

Introduction

As our mediator, Jesus Christ fills three major roles. He is prophet, priest, and king. And in each case there is a forerunner who foreshadows that role. The forerunner of Jesus as prophet is Moses. The role of prophet is to speak forth the word of God. The forerunner of Jesus as priest is Melchizedek. The levitical priests also illustrate the work of Christ as priest. The forerunner of Jesus as king is David. He has been given the throne of his father David. Isaiah 11 declares: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." As king, Jesus is the ruler and deliverer of God's people. He fights our battles. He is the fulfillment of God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7: 16 that "your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." If you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, he is your King and your Lord. If you do not bend the knee to Jesus, then he is not your savior.

This morning we begin a new series. We will be looking at the life of the kingly forerunner of Jesus. We can anticipate growing in faith and in fellowship with the Lord Jesus as we make our way through powerful and vivid narratives and beautiful poetry of the psalms of David. We will be able to see and feel what it means to be a man or woman after God's own heart. We will see a man who is brought from out of the pasture to the battlefield and to the throne with the blessing of God. Though successful, we will see a man whose life is yet fraught with hardship, suffering, and sin. But all in all we will observe a man who walked with God. Even more importantly, we will see the heart of God and get glimpses of the glory and work of Christ Jesus.

Before we get to the text this morning, I want to orient us as to where we find ourselves in the flow of history as King David emerges. In the beginning was creation itself. All was well until . . . the Fall. As everything came crashing down, God issued a wonderful promise: the serpent would be crushed by the seed of the woman. Then on we go to generations who abandoned God and filled the earth with evil. When the thoughts of men were only evil continually, God brought a world-wide flood saving only the godly man Noah and his family to repopulate the earth. However, that act of judgment was quickly lost in the minds of people who, as the world's population grew, thought only of making a name for themselves. Again the earth was filled with the darkness of sin. Human beings resisted God. They did not want to disperse so they sought to build a tower and make a name for themselves. Climactically, God confused their language and dispersed the people over the face of all the earth.

And then God called a man named Abram to leave his country and his family. God would make of him a great nation and bless him, and in him all the families of the earth would be blessed. He even promised that kings would come from Abraham. God was gracious to his descendants. He preserved them through famine and brought them into a fertile land in Egypt. But over time they sunk into idolatry and were oppressed under Pharaoh. Again God worked mightily, bringing the people out and giving them the Mosaic law. Surely the law would enable the people to be faithful to God. No! The law only aggravated the sinfulness of their hearts. The people came into the promised land and were sinful as ever. During the period of the Judges, they sank deeper and deeper. The description of their life and times is graphic: "There was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." It went on for hundreds of years.

Samuel emerged as a prophet and leader in the land, and as his life was nearing its end, the people came to him and asked that he appoint for them a king so they could be like the nations. They wanted a king to govern them and fight their battles. In effect they were rejecting God from being their king. In judgment, God gave them what they requested. Saul was a king chosen by God but according to the desires that were driving the nation to cry out for a king. He had the look. When he stood among the people, he was taller than any of them from his shoulders upward. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!" Saul won a battle and the nation was galvanized around him. And at that time Samuel gave what in effect was his farewell address. He condemned the people for their sinful hearts in demanding a king and rejecting the Lord. The people acknowledged their sin in asking for a king, and feared the consequences of their evil. But Samuel assured them all would be well, if only they would fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandments of the Lord, and if both they and their king would follow the Lord their God, it would be well. But if they would not obey, the hand of the Lord would be against them and their king. These are pivotal words! Things will go well for you if you fear the Lord and obey him, but if not the hand of the Lord will be against you. God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Samuel promised that he would pray for the people and instruct them in the good and right way.

And so how do you think things would go in the aftermath of such a serious exchange between Samuel and the king and the people? 1 Samuel chapter 13 occurs apparently some years after Samuel's warning. The people were called out to Gilgal to join Saul in battle against the Philistines. Let's read the account from the word of God . . .

[Read 1 Samuel 13:5-15]

Now turn over a couple pages to 1 Samuel 15:26-28. The Lord commanded Saul to strike the Amalekites and to devote them—the people and the animals—totally to destruction as a consequence of the way the Amalekites opposed the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. But Saul kept the Amalekite king alive along with the best of the oxen and sheep. He argued he had obeyed, but Samuel instructed Saul that partial obedience is evil disobedience and the Lord had rejected him from being king.

