

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Well I wonder what you thought as we had that reading?

What struck you?

That's great and I hope to touch on a few of those things and if I don't touch on what struck you well why not chat to me afterwards.

There is always a danger for us when we take a passage like this and it is not part of a series because we run the risk of not seeing it in context. So let me say at the start that I think the passage helps us to see how God is moving forward his kingdom by appointing a King of his choosing. The qualities God was looking for in that king were not necessarily the qualities we might look for in our leaders.

1. A sad scenario

One thing that strikes me at least in the passage is there in v1, "The LORD said to Samuel, how long will you mourn for Saul?"

The question helps us get this in context. While the passage is about choosing a new king for the people of God it begins with Samuel grieving over Saul. Now why was he grieving because Saul certainly wasn't dead?

Samuel's grief was wide ranging. Back at the start of I Sam we see how he was raised in the temple at Shiloh under Eli and how God pronounced his judgement on Eli's sons and in 1 Sam 4:18 how when Eli heard of his son's death and the loss of the Ark of the Covenant he collapsed and died. There was a wide ranging grief over the failure of those who should lead God's people. But here he was grieving over Saul and over so much promise that had gone bad. Mourning because he had hoped and yet he had had to sum up things for Saul in 1 Sam 15:23, "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king." In Saul we had hoped – I see echoes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus speaking to Jesus about his death and saying "we had hoped". Samuel was grieving because he had anointed Saul as King and hoped Saul would be God's king but no and the last couple of verses of 1 Sam 15 speak of Samuel separating from Saul and God grieving that he had made Saul King (1 Sam 15:34-35).

However Samuel's grief was perhaps also for Israel, the people of God and a kind of what's next grief. Would Israel now collapse into anarchy and apostasy? As one writer puts it "He was distressed over the spiritual disaster of a promising instrument of God, over the welfare of God's people, over their condition and security".

I wonder if we ever grieve over such things, over failure among God's leaders, over unbelief in the church and over the church's failure to speak and live the gospel?

It was indeed a sad scenario.

2. The Divine Initiative

From a human perspective it didn't look good. However, the Bible is a book about God and here God shows yet again his commitment to his people. Yes the King had failed but as one door closes....

God was not prepared to give up on his people and he was not prepared to his purpose for his people to be thwarted because one man failed. Way back at the beginning Adam and Eve had rejected God's word and so God as ruler and yet God had not given up and now his plan to restore his people to his place under his rule was not going to be stopped in its tracks because Saul as we see from 1 Sam 15:23 had rejected God's word. So the message to Samuel was "Fill your horn with oil and be on your way." Yes a door has closed so God was opening another and he would continue to open doors despite human failings until the true King would come.

I don't know about you but I find that very encouraging. I find it encouraging in terms of my own spiritual life and I find it encouraging as a worker in God's kingdom.

We all know that our lives are not what God would want. As Frank Sinatra might say "regrets I've had a few" though actually many of us have more than a few regrets and often because like Frank we did it my way not God's and it is not unusual when we are brought faced to face with the failings in our lives that we can imagine that God can't love us.

I have been with my grandchildren over the last couple of days. I was playing with Caleb at one point and thought I smelt an unpleasant smell and I did. I knew it was coming from him. So I stood him up in front of me and told him some home truths. "Now Caleb," I said, "in our family we don't do things like that. I'm afraid that either you will have to shape up or ship out because this can't continue if you want to be a member of our family."

Now of course I didn't do that. What grandfather or father would do that? No I did the obvious I shouted for Anna to come and change his nappy.

We do mess up as individuals and as the people of God yet God doesn't abandon us and we see that through the history of God's people in the OT but God sticks with us and there is forgiveness and cleansing through Gods' great King and rescuer Jesus.

But this also brings assurance for us as we seek to serve God using the gifts he has given us. Samuel must have felt pretty down over Saul. The whole thing was a shambles and at time we can feel the same perhaps over an area of ministry we are involved in, or even over our church but here is the reminder that Samuel and we are about God's kingdom.

