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Kingdom Living, Part 2

Signs of the Time

Most all of us have heard of the *Signs of the Time*. This phrase describes certain happenings or situations which precede or point to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And though they are present throughout this age, before Christ's return they are going to intensify. Christ told us to expect such things as these:

- Wars and rumors of wars.
- The appearance of numerous antichrists.
- Tribulation.
- Earthquakes.
- Pestilence.
- Famine.

These signs are all now present, but they will intensify as we get closer to Christ's return.

Now each of these signs proclaim one and the same message: Be sober! The time is drawing near! Christ is coming soon!

And yet there is another facet to these signs. For you see **THEY HAVE A DUAL MESSAGE!** On the one hand they indeed proclaim the immanency of Christ's return. And yet on the other, they proclaim one

of three messages.

1. The Grace of God. The signs in this category are these:

- a. The Gentile Mission, Matthew 24:14; 28:19.
- b. The Salvation of "all Israel," Romans 11:25-26a.

When we behold the fulfillment of these signs we are reminded not only that Christ is soon to return, but also that God is compassionate and gracious.

2. The World-wide Opposition to God. In this category are such things as these:

- a. Tribulation, Matthew. 5:10-12; 24:15-25; John. 15:20; 16:33.
- b. The falling away from God, His word, and His worship, Matthew 24:10-12, 24; Hebrews 6:6; 10:29; 2 Pet. 2:20; 1 John 2:19; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3.
- c. The rise of antichrists, Matthew 24:15-16, 23-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:4, 9; 1 John. 2:18, 22; 4:2-3; 2 John. 7.

When we behold these signs we are reminded that this world is not our home and in fact is a hostile place.

3. The Coming Judgment of God. The signs in this category are like these:

- a. Earthquakes and famine, Matthew 24:7b-8; Romans 8:18-25.
- b. Wars and rumors of wars, Matthew. 24:6-8.

From this I hope you see that Biblical signs typically carry more than one meaning. With regard to the *Signs of the Time* generally, they tell us that this world is coming to an end; "Prepare Ye the way of the Lord!" But then specifically, they witness either to the grace of God, the conflict that is part and parcel of this world, and of God's coming judgment.

And yet there are other signs mentioned in Scripture. These are signs which also house a dual message like these:

- The Sign of Jonah (resurrection and judgment).
- The Sign of Immanuel (deliverance from temporal and eternal harm).
- The Sign of the Covenant (union and purity).

Our passage gives us three signs which validate Saul's anointing from the Lord. These are signs which when given proclaimed a twofold message. First they proclaimed that Saul was indeed God's choice for King and that all that Samuel had said was true. ****And yet in keeping with the dual-nature of God's signs**** they also proclaimed a specific message of comfort and hope which were designed to encourage the king and for that matter, ALL servants of the Lord, kings and queens of the Kingdom who have been anointed by God unto the ministry of His Kingdom, which is you and me.

Let us consider the signs which God used both to attest to Saul's royal calling, and encourage him as he undertook the calling and ministry of "servant" of the Lord.

The King's Earthly Concerns

1 Samuel 10:2, “When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel’s sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?”

Recall that earlier when Saul first met the prophet, Samuel informed him of this very message.

1 Samuel 9:20, “And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father’s house?”

Well this now would play a role in one of the signs of Saul's anointing. Except here the sign would include two men situated in a very specific place proclaiming a very specific message. Notice the text:

1 Samuel 10:2, “**When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel’s sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah;** and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?”

Recall that Saul was a Benjaminite who traced his heritage back to Rachel, the beautiful, younger sister of Leah, the one whom Jacob loved. She was the mother of two sons, Joseph and Benjamin.

In fact, after Rachel gave birth to Benjamin, she died due to complications in labor. Jacob then buried her near Ephrath (or Bethlehem) and set a pillar on her grave.¹ In Saul's day, the exact location was named Zelzah.