[Read 1 Samuel 15:26-28 and Pray]

I wanted to begin our study of the life of David here before we actually meet him. We already are learning about him before his name is mentioned in 1 Samuel. God rejects Saul and chooses a man after his own heart, one who was better. Here then is a stunning contrast between the king that was the people's choice and the king that would be the choice of the Lord. Three points of contrast stand out between Saul and David. They point us to three key elements that are essential for a man to be successful in the role of king of God's people. They are essentials in every follower of Christ. Saul lacked these qualities and was rejected while David possessed these qualities and his kingdom is established for all eternity. These qualities help us discern the true lover of God and follower of Christ from the fake.

The first of these qualities is . . .

I. Esteem for the Word of God.

The texts before us this morning reveal that Saul lacked esteem for the word of God. We see it especially at a place called Gilgal. Samuel had instructed Saul to go to Gilgal and wait. Those

instructions are recorded in 1 Samuel 10. Saul was to wait seven days until Samuel would come. Samuel was coming to preside over the offering of sacrifices, but equally important, he was coming to provide to Saul instructions from God as to what he should do. This is the dynamic that the Lord set up for his king. The king was to lead the people in battle. But that leading was to be according to the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord was to be communicated to the king by the prophet of the Lord—in this case Samuel.

Now what happened at Gilgal was that Saul waited almost 7 full days but apparently not the full seven days. Things looked to be unraveling. Nearby the Philistines had mustered a huge army. Those with Saul were vastly fewer. They were not lined up to fight yet, but those who were with Saul were running for cover in holes and caves and rocks and cisterns and some fled. Saul obviously grew anxious. The thing is he was supposed to wait for Samuel not only for the sacrifice but also for the instruction. Seventh day or not, he was to wait until Samuel arrived. By offering the sacrifice, he disobeyed what he had been told to do. In addition, however, what Saul did, in effect, was to elevate the ritual that prepared for battle over waiting for God's word of instruction. He was ready to do his own thing instead of waiting for the Lord's direction. He was leaning on his own understanding. He failed to esteem the word of God. Samuel told him that he acted foolishly.

Brothers and sisters, it is foolish to try to live this life leaning on our own understanding. What the prophet was to the king, the Bible is to us. Every day we face multiple battles. Satan is a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He is full of evil schemes. Then there are people and various kinds of circumstances to face. Sanctification itself is a battle. It is a fight for growing in holiness and sinning less and less. We must esteem the word of God for these battles. We esteem the word not only by doing what it says but by craving it and delighting in it for the wisdom and guidance and knowledge it imparts.

Samuel explained to Saul the consequences of his foolishness. He lost the opportunity to have an eternal dynasty. The Lord would have established his kingdom over Israel forever, but after this act, his kingdom would not continue past himself. Instead, the Lord sought out a man after his own heart and commanded him to be prince over his people. We know that man to be David. And what a difference from Saul when it comes to esteeming the word of God! David treasured the word of God. He esteemed it highly. He wrote Psalm 19 declaring that "the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

Many believe David wrote Psalm 119 which reflects profound esteem for the word of God. The psalmist says, "In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches." "My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times." He says he loves the commandments of the Lord. He says God's word is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path. A man or woman after God's own heart is one who delights in the word of God. They highly esteem it as such. They recognize the blessing and privilege to have the word of God and so they long for it, spend much time in it. They do not lean on their own understanding.

It was not just a big mistake for Saul to disregard the instruction of Samuel. It revealed that his heart was deficient toward the Lord. He did not esteem the word of God; he did not treasure it; he did not delight in the commands of the Lord; and that was his collapse.

It is crucial that we esteem God's word for the instructions he gives us for daily living. But it is crucial that we delight in God's word as well because that word is what directs us to the person who is the word of God. John declares at the beginning of his gospel that Jesus is THE WORD. If you do not love God's word, you won't love Christ. The word of God reveals on every page the One Person who is the word. You can search the scriptures, but if you do not love the scriptures, you will miss Jesus completely. To those who were trying to kill Jesus, he said, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40).

There is an almost unseen tragedy after Samuel rebuked Saul. 1 Samuel 13:15 says, "Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up to Gibeah." Samuel went one way and Saul went the other. The prophet of the Lord with the word of the Lord departed. If you and I do not treasure the word of God, we won't have it when we need it.

How does your life display an esteem for the word of God? Do you value it more than the riches of the world? Is it sweeter than honey to your taste? Do you hide it in your heart? Do you wait to hear from God on a daily basis? We need it every day. We need it every moment. God's kind of king esteems God's word; so does any man or woman who seeks the Lord. The blessed man meditates on God's word night and day.

There is a second point of contrast that stands out between Saul and David

II. Obedience to the Word of God.

Saul not only failed to esteem God's word, he refused to obey it. We have seen it at Gilgal. He disobeyed the word of God that he had and was cut off from the word of God he needed. Another graphic depiction of his disobedience happened at Amalek. Samuel came to Saul with a word from the Lord. It was delivered to the king with force of command. "Thus says the Lord of hosts, I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel, and donkey."

