

When God Is Not King

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[0 : 00] Forever. We hear from the angel Gabriel in Luke 1 that no word from God shall be void of power. Would you pray with me? Lord, we thank you that your word is living and active. We thank you that it's the word of our sovereign king, the Lord of all.

Lord, we pray, Lord, that your sovereignty, your kingship will be so clear, so evident. Lord, if there are those today here who are outside of your kingdom, we pray that you will draw them in by the work of your Holy Spirit, which only you can do.

And Lord, for those of us who forget or who it seems like it's been a while that we've recognized your lordship over our lives, that you will make it impossible for us to walk away from here without you being the established king over our lives.

We ask all of this by your power, for Christ's sake and for your glory alone. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Whenever there's a change in regime, this creates a vacuum of power. Likely some of us have experienced something like that at work in the recent past, and it's even more painful in a church context.

[1 : 26] The definition of stress is when there's change forced upon us that's out of our control. And that's exactly what's happened to Israel.

The Lord God, the Lord of hosts has made it very clear he is their king and their deliverer. But yet the people's hearts have wondered once again. They've chosen for themselves the tallest man in the nation to be like all the other countries around them.

There's been a change in regime. They have a new king. And it's Saul. So beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The message for us today is a cautionary tale. It's a warning from this passage about when God is not king. When God is not king.

I have three observations as we read through this passage one more time together. And then I hope to encourage you and exhort you with the contrast between Saul and the glorious Lord Jesus, the king of kings.

[2 : 35] Here's our first observation. When God is not king, freedom becomes bondage. When God is not king, freedom becomes bondage.

Would you look at verses 21 and 22? After the Lord gave this great victory through Jonathan, we're told that even those dissenters, those soldiers who had abandoned their post and just gone away. And the mercenaries, most likely as who's referred to that. These are Israelites who had sold their services to go fight for the Philistines. As the Philistines fighter against all the other neighboring nations. Well, now they see the tide of the war turning and they come back to fight on Israel's side as well.

We left off last week with verse 23. So the Lord saved Israel that day. Do you see that in verse 23? Now pick up on that phrase that day and look at where verse 24 starts again.

The men of Israel were distressed that day. See, that day was a day of great freedom. Their oppressors, the Philistines, had been defeated by the Lord. That same day, a day that should have been a day of freedom, became a day of bondage.

[3 : 52] Because the Lord is not their king. So verse 23. So the Lord saved Israel that day. It's an allusion to Exodus 14:30, which says, listen for the similarity.

So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians. Referring to their bondage and slavery. And the battle, now we read in our passage, is shifted to Beth-Avon.

In Hebrew, that means the house of trouble. The Exodus has now been reversed now with Saul. Stepping into the spotlight in the place of Jonathan. The first half of this chapter, wonderful.

Here's a man relying on the Lord. It's the Lord's battle to win. And as Saul steps into the spotlight in front of Jonathan, once again, house of trouble. The promised land.

The army of God is now distressed. Verse 24. The men of Israel were distressed that day for Saul had placed the people under oath.

[4 : 53] Saul is the source of their distress or their oppression or their bondage. What was it that Saul said? Cursed. First words out of his mouth on a great day of victory.

Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening. Now notice what Saul's motive is and the words he says next. Before I, first person singular, red flag for leadership.

Before I have taken vengeance on my enemies. First person singular again. Saul fails to recognize what Jonathan did recognize.

That the battle is the Lord's. And he has authority to do this. He's the king. The king the people wanted. So none of the people tasted food.

Now listen to the similarity again here. Exodus 3, 7. The Lord said, I have surely seen the oppression. It's the same word. I have seen the distress of my people who are in Egypt.

[5 : 56] And I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. Their slave owners, the Egyptians. For I knew their sorrows. And I have come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians.

And he brought them into the promised land. But now look what's happened. The exodus has been reversed. They're back under slavery to the king of their own choosing.

The people rejected God who redeemed them. Who secured their freedom in order to have a king like all the nations. And what did they get?

They got a king like all the other nations. They got their very own Pharaoh in the place of God. We read in verse 25. Now all the people of the land came to a forest.

