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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**Eli's Wicked Sons**

**1 Samuel 2-3**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just, I thank you for moms. I just thank you for the incredible affect that they've had, how your plan for this world has a huge role for mothers to play and we're grateful for the moms who have played it and played it well. We just continue to pray for the grace, strength and wisdom they each need to continue on doing that task and doing it well. And we also pray, Lord, as we are about to open up your book, that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would be again guiding us, this is a new book, kind of a new venture and we're grateful for the Spirit, your Holy Spirit being here. And so we pray you would accompany us as we open up this book and that you would give us the ability to make it of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Like I said, we're taking up our study of 1 Samuel. This is only our second installment. If you recall last time we introduced the book by pointing out that Israel was in a very sad state at the time that we get introduced to the prophet Samuel. Israel is

coming off a period known in the book of Judges where -- quote --  
*"everyone did what was right in their own mind."*

And 1 Samuel opens up and it opens up with a conflict and the conflict is between Samuel's mother Hannah, her husband Elkanah, and Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah. You see, in that culture at the time it was absolutely critical for wives to produce sons. Children were an absolutely critical part of a family's economic survival; and if a woman was barren, it was considered a shame, it was considered a disgrace. And if there was any hope for a family legacy to continue to be passed on, she didn't just have to produce children, she had to produce sons. Well Hannah, Hannah was barren on both counts. And Peninnah, her rival, well she had born many, many children and she'd actually become a thorn in Hannah's side and Hannah was despondent. Elkanah, her husband, he thinks Hannah should simply accept her fate noting that he feels he's as good to her as at least ten sons, which is far less than helpful.

Hannah pours out her heart before God at the temple, and Eli, the high priest, he sees her speaking without saying a word, and he's just, he assumes that she's babbling and that she's drunk. Hannah is actually promising that should God grant her her wish and open her womb, she will give her firstborn in service to God. God answers her prayer and she becomes pregnant with Samuel. And true

to her promise as we saw last time, she waits until he is weaned and then brings him fully dedicated to the temple in order to serve under Eli, the high priest. That's where we were last time.

Today's scripture, chapter 2, it first addresses the prayer that Hannah prayed when she brought little Samuel to the temple in order to give him in service to God. This is 1 Samuel 2:1. It says:  
*And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation."*

Understand, Hannah has just left her three-year-old Samuel at the temple and she's focused first and foremost not on the pain of that parting but on the God who has blessed her with a son. And she's rejoicing that God has given her victory over her rival Peninnah and she's making good on her promise. In verse 2, she says:

*"There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed."* Talk is cheap, Hannah says, but God still has the final word, and he has chosen to bless me.

She goes on to say in verse 4: *The bows of the mighty are broken,*

*but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world.*

So Hannah pours out ten different ways that life can change on a dime, all of which are in the hand of God. *The Lord brings down and the Lord raises up.* I mean, Hannah for years has been brought down and now she is celebrating the fact that God has brought her up. Verse 9, she says: *He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."* Then Elkanah went home to Ramah. *And the boy was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.*

"For not by might shall man prevail." Those were Hannah's words

and, you know, even today, many years later, the prevailing notion is that might is exactly what makes right. So Hannah declares in God's providence, no, it is God who makes right. So for many years, she's been pouring her heart out about her childlessness and now her patience has finally paid off. God has answered her prayer.

You know, right now, you might also be on the downside of a struggle like Hannah was. You have to understand how her prayer exactly expresses what she experienced. God has reversed her fortunes and she has now found that he's blessed her faithfulness. What I take from Hannah is not just the trust that she had but what is absolutely critical here is her patience.

I've said it before, I'll say it again, one of our greatest sources of pain as believers in Christ is the pace with which God answers our prayers. It is an eastern pace and we are a western culture. We want everything yesterday, but God simply doesn't operate that way. Hannah could say along with David the psalmist in *Psalms 40*, he says: *I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

Well, the text now shifts and it shifts from Hannah's prayer to the sad state of Eli's sons. Verse 12 says: *Now the sons of Eli were*

*worthless men. They did not know the LORD.*

How'd you like to be singled out by God himself as worthless? God says not only were Hophni and Phinehas worthless, they were unbelievers as well; but, you know, that's not supposed to happen in good, faithful families. But it did. It happened in Eli's family and it happens in many evangelical families as well.

