

## Grace in Transition | The Book of Samuel

### *Saul's Falls (Part One)*

First Samuel CH 13

11.1.20

*Saul was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty-two years over Israel.*

<sup>2</sup> *Now Saul chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel, of which 2,000 were with Saul in Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, while 1,000 were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. But he sent away the rest of the people, each to his tent. <sup>3</sup> Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." <sup>4</sup> All Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. The people were then summoned to Saul at Gilgal.*

<sup>5</sup> *Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven. <sup>6</sup> When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits. <sup>7</sup> Also some of the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.*

<sup>8</sup> *Now he waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him. <sup>9</sup> So Saul said, "Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. <sup>10</sup> As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him. <sup>11</sup> But Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, <sup>12</sup> therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering." <sup>13</sup> Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. <sup>14</sup> "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."*

<sup>15</sup> *Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men.*

**A few years ago I read a short, humorous article** that attempted to sort of analyze some of the sayings and colloquialisms that have weaseled their way into our cultural moment and into our shared vocabulary.

Some of the adages considered were, “It’s all good” and the analysis of what people really MEAN when they say that was: “It’s not all good, something has gone badly amiss. And I absolutely don’t want to admit it.” OR the phrase, “Just sayin’” that really means: “Don’t even THINK I wish to convince you of something. Believe me, all truth is relative — except my own opinions. (“Just sayin’!”)

“It is what it is” - they analyzed that. “Yuh think?!”, “How great is THAT!?”, “No worries”; “Yada, yada, yada” – great article dissecting ten phrases (I’ll send you a link if you ask). But one expression NOT found on the list which I’ve used...maybe you too is “Hey, what can you do?” It’s a handy saying...usually very similar to “It is what it is” – it’s a resignation or acceptance that some things we just can’t can’t change. “I had to call a plumber... Hey, what can you do?” “So much rain lately! ... What can you do?”

So... my question today... as we look at this sad episode from ancient Israel... my question is: “What CAN you do?” You want to change the world or you just want to earn a little more or get your kids in line or your husband in line... Big goals ... little goals... aspirations of greatness or just trying to get by, “Hey, what CAN you do?”

And what CAN you do... spiritually...to improve your situation, to promote or advance your relationship or walk with God? Hey, what can you do? A n d you may be surprised at the answer. God was teaching His Church... and used this mysterious figure who went on to a life of insanity and seething bitterness, Saul, the first human king of Israel – God used this tragic man and sad story to teach US, what CAN you do?

### **Let’s look at: 1) Saul’s Rising Tide of Troubles**

#### **2) What He Did**

#### **3) How Avoid It**

The last two weeks looked so promising for Israel and Samuel the Judge (Prophet/Priest) and for Tall Saul. Israel gets this big handsome king. Saul goes from chasing donkeys to ruling a nation. Samuel leads the nation/church in Covenant Renewal and they humble themselves... CH 12 ends with good news and a seamless transfer of power...

Then apparently time elapses and Saul’s adult son, Jonathan takes a thousand troops and carries out a special-ops raid on the Philistines (they’re back!) – may have been an assassination (garrison = prefect) and that stirs up the hornet’s nest. Saul is evidently proud of his son...he blows a trumpet and says, “Look! My son conquered in my name!”

Then the Philistines strike back! They bring all their chariots (they had iron chariots and weapons) and they look like sand on the seashore (too many to count!) and Israel was afraid! People hide in caves and in bushes and basements (Jdg 6.2).

AND some begin to run away. In fact, they've gathered at Gilgal (where Joshua set up the twelve boulders after God parted the Jordan River and they entered the land – a sacred place!) and some of the "Hebrews" (v7 – kind of a loaded name – Egypt) some of them escape back over the Jordan like a reversal of the Conquest (it's really bad!)

And Saul is standing his ground... staying at that very special place packed with history of God's grace to His people (GOD parted the river!) and King Saul is waiting for the Prophet/Priest to arrive. They've made an arrangement and Saul knows he cannot go into battle without instructions from God from the mouth of the prophet. He waits... waits...and waits.

He waits the full seven days they agreed upon... and now the day is almost done... and the people are all scattering from him. He's watching the enemy (with all that heavy metal!) and he's watching his army like ice melting in the sun (numbers dwindling)...

He knows he HAS to have God on his side... He's hopelessly outnumbered but Samuel the prophet and priest is nowhere... and Saul has got to be thinking, "Hey... what can you do?"

So... against his better judgment (12)... he says, "Bring me the burnt offerings and the peace offerings...these are desperate times..." And he himself offers the sacrifices in order to ensure that, "God is happy and that He'll go with us into battle against this impossibly huge and technologically superior army."

And just then, up comes Samuel, and asks, "Adam, where are you?... Adam, what have you done?"

It's like the first instance of human sin – Saul is like a Second Adam (he crushed the serpent's head – last week) but HERE he looks more like the old Adam – "What have you done?" (Who told you were naked?)

JUST LIKE the first Adam, Saul has a series of very valid proofs that the tide of trouble was rising and it wasn't his fault: the people were running (reversing Joshua!) and YOU didn't come when you said and the Philistines are coming (LOOK! See it yourself!) and (last) I had to have God's presence! So... I DID what I had to do – you know...what CAN you do?"

