

Saul Anointed King

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[0:00] We're going to now jump back in. We're in a series in the book of Samuel. And today we're going to be continuing in chapter 8. So if you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn there.

If not, no worries. We're going to have it on the screen behind you. And this week we're going to be dealing with a segment of this book that deals with what is really one of the key events in the history of the life of the nation of Israel because we're getting ready to enter the period when Israel is given a king.

Now obviously in the scope of world history, having a king or a king-like ruler is pretty unremarkable. Throughout history, we actually have to be drawn to like the exceptions to that, not the rule.

It's why things like this little fledgling democracy around Athens kind of catches our eye because the way of things is to expect that there will be a strong central ruler in charge of the country. And it's really important as we go into like this portion of 1 Samuel to kind of understand that for the history of this nation because remember that to God, this wasn't supposed to be just any other nation.

[1:15] Israel, as a people, as they were brought out of Egypt, as they were put together, were meant to be a part of how God was revealing himself or really re-revealing himself to a world that had largely forgotten him.

He called them out not because of anything special about them, not because of their greatness. He made that clear. He called them out because of his loving kindness. And in that loving kindness, he said, the way we're going to show the world who I am is by a covenant that I make to you so that this world will know I'm not just any other God.

I am not some unknowable force. I am not some superstition. I am not like the petty and bloodthirsty deities that have to be appeased for other nations.

I am the God, the only true God. I am the I am. And so the arrangement that God had set up with this nation, the laws he gave them reflected that.

It was an arrangement that was built not on trust in some king, but on trust in him. It was reflected in the laws he gave that this nation was to be sustained, not by some particular form of government, but by his presence and his provision.

[2:43] Now for the people of Israel, particularly when they were interested in turning away to other sinful things and other gods, that arrangement at many times was frustrating because it was a government structure that didn't offer simple answers to hard questions.

It was an arrangement that required a lot of waiting on God to move when you very much thought he should have moved faster. And so as they watched the nations around them rise and grow strong and act decisively and pull on both the oppressive but somewhat comforting covering of a king that they could see and they could touch, that began to grate on them.

And now in the book of Samuel, after really decades if not centuries at this point of what probably felt like disordered chaos to them, it finally reaches this boiling point in Samuel chapter 8, which is where we're going to pick up the story today.

So 1 Samuel chapter 8 verse 1. When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah.

And they were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and they perverted justice.

[4:09] Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. And they said to him, Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the other nations.

But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord said to Samuel, Obey the voice of the people in all they say to you for they have not rejected you but they have rejected me from being king over them.

According to all the deeds that they have done from the day I brought them out of Egypt to this very day forsaking me and serving other gods so they are also doing to you.

Now then obey their voice only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them. So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him.

And he said, These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you. He will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots.

[5 : 18] And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.

And he will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He'll take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants.

And he will take a tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his servants. And he will take your male servants and your female servants. The best of your young men and of your donkeys and he'll put them to work.

He'll take a tenth of your flocks and you shall be his slaves. And in that day, you will cry out because of your king whom you have chosen for yourself.

But the Lord will not answer you in that day. But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel and they said, No, but there shall be a king over us that we may be like all the nations and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.

[6 : 22] And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them to the ears of the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, Obey the voice and make them a king. And Samuel said to the men of Israel, Go, every man to his city.

This is God's word to us. So just when it looks like from last week that things are looking up for the nation, people are turning back to God, they've got a man who follows God and Samuel, just when it looks like they've turned a corner.

When Samuel gets old, he appoints his sons as judges, as rulers over Israel, as was the custom. And they fall right back into the same pattern, perverting justice, using the office to benefit themselves.

Now, as a quick side road here, I actually think this is one of those places in scripture where it's really easy to try to insert a sermon in here or like overanalyze what happened because we're really tempted when something goes wrong like this, particularly with our children, to make some sweeping statement like, well, you know, the kid, like celebrity leaders and their kids, it never turns out well, right?

Like they're always gonna fall apart. But it doesn't say that. Like the text doesn't say, Samuel was a bad or absent father and that's why they turned out like this.

[7 : 45] Interestingly, we also don't see God condemning Samuel for choosing them, even though choosing them is the impetus for Israel turning and asking for a king.

And that's at least a little bit interesting because if you'll remember, we just saw God judge Eli for not dealing with his sons. But for whatever reason, it's not recorded.

He doesn't do that with Samuel here, which again, I think at the very least might mean, and maybe this is just like God wants some parent to hear this today, not all of your children's successes or failures are on you.

You know, Proverbs 22, 6 says, train up a child in the way he should go and even when he is old, he will not depart from it. That is good wisdom. Well, what you do with your children matters.

