

**“Judgment Begins With The House Of God”**  
**1 Samuel 2:12-36**

**July 24, 2016**

**SI:** We’re studying the book of 1 Samuel.

It traces some of the most turbulent years of Israel’s history  
as the nation transitioned to a monarchy.

It’s a book that shows the failure of men, the power of God  
and what it means to live by faith.

**INTRO:** I've mentioned before my first boss after college, Mr. Verne Craft. He was the principal of Westminster Academy in Ft. Lauderdale and he hired me the summer after I graduated from college— gave me my first real job, so I remember him with fondness.

I also had a healthy fear of him, not just because he was an ex-Marine and Korean War combat veteran, but because he had been a teacher himself and expected teachers to be excellent and do their work well.

When he hired me, he hired three other first year teachers at the same time, and he told us that he would come to our classes and judge our teaching and judge the way we handled students and parents.

He did all that. He observed and he judged.

At the end of the year he told one of those first year hires to look for another job.

There's a principle of life that judgment begins in house, so to speak.

If you care about an institution, if you care about it's health and future, then you judge those who are in it and sometimes cut people loose.

I heard someone recently tell how the university he went to was known to be strong in the sciences.

In freshman chemistry 40% to 60% of the students flunked.

It was designed that way.

They wanted to weed them out.

They wanted science majors who could do the work

and contribute to growth and reputation of the science departments.

So judgment began with freshman chemistry.

The Bible says that judgment begins with the house of God.

That's a strange statement. It's unsettling.

Isn't God supposed to judge the world? Judge all those people out there, pagans?

Yes, he will certainly judge the world. Bible says so.

But it also says that judgment begins with the house of God.

This passage shows us one example of his judgment in vivid, real-life detail.

It's a sobering story, this story of Eli's sons.

If you aren't sobered by it, then something's wrong with you spiritually.

Because this is not God judging people out there, but God judging his own house.

We're in his house. And God doesn't change.

So this judgment is a reality in our lives we can't ignore.

What is it and how do we stand in it? Those are the questions.

Here are the answers, and the three points to the sermon.

1. He judges the church by exposing those who don't really know him.
2. He judges the church by allowing people to do what they want to do.
3. He judges the church by intervening and rescuing his people.

The first two points are going to be hard—but hold on till the third point.  
After the darkness comes the dawn.

## **MP#1 He judges the church by exposing those who don't really know him**

These were dark times in Israel spiritually and morally.

Even the priesthood was corrupt and worship corrupt.

The passage begins by telling us the sons of Eli were worthless men.

Then it tells us why in the next sentence—They did not know the LORD.

This word “know” is an expressive word in Hebrew.

Means more than factual or intellectual knowledge.

To know someone in Hebrew meant relational intimacy.

Hophni and Phinehas knew about the Lord.

They knew about his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

They knew about the Exodus, how he brought Israel from slavery.

They knew about the Law God had given to Moses.

But they didn't know the Lord. And notice, it's LORD in all capital letters.

That tells us English readers that this is the personal name Yahweh.

They didn't know the Lord personally.

They didn't trust him. They didn't love him. Their actions showed that.

There were specific instructions for the priests regarding sacrifices,

what meat they could take—only from certain sacrifices, only certain cuts.

They were to receive that meat with gratitude and thankfulness.

One specific instruction—All fat to be burned on the altar as an offering.

The sons of Eli and their servants would go around with big fork, spearing whatever

meat they wanted, and even demanding choice cuts with fat still on them.

When people objected, threatened them with physical harm.

In addition, they had sexual relations with women who served there.

They were men in religious positions of power and they took what they wanted

to feed their appetites—the best cuts of meat and women.

Why did they do these things? Because they didn't know the Lord.

They had another god.

Paul in Philippians: Their god is their stomach, their minds on earthly things.

Then Paul says: Their destiny is destruction.

And also, they certainly thought they were immune to judgment because of their position in the church—if they even thought of God's judgment at all.

Think how many times we've seen news stories about professional athletes with multimillion dollar contracts who are arrested for terrible crimes—assault, armed robbery, even murder.

You have to wonder if they began to think—

I'm at such a high level nothing will happen to me, nobody will find me out.  
I'm a star. I'm in the NFL.  
But that's not unique to pro athletes, that's a human thing—  
labels and status give us a sense of safety and immunity.  
I am this, so nothing bad can happen to me.

