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1 SAMUEL 3:10-6:21

1 Samuel Series

Would you please open your Bibles to 1 Samuel 3. As you know sometimes as I'm teaching verse by verse through the Bible we will spend our whole Sunday on one verse. When we were going through Romans sometimes it was the whole Sunday on a part of a verse. Well today in 1 Samuel 3:10 we're going through four chapters or at least three-and-a-half chapters. We're going to move through this because it's all one big story. I want you to get the whole piece of this as we go forward.

So let's draw our attention to the Lord here and prepare our hearts to open His word.

[PRAYER] Lord, we recognize that your word is sovereign in our lives. It is the lamp for our feet, the light to our path. It is our authority for life and we want to build our lives upon it. Some of the passages are ones that are direct commands to us, some of them are ones that critique our hearts and cause us to evaluate our lives. Others are illustrations or stories of great men or women in the Bible that we can learn from and emulate. Today as we look at this one story I ask that you would reveal to us more about your power. You are God Almighty, not just back in the time of Samuel, but you are God Almighty today. You are in charge, you're in control, you're powerful. Lord, reveal that to us as we look at your word this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

1 Samuel 3. We're going to go to verse 10. We ended this story last week at this exciting place because Eli told Samuel to go back and lie down and when you hear the name called again, *say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."* So here's the young boy who's maybe ten or twelve years old I'm imagining and he goes and lies down and he's waiting. Will the voice come again? Will he hear his name called again? Because now he's going to respond differently than to running in to Eli. So we're at this very interesting place.

Let's rewind back to verse 10 and pick it up there. *The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"*

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle."

I'm going to tell you the whole story because I think your ears are going to tingle and you're going to want to hear the rest of it. It's one of those things where someone starts to talk and you go, "What are they saying over there? I want to hear more about that." That's the ears tingling and that's what this story is going to be.

But before we get to this story, God is speaking to Samuel in the middle of the night and He's revealing something to him. Notice verse 12. He says to him, *"At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"*

I just want to point out that Eli isn't going to be judged because his kids sinned. He's judged, as you can see in the passage, because his kids sinned and he didn't do anything about it. He didn't restrain them. It wasn't just a power of a parent to come in and do something about it, but he had the office of a priest and his sons were functioning as priests. He had the power and the authority to stop them from doing what they were doing as priests, not just as a father, but in this very sacred task of representing God to the people. He didn't do it and so God is judging him.

What a message that boy heard that night from God Himself. He'd lived among the people. He knew what Hophni and Phinehas were doing. He had watched Eli to relate to them. Samuel was living in the midst of that and now God is speaking to him and telling him what's going to happen to these people that he lives with.

Verse 15 – *Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord.* So he started going about his work around the temple. *He was afraid to tell Eli the vision.* He had the word of the Lord, but he was afraid to share it. I'll come back to that idea in a few minutes.

But Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

"What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes."

Eli realizes that Samuel is being used of God to present this message. God is raising up this boy who has some integrity before the Lord and God is using Him as a vehicle to communicate a message.

I just want to suggest that God speaks to young people and children today. We don't want to suggest that God is going to just speak to these kids that are up here or to the young people when they get to be adults, that the church is an adult thing. But we know that God speaks to children and young people today in their youth. We want to listen to what God has to say. God may be speaking through them to us as parents or leaders or friends or whatever.

One dad wanted to impress this idea on his son (the boy is about eight years old), so as they were going to church, he says to his son, "Son, when you go to church today I want you to listen to what God has to say and then I want you to tell me what He taught you in your class so that maybe I can learn from you in that experience." That's the attitude I like. That's what the dad said to this boy.

After church was over and they were riding home in the car, he says to his son, “So son, what did you learn in church today?” And the son said, “We learned about Noah.” His dad said, “That’s a story, not a lesson.” I really like those words. That’s a story, not a lesson. Then they went on doing some other things and the car got quiet, the dad didn’t even realize he had gone to something else in his mind, and after a few minutes the boy said, “I learned that we need to obey even when it’s hard.” Yes, that was a message that came from that story.

