

Sunday October 2 sermon: “King Saul begins to wobble – Put Not Your Trust in Princes (Pt 4)”

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS, by John Pittman Hey

1 Samuel 13; Matthew 26:46-57

God's Word warns us not to put our trust in princes.

Yet we will continue to create kings, rulers, and institutions in the vain hope that they can rescue us from the consequences of our sin.

But they never can, and never do.

That's because they cannot address the root problem, which is our sin.

What we must have is a Savior Who can take away our sin, and reconcile us to God. Only our Lord Jesus Christ can do that, by His dying in our place on the cross, and for our crimes.

King Saul started out well - he was humble, prudent, did not seek revenge against his political opposition, and was brave in the face of danger for his people.

And yet, King Saul soon began to wobble, when he disobeyed God's commandments.

This disobedience by Saul resulted from his attempt to keep his people in line, as they fled from their enemies, and distrusted their God.

So in the end, Samuel's warning proved correct: if the people continue in their sin against God, God will destroy both them and their king.

Saul and his son Jonathan provoked Israel's mortal enemy, the Philistines, stirring them to great anger.

Israel grew afraid, and began to desert their king, by hiding and fleeing across the Jordan. God had wrought great victory before, but they no longer trusted their king to protect them, nor God's mighty power to save them.

Israel had demanded a king to lead them into battle, but now that they had one, when the battle approached, they fled in terror.

Saul thought that he must do something to shore up his support by the people, so that he would have enough troops left to withstand a huge impending onslaught by the enemy.

He was waiting for Samuel to appear to offer sacrifices to God, but Samuel being late, Saul "forced himself" to make the offerings himself, against God's commandment.

Saul thought he couldn't wait any longer for Samuel to appear, so Saul intruded into the holy office, and offered sacrifices, to appeal to God for help fighting the Philistines.

When Samuel appeared, Saul knew he had done wrong, but he excused himself to Samuel, because Saul thought he just had to do something to keep his army from deserting.

Of course, Saul could have prayed for divine deliverance, and broken no commandment.

But that would not satisfy the desire of the people for a religious ritual of sacrifice. Saul needed to exploit that ritual to calm his troops.

How often we see these sorts of invocations of God's name and blessing by our political leaders. God's holy worship is perverted to a psychological manipulation of the people for carnal purposes.

Samuel rebuked Saul for his foolishness and disobedience against God, and told him that he had failed the test, and so God would appoint another man as king over Israel.

Saul's test was whether he would obey God in the face of rejection and abandonment and loss of confidence in him by his people. How many of us can say we would have done better than Saul?

But this gives us insight into the cause of the failure of our leaders and institutions – they perceive that if they do what is good and proper and right, they will lose their influence and power.

We will lose our support by the people! All our donations will dry up! All our voters will desert us, and stay home on election day!

So we can see how the people's fear and loss of trust in their powerful God, lead their king into sin.

And thus, as Samuel had warned, the people did wickedly, and God consumed both them and their king.

There is a sympathetic resonance between the sin of the people, and the failure of the institutions the people have set up.

Rather than the institutions or the king upholding right and truth and justice, they react and respond to the people's wicked hearts, until both the king, the institutions, and the people are destroyed.

How completely different is our Good King Jesus!

Jesus never did cater to His audience! Jesus never did worry about losing the crowds that followed Him! Jesus never did try to say only the smooth things that His audience wanted to hear!

It started early in His ministry, at His home town of Nazareth. In Luke 4, the people desired for Him to perform miracles. They were not satisfied with Christ's teaching that He is the long-promised Messiah, come to rescue God's people.

Instead, Jesus meant to demonstrate how ready Israel was to reject their Messiah, and the truth that Christ would save Gentiles as well as Jews.

Jesus knew what their response would be, for He knows all things.

He knew they would rise up in wrath and try to destroy Him immediately.

And yet, Jesus obeyed the will of His Father, and proclaimed the hard truth to His rebellious audiences.

