

Post Tenebras Lux

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[0 : 00] But if we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. 1 Samuel chapter 3.

1 Samuel chapter 3, page 227. Page 227 in the pew Bible, or the church Bible.

We don't have pews. 1 Samuel chapter 3, we're reading again at verse 1. Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli, and the word of the Lord was rare in those days.

There was no frequent vision. The word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no frequent vision.

I don't know if you've ever heard of the phrase post-tenebras lux. Post-tenebras lux.

[1 : 01] It's an old Latin phrase which means after darkness, light. Post-tenebras lux. After darkness, light.

The phrase didn't originate with Katrina Murray and her thought-provoking articles, which often appear on the back page of our church magazine. Rather, the Latin phrase, it originated way back in the 16th century during the Reformation.

And the phrase post-tenebras lux, it actually was the rallying cry of the Reformers. It was their rallying cry as they sought to rediscover the light of God's Word after a period of spiritual darkness.

And what's fascinating is that the phrase post-tenebras lux, after darkness, light, it had such an impact and such an influence upon the Reformers that it became the motto of the Reformation.

It's a wonderful motto, post-tenebras lux, after darkness, light. And the Reformers, they believe that the more we are subjected to the light of God's Word, the more it will dispel the darkness of this world and give direction to our lives.

[2 : 19] That's what the Reformers believed. They believed that the more we are under God's Word, the more we read God's Word and meditate upon God's Word, the more it will dispel the darkness of this world and direct our lives.

And, you know, that was certainly true in the thinking of the French Reformer, John Calvin. Because while John Calvin was a minister in the Swiss city of Geneva, I don't know if you've ever been to Geneva, I'd love to go.

John Calvin in the 16th century, he was a minister in the church in Geneva. And he had a preaching schedule, like most ministers have a preaching schedule. But John Calvin had a preaching schedule that would make my hair go all gray.

Because Calvin preached each Lord's Day at 6 a.m., 9 a.m. He had a catechism class at 12, and he preached again at 3.

Preached four times on the Lord's Day. On top of that, during the working week, Calvin would preach on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

[3 : 26] So he would speak seven times a week. Seven times a week. Four times on the Lord's Day, three during the week. And I'm sure most of you are thinking, well, Murdo, you've got it easy.

You've got it really easy. Twice on Sunday, once midweek. But, you know, so do you. You've got it easy too. Because you're not expected to be in church four times on the Lord's Day.

And three times during the week. And yet most people nowadays, if we're going to be brutally honest, some are sitting on their settee with their slippers watching online. And others will only turn up in church on a Sunday morning.

Very rarely on a Sunday evening. Never midweek. And yet during the Reformation, during the 16th century, there was this hunger, this thirst for God's Word.

There was this desire and determination to be under the light of God's Word. They wanted to be under this light. Especially living in a world that's shrouded and surrounded by spiritual darkness.

[4 : 30] They wanted to walk in the light as much as they possibly could. Which is why we need the light of God's Word in our day and in our generation.

Because, as I'm sure you're aware, we are constantly being surrounded and shrouded in the darkness of this world. The ignorance of darkness.

The immorality of darkness. The inaccuracy that's found in darkness. And my friend, we need to keep returning to this Reformation motto. Post-Tenebras Lux.

After darkness, light. After darkness, light. And you come to a chapter like this one. 1 Samuel chapter 3. And that's that Latin phrase which actually summarizes what's happening in this chapter.

Because in this chapter, there's a change. The first two chapters have been full of darkness. But now here in chapter 3, there is light. There's a change coming.

[5 : 31] And in this chapter, I want us to see three things as we look at it together. Three things. There's dark days. That's how it begins. Then there's discerning direction. And then there's disclosing danger.

Dark days. Discerning direction. Disclosing danger. So first of all, dark days. Dark days. Look at verse 1.

We read there, Now the boy, Samuel, was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no frequent vision. At that time, Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place.

