

A King After Israel's Heart

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] Okay, here we go. Well, also a couple of weeks ago we started this series and David asked us a question to begin with and his question was, do we have a future?

Do you remember that question? I wonder if you remember how he answered it. He answered it by saying that our future was really friendly.

Because we have a great wireless internet service. Aren't you glad that isn't how I answered that question?

I don't think I want to think about my future being friendly because of some wireless service. But it is important to think about our future and even more to think about who it is that leads us into that future.

And today's passage just picks up where we've left off even in some ways last week and the weeks before at looking at who it is that leads us into the future and why it is that he leads us into that future.

[1 : 08] And what kind of person it will take. And we've been learning that that person that God uses to lead his people into the future this 3,000 years ago was someone by the name of Samuel.

And Samuel is quite a remarkable judge when God first identified selected judges for his people. It got sorted off really well in the book of Judges with Othniel.

And it kind of ascended up to someone by the name of Gideon which most of us probably know. But after that from Gideon it just was a steady descent all the way down to Samuel.

Sorry, no. To Samson, right? And Samuel is clearly no Samson. He's pretty closely I would kind of put him in terms of someone like Gideon.

Except there's one way in which he's not quite up to Gideon's standard. I'll come back to that in a minute. But last week's story I think it's important to return to started in crisis but it ended in peace.

[2 : 18] And this week I've been given this text it begins actually in peace but it ends in crisis. If you weren't here last week let me kind of quickly recap what's happened.

Chapter 7, Samuel. Samuel at the request of Israel judges the people of God. He leads Israel back to the Lord after they get whipped by the Philistines.

They lose the Ark of the Covenant. It's returned to them and then they begin to lament all that they've experienced. All the losses that they've had.

It's a really powerful picture of what Jesus describes in the Beatitudes I think. We see the people of Israel demonstrate this poverty of spirit.

They mourn and they grieve. They become meek. They hunger and they thirst for righteousness.

They're merciful. They become pure at heart as they offer all of who they are to the Lord in worship.

[3 : 22] And finally also they even have a peacemaker in Samuel. And that's how chapter 7 ends.

The people are at peace with God and they are at peace even with their enemies the Philistines and the Amorites or at least they have peace from their enemies.

But as we end that chapter and begin the next chapter chapter 8 things begin to change. Chapter 8 verse 1 we learn that Samuel is now getting old.

There's nothing to fear. He's running the judges circuit and maybe he's getting a little bit tired. But leadership and aging certainly have their pleasures but also their pressures.

So at this stage of Samuel's life he's looking into the future when he could maybe sit back and write his memoirs. He's like a good leader who approaches the end of his ministry.

He wants to prepare for the future. He doesn't want a good thing to come to an end. He served God and his country very well almost faultlessly. So what does he do?

[4 : 29] Well verse 1 tells us that Samuel takes matters into his own hands. Time is passing and all is well on the Middle Eastern front and Samuel wants to make sure it stays that way.

So he looks around and he goes left and his right and see if there's any judges in Israel and he can't find any and so he makes his sons judges. This is something that Gideon explicitly decided that he wouldn't do.

He couldn't pass on his role. He couldn't pass his ministry on to his sons. It wasn't something to be inherited. It was a gift from God. And so that was the disaster because Samuel didn't pray to the Lord.

His sons didn't walk in his ways and they were just like Eli's sons. Israel's now back where they started just one generation earlier. And while there's not an external crisis there certainly now is an internal one.

In the hand of God while he holds the Philistines and the Amorites at bay Israel is in more trouble than they know. So the elders step in.

[5 : 40] They go to Samuel and they tell him what they want. They want a king. No one put them up to it. They don't take matters into their own hands. But they were anxious about the future of Israel just as Samuel was.

They want Samuel as we read in verse 6 to give us a king to judge us. And Samuel's first response is sadness and grief.

The text says that this displeased him. It was like the request was kind of a punch that took the last breath of joy out of Samuel's soul.

