

== IN SEARCH OF A KING ==

Understanding 1 Samuel

Week Commencing 19th September 2022

Notes for next Sunday's sermon covering 1 Samuel 16-17, "The king who saved his people".

DAY 1: Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Last week, we saw how the tragedy of Saul's failure distressed the prophet Samuel. Do you recall 15:11? "*Samuel was angry and he cried to the LORD.*" Saul may have been able to win battles, rally the nation, provide some political stability, but he disobeyed God. He was therefore an unmitigated disaster as a leader. How can you live as God's people with a king who is disobedient to God? Saul would suffer from his failure, and Samuel would weep as a result. Why? Samuel knew that Saul's failure was a failure of faithfulness to the Lord who had done such great things for his people.

So Samuel wept – just as Jesus wept for Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37) and the Apostle Paul had great sorrow and anguish for his people (Romans 9:2). Each grieved because of the consequences of sin, particularly on the people of God. If you love God and his word, you will care deeply about sin and its terrible impact.

And yet, in v16:1, the Lord rebuked Samuel for his grief. The tragedy of Saul's failure was real, but it was not everything. Samuel was not to be so overwhelmed by the calamity that he failed to see God's hand in it nor God's purpose beyond the disaster: "*How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel?*" (See 15:26.) Now the time had come for Samuel to recognise the rightness of God's judgment. It was time to turn from his grief to God's future.

When the Lord instructed Samuel to fill his horn with oil and be on his way, he sent him to Jesse in Bethlehem because literally, '*I have seen among his sons for myself a king*'. Note that he said, 'for myself'. Samuel had referred to the king they demanded as *your* king, whom *you* had chosen for *yourselves* (1 Sam 8:18). The Lord had told Samuel to make a king *for them* (1 Sam 8:22). Saul was described as 'the king who *you* have chosen, for whom you have asked . . . *your* king' (1 Sam 12:13, 25). The people acknowledged that they had asked for a king *for ourselves* (1 Sam 12:19). While it is true that God retained his sovereignty over this development, Saul was appointed because of the people's demands for themselves.

Now, however, there would be a different kind of king . . . a king for myself. This was previewed back in ch 13 when Samuel announced, 'the Lord has sought out a man *after his own heart* to be prince over this people (13:14). And so, the Lord chose David – an unlikely candidate from a human point of view but anointed for one reason only: the Lord willed it. Something very important happened in the little town of Bethlehem that day. It was not publicly known and even those who witnessed it would have little idea of its significance. They certainly would not have realised that what happened on that day in Bethlehem would eventually lead to another day for which the little town of Bethlehem gained its lasting fame (see Matthew 2:1-6, Luke 2:1-7)!

DAY 2: Read 1 Samuel 16:14-23

In 16:13, we read that *the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power*. The Spirit and breath of God is God himself. By his Spirit, God accomplished his purposes in his creation and for his people. His Spirit sustained the leadership of God's people so what the writer tells us now about Saul is remarkable. The immediate sequel to the Spirit coming upon David is that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him. The Lord himself abandoned Saul because Saul had abandoned the Lord. Saul was no longer the one equipped by God for the leadership of Israel.

The evil spirit from the Lord symbolized that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul. The precise form of Saul's suffering can only be guessed, but his later behaviour suggested a severe mental or emotional disturbance. In finding someone to play music to relieve Saul, Saul chose for himself the very man God had chosen for himself!! Note the telling description when the servant finds David – (v18) – *and the LORD is with him*.

