

Bible Notes

1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Background...

The books of Samuel (originally one book) were written (and possibly edited) between the Exile of the Jewish people in Babylon and (if edited) whilst in Exile; ie: between 621 and 561 BC. They are concerned with: Samuel's calling and ministry; the establishment of a monarchy under Saul; David's growing claim on the monarchy through exploits in battle and relationships with Saul's children Jonathan and Micah; David's eventual succession to the throne and reign; and the succession after David's death.

Passage...

The passage concerns the call of Samuel and his response. At first he mistakes the call of God for the voice of Eli but, once instructed in how to respond, he knows what to do. It's not unusual in literature from the ancient near East for people to perceive God speaking through dreams - in St Matthew both the Magi and Joseph hear God in this way. The call of Samuel - and his response - change him, Eli and Israel forever. Samuel goes from being a servant to being the prophet, Eli loses status and his sons are not to be anointed as prophets in his stead, Israel is changed through the intervention of Samuel during his ministry through the establishment of a monarchy and then the change in succession. Responding to God's call has dramatic consequences for ourselves, our families and our world. How is God calling you? What dreams do you have? Are you prepared to respond to that call?

Luke 10: 38-42

Background...

Scholars think that Luke was written around 80-85 AD at a time when the mission to non-Jewish people was increasingly successful. Luke's author writes, in chapter 1, that he compiled his Gospel from a variety of sources. Mark is one such source and another, shared with Matthew, is evident. Luke also had his own stories about Jesus which Mark and Matthew don't include in their Gospels - most notably the passages about: Gabriel and Mary; Mary and Elizabeth; the angels and shepherds and today's passage.

Martha is burdened by the demands of hospitality; Mary ignores them. Both are serving the Lord; one by preparing food and getting the home ready, the other by listening to him. Not surprisingly Martha gets impatient with Mary and wants help but Jesus reminds her that Mary is also serving by listening to him - indeed she has chosen the better part in listening to Jesus. This passage has been used to suggest that the appropriate role in church for women is that of Mary - to passively listen - but nowhere does Jesus suggest that Martha isn't also serving him. His reminder is that there are more ways to serve than Martha realises. Martha and Mary's work was necessary but Mary reminds us that first we have to listen to the Lord. We will each respond in different ways to what we hear and, sometimes, our response may attract the criticism of others, but first we have to listen.

Ephesians 4: 1-16

Background...

Ephesians is popular with its vision of the Church as united, maturing and loved. Until the last 200 years it was believed to have been written by Paul but since then the differences of style and the lack of Paul's normal list of people mentioned in his letters lead some to wonder if it was written by a disciple of his. Antiquity didn't have the same issues of copyright and authorship that we do - after all the Gospel of Matthew includes almost all of Mark without attribution! Ephesians was recognised as having authority by the early Church in part because its content allowed people to see God's truth shining through.

The passage...

The writer wants the church to attract comment for lifestyles based on the fruits of the Holy Spirit; his own position of a prisoner is not something to attract gossip or shame. Unity is at the core of this passage - flowing from the truth that we have one Lord, faith, baptism and God and father of all. This unity is at the heart of the purpose of the various offices in the Church which are mentioned - God has given various offices to the Church (now we'd think about Sunday School teachers, Elders, greeters, those who visit the sick, ministers etc) in order to equip the saints (that's you and me) for their works of service in the world. We're all called to various tasks in ministry - but that calling is to help the Church do its ministry and to reflect the unity that we find in Christ.