

Saul the Lords Choice

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- [0 : 00] I'm going to sing to God's praise from Psalm 75, from verse 4 to the end of the psalm.
- Psalm 75, from verse 4, I to the foolish people said, Do not deal foolishly, and unto those that wicked are, lift not your horn on high.
- Lift not your horn on high, nor speak with stubborn neck. But know that not from east, nor west, nor south, promotion but flow.
- But God is judge, he puts down one and sets another up. For in the hand of God most high of red wine is a cup, it is full of mixture.
- He pours forth and makes the wicked all. So, ring out the bitter dregs thereof, yea, and they drink themselves. But I forever will declare, I, Jacob's God, will praise.
- [1 : 04] All horns of lewd men I'll cut off, but just men's horns will raise. Let us sing these verses.
- Psalm 75, from verse 4 to the end. I to the foolish people said, Do not deal foolishly. I to the foolish people said, Do not deal foolishly.
- And unto those that wicked are, lift not your horn on high.
- Lift not your horn on high, nor speak with stubborn neck.
- But know that not from east, nor west, nor south, promotion doth blow.
- [2 : 32] But God is judge, he puts down one and sets another up.
- For in the hand of God most high of red wine is a cup.
- Tis full of mixture, he pours forth and makes the wicked all.
- Ring out the bitter dregs thereof.
- Ye, and they drink them shall. But I forever will declare, I, Jacob's God, will praise.
- [4 : 05] All horns of lewd men I'll cut off. But just men's horns will raise.
- And we turn to the passage that we read together. 1 Samuel chapter 9. We're going to look at most of what we read.
- But we'll focus on these words just now. Verse 15. Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear, a day before Saul came, saying, Tomorrow about this time, I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin.
- And thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines. For I have looked upon my people, because their cry was come unto me.
- And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I speak to thee of, this same shall reign over my people.
- [5 : 28] And so on. We often use the word coincidence to describe many of our experiences.
- Do you believe in coincidence? Well, what is coincidence? According to the dictionary, one of them anyway, it's a remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection.

A remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection. And when we look at the account that we have here of the life of Saul, as we are introduced to it, you could explain it away and say it's full of remarkable events without any causal connection.

And yet, what we believe contradicts that. Because what we believe is that the life of Saul was directed, whether he understood it to be so or not, or whether he was able at any point even to realize the hand of God upon him.

Directing his footsteps in ways that were beyond his mortal ability to understand. Monday evening in the Gaelic service, we spoke about providence.

[7 : 32] And our thoughts were on the providence of God combined with God's purposes and the faith of God's people.

Now, coincidentally, we're returning to providence. If you believe in coincidence, that's why we're here tonight considering Saul's providence.

Or if you believe in providence, then it's something that Marys will desire to follow the path that God led his servant Samuel on.

And while Samuel doesn't appear in the first part of this chapter, he's not instrumental in any way in the experiences of Saul the king to be.

And yet, undergirding everything that's happening in the experience of Saul, Samuel lies, as it were, in the background, waiting to act at the appointed time.

[8 : 46] And we look at this passage and the passage, the section of it that we refer to, simply to hang our thoughts on as it were.

Dale Ralph Davis points out something in his own comments on this chapter. And it's simple enough to follow his logic. If you read the story of Saul from the beginning of the chapter, you're able to follow it until the point at which we read there, Now the Lord had told Samuel in his era a day before Saul came.

See, down to verse 17, these words could easily appear in parentheses as an explanation, and that's what they are.

Because if you take these words away and follow the story from verse 1, down to where we stopped reading this evening, without these words, from verse 15 to 17, the story makes perfect sense.

It lacks nothing. It follows a logical course, and every part of it is easily understood. But in the middle of telling the story, we are introduced, as it were, to God's involvement in it, and to the following actions of the prophet, or Samuel in particular, as directed by God.

[10 : 38] To help us understand that here indeed we have an example of God's providence being displayed before us, and our attention focusing on it like that.

While we have focused, and we've said at the outset, that our focus would be upon the passion of Samuel, and his ministry, and the role that he exercised with regard to God's people, yet we cannot ignore the fact that he himself is part of God's providence, in the provision that he makes for his people, and the actions that are his to conduct.

He is there, not as a bystander, but an active actor, as it were, within the experiences of God's people.

He fulfills a role that is important, and it is readily recognizable as such. But we cannot see the activities of Samuel, and the importance of them, without taking the entirety of the picture, as it is described to us.

And we begin with that. We must, in order to appreciate the God of providence, in the way that he functions within your providence, and my providence, we must understand that he features every bit as much in what we would call the mundane, as he does in the significant and the great and the large events of our lives.

