

...The Matter of the Kingdom

Series on 1 Samuel

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Bible Text: 1 Samuel 10:1-27

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Well, do take your Bibles and turn with me to 1 Samuel chapter 10. See if you can juggle the Bible on your knee and the fan in your hand. Keep the fanning going, because I can feel the benefit here in inverse proportion to the hot air that was coming in my direction a minute ago when you were singing. The fan is cooler.

Well, you know, one of the things that struck us as we have been looking at these stories in Samuel is the ordinariness of people's lives. Over and over again we have been struck by the fact that in the process of the unfolding story in the book, the characters in the story are really not aware of the bigger plot line which runs through the entire Scripture. The plot big plot line, of course, is that God has a purpose and plan one day to take this old world that we live in, to thoroughly renew it, the planet we live on, the bodies we inhabit, to transform us and transform it and for Christ to rule over everything for all eternity in a world that is so beyond our comprehension, but at the same time is not completely unfamiliar to us in that it is this world and these bodies that will be changed in that renovation, that new heavens and new earth. That is God's great plan.

But actually in the unfolding of our lives from day to day that being plan isn't very obvious. It isn't obvious, is it, when you wake up in the morning and grab a shower maybe and head off to work and you have to face the stuff that comes in the office that comes up every day and you have to decide what route to take to drive to work or what public transport to take and it is just usually the way it is. And you find yourself confronted by the same old, same old hassles day by day. And in the course of living your life, really, the things we talk about on Sundays never really registers. It doesn't seem to fit in the unfolding story of your life.

It was an ordinary day when Saul was sitting at breakfast and his father came in and said, "Look, the donkeys have gone. We just can't find them. You need to go looking for the donkeys."

Well, you don't have donkeys, but you have their equivalent in your normal life. And Saul sets out looking for the donkeys. And it was just a normal day as he searched and as he had these random encounters with people and as he got advice from his servant which he could or couldn't take depending on whether he felt like it and it was ordinary. And

eventually he finds himself in the region of the country where Samuel came from. He didn't even know that. Apparently, he is not a particularly religious person. He didn't even know the number one guy in the country. He didn't know the best preacher there was. In fact, this day Samuel may be the only act in town. He didn't even know the name of Samuel. He wasn't a religious man. There is no hint in this text that Saul had any kind of feeling for spiritual things.

Well, his servant said, "We should go and consult a man in this town and ask about where these donkeys might be."

I think Saul was only operating on the level of superstition and thought that maybe somebody here can read, who can read people's palms or read the tea leaves or some insight, some foreknowledge, some foresight. He wasn't really thinking about anything spiritual, I don't think. The day he met Samuel.

And our story this morning it really begins at the end of chapter nine where as they are leaving the town and Samuel says, "Let's hold back a bit and let your servant walk further. I have something I need to say to you personally." I don't think Saul had any idea what was coming, but what was coming was that Samuel said to him, "I want to make known to you the Word of God. I want to make known to you the Word of God."

Saul had absolutely no idea what this was going to look like.

Chapter 10 begins with Samuel taking a flask of oil. It would have been a specially prepared anointing oil. Olive as a base, but with other things added including fragrant things like cinnamon and so on. It was specially made according to the law of God and it was specially used for the anointing of priests, occasionally for the anointing of a prophet. But this was the very first time it was going to be used this way.

And he anoints, pours it over Saul's head and kisses him. I don't know if Saul was a bit taken a back at all this. You know, he hadn't come looking for people pouring oil on his head and giving him a big hug at this time of the day. But then the Word of the Lord comes and explains the action. God's Word explains the action.

"Has not the LORD [Yahweh] anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?"¹

And it is interesting. It is interesting to me the way in which those words are juxtaposed. As Samuel is explaining what his action is, he is anointing this man to be a prince or a leader over Israel. Israel, the very name of these people that he is going to lead, the very name of these ordinary people over whom he is going to rule, Israel. Israel was the prince with God. These people were princes with God. They had a real relationship with God. It is underlined as we will see in a moment as the passage proceeds. But this was the job that God was going to give to Saul.

¹ 1 Samuel 10:1.

And the job description is specified. The Lord will have you reign over these people and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies. In other words, the job of this prince over Israel is delimited. It is quite specific. They have one job to do. He has one task to perform. This is the thing that God has put at his hand to do for him and what is it? It is this. He is to fight for Israel. He is to overwhelm the enemies of Israel. He is to be the champion of Israel. He is to be the military leader of Israel. And that is it. That was the job to which he was called. He was to be first among equals, a prince among princes with the specific task of leading them into battle against their enemies.

