



1 SAMUEL 9:1-12:25

Fear the Lord and Serve Him Faithfully

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER – MAY 14, 2017 (AM)

INTRODUCTION

This covers most of the account we just read. We meet a young man named *Saul* in the opening verse, and we hear his ancestry four generations back, so his lineage is important. And all this is bracketed by his tribal affiliation: he's a *Benjaminite* (1). And he's a pretty striking young man appearance-wise (2)—(*tall*), dark, and *handsome* we might say!

Last Sunday, as our account of life in Israel during the action-packed, latter days of the Judges (~1370-1050) was coming to an end, we saw the *people* responding to Samuel's warning about what it would mean for them to have a *king like all the nations* (8:19-22). He would *take* their very best—children, servants, animals crops, and lands—then he'd tax them to pay for the use and care and upkeep of all those possessions! (8:12-18)

But the people's response was still: 8¹⁹... *"No! But there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.* The notably ironic part of this was that this statement followed on the heels of an account where *God* defeated their enemies with a thunder clap, then just let His *people* clean up afterward, military-wise. But Israel still wanted a *king*. And they were going to demand a *king!*

Then, as great story-tellers do, as c.9 opens were introduced to a new and quite interesting character whom we're pretty confident will become a key player in the story. But at this point, we don't know. Let's follow this story through four scenes. Then I want to make one broad observation and one targeted one.

PRELUDE TO A KING – 9:1-27

This covers most of the account we just read. We meet a young man named *Saul* in the opening verse, and we hear his ancestry four generations back, so his lineage is important. And all this is bracketed by his

tribal affiliation: he's a *Benjaminite* (1). And he's a pretty striking young man appearance-wise (2)—(*tall*), dark, and *handsome* we might say! *Saul* went searching for his father's *donkeys*—interesting that he was out searching for what were known to be the beasts of a *king*—yet, he *found much more than he bargained for!* (Leithart 72-73) Even more interesting, though, is that in these days of the Judges when *everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (Jud.17:6; 21:25), we find *Saul* obeying his *father* without question, and keeping at it longer than even his *father* may have wanted (5). Young *Saul* also seems to be an honorable man.

And more interesting yet, before he gives up on his assignment and heads home, he agrees to consult a *man of God* (10) to seek the whereabouts of his father's *donkeys*. The *young women* they meet on their way into town seem more than willing to help them, but I'm sure *Saul* was used to that!

The next person they meet is *Samuel* (14). And it's now that learn that *Saul* was indeed a special character. *God* had prepared *Samuel* to meet *Saul* (15-18), saying: *This is the one you shall anoint... to be prince over my people Israel* (16). Notice, not *king*. *The Lord* is *King* over his *people*. And their human *king* here is called a *prince*. And ¹⁷*when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord told him, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people."* *He it is who shall (govern)*, essentially. Again, the word *rule* is carefully avoided. That's *God's* job (Baldwin 96).

From there, we heard in our reading how *Samuel* honored *Saul* (22-24). He let *Saul* know that his *donkeys* had been found, and that he would have a special assignment in *Israel* (20, 27).

PROCLAMATION OF A KING – 101-27

10₁ *Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, "Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies.* For a young man from *Saul's* background (cf. 9:21), these had to be amazing words to hear! But *Samuel* continued on to give him very specific instructions about three groups of people he would meet on his way home (2-5), all of which would serve to confirm for him that *Samuel's* words were true. The third was a *group of prophets* (5). And *Samuel's* words regarding this meeting were amazing! ⁶*Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. Saul will be transformed!* His heart will be changed to prepare for his assignment from *the Lord!*

7 Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, do what the Lord directs you to do (Baldwin 98), for God is with you. 8 Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.” 9 When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart. And all these signs came to pass that day. In short, God did not withhold anything Saul that he needed to be successful as king in Israel, physically or spiritually. But there are several moments in this story that just seem odd. The first is just after his prophesying, when ¹⁵(his) uncle said, “Please tell me what Samuel said to you.” ¹⁶And Saul said..., “He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found.” But about the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell (his uncle) anything. Why? That just seems strange. Was it humility, fear, timidity..., what?

The second odd moment is when Saul is being identified before the *people* as being their *king*. Much like the process Joshua went through to identify Achan following his sin at Ai (Jos.7), Samuel selected by lot the tribe of Benjamin from all the tribes of Israel (20). Then he selected the clan of the Matrites (21). And finally, Saul... was (selected) (21). But he was nowhere to be found! The thought it was a mistake! ²²So they inquired again of the Lord...! And it was the Lord Who said, “Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.” What? Was this the *humility* of a servant, as some suggest (Leithart 76), or the antics of a child?

The third moment comes right at the end of c.10 following his coronation (24) when the crowds headed home (25). We read that ²⁷... some worthless fellows said, “How can this man save us?” And they despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace. Without the first two moments, this could sound like amazing self-control. But in the wake of them..., cowardice, what?

PRESENTATION OF A KING – 111-15

In any case, as c.11 opens, we see some of Samuel’s words about Saul proven true: ¹⁰¹... You will save (the people of the Lord) from the hand of their surrounding enemies. The Ammonite king, Nahash, besieged and cruelly threatened the city of Jabesh-gilead, with whom the tribe of Benjamin had a close relationship—many of their wives came from there (Jud.21). Nahash would make a treaty with Jabesh-gilead, but only on (the) condition that they would allow him to ²... gouge out all (their) right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel. The elders of Jabesh begged a bit of time (seven days) to see if any in Israel would come and help them (3).