It happens a lot in the church.  
People think that because they are church members, because they believe in God,  
because they are Christians in the formal, visible sense—  
they are safe and immune to judgment.  
It's a particular danger of for covenant children.

Listen to me, all you kids and teenagers who are in the church.  
You have been given a great blessing and a great heritage.  
You were born in a Christian home. You've been raised in a good church.  
Those are good and wonderful things.  
Praise God for those things.  
But don't be tempted to think those things are enough to keep you safe from the  
judgment of God. They won't. Even having those things and doing good things.

Jesus said that many will say to him on judgment day:  
Lord, Lord, did we not do this or that good thing for you.  
And I will say to them: Depart from me, I never knew you.

It's only knowing him that protects you from judgment.  
Hophni and Phinehas did not know the Lord even though their daddy  
was the preacher—and their lack of real faith was exposed.  
If you don't know him with saving faith, you're going to be exposed  
and when that happens, just growing up in the church won't count for anything.  
Instead, it will be an indictment against you.

Hang on, it's going to get worse.

**MP#2 He judges the church by allowing people to do what they want to do.**

Eli was old, he had been hearing all these terrible things his sons were doing.

He finally confronted them. He tried to warn them.

After he warned them a man of God came and implicated Eli in his sons' sins.

That's probably because he didn't warn them when he should have.

He put off and put off confronting them.

He had probably heard these things they were doing for years, complaints from worshippers, but he didn't deal with it.

Mostly, Eli was complicit because he didn't remove them from their positions.

He should have removed them from the priesthood.

That would have preserved the purity of worship and the honor of God.

And maybe it would have gotten their attention.

But he didn't. He just couldn't fire his own sons—how would they support selves?

Finally, though, the complaints and bad reports got so loud he had to confront them.

He did say all the right things.

Warned them they were sinning in a deliberate, high handed way against God.

But they wouldn't listen to their father.

Look again at the reason they would not listen, verse 25, it's startling.

But they would not listen to the voice of their father,  
for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.

Did you get that? It doesn't say:

The Lord decided to put them to death because they didn't listen to their father.

It says they wouldn't listen to their father because the Lord had already decided to put them to death. What does that mean?

It means that sometimes judgment begins in this life.

Even before a person has died, God gives him over to what he wants to do and he hardens that person's heart so that he, or she, will not listen to the gospel, and will not repent and cry out for God's mercy.

Does this mean if Hophni and Phinehas had wanted to repent,

God wouldn't have let them?

No. It means they would never, ever even want to repent.

They liked what they were doing.

They liked eating the best food and intimidating people and sleeping with lots of women—and the didn't want to listen to their old fool of a father.

And there came a time when the Lord said, Ok—have it your way.

CS Lewis said:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.”  
And that’s absolutely true. Hell is a choice.

But what this passage shows is that sometimes God doesn’t wait till the end. Sometimes before people have even died, when they are still very much alive and have years ahead of them, God confirms them in their sin and seals judgment. He hardens their hearts so they aren’t even able to repent.  
What a frightening doctrine that is.

And it gets even more frightening and more personal. Hophni and Phinehas weren’t pagans out there in the world. They were members of the church and even ministers in the church. They knew the truth. They knew about Yahweh and his salvation. What was the sacrificial system in the Old Testament?

It sometimes seems so exotic and strange to us, killing animals in worship. But it was simply the Gospel message in a different form. Every time an animal was killed it was a message of the Lord’s grace and mercy and forgiveness through a substitute—and call to faith and repentance. It was no difference in substance than hearing an evangelistic sermon.

So every time Hophni and Phinehas abused a sacrifice, they were trampling on the free offer of salvation, they were disregarding God’s grace, they were refusing to avail themselves of substitute, until the Lord said: Enough. When people sit for years in the pews, or for years stand in the pulpit, and hear the message of grace, but don’t really give lives to Jesus and trust him, and keep doing their own thing—God sometimes acts in judgment and makes their hearts impervious to the gospel.

That scares me. This story scares me. I’ve got a lot of Hophni and Phinehas in me. I often treat God’s grace lightly and I often do my own thing and my heart and mind are full of greed and lust just like theirs. I don’t want to be a preacher with a prematurely hardened heart, standing up here on Sunday with one foot already in hell. And I hope that’s not true of any of you.