The lamp of God had not yet gone out. And Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was. So the day and generation that Samuel was born into, it was one of the darkest days in Israel's history.

In fact, Samuel was born into such a tough and turbulent transition period within the nation of Israel. Because since the time of the Exodus with Moses and then entering the promised land with Joshua, there was this period, the period of the judges, where the judges ruled in the land of Israel for generations.

[6 : 49] But each generation of the judges, it was overshadowed by this constant cycle. A cycle of rebellion against the Lord, then restoration by the Lord. There was rebellion and restoration.

Rebellion and restoration. And by the time you come to the end of the book of Judges, you see that there's the statement given about that generation. There's no king in Israel.

Everyone is doing what's right in their own eyes. There was no king in Israel. Everyone was doing what's right in their own eyes. They were dark days. But it was into those dark days that Samuel was born.

And as we know from our study, Samuel was a special son. And he was a special son not just because his mother Hannah had earnestly prayed for Samuel.

Samuel was a special son because he had been set apart to serve the Lord. And from a young age, Hannah, she dedicated and devoted Samuel to the service of the Lord.

[7 : 49] But what we saw last year, we could say, what we saw last year in the opening chapters of the book of Samuel was this contrast. There was this contrast being made. A contrast between Hannah's special son and Eli, the priest, and his secular sons.

So there's Hannah's special son and Eli's secular sons, Hophni and Phinehas. And the contrast is made because even though Eli's sons are ministers' sons, they're sons of the manse who have been set apart and sanctified to the holy office of the priesthood, even though they're the clergy of God's covenant people, these men, Hophni and Phinehas, even though they wore the clerical clothing and they served at the sanctuary, Hophni and Phinehas were two men who did not take their role and responsibility seriously.

In fact, you could describe them as corrupt clergy. They were misbehaving ministers, reckless reverence. That's what you could say. Whatever you want to call them, they were shocking servants of the Lord.

To the point that at Shiloh, worship was a farce. Because they not only disregarded all the worshipers at the temple, they also disregarded the women at the temple.

And so Hophni and Phinehas, they used and abused their position as priests in order to gain possessions and power. They were awful men.

[9 : 17] And it's no wonder the scriptures, the opening chapters of Samuel, they condemn these two men by saying they did not know the Lord. They did not know the Lord.

But as you know, there's nothing new under the sun. Because these two men, they were not only corrupt clergy who abused their position and power. They were there in Samuel's day, but there was also corrupt clergy in Isaiah's day, and Jeremiah's day, and in Paul's day.

In fact, Paul even said that it would happen in our day. Paul wrote, 2 Timothy, he wrote, Paul said that of our day.

And Paul was right. And Paul was right because, I don't know if you watch the news or follow the news, you get it on your phone, all these alerts, but I woke up last Monday morning.

And the Monday morning headline was all about an African megachurch leader called TB Joshua, who used and abused his position against worshipers and against women.

[10 : 45] There's nothing new under the sun. And let's not delude ourselves into thinking that we're exempt or we're excluded from this and that corrupt clergy are only confined to the far-flung continents of Africa or even America.

Corrupt clergy are found in our own country too. Because whether we're aware of it or not, in our nation today, there are many men and many women in pulpits up and down our land who may look the part and who may say good things.

But the Bible says they are wolves in shepherd's clothing. They're wolves in shepherd's clothing. And like Hophni and Phinehas, they do not know the Lord.

They do not know the Lord. And what's worse about them? And I think it is. It's the greatest sin. They are leading countless precious souls to a lost eternity in hell.

It's the greatest sin. And you look at the opening words of this chapter, just verse 1 even. You look at the opening words and you realize that those days in Israel, they were dark days.

[12 : 02] And they were dark days because there were so few coming to worship the Lord. There was not only corrupt clergy, but nobody was coming to church. So few were confessing their sin to the Lord. So few were committed to following the Lord.