And Samuel says, "NOT this!"

"You have acted foolishly and not kept the commandment of the LORD, your God... and now your reign is over – it won't last."

Now, you may be thinking, at this point... "I'm not exactly sure... what was so wrong about what Saul DID or DIDN'T DO! You can call them excuses but they WERE all true... You could see it with your own eyes that the tide of trouble was rising!"

I was in another country with some friends. One guy slipped and fell and dislocated his shoulder. The only doctor we could find was a gynecologist.

But ... you know...what can you do? You just have to do the best you can...you make do. So this gynecologist set his shoulder (and he got a full pelvic exam to boot). You make it work – what can you do? You manage. You improvise. “Desperate times...”

And don’t you feel... a little... sorry for Samuel? It seems that for one infraction...under the most dire of circumstances... seeing with his own eyes that the murder hornets were stirred up and lives would be lost and “look! They’re reversing all that Joshua did!”

Do you feel a little bad for Saul... and do you think, MAYBE, Samuel the prophet...over-reacted? ...Just sayin’

And do you think... maybe... I know this is church and you don’t want to admit it (unless you're home with your little snacks!) do you think maybe ...God was a little hard on ol’ Saul? (2 Sam 6.8!)

Is it possible that ...maybe...this once... God could’ve been just plain “Holy”...instead of “Holy, Holy, Holy”?

I admit: I think that way... I feel a little sorry for Saul. I see the hopelessness of the sentence (God has chosen someone else – you’re out!)

And ...you know...when I DO feel sorry for Saul... truth is: I’m really feeling sorry for myself.

Truth is... Saul sinned. And every sin deserves God’s wrath and hot displeasure. Even the smallest sin is “cosmic treason”...and God’s nature is unchangeable i.e. He won’t turn down His holiness... He won’t stop being God... And looking at Saul and his fall makes me think, “WOW! If God gave me what I deserve, I would be vaporized right on the spot!”

My real question is not so much, “Why did Saul get what he deserved but...why don’t I get what I deserve? “Why Me, Lord?” (Kris Kristofferson).

And as far as I can tell... what Saul did was to separate the offices of prophet, priest and king.

He was king... but he was only to act in conjunction with prophet and priest. I’m not so sure the most serious sin was offering sacrifices... but rather his proceeding without relying on the Word from God as spoken by the prophet. Samuel was to instruct Saul and Saul was to utterly depend on that Word...from God (It wasn’t Samuel that Saul was rejecting – it was God.)

Saul was relying on his own eyes – he saw the tide rising and saw the Conquest being reversed and saw the Philistines coming and anyone knows what to do in such a moment – you just make do!

But God was saying to Saul, “I am the One who held back the waters of the Jordan (see those stones?!) and I am the One who gave them the land (not Joshua!) and I am more reliable than your own eyes!”

But Saul is not a man who trusts the good purposes of God...and ready to depend on God to DO what human beings simply CAN'T do... Saul is NOT a man after God's own heart. And He never will be. Saul's not a man who lives “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” and not a man who lives by faith... He's a strong man who lives by sight. “DIY”

After this tragic scene is over, Saul and Samuel separate (Samuel goes to Gibeah) and Saul stays at Gilgal... doing a head-count. He's still “working it” and fixated on “what can you do?” – not faith but sight. He wants to “do it yourself.”

When Jesus Christ came, He made it even more crystal-clear when He told His disciples, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing!” (John 15.5)

Well, what does THAT mean? Are you saying that if I get a flat tire, I can't change it? Are you saying that non-Christian people can't change a tire or take a breath or solve complicated mathematical equations?

No... I'm saying that you, I or anyone else – NO ONE CAN DO ANYTHING TO PLEASE GOD apart from Jesus Christ. You can't change a tire...or a diaper...or take that next breath in a way that please God... apart from trusting Him who is Prophet, Priest and King.

As Prophet, He IS the Word of God, the very Mind of God made flesh – He reveals God as God IS.

As Priest, He offers the one and only Sacrifice that can take away our guilt. He stands in our place – He lives for us and dies under the weight of MY guilt and (as we saw last week) He prays constantly for me. His prayers hold me (and all things!) together!

And as King He's always “subduing us to himself, ruling and defending us, and restraining and conquering all His and our enemies.” (WSC 1:26) Saul thinks it's about Saul... He's trying to appease God and get God to go with them into battle – but it's really SAUL doing the work...trusting his own efforts and his own eyes... Not resting in the Everlasting Arms and not a man resting on God's merciful heart.

You want to avoid Saul's sin? Trust in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ – He IS thĒ Man after God's own heart. He is the King we need... Even when your eyes don't see it, even when it

appears that the right thing to do is to DO IT YOURSELF! – Instead, the way of Jesus is HIS grace that we rest on... We receive it.

I admit – it seems counterintuitive in the extreme – that I can do NOTHING to fix the world... nothing to save this floundering nation... C'mon, I can't even take my next breath in a way that enjoys and glorifies God...except that I do it in reliance on Jesus.

My job is to open my mouth (like a little bird in a nest) and His job is to save, forgive, and fill me with all I need to be beautifully transformed into a New Person – a person made in the image of Christ, the Man after God's own heart.