

Power With God Exemplified in Samuel

by T. Austin-Sparks

Samuel's life represents power with God, a new start in himself, and a personal life with the Lord, which is essential for effective ministry and for being sensitive to God's feelings and dissatisfaction.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:19, 1 Samuel 8:7, 1 Samuel 10:19, 1 Samuel 12:19-21, 1 Samuel 16:1, Psalm 99:6, Isaiah 43:19, Jeremiah 15:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 1:15-16

Topics: "Personal Relationship with God", "Power with God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of Samuel's ministry as a representation of power with God, particularly in a time when the people of Israel were not aligned with God's original intentions. He draws parallels between Samuel's era and the present, highlighting the need for a new beginning and a personal relationship with God, free from the constraints of tradition. Sparks urges believers to seek firsthand knowledge of God, moving beyond secondhand beliefs, and to become sensitive to God's dissatisfaction with the current state of His people. He illustrates that true ministry arises from a burdened heart that resonates with God's desires, positioning believers as bridges for God's transition from the old to the new. Ultimately, Sparks calls for a commitment to a personal walk with God, which empowers believers to influence their surroundings according to His will.

Transcript

"Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people" (Jer. 15:1).

"Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name; they called upon the Lord, and He answered them" (Psa. 99:6).

"And the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have indeed done all this evil; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart: and turn ye not aside; for then would ye go after vain things which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain... Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will instruct you in the good and the right way" (1 Sam. 12:19-21,23).

We come now to the fifth and, for the time being, the last of these representative men who stand in that relationship with God which is acknowledged by Him to be one which has great weight and great power

with Him. In our previous meditation we were seeing what Moses represents as to the ground of God's power put into operation. Moses stood at the beginning of Israel's national life. His work was mainly the shaping of the rough material, the raw clay, into a vessel for God, and he found it hard work.

The Situation Which Confronted Samuel

When we come to Samuel, we come to the point where that vessel is marred in the hand of the potter, and there are extra and even more difficult conditions. Samuel's work was with a vessel which was not being made from the beginning, but with a lot of material that had gone all wrong. It is important for us to recognize exactly where Samuel stood, and that with which he was confronted, in order to see the specific and peculiar significance of his ministry, and therefore in what way he represents power with God.

There were many features which made Samuel's time very much like our own, and therefore many features in our own time which are very much like his time. His was a time when the people and the work of God were not upon God's essential basis. They were on a secondary line and basis, which was only accepted by the Divine sovereignty. It was being governed and ruled, and, as far as possible, blessed, in the sovereignty of God; but it was not immediately in the thought of God. Taking Saul as an illustration of that as a part of a much greater whole, it is perfectly obvious that Saul was not God's essential thought. But God went as far as He could in the acceptance, the recognition, and the blessing of Saul, and in using Saul and that order of things which obtained in his days. God just did the best He could. But it was not His real mind. It was secondary, and it only came within His purview at all on the ground of His sovereignty. God sovereignly uses and, so far as He can, blesses whatever there is in existence - but, oh! that it might be otherwise! That is His attitude, and that is clearly seen as to the Lord's and Samuel's attitude toward the whole order of things in those days.

A Situation Akin To That Of Our Day

It does not require a great deal of spiritual understanding, perception, enlightenment and education to see how akin to that time is our own. There is, so far as what is of God on this earth is concerned, something of which God is taking account, is allowing, is accepting in a sense; He is using it, He is blessing it, He is going as far as He can, but it is only just as far as He can. He cannot wholly commit Himself to it. It is a secondary idea. He has His own thought, but His people are not in the good of that. I cannot very well go further than that statement. It is a general statement, but I say that you do not need a great deal of perception to see that God is limited, and if you are at all exercised and concerned about the situation - that is, about the effectiveness, the fruitfulness, the permanence, the purity, the power of what is related to God on this earth - and troubled that it does not go further, then you should look into it from this standpoint: is it on a secondary line, or does it correspond to God's original and full thought as to His way, His means and His purpose? Well, read about the times of Samuel and you see how restrained, limited and straitened God was, and, therefore, what an unsatisfactory state - to say the least of it - existed amongst the Lord's own people. That is the setting of Samuel, and that really is the key to the whole situation: something which God uses as far as He can because there is nothing else, and because the real thing has been lost.