As the mother of Benjamin, you can imagine how important her grave would have been to any Benjaminite (it would have been frequently visited and honored). Thus as Saul made his way home and passed by Ephrath and Rachel's tomb, two men would meet him and give him a very specific message:

1 Samuel 10:2, “When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel’s sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, **The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?**”

You can imagine that when Saul heard these men speak thus, his heart must have skipped a beat. Upon these words this man, who considered himself to be of the least of the families of Benjamin,² would have known that he was to be king and thus the most important man in Israel!

And yet what was the message? What was the implication arising from this message to this future king?

The message was nothing less than this: The concern which lead Saul on this donkey chase... which brought him before Samuel... also is the concern of God! We say this on account of three reasons from this passage:

¹ Compare Genesis 35:16-20

² Compare 1 Samuel 9:21

Notice firstly that Saul here is represented as being burdened/consumed by the loss of his father's donkeys.

1 Samuel 9:3-5, “And the asses of Kish Saul’s father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses. And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not. And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us.”

This text reflects two concerns on the part of Saul. First the concern for his father's wealth which lead him on a three day hunt for the donkeys. Recall that the text here is showing us how diligent was Saul in his attempt at finding the donkeys. Truly, he didn't haphazardly look for his father's wealth- nor did he do it begrudgingly. Saul scoured the countryside in hopes of pleasing his dad. So concern for his father's wealth weighed heavily on his mind and yet this lead to another concern.

Secondly, when the duration of Saul's absence from his father became inordinately long, the future king thought of his father at home growing in concern for the welfare of his son. And this moved Saul! Recall from this we saw that Saul not only had a diligent character, but he also was mindful of others. The thought of his father sitting at home worrying about him was not good. This alone was enough for Saul to break off his search.³

In fact if there was any doubt, notice the exhortation of Samuel when first he informed Saul of the status of the donkeys.

1 Samuel 9:20, “**And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found.** And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father’s house?”

Secondly notice, that Saul predicted a couple days before this that his father would be concerned about the absence of Saul after so many days.⁴ Thus to have this quoted back to him here would be short of amazing! Saul surely would have thought, “That's exactly what I said a couple days ago. Truly, the Lord must be involved in even the smallest things of my life.”

Finally, would you notice that God didn't have to have the donkeys be found or use this as a sign. Indeed! Countless could have been the signs given to authenticate Samuel's message. That God chose as the first sign a message of assurance, tells us something of God's compassion and grace toward this servant. Saul was about to become King. He needed to know that if God cares for some lost donkeys then He certainly would care for him! He needed to know that God was intimately involved in his life!

From this we see the dual message given to this future king at the inception of his calling. First, he genuinely was called. All that Samuel had told him was true! But then secondly, Saul must know that if God cared for something as trivial as some lost donkeys, God certainly would care for him!

³ Compare 1 Samuel 9:5

⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 9:5

It reminds us of Christ's words.

Matthew 6:30, "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

What an important message at the outset of a ministry! And yet don't miss it... it is a message which still has relevance today!

Previously I made the case that with Saul we too have been anointed unto service in the Messianic Kingdom of Christ.

1 John 2:20, "But ye have an unction [anointing] from the Holy One, and ye know all things."

1 John 2:27, "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things⁵, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."

From this we saw last time that the calling that rested upon Saul's life also rests on ours. This is the calling to be little kings and queens in the Kingdom of God. It is the calling to live not for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf. It is the calling to actively participate in the ministry of

- Caring for one another.
- Bearing each other's needs.
- Visiting the widow and orphan in their distress.
- To shepherd the body of Christ.

However my premise is that while Saul rightly needed a sign to validate the message of Samuel, we no longer need a sign of validation when it comes to any calling (for in this age it is the finished word of God).⁶ What we need on account of the weakness of our flesh is the ongoing promise of assurance from God that

- We are in His care.
- We will not be overlooked.
- He will meet our needs.
- Our earthly concerns are secure having been entrusted to God!

It is one thing to be called to service in Christ's Kingdom, what a glorious calling and privilege. It is wonderful to think that God saved us for a purpose, and that our lives, as meaningless as they may be to the world, have the ability to impact eternity. It is glorious to think that God has a vested interest in what we do today. But then the dust settles and we find ourselves confined to time and circumstance, filling a little space- hardly noticeable, facing a world and often times a church body that doesn't care and never has our life seen the excitement and impact portrayed in the movies.