And there was honey on the ground. When the people had come into the woods. There was honey dripping. But no one put his hand to his mouth. For the people feared the oath. Let me summarize for us.

[6 : 56] That this oath said. As long as we're pursuing the Philistines this day. During the daytime. And driving them away. Don't eat anything. That was Saul's oath. It's very specific to the day. In other words.

When it comes to the evening. And we're done driving away the Philistines. Then it's done. But he's making it very clear. As they're pushing the Philistines away in the forest. There's so much honey. That the bees have made it.

It's dripping from the trees onto the ground. It's just sitting there. A comb. Ready to be tasted. Verse 27. Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath.

What's the difference between an oath and a vow? We discussed this with the men. Our confession helps us with this. An oath is among men.

Or among people. Before God. A vow is a promise to God. So we should really say our wedding oaths. Because it's among people. In the presence of God. God. But Jonathan had not heard this oath.

[7 : 56] And therefore he stretched out the end of his rod. Can you picture this children? He had this rod in his hand. As he's charging through the forest. And he dips it in the honeycomb. Brings it up and licks it.

And we read that. As he put his hand to his mouth. His countenance. His face or appearance. Brightened. Then one of the people said. Your father strictly charged the people with an oath. Saying cursed is the man who eats this food. This day. We have an illustration of a foolish king. A foolish man.

Saul's oath was most foolish. The result. The end of verse 28. Is that the people were faint. Jonathan said. My father has troubled the land.

Another allusion here to. When the people were invading this promised land. And the Lord gave him very strict orders. Of what to do with the loot. And then a man named Achan.

[8 : 56] Disobeyed the Lord. That's how he was described. Achan troubled the land. With his sin. And now Jonathan says this. Of King Saul. Jonathan says.

Look at my countenance. It's brightened. Because I tasted a little. Of this honey. See Jonathan's faith in the Lord. Is associated with honey. That fills the bloodstream.

With healthy nutrients. And brings light. To the eyes. That's a faith. That we need more of. Verse 30. How much better. Jonathan says.

If the people had eaten freely today. Of the spoil of their enemies. Which they found. For now. Would they not have. Been much a greater slaughter. Among the Philistines.

But Saul. Like Adam. As we just read. In Romans 5. Has cursed. All the people. In his whole line. [9:54] Each man's. Sin. Led to their son's. Death sentence. Right after Adam's sins. Abel. Dies. Now.

Saul's sin. Publicly. Leads to. A death sentence. Upon Jonathan. When God is not king. This was true of Adam.

It was true of Saul. And it's true of you and me. When God is not king. Freedom. Becomes. Bondage. Amen. Jesus said. In John 8. 34.

Whoever commits a sin. Is a slave. To sin. It's like a college student. Goes off. Away from the home.

For the first time. I'm finally free. Only to learn. After a couple of months. Or less. That self-indulgence.

[10:50] Quickly becomes. Bondage. In some cases. Addiction. And. Christ's words. Are proven true. When he is not king. We are slaves.

To sin. That's the first. Observation. The second one is this. When God is not king. Blessings become. Curses.

When God is not king. Blessings become. Curses. Notice how. Saul's put a curse. On the whole. Land. The whole people.

And his religion. Is now calling an army. To fight against the enemy. Under the threat. Of a curse. That's the type of. Kingdom. The type of sovereignty. Saul is establishing.

In verse 31. We read now. They had driven back. The Philistines. That day. From. Michmash. To. Ijalon. Michmash. Remember.

[11:44] Is in Benjamin. Is just through that pass. Where Jonathan. And his armor bear. Stormed. The garrison. Of the Philistines. And now. They're pushing. The Philistines. Westward.

Toward. The Mediterranean Sea. Remember. How the Philistines. Came from the island. Of Crete. These were. Greek descendants. And they. They brought. These traditions. With them. To the coast.

From Egypt. Up to the Mediterranean. Coast. And this is how far back. They pushed them. I looked it up. And that's about. 18 miles. You know. How far. 18 miles is. Some of you.

Like to hop. On your bicycle. From here. And ride your bikes. On the Cherry Creek Trail. All the way. To downtown Denver. So you see. The REI there. Or the ball arena. That's 18 miles. From here. That's how far.