[12 : 33] If we take time, for example, to think of the most recognizable situations in which we have been involved up until the present, and where we can say, well, God was in this, and we can say, God was the means by which this came to be.

We cannot expect to have come to that point without realizing that God was in the finer detail as well.

And that's what we are taught in this place. Nothing could be more ordinary than the story of Saul. We're told something about his father, Kish, a man of Benjamin, and we're given some of his, his background, his genealogy, and the fact that he was a mighty man of power.

Some translations say that he was a rich man. But those Old Testament commentators think that because we have a list of his forbearers given to us, it suggests to us that this man, a Benjamite, was of significance within that tribe, and that he possessed wealth, and he was somebody of influence.

So that's how the story begins. We're introduced to Kish, we're introduced to his son, and we're introduced to a most ordinary circumstance.

[14 : 25] Kish, the wealthy man, possessed a lot of asses or donkeys, and they had gone missing. And we're not told why they got missing, what, what was the cause behind that, just that they were missing, and that Kish told his son to take a servant and seek out these asses.

And the story is very simple, just go and look them out, and we're told every step that he took almost, when you follow the path that he took, he went, he went to Shalim, he went through the land of the Benjamites, he went to Suf, and so on.

All of these names, all of these places, they might not appear of any importance to us, but he had to go to all of these places, and without any sense of God directing his footsteps, without any understanding that the path that he was on was going to be a path of great significance, ultimately.

And the description that we're given of Saul, the individual before he goes out on this course of action, it's a flattering picture.

Somebody who was head and shoulders above his pier, I don't know if that means that he was a strapping person, whether he was strong, whether he was just tall, some various opinions are expressed as to that, but he stood out, and it's a very flattering picture of him physically.

[16 : 17] And there's also, I think, some elements about his character that are revealed to us, that when it came to taking important decisions, he was concerned about the well-being of his father.

Remember, in the account that we read, we're told that he was worried that his father would start worrying about them rather than worry about the answers that were missing.

So, it shows a sensitivity to the needs of others, and it also reveals to us that he was willing to take advice.

His servant told him, if you remember, behold, now there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man, and all that he says comes to pass.

Let us go thither, peradventure he can show us a way that we should go, and so on. It's the servant that tells him about this man of God.

[17 : 32] Now, that doesn't mean that Saul didn't know about Samuel, I very much doubt if you can say that, but given the situation I was in, he probably didn't even think about this.

And I suppose that's significant, again, how if you wanted to present a picture of a champion, if you wanted to present a picture of the ideal candidate for ruling over Israel, he would be a spiritual man, and instantly, because of his spirituality, it would occur to him to think about applying to this man of God, and seeking light from him upon their predicament, but that's not what we're given in the account.

that direction came from someone else, that was a servant who told him about Samuel, or who reminded him about Samuel.

And every single part of this, you can't omit any part of it, in the telling of it, because when you actually come to the outcome of it, every part is every bit as important.

Neglect one part, not just in the telling, but in the fulfilling of what happened, you are going to miss out on the direction that God gives.

[19 : 09] to be important. And we need to think, when we're thinking about the way God is at work in our own life, we are quite ready to highlight the things that we consider to be relevant, or to be important.

important. And yet, in the light of God's dealings, it may be that the things we consider minor or insignificant are equally necessary.

And in the dealings we have with individuals, I have often felt that one word spoken of the curve may dwell with you, remain with you in your subconscious, far longer than somebody who takes time to write a speech and deliver it and think that that's the key to all the events of your life.

That's not necessarily the way God works. He can use things, he can use mighty acts, he can use wise words, he can use all kinds of things.

But here what we're seeing listed to us is a series of actions, both Saul's and his servants, and collectively they are taken to meet with Samuel.

[20 : 47] One of the commentators puts it like this, the good, the bad, the ugly, the foolish, the disastrous, the wise, the encouraging, the difficult, the uncertain, are all brought under the sovereign control of a God who has done all things well.

Now we need to remind ourselves of that because sometimes our attitude is that of Jacob's and we'll say against me, are all these things, these things are for the crushing of my soul, these things are the things that will be the death of me.

but under God's hand we need to remind ourselves that however difficult these events are, they may well be the means that God is using to open the path to himself even, or open the path to a greater knowledge of himself.

Even to a degree it must be acknowledged that the presence of Samuel in the locality is necessarily a provision of God's providence.

Saul didn't know Samuel was going to be there offering a sacrifice and he would never have met Saul if he hadn't been there. But on this occasion for this purpose God ordained that Samuel was in this very place where Saul would find it easier to meet with him.