But as we learned throughout the book of Proverbs, statements like that in Proverbs are meant to be markers of God's good intent and wisdom. They're not magic guarantees that if you do this and you do that, everything will always turn out right.

[8 : 52] We live in a broken world. Sin makes everything harder and in point of fact, your kids get a say in how their lives are going to turn out. So don't read too much into that there.

That's not what the Bible wants us to search out because at any rate, it's not the focus of the passage. Samuel's sons do the wrong thing and because of that, the people of Israel make a

request.

And it's a request, if we're honest, probably seems to have a certain rationale, a certain reasonable to us. There's a pragmatic logic to their request because they're living under wicked rulers.

They've done this cycle back and forth throughout the book of Judges and so they say, give us a king so we can stop this. Seems like a reasonable or rational request, but the Bible tells us it breaks God's heart.

Which means that one of the things I think God is trying to teach us through this is, be careful because there is always a good reason to make a bad decision.

[10:05] Now we should probably clarify what I mean by, or what I think the Bible means by, a bad decision. decision because in modern day culture, just frankly, we tend to judge a decision on whether it's a bad decision or a good decision very heavily by what we see as the outcomes.

You know, we're right in the middle of college football and NFL season, glorious time of year, right? And during this season, there are no shortage of armchair quarterbacks and armchair coaches who have a very keen eye for every play that their team should be calling in every potential situation. And somewhere in the part of our brain that doesn't work very well on game day, you know, like you know, okay, it's a team full of highly trained coaches.

Like literally, they are paid millions of dollars to think about nothing but football all week. They spend thousands of hours looking at film, looking for tendencies.

They have huge analytics teams looking for strengths and weaknesses on their teams. Like you know they're doing that and yet, when the critical play comes in the game and it fails, you still can't help but say, how could you go for two right there?

[11:27] How are you not running the ball on fourth and goal? We've been blowing them off the, you know, why are we in a prevent defense right now? I hate prevent it. Like, you become John Madden and you're all over it.

And the truth is, sometimes the play fails because it is a bad call. Like, they are out there trying to out-compete each other. So sometimes the coach makes a bad call but a lot of the times, there's nothing wrong with the decision.

It is exactly the right call and it just doesn't work out. The tackle slips when you snap the ball and he gives up a sack. Receiver tries to make his move before he's caught the ball and he drops it.

Sometimes you just get out-athleted. You got the right defense and just Randy Moss is better. it happens. Just because something turns out good in our estimation doesn't mean it came from a bad decision.

And just, spoiler alert, vice versa, just because something seems like it's bad doesn't necessarily mean, like, the outcome is not what we expected doesn't mean it wasn't made right.

[12:36] We're gonna see this dynamic. We're not gonna read them today but in the next two chapters, chapters 9 and 10, we're gonna see Saul anointed as this first king. And when you read that, you know what is gonna stand out to you if you haven't read it before when you see Saul?

Seems like a pretty normal guy. Like, not the devil. And the first couple of chapters, you're gonna see God actually using him to make the situation better for Israel.

And you might think, ah, see, that's what we needed all along. It was a king. It's turning out better.

The Bible's already told us this decision, this ask, grieved his heart.

I think what the Bible uses to decide whether a decision is bad or good are based around questions like, is the decision made from a place full of faith and confidence in God and what he's gonna do? Is it confident in his love and provision no matter how it turns out? Is the decision based on the fact that it's the right and righteous thing to do even if it doesn't benefit me or my people?

[13:55] Or, did I make this decision from a place of anxiety or fear or annoyance or desperation?

I don't think it's rocket science to note and I think most of us would agree many, if not most, of the bad decisions we make in life come at a time and a place where you're things like exhausted, afraid, angry, desperate, confused.

And what's, the book 1 Samuel is trying to show you here is when you feel those currents, you have to be on the lookout because you're poised to rationalize something that shouldn't be.

It seems like Israel has a rational, reasonable request. These two sons are not leading well.

They're taking advantage of us. But here's the thing, instead of seeking God for remedy, instead of putting it back before the God who had called them out, crying out to him, rectify this, they demand another solution.

[15:07] Give us a king. And they can't claim any ignorance to what that's going to mean. Like there is high intention in what they're doing and we know that because God tells Samuel the one thing you're going to do is lay it out for them.

And so he does. He says, hey look, here's the deal. A king is going to take your sons, going to take your daughters, going to take your money, going to take your food.

And then he goes so far as in verse 18 to say, and in that day you will cry out because of your king whom you chose for yourselves but the Lord will not answer you in that day.

Literally just saying, just so you know, you are going to regret it. And when you complain, God ain't gonna hear any of that. And even knowing that, they still say, what is their response?

No, there shall be a king over us that we may be like all the nations and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.

[16:18] See, this is why it grieves God so much because they weren't meant to be like other nations. nations. If you're like other nations, you can't reveal me in the way I want.