They were driving. The Philistines. If you're on a bike ride. My wife. Has less reserves. Than I do. You know. So she might say. My blood sugar. Is getting low. I need. A protein bar.

[12:38] Some. You know. Maybe some honey. It's exactly. What Jonathan needed. The all the army. Needed this. Over 18 miles. Well. The people. Were very faint. Verse 32.

The people. Rushed. On the spoil. As they went. They took sheep. Oxen. And calves. And slaughtered them. On the ground. And the people.

Ate them. With the blood. We most likely. Have a room full. Of city people. Here. Who don't understand. What these details. Are saying. How is it supposed to go? I remember.

On the farm. In Brazil. It was a. A cow. Lifted up. By one of the hind legs. With a tractor. In a chain. Like this. And you slit the throat.

While the heart. Is still beating. Why do you do that kids? Well. The heart. Is pumping. Blood. Out of the cow. Till it drains out. And if you don't do that.

[13:31] Then these muscles. Are. Are going to have that blood. Sitting in them. And we're told. That these people. As they're. Remember. Some of these. Are mercenaries. And dissenters. It's a rough. Crowd. God has not been their king.

For a long time. And here's these cows. They probably didn't even know. The ceremonial. Or civil laws. And they're just slaughtering. And some commentators. Think. They were just. You know. Stuffing their mouths.

With raw meat. Can you picture an army. You know. Blood on their noses. And mouths. And beards. And hands. And they're. No wonder the Philistines. Are running away so fast. But that's

what they're doing. So we have a lot of sins.

Now. Piling up. One on top of the other. Verse 33. Then they. So someone else.

Had to point out. How this too. Is now a sin. Things are not getting better. They. Told Saul. He did not have the conviction. Nor. The. The fourth.

[14:26] Foresight. Nor the fear of God. Maybe even. Not even the knowledge. Of God's law. He's always reacting. And they said. Look. The people are sinning. Against the Lord. By eating. With the blood.

Jonathan's faith. Proved that. Nothing can restrain. God. From saving. With power. But. Saul's religion. Was powerless. To restrain. The lusts. Of men. To satisfy.

The cravings. Of their flesh. This is a cautionary tale. Saul's religion. Is too weak. To satisfy.

And restrain. The cravings. Of the lust. Of the flesh. It can't. So how does Saul handle this? He said. You have dealt treacherously. Roll a large stone.

To me. This day. So they make. A stone table. At least here. You can prop up. The carcass. Of this dead animal. While the heart's still beating. And do what you have to do. To prepare it.

[15:23] But by now. It's too late. The sins already been. Committed. We're told. This was the first altar. That he built. To the Lord. It's just a comment.

Thrown in there. But. From the context. We can understand. That Saul is. A man. Taking things. Into his own hands. Not listening. To Samuel. Who's still alive. And thriving. And present.

And doing. Whatever he sees fit. Approaching God. In whatever. Way he deems best. He being Saul. It's a man. Centered. Religion.

We read that. In verse 36. Saul said. Let us go down. After the Philistines. By night. And plunder them. Until the morning. Light. See the altar.

Was meant to be. A place of communion. A place of grace. Saul is simply. Reacting. To the pressures. Of the crowd. And pursuing. His own agenda.

[16:23] And now. He's got another. Great idea. Let's keep this. Going through the night. Let's keep chasing them. And then the priest. Has to stop him. And say. Hold on.

Let's draw near to God. Here. We just built an altar. Remember the last time. The priest was putting his hand in. What's the will of the Lord. Saul was in too big a hurry. He heard the Philistines. Didn't have time. To listen to God. They just built an altar.

Now he's trying to get us. To all go out. Everybody's saying. Pump the brakes. Saul. We read in verse 37. That Saul asked.

Counsel of God. Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you deliver them. Into the hand of Israel? But he. The Lord. Did not answer. Saul. That day.

The big question. By the end of this passage. Is going to be. Whose sin. Is God holding to account here? This silence. Speaks volumes. The Lord.

[17:21] Did not. Answer. Saul. So verse 38. Saul said. Come over here. All you chiefs. Of the people. You know. And you see. What this sin was today.