They were dark days. We're told there that the word of the Lord was rare. If you're using the authorized version, it's the word precious. Emphasizing something that's so rare, it's not really seen.

The word of the Lord was rare. There was no frequent vision. Hearing the voice of the Lord, seeing the visions of the Lord were so few and far between. It was a day of small things.

That's how dark it was in Samuel's day. It was a dark day. But there was still hope. There was still hope in the midst of darkness.

Because we're told there in verse 3 that the lamp of God had not gone out. Not yet gone out. And Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was.

[13 : 08] So the lamp of God had not gone out. And the ark of God was still present at the temple. The lamp which symbolized the light of God's word in the midst of a dark world, it had not gone out.

And the ark of God which symbolized God's presence in this world was still there. The lamp of God had not gone out. The ark of God was still present.

There was still hope. There was still hope. And it reminds me of that promise in Isaiah 42. A wonderful promise. Where the Lord says, A bruised reed he shall not break.

And a smoking flax he shall not quench. A bruised reed he shall not break. And a smoking flax he shall not quench.

The Lord promises there that even when the light of the lampstand is only smoldering. It's just smoking. You can't really even see a flame.

[14 : 09] Even when the lamp, the light of that lampstand is smoldering and smoking, he's still present. Which is such an encouragement because, well, you know, we live in dark days ourselves.

We look at the day that we live in. We live in dark and difficult days. We're living in a day of small things. A day of small things. So few coming to church.

There's apathy in attendance. There's casual commitment to the Lord's cause. The prayer meeting's not really a priority. We don't see many conversions or many professions of faith.

And yet the Lord promises a bruised reed he shall not break. A smoking flax he shall not quench. Even when the light of the lampstand is smoldering and smoking and that flame is just barely flickering at all, he's still present.

He's still present. And, you know, that should be the greatest comfort. But, you know, the comfort of God's word shouldn't allow us to ever become complacent.

[15 : 16] Because as the Lord warned the church in Ephesus, he said, I will remove your lampstand unless you repent. Which I always find such a serious warning.

I will remove your lampstand unless you repent. You know, my friend, there's never going to be a revival unless there's repentance. So many people phone the manse about the revival in 1949.

I could, I don't have enough fingers to tell you how many people I phoned. Or the email. But, you know, I'm reminded, 1949 has come and gone.

We are in 2024. We need a revival today. And there's never going to be a revival unless there's repentance. The church is never going to wake up unless there's repentance.

Our community is never going to become alive unless there's repentance. There's never going to be revival unless there's repentance. And that's what we see here.

[16 : 21] There was dark days. Dark days in the days of Samuel. But then secondly, we see discerning direction. Discerning direction.

So there's dark days and then discerning direction. Look at verse 4. Then the Lord called Samuel and he said, Here I am. And ran to Eli and said, Here I am, for you called me.

But he said, I did not call. Lie down again. So he went and lay down. And the Lord called again Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, Here I am, for you called me. But he said, I did not call my son.

Lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord. And the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he rose and went to Eli and said, Here I am, for you called me.

Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, Go lie down. And if he calls you, you shall say, Speak, Lord, for your servant hears. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

[17 : 24] And the Lord came and stood calling as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. And Samuel said, Speak, Lord, or speak. For your servant hears.

What should stand out in this passage is that even though the word of the Lord was rare, we're told there in verse 1, and even though there was no frequent vision, even though the Lord didn't speak often and there wasn't many visions from the Lord, even though there were dark and difficult days and a day of small things with so few worshipping the Lord, and apathy in attendance and casual commitment to the Lord's cause, and prayer not a priority, despite all the folly and all the failings of God's people, you read there in those verses, the Lord still called Samuel to serve him.

Despite the darkness, the Lord still called somebody to serve him in the light. Which again should be an encouragement to us.

Because it should always remind us that the Lord hasn't abandoned his church. When we hear someone being called into the ministry, it should be a reminder to us that the Lord hasn't abandoned his church yet.