There are a lot of things in the whole course of the Christian era, from those early New Testament days, which are not God's thought as to how the work of God should be done, by what means, on what basis, according to what principles, which He has blessed and used, and is still doing so, but they represent a limitation to the Lord because they are secondary. And that is where we are! There is no doubt about it.

That is Samuel's situation, and because he had to contend with such a situation we see the significance of his life.

Samuel Against The Secondary And For The Primary

What was that significance? Samuel came in at a time like that to stand in the midst of it; on the one hand against something secondary, and on the other hand for something primary. I think his life is summed up in that. Samuel did not wholly accept Saul, and he was inclined to have absolutely nothing to do with the idea of a king, so that the Lord had to say to him: 'Samuel, they have not rejected you; they have rejected Me' (I Sam. 8:7). Samuel was not going to have anything to do with this, and the Lord had, in other words, to say sovereignly: 'We cannot have what we would have, but we will allow this. We know how it will work out; nevertheless, give it a chance, facilitate it as far as you can.' Samuel had that secret with the Lord all the time. He knew how it would work out, and he was not accepting it. He was there to hold things for God's primary, full thought amongst His people. That is what he represents.

Now we are going to break that up, and I want to do so very simply. I do want that the Lord should get this across in very definite ways, in simple ways. When things are like that, when there is a lot of history in the background, a lot of tradition, and the things of God and the people of God have become very mixed and confused, and are not clear, precise, definite, distinct in relation to God, what does God have to do if He is going to be true to Himself, to His Own thought, to His Own intention, and go on without committing Himself to a lower level, a lower standard, and wholly compromising and surrendering? If He is going to react again to His full intention, what will He do in such a day? He will do exactly what He did with Samuel - and I do hope you are not just following this with an objective mentality, thinking back to Samuel and his day, or looking out in a sort of nebulous, abstract way. I do hope that as we go on, step by step, you are putting yourself right into this. If it is true that the situation in our day is very similar to the situation in Samuel's day, so far as the Lord's people and the Lord's work are concerned, that represents a loss to the Lord, something other than the Lord intended to have at the beginning of the dispensation, and we have to come to some position about it and ask ourselves: Is God going to accept that as final? Is He going to settle down and just take that attitude, saying: 'Well, we can have no more. We will be thankful if we can have half a loaf if not a whole one, so we will leave the other.' We do not believe that is God's attitude.

A New Beginning

If it is like that, then in such a time God must react to the situation. His reaction will be on the same line as it was in the case of Samuel - and what was it in his case? Well, firstly, Samuel was a new start in himself. That is a simple way of putting it, but it is very precise. He was a new start in himself. Samuel was not a child of tradition. He could not be; it was impossible. A miracle from heaven had to be worked to bring Samuel into this world at all. There was no open way for Samuel to come into this world. He began at a grave, a place of death. You know what I am referring to in the case of Hannah. Oh no, this is not a succession, this is not taking up a tradition, this is not just following on something that has been. This is a new beginning. Right from zero, right from death, he in himself is a new beginning. He does not take things up with a background of inheritance. God has taken precaution against that in His sovereignty again. The impossibility of Hannah having that child was God's sovereignty in relation to His purpose. Nothing could have been at all but by a special act of God. There is no carry-over from the past, no link at all. It is a clean-cut, new beginning.