If God won't speak to me. Then I'll go ask the crowds. Let me do a poll. A survey. Instead of waiting. To take your marching orders. From the Lord. Let's. See which way.

The wind's blowing. Saul's religion. Was an outward. Show. By a rejected king. Propping up. A rejected priest.

Remember the line of Eli. Had been cut off. Cut off. To publicly execute. The man. Jonathan. Whom God saved. Used to save the nation. Jonathan.

Had a faith. Built upon God. Keeping his promises. To sinners. Saul. Had a religion. Built upon sinners. Keeping their promises.

[18:16] To God. When God. Is not king. Blessings. Become curses. Saul.

Turns. This blessing. Of being gathered. Around the altar. It's a picture. Of Christ. His shed blood. And he. Piles on. Another vow. Another attempt. From man.

To make a promise. To God. In verse 39. For as the Lord lives. He's going to swear. On the living Lord. Now. Who saves Israel. Though it be. In Jonathan.

My son. This sin. Then even. Jonathan. Shall surely die. Beware. Of a proud man. In power. So quick.

To condemn others. Blind. To his own sin. Thinking. That this. Is his. Kingdom. His battle. And it's his.

[19:10] Honor. On the line. He's slow. To see. What is obvious. To all. The battle. Is the Lord's.

This is his kingdom. These are his. People. And notice. In verse. 39. He gets the same. Silent treatment. From all the people. As he got from God.

Not a man. Among all the people. Answered him. When God is not king. Blessings. Become. Curses. Third observation.

When God is not king. Even the sweetest victory. Tastes. Like bitter. Defeat. When God is not king. Even the sweetest victory. Tastes like bitter.

Defeat. So. Saw. Says. We're going to find out. Who committed this sin. That's keeping God silent. We got to find out. He gathers everyone.

[20 : 07] In front of him here. In verse 40. He says. To all Israel. You be on one side. All you Israel. The whole nation. And my son. Jonathan. And I will be on the other one.

Can you picture this courtroom. That King Saul. Has now set up. To judge. And to try to discern. From God. Who is sinning. Father and son. On one side.

The people. Of God's kingdom. On the other. They're using. Something we don't know. A lot about. From scripture. The urim. And thunim. And it's kind of.

A heads or tails. A way of casting lots. A or B. It's a binary. Way to decide. Is it this. Or that. And what did the people. Say to John.

To King Saul. In verse 40. Do. What seems good. To you. That language. Is language. From judges.

[21 : 01] There was no king. In the land. Everyone did. What seemed good. In their own eyes. And that's what the people. Are saying back. To Saul. It's no. King. Language. Verse 41.

Therefore. Saul said to the Lord. God of Israel. Give a perfect lot. So Saul and Jonathan. Were taken. But the people. Escaped. Kids. What that means.

Is that. The binary option. Was before. The Lord. Casting lots. Putting it back. In God's hands. The people. Were said. You're free.

The sin. Is not among. The entire nation. Of Israel. Even those eating. The meat. With the blood. In it. The sin. Lies in. One of these two. Over here.

Father. Or son. King. Or Jonathan. The prince. And verse 42.

[21 : 58] Saul said. Cast lots. Between. Jonathan. And me now. See now. We set up. The next. Heads or tails. Options. We narrowed it down. To two men. Among the whole nation.

Now. Which of these two men. Is it. A. Saul. Or B. Jonathan. This is what. I still don't have. The answer to this.

I'm wrestling it. In my head. In my heart. But the lots. Were honoring to God. And it was God's way. Of revealing. To his people. In this period. In redemptive. History.

His will. And because God. Is the true king. Over his people. All along. The Lord. Ordained. That the blameless.

Prince. Be sentenced. To die. This was. The Lord's providence. For Jonathan. The son. Of this wicked king.

[22 : 51] So. Jonathan. Jonathan. Was taken. Verse 43. Then. Saul. Said. To Jonathan. Tell me. What you have done. And Jonathan. Said. To him. I only tasted.

A little honey. With the end. Of the rod. That was in my hand. And it's not a question. He says. So now. I must. Die. He's a man of honor.