One of the hardest truths for evangelicals to grapple with is the fact that salvation is not passed on genetically. The apostle Paul took great pains to explain to his fellow Jews that merely being the physical son or daughter of Abraham does not make you in the true sense a Jew. He said it's not what's in your DNA, it's what's in your heart. In *Romans 9:8*, Paul says: *This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*

Now it's true that God blesses the family structure and the likelihood of someone coming to know Christ is certainly increased if they're raised by godly parents, but there's absolutely no guarantees. You know, many an evangelical has heard and placed their trust in a very singular statement made in Proverbs. It's in *Proverbs 22:6*, we've all heard it: *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.* Well

there's a problem with that verse and the problem is that word "should" is not in the original. And what that Solomon was actually saying is if you trained up a child according to his way, that is according to his personality, according to his drives, according to his inclinations, then that training is likely to stick. And what we've translated that passage into is we think it means as long as you can get your infant children to make a commitment to Christ as children, then as adults they'll have some kind of guarantee that they'll not depart from it. Sadly that's not the case.

And this text that we're looking into this morning, it's actually a case in point. I mean, Eli was the high priest of Israel, he's someone that God communicated directly with, someone whom God gave the responsibility of raising up Samuel to; and yet when it came to his sons, to Phinehas and Hophni, there's no doubt they clearly departed from the truths that Eli had trained them in. As we'll see later on, Eli proves to be a very poor parent. And even further on down the road we're going to find out that Samuel himself turned out to be a poor parent as well and his children departed as well.

Now, I don't want to minimize in the slightest the importance of early childhood training in the things of God, I consider them

absolutely essential, but I can't tell you how many times I've spoken with parents of children who are far, far away from God and these parents feel confident that because their child made a profession of faith at age seven or maybe they were baptized that somehow they are still safely in the arms of Jesus. That's simply not the case. It's sons and daughters of God who belong to him, not grandsons or granddaughters. You will never get to heaven on the basis of your family's faith but only on your own. There is no genetic shortcut to the kingdom.

And again, I don't want to minimize the absolute importance of early childhood training in the things of God -- it makes a huge difference but God is sovereign. And for reasons known to him alone, some children wind up like Eli's children, they utterly reject the gospel, they wander far, far from the truth.

Now I firmly believe if they're -- if they're one of God's own, he's going to send the very hounds of heaven after them because God very clearly states in *John 10:27*: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."*



What I think this points to, though, is how incredibly important prayer is in bringing and keeping your child in the faith. I tell people all the time no one has access to the inside of your child's head but the child himself and God, and anyone who has a child who's walked away from the faith or who is not actively seeking the kingdom, you know how impossible it is to argue or cajole them back. You know God alone has that power and you access that power through prayer.

I frankly have no idea why we're not overwhelmed with people at our POPS meeting. Once a month we pray specifically as parents of prodigals for those who have wandered away from the faith, whether they're our children or our relatives or our friends. It's a time that we set apart just for prayer and you don't even have to leave your house. I mean, it's part of our corporate prayer Zoom meeting. It takes place on Wednesdays. And frankly almost no one avails themselves of it, yet I know there are lots and lots of people who desperately need prayer.

And I know most of you are praying privately as I'm sure Hannah did, but she saw corporate prayer as yet another tool in the toolbox and she went for it. So I just say please don't think that if your child made a profession of faith as a youngster that somehow or other that that seals the deal, that eventually he or

she is going to come back to the faith because, as we'll see in this case of Eli's sons this morning, it's simply not guaranteed. I mean Eli's sons, they just continued on the pathway of wickedness until God finally took them out.

Our text goes on to describe just some of Eli's sons wicked behaviors. This is verse 13. It says: *The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.*

You see, whenever a sacrifice was offered up, the premier portion first went to God, the next portion went to the priest, and finally another portion would go to the people. Well Eli's sons, they demanded the portion that was reserved for God himself. And it was literally a slap in God's face. God's certainly not interested in consuming animal flesh, but he's very much interested in the honor that is due him. And in the interest of getting a prime cut of meat, Eli's sons were literally, literally insulting God to his face.

Verse 15 says: *Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw." And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force."*

So again understand, the fat portion, that's the portion supposedly reserved for God. It was considered the premier part of the sacrifice. And Eli's sons cared so little about the God they were sacrificing to that they threatened violence if they were not given the premier portion. Verse 17 says: *Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.*

One of the reasons why Eli's sons' sins were so great is because they were in a position of leadership. They were priests as well. And there's a greater burden and responsibility on those that God has given to lead that caused God to say -- quote -- *"The sin of the young men was very great."* You know, it's bad enough for rank and file believers to treat the offering of the Lord with contempt, but when the priest does, well then he infects the entire assembly with that same level of contempt. And knowing that leaders are going to bear the greater responsibility, I found it -- I find it

astounding today how many leaders act just like Eli's sons, treating their ministry and their responsibilities that God has given them actually with contempt.

