Those who honour me I will honour

1 Samuel 2:12-36

Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained. (30b)

In today’s key verse, the LORD gives us both a **promise** and a **warning**. The LORD **promises** that those who honour Him, He will honour. At the same time **he warns** that those who despise Him will be disdained. The NLT puts the warning a bit more bluntly. It reads: I will despise those who think lightly of me. The question we need to answer today is: are we believers who honour the LORD, like Hannah? Or are we believers who despise the LORD, like Eli and his two sons – the priests? Let’s first consider Eli’s two sons.

Look at verse 12.Do you remember who Eli was? Yes, he was the priest serving in the house of the LORD in Shiloh. He was the one who thought Hannah was drunk when she poured her heart out to the LORD in prayer (1:13-14). Also, he was the one with whom Hannah and Elkanah left their little son Samuel. (2:11) Now this Eli, had two sons, named Phinehas and Hophni. Like their father, they were priests serving in the LORD’s house in Shiloh. Since they were priests, we would expect Phinehas and Hophni to honour the LORD; and therefore faithfully and humbly served Him in the temple. But surprisingly we read in verse 12 that Phinehas and Hophni had no regard for the LORD. The NLT put it more plainly, saying they had no respect for the LORD.

Their lack of respect for the LORD is clearly illustrated in verses 13-16. In those days, it was the practice of the priests with the people that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice and while the meat was being boiled, the servant of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand. He would plunge it into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot, and the priest would take for himself WHATEVER the fork brought up. In this way, the priests selfishly ensured that in addition to the breast and right thigh the LORD allotted to them, they could also claim for themselves some of the choice parts from the LORD’s offerings. But Phinehas and Hophni, was not contend even with this practice. Look at verses 15-16. Even before the fat was burned up to the LORD, Phinehas and Hophni would sent a servant to say to the man who was sacrificing….. (With rude and angry voice)……“Give the priest some meat to roast; he won’t accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.” If the man said to him,….. (Pleading voice)…..“Let the fat be burned up first, and then take whatever you want,” the servant would then answer, (Forceful voice) “No, hand it over now; if you don’t, I’ll take it by force.” Actually, these offerings the people brought to the LORD were holy and sacred to the LORD. By them, the LORD made atonement for Israel’s sins; and could consequently dwell among His people. Consequently, it was right for the LORD to expect His priests to revere these offerings and treat them with honour and respect. **Yet** Phinehas and Hophni trampled on these offerings as if they were worthless and meaningless. To them, these offerings were merely a means to score a free piece of raw and juicy meat; for a braai or extra pocket money. **Here we can learn that Phinehas and Hophni’s attitude towards the LORD’s offerings reflected their attitude towards the LORD. In other words, since they had no respect for the LORD’s offerings, they likewise had no respect for the LORD.** In fact, they thought so little of the LORD that they did not even wait for the people to burn up the fat (which was the best part of the offering) to the LORD. Instead, they forcefully took the best pieces of meat for themselves, and left the leftovers for the LORD. And this was not the only wicked thing they did. Look at verse 22b. Phinehas and Hophni also turned the LORD’s house into a brothel. They shamelessly and openly slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

As believers, and like the priests in those days, we would not easily think of ourselves as servants who has no respect for the LORD. Quite the opposite! I am sure most of us will say that we have great respect for the LORD. And honour Him in our lives. However, when we consider carefully how Phinehas and Hophni behaved, we will discover that in one way or another we behave just like them. Take the LORD’s Sabbath as an example. Do we honour the LORD by keeping it holy? What about His worship service? Do we sincerely and faithfully attend the worship service, to give thanks to God and receive His word in our hearts? Or do we like like Phinehas and Hophni, first take care of our own needs before considering the things of God. What about obeying the Word of God we receive from Sunday worship service or bible study? Do we obey it absolutely? What about tithing and offering, do we honour the LORD practically with our materials. Do we contribute faithfully to the work of the LORD, do we encourage one another with the words of the LORD? Or like Phinehas and Hophni, do we take care only of ourselves? **Here we can learn that it is not with our words that we show our respect for the LORD. But through what we practically do and how we practically treat the things of the LORD.**

