be eternal (a gnostic heresy). What we do with our bodies, has eternal consequence. It is our physical actions that reveal what is really in our wills and thoughts. People can say they think or believe anything, but it is in the reality of our bodies' actions that we show the truth.

Paul asserts that because we are in Christ, our bodies are members (that is bodily parts) of Christ. What we do with our bodies we are doing with Christ. If we are in an immoral relationship, we take Christ into that relationship. It applies to any immoral relationship but Paul uses the example of going to a prostitute. That was a major problem in Corinth both because of temple prostitution in the pagan religions and because the city was considered the moral sinkhole of the Mediterranean.

Paul takes the spiritual unity of Christ with his people very seriously. Christian's spirits are united with Christ. He also takes the physical union of sexual partnering very seriously. Quoting from Genesis 2, the sexual union causes the two to become one flesh. So if a Christian unites with a prostitute he has united the Spirit of Christ with the body of the prostitute. That is an unholy and a blasphemous act.

There is something mystical but, none the less, very real about this oneness. Sexual union is designed to bond husband and wife together. Anyone in prayer ministry with people soon learns that sexual unions tie people together and this can have serious effects of spiritual confusion when the relationship is broken and worse

---

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor 6:19-20

still, when relationships are multiplied. Besides the tearing of the soul, infidelity in marriage causes so much trauma for the husband and wife and for the children. So often we hear of the heartache of a deserted spouse for the one who left them. Time after time, we hear of the anger, the rejection, the insecurities introduced into children's lives by the divorce of parents. Boys who become angry youths because Dad left – sometimes going into gangs and drugs because of their emotional pain. Girls who grow up thinking they have no value except as a sex object for any man.

And these traumas continue to affect people throughout their lives. It takes many hours of skilled ministry to heal these deep wounds. It is easy to see why God put moral restraints on us for our own good. Fornication and adultery are destructive of emotional health. They can open doorways to unclean spiritual powers so we often encounter the need for deliverance as a consequence.

Paul warns that sinning sexually is uniquely sinning against oneself. Perhaps he was thinking about Proverbs 6:32 "... a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself."

Is there revelation in this reading? Well would we know the answer to Paul's questions without the revelation he gives?

**v15** Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

**v16** Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

**v19** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit – you are not your own?

We have the wonderful privilege together of being the house of God; we have the extraordinary honour of being temples of the Holy Spirit; we have the potential to be gateways to heaven for those we meet.

Our readings started with the moral corruption in the tabernacle and God manifesting there to start to bring change. We finish with the warning against immorality in the people of God – his temple on earth. We are called to holiness. Let us not squander these precious and very great privileges for passing pleasures which do not satisfy but serve to destroy us. Rather let us offer ourselves as clean vessels for the master's use that he may be able to use us for those good works he has planned for us to do.<sup>5</sup>

All scriptural quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*® ©1972, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Societies. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

---

<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 2:20-21, Ephesians 2:10