We’re not just learning about stories, we’re learning messages, lessons that we take Jesus home and then we apply them to our lives in practical ways. Young people can do that and it’s important to recognize that young people can be vehicles through whom God speaks. We want to listen to what God is saying to them. I’m interested in that. I’m grateful that Natasha suggested a song this morning. I want to hear what’s going on in the lives of the rest of our young people, and I hope you do too as we continue to eat lunch together or we fellowship together here.

Let’s go on. Verse 19 – *The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground.* At this day and age where we have broken political promises and deception and lies, it’s nice to see a man of integrity. Here’s a man, Samuel, of integrity growing up and the Bible says that *none of his words fell to the ground.* In other words what God is saying here in this passage is that all the things that Samuel predicted came true. There was integrity behind what Samuel did. When he spoke for the Lord it was clear that it was the Lord who was speaking.

The idea of didn’t fall the ground comes from this analogy. If you live in a third world, like when I lived in Kenya, let me put it this way: There’s no 5-second rule in Kenya. If something falls down in the dirt, you don’t eat it. It’s not good. If you carry the water up from the river, they’ll boil it and they’ll serve it to you, and if you spill your water, it’s gone. So it’s special in that regard. If you’re eating your food and some meat or something falls on the dirty, you’re not going to pick it up and eat it. It’s wasted. It’s lost. And so he’s saying here that none of the words of Samuel fell to the ground or were wasted.

Verse 20 – *And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.* Notice it took time for people to recognize that Samuel was a prophet. It didn’t happen instantly. It took some time.

In fact, I just want to go back and look at now for a moment the life of Samuel and how God spoke to him and how he learned to listen the Lord and speak, because that’s what many of us want to do. We want to listen to God and we want to speak words that God has given to us to tell others so that we can minister to other people.

There are several principles from this passage that I think are helpful to give us an idea and an understanding of what it means to listen to the Lord and respond to Him. So here are some things to remember right out of the story.

First, I would suggest we need to learn to listen. Remember in Samuel's situation it wasn't quick. He had to learn how to listen to God. We have to learn that. It's not something that comes instantly for many of us.

Secondly, we might not recognize God's voice at first and need experience to know when God is speaking. So there's experience that is involved here that I think is important. Sometimes we get it quickly, but other times we just don't know. Is this God speaking to me or is this my own impressions of life? So that's another interesting thing about the story.

The third one is this: Sometimes others, even godly people help us hear from God. I want to make it clear that Eli was not a godly priest. He did things that were not the best. But God still used him to help Samuel get it. So as you're learning to listen to the Lord and speak on His behalf, you don't want to limit God to only the people that you think are godly. God may speak through non-Christian parents. He may speak through friends and as you're listening, God may do something to direct you and help you understand more about who He is.

A fourth one – listening and speaking for God can take place even when you're young. We've already made that point, but I just want to again say that it's not just something for someone who's older. This is something that God wants to do and often wants to do new things in the lives of people, and He uses young people to do it. So that's number four. God shares valuable, important information with young people who are willing to listen. So if you're a young person today, I just want to encourage you to listen to the Lord. God wants to work and speak in your life.

Another one – others might not recognize our sensitivity to God for a while. Notice we saw in the passage it took a while for them to get it. They didn't recognize that he had the word. He wasn't the prophet instantly. But it came to be known overtime because of his reputation and track record.

And one more – our job is to be faithful and share the message and let God handle the details. Remember Samuel was afraid. He didn't want to share the message. Yet his responsibility was not how the message would be received. His responsibility was to share what he had heard. That's our job. It's not our job to measure how people are going to receive it. We just want to pass that message on.

I just think those principles about listening to God and speaking on His behalf are key elements that we learn from this story as it unfolds for us and we see this guy Samuel.

Okay, let's go into the next chapter because it starts this way. *And Samuel's word came to all Israel.* Here's the story. Your ears will start to tingle. Here we go.

Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. Well up at the top you have Ebenezer. See it there? And then you have another red dot that is Aphek. Those are the places that are mentioned so far. We are going to take this path here and we're going to take a good section of it on this map to follow where the ark goes. But I just want you to see in the history of Israel, you've got Jerusalem down here.

Shiloh is up a little bit higher where the central place of worship is now. They've gone over to Ebenezer to fight and they're fighting against Aphek, one of the kings of the Philistines.

