

HEARING THE LORD

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Lesson: I Samuel 3:1-10,19-21.

At a very early age Samuel was given to the Lord to serve in the tabernacle. Eli the high priest, who was to be his master and teacher, was a very old man, and the Lord was preparing Samuel to take his place—to become a leader and a prophet in Israel.

In order that Samuel might grow up to be a prophet he had to learn to recognize the voice of the Lord. For it was a prophet's duty to give the Word of the Lord to other people.

The story of how the Lord first spoke to Samuel tells you that Samuel did not at first recognize the Lord's voice. This event took place when Samuel was a boy about six years old. One night before he went to sleep he heard a voice calling his name. Now you must remember he had never before heard the Lord, and since there was no one else around, he naturally thought it must be Eli, the high priest, who called. Quickly he ran to Eli only to be told that Eli had not called. No sooner had he lain down than he was called a second time and again hurried to obey his master, Eli. But Eli said, "I called not, my son; lie down again."

Then a third time the Lord called his name and a third time he hastened to do as Eli might direct. This time, however, Eli, who had himself often heard the Lord speaking, perceiving that it was the Lord who called Samuel, told him what to answer when next he was called. So when the Lord spoke his name a fourth time, Samuel was prepared and ready. He knew that it was the Lord's voice, and answered, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." And from that day Samuel became the obedient servant of the Lord and a great prophet through whom the Lord gave His Word to men.

You know a very similar thing happened to Emanuel Swedenborg. Not when he was a child or boy, although he was prepared from his early youth, but when he was a grown man fifty-seven years old. He, too, heard the Lord's voice, and he was commissioned to give the Lord's Word to the world.

The reason these two men could hear the voice of the Lord and could become His servants was because they had been especially prepared for this purpose and were willing to do whatever the Lord might tell them to do.

The fact that Samuel and Swedenborg heard the Lord speaking to them seems like a very strange and wonderful thing to us. It seems very unusual for us to read about the ways in which the Lord first spoke to them and gave His Word through them. Yet the truth is that the Lord prepares each one of us to receive Him. Each one of you boys and girls can come to hear His voice. He does not prepare you to be Revelators of His Word like Samuel and Swedenborg, but He does open your minds to hear His voice. In fact, if you but knew it, He is calling you all the time. He is calling in His Word. For the Word is the Lord speaking to us.

The Word is like a letter that the Lord sends to us to tell us all about His wonderful kingdom in the heavens—a letter which contains all the secrets of human happiness. Men like Samuel and Swedenborg were chosen to carry this letter, but every man is invited to read it—to hear the Lord speaking to them in its pages.

But, you know, it is a curious thing that although the Lord constantly calls each and every one of us in His Word, and although we may hear His voice very often, still only gradually do we come to recognize that it is the Lord's voice, only gradually can we be prepared to know that it is the Lord who calls.

At first, like Samuel, we think it is someone else's voice. At first we think it is our parents and teachers only who want us to learn what is true and to do what is good. When you are young, you believe that your parents and teachers for their own sakes want you to learn self-control, order, and obedience. However, this is not true, for they want you to learn how to think and how to behave properly for the sake of your own happiness. For they know that only when you have learned good habits of conduct and thought can you be prepared to recognize the Lord's voice.

If you think about the story of Samuel, you will notice something very important in his behavior. If you reflect on what Samuel did each time he was called, if you consider just what his reaction was, you can understand the real meaning behind this story; for then you will understand the real quality that made Samuel able to recognize the Lord when He called.

The important thing that he did was that he obeyed. He went immediately to Eli to see what Eli desired of him. And he did this not just once, but every time he was called. This shows us that he had the habit of obedience and that it was really this habit that made him able to recognize the Lord's voice and capable of serving Him.

The Lord constantly calls all people. He does this in His Word. But only those who have learned obedience, only those who learn to act promptly and with a willing spirit, really hear Him. Only by obedience, by the habit of doing what

you are told by your parents and teachers, can you be prepared to serve the Lord.

And when you are so prepared, the Lord will speak to you and will lead you into the freedom and, delight of heaven. For when you practice obedience, when you learn self-control and how to act in an orderly manner, you are given a love of order. Then you will realize that when you obey, you are really learning to hear the Lord Himself and to follow Him in willing obedience, as do the angels in heaven. And then you will be prepared for eternal happiness that the Lord can give only to those who obey Him and love Him.