And the result is that we live in despair. We are telling ourselves that no one cares about us and what difference will it make if I remain vigilant. And this pushes us to take matters into our own hands! "Yes I'm a servant of God, but before I attend to my calling, first I must provide for my own, look out for my

⁵ This is in regard to the assurance of salvation, compare verses 25-26

⁶ Compare 2 Peter 1:17-21

own interests, and take care of number one.

And that is where this first sign enters into our lives! Just as we have been anointed with Saul as little kings and queens in God's Kingdom so also we have need for the assurance given to him that though the world doesn't care about us, God does!

And that is why in Christ's first advent He gave the following message to all of His disciples, which means this is God's message to you and me:

Mark 10:28-30, "Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."

Peter here is saying, "what about us and our needs?" And Jesus said, "I'll take care of them."

When it comes to our need for security- the security that arises from family, loved ones, and relationships Christ will more than meet that need in this age!

You say, "Yes, but what about my family? If I follow Christ will God take care of them?"

Listen to Christ's concern as He hung on the cross:

John 19:25-27, "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

This forever settles the question as to whether or not God cares about our loved ones. When Christ provided for His own mother, He taught by His example that our families are not only our concern but they also are His concern. Accordingly, Peter could exhort a persecuted people, aliens and strangers in this world on account of Christ, to "commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

Family of God, when persecution and suffering increase, immediately we think of our loved ones. Accordingly Peter exhorted the early church to entrust not just their

- Loved ones.
- Future.
- Jobs.
- Security.

BUT THEIR SOULS UNTO GOD! HE'LL DO WHAT IS RIGHT!

You might say, "How can I be so sure?" Because listen to this passage:

Matthew 28:20, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo,

I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

When the disciples themselves were commissioned to serve in Christ's kingdom, just like Saul, they received the following words of comfort, “...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Brothers and sisters, how we need to hear and become convinced of this in our own lives and ministry!

Let the Dead Bury the Dead

Do you remember the seemingly harsh words of Christ? The context is one where good-intentioned Jews were approaching Christ one by one in order to one of His disciples.

Matthew 8:21-22, “And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.”

On the surface this sounds harsh, especially if you think very long about the context. A father has died. A son wants to provide for his burial. And Christ said, “Let the dead bury the dead!” And yet that is not the context at all. In Judaism, the phrase, “Permit me first to bury my father” was an expression which meant “Let me first secure my inheritance. Let me first set my home in order.”

With this we see the real issue. When it came to following Christ this disciple wanted first to provide for his security. He wasn't willing to entrust his soul to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. No! He first needed to care for himself and his own.

Now this is not to say that it is wrong to strive for faithfulness when it comes to our needs, our future, and the like. Christ Himself said toward the end of His life this:

Luke 22:35-36, “And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.”

The first time Christ sent His disciples out, there was an object lesson involved: Don't be concerned for your needs, I'll provide! And Christ did. But now when it comes to reality, the faithful disciple must provide for his own.

You say, “Well then what was Christ teaching when He said, ‘Let the dead bury the dead!’?”

He was not criticizing wise stewardship. Rather he was stressing the importance of faith and reliance in our service in God's Kingdom. Of all people we must entrust ourselves to God and we must excel in one of the more difficult callings in ministry- practical faith! And so having done all to stand that which constitutes faithfulness we must release our feeble claim on this life, and rest completely in God to take care us.

And that is why the Sign which God gave to Saul, the message which God continues to give to all His children, is so important. Part and parcel of every commissioning in God's Kingdom is the promise that He is able to be entrusted with

- Our soul.
- Our families.
- And every other earthly concern that might hamper His ministry.

Christian, what holds you back today in your ministry? Fear? Distrust? Concerns about tomorrow?

May I encourage you having done all to stand:

- Give your concern to God!
- Release your feeble grip!
- Cast your burdens upon God!

And yet What if you don't trust God here? What will happen?

Hear the good news. God won't be any less pleased with us than He already is. Rather we will just bear burdens which God Himself said that He would carry (~Martha). Peter tells us to cast “all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Christ says “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1).

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About the Preacher

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