**THE LORD ANOINTS SAUL AS KING**

August 3, 2014

1 Samuel 8:1-9:27

Key Verse: 9:16 “About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin.

Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me.”

In this passage, the Israelites demands Samuel to appoint a king over them. They want to be like their neighboring nations who had strong kings. This displeases Samuel, but he takes the matter to God in prayer. God warns them about what a king would do to them, but allows them to do what they wanted. God calls the Israelites “my people,” even as they reject him as their ruler.

I. ISRAEL ASKS FOR A KING (8:1-18)

All the days of his life, Samuel served the Lord as Israel’s judge, shepherd and Bible teacher. But his sons, Joel and Abijah, did not walk in his ways (3). Samuel must have seen enough potential in them to appoint them to serve as judges for Israel at Beersheba. But they abused their office by accepting bribes and perverting justice (3). No doubt Samuel felt the pain of watching his sons going astray. As parents, we do our best to raise our children in God. But they don’t always turn out according to our expectations. We have to pray for them continually.

Look at verses 4-5. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.” At first glance, they seemed to be saying that they couldn’t trust Samuel and his sons as effective leaders and thus, they wanted a regime change. But their real motive was that they wanted to be like the neighboring nations: They said, “Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.” What’s wrong with asking for a king? After all, God seemed to have known that there would be a king in Israel when he gave detailed instructions about kingship in Deuteronomy 17. But the problem in their asking for a king is seen in their statement, “such as all the other nations have.” In other words, they wanted to be like the other people around them. They envied the neighboring countries that seemed to have strong leaders and military security, for example, the Ammonites whose king was Nahash, a cruel man who had the habit of gouging out the right eyes of his enemies. According to 12:12, they had great fear that Nahash would attack them and gouge out their eyes. They viewed that having a decentralized system like theirs was a distinct disadvantage compared to the neighboring countries that had a strong central power to make decisive decisions. It was not easy for the 12 tribes to work together. It was especially difficult for Israel to fight an enemy like the Philistines without a central government and military force, given their different geographical locations of the tribes. For example, the Philistines were no imminent threat to the eastern tribes of Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh. They had little incentive to cross the Jordan River to fight against the Philistines.

The elders revealed their spiritual problem in asking for a king. God had called them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). He had warned them not to follow the ways of the Canaanites. God had told them not to be like other people who were idol worshipers. God had promised that he would bless them if they submitted to his rule. He promised that he would protect them from the powerful kings in the region (Dt 7:24). He also promised them a material prosperity (Dt 7:12-15). God told them: “You will be blessed more than any other people” (Dt 7:14). But the Israelites asked for a king. They did not trust in God and his promises. They had rejected God as their ruler. Today, we also want to be like the people of the world. We often envy their wealth and prosperity. Their grass seems greener than ours. We may not envy the lives of non-believers. Still we may envy those who are nominal believers—those who seem to enjoy the world while living as Christians just on Sunday. But God wants us to be his people with full commitment of the heart. He wants us to be different from the people of the world with different hopes and value system. We are a royal priesthood and a holy nation. We are in the world, but we are not to be of this world. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” At this time, let us search our hearts to see if we have become like the Israelites who wanted to be like the Canaanites.

When the elders criticized Samuel and asked for a king, he was displeased. He was offended that the people were linking his age with the need for new leadership. Samuel may have felt more than a little threatened and devalued by the request of the elders. Samuel left the scene convinced that he had been rejected by the people he had spent a lifetime faithfully serving. As any godly leader would, Samuel probably agonized over whether what is happening is due to some failure on his part. But perhaps most of important of all Samuel saw what Israel’s rejection of God will cost. Samuel fell on his knees and prayed to the Lord. What was God’s reply to Samuel? God told him to listen to them (7). God essentially said, “Samuel, don’t take it personally. It isn’t about you. Their rejection is more about me than about you. They have rejected me as their king. This is not a new problem either. Ever since I brought them out of their slavery in Egypt, they have disobeyed me and my word, serving other gods.” Still, God told Samuel to listen to the rebellious people. Look at verse 9. “Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do.”

So Samuel delivered the words of the Lord to the people of Israel. He listed the problems they would have to face under the reign of a king. The king would enlist their sons to fight his wars as infantry men, cavalry, charioteers and commanders. Many of them would die in battles. The king would make their sons work for weapons factories. The king would take their daughters to use them as perfumers, cooks and bakers. The king would take away their fields, vineyards, and olive groves. The king would impose a 10% tax on their grain and wine, and also on their livestocks. The king would take away their servants and also the best of their cattle and donkeys. And the king would make them his slaves. After enumerating the troubles they would have under the reign of a king, Samuel gave them a final warning. Look at verse 18: “When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day.”