He's a valiant man. Of integrity. With the fear of the Lord. And the Lord. Is able to. Deliver. Them. Into our hands. Nothing. Can restrain the Lord. From saving. That's what he just said.

Earlier in this chapter. He puts his life. Once again. In God's hands. So Saul answered. God. Do so. And more. Also. Oh God's justice.

Isn't enough. Let me. Pile up my own. Condemnation on you. For you shall surely. Die. Jonathan. Through Jonathan.

[23 : 48] The Lord brought blessing. And now. Jonathan is under a curse. By the law. Because of his father's. Foolishness. This. Blameless prince.

Needs to be redeemed. This man's. Religion. Saul. He inverted. A day of. Great celebration. For deliverance. Received from the gracious. Lord God.

Into a day of condemnation. From man. Dale Ralph Davis. Had this wonderful. One-liner. Saul managed to snatch.

Defeat. From the claws. Of victory. The Lord had it locked in. And Saul spoiled it. Verse 45. The people said to Saul. Shall Jonathan die.

Who has accomplished. This great deliverance. In Israel. Certainly not. For the Lord lives. The same. Phrase that Saul invoked. To put on a vow.

[24 : 43] The people throw back at him. Not one hair. Of Jonathan's head. Shall fall to the ground. For God. For he has worked with God. This day. And so the people.

Rescued. Jonathan. It's the same Hebrew word. The people ransomed. Jonathan. Or the people redeemed. Jonathan. And he did not die. You see how Saul's religion.

Led to such injustice. That sinful people. Had to redeem. The one. Through whom God delivered them. From their enemy. There's so many.

Gospel themes. Layered in here. Aren't there? But yet it's hard. To put your finger on it. Verse 46. Then Saul. Returned from pursuing. The Philistines. And the Philistines.

Went to their own place. So Saul established. His sovereignty. Over Israel. And fought against. All his enemies. On every side. In verse 52. We read.

[25 : 38] There was fierce war. With the Philistines. All the days of Saul. And when Saul. Saw any strong man. Or any valiant men. He took them.

For himself. Just as Samuel. Had warned the people. He will take your sons. And enlist them. In his army. Campaign after campaign. Draining God's people.

Of their sons. Their daughters. Their resources. Just like all the other nations. Saul's religion. Turned God's sweet victory.

Into bitter defeat. I hope that. You'll be like me. And this passage. Stays in your heart.

In your mind. For a while. Maybe for a lifetime. Pondering. Plumbing the depths. Of God's. Glorious gospel. I don't have all the answers. Of the connections here.

[26 : 35] What I do. Believe is. Very clear though. Is that this is not. To sit well. With God's people. It's to. It's to be a distortion. Of a good thing. Just as we've seen.

Victory. Turn to defeat. Blessing. Becoming a curse. Freedom. Becoming bondage. For some of you.

Hearing this today. You do live. Like God. Is not your king. This is a very real temptation.

You and I are. More like Saul. Than we want to admit. If left to ourselves. And our flesh. Aren't we? Saul was very. Religious. Maybe.

If you're like me. Maybe you don't trust God. Because. It's hard to trust. Authorities. You've been hurt. You've seen power.

[27 : 31] Be abused. And misused. You've suffered. Under. These vacuum powers. And these. Misuses. Of the good gifts. That God has put. In the hands of men.

And it's most painful. To hear. And to watch it. Happening within. His kingdom. His church. Church. Maybe some. Have. Been abused. By. Power.

Parents. Church officers. Family members. And these. Are people. Who. If they're saved. They. Have been. Ensnared. Once again. In the religion.

Of Saul. We need. To pray. For the true king. To establish. His throne. Over those places. And those lives. And in our own. Hearts. And so what I think.

This passage does. For people like you. And me. Is it helps us. To desire. A greater king. One who is. Trustworthy. And we do this. By seeing the contrasts.

[28 : 26] We see how God. Is the only king. That you and I. Can trust. And to trust God. Like Jonathan. That's a life-giving. Faith. Think of the gospel.

How that same. Stage. Was set. For you and me. Father and son. On one side. The people. Of God's kingdom.

On the other. In the case. Of our passage. Today. Saul declared. Jonathan. Guilty. And the people. Had to redeem. Jonathan. But in the gospel.