That was the Word of God to Samuel.

And, as I say, for the very first time, a leader, a king like figure, although the word isn't used yet—and that is significant for the story—but a leader figure is anointed.

Now what... why that is significant for us is that we have already learned in the Bible that God anoints his priests and his prophets. But now we learn that he is anointing a king. And that is significant for us because as the Bible story unfolds, the hidden plot line of which Saul is unaware is that ultimately one day these three offices are going to be united in one person who will be anointed.

The Greek word is Christ-ed. You will be Christ-ed as a prophet, a priest and a king. And that figure, of course, is the figure of our Lord Jesus. He is our prophet, priest and king. And his task is to execute those offices that God has established for him as he established this office for Saul.

Well, the other thing I want you to notice as you look at this anointing and this Word of God to him, is the underlining that Samuel does in stressing to this man Saul who these people are over whom he is going to reign. They are Israel. He is going to be a prince among princes. They are the people of the Lord. You will reign over the people of the Lord. But not only that, do you notice at the end of verse one, “The LORD has anointed you to be prince over his heritage.”²

What is Samuel saying to this man?

“God is giving you a leadership position in the Church. He is giving you a leadership position in this holy nation, this royal priesthood. But I want you to know,” he says, “who these people are, to whom these people belong. They are not your people. They are not yours to do with as you please. God is setting you as a leader among these people, but these people belong to him. They are princes as far as he is concerned. They are his people. They are his possession. Israel is the people of God. He is their Creator, their Redeemer, their Conqueror. They are his permanent possession. God is not about to give them up. He is not about to hand them over to you. He is still the possessor of his people.”

² 1 Samuel 10:1.

The word that is used for “heritage” here is an indisputable possession that cannot be transferred to another. The Bible often uses this language of the people. God’s people among the Jews were his people. They were his heritage and God has a heritage among the nations of the world, the people’s of the world. God has people out there. They are his heritage.

David, who is the king who is a man after God’s own heart, when he is reflecting on this very language and he is writing Psalm two for example and he is writing about one who is coming who will be Christ-ed, who will be anointed, who will sit at God’s right hand and will have all the nations of the world as his heritage, his inheritance. When that king comes, it will not just be Israel. It will be the nations, the people from the nations, the new Israel, the true Israel of God who will be his possession.

Samuel is saying to Saul, “God is not about to let his people go. You have a job to do. But it is the job God gives you to do. And that is where it stops.”

And it is a warning, isn’t it? It is a warning to all those who hold any kind of office or position within the Church of God. It is a warning to every pastor or elder, everybody who has any kind of position of leadership, even if you are leading a small group. It is a warning to all of us, isn’t it? In the language of Peter who is the leader of the apostolic group when he is writing to the elders and he says, “Don’t lord it over the household of God. Don’t throw your weight about. Remember. Those people are not yours. They are not your possessions. They are not your followers. They are not your pew fodder. Those people belong to the Lord. They are the Lord’s people. Don’t Lord it over them. Serve them. Serve them.”

That is what Samuel is saying to Saul. And he is saying to Saul, “This is the Word of God.”

Now that raises a second question. How do I know it is the Word of God? Saul could have asked the question, “How do I know that? I don’t even know you, Samuel. I don’t know you from Adam. Well, Adam lived a long, long... longer, you know ago than you. But you are old, but Adam would be older. So I don’t know you at all, Samuel. So how do I know that what you are saying is the Word of God?”

Well, how do any of us know what is the Word of God? I just find myself at times I am overwhelmed by the fact that things have gotten so bad in American Christianity that I am standing in this pulpit and before there have been so many great men who preached from this pulpit who have written all kinds of books. Most of them, I mean, it cost a fortune to buy all their books. I have been doing it most of my life. I have invested in their books and they are in my bookshelves and they are great books. But none of those guys, Boardman, Barnhouse, Boyce, Bryken—he needed a B—BeTripp—none of these, none of these boys get their books in the Bible. I mean, they are great books, but they never get into the Bible. Why is that? Why does Samuel get into the Bible and none of those great guys get into the Bible?

Well, here we find out the answer to that story, to that question in this story. You see what he says to him. He says, "There is three signs that are going to be given to you so that you know that this is the Word of God. This is the Word of God. Three signs that the Lord has anointed you to be prince over his heritage. Sign number one. On your way home you are going to come to the tomb of Rachel."

That is in Benjamin territory. Rachel was the matriarch of Israel, you will remember. She died in child birth. The baby that was born was Benjamin, the great, great, great, great, great, great, great grand daddy of this man Saul.

