

INI - SDG

15th Sunday a. Trinity
September 12, 2010
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: I Sam 2:12-17. 22a. 23-25 ¹² *Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD. ¹³ And the priests' custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; ¹⁴ And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither. ¹⁵ Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. ¹⁶ And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force. ¹⁷ Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.... ²² Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. ²³ And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. ²⁴ Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD'S people to transgress. ²⁵ If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.*

Theme: "ICHABOD TO EBENEZER"

#3 - **THE DEPARTURE OF ISRAEL'S GLORY WAS FORESHADOWED BY A GROWING CONTEMPT FOR THE LORD'S HOUSE AND WORD**
- Adapted from a sermon (1965) by Pastor E. Schaller (1904-1971)

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

Remember how Hannah, wife of Elkanah, stood at the temple door praying for the gift of a child? Something happened that marred this picture of godliness and faith. Eli, the High Priest, seeing Hannah deep in prayer and watching her lips move as her heart spoke, came to her side and said: "**How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee!**"

A moment's reflection serves to make us realize that this startling interruption was an indication of a state of affairs in Israel. Why should a priest of God suspect, when he sees a humble woman bowed in prayer, that she might be drunk? How could he come upon such an idea? Had he had some sad experiences? What was going on?

At the outset of this series of sermon studies we anticipated the day in which the word ICHABOD was spoken over the church of the Old Testament: The glory is departed. From that point we went back to see wherein that glory consisted, namely in the devotion and faith of the homes of Israel in the true God and His Word. We observed this glory in the home of Elkanah and Hannah. And we wondered: How did it come to **Ichabod**, "in-glorious?"

The remark of Eli puts us on notice. Something is not right in Israel! We shall now look

into this matter as our text stands before us like the clouds of a gathering thunderstorm. The glory of Israel did depart. And here we shall see **THE DEPARTURE OF ISRAEL'S GLORY WAS FORESHADOWED BY A GROWING CONTEMPT FOR THE LORD'S HOUSE AND WORD.**

1. *The sons of Eli*, says our text, *were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord*. How fitting that it should have been the wife of one of these sons who, on her death-bed, first pronounced the sentence of Ichabod upon Israel; for here it had started, in her home and in the homes of her in-laws, although she herself may well have been a God-fearing wife. Her husband was a son of Belial, ...literally, worthless, vile, wicked. "*The sons of Eli were sons of wickedness.*" So God Himself characterizes them. Yet they were priests in the Lord's House!

At all times in the life of the visible church there are hypocrites and unbelievers in its midst who in their hearts despise the faith and life of true believers. There were wicked people in Israel before Hophni and Phineas were old enough to know what a priest was. But the presence of evil people in the church did not remove the glory. There is not and never has been such a thing on earth as a visible church body free of imperfections. But a true church deals with hypocrites and false brethren when they reveal themselves. Pastors and congregations have definite instructions from the Lord in this regard.

But Hophni and Phineas were living in contempt of God, His Word, and His temple **openly** and in the **crudest possible** manner; and they were priests! When it is said that they knew not the Lord, it means that they did not acknowledge the Lord in their hearts and defied Him by their conduct.

There, at the very altar where people troubled by their sins brought their offerings according to the command and promise of God and sought the highest gift from Him, namely forgiveness of their sins through the merits of the promised Savior – **there** these young priests, members of the rising generation in Israel, committed their abominations. They were not devout in the temple and wicked when they were off duty; moreover, in their official functions they openly showed their contempt for the holy relation between God and His people. Instead of accepting what was due them as priests by the Law of God which provided that His priests should live of the offerings, they turned God's House into a robbers' den. They came with grappling hooks and lowered them into the pots where the meat of the sacrifice lay. They took as much as they could hook of the best meat. If anyone complained, they threatened with their fists. This, and other shameful behavior not necessary to dwell upon here, disgraced the service of God's House. (v. 22)

The result may well be imagined. When the glory of faith was so eclipsed by the leaders in the sanctuary, the corruption soaked down through the church. Our text declares: "**Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.**" (v.17) People began to turn away in disgust from that which they had learned to revere while yet at their mother's knee. What kind of God is it that has such priests? They were offended - their faith caught in a death-trap. Hophni and Phineas poured the acid of their blasphemy over the hearts. Young people took them for heroes, laughed and followed their example.