You are wondering how that is going to be applied. It can be applied in various ways, and quite simply, too. Perhaps most of you have a tradition. You say: 'Well, I am out of it. I do not come into this, for I have a tradition.' Yes, many of us had a tradition. I suppose everyone who comes into Christianity comes into a tradition; but, you know, God can do something in a life with a very big tradition to cut them clean off from their tradition and bring them to an end of it. They can make a completely new start, and if He is going to do the kind of thing that He did with Samuel, He is going to do that. But is He not doing it? Some of you young people have been born into Christian homes and have been brought up in godly surroundings, and you have received a great deal of your Christianity secondhand. How you view that, I do not know. I used to think that if only I had had a long line of godly people behind me, it would be a tremendous asset. I have changed my mind about that. I used to think that the men who were 'sons of the manse' had all the advantages. I was not a 'son of the manse', and therefore I was handicapped. I have changed my mind about that. Your tradition, even your Christian home, may be a handicap to you. You may have got a lot secondhand and it may not be yours at all; it may be your parent's. You have taken it over. It may have become just a straitjacket to you, or it may be an altogether false position where you are concerned and it is not yours right from the beginning. What is God doing with you? Is He not putting you into positions and situations and taking you through experiences where father's or mother's religion is no use and you have to have your own? The knowledge of God which has been given to you and which may have helped you in the matter of counsel and influence in your childhood does not stand up to the situation now. You have to know God for yourself, and unless you do, you are not going through. You know quite well that if you are going to be of real value to God you must not be just a child of tradition; you have to be born right 'out of the blue' and know God right there from zero. That is the application of this.

That application, I say, is made in various ways and various stages. The trouble with a lot of people is that they will not hand up their tradition to God and let Him transcend all that is merely secondhand and bring them from zero into something of Himself. They are clinging to their accepted, already-made beliefs and doctrines, and God has His great difficulty there. He has to say, in effect: 'All right, I cannot do anything here. I must go and work where I have a chance.' If God is going to do today what He did in Samuel's day, somehow there has got to be that clean cut in between what is merely tradition and what is experience, what is secondhand and what is firsthand, what has come to us from the outside and what has come to us inside.

You can see how true this was with such men as Paul. What a tradition! What an inheritance! What a history! Ah, but what a break right down to death and starting all over again! He said: "It was the good pleasure of God... to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1:15-16). That is the beginning. We need not enlarge upon it. This is the very first thing. God needs men and women, a vessel which is not constituted upon something secondhand, although that something may be true and right and of Himself. Do not despise it, but remember that is not good enough. You have got to have it from the beginning in yourself, and God would do that. He can do it, and some of us know how drastically He can do it. We have had a big tradition; we have had it all and been in that whole history and realm, and then an end was brought, and so complete that it was beginning all over again, even although we were preachers and in the full flood of Christian work and activity - an end, and a new beginning, everything born right out from God in a new way. Well, something like that is necessary. The Lord will have His own way of doing it. You ask Him to do it. Your transaction with the Lord must be this: 'Lord, give me firsthand knowledge of Yourself. Bring me into the place where everything is living between You and myself, and where I know You for myself.' You may go through it, but God will do it. It is essential.

Do you brethren - those of you who have had years of experience - agree with me that one of the paralyzing handicaps today is a fully-fledged, established system of Christian doctrine which is taken up in a secondhand way and propagated? Put that round the other way. Is not the weakness of today the inability of men to come forth and say: 'Thus saith the Lord! The Lord has spoken to me and He has spoken to me today! I am not speaking about stuff that I have been collecting, gathering up from books and libraries. God has spoken to me, and this is what He is saying.'? Do you not feel there is a need of men to come out with a message straight from God? What is being given? So much that is secondhand, so much tradition, so much long-established truth, but it is not alive and crucial in the hearts of the preachers. That is the situation. God must begin again. Samuel represents a new start, and a new start in himself.

