

Character of a King

As we close our series of messages taken from 1 Samuel we will see that although God's people do not always bring glory to Him, God continues to call His people to be His witnesses in this world.

The nation of Israel was to be like no other nation on earth. *"You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own,"* Lev. 20:26. Their obedience to the commands of God was to show that God is close and hears their prayers, and that they are to live by righteous laws (Deut. 4:6-8). Their ancestors had been freed from slavery in Egypt, by God. They were a free people under God, united by their common allegiance to the God who

In the same manner, Christians are to carry the mantle of Christ: *"As you come to him, the living Stone ... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood..."* 1 Peter 2:4-5. Christian people have a calling to lead holy lives as God's witnesses in this world. We have the advantage of knowing the Savior, the only Son of God who walked this earth, spoke words of truth and grace, paid the price for our sin and failure to live up to God's standards, and then ascended to heaven where he judges the living and the dead.

God's Plan B

Samuel was the last of the Judges of Israel, those raised up by God to lead the people into faithfulness, responsibility, and adherence to God's righteous laws. Samuel was their religious and moral leader, upholding the law equally for all and exhorting them to reverence God. That's what kept them free. But the people strayed from God – their true king - and morality declined. *"In those days there was no king in Israel ... everyone did what was right in his own eyes,"* Judges 21:25. So the elders of Israel asked for a king thinking that would make them like all the other nations, shifting responsibility for their freedom under God from themselves, to someone who would fight their battles for them. God consoled Samuel by telling him, *"They have not rejected you; they have rejected me as their king,"* 1 Sam. 8:7.

So God's people wanted a king and God said to Samuel, let them have it, but warn them of the consequences – how a king will abuse his power over them. Yet God would continue to work for His purpose, even if He had to do so through a king. We might call it God's Plan B. Samuel complied and found Saul, an unknown young man with the physical stature (and perhaps good looks) that seemed to many to fill the bill for a king – someone who would look regal and be

strong before their enemies. We heard last week from Andrew about Saul being anointed king of Israel, how he led the armies of Israel to victory over their enemies ... at least for awhile. But Saul degenerated and all his human flaws came to forefront, most of all his failure to obey to God. Samuel told Saul, *"You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel,"* 1 Sam. 15:26. Rejecting God's word is a sure path to destruction for any group or church called by His name.

After Samuel had prophesied that the kingdom would be torn from Saul's hand, he retired to his home in Ramah, perhaps grieving over events. As it says, *"Until the day Samuel died, he did not see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel,"* 1 Sam. 15:35. Samuel had thought that Saul would champion God's cause and bring victory for God's people; but he had failed. These were dark days for God's people. In his old age Samuel may well have been heart-broken to see order collapsing and he may have felt he had failed God and Israel. Was this the end?

Plan B Revived

The LORD said to Samuel, *"How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king"* 1 Sam. 16:1. There *is* a time for mourning, but there's also a time for moving on. Everyone has pain in their past – circumstances, events, or people that have wounded us. You can find yourself going over the same ground: Why did this happen to me? Why did they hurt me? What did I do wrong? Why did I do this or that? You can spend a lot of time struggling to emotionally deal with it and let it go. But you always have a choice: You can keep talking about the hurt or start talking about God's goodness. You can keep asking 'why' or get a hope for the future. Samuel learned he needed to "get over it" before he could "get on with it." Maybe God is saying to you this morning, "Let go of the past! Repent and give or receive the forgiveness necessary to healing. Put it behind you for I have new things ahead for you. That's where your focus should be."

Ten-year-old Alan had looked forward for weeks to this day because his father had promised to take him fishing, if the weather was suitable. It hadn't rained for weeks, so when Alan awoke early he was shocked to see that it was raining heavily and it appeared that it would all day. Alan moped around the house, looking out the windows and grumbling. "Dad, why couldn't the Lord let it rain yesterday? It just isn't fair," he complained to his father who was sitting at the breakfast table.