Let's go back here. *Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield.* That's quite a loss. *When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked (a very good question), "Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines?"*

The "why" question we often ask and that's a good question. Why? It's good when we ask it this way. As in: Why do bad things happen to us? What can I learn from this? How can I grow from this? What is God doing in this situation? That kind of a "why" question is good. When we use the "why" question to blame God for something (why are you doing this to me?), that's not a good response.

So they're asking a good question, but they don't listen and wait for a response. They just have an idea. "Oh, I have an idea. Let's do this." The next verse – *"Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."* The battle isn't over yet. They're going to go back in again. Let's go get the ark and bring it out here. That's their idea, but they didn't check with God whether this idea was a good one and it's going to result in some problems for them.

The ark of the covenant was this chest. It was a treasure chest of God's blessing. It contained Aaron's rod that budded, the Ten Commandments were in there. It was a chest that was made out of wood and overlaid with gold. It was four feet wide, two feet deep, and two feet tall. It had on top of it a gold plate or lid and that lid was the mercy seat made out of solid gold. It had two molded or crafted angels on top of it with their wings coming close together.

That was the place where this ark would be placed in the Holy of Holies. Once a year God would meet the priests and His presence would be made at that point where the cherubim's wings met. Between the cherubim and the Holy of Holies God would speak, the presence would be made known, the blood would be sprinkled on the altar, and God's power would be revealed.

This was a very powerful ark. It was designed by God Himself and the people built it. The ark led them out of the wilderness, wondering into the Promised Land. It had accompanied them in the battle before. It just represented God's power, His sovereignty, His control, His leadership. It was powerful.

So their idea was we're going to go get it because we need something here. This isn't working for us. So they did and went with their own thing.

They got the ark and we pick it up in verse 4. *So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas (these bad guys), were there with the ark of the covenant of God.*

When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. As we sang worship songs a few minutes ago, there was this sense of the ground shook. We were all just drawn into corporate worship together clapping and so on. Just the presence of God was there. That's what happened. The ark comes in and people are really excited about it, so much so that the ground shook. They knew that the power of God was represented in this tabernacle.

Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. "A god has come into the camp," they said. "Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. We're doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness."

That was fifty years ago or longer that this took place and the reputation is still out there that all the plagues came to the Egyptians and they sent them out and all these bad things happened. God had a reputation, amazing things that were going on. Here's the interesting thing. When you share Jesus Christ with someone else and you tell them about the Lord, oftentimes they've heard about things. They've heard about God and now you're bringing more specific information about who He is. The Philistines knew about the power of God.

Verse 9 – *"Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!" So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. They had already lost four thousand. Now they've got thirty thousand more they were losing. This is bad.*

I pause for a moment and I think what happened here that tremendous failure came. I think what they were doing is they were trying to use God as some kind of a good luck charm. I'm going to wear a cross or I'm going to put God in my pocket and I'm going to have Him come round with all of my plans as if somehow we control God. We don't control God. We serve God.

So when we're serving God we need to fit into His plans. We don't ask Him to fit into ours. It seems that that's a big mistake, a very important mistake that I think is very practical for me and for all of us. We just start making plans and say, "God, come on. I'm doing this over here. Come on with me," then we're missing something very important. The best question we can ask every morning is, "Lord, how can I fit into your plans? As I'm maneuvering through my life today, would you please guide me and help me fit into your plans today and what you would have?"

Well here's the sad news. Verse 11 – *The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.*

That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. Interesting. I would think his heart feared

for his children. But the ark is really what captured his thoughts. *When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.*

Eli heard the outcry and asked, “What is the meaning of this uproar?” The man hurried over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes had failed so that he could not see. He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.”

Eli asked, “What happened, my son?”

The man who brought the news replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.”

When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

Wow. It just makes my ears tingle. It's one of those stories that's interesting. Just looking at the numbers there, he was ninety-eight, he had ruled in Israel or had this ministry post for forty years. You go back, that's fifty-eight. I'm fifty-nine years old. I'm thinking, wow, maybe my ministry is just starting here. That would be great. But I'm just amazed to see the power of God demonstrated in this situation.

