

MONDAY, 4/15

Read 1 Samuel 8:1-22.

During this week and in the weeks to come, we will be diving into the world of 1 and 2 Samuel by exploring the life of King David. As a word of warning, the scripture readings will be longer than usual. We will try to make the devotional content more succinct. We want the emphasis to be on the scripture story.

Our passage today picks up with God's people asking for a king. There is a lot of back story that lead up to this moment. In the book of Joshua, God's people had entered the Promised Land. Through conquest and agreements, the people settled in the land God had in mind for them.

During this period, God's people were divided into 12 tribes. This division made governance a challenge. Now that they were settled, they needed a different structure. This is where the book of Judges picks up. Judges were appointed to bring wisdom and order to their life together. If you've read through Judges, you will know that that did not often happen. Oftentimes, the judges were corrupt, and the people were rebellious against the Lord. After generations of struggle, it became evident that judges were not the solution to their governance problem. The book of Judges ends with the idea that perhaps a king could solve their problems.

This is where 1 Samuel picks up. Here in chapter 8, the people ask for a king. There are a couple of things to note about this request. The first is that this move will eventually help them become a single nation. Under the leadership of a king, they will become a unified kingdom, at least until they aren't any longer.

The other thing to note is that their call for a king is ultimately a rejection of God as their King. Just as God led the people out of Egypt and fought many of their battles along the way to settling in the land, so God wanted to be their King. He wanted the people to look to Him for leadership, protection, power, and wisdom, yet the people continually went their own way, doing what they thought was right. They rejected God's leadership. The Lord allows them to do this, but He is clear that there are consequences. The consequences are that their kings will act like kings. Unlike under God's rule, the kings will build armies and require the people to serve their purposes. This is what the people asked for, even after God had warned them against it.

Once again, we are given a great vantage point to the people's stubbornness. Rather than trusting the Lord, the people want what they want. They seek their will, even at a cost to themselves, rather than pursuing God's will, which is much greater.

We know that we too are capable of this. I wonder how often we seek to lead our own lives apart from trusting God's leadership. We pursue our own will rather than His will. Let us seek to yield our desires and plans to God's greater will.

Praying Together:

"God, forgive us when we, like the people here in 1 Samuel, have sought our will apart from Your will, and how often we have gotten ourselves into trouble by chasing our own wants and wishes. You have such good plans for us, plans not only to bless us but to call us to be a true blessing to others. We want Your will be to be done in our lives--nothing else and certainly nothing less. Amen."

TUESDAY, 4/16

Read 1 Samuel 9:1-17.

In 1 Samuel 9, the people receive their first king. His name was Saul. While the Bible rarely describes someone's appearance, we are told that Saul was a stud. He was tall and handsome, the kind of person who easily garnered respect and admiration. Remember this, as it will show up in our scripture next week.

While Saul might have been good looking, he will prove to not be very wise. In this chapter alone, we discover that he doesn't fully understand the role to which he has been called. He struggles to grasp the significance of his responsibilities to God and the people. This will plague much of his reign as king.

The chapter is clear that God has chosen Saul to lead the people as king, but this is not to be understood as God's changing His mind about a king. God still knows that their desire for a king reflects their distrust in His leadership. As in the book of Judges, God gives the people their desires. He does the same with us. If we choose to set out on our own to seek life apart from God, He allows us. This is the gift and curse of free will. God honors our choices even when they are foolish. We often have to learn the hard way. That will indeed be the case throughout 1 and 2 Samuel.

Another point to note is that Saul is anointed by Samuel as king of God's people. Anointing prepared someone for a specific role. Later in 1 Samuel, we find David calling Saul the Lord's anointed one. By 2 Samuel, this title extends beyond Saul and becomes the basis for the hopes for the Messiah, which means God's Anointed One. After countless failed attempts to save themselves, the people will long for a day when God sends His Anointed One to rescue them. We know this to be the ministry of Jesus, the Messiah, who came to redeem God's people and establish His Kingdom.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, You are the Lord and King we need. You are the One who leads out of goodness and justice. We call upon You to direct our lives. We want Your will and gladly entrust ourselves to Your care. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 4/17

Read 1 Samuel 9:18-10:8.

Our reading today gives us further insight into Saul's character. One thing that becomes evident to us here is the tension that develops between Saul and Samuel. Samuel's commentary on Saul only confuses Saul all the more. This will continue to be a theme during Saul's reign.