They wanted a king they could see and touch who will fight their battles which is really just another way of saying, so I don't have to. I don't have to rely on a God I can't see and touch.

I can put my faith in something concrete in front of me. And though it's not really said here, the truth about a king who is a man or a woman is that they can be manipulated where God can't.

Now, if we hadn't already read the next verse, you might expect God's response to that to be the thunder and fury. To just absolutely deny the request to come down in terrible smiting power and prove who he is to remind them of who they actually serve and who they're rejecting for a petty human king but that's not his response.

He simply says to Samuel, obey their voice, make them a king. Which I think means, and we might have to wrap our heads around this, sometimes the best God can do for you is the best you'll let him do for you.

[17:45] I would submit, I think you see this all throughout scripture, God is not going to force you to love him.

Even when you kind of wish he would. He is absolutely not going to prevent every possible bad decision if your heart is set on it. And because of that, what you see often in scripture is that the blessing God gives to a people or a person.

And sometimes even the course he tells them to go, the way he directs them is restricted precisely by how much they're going to allow him to do. In Matthew chapter 13 we find this scene of Jesus teaching in Nazareth which is his hometown.

He grew up there. And even though the people in the town acknowledge that his teaching and his wisdom are astonishing, they just can't get past the fact that this is Jesus.

Like Jesus that I know he was there and we did the carpentry thing together and they just can't see him in any other light than like the guy down the street.

[19:00] And it says because of that it says in the Bible that Jesus did not do many mighty works, many miracles there because of their unbelief.

they set the terms of what Jesus was going to do. I think it even applies to the application of the law in Mark 10 a Pharisee comes to Jesus it says to test him and the question he asked is hey is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife because there are all kinds of thorny questions that go around this and Jesus response to him is to ask him he says what did Moses command you which is just another way of saying what did God tell you in the law handed down through Moses what did he tell you to do and so the Pharisee answers Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away and what's interesting is when Jesus responds he doesn't say well there's your answer why are we talking about it he also doesn't say yeah I know that's what it says but you're interpreting that wrong there's another way to look at that the first thing out of Jesus mouth is because of the hardness of your heart he wrote that command but that was not the intention because you would have it no other way because of the brokenness of sin that has infected this world sometimes the thing

God does is simply limit the damage God is not going to force you to love him and that's interesting I think too because let's think about force for just a second okay by the application of force I bet I could make you if I was a sadistic or mean person do a lot of stuff that you never thought you would do by the application of force you can make people do some humiliating things by the application of force you can make people do evil wicked things that they thought they would never do by the

application of force you can make people deny their God you can make people pretend to be all kinds of things but there is one thing that no matter how much force you apply you can never never do and that's you can never make someone actually love you like really love you by applying force and if you kind of want to know why God being omnipotent why it seems like sometimes he does and sometimes he doesn't it's because ultimately he knows the thing the thing that would really be best for you is to love him and if that's his goal sometimes the best thing he can do is not blow you away with a display but to put you on a journey that gets you to the place where you can love him and there's mystery in that but that is God's goal now I'll be honest with you when I personally ponder that it scares me it actually is something that if left there would be a cause for my heart to despair because look

I know me pretty well and I know that if ultimately what God can do in my life is dependent on me yikes like I am never gonna get the best because I'm never not gonna mess it up in some way man but thankfully the story isn't done in first Samuel because as we start to read in chapters nine and ten and beyond what you're gonna see is God following through on this plan to give Israel king but you're also gonna start to see some threads appear that they didn't expect which is gonna make it really clear that God really is out here playing chess to our checkers I really wish I could have thought of a less corny way to say that but I just want to be real God is playing a different game than you your choices matter they really do they have so much consequence to you and the people you love and the people around you they are a part of the tapestry of how

God moves or doesn't move in this world and it is amazing and unsearchable but they are also part of a much bigger picture that you most of the time don't get to see you know Kirk last week did an excellent job pointing out that one of the things you start to see in first Samuel is that all this ritual all the imagery contained and the sacrifices that Israel brought over the centuries the lamb that takes your sin away the scapegoat that takes your sin into the forest never to be seen you start to see that God is actually writing a multi century story to prepare the world for something better and even here is Israel is receiving a king and we see this more and more as the book of first Samuel unfolds God's got something bigger in mind to God this transition isn't a transition from well you were under divine rule and now you're under human rule to God all this is is a change in how his sovereignty is mediated through