Do you know? And the thing is, the Lord is still calling people into the ministry. And we need to keep praying to the Lord of the harvest. To keep calling men into the ministry.

[18 : 53] Because there are so many vacancies in our denomination. In our denomination alone, I was reading this week, going through our yearbook, how many congregations in our denomination are vacant.

Just to name a few.

They're all vacant congregations in our denomination. And as Jesus described them, they are like sheep without a shepherd. Which is why Jesus said, the harvest is plenteous, the laborers are few.

Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest, that he would send out laborers into the harvest field. We're to pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he would thrust out more men into the ministry.

And you know, this chapter really was a post-tenebrous luxe moment. That after the dark and difficult days of corrupt clergy, the Lord now speaks with light.

[20 : 10] And he speaks with light by calling this young man, this special son Samuel. He calls him to serve him. But as you know, the issue many 21st century readers have with this passage, I don't know if you had the issue when we read it, verses 4 to 10.

The issue that many people have when reading those verses is that the Lord spoke to Samuel with an audible voice. Samuel.

Samuel. There was an audible voice. And for many people, I don't know, maybe you think it yourself. Many people say to me, Murdo, I would believe in God, and I would be a Christian, and I would follow Jesus, Murdo, if I heard God speaking to me.

I'd believe everything you're saying. I'd become a Christian. No problem. I would follow Jesus if I heard God speaking to me like he spoke to Samuel.

And of course, there are many times in the Bible when God does speak to people with an audible voice. We see that with Moses at the burning bush, or Elijah up the mountain, or the disciples when God spoke from the cloud, or even Paul on the road to Damascus.

[21 : 29] There was these instances where God speaks with an audible voice, and they hear the voice of God. But that was before we had the Bible.

Now that we have the Bible, you're all holding a Bible this morning, and it's a Bible in your own language.

You're able to read it and understand it, which means that we're able to hear the voice of God anytime, anywhere. It was the reformer, John Calvin, that we mentioned earlier.

He said, the word of God is the voice of God. The word of God is the voice of God. Therefore, you've already heard the voice of God speaking to you this morning.

You've already heard God's voice this morning. That's why every time we come to reading the Bible together, before we read it, that's the first thing I say is, let us hear the word of God.

[22 : 37] Equally, I could say, let us hear the voice of God. Let us hear the voice of God. Because the most important part of a church service is not the praise or the prayer or the preaching or even the kids' address, as great as it is with the kids.

The reading of God's word is the most important part of the service. because that's when we hear God's voice. Steve Lawson, one of my favorite preachers, he once said, if you want to hear God's voice audibly, then open your Bible and read out loud.

If you want to hear God's voice audibly, then open your Bible and read out loud, because the word of God is the voice of God.

And you know, I love this passage, especially those verses, verses 4 to 10. I love those passages where Hannah's special son, Samuel, he's been called to serve the Lord. He's not been called to salvation.

He's been called to serve the Lord. And the thing about this call is that it's a specific call. He's been called to be a prophet. So they're moving away from being judges to now being prophets.

[23 : 54] And we'll see that as we go through the book of Samuel. So it's a special call and it's a specific call. It's a call to ministry. It's a call to ministry.

But you know, even as Christians, every Christian has a calling. We're called from darkness to light, but we're also called to walk in the light.

And so every Christian is called, as I think we mentioned at last Lord's Day, we're called to be a minister in our own sphere and in our own circle of our family, our friends, our congregation, our community, our workplace.

We're called to minister. But this call here that Samuel received, you could say it was a special call, a specific call.

He was called to ministry. And I love this passage because it reminds me of my call. I didn't hear the voice of the Lord audibly. But it reminds me of my call to ministry when God spoke to me from His Word, calling me into the ministry because I didn't want to be a minister.

[25 : 01] Believe it or not, the last thing on earth I ever wanted to be was a minister. Even the advice I was given about ministry, the advice was, if you can avoid entering the ministry, do so.