Well, *Saul* heard about this (5). ⁶*And the Spirit of God rushed upon (him), like one of the Judges, and his anger was greatly kindled.* ⁷*He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen! ... This sounds quite a bit like what the Levite did when his concubine was abused and murdered right there in Saul's home town (Jud.19). But it could also remind us of the dividing of the animals for the Lord alone to pass through, establishing His covenant with His people (Gen.15). Here the text says: ⁷... Then the dread of the Lord fell upon the people and they came out as one man. ... ¹¹And the next day Saul put the people in three companies. And they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.*

And look at this. ¹²*Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death."* ¹³*But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel."* No cowardice here! *The Lord* gets credit for the victory, and those worthless fellows (10:27) receive mercy from the king on the day of Israel's victory! *God* is at work through this king! ¹⁵*So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.*

POSTLUDE TO A KING – 121-25

With *Saul* in place, then, it would seem that Samuel's work was finished. As c.12 opened, he stood before them *people* and confirmed that he had served *the Lord* well among them. He was about to speak a hard word to them, so I believe he was just making sure they didn't think it was because they'd rejected his sons to be judges over them (cf. 2).

He then recited for them (6-11) the faithfulness of *the Lord* throughout their history to provide deliverers whenever they *cried out to Him* (8). ¹²*(Yet) when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, "No, but a king shall reign over us," when the Lord your God was your king.* ¹³*And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the Lord has set a king over you.* ¹⁴*If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well.* ¹⁵*But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the*

Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king. And that means something, proven by the fact that this *God*, not *Baal*, controls the *thunder and rain* (16-18). Bottom line: having a *king* won't excuse you from the responsibilities of following and serving *the Lord* (14)—you or your *king*.

¹⁹*And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king."* ²⁰*And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.* ²¹*And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty.* ²²*For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. ...* ²⁴*Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you.* ²⁵*But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."* Having a *king* will not excuse you from the responsibilities of following *the Lord*.

CONCLUSION

There is God's bottom line word to His *people* to close out this part of the story: ²⁴*Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you*—just as relevant to us today as it was for *Israel* 1000 years before Christ. But, by way of application, I want to make the two observations I mentioned: one broad and one targeted.

Receiving God's blessing doesn't excuse us from wholehearted obedience.

God's *people* asked for a *king* in order to lead them into battle. *God* raised up a *king* and gave them victory in battle. But then in the wake of that battle *He* confronted them through *Samuel* for seeking a king, reminding them that *He* alone is *king* over them. God's blessing was upon them. But it did not mean in that instance that they were walking according to His ways. *God* in His mercy, here, both supplied what they needed, and yet corrected them for their sin. They could not afford just to sit back and soak in what they saw as God's blessing and so be lulled in to laxity with regard to their worship and service to Him. And neither can we. *Israel* repented of their sin of rejecting *God* as *king*, and *He* graciously forgave them, calling them back into covenant obedience—them and their *king* (12:15). And, my friends, *He* will do the same for us as we realize by His grace that our allegiance, due only to Him, has been divided, and we return to Him in repentance to *serve Him faithfully with all (our) heart* (12:24).

Receiving God's blessing sets us up to reflect God's mercy.

Did you notice the beautiful irony of Saul's interaction with those *worthless fellows*? (10:27) Their specific question was strange: *How can this man save us?* This could be nothing but doubt of *God*—that it was He Who raised up *Saul* to be *king*—because from a human perspective *Saul* would have been more capable than any man in *Israel* to *save* them! Still, the answer to their question was: *This man can save you because He's been given a (new) heart* (10:9). By God's sovereign grace *Saul* was enabled to reflect the mercy of *God* into the lives of those men, before the eyes of all *Israel*, when the *people* called for them to be *put to death*.
¹³*But Saul, transformed by the grace of God, said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel."*

Two victories happened that day: the military victory over the *Ammonites* under the command of God's anointed *king*, and the victory of God's mercy reflected to those *worthless fellows* through that same *king*. And there are only two ways things could have gone better. First, how great it would be for God's *people* if their *king* and their *God* were one and the same Person! And second, how great it could be if their *king* could actually change the hearts of those *worthless fellows* such that beyond just receiving God's mercy, they could also, like their *king*, be transformed to reflect it themselves!

And, my friends, both of these have now been realized in Jesus! First, He is the *King* that *Israel* truly wanted and needed! He is the *King* we truly want and need! He is *God* of very *God*, *King* of *kings* and Lord of lords, *God* the Son, come in the flesh, to be our *King*! And second, by His grace He can change our hearts so that we, too, can reflect His mercy and grace. He can change us into *another man, another (woman)*! (10:6) He can give us *another heart* (10:9) such that we can hear and obey His Word. We can ²⁴... *fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all (our) heart*. Taste of His mercy and grace as *Israel* did. Experience the victory He achieves not just over the *Ammonites* or the heart of *Saul*, but over your own sin, and your death sentence due to your sin. Then you too, like *Israel*, can know the joy of ²⁴... *(fearing) the Lord and (serving) him faithfully with all your heart, (considering) what great things he has done for you*.