And for the first time over this matter we're told Samuel prayed to the Lord. He prayed to the Lord. And the Lord is just really gracious with him.

He doesn't say to him He doesn't say Samuel son of Elkanah of Ramathaim Zophim of the hill country of Ephraim. Just deal with it. You started all this by making your sons judges.

[6 : 44] I'm not getting involved in the mess you made. That's not what God says. He says to him Samuel Samuel don't take it personally. It's not about you.

It's about me. They've been acting like this ever since I led them out of Egypt. Explicitly the Lord cites Israel's rejection their forsaking of the Lord and now serving other gods.

And this is just beautiful. Samuel then he doesn't hang his head. He doesn't dig a hole. He doesn't waste away in shame until he dies.

He obeys the word of the Lord. By taking the Lord's direction to obey the voice of the people but not without a warning. King James translation is really really helpful here.

he says that he's to go not to warn them but to protest solemnly. So Samuel obeys the Lord and he warns the people by giving this description of the king of their choice.

[7 : 54] And there are three key phrases in these verses from 10 to 21. I'm not going to reread it. But here's the first key phrase. The first one is that he will take and along with that the word that comes at the end of the sentence usually is his.

In other words this king is all take and no give. You just read it. It's take, take, take, take, take, take, take, take, take, take. All take no give.

He's like this political and social and economic spiritual funnel pulling all things into himself instead of being like a fountain. There's the second key phrase.

The key phrase comes in verse 18. He says your king whom you have chosen for yourself. They've brokered this deal without even bothering to ask what the Lord wants.

The second key phrase. And the third key phrase is this. It's first in verse 5 but then it's repeated in verse 20 and it's this. Like all nations.

[8 : 55] And here's the real problem. They want to be like everyone else. It's not that the other nations are putting pressure on them to do this but it's more like it's almost kind of like a market-driven management.

It's just the examples around them of the other nations for some reason has captured their imagination and they want the same thing as the other nations. And that's how chapter 8 ends. Chapter 9 picks up and I just kind of love chapter 9. I'm not going to spend as much time in it but it just shows that God has this great sense of humor. He describes how Samuel the prophet or a seer identifies Saul as the anointed one.

Now the word seer is a bit misleading because in the Hebrew tradition a prophet is really more of a listener. He doesn't see what the Lord is doing so much as what the Lord is saying.

Nevertheless, what's so funny about this future is that God uses He uses obviously Samuel as a prophet at the end of the story but at the beginning of the story the new king of Israel is actually led

into learning about what the Lord has in mind for him by an ass.

[10:12] I mean just think about it. You know, we know probably not by experience what a donkey is like and how stubborn they are and you have to pull them along but it's reversed in this case. Saul is the one who's led to the man of God for the word of the Lord by a donkey and of course there is his servant and a woman as well.

But that aside, actually Saul looks pretty good. He's the first anointed one and God makes a very good choice for his people. He's kind of a big fish in a small pond.

The small pond is the tribe of Benjamin but he's head and shoulders above the rest. He's kind of the Arnold Schwarzenegger of Israel. The good thing about this, Saul, is that he listens to his own servant.

He doesn't lack any humility. We see that in verse 21. He's not hungry for power. He says, Am I not a Benjamite from the least of the tribes of Israel?

And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way? This is not false humility.

[11:29] No one could fault the Lord for setting Israel up for failure. It was a man of their own choosing but the Lord is looking out for his people. Look what he says in verses 16 to 17.

He says, He will take your male servants and female servants. Sorry, chapter 9. Tomorrow, about this time, I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel.

He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people because their cry has come to me. And Samuel saw Saul.

The Lord told him, Here is the man whom I have spoken to you. He it is who shall restrain my people. God is clearly, clearly on the side of his people who have rejected him, who have forsaken him, who have gone to serve other gods.

This is just a great picture of God's grace and his generosity. And I come to the end of these two chapters and I just think to myself, God, what are you doing? This is certainly not the way that I respond in these circumstances.

