

== IN SEARCH OF A KING ==

Understanding 1 Samuel

Week Commencing 5th September 2022

Notes for next Sunday's sermon covering 1 Samuel 9-12, "The rise of Saul".

DAY 1: Read 1 Samuel 9

We have seen that 1 Samuel deals with leadership – albeit in a complex and unusual way. The book first recounts a turbulent period in the history of Israel during which the leadership of that nation went through a radical change: from the occasional and unpredictable *judges* (of whom Samuel was the last and arguably the greatest) to a *monarchy*, which will eventuate in the rule of the great King David. However, the issue that was being worked out through these rocky days in Israel was the *leadership of God's people, Israel*. What kind of leaders did *God* want his people to have? What should God's people look for from a leader?

In 1 Samuel 8 we saw the elders and then the people demand that Samuel give them a “king like all the nations” (1 Sam 8:15, 19, 20). Samuel's old age apparently motivated their demand, as did the disastrous conduct of his sons and the ongoing threat from their enemies. While we might feel some sympathy with their concerns, Samuel was not pleased with their proposal. In fact, it was *evil* in his eyes. He saw it as a rejection of the Lord as their king, the One who had called them to be *unlike* all the nations! Yet, God was apparently willing to give them their king – even though it'd be a long process before that happened.

Let's consider, too, the chapter as a whole, and not just the details. Saul did not know what was going on (V27). Three days earlier, Saul had set out to search for donkeys and was about to encounter *the word of God*. We will soon see in the following chapters that he would never be the same again. This strange story was pointing to this reality: that the word of God would change *everything* for Saul and for Israel.

It's worth pausing at this point to reflect on God's word and how the Bible teaches us that God speaks. Through his word, God expresses and enacts his purpose. God rules things by his word (see Heb 1:3). By his word, creation was brought into being (see Gen 1:14, Psalm 33:6, Heb 11:3). Jesus Christ himself is God's word that became flesh (John 1:14), and the good news (Gospel) about Jesus is now God's word to the world (Col 1:25). In other words, we see the significance of the events recounted in 1 Sam 8 only when we see that the word of God was at the heart of it all. God said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king” (1 Sam 8:22a). Then he said, “tomorrow . . . I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin” (1 Sam 9:16). Everything that happened in this chapter was according to God's word. In due course, Saul would become Israel's king by the word of God, and he would be required to listen to and obey the word of God. So even in the seemingly mundane details of the story, God was sovereign. God was making Saul king, by his word and rule over the mundane details, appointing Saul to be Israel's leader. Each act reminds us that, in all things, God's purpose for us will be achieved under Jesus Christ's rule (see Romans 8:28-30).

DAY 2: Read 1 Samuel 10

On the surface of things, this story might appear dull and ordinary. But the background of 1 Sam 8 suggests otherwise, when God's people asked for a king. When we meet a young man named “Asked For” (1 Sam 9:2), we suspect there is actually more going on than lost donkeys! Soon, the donkey chaser finds himself in the presence of Samuel, the prophet whom God had told to make a king for Israel. Saul was still unaware of all that had led to this meeting, but the word of God would now be made known to Saul through Samuel. When Samuel said, “*Has not the Lord anointed you leader?*” he was indicating that although Samuel did the pouring, the Lord had anointed him. For now, though, this “word of God” was a secret only Saul and Samuel shared.

From that point, three signs were given to Saul, each of which was fulfilled: 1. The assurance was that God was behind all the events of that day and that the Lord was with him; 2. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power; and 3. *God* changed Saul's heart. We should note that God was calling the shots here every step of the way, for he indeed remained Israel's true King.