There's a publication called "Ministry Watch," it comes out once a month, it looks at the evangelical church, looks at it nationwide and it reports on many ways that people in positions of leadership, people who should certainly know better are treating the Lord and his church with contempt.

I just looked at this month's. This is just a couple of headlines from this month. It says, "Student Ministry Worker Tied to Arkansas Church Arrested for Sexual Abuse of Minor." There's another one: "Scandal Ridden Ga. Christian School Stripped of Accreditation." And then an article saying: "Three women filed suit against the Southern Baptist Convention and Champion Forest Baptist Church, The lawsuit claims the SBC and Champion Forest 'invited, encouraged, and enabled a predator to be part of their trusted inner circle.'"

These are not unusual unfortunately, I mean, how many times have you seen people exploit the gospel for power, for money, for sex? We're thousands of years removed from Eli's sons but the effect is no different than it was back then. You know, if you treat God and

his temple with contempt, you only sow that seed. You also spread the attitude that God's worship is contemptible. I mean how many people look at the hypocrisy and the greed and the deception that they see occurring in the church and conclude that this is what Christianity is all about? What a contrast between Eli's wicked sons and the little boy Samuel who spent his life in the temple learning and growing and ministering even as a young child.

Verse 18 says: *Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy clothed with a linen ephod. And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the LORD." So then they would return to their home. Indeed the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.*

So God had clearly opened up Hannah's womb as she presented Elkanah with three sons and two daughters. I mean, God's not to be outgiven by Hannah. But the contrast between Samuel and Eli's wicked sons continues.

Verse 22 says: *Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that*

*his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.*

You see, Eli has been an ineffectual parent for many, many years, and the result is his sons have gone from bad to worse not only demonstrating contempt for God's sacrifice but now they're preying on the women who served at the temple.

You know, I wish I could say this was some kind of horrifying aberration but even now today we often see headlines describing religious leaders taking sexual advantage of those who are in their care. It says: *And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?"*

I mean Eli's trying to tell his sons what desperate shape they are in, he says it's one thing to have a dispute with another man and you call God himself in to judge between the two of you, but if your dispute is first and foremost with God, then there's no other man you're going to be able to bring in to act as an intermediary. See, the problem is Eli's sons, they have no fear of God

whatsoever. In fact they consider themselves untouchable. It says: *But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.*

Now some folks have a real problem with this text, first because they interpret it as saying that God took away from Eli's sons their freedom to choose, I mean, after all God says it was his will to put them to death. Can they not say that their debauchery was not their fault because, after all, it was the will of God. First you have to understand, all of us operate, we all operate constantly under the grace of God and with that grace given to every single man and every single institution throughout the entire world believer and non believer or not, we call it common grace, without that grace the world would implode upon itself. Eli's sons not only had that common grace that God extends to everyone but they also had a unique grace that put them at the center of the temple and as sons of Israel's leading religious teacher. That was a special grace that they just chose to ignore.

And when a man or a woman rejects the grace of God, there are always consequences. And part of those consequences include what we call the hardening of one's heart. And we saw this happen with Pharaoh in Egypt. We saw time and time again God used frogs, he used flies, he used darkness, he turned water into blood in order

to convince Pharaoh to let his people go. But over and over we read as we read in *Exodus 8:15*: *When Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.* And then in the end we see Pharaoh with his heart already hardened not just by himself but now by God as well as judgment for his attitude. *Exodus 10:1* says: *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them."*

Well, Eli's sons no doubt went through the same process. Instead of being moved by their father's warnings, they simply hardened their hearts. They ignored the evidence. And it's a process that many of us today have been witness to. See, sin always presents a glide path that makes it easier and easier to commit, and the unthinkable easier and easier to consider and then to undertake. In the case of Eli son sons it went from stealing from the Lord's sacrifices to sexually assaulting the women of the temple.

But this is not confined to ages past. In fact we're seeing the effects of it in the collapse of our culture right now today. Things that were considered absolutely out of bounds are now routinely accepted from the culture of death that sees abortion as something worthy to brag about to the very idea of drag queen story



hours that libraries now feature men suggestively dressed as women foisting suggestive exploits on children. I mean, that's clear evidence of the hardening of the heart not just individuals but of an entire culture.

And so we need to ask that question. The question is who's responsible for the death of Eli sons? It was God who said, "*They would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.*" So now was God's will the cause of their death or was it in an effect of their behavior? Well, God putting them to death was clearly an effect and every effect has to have a cause and the cause and the circumstances was their advancing wickedness.