[12:44] He is not even kind of measuring up with what some people accuse God of in the Old Testament. You know, he gets accused of being some kind of tyrant. You know, some Christians like to, or not Christians, like to think that the God of the Old Testament is kind of vindictive.

Right? You know, they say, well, I don't really like this God of the Old Testament. He is angry and he takes things out on his people. The God of the Old Testament kind of rules with an iron fist and he forces people to obey.

He coerces them into submission. When Samuel prayed to the Lord, God didn't fly into some kind of rage and say to Samuel, look, I'll just go find some other people.

I'll go to one of these other people who are more dedicated to their God than mine are to me. Usurp that God's power and receive their dedication. That's not what he does.

There's no coercion going on here. But then it made me wonder, well, does it look like a bit of capitulation? The Lord looks like he's giving in to the Israelites.

[13:46] He's giving them permission to have a king even though they're rejecting him, forsaking him and serving other gods. It's hard to believe the Lord would do this. Well, unless maybe he's playing some kind of trick on his people.

You know, a trick like the one that Jesus illustrates about prayer in Matthew. Jesus says, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives and everyone who seeks finds. And to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, of his son, asks him for bread and gives him a stone?

Or if he asks for a fish, give him a serpent? Now, the Lord isn't saying he's going to give them one thing and then slip them another.

So what is he doing? Well, he's giving Israel the monarch they want. They get exactly what they ask for. And God delivers a ruler in Saul.

[14:54] He's called a prince in chapter 9 and the beginning of verse 10 as well. Verse 16 reads, You shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the land of the Philistines.

He's called a prince but clearly enough he's anointed a ruler. Well, the trouble is the elders' request is right but their understanding of the ruler, their understanding of kingship is wrong.

You see, there's nothing wrong in asking for a king but the reason they want him is completely wrong. God promises Abraham, in fact, in Genesis chapter 17 verse 6 this.

He says, I shall make you into a nation and kings will come from you. But the trouble is they don't want God's kind of king.

They want the kings of the other nations. They're envious of that kind of king. They should long for the rule of their God, of Yahweh.

[16:01] But here's the point and that is that Israel cannot, they cannot be like the other nations because they have a completely different God. Yahweh is their God.

He's the one that makes them unique. It's not a king who rules them but it's Yahweh who rules them. It's not one of them who they can see like the other nations who defends their country.

It's Yahweh who they can't see. And he gives them a ruler who is good if not better than the rulers of other nations. But Saul can in no way be for Israel what the Lord is for his people.

And that's why the Lord says in chapter 8 verse 7, they've rejected me from being king over them. No one can provide security for his people like the Lord.

And that's what they really want. They want security. But they don't trust that the Lord is the one who can give it to them as they think about their future and Samuel no longer being with them.

[17:10] It's like they almost panic. And they don't realize that all along Yahweh is the one who's ruling. Yahweh is the one who's leading them into the future through Samuel.

And so they don't trust in him. They think they can get it from a king like the other nations who provide for them some kind of security militarily or economically or socially or maybe even spiritually.

Instead of looking to the Lord, they look to a man. It's a great temptation, isn't it? We have to ask ourselves, financially, do we place security in a banking system that didn't have to get bailed out? Or do we place confidence, security in a military that won't plunge its country into trillions of dollars of debt? Or what about faith?

You know, I used to think, you know, wouldn't it be great if the Archbishop of Canary just kind of stepped into our situation, you know, kind of like a pope and sorted things out for us. Now what God is asking is for us to trust in him.

[18:18] He's the one who gives us security. And the question is, will we trust in the Lord with all our hearts and lean not on our own understanding? So this is why God gives his people a king.

He's preparing them for his kind of king. They want a king created in the image of another country, but he wants to give them a king created in his own image.

And this is how God wants to rule his people. All throughout Samuel chapter 8, we're learning that he is the one in ruling and the way in which he rules, not only why he rules this way, but the way in which he rules his people is through his word on one hand and his warning on another.