A Personal Life With The Lord

And going hand-in-hand with that is this: Samuel represents a personal life with the Lord; not only a new start in himself, but a personal life with the Lord. The Lord did not let him off. He did not say to Eli: 'Go and tell Samuel. Samuel does not understand. He is a little child and you must teach him.' God called SAMUEL. It was one of those double calls of God which made it emphatically personal: "Samuel, Samuel". The only thing that Eli, with his long experience, could do was to tell Samuel to get personally into touch with the Lord - "You say, "Speak, Lord!". Samuel is just that. It is very simple, but it is a wonderful and mighty thing - a personal life with God. No one will bring God in power to meet and to change situations which are not according to His mind and satisfying His heart who has not a personal life with God. Have you a personal life with God, so that you are outgrowing a lot of things? There was a time when you picked up a spiritual book and got a lot of help from it. You now always think of that book as a wonderful book, for it meant so much to you. After a year or two you pull that book down again. Where has it all gone to? There is nothing to bite on! Where did you get all that help from? You have outgrown it. Yes, it belonged to a certain stage, but not now. I use that only as an illustration. Have you that personal life with God which means that you are outgrowing your spiritual clothes all the time? The clothes that were all right at one point are no use any longer. Have you a growing personal life with the Lord? Are you living upon the past - even of your own experience? Are you living upon meetings, upon conferences, upon addresses, upon someone else's help? All these things are good, but if you live on these things and they are the beginning and the end - well, conferences will soon fade out. You see, the very strength and value of a conference is that there are living people together, people who are moving with God and who are growing. It is a living thing. Is it like that with you? Are you sure you have a personal life with God, that God is speaking to you, dealing with you in your own life, that He has His hand upon you and He is doing something in you? It may be a painful thing - perhaps one or more of a whole lot of things - but you know that God is active in your life and is doing something.

On the one hand, He is undoing, He is weakening, taking away your own strength and stripping you of your own sufficiency, but, on the other hand, He is making Himself known. Oh, young people, let me beg of you to take this to heart. It is so wonderfully and gloriously possible for every one of you, the youngest and the simplest, the one who has the greatest complex of inferiority, to know the Spirit of God working and speaking in your own life so that you can say: 'The Lord would not allow me to do that. The Lord checked me up on that. I know the Lord spoke to me about that.' That is Samuel! It is simple, I say, but it is essential if God is going to do something effective. He must have a people walking with Himself. That does not admit of any independence and unrelatedness and freelance line of things where you say: 'God has spoken to me and I therefore brush aside all that others have to say about it and I recognize no

authority in the Church.' God will never do that. Because you have a personal walk with God, it does not mean that He makes you a law unto yourself spiritually. That is a misapplication of this principle. Well, do please take this to heart. Do have very definite dealings with the Lord. 'Lord, I must know You dealing with me, speaking to me.' There are times in your life when God allows you to do certain things, but as you move on with Him you know that no longer does He allow that. God overlooked it in the times of your ignorance, but now He is not accepting it, and you know it.

Fellowship With God In His Dissatisfaction

Samuel had a personal life with God. These two things - an absolutely new beginning in himself and a personal life with God - led to Samuel being a link with God in the Divine discontent, the Divine dissatisfaction and the Divine reaction. God was not satisfied. What does Eli know about that? What do the other people know about that? They are going on; they have no registration of God's dissatisfaction and discontent. God is not having it and is reacting, but they are insensitive to His feelings. That is the state of things. They simply go on with the form of things. Yes, they are having their services in the tent of Shiloh, they are still carrying on their round of meetings and sacrifices and priestly orders, but they are not troubled or disturbed with a disturbance of God in their hearts. They simply go on, and, I say again, there is a lot like that today. Samuel, because of the things which we have mentioned, came immediately into a sensitive, conscious, intelligent union with the dissatisfied heart of God, and that night in the temple God made known to him that dissatisfaction. It involved him in difficulties and in most painful courses. It was no easy thing for a young one like that to go and have to tell the old what God thought about the situation. But Samuel was brought so much into the heart of God that he was able to be perfectly loyal to God and hold nothing back. We will give Eli credit for this: that he compelled Samuel to tell him what God had said, and Eli accepted it, though tragically.