The rest of the chapter is more of the story. You know how these stories are. There's this going on here, there's another part going on over here.

So verse 19 – His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. As she was dying, the women attending her said, “Don't despair; you have given birth to a son.” But she did not respond or pay any attention.

She named the boy Ichabod, saying, “The Glory has departed from Israel”—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, “The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

Wow. So now the ark that had been with Israel all this time since its creation and God designed it, they built it, it had been in the center of their worship experience, it had led them through the Jordan River on dry ground. All these things happened. It was powerful. Now it's not with them. Where is it?

Well let's go into chapter 5. *After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.* Ebenezer down to Ashdod. Philistine cities all over here on the coast of Israel. That's Tel Aviv (it wasn't Tel Aviv then, it is now). Joppa on this side, Jerusalem will give you land marks. But that's the Philistine area. They take it down to Ashdod. That's where they're going to take this thing.

Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon (another religious artifact). They'll put it within their temple with the other religious stuff. So now they got the ark of covenant with the statue of Dagon there. I can't imagine what he is. Some kind of a statue that's there and that they would worship.

When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! I mean it's kind of funny to think here the statue now has fallen over in the night and is laying prostrate before the ark of God. So what do they do? They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained. Now this statue thing is all broken up. He's on the ground bowing down before the covenant and his head is rolled off and his hands are broken down on the threshold.

Verse 5 – *That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold. They don't want to get on that threshold. Nobody steps on that thing. Even today, it says.*

It just reminded me Jesus said you can't serve two masters. You put these two masters together; it's not going to work. The power of God is so great that in the night Dagon's bowing down to the ark of the covenant.

Verse 6 – *The Lord's hand was heavy on the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation on them and afflicted them with tumors. When the people of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy on us and on Dagon our god."*

So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?" They answered, "Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath." There's another king. There are five kings of the Philistines and they move it down to the king that's into the city of Gath. So they moved the ark of the God of Israel.

Verse 9 – *But after they had moved it, the Lord's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors. So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. Let's get rid of this thing!*

It's like a hot potato going through Israel. Nobody wants this thing around. God doesn't need somebody else to protect Him. He can protect Himself. They don't know exactly what to do with this ark. So they're trying to get rid of this thing.

As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people." So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and had a powwow. So getting together the five kings, the leaders, and they're going to decide what to do. "Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was

very heavy on it. Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

That's the end of chapter 5. You can't stop there. You have to go on. Aren't your ears tingling? You want to know more. That's how I'm feeling! Okay, let's go to chapter 6.

When the ark of the Lord had been in Philistine territory seven months (so seven months this whole problem is going on. They don't know what to do and they're trying to solve this problem), the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we should send it back to its place."

They answered, "If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it back to him without a gift (and what gift are they going to give? This is interesting to me at least); by all means send a guilt offering to him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been lifted from you."

The Philistines asked, "What guilt offering should we send to him?" I mean what kind of gift would you send?

Well here's their idea. *They replied, "Five gold tumors and five gold rats (very interesting gifts), according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and give glory to Israel's god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land. Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When Israel's god dealt harshly with them, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?"*

"Now then, get a new cart ready." Here's the plan. A very interesting plan. Is this really from God or is this by chance, is the question they're asking and trying to figure out. "So let's have this plan," say the diviners and the priests, "Try this."

"Now then, get a new cart ready with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. (So they've never been on a yoke, they don't know how to work the yoke. And they've got calves. They're not going to want to leave their calves.) Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up. Take the ark of the Lord and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way, but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh (the Israelite town), then the Lord has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us but that it happened to us by chance."

Now the reason this is interesting is because if you take two cows that have never been on a yoke before, they're going to butt with each other, the cart's not going to go anywhere, they're going to be stuck. They haven't been trained yet to be on a yoke. Secondly, if they have calves back there, they're not going to want to leave their calves. So this is a good task. Are they going to go or are they going to stay? They're making all the temptation for the cows to not make progress. So what's going to happen?

