

## BRINGING BACK SAMUEL

"Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel."  
I Samuel 28:11.

Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, had been denied the crowning glory of the Hebrew woman, the privilege of motherhood. For a long time she had prayed for a son, and her disappointment seemed more than she could bear. She was not looking for what people call a career; she was old-fashioned in her thinking and counted it more important to rear a boy for God than to attain notoriety outside her home. Hannah believed that being a good mother was the most wonderful thing that could come to her. While she was praying for a son, God was waiting for a man. In answer to her prayers, God gave Hannah a son.

Unlike most mothers, who give their sons to business, to their country, or to the giddy whirl of social gait, Hannah gave her boy to God. Most present-day mothers do not want their children to belong wholly to God. They are teaching them to play with fire, and trying to see how near they can come to the flames and not be burned. Hannah named her son Samuel, which means "loaned unto the Lord," and when he was of an age for it, she left him in the holy house at Shiloh. While he slept in the holy house, and ere the lamp in the tabernacle had gone out, he heard a voice calling him, "Samuel! Samuel!" Upon learning that it was the voice of God, Samuel said: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Henceforth the life of Samuel was the echo of that declaration. He wrote a noble record of honesty and self-sacrifice in the service of his nation. He served as the faithful minister of Saul, whom he had anointed as king, to whom he administered divine counsel, on whose behalf he offered numerous prayers, and whom he furnished a noble example of righteousness.

When Saul was chosen and anointed king, Samuel, like everyone else, admired him and loved him, for Saul was not only preeminent in physical stature, head and shoulders above all others in Israel, but had certain noble traits and virtues. Saul began his reign with courage, humility, and magnanimity. But soon that bright morning was overcast with ominous clouds, and Saul began to depart from the Lord and go his own way. Samuel rebuked him and warned him. Saul readily acknowledged that he had sinned, but every time he would go back and sin again. When God rejected him, Samuel prayed unto God and wept all night in his behalf. Then we come to that sentence, which is one of the saddest in the Bible, "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death." The voice that Saul refused to hear was silenced and an evil spirit troubled the king.

Saul's character combined the most opposite qualities, and his life abounded in startling contradictions. He was rash in danger and cautious in safety. He had the courage of a hero and the timidity of a coward. He cut off the diviners and fortunetellers out of the land, and on the last night of his life he traveled ten miles in great distress of mind to inquire for himself of a woman who had a familiar spirit.

As Saul looked across the valley to the camp of the enemies whom he had previously routed, his mighty frame trembled exceedingly with fear. He needed counsel of God, but he had rejected it so often that it was no longer offered to him. So this unhappy king, having shut his eyes to the light that shines from heaven to guide all in the safe way, resolved to seek counsel from beneath. He took off his royal robes, put on the garments of a common peasant, took two men whom he could trust with him, and stole silently out of the camp.

What pathos there was in the fact that on the eve of his dreaded battle Saul did not have his old friend, Samuel, to consult. "Samuel was dead." He had been everything to Saul. But Saul had not treated him right. He had disobeyed his counsels. He refused to be in-

fluenced by his reproof. He had slighted his old friend. He thought that he could manage well without him. But, now in his hour of great darkness, he would have given almost anything to have had his rejected friend, but he had died. What a lesson for all of us! How soon valued presences may be missing! Make the most of them while you have them. Do well by them. The Sauls of today may be heedless of the preacher's message, but some day you will long to hear it. There will be a famine of the Word of the Lord. Some day your wise and loving parents will be gone, and in your perplexities how you will pine for their soothing and encouraging words. O Saul, appreciate Samuel while you have him!

On the eve of that battle Saul inquired about a spiritualistic medium or witch, wanting to consult one of that obnoxious group whom he had driven from his territory. What devices men are driven to when they forsake and ignore God! Ah, how men change with sinful years! What once they did not think themselves capable of doing they come to do. That which they scorned others for doing they at length do themselves. One never knows to what depths sin may bring him. Sin always drags its victim down. Never did sin exalt any person.

Saul had reached the end of his resources and was at his wits' end. He found himself confronted with facts with which he was unable to cope. Like so many others in an emergency, Saul turned his thoughts toward God, Whom he had neglected and ignored, and Whom he seemed to think had nothing else to do except to await the pleasure of man. Receiving only silence from God, Saul longed for his old friend and pastor, Samuel, but he had passed away.

In his sad plight Saul remembered that there were those who professed to be able to get into touch with the dead, and claimed the power to see into the future. He approached the witch in the cave at Endor in the hope of enlisting her assistance. She immediately suspected treachery on his part, thinking that he was only seeking evidence against her in order to put her to death. Saul swore that he would see to it that she would be protected, if she would only help him out of his predicament, which he had brought upon himself. When he had reassured her, the woman asked Saul with whom he desired to get into touch, and our text is the answer to that question: "Bring me up Samuel."