[25 : 06] Israel's leadership relationship and it's one step closer to the king he's actually trying to get to because see here's the thing for the people God loves he is never going to be content to leave you in this is the best I can do for you land he's not going to do it and many of you you know this like if you've if you've ever had you know sort of the terrible experience of having to watch a child just rebel and make really bad choices like even in those places where you know they're just going to have to feel the consequences of them the heart of a true parent never looks at that and goes they're going to get what's coming to them or one day I'll get to say I told you so it looks and says I want nothing more than you to come home I want nothing more than the day when you are restored and whole and happy and even if you won't let me step in right now even if you limit what

I can do I'm still going to be moving to that end Jesus tells this famous parable the prodigal son in which we see a father who is very limited in what he can do for his son because his son makes it clear I want nothing to do with you I want nothing to do with your life advice I want your stuff and I want to make my own choices and I'm out that is a box that the father can't speak much into and so as his son goes out into the world to seek what he thinks is his fortune but actually his ruin the best his father can do he can't lock him up he can't he's limited the best he can do is to sit on the porch with a prayerful and weightful eye hoping laying before God that maybe one day might his son come home and what you see is the instant the instant he sees on the horizon the glimmer of hope that he can do better for him that's exactly what he gets here's a robe here's a ring here's the best food this is actually the best

I can do for you is not just sitting and watching this is the best I can do for you won't you let me a little caution here because just like the older brother in that story if you are a person that has a self confident disposition a self righteous heart if you believe that you're going to be okay because you're a good person you are right in how you understand things you have done the right thing whenever God does what he does here whenever someone who has been far comes home to see what the best God could actually do is your cry is always going to be the same of his it's not going to be welcome home deserves the heart that the Bible says can find the father is the one that never cries out for what it deserves it cries out for mercy have mercy on me a sinner oh

Jesus give me not what I deserve but what I don't deserve because of him God is not content to leave us there even in this mistake of getting a king what's funny is God always wanted them to have a king and a human one at that just not the one they were looking for and just not the one you're going to find in the pages!

of 1 Samuel he's looking for a king that's of his own making a king called Jesus the band comes up today a couple of ways we can respond if you're here and you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus we are always just so grateful it really means we don't take it as a coincidence that you're here and I think the thing that God would want me to ask you is simply this who is the king you are looking for or maybe to say it another way because we don't think always in terms of kings who are you looking to to fix it whatever it is is it your spouse your lover is it like a politician like some some platform is it AI some pastor some influencer is it you is it ultimately you will have no king because you got this

[30:12] Jesus is the only king who can heal what is broken and so whether you want it or not today you actually step in here with a choice you have a choice before you leave and the is it if I can come home Bible says the heart that needs nothing can't find him but the heart that longs the heart that knows it is weak the heart that knows it needs forgiveness can find it in the savior and that's what he really wants to do he he wants to put you back in the family that you were always meant to be a part of not as some religious trick or some manipulation this is an invitation to actually find the things that all humans long for rest redemption forgiveness an actual new life if any part of you is curious about that the father says come there'll be a prayer on the screen that's a way you could maybe express that right where you're at if you really want to be bold and take hold of that there'll be some people down front that would love to talk with you doesn't have to be complicated

Jesus have mercy on me fix it show me if there's something better for those of us who are followers of Jesus I think these are the kind of days that it's good to just take a little stock and so I think there's a couple questions you could ask yourself in prayer here and before I even read them let me just say they're not questions intended to engender shame to make you feel bad about where you're at like even the invitation to repent to change your course to change your mind is God inviting you back in he is not angry he's not waiting with the paddle he wants you to get back into the best and so I think two questions you could ask yourself one is there anywhere that you are making bad decisions for what you have deemed a good reason something that you have in your head rationalized as something you can do but in your heart you know you're making the wrong choice give it to God ask him what trusting him would look like or maybe is there anywhere that God has shown you that what you have what you are getting is not actually the best that God wants to give it's all you're letting him do help ask him to help you see what that block is if you don't feel like you've gotten all of God let me go ahead and solve the mystery you haven't he is infinite you have never gotten all of what God could give you of what he has for his children so just take a moment and pray on that like again there's the heart of the father is not to make you feel bad for where you're at it's literally again to call you home and then when you're ready another way you can connect with him is to come to the communion table as a follower of Jesus you take this bread and this cup and you can take it back to your seat and partake of the elements and what's so beautiful about that is you're remembering in that the king that God always wanted for you is not just a king who sits on high it's one that washed the feet of his people it's one that made it so that you didn't have to just be a servant you could be called a friend of God child of the king like if if you want to know what the best God can do is it was his son that's what this meal means it's Jesus saying there will never be anything that costs the father this much and so you can trust his heart that there is nothing good he will withhold from you father we give you this moment and this time I pray you will speak into the hearts of everyone here you will draw those who are far near you will comfort those who are hurting you will free those who are ashamed you will silence the voices of condemnation and fill it with the voice of your spirit this place belongs to you holy spirit come in Jesus name and