[22 : 37] And even that itself seems haphazard and providential in the sense that he meets, they meet, the maidens who are pouring water at the well.

And they tell them, they ask the question, where is the seer? And it's them that direct them to meet in person with Samuel.

And all of these things, not one of them without exception can be excluded. However simple it may seem to you, the simpler the better, as far as I'm concerned.

Remind yourself of this, all the things that you think that are of no consequence going on in your life at the present. don't forget that within that cocktail, if you like, within that cup that God is pouring out for you, the sweet and the sour, the bitter, and everything that is in it is God's doing.

And we need to remind ourselves of it. When I was preparing this, I came across a story, and I was familiar with the story, and maybe I've told it before, but it doesn't matter.

[23 : 55] I think it's descriptive of the way God works in the lives of certain people. And it's a story of a doctor, a Scottish doctor, who lived many years ago, and he had been raised in a godly home, and he had a godly mother who prayed for in his company, in his presence, and she committed him to the Lord in prayer, and she, in his hearing, she offered pleas before God for his soul.

But he left home, and he forgot the god of his mother, and he went the way he did, with absolutely no interest in the things of God.

But in his, he entered into medicine, and in the process of his work, he was once, one day presented with a person who had fallen off a ladder while he was working as a labourer, and it was a fall from a great height, and his injuries were so severe, that he was not going to recover from them.

So the doctor was responsible for his care, his terminal care, as it turned out, and he dealt with him daily.

Now the man, he discovered, had no relatives to refer to, and he had only the lady who looked after his lodgings.

[25 : 43] and although he was in great pain, he wanted, before he died, to settle his debts, and he wished his landlady to be sent for.

And in the message he gave to his landlady, he said, tell her to bring the book. He didn't explain what the book was, he said, she will know what book to bring.

And when she came, she duly received her, whatever she was owed, and she left with the book. It turned out the book was a Bible, and he, as long as he was able, he read the Bible.

He only survived for maybe a week, ten days, but as he was able, he read the Bible, and when he was not, he had it in his hands or under his pillow. But the doctor was not interested in his spiritual welfare, and not too concerned, he wondered at why this man, knowing that he was terminal, he wasn't, he was always of a happy disposition, he was always in a good frame of mind, even though he was in great pain.

But that was all it was for him, it was just a puzzle. But when the man died, the doctor had to handle all his affairs, because he was with somebody that had nobody to turn to.

[27 : 15] And the nurse, when they were dealing with his affairs, the nurse said, what will I do with the book? And he said, what book is it? And when she passed the book to him, to his surprise, the book turned out to be a Bible that contained its own name.

And it was the Bible that his mother gave to him when he left home. And in it she had put a text for him.

And it was through the book being put in his hands that he discovered God and he came to faith.

But it's just one of these instances of how did the man come to buy the book? Well, shortly after leaving home, although the Bible was in his hands, he was short of money and he went to a book shop and sold the book, sold the Bible.

It didn't mean much to him anyway, but it meant that he could put food on the table. But here he was, years afterwards, the book, the Bible being put in his hands, the same Bible his mother had given to him, and he saw God in that providence.

[28 : 40] Now you might think that's just a story, but it's a story that was told by the doctor himself who later on went into mission work and to serve the Lord as a converted Christian.

You can't explain that. you can say that there are so many coincidences that it's beyond our ability to reconcile them.

But in the providence of God, these strange events take place far more often than any one of us ever take to heart.

God, and I'm sure if you analysed your own life as a Christian, if that's what you are, you will find God more often than not, meeting you in places where you did not expect to find him, speaking to you through people that you didn't expect to speak the truth of God to you.

and other things more deeper than that perhaps and more strange than that. But returning to Samuel, we know that he was in the path of duty and even though he was in the path of duty, one thing that's directed to our attention is this, that he had an ear that was open to the voice of God.

[30 : 12] And remember, go back to the way Samuel was initially. God had to speak to him as a child three times before he heard the voice of God or recognised it.

But from that point on, he knows the voice of God, he discerns it and in verse 15 we read, the Lord had told in his ear something about Saul.

He told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, tomorrow about this time I will send the young man out of the land of Benjamin.

And he told him what to do with him and he told him why he was being sent. And the discernment needed by Samuel in order to recognise the word of God and to understand his duty as a servant of God, we may take for granted.

But obviously he had also been told about the discovery of the asses as well because he communicates that to Saul and he says the asses had been found three days ago.