"And on your way home you are going to meet when you get right about the territory of Rachel's tomb you are going to meet two men who are going to come, turn up there and they are going to tell you a message. They are going to tell you that the donkeys that you lost the other day have been found. I just told you that. They are going to tell you that. They are going to confirm the word that I have just told you. The donkeys have been found. But not only that, they are going to tell you something that you don't know that anybody knows except your servant because you only said it to him. When you were trying to make an excuse why you shouldn't keep the search going and go home, you said to your servant, 'I need to go home in case my father is no longer just concerned about the donkeys, but now he is concerned about me.' They are going to bring that message. How could they have known that? How could I have known the donkeys are found? How could they know the very, very words you used when you were speaking on you own to your servant the other day? The Word of God will come true. Test number one.

"Test number two. When you get to the oak of Tabor..."

This was apparently near Bethel. Bethel, the house of bread, Bethel, the place, you remember where Jacob had that amazing encounter where he saw the stairs and the angels of God ascending and descending on the stairs, where God introduced himself to Jacob and promised him that he would have this land as his inheritance for him and his offspring and that he would be a blessing to the whole world. And it was there that God called Jacob Israel, a good place to be.

"When you get to the oak of Tabor," he said, "there you will meet three men, three men going up to God as Moses went up before the people in Exodus 19 to worship and commune with God. And they are going to worship God oat the shrine and they will be carrying bread to offer to the Lord and to share with the anointed priests of God. And guess what? They are going to do something very unusual. They are going to share that sacred bread with you. In other words, they are going to know without anyone telling them. Nobody knows what I have just done to you. Your servant doesn't know. Only you and me. It is you and me, Samuel and Saul, we alone know that I have just anointed you. But they are going to treat you as if you are anointed. They are going to share with you the bread, holy bread. The Word of God will come true.

“And, thirdly, when you come to the hill of God in...” Look at verse five. “When you come to the hill of God...” Gibeath-elohim means the hill of God. And here the reader has a bit of a surprise for us. Instead of immediately going on to the fulfillment of the Word, he mentions this garrison that was there. There was a garrison of Philistines there. That is, right near to where Saul lived, to his homestead, to the farm, the ranch where he and his father lived, right near to there, apparently, there is a garrison of Philistines that have just parked themselves, feet under the table. They have made themselves at home. They have built a fortified city. They are just managing that area, doing as they will. There is nobody stopping them. Nobody is inhibiting them. Nobody is limiting them. Nobody is fighting them. There they are. They are right there next to your house.

Now, why does Samuel randomly mention them here at this point and then he forgets about them and he goes on?

“When you get there and you get near to that particular Philistine encampment...”

Bear in mind what he has been told, he has been anointed to do. What has he been anointed to do? Don't all shout at once because it will be too much hot air for me. He has been told that he is attack the enemies of Israel. Ok? They are there.

“When you get there, something amazing is going to happen. You are going to bunch into a... you are going to meet a bunch of prophets coming along the road, strumming their guitars, singing their choruses, exalting in God, jumping around and doing all kinds of strange and remarkable things. And something strange and remarkable is going to happen to you, something very unusual. The Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of God will rush upon you and you will prophesy with them and will be turned into another man.”

And that phrase “to rush” there has been used before in the Bible. It was used only once before, but of the Spirit rushing upon Samson, empowering him to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

So Samuel will understand what is going to be happening to him. There is going to be a rush of power that is going to strengthen him for the task that God has given him to do. He will make him mighty to act against the Philistines.

I think what I need to say here is this. There is no hint. This phrase is never used in the sense of regeneration, never used in terms of the new birth or that suddenly Saul would become a spiritual man with spiritual tastes and appetites and desires, because there is absolutely no use of this word in that context. The context indicates that it is empowerment to serve and particularly empowerment to fight the Philistines. Nowhere do we find anywhere in the record that this man Saul had any kind of relationship with God. He didn't even know who Samuel was. He wasn't interested in the things of God. He had no interest in those things. And the rushing of the Spirit, as we will see, makes no difference to his spiritual state, though it does empower him to serve the people of God.

Now he is a terrifying thing. We have officers in the church. I suppose in the language of Herman Bavinck, “The offices of the church are analogous to the offices of the Lord Jesus.” The prophet, I guess, and that is an analogy of the ministers, an analogy of a prophet in that he proclaims the Word of God. And the kings and the elders are analogous to each other because they are given the task of ruling the church. And the deacons have the rule of the priests in serving the people and, in a sense, the offices of the church are analogous to the offices of Christ.