Right? The Lord makes his will known to his people through his prophet. His will is revealed first by his word. So that at the end of today's reading, not only at the beginning, but actually at the end, Samuel says to Saul, right at the very end, chapter 10, stop here, sorry, end of chapter 9, stop here yourself for a while that I may make known to you the word of God.

that's how he leads his people into the future. The Lord is our Father and he rules and leads us into the future by speaking truth to us.

[19:42] But he'll also warn if he has to. He makes his will known in these terms. And in verse 10, Samuel reports back, or sorry, the narrator reports that Samuel told all the words of the Lord to his people.

What do we learn? We learn that the word of the Lord comes with a warning. And that too is how a loving father prepares his children for a future. And I think this is really key.

It is a loving, heavenly father that leads us into the future. How do I know that? You look at the names and go back to the beginning of Samuel's sons. It must have been really tragic for him to see his sons to make decisions of judgment for personal gain, financial gain, and also to pervert justice.

But look at this. Look at what Samuel had in mind for his sons. One's name was Joel. It's two words. El is shortened Elohim. And Joe is Yo God.

No, it's not that. It's Joe. Yo, actually, it's a shortened version of Yahweh. Yahweh. Yahweh is God. Yahweh is for them who nobody else can be.

Why, our phones today are even smarter than they were back then. Or so we think. Some of us think we're not only smarter, but we're making ourselves and our world better than they were. We denigrate and we ignore you. And if we were kings or dictators, we would crush peoples for being rebels, for the activity and the way we act.

[27 : 51] If we acted towards them the way we act towards you, we would deserve nothing. Yet, you show your power through our weakness, so that the more feeble and stupid we are, the more suitable we are for yourself, for your use.

For you put up tents of grace to cover our weaknesses. Lord, help us to rejoice in our various situations and to always give you praise.

Help us to see our deficiencies and not be discouraged by them. But understand that even they can bring glory to you. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer. Teach us, we pray, that we must act by a power that's supernatural, so that we attempt things beyond our strength and act for Christ in everything we do.

There is no comfort, Father, in anything apart from enjoying you and working for you. You are all we need. Even the enjoyments and fun in this world come from you.

[29 : 14] And, Father, we're so sorry for the times we don't understand this. For the many times we've tried to fit you into the confines of our human skulls.

Help us delight in the fact that everything in our worlds and the worlds beyond it are at your disposal. Because you and your majesty are beyond the vastness of the view from the Hubble telescope.

O God, Lord of grace, the initiator and completer of our faith, we praise you for everything you are, particularly for our redemption.

And for the very fact that we speak to you this morning in full confidence that you're listening. We so long to give you something wrapped in finest gold sparkly gift paper.

But we've nothing that's really ours. For every good thing comes from you. By ourselves, we can't even glorify you or your name.

[30 : 22] But, Lord, there's something we can do. And that's to cheerfully surrender soul and body to you. So, Lord, take us.

Even though we come in the filthy wrappings of pride and rebellion, do with us what you will. Make us fit for that glorious and funnest day.

The funnest day in our entire lives when we'll see you face to face. And truly then, and only then, understand what glory really means.

O Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer. This morning, Lord, we specifically pray for those in our congregation who are ill or in great distress.

And in a moment of silence, we add to those.

[31 : 25] People who are near and dear to us and desperately need your touch of grace this morning. Amen. We pray for Mandy Johnson and her family.

Be close to them in this time of bereavement. And for the diocese of the Upper Shia in Malawi. Bless those who work for you there. Keep your children safe.

Guard them from enemies within and without who would destroy their faith. Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer. Father, the heavens declare your glory.

The mountains that ring the city confirm it. We thank you for the riches you have showered upon us. And we ask that as we live our lives this coming week, that you will keep us anchored in you.

Reduce our pride in ourselves, we ask. And may everything we do bring you glory. And these things we ask in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[32 : 43] Amen.