It is God's kingdom that will prevail to the end. Do you see what this says to our strategies, schemes, plans, training, abilities and leadership models? The kingdom of God must and will prevail! Some will be unimpressed and despise the ways of God's kingdom; they will seem foolish and weak to them. Indeed, it will only be those whose hearts God touches who will yield all human power and cleverness to the Word of God. Our confidence that the Kingdom of God will come rests not on our efforts to transform societal structures into some notion of God's Kingdom. Instead, our hope lies entirely in the One whose kingdom it is, who will usher in his new heavens and earth with unstoppable power!

DAY 3: Read 1 Samuel 11

In this chapter, we find a graphic example of Old Testament warfare that helps us see how our Gospel endeavours won't be easy. At the end of Ch 10, Saul had not yet done anything as king. Everyone had gone home as Samuel had instructed. Meanwhile, across the Jordan River some 65kms northeast of Saul's home in Gibeah, there was a crisis. The menacing Ammonites from the east had put the people of Jabesh-gilead in grave danger. In their fear, they requested a treaty with Nahash the Ammonite, asking him to become their king. This was not just a king 'like the nations'; he was one of the nations' kings. But what about Saul who had claimed to be Israel's king? It seems they assumed he could not save them because he was busy farming! God, however, intervened (v6) in what could be called "God-inspired rage" directed at the threat to the people of Jabesh-gilead by Nahash and the Ammonites. The message he sent (v7a) was shocking, but marked a new beginning. Now there *was* a king in Israel. What difference would that make? The people gathered together as the dread of the Lord fell upon them and a remarkable victory ensued.

We are reminded in the New Testament that we, too, are at "war." But we must remember that our struggle is *not* against flesh and blood (Eph 6:10-12). We do not take the gospel into a happy marketplace, selling an idea to eager customers. Instead, we must remember that ours is a spiritual battle against unbelief, godlessness, pride, ignorance and sin. The proclamation of the gospel has always been at war with the spiritual enemy and his forces. But our weapons are righteousness and love. Thankfully, we *know* that the appointed King has already won! What God did through Saul that day pales compared to what God did when King Jesus died on the cross. Consequently, we enter a "battle" only because of Christ's decisive battle. The blood has been shed. The enemy has, in fact, fallen, and we do not need to be afraid. Just as Saul said, (v13), "*This day the LORD has rescued Israel,*" we know that Jesus Christ has *disarmed the powers and authorities, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross* (Col 2:15). The God who wrought salvation in Israel that day long ago is doing it still!

DAY 4: Read 1 Samuel 12

The conflict we see in Samuel, we see in today's culture. It is the conflict between the kingdom of God and human power. Israel had rejected the kingdom – and kingship – of God for the power of a human king. At the end of Ch 11, however, we see the climactic moment in the establishing of Saul as Israel's first king. They confirmed Saul as King *in the presence of* (or 'before') *the Lord*. In other words, they brought the human power of King Saul *before* the heavenly King. What did that mean for Saul to be made king 'before the Lord'? Chapter 12 provides the answer: Samuel's address to 'all Israel' was a moment of national significance. Samuel presented the people with a king as an act of obedience to God. The resultant king was both the king they had chosen (v13) but also him whom the Lord had chosen (v13b).

Samuel's speech would cast a devastating light on their demand for a king: his first point (in vv2b-5) addressed the old style of leadership that had served Israel well. No one could deny it. The problem had not been with the model, but with the people's ongoing rebellion. The Lord had given them over to their enemies, and the Lord had saved them from their enemies, through Moses, Joshua and the Judges including Samuel. Their request for a king was a failure to trust God's covenant promises that he would continue to be committed to them.

In renewing the kingship here, God was setting down the terms of this new model of leadership. They would have a king, but he would not be like the kings of the nations because he would be dependent on God, on his word and on his prophet Samuel who would continue to teach Israel and pray for Israel (vv22-23). And in response to the great things God had done for them, they were to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all their heart (v24).

The kingdom of God has now come into this world more powerfully than in Samuel's day! Jesus is the Lord's anointed who has saved us, loved us, taught us and still prays for us. When we realize all God in Christ has done for us, how can we not surrender all to him?

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