You will appreciate that this was an amazing request. It was a revelation of Saul's complete distress. Saul had lived long enough to make a profound discovery, namely, that neglected opportunities never return, and that when a man shuts his ear to the voice of God, that voice may be silent when the man most desperately desires it to be heard.

"Bring me up Samuel." Samuel, the prophet, to whom Saul had refused to listen in days gone by; the man whom Saul had sought to deceive; the man through whom God had spoken to Saul, making His commandments known, commands which he had refused to obey; the man who had wept over and prayed for Saul. This was the man for whom Saul was appealing desperately, thinking that he was the only man who could help him. Little did Saul realize that he was about to learn that God cannot be mocked with impunity; that in attempting to mock God man simply deceives himself.

And Samuel came up, not at the incantation of a witch, but by the power of God. When the woman with the familiar spirit saw that Samuel was actually coming out of Sheol, which was something that was entirely unexpected by her, she was so startled and terrified that she cried out with a shriek of horror, and fell on her face in terror. Samuel was not yet visible to Saul, so he asked the woman what she saw. She said: "I see a god coming up

out of the earth." Saul said: "What form is he of?" She replied: "An old man is coming up; and he is covered with an mantle." At this juncture Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and bowed his face to the ground in reverence and obeisance. Samuel said to Saul, "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" Saul answered, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophet nor by dreams; therefore have I called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

Saul no doubt expected to hear words of comfort from Samuel, but the ones that he heard were words of condemnation. He expected to be encouraged, but he was greatly discouraged. He hoped to hear words which would paint for him the picture of the future with the glowing crown of success placed upon his head. What he did hear revealed to him his own utter destruction. Samuel said: "Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hands of the Philistines: and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." Thus the man of God spoke of divine wrath, the hatefulness of sin, and the emptiness of a life from which God withdraws Himself. It is not surprising that upon hearing this message Saul fell headlong into the cave.

Something always lies behind a tragic experience like the one at the cave of Endor. What was it? Sin -- yes, but that is too general. First, it was a case of silly optimism. Life is dreary without hope, but when hope goes to seed in silly optimism the consequences are disastrous. If somebody had said to Saul, "You are making a fool of yourself; Samuel is the greatest opportunity you have; make the most of him; if you don't, some day you will go to a cave wanting the ghost of your chance back again," the king would not have believed it, but would have hoped for the best, and would have thought that everything would come out right. That attitude, which is so prevalent in our nation, needs tackling in a resolute fashion today. We are such silly optimists. Unless we are cured of this fatuous optimism our country will be going to a cave and asking for another chance.

Another thing which contributed to this tragic experience is an expectation of inevitable progress. It is the notion that we are on an escalator going up; if we should walk or run, we would go faster; no matter what we do, we shall be higher tomorrow than we are today. That is a disastrous absurdity. Regression is as possible as progression. Progress depends on whether or not we successfully utilize our opportunities while we have them.

A third contributing factor to this tragic experience is a comfortable religion. Americans have worked out the most comfortable religion on earth. Most Americans have the idea that God will let us steer our own boat and when or if we get in danger He will rescue us, and that regardless of what we do everything will come out all right in the end. But that idea is untrue.

Our Samuel is not dead yet. That is why we need to think and talk about him. We still have a glorious opportunity. If, on this road of foolish optimism, or expectation of inevitable progress, or of a comfortable religion, we should go much further, there is no power on earth or in heaven that will keep our nation from Endor's cave.

This message is meant to be a lesson in appreciation. What I am trying to say to each of my listeners is: "Appreciate your Samuel, while you still have him." How fortunate you are to have home, family, friends, character, reputation, salvation, and opportunities

for service! May God help you to make the most of them! May He keep you from throwing away your opportunities! May He keep you from going to the cave at Endor, the place where you seek to get in touch with the past!

Few things, if any, are more difficult to bear than the realization that life is drawing toward its close, haunted by the fact that the years which have passed long have been misused. How tragic it must be to live long enough to realize that the best years of life have been wasted! Likely some of you can remember how you smiled at those who sought to direct you in ways of service for God and for others. When your opportunities are allowed to pass by unused, they will never return. Be warned in time. If the cave at Endor brings up your past for you, it will be in order that it may sit in judgment upon you.

In the sermon which he preached from the grave, Samuel told us that there is a limit to the opportunity which God gives to each of us, and that the only time for repentance is today, and never tomorrow. As Dr. Addison Alexander of Princeton Seminary wrote:

"There is a time, we know not when,  
A place we know not where,  
That marks the destiny of men  
For glory or despair.

There is a line by us unseen,  
That crosses every path;  
The hidden boundary between  
God's patience and His wrath.

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Oh, where is this mysterious bourne  
By which our path is crossed;  
Beyond which God Himself hath sworn  
That he who goes is lost?

How far may men go on in sin?  
How long will God forbear?  
Where does hope end and where begin  
The confines of despair?

An answer from the skies is sent;  
"Ye that from God depart,  
While it is called today, repent,  
And harden not your heart!"