Verse 10 – *So they did this. They took two such cows and hitched them to the cart and penned up their calves. They placed the ark of the Lord on the cart and along with it the chest containing the gold rats and the models of the tumors. Then the cows went straight up toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way.* That’s like purring. If you’re a cat, you purr; if you’re a cow, you low. They’re just having a great time. In other words they’re happy campers. They’re going home back to Beth Shemesh. Who knows if they’ve ever been there before, but that’s where they’re headed. God is obviously working here. *They did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.*

Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley (minding their own business, just doing what they do, enjoying themselves), and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced at the sight. The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. It just stopped. That’s where it ended. It went all that way and just stops right here.

The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. The Levites took down the ark of the Lord, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the Lord. The five rulers of the Philistines saw all this and then returned that same day to Ekron. So they went back to where they were.

These are the gold tumors the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to the Lord—one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers (so I guess the kings were rats, that’s their emblem. It certainly wouldn’t fit into our culture. Maybe we’re losing something in the translation here, I don’t know. But they’re the rats)—the fortified towns with their country villages.

The large rock on which the Levites set the ark of the Lord is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh. So this rock is now this place that says, “This is where the ark of the Lord came back.” Wow. That’s a story about the power of God. Very interesting story hidden away in 1 Samuel 3-6.

Now the ark is back into Israelite territory, but there’s another piece of the story. Before I leave that, I’ve got to finish the chapter here because another thing happens.

Look at verse 19 – *But God struck down some of the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they looked into the ark of the Lord.* They opened up the mercy seat, looked in to see what was in there and seventy of them died. *The people mourned because of the heavy blow the Lord had dealt them. And the people of Beth Shemesh asked, “Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God? To whom will the ark go up from here?”*

Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, “The Philistines have returned the ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up to your town.”

Now. That's the end of our passage today, but go back to verse 20 that we just read. I really like that statement that *the people of Beth Shemesh* asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" We must realize that in our faith we are not just adding some trivial thing to our lives when we become Christians. We are not in the course of our day just asking God to bless our food because we're going to eat it. That's not the way we respond to God. Our commitment to God is a total commitment because He is powerful, He's awesome, He's God Almighty. It is so important in the course of our days and our weeks that we are tying ourselves into the very power of God.

When we think about God's power and how almighty and magnificent we are and we tie into that power, we can see God at work in our world today. If you're getting discouraged about the political climate or you're getting discouraged about problems in your life, you need to get out of that and see the hugeness of God and how God Almighty is working in our world today. People are getting saved and people need to understand more about who He is. I'll tell you that if our world and as our world gets more difficult.

I would suggest that after November 8th or January 21st when whoever's going to be in office gets elected, we have bad news coming no matter what happens. The good news is with that bad news the church is going to shine brighter than it ever has before because there's going to be a big difference between what we see in the world and we see in God's kingdom if God's people are committed to God. If God's people are just going to wear the cross and put their bumper stickers on as if we're carrying God along with us, we're missing something really important. We have the privilege of being connected to the power of God.

I trust that God will do something in your life in that regard. What does He want you to do? What does He want you to dedicate to Him? What does He want you to give to Him? How can you fit into the plans of God? It's just such a big question that the possibilities are endless.

I believe that God wants to do some amazing things in our lives. It means we have to be serious about our faith. We have to give up some things that maybe we had going and we thought, "Oh that's okay." There's nothing wrong with it, but maybe God wants to say, "There's something wrong with that because I want you totally committed to me. It might not be wrong to somebody else, but for you, it's hindering your ability to be empowered by me."

God wants to take His power and He wants to give it to us because the greatest gift that any of us could have is to be anointed by God. That God would anoint us and use us in anything that we're doing whether that's anointing us for family, for business, in our work, in our relationships, in our finances. We want to be anointed by God and we want God to do that deeper work in our hearts. Amen?

Let's stand and pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we come before you now and we know that you are an awesome, awesome God and that you're powerful. Lord, we also know that you've chosen to have a personal relationship with us. You're not just distant and powerful, but you're powerful and personal. We need that. We know that you even know our names and you care about us as individuals. We're

not just a number to you, but you know what's in our hearts. You know what needs to change. You bring conviction on us. Lord, I pray that each one of us today would feel the conviction of your Holy Spirit, feel the power that you want to bring to us. Make us receptive to that as we dedicate ourselves to you. In Jesus' name, amen.