The classic description of this process of God hardening the heart of someone who's hardening their own heart, it ends up with that person being of a mind that has no desire whatsoever to turn toward God, and that's a mind that God refers to as debased. This is not something that God actively imposes on someone as opposed to him removing his grace and letting man's natural inclinations prevail literally as a judgment on sin. And the result is God removing a grace that no one's entitled to in the first place and allowing the natural state of man to rise to the top.

You see, it wasn't God's will that Eli's sons would become wicked; that was their own choice. God's judgment never involves active inducements to sin but rather the judgment of the removal of grace that might have prevented more sin. It happens to individuals like Pharaoh, like Eli's sons, and it happens to cultures just like it's happening to ours.

If you want to understand the nuts and bolts of why our culture is collapsing, you need look no further than Romans 1 which actually gives us a detailed process of a public culture descending into wickedness by virtue of God's judgment. And again just -- just like with Eli's sons, God's not making the culture wicked, rather God is allowing its inherent wickedness to come to the fore as a judgment against sin.

In Romans 1, one sin is presented as arguably the greatest sin of all. It's not homosexuality, it's not greed, it's not even the murder of innocents. It's far more basic than that. It's the sin behind virtually every other sin. And this is how God describes it and the process in *Romans 1:18*. He says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* This is the primary sin that virtually fosters all other sin. It's the suppressing of truth in unrighteousness. And in this case God is

stating very clearly that he holds men responsible for repressing the truth of creation itself.

You know, I cringe every time I see a commercial talking about nature like it was God. Now, oh, look at the loveliness of nature, look at what nature is doing, nature's doing this, nature's doing that. It's clearly a case of taking God out and sticking the word "nature" in for the express purpose of removing God from the process. Nature is God's creation, it's not a thing in and of itself, it's not an entity in and of itself, and yet people are so dead set against glorifying God and giving him his due that they can't even bring themselves to say, "Look what God has done."

And worse yet, and this is the sad part about it, it's not happening on a conscious level. People don't realize that they're suppressing the truth in unrighteousness because it's come so much a part of who we are that instead of worshiping the creator, we worship his creation which is something that God finds appalling.

And God goes on to say what happens when a culture outright rejects the truth of who God is. He goes on to say in verse 19: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the*

*creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

You know, I had a conversation just literally three days ago with a young man, long conversations, one of my neighbors, he comes up and he says, "Are we going to have our religious discussion?" He comes up usually once a year, and said, "Yeah, yeah, let's do that." So we meet and we talk. He's a devout atheist.

But during the conversation I asked him if I could read these verses to him. And I said, "Do you see what God is saying here? What he is saying is how can you stand on my green grass looking up at my trees, breathing my air, feeling my sun on your face and claim that nature did it?" I mean, if you believe in naturalistic evolution, which he does and most people do, you believe that all of these things happened through chance and time, guided and designed by nothing. Then you believe that the author of virtually everything is nothing. On its surface alone that is insane.

God says when you suppress that truth, a truth as basic as God's authorship of his own creation, you will pay a price. And it's not thunder, lightning or earthquakes, instead it's God removing the grace that would have prevented you from going deeper and deeper into that particular level of insanity. It's what God did eye

Eli's sons. I'm sad to say it's what he's doing with us.

Verse 21 says: *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.*

Now if you remember God defines the word "fool" very specifically in *Psalm 14*. This is what it says: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* And again what God is saying is deny God's existence, deny his existence and his creation and you will pay a price. And it goes on to say: *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

You know, it was G. K. Chesterton who said: "For when we cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing, we worship anything."

We're the crown of God's creation. We're created in his image for the express purpose of bringing honor and glory to God through worship. It's built into us. It's a drive we cannot ignore; and if we suppress it, it just finds expression some other way.

And not for nothing, I think you can make the case that the focus of worship in our culture, the actual place where national

corporate worship takes place is in professional sports. Heath Thomas, interesting enough in his commentary on 1 Samuel on this very book, this is where I discovered his observation about sports, this is what he says.

He says: "People go crazy over sports. They (no, really, we) dress up, scream and shout, and do things we normally wouldn't do in everyday life. Think about going to a favorite team's football or basketball games, for instance. People enter into the gates of the sporting arena singing their teams' praises. They watch the warm-ups to get excited about the game. They give one another 'peace' and high fives as they anticipate the event. They sing songs (the national anthem or the official team songs), watch special rituals (coin toss or tip-off), and then participate in the spectacle of the game. If you think about it, for many, sporting events are similar to religious services. The sporting arenas are like houses of worship, sacred spaces, and holy places. At least that is how we can treat them. Everything feels like a worship service. The reason sporting events carry so much power and influence for modern people (and indeed American Christians!) is because they give a place where we can express our need for worshipping something greater than ourselves. Do you doubt that? Well, just take note of how we do things in a sporting event that, at least one would think, we would do in a worship service (but

often don't!): expressing emotion, praising, lamenting, and no doubt lots of prayers!" (Thomas, Heath A.; Greear, J.D.. Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 83-84). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

I've often said, I believe the Super Bowl halftime show is the largest corporate worship event in the entire country. I mean it celebrates sex, celebrity and music, the three things that our culture worships the most.