What a dreadful thing for the Lord to give a person over to what he wants. How do we escape this judgment? That brings us to the light.

### **MP#3 He judges the church through his faithful priest**

There’s another story in this passage that we haven’t even paid attention to.

It's so quiet and simple that it's easy to overlook.  
The parallel story about the little boy Samuel, growing up in the house of worship.

I want to show you how masterfully the writer of 1 Samuel has woven the quiet story of Samuel growing up into this loud, disturbing story of Eli's sons.  
Open your Bibles again and look at verse 11.

“And the boy ministered to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.”

Just a brief reference to Samuel and then verses 12 to 17 come crashing in with a detailed description of the worthless sons of Eli and their corruption of the sacrifices and their threats of violence.

It's so bad and so descriptive, you forget about little Samuel.

By the way, don't you know that must have worried Hannah and Elkanah—leaving their tender little boy to grow up around those men?

They certainly knew about Hophni and Phinehas—everybody did.

But look at verse 18.

“Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy clothed with a linen ephod.”

And then there's this quiet family scene where we learn about Hannah making a new little robe every year and bringing it to him.

We imagine her wondering how much he's grown, how big she should make it.  
But before we can enjoy this precious moment, back to sons of Eli.

Told about them having sex with women serving at the tent of meeting, and Eli's warning and their disregard and God's plans to kill them.

It's so disturbing, we forget all about Hannah and the sweet little robe.

But look at verse 26

“Now the young man Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man.”

Ah, Samuel again. And he's growing. By the way, does that verse ring a bell?

It's quoted almost verbatim in Luke 2 to describe the boy Jesus.

“Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”

Then it's back to Eli's house and the long and disturbing message from the man of God as he details the unbelief of Eli's sons and the scorn they have heaped on God's worship and their gross ingratitude for the honors the Lord has given them.  
He says the effects of their unbelief will even be felt by future generations.

It's a very grim message.

But look at the very next verse, first verse of chapter 3.

“Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli.”

Samuel again. Still quietly serving God and the people.



He's contrasted over and over with the sons of Eli.

His faithful service stands as an indictment and judgment against them. And we get a hint here that the Lord is going to use this faithful priest one day to bring many in Israel back to the Lord.

By presenting it this way, the writer of 1 Samuel is telling us something.

He's telling us that there's another way God judges his church, and that's by providing the church with a faithful priest whose perfect life indicts the people's unfaithfulness—but at the same time, his priestly service saves them.

So what does this all mean for us?

The message of this passage is that we have a Samuel. We have a faithful priest.

Samuel is not just Samuel.

The great figures in the Old Testament were types of Christ.

They were foreshadowing the person and work of Jesus himself and they were a message to God's people back then—hang on, the Savior is coming.

Samuel was a foreshadowing of Jesus in his faithful work as a little boy priest there in the house of worship. We've already seen that parallel to Luke.

And as the better Samuel, Jesus' obedience and faithfulness judges us.

But he doesn't do it to kill us. Or to give us over to our sins and harden our hearts.

He doesn't do it to expose your unbelief.

He judges you for the very opposite reason—

so your faith can be affirmed through repentance.

So you can avail yourself of his priestly service on your behalf.

Reading this passage can't help but make you ask the question: Is my faith real?

Do I really know the Lord, or am I one of those in the church fooling myself.

This is one of the main ways you can know you really know him.

When Jesus exposes your sin,

whether he does so through your conscience and Holy Spirit convicting you or whether he does so by arranging things so you get caught—

Either way, when your sin is exposed—how do you respond?

Do you turn to your priest Jesus?

Do you tell him you're sorry you've offended your heavenly Father,

and sorry you've grieved the Holy Spirit—and do you ask him to forgive you?

If you do, he will. Always.

And he'll lead you and help you walk in his ways

and strive to live a life of love and obedience—  
And that response to him is a wonderful confirmation that he is at work in you,  
and that your faith in him is alive and real.

Judgment begins with the house of God.

God loves the church with a fierce love and he will protect it and preserve it.

That means he's going to judge the people in it before he judges the world.  
But in that judgment, let's be those who are not cut loose, but who respond  
to the exposure of our sins by turning to our faithful priest Jesus,  
who even now is working quietly and gently in our church.