God’s words to his people couldn’t be clearer. In spite of the clear warning, the people refused to listen to Samuel. Look at verses 19-20. “But the people refused to listen to Samuel. ‘No!’ they said. ‘We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.’” They were fixated in what they wanted and refused to listen to God. Still, God told Samuel to listen to them yet again (22). He told Samuel to give them a king.

II. GOD CHOOSES SAUL TO BE THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL (9:1-27)

Now Saul appears on the stages in verses 1-2. He was a son of Kish who was a Benjamite and a man of standing (9:1). Physically, Saul was an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites--a head taller than any of the others (2). He was tall like Yao Ming and perhaps more handsome than him. Saul was obedient to his father. When his father told him to go and find his lost donkeys, Saul traveled through many towns looking for them. (Donkeys were important to their daily life. It was like a car or bicycle today). He traveled through Ephraim and Benjamin, covering extensive areas. He went beyond what was expected of him. When it took longer than expected, Saul began to worry about his father who might be more worried about his son than the donkeys. And he was right. He knew his father’s mind well (10:2). Saul was not a spoiled brat. He even listened to his servant and followed his suggestions. He did not ignore the servant just because he was a servant.

Although Saul was an impressive young man, he was not confident. He said in verse 21, “But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin?” He was also clumsy and inattentive. Along the way to Zuph (1 Sam 9:5), his servant was the real leader and not Saul. The inept Saul did not bring any money (1 Sam 9:7), and did not know who Samuel was (1 Sam 9:18) even when Samuel was right under his nose, checking him from head to toe. Saul’s ignorance of Samuel suggests that he was not interested in spiritual matters. In some respect, Saul was more comfortable with donkeys than with people, in the country than in the palace, and as an adventurer than as a warrior. The lack of self-esteem and confidence, however, does not diminish a person’s potential or disqualify him from leadership. It only serves to magnify God’s presence, work and grace in the person’s life. “God raises the weak and powerless” is the constant theme in the book of Samuel and the Bible. 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, “God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong,” to demonstrate his almighty power and amazing grace.

God saw the unlimited potential in Saul’s talents, character, and upbringing. He chose Saul for the man he was – his character, nature, and qualities. The day before Saul came to town, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel: “About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me” (15-16). God told Samuel to anoint Saul to be a leader over his people Israel. It is interesting to note that God didn’t use the term “king.” He called him “leader.” God wanted him to lead his people in the right direction. God also told Samuel that his purpose for anointing Saul to be leader over his people Israel was to deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. In revealing his purpose for Saul, God repeatedly said “my people.” He used the term four times in verses 16 and 17. Let’s read verse 16 together. “About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me.” God said, “I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me.” Despite their sins of idolatry and unfaithfulness, God still cared about his people. A loving father cares about his son, no matter how bad the son behaves, just because he is the son. This is the heart of God. God called the Israelites “my people” even as they said, “Give us a king,” meaning “I don’t need you.” Let’s learn the heart of God. He is our heavenly Father. We are his people. We are his sons and daughters. Let’s never forget this. God loves and cares about us, just because we are his children.

God had a clear mission for Saul. It was to be an instrument of God’s rule over his people. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 says, “When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law…It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and now consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left.” The king in Israel was subject to the law of God and the word of the prophet. He was supposed to serve God’s will. In Saul’s case, it was to deliver his people from the hand of the Philistines. On the other hand, kings of other nations did whatever they wanted. They could take away others’ fields at any moment. But the king in Israel could not do that. He had to follow God’s law. For example, King David did not take Araunah’s threshing floor to build an altar. He paid for it. (2 Sam 24:20) On the other hand, when Ahab took Naboth’s vineyard by force, he was condemned by God. (1 Kings 21) As we will see in later chapters, Saul demonstrated that he was unwilling to submit to God’s law. This is the reason why he was rejected as king. People asked for a king like other nations who denied their covenant relationship with God. They paid dearly for it.

Saul was shy, awkward, and unpolished, and so God sent Samuel, the most powerful, influential, and respected person in Israel, to assure Saul that his selection was of God’s. Samuel’s reputation for accuracy in prophesy was known to all (1 Sam 3:19), and he tried his best to bring out the royalty and the regime in Saul. The prophet gave the future king the best seat in the house (1 Sam 9:22), the best portion at the table (1 Sam 9:23). To make Saul look and feel important, Samuel even invited 30 guests (1 Sam 9:22)--probably the most important people in Israel--to meet him, chatted privately with him in their presence (1 Sam 9:25), and invited him to stay overnight at the prophet’s house (1 Sam 9:26). In the next week we will learn how Saul was anointed publicly, and the Holy Spirit changed him into a different person to do great things. Stay tuned.

In today’s passage, we learned that God called the Israelites “my people” even as they rejected his rule and asked for a king. Let’s learn the heart of God who still cares for his rebellious people. God chose Saul, despite his many flaws, to deliver his people from their enemies. Our flaws do not disqualify us from being leaders. As long as we are obedient to God, God will use us for his purpose in this generation.