God. The father. Put God. The son. To the test. And on trial. God. And he declared him. Perfectly. Righteous. God. The son. Does not need to protest. His father. Is most just. Most loving. Most wise. God.

[29 : 25] The father. Declares. God. The son. To be innocent. God. Galatians 3.13 says that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.

We sing bearing shame and all my sin there in my place. He stood condemned and here I am now justified.

My guilt is his and his grace is mine. Amen. Saul's oath was most foolish and Saul's foolish, foolish misuse of his sovereign power.

It cursed his own helpless son. What did Saul do then? Well, the people protest and it just goes away. Saul simply revoked the curse that he had pronounced. He simply didn't keep his vow to the Lord. His credibility got reduced to zero. But God is most wise. [30 : 33] In his infinite wisdom, the Lord God sovereignly decreed that his only eternally begotten son would bear the curse for Adam's helpless race.

And God did not revoke his curse upon sin to do this. He received the curse for his people's sin upon himself on the cross.

King Jesus reverses man's curse. He replaces our bitter guilt with the sweet grace that tastes like honey every time we receive it.

A pastor named Brian Voss pointed out there was so much conflict in 1 Samuel 14 between the father and the son. But in God, the father and God, the son.

There's perfect union and salvation. In Saul, we see a king who managed, who in victory manages to suffer defeat.

[31 : 31] But in God, father and son are not at cross purposes from one another, but rather they share one purpose. And that's the cross to save sinners like you and me.

In Jesus Christ, we have a king who even in apparent defeat on the cross has secured forever the greatest victory. That's the end of Pastor Brian Voss's quote.

Saul's religion focuses on what man does. Have you been around this type of religion? It's exhausting. That religion says, whatever is your focus, you then have the right to turn it into a grounds of boasting.

But the gospel calls us to focus on what God has done in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. God satisfied his own justice and he ransomed, redeemed a sinful people from the torments of Satan, the great oppressor.

And that's why we sing, I dare not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom. But I will boast in this one thing, Jesus Christ, his power and resurrection.

[32 : 46] Why should I gain from his reward? I cannot give an answer. But this I know with all my heart, his wounds have paid my ransom. Saul's religion called an army to fight against the enemy under the threat of a curse.

But King Jesus removed the curse from his army so we can fight the spiritual battle resting upon the Lord to deliver the victory. Just like Jonathan.

I'll remind you one more time. Jonathan, Yehonathan, Yahweh delivers. That's what his name means. And that's our faith. It's life giving and sweet.

Saul starved the troops and he forced their service. King Jesus does not leave us without food to fight against sin, Satan or the world in this life.

His troops are willing on the day of war. He gives us the honey of the gospel and he nourishes us with himself, which we'll celebrate in a moment.

[33 : 48] He is our bread from heaven. And his gospel truly is sweeter than honey. It gives light to our eyes. And it says, rest in Christ alone.

I alone can give you the energy and the power to press on. Follow after King Jesus. He's the commander of the Lord's army. He is the Lord of hosts.

He's the one building his church and advancing his kingdom to the coasts and the islands. His spirit is the way he is with us.

His church. When two or three are gathered like an army in my name, there I am with you. How can that be? In his glorified, resurrected bodies at the right hand of the throne of God.

It's because he's poured his spirit out on the church and he's with us. And he's with us in a special way around his table, which he has set up in the presence of his enemies.

[34 : 46] It's his battle. And he will feed his army as we march with him. You see the contrast between these two religions. The religion of King Saul and the religion of King Jesus.

That's why John Bunyan and Ralph Erskine and others have pointed out the sweet truth of the gospel in this contrast. A rigid master was the law demanding brick denying straw.

Run and run the law commands, but gives us neither feet nor hands. Far better news the gospel brings. It bids us fly and gives us wings.

When God is not king, misery. When Jesus is king, no matter what else is going on, sweet celebration.

Let's rest in this glorious peace that we have in Jesus Christ and settle ourselves to come celebrate at his table that he set before us.

[35 : 58] Would you go to the Lord in prayer with me? Did you come to the Lord in prayer with him? Did you come to the Lord in prayer with him? Thank you.