Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 2, 1 Sam. 2: Disrespect Can Be Deadly, Podcast Audio Overview

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All right, you guys, get ready for a deep dive. We're going to jump right into ancient Israel. Sounds good.

Specifically, we are opening up the book of 1st Samuel, chapter 2, verses 12 through 36. Okay. Let me tell you, it is a roller coaster.

Family drama, power struggles, divine justice. That's right. All wrapped up into one compelling narrative.

Yeah. What I think is really interesting about this is how it comes right on the heels of the story of Hannah, which we talked about in previous deep dives; her story's filled with faithfulness and ultimately reward. And then you shift to Eli and his sons, and you see kind of the opposite.

And I think it's a stark reminder of what happens when that respect for God and for his laws goes out the window. Okay. So for those who might not have this whole story fresh in their minds, could you give us a little bit of a rewind and remind us who Hannah is? Yeah.

So Hannah was a woman who was unable to have children, and she was treated pretty terribly because of it. But she's a powerful example. Of faithfulness; she never wavered in her faith.

She poured her heart out to God, vowing that if he blessed her with a son, she'd dedicate him to God's service. And you know what? God came through just like he promised. Hannah gave birth to Samuel, and true to her word, she dedicated him to serve at the tabernacle under Eli the priest.

What a testament to God's faithfulness. I know. It's amazing.

Okay. So then we meet Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, and things take a turn. They do? So the text straight up calls them wicked men with no regard for the Lord.

What did these guys do? That was so awful. Okay. So imagine this, you're in ancient Israel.

And the way you connect with God is through sacrifices. Offering up the best portions of your livestock as a sign of respect and reverence. Well, Hophni and Phinehas, instead of treating these offerings with reverence, abused their position as priests.

And start taking the choicest cuts of meat for themselves. Wow. I mean, this is a complete disregard for God's commands.

So they were putting their own desires above God. Exactly. A complete disregard for the sanctity of the sacrifices.

But their disrespect doesn't stop there. They were also using their position to exploit the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Oh, wow.

So, yeah. I mean, they were totally corrupt. Totally corrupted by their power.

Where was Eli in all this? Yeah. Surely he knew what was going on. He did.

He knew. So the text tells us that Eli was fully aware of his son's wicked deeds. Okay.

In fact, he even confronted them. Oh, really? Yeah. He questioned why they were acting this way.

He warned them about the severity of their actions, reminding them that sinning against God has greater consequences than sinning against a human. So he tried to reason with them. Right.

But here's where things get really interesting. You know, while his words might sound like a genuine attempt at correction, they weren't backed up by any real action. So he didn't remove his sons from their position of power.

So, like, imagine if someone today said one thing and then didn't actually do anything about it. Right. Like their words would be meaningless.

Yeah. Yeah. And so from God's perspective, Eli's inaction was viewed as valuing his sons more than God. Wow.

Which is a powerful reminder, I think, that sometimes our silence or our lack of action can speak louder than words. Yeah. It makes you wonder, like, was he afraid of his sons? Yeah.

Or did he just not really understand the severity of what they were doing? Right. I mean, whatever the reason, I think it's clear that his passive response had serious consequences. Okay.

So God took this very seriously then. Oh, absolutely. Eli's failure to discipline.

Yeah. And this is where we get one of the most dramatic- it is. pronouncements of judgment in the entire book.

It is. So this is where God decides he's had enough and steps in. He does.

Okay. The text says, "For it was the Lord's will to put them to death. Wow.

And I think this might seem shocking to some, but it underscores a crucial truth about God's justice. Okay. I mean, Hophni and Phineas had repeatedly rejected God's ways, and their hearts had become hardened to the point of no return.

Hold on. Hold on. Hardened hearts.

Yeah. What does that mean? Yeah. Yeah.

Like, is God forcing them to sin? That's a great question and an important clarification. Okay. So the concept of God hardening hearts appears in other places in the Old Testament.

Okay. Think about Pharaoh during the Exodus story. Yeah.

He refused over and over again to listen to God's commands. Right. And eventually the text says that God hardened his heart, but it's not that God was manipulating Pharaoh into doing evil.

Okay. Right. But rather, it's the consequences of repeatedly choosing to go against God's will.

Okay. So it's like a callus that forms on your hand from repeated friction. Right.

Their hearts became hardened through their constant rejection. So they kind of made themselves numb to it. Exactly.

Yeah. And this isn't confined to the Old Testament either. Right.

The Apostle Paul in the book of Romans describes how those who consistently reject God are eventually given over to their sinful desires. Right. Like when we ignore that inner voice telling us right from wrong, it becomes easier to make those bad choices.

So in the case of Eli's sons, was it too late for them to turn things around? That's the heartbreaking reality of the situation. They'd reached a point where God's judgment was inevitable. Wow.