Before he is anointed, Samuel is given the meat from the thigh, who then gives it Saul. The significance of this is that this cut was often for the priests. It was symbolically given to God as an offering and then received back from God to then be given to the priests for them to eat. This was due to their special calling to serve God's will. It is extended to Saul to represent his sacred role as king. Saul is then anointed shortly after by Samuel.

1 Samuel 10:1 can read differently given the translation you use. In it, Samuel states how Saul will rule as king and will effectively "save" the people. Samuel envisions the role of a king as mostly

a warrior who will lead the people to victories over their enemies. This plays out in the later part of the reading where Samuel tells Saul to go lead the people to confront the Philistines, the enemies of God's people. Samuel promises that the Spirit of the Lord will "come powerfully upon" Saul and that he will be "changed into a new person".

This language is what we often associate with the New Testament rather than the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the only people who received God's Spirit were those who needed the Spirit to perform their ordained task. Saul and David both receive the Spirit as king. After Pentecost, every believer has received the Spirit as both a deposit on the life to come and to empower them to live into the life they now have with Jesus. It is the work of Christ both on the cross and resurrection as well as the work of the Spirit that make us new people. This is God's work in us. We share in His Spirit and now have the power to live in Christ. It is for us as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, the "old life" is gone and the "new life" has come.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, You are a gift to me that I may live into the fullness of life that Jesus made possible. Empower me to enjoy and go deeper in life with Christ. I want to know Jesus and walk with Him. I want to grow in my love for Him and serve Him that I may bless Him as He has so blessed me. Amen."

THURSDAY, 4/18

Read 1 Samuel 10:9-27.

Here we see the power of God to bring change in our lives. Saul becomes a new person. With a changed heart and God's Spirit upon him, Saul begins prophesying with the prophets. In other words, he begins to speak God's words. Even the people who knew Saul didn't recognize the person before them. He had been that changed.

I wonder if people around us see the evidence of Christ in our lives by how we are changed. The same power of God that was at work in Saul is at work in us. We even have the work of Christ in us. May we ask God to continue to sanctify us and form our lives that we might reflect Jesus.

As Samuel seeks to install Saul as king before the people, Saul is found hiding. That must have been a little embarrassing. It shows us that Saul still doesn't understand the importance of his role and that he fails to trust even the wisdom and power God has given him to fulfill his calling.

We understand where Saul comes from on that point. I wonder how often we have chosen to hide from God's call rather than humbly submit to it. We choose to not do so rather than do what God wants us to do.

Samuel tells the people that since they have rejected God as their king, they will be given Saul to lead them. It's not exactly a ringing endorsement, but in the end, the people receive Saul as their king, even in spite of Samuel's rebuke.

It is clear that not everyone is thrilled about Saul as their king. There is no winning when you enter the world of politics, but this is what the people wanted. With a contentious presidential election looming over us, we feel the same effects today. Whatever happens, some will be excited; while others, infuriated. Regardless of the outcome, we must remember that we are first citizens of God's Kingdom and that Christ is our King. He has called us to conduct ourselves in a way that reflects Him. We cannot contribute to the toxic nature of what we're seeing around us.

Regardless of who sits in the White House, God is the One with real authority over us. We must seek first to follow Him and His way.

Praying together:

"King Jesus, we acknowledge and receive Your authority over us. You are the One worthy of our praise and admiration. In this season, teach us what it means to follow You and bless You. We want to reflect You and our hope in You in our attitude and lives. Amen."

FRIDAY, 4/19

Read 1 Samuel 13:1-15.

King Saul is stuck. He is caught up in the dangers of the role to which he has been placed. The preceding chapters have presented both the positive and potentially negative effects of the people's new governance. Samuel has said that a king has the power to liberate the people at best and at worst to oppress the people.

We have also seen into Saul's character and leadership as well. Saul can be passionate and yet sometimes passive. In the coming chapters we will see how his tendency to vacillate between the two will lead to his failure as king. He will eventually be rebuked and rejected, both by God and the people.

We see one example here in chapter 13. Saul is given the command from God through Samuel to wait for him so that he can make a sacrifice. When Samuel was late in coming and with the people growing antsy, Saul takes it upon himself to offer the sacrifice. His impatience reflects that of the people when they refused to wait for Moses to come down from Mount Sinai and then fashioned the golden calf. Saul fails to trust God and takes things into his own hand with his own plans.