But it is possible, you see, like Saul, to occupy an office, to do the work and not be regenerate, not be born again, not to have a vital living relationship with the Lord Jesus. It is possible for me to stand up here and preach this book and for you not to even know for one minute that my heart is not right with God. It is possible to have preachers of the Word who instruct us in the deep things of God who do not know the Lord. And one of the tests, of course, of not knowing the Lord is you abandon your faith. You abandon your walk with God ultimately and I have friends who have done that, friends from whom I have learned so much, friends who, frankly, had gifts that I don’t think are comparable to anybody else that I have ever heard, who have been mightily used by God who are nowhere today.

And there is a warning here, isn’t there? There is a warning to every pastor, every teacher, every small group leader, anybody who handles the Bible on a one to one basis.

How is your heart today? Do you have a relationship with the Lord Jesus? I asked that question at the earlier service and someone rightly spoke to me afterwards and said, “You know, things are going on in my life and I worry. I worry. When I heard you say that this morning I worried whether maybe my relationship with the Lord wasn’t real.”

And I said, “Here is the thing. If Saul heard me say this, Saul wouldn’t have even noticed I had said it. . He wouldn’t have bothered. His mind would have been somewhere else, as we shall see in a moment.

In other words, it is only someone who has a relationship with God that worries about their relationship with God. You know? That is the bottom line. It is a mark of grace to doubt.

I remember Johnny Erickson sang a song many years ago in which he talked about the grace to doubt and yet believe that God is really there. You really have to believe in God, if you think about it.

Well, anyway, back to Saul. Samuel hasn’t finished talking to Saul and look at verse eight. You will find this something else to say to him about the way in which he is to live his life. He is to live his life under the Word of God.

First of all he is given a task to do. There is an order here.

“When these signs meet you, well, believe this is the Word of God.”

That is, by the way, why Samuel is in the Bible, because his contemporaries recognized that the prophecies that he gave came true 100 percent. That was Moses' declared qualification for anybody before their word got in the Bible. They had to say things that were fulfilled 100 percent. A 99 rating didn't make it. It didn't get in the Bible. That is absolutely vital for us to understand that.

So when these things happen, you will notice the word of God.

“When these things happen, I want you to do whatever your hand finds to do for God is with you.”

And that is left hanging in the air. The question comes into our mind. What was this thing that his hand would find to do and that God would be with him and why does nothing happen after the signs are over?

And suddenly we are aware of this... remember, that little mention that Gibeath-elohim gets, the hill of God. It is the hill of God, but parked on the hill of God are this bunch of Philistines sort of encamped there.

“When the Spirit rushes on you, giving you power, do whatever your hand finds to do.”

What was my job description? My job description was God has anointed me to fight the enemies of Israel, the enemies of Israel, the hill of God, Philistines parked on the hill, the rush of the Spirit, empowered. Like it is a no brainer. Maybe I am supposed to attack the enemies of God because God is with me.

But nothing. Nothing. Is it that he doesn't believe God is with him? Is it that he is just indifferent to the Word that Samuel has spoken to him? Samuel now then in verse eight says this.

“Then, after you have done that, go before me to Gilgal. Behold I am coming to you to offer burnt offerings and to do sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait. You shall wait until I come and shall show you what you shall do.”

So do what you are supposed to do there. Then go to Gilgal. Wait for me there and then wait until I give you the next orders, the next instructions, the next Word from God.

In other words, what he is teaching Saul is this. He is teaching Saul that to be a king in the Israel regime meant not taking the initiative beyond your pay grade. It meant listening to the Word of God, to the prophet of God. That is the way it was to be. The Word of God was to control the behavior of the king. The king was subject to the Word of God.

I think I have quoted this before. George Melville, before King James I of England, the VI of Scotland till we kicked him out. There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland. There is King James the head of the commonwealth to whom we give all due

allegiance. And there is King Jesus the head of the Church in whose kingdom James is neither a king nor a head nor a lord, but a subject.

Don't you just wish you could have said that to the king? He was absolutely right, wasn't he? And that was the message that Samuel is giving here.

“Wait. Wait for the Word of God before you act.”

Well, the lesson... I am going to skip a whole load of stuff this morning because you are hot. You need to out into the... no, it is not fresh air actually. It is probably a bit better in here than it is out there. But the one little thing that I anted to pick up here is this whole thing about him prophesying.

When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart. And all these signs came to pass that day. When they came to Gibeah, behold, a group of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied among them. And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, “What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?”³

It became a saying. And I want you to notice there is no answer given to the question.