It's a sobering reminder that our choices have consequences. And there comes a time when that window for repentance might close. So we've got all this going on with Eli's sons.

But simultaneously, Samuel's growing up. That's right. So it's like their lives are on two different trajectories.

Two totally different paths. One headed towards destruction and the other towards a deeper relationship with God. I like that.

Yeah. You said it perfectly. And to emphasize this contrast, the author includes this really touching detail about Hannah.

Every year when she and Elkanah would go to Shiloh to offer their annual sacrifice, she would make Samuel a new robe and bring it to him. Oh, that's so sweet. It's such a beautiful picture of a mother's love, but also a subtle way of highlighting Samuel's spiritual growth.

He's literally growing in stature before God and the community. Wow. Before we move on, what stands out to you the most so far? Well, for me, I think it's the juxtaposition of the blatant disrespect of Eli's sons with Samuel's growing faithfulness.

I agree. I think that contrast really sets the stage for what's to come. A powerful exploration of God's justice and mercy and how those themes impact not just individuals, but families and entire communities.

Wow. Yeah. It's almost like we're being shown two paths here.

One of arrogance and self-serving ambition, and one of humility and devotion. Yeah. Like, which path are you on? Right? Exactly.

And it's a question we should all be asking ourselves, I think. Yeah. Especially as we consider what happens next in the story.

Okay. We have the entrance of a man of God, a prophet who arrives on the scene with a message specifically for Eli. Okay.

So it's not just the sons in the hot seat anymore. Right. Now the consequences are expanding to the father.

Mm-hmm. Why is that? Well, the prophet reminds Eli of the incredible honor and responsibility that was bestowed upon his family line, starting way back with Aaron, the first high priest of Israel. Yeah.

And he recounts how God chose Aaron and his descendants to serve as mediators between God and the people, to offer sacrifices and to lead the nation in worship. Okay. So you can think of it like being entrusted with a priceless family heirloom.

Yeah. Something that's been passed down for generations. Right.

That you're meant to cherish and protect. Okay. So it wasn't just power and privilege.

Right. It was a sacred trust. Exactly.

But then comes the gut punch, right? Yeah. The prophet delivers this scathing accusation to Eli. Okay.

He says, why do you scorn my sacrifices and offerings? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people? Wow. It's a direct confrontation, calling Eli out for his complacency and his misplaced loyalties. So Eli's being held accountable, not just for his son's actions, but for his failure to act.

Yeah. He may have spoken to his sons, but he did nothing. His lack of action speaks volumes.

And it's a powerful reminder that our actions often carry more weight than our words. Absolutely. We can't just talk the talk.

Yeah. We got to walk the walk, you know? God sees our hearts. Yeah.

And he sees our choices. Yeah. And he's not fooled by empty gestures.

Okay. So what happens to Eli? So the consequences are pretty devastating. Okay.

First of all, God revokes the promise of an everlasting priesthood for Eli's family line. That's a massive blow. Huge.

Remember, this was a huge deal. Yeah. You know, a privilege that had been passed down from Aaron himself.

It almost seems like God is going back on his word. Right. Didn't he promise an eternal priesthood? That's where we need to kind of dig a little deeper into the nature of God's promises in the Old Testament.

Not all covenants are created equal. Some, like those with Abraham and David, are unconditional. It's a no-matter-what guarantee.

Others, like the one with Eli, are conditional. Yeah. They come with expectations attached.

So if the expectations aren't met, the promise is off the table. That's a great way to think about it. Yeah.

Like a contract. Yeah. One party breaks it, the deal is void.

Yeah. And in this case, Eli and his sons broke the covenant through their disobedience. And the consequence was the loss of the priesthood.

Wow. Okay. So what other punishments are in store for Eli and his family? So the prophet doesn't hold back.

Okay. He foretells premature death for Eli's descendants, distress in God's dwelling. Okay.

And perhaps most strikingly, they will be reduced to begging for food. Wow. So it's a bleak picture of a family line that has fallen from grace.

Wait, begging for food? That seems like a really specific punishment. Yeah. Why that? I think it's fascinating how God's judgment often reflects the nature of the sin.

Okay. Almost like poetic justice. Yeah.

That highlights the heart of the transgression. Right. In this case, Eli's sons were consumed by their own greed.

Yeah. Forging themselves on meat. Right.

That belonged to God. Yeah. And now they're going to experience the opposite.

Wow. Lack of even the most basic necessities. It's almost like God is saying, "You indulged in excess, so now you will experience scarcity.

Exactly. That's pretty powerful. Yeah.

And it's a stark reminder, I think, that our choices have consequences that can ripple outwards, impacting not just ourselves, but future generations. This whole idea of God

relenting or changing his mind is a bit puzzling. How do we reconcile that with the idea of God as unchanging and all-knowing? That's a question that has challenged theologians for centuries.