And, you know, understand, I don't think God is saying that professional sports is evil. You know, Paul even refers to athletes. He uses athletes to speak about spiritual discipline. In *1 Corinthians 9*, he says: *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.* So I don't think God is making a blanket condemnation of professional sports, but I am certain though that he's opposed to sports taking the place of the worship that God is entitled to.

And if you just look at the names of professional sports teams, you can find a startling connection between the names of those teams and what God says about our worship.

Ask yourself the question, do we worship mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things in our professional sports? And in answer we say, well, let's see. For mortal man we've we have the Kansas City Chiefs and we've got the Dallas Cowboys and we've got the Patriots, the Vikings, the Raiders, the Packers, and the Texans. And when it comes to birds well we've got Falcons, Ravens, Eagles, and Cardinals. And when it comes to animals we've got Panthers, Bears, Broncos, Jaguars and Colts. And even when it comes to creeping things we've got Hornets and Diamondbacks.

Understand, I'm not trying to say that it's wrong to enjoy professional sports. What I'm trying to point to is how our need for worship has been transferred from God to other things. And that happens when the truth about God and his creation is suppressed in unrighteousness.

I mean three times in this passage we hear of God giving people up. That's not God actively inducing them to do evil, it's God removing his protection and allowing the evil within to bubble up. In verse 24 it says: *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.* And again, God gave them up is very



different than God causing folks to dishonor their bodies. It means that God has removed his grace that was preventing the impurity thus allowing it to burst forth.

Verse 26 says: *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

Again this is the second level of God giving up an individual or culture. And understand, homosexuality is not the cause of God's wrath, rather it's an effect. The cause is the suppressing of truth. Verse 8 says: *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.*

The third and the final case of God giving up a culture is to a debased mind. That's a mind that can't think straight. That's a mind that no longer arrives at logical conclusions, a mind that looks straight at truth and is able to deny it or worse yet to proclaim truth as a function of an individual's autonomy so that all truth becomes your truth, my truth, our truth, their truth.

If you ever wonder why logic and reason don't seem to matter at all any more, look no further than verse 28: *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.* That's exactly where we find ourselves today. And it's nothing new. It's where Eli's sons found themselves, and yes, at that point it was clearly God's will for them to perish. But, you know, God says the same thing in his conclusion to Romans 1. In verse 32 he says: *Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

So the answer to the question did Eli's sons deserve to die is, absolutely. The question is do all of us deserve the exact same fate? And, again, the answer is absolutely. God says in *Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death.*

But thank God it doesn't end there. See, that death sentence has been on mankind since the fall in the Garden of Eden, but God so loved this world that he took on human flesh and lived among us flawlessly so that he could offer up himself and his perfection as a substitute for our sin. And when Jesus rose from the dead, he had proven that his perfect life had ended in a perfect sacrifice that had ransomed and rescued his sheep. And we have the

incredible privilege of being those sheep. We have the privilege of bringing them the full story that the whole of that verse tells. This is what *Romans 6:23* in its totality says: *For the wages of sin is death but -- what a glorious but -- but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

See, we've been blessed beyond measure. We hear his voice. We follow him. And he's told us quite clearly what he expects of us. He said this in *Matthew 28*: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Like I said before, those fields outside that door, they are ripe for the harvest. There are loads of people surrounding us who are absolutely bewildered at a culture that's collapsing because they have no idea why it's happening. You and I have the privilege to tell them why and to tell them what their only hope is and that is the Lordship of Christ. Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you that we are just like Eli's sons, deserving of death. The wages of sin is death but thank God you sent your Son, thank God that he lived a perfect life and took it to the cross so*

*that he could ransom us for that death penalty. And Lord, I pray that you would give us a holy boldness and an ability to share that good news. There are so many people that can't understand why logic doesn't work any more, why people's thinking is so different, why what such appallingly bad things get trotted out as reasonable. Lord, it's the product of a debased mind. That's the mind of our culture. That's the field that we get to operate in. We get to respond to that debasement with the absolute truth, love and beauty of Jesus Christ. Give us the ability and give us the opportunity, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*