If you can do something else, do it. If you can avoid entering the ministry, do so. If you can do something else, do it.

And you might think, well, that's very negative advice. But that's actually very pastoral advice. Very pastoral advice because ministry will suck and sap every ounce of physical, spiritual, and emotional energy out of you.

Sometimes to the point that the only thing that stops you from resigning is your call to the ministry. The fact that the Lord has called you to do it. Because God's call is strong.

God's call is specific. God's call is so direct. And the remarkable thing about God's call, and this is the greatest encouragement for me, God doesn't call the equipped.

[26 : 05] He equips those whom He calls. That's something I was reminded at the age of 18 when the Lord was calling me to the ministry. The Lord doesn't call the equipped. He equips those whom He called.

And you look at the Bible and you see that repeated again and again, time and time again throughout the Bible. The Lord called Moses the man with a stutter.

The Lord called Jeremiah just a man in his youth. The Lord called Peter an educated fisherman. The Lord called Paul who had been a persecutor of the church.

They were the most unlikely candidates for ministry. And yet, the Lord doesn't call the equipped. He equips those whom He calls. But you know what became apparent about each and every one of these men and every man in Scripture, every woman who's called in Scripture, the amazing thing about them all, they're willing to serve the Lord.

They're willing to serve the Lord. Just like Samuel was willing to serve the Lord. Because every time the Lord called Samuel, how did Samuel respond?

[27 : 11] Every time Samuel heard God's voice, what was his answer? He said, here I am. Wasn't hang on, Lord. Wasn't wait till I'm ready.

Wasn't, no, I need to finish this first. It's just, Lord, here I am. Every time the Lord called to Samuel, Samuel responded by saying, here I am.

Samuel, Samuel. Samuel says, here I am. He was willing to serve. And you look at other men in Scripture.

Isaiah, when he was called, he has this great call in Isaiah chapter 6. He sees a vision of God's glory. And when the Lord asks the question, to whom shall I send and who will go for us?

Isaiah responds by saying, here I am. Send me. Here I am. Send me. Which, you know, it should always make us question ourselves.

[28 : 14] Whether you're being called to the ministry or whether you're being called to serve in your own congregation and your own community. Am I willing to serve the Lord?

Am I willing to respond to the Lord's call upon my life? Am I willing to say to the Lord, here I am. Send me. Or are we always, when the call goes out, we just take a wee step back and we allow others to go forward?

They do it. Not me. Not me. They do it. We should be willing to respond to the Lord's call and say, here I am.

Send me. Send me. But for young Samuel, he had difficulty discerning the Lord's call upon his life. Because it's not easy to discern the Lord's voice.

It's not easy to discern the Lord's direction. Sometimes men can be misleading. Sometimes our feelings can be false. Sometimes our desires can be deceptive.

[29 : 18] But again, that's why we have the Bible. Our Bible is inspired. Our Bible is inerrant. Our Bible is infallible.

It's the Word of God. It's the voice of God. It's the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Our Bible is the only rule to direct us. And so when God speaks light into our lives, we need to respond. God is speaking light into your life this morning.

And we need to respond. We have to respond by saying with Samuel, speak, Lord. speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. I've seen the time has gone. But in this chapter, we see dark days, we see discerning direction, and lastly, in a word, we see disclosing danger.

[30 : 24] Disclosing danger. Look at verse 11. Then the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I'm about to do a thing in Israel, at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.

On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I'm about to punish his house forever for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.

Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever. Samuel lay down until morning, then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord.

And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, Samuel my son. And he said, Here I am. And Eli said, What was it he told you? Do not hide it from me.

May God do so to you and more also. If you hide anything from me, from all that he told you. So Samuel told him everything. And hid nothing from him.

[31 : 28] And he said, It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him. You know, when Samuel was called to serve the Lord as a prophet, the first challenge Samuel had was to tell the truth.

The first challenge Samuel had was to tell the truth. You know, he could have covered it up. He could have lied like Eli's sons did, especially because the Lord's message was a message of judgment.