If the obvious question is asked: Why didn't somebody do something about this? The text answers that somebody did. But it also reveals thereby what happens when the home breaks down. If the glory finally departed from Israel, it was not only because Hophni and Phineas were

satanic; it was because their father Eli also despised God and His Word.

In what fashion had Eli reared his sons? This becomes evident when we observe how he handled the terrible conduct of these young priests. The rottenness of their hearts left its odor throughout Israel. Eli couldn't ignore it. But how did he deal with it? He scolded a little. He gently urged them to remember how holy was the place where men were cleansed of their sins and made ready for the judgment. He pleaded with them not to destroy this way to salvation. The young men sneered at his admonition and went right on in their way. And Eli allowed them to continue!

Without doubt the pattern had been set early in their life by a father who *"honored his sons above the Lord.* (2:29). Eli had shamefully neglected his duty as a father and as a priest; and the boys had grown up doing much as they pleased. Now there would have been only one remedy remaining: That of unfrocking the apostate priests and punishing them to the full extent of the law. But the function of the leading home, as well as the leading office, in the land had broken down.

2. The question is whether there are also among us signs that foreshadow the coming of **Ichabod by revealing a growing disdain for the sanctity of God's Will, of His House, and of His Word.** We need to face this question forthrightly while there is still time!

It is not to be denied that in a growing number of homes the discipline of parents has broken down. Among grade school, as well as high school, students serious delinquencies are the order of the day, manifesting an evident lack of respect for superiors, for the rights of others, for what is proper. And these troubles do not arise merely with children from unchurched homes, but with baptized children in Christian congregations too.

We all know that any home may be afflicted with a wayward child. The best parents may suffer under such a cross. But such exceptions are not the causes of general disturbance. Our concern is occasioned by the ever-growing number of homes in which parents guide and rule their children as Eli did - with whining words, with empty scoldings, with inconsistency that betrays a lack of fixed standards, and a lack of love in discipline. Although the blood of parents should run cold at the sound of youngsters talking back to them, sassing them and even venturing to call them names, many seem able to do nothing more than protest. To achieve a measure of peace they may buy the rebellious child off with suckers and lollipops until the teeth rot and the stomach is ruined and, like Hophni and Phineas, the child has become a son of Belial. Those who have said that there are no problem children, only problem parents, are significantly approximating the truth.

How many parents do we not find who show no understanding of how to apply either the Law or the Gospel in the training of their children? The result is that a generation grows up, even in our churches, which does not truly know the Lord.

Though children may have learned the Catechism by heart, this offers little assurance, if homes fail by correct training to teach the children HOW to know and love their Savior. Where is the result of such failure more evident than in the attitude of children and young people toward their church, toward the services of God's House, toward the preaching of the Word? **When** we see youthful worshipers gossiping, whispering and laughing during the service; **when** their parents simply ignore this conduct or fail to look into the matter; indeed, **when** they make it a policy of sorts to leave at least one or two of the children at home every Sunday, and defend such a practice; **when** the pastor, looking the assembly over, must ask himself again and again

where all the children are who ought to be in the audience - **then** we are beginning to observe a contempt for the precious blessings of God's House which, if not checked, will certainly lead to **Ichabod**.

As we begin a new year of Sunday School, our text reminds us also of the importance of having God-fearing spiritual leaders. Notice we do not say "sinless," but rather God-fearing teachers. Men and women who love the Lord, His Word, the Gospel, and the souls entrusted into their care. Love for the Gospel is of utmost importance. We want our children to know about the length, the width, and the height of Jesus love. We want our teachers to be able to share with our children that Jesus loved them so much He was willing to die to free them from hell.

But when we install our Sunday School teachers we ask them not only about their willingness to teach, but also about their Christian conduct. We see in our text why this is so important. Hophni and Phineas not only defied the LORD in their hearts, but also in their conduct. And it was their shameful conduct that caused the congregation to despise the LORD and His offering. These children look up to their teachers as Christian role models. If they see and hear their teacher saying one thing but doing another, it will lead them to despise the LORD as well. We learn from our text how love for the Gospel and Christian conduct is so important for our Christian leaders.

It is necessary to speak frankly and openly to our people about this, as Eli ought to have talked to his sons and did not. Let us read again and ponder the words of Eli himself, the best of the statements he made: ***"If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?"*** What happens to us, he means to say, when there is no altar of a forgiving God left to seek - when the open Throne of Grace has vanished from our midst? What will we do when **Ichabod** comes? May God guard us from such sins and lead us to relish in His glory! Amen.