Ministry Out Of A Burdened Heart

But here the point is this: when God gets that foundation with Himself, then there begins to arise in those concerned a sense of things not being right. It is not just that outward discontentedness, "agin the Government" kind of thing - criticizing and judging and superiority. Oh, dear friends, anything of the pedestal judgment is foreign to what I am talking about. It is utterly in a different world. But there is that deep heart pang, the echo of God's disappointment, dissatisfaction, something that you feel God's Spirit is grieved about: it is suffering. It is out of that that ministry is born. It was from that time that Samuel began his ministry. When he came into heart union with God's anguish and disappointment and dissatisfaction, and that had its echo in his heart, then his ministry began. Effective ministry from God must spring out of something like that. Oh, you are not just going to MAKE addresses, no matter what the subject, however high the truth may be. It comes out of something that God has done inside and you have a burdened heart about the state of things; you have seen what God wants, and you have seen what exists, and out of a burdened heart ministry begins. You need not go and become an official in ministry for that. You have not to go into what is called 'ministry' and don a certain kind of attire and join some society. You will just be where you are until God moves you somewhere else. Samuel started there where he was, with his burdened heart. Later on he went in circuit from Ramah round in his ministry. The extension of ministry may come later, but it is just where you are that your ministry begins. Where you meet God, where you come into the personal experience of Him, where you have your own personal life with Him - that is where your ministry begins.

And what is your ministry? To be there in relation to God's desire, God's thought, as one standing against the tide of what is contrary to God, and even if that tide will break over you, you stand against it. That is the essence of ministry.

In that ministry Samuel became a bridge. He and his ministry were a bridge for God, a bridge for God's transition - Saul to David, from this kingdom to that, from this state of things to that. The first book of Samuel is called the book of transition, and that is what it is. You know the issue - the transfer of the kingdom from Saul to David. That is the issue of Samuel's life, and he and his ministry were that bridge over which God could pass, leaving one order behind and bringing in another. Yes, it may in our case only be in measure, in a limited way, but God needs the bridge to be the link - one side rejecting, and the other side standing for.

You see, all that just comprises this ground for God. You say: How is God going to work, move, commit Himself, come in? It is just on those lines. He must have a beginning which is a beginning with Himself and not a secondhand thing at all, not something of the past, not something from someone else, but with YOU from the 'A' of the alphabet of spiritual life and experience between you and God. He must have a walk with Him on your part. Yes, in fellowship with His people, having all that there is available of spiritual help in a related way, but, nevertheless, in the midst of it all, you are walking with God. It is only in that way that the Holy Spirit says the same thing and safeguards what He is saying to you, because He will say the same thing in all who are walking with Him and that will be a great safeguard. But the point is - a personal knowledge of and walk with God is His way; then coming steadily, quietly to know what God does not want, what He really does seek and what He really must have to be a link with His heart in that way. And then a bridge for God - that is, God is able to reach His object in measure through us individually and through us collectively. Oh, that it might be like that with the Church as a whole! Perhaps it is too much to expect. Because the whole is not like that, are we just going to capitulate and say that NOTHING can be like that? If Samuel had taken that attitude, it would be a very different story, but he did not. Samuel will be a bridge for God between all that is not, and what God could have.

Do take this to heart! I do not want to leave anyone out. I do not want to seem to be despising anybody. I am not doing that when I especially appeal to my young friends in this matter. Of course, it may be that some who have been on the way a long time need a word like this as a safeguard, or a deliverance from things, even their own experience becoming a tradition, something that was many years ago but is not right up to date with God. Young people, you can be saved from so much like that. You need not have many years of undoing. You can come so quickly into this if you will be very definite with the Lord. Say: 'Now, Lord, as for me, I want everything to be firsthand. I do not despise what I have been taught, what I hear, or people who know, but, Lord, I must have it firsthand, I must know it for myself. You must begin in my case as though I were the first that ever knew You. You must bring me into a life where I am just walking with You, where I am learning, where I am knowing You in a growing, progressive way. Then, getting that, You bring me into fellowship with Your heart, what You feel about the situation, to constitute me a servant, a useful instrument in relation thereto. Whether You want to call me out into full-time service or not is not the point; the thing is that I should be here standing for God and influencing the situation according to Your mind.' God commits Himself to that; that counts with God, and that has power with God.

The great thing said about Samuel is: "God... let none of his words fall to the ground" (1 Sam. 3:19). That is God committing Himself to Samuel. Just think of a man speaking and not one of his words falling to the ground, not one being in vain or ineffective! That is tremendous! The point is that God commits Himself, and that has power with God.

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