In response to this, you and I might think to ourselves: “God will understand that I am just a sinner. It is not such a big deal!” But look at verse 17. This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD’s sight. “This sin”, refers to Phinehas and Hophni’s total lack of respect for the LORD. It was a very great sin in the LORD’s sight. Why is that? It was because, as priests, the LORD appointed Phinehas and Hophni to invite people to the LORD, to pray and mediate for them, to help them repent and have a right relationship with the LORD. Yet, because they had no respect for the LORD, Phinehas and Hophni did the exact opposite.They pushed people away from the LORD, since people no longer wanted to bring their offerings to the LORD. **Then what about you and me? As believers, do we take our priestly duty serious? Do we make sure that we do everything we can to help others come to the LORD? Or like Phinehas and Hophni, do we care so little for the LORD that we have no problem to act selfishly and wickedly? Even if it means we push people away from the LORD?**

Then what about Eli? Was he any different from his wicked sons? Sadly not. When Eli heard about everything his sons were doing, he simply said to them; (look at verses 23-25. Read, in a very slow and monotonous tone)*“Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD’s people.If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?”*………………And that is it! Despite the shocking and wicked behaviour of his sons….Despite dishonouring the LORD and ruining the spiritual condition of His people…..THIS was the best response Eli came up with. Eli did absolutely nothing to rectify their behaviour! He did absolutely nothing to make atonement for their sin. He did absolutely nothing to restore the spiritual environment at the tabernacle**. By doing nothing, he too just like his sons, showed that he had no respect for the LORD**.

It was a tragedy that this was the way Eli and his sons regarded the LORD. They were His servants whom the LORD appointed to lead people to Himself. Yet, because of their bad attitude towards the LORD…….. Because of their lack of respect for the LORD……. they became stumbling blocks and hindrances for the people. And the LORD could no longer use them. Here it is important to remember, that it had been almost 430 years since Israel fell into spiritual apostasy. Consequently, the spiritual condition in Israel was really terrible. It was for this very reason, that the LORD expected His priests to faithfully serve Him and so lead Israel back to the LORD. But instead, His appointed priests did not respect Him even enough to honour the offerings His people brought Him. In this condition, they became completely useless to the LORD. Because of their bad attitude towards the LORD. Because of not respecting the LORD, Eli and his sons became obstacles to the restoration work that the LORD wanted to kindle in Israel. Look at verse 30a **“Therefore** the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that your house and your father’s house would minister before me forever.’ But now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me!’ Instead, of allowing Eli and his sons, along with their descendants to continue occupying the positions of priests in Israel, the LORD would remove them. Look at verses 31-34. I will read from the NLT. (Strict and loud voice) The time is coming when I will put an end to your family, so it will no longer serve as my priests. All the members of your family will die before their time. None will reach old age. You will watch with envy as I pour out prosperity on the people of Israel. But no members of your family will ever live out their days. 33The few not cut off from serving at my altar will survive, but only so their eyes can go blind and their hearts break, and their children will die a violent death. And to prove that what I have said will come true, I will cause your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to die on the same day!

These were very hard words that the LORD spoke to Eli. Words, with far reaching and devastating consequences; not only for Eli and his sons, but even for their descendants. The question is, apart from removing them from their priestly positions, why did the LORD (who usually speaks with much patience and understanding) speak so direct and harshly to Eli? Look at verse 30b. Can we read today’s key verse together? Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained. The LORD’s attitude towards Eli and his sons were exactly the same as their attitude towards the LORD. The LORD Himself explains this when He says: those who despise me will be disdained. Or put differently, I will despise those who think lightly of me. Somehow, we might think and even expect that the LORD will never despise you and me. **But here we are warned, that the LORD will not allow us to think lightly of Him, and simply let us get away with it. He is the LORD. He is Holy! He is a consuming fire that does not tolerate sin. He deserves our utmost honour. In fact, He demands it from us. It is, however, our choice whether to Honour or despise the LORD. But depending on our choice, we will most definitely suffer the consequences.**

