

*But Samuel was ministering before the LORD—a boy wearing a linen ephod.<sup>19</sup> Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.<sup>20</sup> Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.” Then they would go home. ...<sup>26</sup> And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men. (1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26)*

### **What Does Samuel Teach Us About Christ?**

A couple of weeks ago, my wife showed her Sunday school class various Christian symbols. They looked at some traditional symbols for the apostles. One of the symbols had a fish on it. She asked the kids why that fish was there. I don't know which child that I have in catechism class said it, but apparently, one of them answered, “Because he was fish-slapped?” Now, I'm not entirely sure what fish-slapping is or what it means, but I certainly have a picture in my head. Needless to say, that's not why the fish was on that symbol. But it does go to show you that symbols are only useful if we understand what they mean. This morning, we have in our Old Testament lesson a symbol of Christ: we have the prophet Samuel. Now, what do I mean by that? All Old Testament prophets were symbols. The whole Old Testament institution was a symbol designed to teach God's people what Jesus would do when he came. So this morning, we want to move out of the stable of Bethlehem and ask ourselves, **what does Samuel teach us about Christ?**

#### **I.**

**He teaches us what a real human life looks like.** Now, obviously, we see real human lives every day. But when God sent his Son into the world, he did not send him to be some kind of other worldly, semi-human being. He did not send him to lead some kind of charmed life. He sent him to face all that we face and to live the lives that we live with one great exception: he had no sin. So God carefully sets the stage for us. First, he shows us real human beings and then he shows us Christ.

Samuel is one of those real human beings. Do you remember his story? Samuel's mother Hannah was one of two wives of a man named Elkanah. Hannah didn't have children but the other wife did. Every year at Passover, Elkanah and his family would go to Shiloh where the tabernacle was. Of course, the Passover feast was the heart of that celebration and just like in our families, big holiday get-togethers somehow bring out the worst in strained family relationships. Hannah's rival wife would needle her about not having children until Hannah got so upset she couldn't eat. One year after this happened she went to the tabernacle to pray. She asked God for a son. God answered her prayer and gave her Samuel.

When he was still a very small boy, Hannah brought him to Shiloh and gave him to Eli, the high priest, to serve the Lord for the rest of his life. Our lesson for today comes in some years later. Samuel was still a boy, but we don't know how old he was. The Hebrew is terribly non-specific. But every year, his mother would come and bring him a new outer garment that she had made for him that year. Every year, Eli would bless the family for giving their son to the Lord and ask God to give Hannah more children, which God did – he gave her five more children.

So in the life of Samuel, we see some parallels with Jesus' life. He clearly loved Eli, the only real parent he had on a day to day basis. But Eli was really a foster parent. Samuel also had relationships with his real family and those relationships were complicated at times. Samuel grew and learned and people were impressed with his wisdom and his service to God, and God himself was pleased with the man Samuel was becoming. Which leads us to see that final point: Samuel clearly was a boy and later a man who had tremendous faith in the Lord.

All those things, to a greater or lesser degree, are things that were true about Jesus. Jesus was born into a somewhat complicated family situation. It wasn't quite as bad as Samuel's, but his father was a step-father. Yet, Christ loved and honored and obeyed his parents. If you take the New Testament in its most natural sense, Jesus had other brothers and sisters by Joseph and Mary and the gospels make clear that his relationship with them was complicated sometimes. They didn't believe at first that he really was the Savior, although two of them, James and Jude, went on to write books of the New Testament. And of course, Jesus grew. In fact, the English translation of the last verse of our Gospel lesson for today, sounds very similar to the last verse of our

Old Testament lesson, “**And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.**” Like Samuel, his body grew. Like Samuel, he learned and studied. Like Samuel, people appreciated his wisdom and service to God and God himself approved of the man he was becoming.

Like Samuel, Jesus had faith. He was a real human being, even while he was the Son of God, so Jesus’ human nature trusted in God, just as our human natures do – just as they will do perfectly when we reach heaven. Of course, that also highlights the difference between Jesus and Samuel: Samuel was a sinner. For example, he did not succeed in raising his sons to be the kind of men that he was. In his relationship with King Saul, he wasn’t always in sync with God’s view of what was happening. Although he was an example of faith, Samuel was not perfect. Jesus was.

So why is that a big deal? Because we’re real humans, too. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus was made like his brothers – like us – in every way. He had a human body and soul, a human heart and mind and will. He ate and slept and got tired and grew and learned just like we do, even while he was true God who can’t get tired and who knows everything and who never changes. God the Son took on a human nature so that he could live our lives.