Christ did it again in His teaching about sovereign election, and the centrality of His very physical body and blood as the only source of life eternal to those who come to Him in faith.

He pushed the fulfilment of the metaphor of His being the Bread of Life, by teaching them that they must eat His body and His blood to be saved from their sin and death and Hell. Though He made it clear that this was done by trusting in His promises to raise up His people to everlasting life, the people were repulsed by this teaching.

But Jesus refused to walk back His startling teaching. Instead, He proclaimed the doctrine of election, that nobody can believe in Jesus or come to Him unless the Father first draws that man. No one can trust in Jesus unless faith is given them by God in the first place.

This of course makes sinners furious. It continues to make false teachers angry in the church today!

Jesus acknowledged that His Gospel teaching was losing Him support and followers, and He knew that Judas Iscariot would go so far as to betray Him for money to the wicked rulers of Israel.

Yet Jesus was constant in His obedience to His Father's will!

The contrast between Saul's wobble to satisfy his army, and Christ's constancy, is remarkable.

Later, Jesus proclaimed His intention to be put to death by wicked men, and rise again the third day.

Peter blurted out what Christ's disciples were all thinking: Not so, Lord, this shall never be! Jesus, you can't throw away the kingdom!

Peter didn't grasp Christ's urgent purpose, of going to the cross to save His loved ones. Peter, like all the rest, was hoping for a physical, political Messiah to rescue Israel from its foreign

barbarian occupiers. Israel had no use for a Messiah Who came to save His people from their own sin.

Peter and the rest were just like Israel in Saul's day, unwilling to trust in the mighty power of God to save them. Apparently, Jesus wasn't going to play along with their plans to use Him to "institutionalize" their carnal desires.

Christ's response is to strongly rebuke Peter, comparing him to Satan, pointing out that Peter delights in the things that satisfy men, rather than those which delight God.

Jesus would not violate God's commandment to Him in order to keep His people following after Him.

In the end, had Jesus acceded to their wishes, all of His people would have been eternally doomed and lost.

This would have been far more disastrous than what, in the end, befell Saul: in the end, he lost his people, his kingdom, and his life, because he disobeyed God's commandment.

Indeed, the Lord suffered the loss of his people, when they forsook Him and fled from Gethsemane, when wicked men came to seize Jesus.

Peter and the others thought to fight to rescue Jesus, but Christ rebuked them.

Christ asked them, how will the Scriptures be fulfilled, unless I am taken and murdered by the wicked rulers of Israel and Rome? Ought I not to drain the bitter cup that My Father has given to me?

In fact, Christ made it clear that, unlike Saul, He was happy to lose His people that night. That's because Jesus ultimately was determined to lose NONE of His people!

Saul had been afraid there wouldn't be enough of his people to win the victory. But Christ knew that there were too many there to win the victory!

Saul forgot that God can save with few people. But Jesus knew that, in the end, God would save His people by ONLY ONE MAN.

Therefore, Christ's disciples all fled that night, so that Christ's promise might be kept: "this is the Father's will, that of all He has given me, I should lose nothing, but raise it up in the last day!"

Only by going alone to Calvary, and suffering and dying for His people's sin, could our Lord Jesus win that great victory to save us from judgment, wrath, and Hell.

In the end, rather than cater to His enemies, Jesus drove them over the edge to destroy Him on the cross. When they demanded whether He is Messiah at His trial, He affirmed that He is

Jehovah, and that one day, they would see Him seated at the right hand of Glory and coming in the clouds!

The Lord Jesus didn't need His people in order to save them, like Saul thought he did.

Our Savior fought the fight to save us alone! He knew He could rely upon wicked men, in their hatred and rebellion against God, to act out their evil role, in sacrificing Him on the cross.

Our King is victorious for us already!

We don't contribute anything at all to His great victory.

We only provide our sin. He took our sin, and was judged for our crimes at the cross, and purchased our eternal redemption there, by Himself.