When I was growing up and if I ever asked my mother for something that was really ridiculously expensive or whatever, which wasn't very often because I was a very sensitive boy as you would expect. She isn't here to contradict it so I can tell you that. She would often say to me. “Do you think I am Mrs. Carnegie?”

Now as a boy I wondered who Mrs. Carnegie was. I discovered, of course, that Mrs. Carnegie must have been married to Mr. Carnegie. Mr. Carnegie was obviously Andrew Carnegie, the great Scotsman who came to New York, made an absolute fortune and became one the wealthiest men in America and then proceeded to give away his money in Scotland to all kinds of good causes. So there are library buildings all over Scotland with Carnegie's name on it and even organs, pipe organs in churches. I was minister in a church that had a Carnegie organ, remarkable thing that still worked, that Carnegie had done that.

So what she was saying was, “Do you think I am absolutely loaded like Carnegie was?”

It was just a saying that went around. Well, there was a saying that went around Israel that was this. “Is Saul among the prophets?”

And it raised a question. Who does he think he is? Does he think that he can act the way the way prophets are? Or maybe it was this. Is he in touch wit God's Word? Does he speak the Word of God? Does the prophet speak the Word of God? Or maybe it was this.

³ 1 Samuel 10:9-11.

Does he listen to the Word of God the way the prophets do? Is he in tune with the Word of God the way the prophets are?

In other words, there isn't actually an answer given to this question in the text. It is left out there. Why is it left out there? It is left out there because we are meant to look at this character in the Bible and at this point in the story we are meant to have a question in our heads. Where is Saul? Where is Saul really at? What is going on in Saul's life? What was this little event where he is dancing around with the prophets and prophesying? Is he in tune with the prophets? Is he in touch with the prophet? Is he on the same page as the prophets? Does he listen to the Word of God? Does he speak the Word of God? Does he do the Word of God? What is his relationship to the Word of God? What is going on inside the head of Saul of the tribe of Benjamin?

And I think it raises a question, doesn't it, for us. In our confession, you know, we admit the fact that it is possible for a person who is unconverted to occupy the office of a minister and preach the Word of God. And we know that ultimately on the day of final judgment, because Jesus himself said there are people who are going to come to him and they are going to say to him, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not do mighty works in your name?"

Jesus says, "And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"⁴

Now that is not to say people can be saved and lost, but it is to say that it is possible to taste something of spiritual activity and be lost. It is possible to feel the power of God without it taking residence in your life.

Well, behind all of this at the end of the day Saul gets home and we are back to the ordinariness of the story. He meets his uncle. And his uncle starts asking him awkward questions. Where have you been? What have you been doing? Who did you talk to? What did he say?

Have you ever had an uncle like that?

And what does Saul do? He is silent.

"What did Samuel say to you?"

"Oh, he said they found the donkeys. He said something about the donkeys."

But nothing about the kingdom. That is the point the text makes.

"But about the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything."⁵

⁴ Matthew 7:23.

⁵ 1 Samuel 10:16.

Why? Still a secret. It is still a secret. It hasn't been revealed. In the ordinariness of everyday life in his relationships with other people the kingdom is still a secret. It is not public knowledge. The kingdom is working. We know that. God is at work. He has already declared in chapter nine that he is the king. He is working out his big purposes. He had got an even bigger purpose that he is going to achieve by the establishment of a kingship in Israel, because the King of kings is going to come from that established kingship. He has a big purpose.

But either Saul isn't interested or Saul doesn't believe or Saul is too embarrassed to say. We don't know. All we know is that about the matter of the kingship he said nothing. And halfway through the story that is where we are going to close today. We are closing with a man who has been anointed king not doing the job that God gave him to do. We are closing with a story of a man who has been anointed king, who has had the Word of God reassured to him three times over.

“This is the Word of the Lord, the Word of the Lord, the Word of the Lord.”

And yet he doesn't seem in any way impressed by that. And we think of our King who is calling out of the world a people for himself, giving them officers, laws and censures by which he visibly governs them, our King who bestows saving grace upon his elect, rewarding their obedience, correcting them for their sins, preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings, restraining and overcoming all their enemies. Our king does that for us, powerfully ordering all things for his own glory and their good and also in taking vengeance on the rest who know not God and obey not the gospel. Our King does the job. He believes the Word. He does only what the Father tells him to do. He listens to his Father's voice. Then he acts and he is always there to do what is at his hand to do even if what is at his hand to do is suffer and die for his people.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank you for our King Jesus, the King of the Church and the Lord of all and we pray that you would help us today as we submit to his royal authority and gladly welcome him into our hearts and lives for his glory's sake. Amen.