Yeah. But I think the key is to understand the nature of God's character. Okay.

God is immutably loving and merciful. Right. But he is also perfectly just.

Okay. He won't tolerate unrepentant sin. He always offers opportunities for repentance and turning back to him.

So it's not that God changes his mind, but rather he responds to our choices. That's a great way to put it. Yeah.

Okay. Imagine God as a master potter. Okay.

Working with clay. Yeah. He has this vision in mind, a beautiful vessel he wants to create.

Okay. But the clay, sometimes it's flawed. Yeah.

Stubborn, resistant to shaping. Right. What does the potter do? He doesn't just throw the clay away in frustration.

Right. He might reshape it, mold it into a different vessel. Okay.

One that's still useful and beautiful. Yeah. But perhaps not his original intention.

I like that analogy. Yeah. So God's always working with us, but the final outcome depends on our willingness to be shaped and molded by him.

Absolutely. Okay. We see this throughout the Bible.

Right. Think about Jonah and the city of Nineveh. Yeah.

God sent Jonah to pronounce judgment, but when the people repented, God relented. Right. He's always open to extending mercy and grace.

Yeah. When there's genuine repentance. Right.

And turning away from sin. Okay. So what does all this judgment on Eli and his sons mean for Israel as a whole? Yeah.

Does God reject the entire nation because of the actions of a few? That's a really important question. Yeah. And I think the answer is a resounding no.

Okay. The prophet makes it clear that God's judgment on Eli and his family does not equate to a rejection of Israel. Okay.

He specifically states that good will be done to Israel. So even amidst the judgment and the consequences for sin, God is still working out his plans and purposes for his people. Absolutely.

Okay. And this is where Samuel's role becomes even more significant. Yeah.

He's that rising star. That faithful leader who will guide Israel into a new era. Right.

He's a shining example of what it means to honor God. Yeah. And to walk in obedience.

So it seems like we're about to see a big shift in leadership. Yeah. Definitely.

Eli's family's on their way out. Right. And Samuel, this young man of integrity- yeah.

Is stepping onto the stage. He is. And it's no coincidence- yeah.

That he embodies faithfulness and obedience. Oh. He's everything that Hophni and Phinehas were not.

It really makes you think, doesn't it? It does. I mean, this isn't just ancient history. No.

There's some serious implications for us today. Absolutely. I think it's easy to get caught up in the drama of Eli and his sons.

But I think there's something much deeper here. I agree. And I think it's a cautionary tale.

Okay. A warning bell ringing down through the ages. Yeah.

Those positions of authority, whether it's in a religious setting or in our workplaces or even in our families- yeah. They're not meant to be abused. Right.

They come with a responsibility to act with integrity and to put God's will above our own. And the consequences of not doing so- yes. Can be devastating.

They can. Not just for ourselves, but for people around us. Yeah.

And even for generations to come. It makes you wonder: are there areas in our own lives where we might be putting something else ahead of God? Right. Are we chasing after our own comfort? Yeah.

Our ambitions? Our desires? Yeah. At the expense of what God has commanded? Right. Are there things that we're holding onto so tightly.

That we've made them idols in our hearts? That's a good question. It's easy to fall into that trap, isn't it? It is. We get so caught up in the busyness of life.

Sure. The pursuit of success. Yeah.

We lose sight of what truly matters. Samuel's story offers a powerful anecdote about that.

Yeah. He was so humble and obedient. Yeah.

He had such a deep reverence for God. Mm-hmm. And that was evident even in his youth.

Yeah. And it continued throughout his life as he led Israel. So it's not about power or climbing the ladder.

No. It's about serving God and serving others. With a pure heart.

Yeah. That's a message that's just as relevant today- I think so, too. As it was back then.

Absolutely. I mean, no matter who you are- yeah. Parent, teacher, pastor- yeah.

Business leader, simply a follower of Christ. Right. We're all called to live lives that honor God.

That's right. So what can we learn from Samuel? Well, I think it starts with a willingness to surrender our own agendas- okay. To seek God's will above all else.

Right. To make a daily choice to put him first. Yeah.

To listen to his voice and to obey his commands. Even when it's hard. Even when it's hard.

Yeah. Yeah. And recognizing that real fulfillment- yes.

Doesn't come from what we want. Mm-hmm. It comes from God's purposes.

Aligning our lives with his will. This has been quite a journey. It has.

We've explored faithfulness and disrespect. Mm-hmm. The consequences of our choices- right.

And God's commitment to his people. Yeah. Even when we stumble.

God is always working. He is. Even in the midst of human failure.

That's right. He offers a path to redemption and restoration. Always.

Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into 1 Samuel. It's been a pleasure. We hope this has challenged you.

And inspired you. Yeah. And that you'll continue to seek God's will in your life.

Absolutely. And we'll see you next time. See you next time.