Look again at verse 30b. It also contains a promise. Those who honour me I will honour. But what does it mean to honour the LORD? The dictionary meaning for honour is: *to pay regard with great respect*. However, I think it is easier to understand what honouring the LORD means if we say it is the complete opposite, of how Eli and his sons regarded the LORD. Here we can look at Hannah as an example. Look at verse 19. Hannah made her son Samuel a little robe and took it to him when she went with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice (2:19). She saw her son ONLY once a year! As a mother, how could she bare living without her son the whole year and then see him only at the annual sacrifice? Many mothers in Hannah’s shoes would have taken their son back home with them. Especially, with all that Eli and his sons got up to and the bad spiritual environment they created. Yet, Hannah left Samuel with Eli. Not because she did not love Samuel. **But because, she deeply and sincerely wanted to honour the LORD by keeping her vow.** Here we can see that honouring the LORD is also not something we can do with mere words. But is an attitude of holy reverence and respect for the LORD that is expressed in **WHAT WE DO**. Hence, there are countless ways that you and I can honour the LORD; depending on our faith and circumstances. If we do honour the LORD practically in our life; what does the LORD promise to do for us? Yes! To also honour you and me!

Then how did how did the LORD honour Hannah? For starters, look at verse 21. The LORD was gracious to Hannah; she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Not bad for a woman who was barren for such a long time! (1 Sam 1:2, 5). But this was not all. In addition to giving Hannah 5 more children, the LORD raised Hannah’s little boy, Samuel, as a faithful priest for the LORD. Look at verse 18. While Eli, Phinehas and Hophni went around despising the LORD, little Samuel ministered before the LORD. Verse 21b also reads that Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD, and grew in stature and favour with the LORD. (26) Eventually, the LORD replaced the wicked Eli and his two sons, with Hannah’s boy Samuel – who became a faithful Priest who did according to what was in God’s heart and mind. (35) As we will see in the rest of our study of the book of Samuel, by His grace and great power, the LORD used Samuel to bring about great restoration work in Israel. Something He could not do through the wicked Eli and his sons. But could powerfully carry out, because of Hannah who so deeply and sincerely honoured the LORD. In this way, the LORD honoured Hannah. He honoured her so much that up to this day we are still reading and learning from Hannah.

Personally, I am greatly encouraged by the LORD’s promise that He will honour me if I honour Him first. It has been almost nine months now since msn Jacob handed the directorship of the WITS ministry to me. Prior to this, my only responsibility was to take care of members in my small fellowship. Yet, these days, I must take responsibility of the entire ministry. In the beginning, I was still fresh and managed things generally without difficulty. But with time passing, and with the fast tempo of ministry life in addition to earning a living, I now begin to feel the strain. Yet, life does not stand still. Ministry does not stand still for even a moment; so I can catch my breath. So I began to wonder, whether I can last for another 14 months as director of our ministry. But I am encouraged by the LORD’s promise; that if I honour Him to the end by serving His ministry with all my heart, the He will surely honour me by helping me in all that I do. More than that; He will bless and keep each and every one of our brothers, sisters, missionaries and shepherds, to grow as His faithful servants. Just like Samuel.

**In conclusion:** In Today’s passage we have learned what it means to either despise or honour the LORD. In both instances, it is not by our words that the LORD measure our actions & our attitude towards Him. But by how we practically treat the things of the LORD. Eli, Phinehas and Hophni treated the LORD’s offering with contempt. Phinehas and Hophni even turned the Lords house into a brothel as they slept with the women who served at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. In doing so, they vividly expressed that deep in their hearts, they despised the LORD. They did not care about the LORD. They also did not care about the salvation work He called them to. Instead, they only cared about themselves; what was good, pleasurable, and beneficial for themselves. Then they became useless to the LORD. More than that, they became huge obstacles and hindrances for the work that the LORD so eagerly wanted to do among His despairing people. Consequently, just as Eli and his sons despised the LORD, the LORD equally despised them and thrust them out of their positions as priests. And eventually replaced them with Samuel (the last judge and powerful prophet, as a mean to honour his mother Hannah. Because she kept her vow to the LORD.

What is important to note here, is that contrary to what we may expect, it was not the LORD who first honoured Hannah or despised Eli and his sons, but the other way around. The LORD merely treated each one of his servants according to how they treated Him. The question is, how are we treating the LORD in our own lives? Like Hannah? Or Eli and his sons? I sincerely pray, that through today’s passage, we may all repent of any conduct that reveals how little we think of the LORD. To instead, honour the LORD practically in our lives; just like Hannah. Amen.

Let’s read the key verse together.

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