Now the events described in 16:14-23 may have come after the dramatic events of ch 17 – which would explain how Saul knew David's name and family and occupation. Nevertheless, the irony here was that *Saul*

asked *David* into his court. The one to whom the kingdom is given will now come to the aid and comfort of the one from whom it had been taken! All this set up the drama of the following chapters, though neither David nor Saul could have seen what would flow from this appointment. For now, David was the one who could deal with the 'evil spirit' brought on by the departure of the Spirit of the Lord, because, of course, the Spirit of the Lord was in David. The Spirit of the Lord would descend on another born in Bethlehem in due course (John 1:32-24). And that one was both Lord and Christ who came to judge the whole world and save those who belong to him! Praise God for his saving purposes and for raising up David and the One in the line of David, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

DAY 3: Read 1 Samuel 17:1-24

One of the Bible's most famous stories is the marvellous and unforgettable tale of David and Goliath. This account, however, takes us to a difficult moment in Israel's history. The leadership of the nation was in serious trouble. Because of disobedience, Saul was rejected as king and God chose a new king, yet secretly. So we'll need to note carefully the context of this critical period in Israel's history.

Ch 17 begins ominously: *the Philistines gathered their forces for war*. Israel had forgotten that God had faithfully delivered them from their enemies. Indeed, only when they abandoned *him* did their enemies gain the upper hand as so often happened in the book of Judges and in 1 Sam 4:1-11. Whenever they turned back to the Lord and cried out for help, he delivered them.

While we can't explore all the detail here, it's important to note that the threat to Israel posed by this giant of a man is very real. The power that stood against the people of Israel was truly terrifying. It would be *astounding* if anyone could deliver Israel from this monstrous threat.

We too know very real threats that could intimidate us. There are terrifying and spiritual forces against us, tempting us to fear. And yet, just as Hannah proclaimed back in Ch 2 that, "*the adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces*", so too can we be confident, as Paul was in Romans 8:32, that "*if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him, graciously give us all things?*"

DAY 4: Read 1 Samuel 17:25-58

David heard – v23b. Just two words in the Hebrew. Few cared or noticed, but this was the turning point in Israel's fortunes and therefore, in world history. David heard Goliath's now twice daily tirade. While Saul didn't appear to have any plan of attack against Goliath, David was indignant that Goliath should defy (or mock) *the armies of the living God*. He spoke of taking away the mockery from Israel, rather than being shattered by it. He saw, as no one else saw, that this uncircumcised Philistine, this pagan worshiper of dead gods, was mocking not only Israel, but Israel's God, who alone was the *living God*. The Spirit-filled young man named David saw Goliath differently. His brothers were unimpressed by the apparently presumptuous bravado, but word spread about what David was saying and it was not long before a report reached Saul. As the failed king met the king-elect, it is astonishing to see how David took charge of the meeting. *Let no one lose heart* (or let no man's heart fail). *Your servant will go and fight*. Outrageous! Preposterous! These words came from a small, skinny youth, too young to leave home. For this kid to tell the king that he need not be afraid anymore because he (David) would fight the Philistine was either stupid or audacious or . . . something else? *Do not be afraid. I will fight for you*. We're reminded of these same words of the angels to the shepherds – do not be afraid; the baby lying in a manger will save you from your enemies. Crazy!

Saul was incredulous. But David defended his claim on the basis of the way he defended his sheep. Ultimately David pointed to his strong and only hope – "*the LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine*." David saw things this way, because he was the anointed one on whom the Spirit of the Lord had permanently come. As David and the Philistine eventually approached one another, Goliath only saw as man sees and was filled with contempt. The same words were used as when Samuel first anointed David (16:12b), but now they were seen as signs of weakness, inexperience and vulnerability.

Because God was with David, the disaster against a real threat in the form of a Giant did not happen. Because the Lord God had chosen a king for himself (16:1) on whom the Spirit of the Lord had powerfully come (16:13), it became clear that *he* was about to fight the Philistine (17:32). David came in the name of the Lord; the Philistine mocked the Lord; and consequently, he would be destroyed. With David's victory, the world knew who God was. And this points us forward to the victory over sin and death that Jesus won. Jesus has magnificently overcome the enemy and we rejoice – and rest – in all he has won for us. The victory of Christ is breathtaking news. The demands of God's law have been met and the power of death has been broken. That is our confidence every day. Thanks be to God!

(Notes prepared using John Woodhouse's 1 Samuel commentary. Some sentences and phrases used directly.)