[31 : 32] So Samuel has the ear of God, he has the mind of God, the Lord has revealed his will to him. And we need to understand also, and even in that truth which we may say this belongs to the child of God who is a servant of God, this belongs to the person who is in a role of responsibility, but even at our everyday walk as Christians, we find ourselves challenged as to God's voice to us in his word and only to believe that it is God that is speaking to us.

When you take God's word in your hands, you understand that it's the word of God that you're handling. But much of what you find in God's word today is questioned.

It's disputed. Even within the church it's debated. And if we don't take the word of God just as surely as Samuel took the word of God to himself, recognizing it to be his word, then if you were to think of Samuel as hearing God's word and ignoring it, hearing God's word and understanding what was said and doing something different, you would be astonished, you would be offended even because somebody who has been given that responsibility, if he refused to act on it, if he refused to deal with Saul as God meant him to, you would think that was quite wrong.

But while we are not in the role of seer or prophet, we are in a privileged position of receiving God's word and knowing that it is the word of truth and we are in the position of knowing that the truth of God is what sets us free and we need to believe in it, trust in it and be ready to communicate it when we are called upon to do so.

It is a simple truth, but how often do we find it challenged in our experience? How often do we find people saying well I can't believe what you believe, I can't believe that God would do what you are saying he is going to do or God is not doing what he is doing.

[34 : 36] We need to remind ourselves of that because just as truly it is expected of us. And the final thing briefly is this, we can notice that there is not a hint of reluctance on the part of Samuel to act as directed.

It is not the same thing, but I want you to think about it as somebody who initially was told that Israel wanted a king.

And his reaction to that was that he was being rejected. rejected. And God reminded him that it was not him that was being rejected, but God. There is no hint at this point that he bears a courage.

He is doing what God is asking him to do, and to hinder it or to obstruct it is the last thing on his mind. God. And we are encouraged to believe that because when you see how it works out, when he meets with Saul, he invites him to partake of the sacrifice that is offered.

And it's a very limited number that are allowed as privilege. It is by invitation only, as it were, after we are told, are with him after the sacrifice is offered.

[36 : 13] But not only is Saul invited to come with him, along with his servant, he is put sitting at the head of the table, and then he instructs the cook, those who are preparing that meal, to bring the joint of meat that they were going to eat, and it's presented to Saul.

The cook took up the shoulder and that which was upon it and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, behold, that which is left set it before thee and eat.

And you might think, well, that's a minor detail, but no, Samuel in these actions is not only acknowledging the place that God had given to Saul.

He is acknowledging by the way that he is dealing with them that this is his rightful portion. The portion that is described there, we are told by the Old Testament scholars, that the shoulder was dedicated to the priests, and this was their portion, and Samuel is setting the portion of the priesthood before the one who was going to be king over God's people.

And while there are many elements there that you could argue are deeply mysterious, at the point at which we are leaving the story, Saul was bemused, no doubt.

[37 : 59] He didn't know what this was all about. He hadn't been told. Samuel knew. We know because we're reading the story as it unfolds. But at this point, you know, Saul has declared himself to be of a family that are the least of the tribes of Israel, and what he sees of himself, why should I be given this place of honor.

And it is only as God reveals it to him that that will come to pass and come to knowledge. And we're going to see that, God willing, as we go on.

But always remember, when you question the providence of God, you're only seeing a part of it. Very often, what you're seeing is with hindsight, and then with hindsight you've got 20-20 vision.

You know perfectly, or so you think, what God has in you. Even looking back at your life tonight, you have no idea what's ahead of you.

However far ahead you're able to look, you don't know how much of your past will impact upon your future. future. But that's God's prerogative, to reveal that to you, or to keep it hidden from you.

[39 : 29] But always remember, it is his will that will be done. And we are part of that camp, bound up within it, and we're thankful for that.

Let us pray. Lord, our God, as we often find ourselves with many thoughts that are struggling to make sense of what we see and fold before us in this world in which we live, we don't need to think of the wider world context, but inevitably we do when we think of what is going on in the world of the present, within countries torn asunder by war, and when we see so many awful wickednesses carried out by men that are seemingly preserved from any contradiction action or any action that would go against them.

And yet, we cannot but believe that the day will come when they are accountable to you and answerable to you, and they will give their account, and they will answer.

And even in our own lives, when we see things that appear to us to be trivial and of no interest to others, and yet, who knows what place these things have in the scheme of the salvation of their own souls, or the souls of others.

We bless you and thank you for your kindness and your long suffering, and your ability to overrule for good in all our lives. Have mercy upon us in Jesus' name.

[41 : 35] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Surya lyatrana.

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