It was a message of judgment against Eli and against his family. It was such a severe message of judgment that as it says there, their ears would tingle on hearing it.

And the message of judgment, we'll see it in the next chapter, God willing, next week, in chapter four, where Hophni and Phinehas, they die. And then Eli dies. There's a message of death and judgment.

But Samuel here, he doesn't lie. He doesn't hide the truth. Samuel tells the truth because the Lord is with him. Samuel presents the truth of God's word because the Lord is with him.

[32 : 42] Samuel speaks without fear or any favor of any man because the Lord is with him. And you know, there's practical advice for us here. You know, we live in a day and generation of fake news or people being false with one another.

We live in a day and generation where people put on a front and a facade. They play mind games and they mislead people or they skirt around serious topics. We live in a day and generation full of lies.

But young Samuel shows us that as hard as it may be, if we really love someone, we won't lie to them. We will tell them the truth.

If we really love someone, we won't lie to them. We will tell them the truth, whatever it is, even if it's about their soul, especially if it's about their soul.

If we really love someone, we won't lie. We'll tell the truth. And as you know, my dear unconverted friend, it's out of love for you that I always want to tell you the truth.

[34 : 00] I'm not here to preach a lie. I'm here to present you the truth. The truth that without Christ as your Savior, your sin will take you to a lost eternity in hell.

That is the truth. truth. It is a blunt truth, but it is the truth. But that's not where the gospel ends. The good news of the gospel is that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And this is why you need to have this post-tenebrous lux moment, because you need to be brought from the darkness of sin into the light of salvation.

You need to be brought from darkness to light by simply trusting in Jesus Christ. I cannot be clearer to you than that. And I say it to you out of love, that you need to be saved for time and for eternity.

Because as Jesus says, you need to be brought from darkness to light, because Jesus says, I am the light of the world. God, whosoever follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

[35 : 19] You need a post-tenebrous lux moment. You need to be brought from darkness to light. You need to experience that after darkness, the darkness of sin, you are brought into the light of salvation.

My friend, I tell you the truth, because I want you to know the truth, and follow the truth, because Jesus Christ alone is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through him.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the light of thy word, and we pray that we would follow it, that we would see that thy word is a lamp unto her feet, and a light unto her path, that it leads us always to the one who is the light of the world, and who says to us that whosoever follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Lord, bless thy truth to us, we pray. Encourage us, we ask, that even though we live in dark and difficult days, help us to keep walking in the light, as thou art in the light, that we will have fellowship with thee, a God who is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all.

Cleanse us, then we pray, go before us, and keep us, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning.

[36 : 56] We're going to sing the words of Psalm 27. Psalm 27, it's in the Sing Psalms version on page 31. Psalm 27.

Psalm 27. We're singing from the beginning down to the end of the double verse, marked four.

As we said, all of our Psalms this morning, they focus upon the theme of light. In Psalm 27, it begins with that confession. A confession of faith. Much like Psalm 23, where the Psalmist says, the Lord is my shepherd.

Here in Psalm 27, the Psalmist says, the Lord is my Saviour. The Lord's my Saviour and my light, who will make me dismayed. The Lord's the stronghold of my life.

Why should I be afraid? When evildoers threaten me to take my life away, my adversaries and my foes will stumble in that day. So we'll sing Psalm 27 from the beginning down to the end of the double verse, marked four.

[38 : 04] And we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. praise. Amen. The Lord's my Saviour and my light, who will make me dismayed.

The Lord's the stronghold of my life. Why should I be afraid?

When evil doers threaten me to take my life away, my adversaries ■ My heart will feel no great Though what against me should arise I will lift up my head

One thing I'll plead before the Lord And this I'll seek always That I may come with thee in waters And dwell there all my days That of the beauty of the Lord I constantly make peace And in his house We seek to know

Direction in his ways The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all Now and forevermore Amen