In response, Saul summoned the people and amassed his army. They rose up and defeated the Amalekites. However, they did not fully obey. 1 Samuel 15 provides the sad details. Verse 9 says, "But Saul and the people spared Agag [the king] and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction." Saul said that they were going to sacrifice the livestock to the Lord, but this was not what the Lord had commanded. This partial obedience brought regret to the heart of God. Look at 1 Samuel 15:10. The word of the Lord came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." After an interchange about the disobedience of Saul, Samuel declared to Saul, (v. 26) "You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." As Samuel turned to depart, Saul seized the skirt of his robe and it tore. Samuel said, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you."

Unlike Saul, David would be marked by his obedience. Psalm 40 is ascribed to David. The psalm demonstrates that David understood that what matters to God is not a great show of sacrifice but simple joy in obeying him. He wrote, "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, 'Behold, I

have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

We know that David was not sinless. Some prolific sins of his stand out. But we do know it was his delight to obey God. Every Christian should be inspired and instructed by the neighbor who was better than Saul. We should see the failure of Saul and deplore all of our partial obedience as complete disobedience. We need to see that God is not impressed with a great show of allegiance. Many times shows are the very things we put on to try to hide the fact that we are not obeying. The show does not atone for disobedience and it does not cover it up. What pleases God is for us to obey, to delight to do his will.

Jesus is the preeminent example of obedience. He never sinned. He never once yielded partial obedience. He always and only completely obeyed. He was tempted in all points as we are yet without sin. Doing the will of God was his very sustenance and life. He told his disciples, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.” Because Jesus accomplished that work fully and completely, he qualified to be the substitute for sinners. He who knew no sin became sin in behalf of sinners so that those sinners who believe in him might become the righteousness of God in him. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have failed over and over to do the will of God. We have refused to keep his commandments. We stand in a position of rejection not just from being a king but from being acceptable to God at all. Only in Christ can a sinner be justified. Only in Christ can we who deserve eternal punishment be set free. But in Christ we can be made new, be given a heart that longs to obey.

Are you in Christ this morning? Is he your savior? Have you believed in him? Trust him now and he will save you. If you are saved then be renewed in the spirit of your heart to delight to do the will of God.

I want to direct you now to a third point of contrast which stands out between Saul and David

III. Heartbroken Repentance.

Saul admitted that he sinned, but he did not truly repent. We just considered Saul’s disobedience to God’s direct command to completely destroy the Amalekites. When Samuel confronted Saul about the disobedience, Saul blamed the people for the sin. Samuel rightly asked, “Aren’t you the king here? Are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king.” Then Saul asserted that the people wanted to make a sacrifice to God. Samuel replied, God does not want your sacrifices; he wants your obedience. In verse 23 we read Samuel’s words: “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.” All along the way Saul is minimizing his sin while Samuel seeks to underscore for Saul that his sin is a flagrant violation of God. You might as well have committed the sin of divination or bowed down before an idol. You can’t brush it off! You can’t pretend it is nothing. You can’t go on as usual. But that is exactly what Saul was trying to do!

Finally, Saul confesses that he sinned and transgressed the commandment of the Lord because he feared the people and obeyed their voice. And he wants Samuel to just forgive him and get on with his plan here. Verse 30 shows that the main thing Saul was concerned with was not the seriousness of his sin but the appearance he needed to make before the elders and before Israel. Saul’s admission that he did wrong was born out of expediency not a broken heart. What really mattered to him was the praise of men rather than the approval of God. Samuel reiterated that Saul was rejected. He would be replaced by a neighbor who is better than him.

That neighbor was to be David. David was better. It was not because he did not sin. Like all human beings save Jesus Christ, David sinned as well as Saul. But when David sinned, he repented with a broken heart. A man or woman after God's own heart is not described as such because they do not sin. Rather they reflect their love of God and their hatred of what violates his will by the experience of conviction along with sorrow and brokenness, and they bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. Serious breaches of obedience call for serious expressions of sorrow before the Lord along with change.

David expresses deep conviction and contrition in Psalm 38: "O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath! For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me."

Accurately does David say in Psalm 51: "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Repentance is more than admitting you sinned. Without broken hearted repentance, there is no reconciliation with God. A person who makes light of sin against God reflects a heart of rejection toward God and will be rejected by God. Pride is the root of making little of sin. Humility before God leads to a broken heart over one's iniquity. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. James says, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

Conclusion

So in short, esteem God's word. Obey God's word. And when you break God's word, let your heart be broken as well. Draw near to God through the Son of David who never needed to repent because he never sinned. You can draw near to God because while we were yet sinners, Christ Jesus died for us.