That same chapter of the book of Hebrews says that he was tempted in every way just as we are, and yet was without sin. So Jesus knew what complicated family gatherings were like. He may well have had cousins and siblings who didn’t appreciate him much. He may have had extended family members who tried to provoke him. Yet he never sinned. Jesus knew what it was like to be a small boy and a teenager. He knew what it was like to have parents who were wrong sometimes. Jesus knew what it was like to have less money and shabbier possessions than other people in town. He knew what it was like to be insulted, to be accused of things he didn’t do, to be hated for no other reason than following the Lord. He experienced all that we experience, and yet he was without sin.

That perfect life counts for us. So God now calls us perfect. That perfect life was what Jesus offered on the cross for us. His humanity means that he could stand in our place and die. Because it was the Son of God who became man, the Son of God was perfect and died. So the payment he made counts for all the sins of all people who will ever live. He died and paid for all those times that we got so mad at our spouse or our cousins or our siblings that we yelled and screamed or insulted them or just plain told lies about them. He died and paid for the hatred we feel at those moments – and for our lusts and coveting and greed and jealousy and every other sin of heart and mind and word and action. He paid for them all and set us free. To do all that, he had to be human like us.

## II.

Last week, I showed the preschoolers a picture of me as a baby sitting on my father’s lap. I asked them who they thought the baby was. Both the three year olds and the four year olds figured out that it was me. I was quite impressed by that. But then I asked them, “When I was a baby sitting on my dad’s lap, did my dad know that I was going to be a pastor some day?” That’s a harder question, isn’t it? The three years olds said, “No!” But the four years olds said, “Yes.” When you have a baby, you think about what they might be. You might even day dream about it once in a while. But you don’t know. Even when they’re teenagers, you don’t know what they’re going do with their lives. Mary and Joseph were told what Jesus was going to do with his life, but it doesn’t seem like they fully understood. Samuel was a little different. His mother committed him to a path of serving God when he was a very small child. No one knew how that would end. But his path does show us something about Jesus. **What does Samuel teach us about Christ? He teaches us what real service looks like.**

What did Samuel do at the tabernacle? It appears that it was fairly menial stuff, at least when he was little. The Bible talks about him opening the doors in the morning and waiting on Eli. Eli was elderly already when Samuel came to live with him and later in life he was blind and needed help. Until God called Samuel to be a prophet, we don’t see him doing anything really special or noteworthy. But all that changed when God called him. God gave him message after message and had him relay them. The very first one was hard: it was judgment on Eli because his sons were desecrating the sacrifices. Samuel hated to share that message with Eli, but in the end, he did. He did a number of other things in the course of his long life, but his primary function was to proclaim God’s Word.

All Old Testament prophets were symbols of Jesus. Once Jesus was baptized, he started preaching and teaching which is the heart of all prophetic ministry. Jesus proclaimed the word of God. To this day, whenever

the gospel is preached, Jesus is working. I will never accomplish anything as a pastor except what he does through his word. In that sense, Jesus is the model prophet that pastors and teachers aspire to be.

And Jesus never hesitated to do the dirty, humble stuff. He got right down in the dirt with beggars and ministered to them. He healed the sick, cast out demons and preached the gospel to the poor, without worrying about their status. In fact, one of the knocks against him was his willingness to associate with sinners. Even though Jesus wasn't a sinner, he loved sinners and he called them to repent. No pastor or teacher can even imagine what ministry really means without looking at Jesus who came into the world not to serve, but to be served. To do all those things, he had to be a real human being. God doesn't send angels to preach the gospel. He gave the ministry to us human beings, to us sinners, so without Jesus, nothing we do would ever help anyone. But he is with us, and I pray that he leads us all – pastors and people alike – to scorn glory and praise and to get down into the dirt and do the humble jobs. By his power, we help the poor and needy and love sinners and call them to repent.

Of course, Jesus did the dirtiest job of all: he suffered hell on the cross and died to pay for our sins. Then he rose and gave us life. He still comes to us in the gospel, he still works through the ministry, he still serves us, by sending pastors and teachers, by sending the word and the sacraments, by ruling all things for the good of his church. For all that to be true, Jesus had to be more than just a man. He had to be the Son of God. As God's only begotten Son, he sits at the right hand of the Father and rules the world and he will come again to judge. But you know what? Even when the King of Kings and Lord of Lords returns, we will still see him as our Jesus. Even then, he will be true man and true God. And he will love us and live with us forever.

Someone told me this week that our first hymn for this morning, "Joy to the World," wasn't written for Christmas. It was actually written for End Times, to celebrate Jesus' second coming, not his first. If you think about the words, that makes sense. "Let heaven and nature sing" "No more shall sin or sorrow reign or thorns infest the ground." Those are promises for the life to come. But that joy is totally based on what Jesus did the first time he came. In Samuel we see a symbol of God working through Christ. We see a real human being who trusted God and served him. In Christ, we see a perfect human being who trusted God and served him by saving us. Because he did, joy will indeed come to the world. Amen.