In the end, Saul trusted his own heart rather than God's heart. Samuel says that, as a result, Saul will be rejected as king. God will call someone to take his place who has a heart "after (God's) own heart". This will pave the way for King David to be anointed and installed as king over God's people.

Saul's story stands as a warning for us to place our trust in the Lord rather than ourselves. The words of Proverbs 3:5-6 come to mind. It reads, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, submit to Him and He will make your paths straight."

Praying Together:

"Father, forgive me when I take things into my own hands without first trusting You. I know You call me to act, but You first call me to submit my plans to You. Help me to trust You and look to You before I turn to myself. Amen."

SATURDAY, 4/13

Read 1 Samuel 14:1-14.

The Philistines were hunkered down before the next attack from the Israelites. The Philistine garrison on the other side of the valley was sent as a reinforcement against the Israelites. The Israelites and Philistines were camped on opposite sides of the ravine at Geba and Michmash,

respectively. Jonathan's plan was to defeat the Philistine troops, then rally the Israelites troops to force the Philistines backward. He did not tell his father Saul of his plans.

Meanwhile, Saul was camped on the outskirts of town, accompanied by a priest and 600 men, none of whom were aware of his next steps. Jonathan decided to head toward the Philistine garrison with his armor bearer. In his mind, he believed that the Lord would act in their favor, believing that "nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few." Jonathan had decided it was time for him and his armor bearer to stand their ground against Philistine garrison.

The Philistines watched the surrounding land in hopes of defeating all who threatened them. When they saw the two men, the garrison called for Jonathan and his armor bearer to come to them. Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet with his armor bearer following closely after him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan and his armor bearer, as Jonathan killed these Philistines one by one. In that first slaughter, Jonathan and his armor bearer killed about 20 men in the space of an acre of land.

There was a great panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The Philistines trembled just as the earth quaked. A great panic spread across the land. Under what circumstances does a son attack the enemy without an army or "consulting the divine" through the sacred ephod? Though he may have had reason not to tell his father of his plans, many would say Jonathan had been divinely inspired to do what he did.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we know You to be a leader in Your kingdom, and that Your wisdom and Your presence are critical for our success. Give us the strength and courage we need to embrace leadership in Your Kingdom. Thank You for Your presence in all things. Amen."

SUNDAY, 4/14

Read 1 Samuel 14:15-23.

Imagine that out of the corner of his eye, Saul, Jonathan's father, sees a battle take place within the Philistine camp. This was unexpected, even frustrating, to watch. All Saul could see were bodies surging back and forth in battle. This was the battle for which he was preparing, maybe even one he was within a day or two of having. But someone beat him to it.

As Saul continued to watch, he asked for a roll call, realizing that the only two missing were his son and his armor bearer. Confused, Saul summoned his priest, the carrier of the ephod, saying, "Bring me an Ark of God" whose ultimate use was for "divination," or to receive prophetic next steps from God. Such was Saul's response to seeing a war break out below him, with his son at the forefront.

People were confused. The Israelite army expected to see Saul, not Jonathan, leading the battle. They may have known how Saul fought and what his fighting strategies were, but they knew nothing of those of Jonathan and his one-man army. Saul's soldiers weren't invited to the battle after all the training they had received. Saul was left out and seen as foolish, especially in light of the fact that his son and his armor bearer had killed 20 men in a relatively short time. What was happening here? Who was invited and who was not? How did Jonathan know to do what he did? And best of all, who was doing the king's work?

As every sword was matched with another sword, folks started changing sides. Now the Hebrews, who previously had been with the Philistines and had gone up with them at a camp, turned and joined the Israelites, who were with Saul and Jonathan. And when all the Israelites

who had gone into hiding in the hill country of Ephraim saw that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed closely after them in battle. So the Lord gave Israel the victory that day.

What once was working is no longer relevant. What once made sense no longer did. Once they saw the example of a divinely inspired leader as he led the Israelites into victory but now that same leader appears powerless.

Praying Together:

"You are in all ways divine, Lord. As much as we need You, how many of us have the desire to follow Your lead, to listen to Your message, to hear Your voice, and to follow Your will over our own? Connect with us in new ways. Teach us. We are listening. In Your name, Amen."