Later, about three o'clock, the rain stopped. There was still time for fishing, so Dad called Alan and they quickly loaded the gear and were off to the

lake. For some strange reason, the fish were biting like crazy and they soon filled their limit and came home with a full string of fine, big fish. At supper, over a plate of freshly prepared fish, Alan's mom asked him to say grace. Alan did, concluding his prayer with, "And, Lord, if I sounded grumpy earlier today it was because I couldn't see far enough ahead."

Despite human failures and flaws, God still has a purpose for our world and lives! Just because Saul failed, didn't mean that God was finished with Israel. God still has a work that he wants to accomplish. Tired Samuel, dismayed by Saul, couldn't see what God could see. But God's kingdom isn't dependent on men or women, but on God! True back then, still true today. There have always been attacks on the Church of Jesus. In the last 10 years, record numbers of Christians have been martyred, courts have over-ruled our belief system, the media has mocked and the atheists have scorned. Yet Jesus said, *"...on this Rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!"* Mt. 16:18. And I believe Him. God's kingdom depends on God and hell will never prevail over the church! To Samuel God says, there is a David out there waiting and ready to enlist in the work of God. To us God says, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light,"* 1 Peter 2:9. God has plans for the future greater than those of the past.

God's Point of View

One of the lessons Samuel illustrates for us is obedience to God. As he had obeyed God before, so he did in his old age, perhaps at a time when he thought his service to God were over. He got up from retirement and went out as God instructed, to find and anoint the new man that God would approve as king of Israel. Did you notice that God sent Him to Bethlehem? And *"... the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart,'"* 1 Sam. 16:7. God is looking for a few men and women and children who are willing to allow Him mold their hearts.

When the Bible talks about the heart, it's not referring to the organ that keeps the blood flowing. It's talking about the center of one's will, emotions, intellect, and desires. The heart is your spiritual core. Evidently Samuel learns his lesson, because he quickly surmises that none of the seven of Jesse's sons are the one God had chosen. They may look good on the outside, like King Saul, but they don't have what it takes on the inside. So Samuel says, "Don't you have any other boys?" When he hears Jesse has one more son in the fields with the sheep, he says, "We're not sitting down until you get him here!" And as the youngest is brought in, the Lord whispers to Samuel's soul, "Anoint him; this is the one."

It says that David was “ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance.” Ruddy: red, like what you might see on a youth’s cheeks. The point is this David was still quite young and inexperienced and it would be many years before he took office as King of Israel. But God plans ahead, for “... *the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.*” David has led sheep; now he must learn to lead people. God grows his character.

We are never too young or too old to cultivate godly character. God can use all life experiences to grow us, teach us, improve us. We can always be seeking to be more Christ-like in our attitudes and behaviors, to be faster in our obedience and slower in our disobedience. Allowing God to have more and more of us, as we seek his will. Because it matters for generations to follow, for those we will bring into the kingdom, for all that God wants to do through us.

Even at Samuel’s advanced age, he was still learning to follow God. Don’t be so surprised that God shows you what you didn’t expect. Never stop learning! Never be content with your spiritual life. Seek more of God. Seek to be more of the man or woman God has called you to be. Know that God is not done with you yet.

God’s plan may change but his purpose does not. He doesn’t change his mind about His purposes. Many verses in the bible teach this truth. I want you to look them up and read them after this service.

1 Samuel 15:29 *“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”*

Malachi 3:6 *“I the Lord do not change.”*

James 1:17 *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”*

Psalms 102:25-27 *“In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”*

Hebrews 13:8 *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*

Here’s a powerful one: **Romans 11:29** *“God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”* That means never canceled, never rescinded.

The book of Samuel teaches us that God’s plans may change but His purpose does not. Israel asked for a king despite God’s warnings. So then God sought to shape the heart of one who would be king. Later, God sent prophets to remind the kings that they were beholden to God and that *they* were not gods. God is not wedded to a particular institution, a particular church, but to His purpose to redeem the world. When our institutions, erected to further His kingdom, no longer fulfill that mission, God will move on. Our job is always to seek God, listen to His call, so that we may stay in the path of His purpose.

When we place our hearts at His disposal and obey Him, God promises to revive our drooping spirits by His Spirit and shape us for His eternal purpose,

that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His glorious light.

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