I remember years back our church were doing Alpha. We were having a day focusing on the Holy Spirit and we had brought in some people from another church to lead it. At one point we were sitting and praying or talking with each other and one of our leaders came and sat beside me and said something like "Ian I feel God is telling me to remind you that it is his work not yours".

That must have been said about 15 years ago but it has stayed with me because , and I am sure I am not alone in this, I can often take on myself the responsibility for what is really God's work. When things aren't going well in church life I can see it as down to me and the answer down to me. Here God said to Samuel don't mourn over what's past look to what I am about to do – the king is dead long live the King.

So if you are concerned about an area of God's work you are involved in. If it doesn't seem to be making the progress you would wish then hear what God was saying through these words – it is his work, his responsibility and we are, like Samuel, only called to be faithful and obedient. Again to quote "The true King never loses control of his kingdom; he is never nonplussed by the latest emergency in his realm."

3. The human option

So Samuel went off to Bethlehem to anoint one of these sons of Jesse. As we read in the passage he looked at Eliab and clearly thought he fitted the bill. Obviously Samuel hadn't learnt from Saul because Saul also looked the part. He had been literally head and shoulders above the rest.

The human option often is to do with outward impressions. If something looks good it must be! If I can give us another quote, "We stumble here, for example, when congregations or denominations select pastors. What we want are the movers and shakers, the aggressive extroverts, the pushers who meet people well and sell the church in the community, who are smooth in the pulpit. Do we ever ask: how does he pray? Does he enjoying being with his wife? Can he weep?"

The human option wasn't the right one but the divine choice was. God had in mind a very different person and eventually this son was called from looking after the sheep. The whole feast was held up until he could get there and then he was anointed and finally in v13 we learn his name is David. But note in case you were worried he was v12 handsome so looking good and being handsome doesn't rule people out of ministry. But then looking at me you knew already didn't you!

4. The defining quality

So what was it that David had that the rest didn't?

Well the point God made to Samuel was, as we see in v7, that God didn't so much look at the externals as at the heart. "The Lord looks at the heart".

This should not have been a surprise to Samuel because back in 1 Sam 13 when Saul had not waited for Samuel to come and make a sacrifice but done it himself, Samuel had spoken God's word to him, "But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command." (1 Sam 13:14) The defining quality of the king to be was that he had a heart after God's, a heart like God's or to put it another way he would be faithful and obedient to God.

So God chose David, the least likely in human terms and it reminds us that God often does chose the most unlikely people to do his work. What was it people said of Jesus, “Isn’t this Mary’s son?” (Mark 6:3) He was just one of us. Then they said, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'” (Matt 11:19) He was living a normal life and mixing with outsiders. They also asked “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46) And ultimately they said “He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.” (Matt 27:42) – the Messiah shouldn’t suffer!

God sees the heart and ultimately in terms of our salvation and service that is what matters. I hope you can see that and from it gain the assurance in terms of your own salvation and also in terms of your own ministry because God deals in faithfulness and obedience not status and success.

5. No bed of roses

“So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.” God chose David to be king and he equipped him for the task. However we should ask what was the result of the spirit of God coming on David? Well we know that it was no bed of roses. It was no easy task indeed what David was launched into must have made his previous battles with lions and bears seem like a piece of cake. Gaining the throne and then building the kingdom was a continual battle for him.

We see something of the same in Jesus don’t we? We read in Matt 3:16 -4:1, “As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” The giving of the spirit led Jesus into the battle. So it is for us, we come to faith receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the battle begins. This is what we like – nice and positive!

But actually it is because both for David and Jesus and then for us the battle is a sign of our belonging to God. The battle is a mark of our sonship and not a sign of our sin. It is when I am in the battle that I know God is with me! It is then that our heart is tested.

One door was closing and another was opening it is the continual way with God. Yes we mourn over past failures, those that are ours and those of other Christians but we should also be looking forward because we are part of the Kingdom of God and our King reigns supreme and his kingdom cannot fail. However as God uses us in his kingdom work we can expect battles yet we know that ultimately God’s expectation of us is that we remain faithful and obedient which we can do knowing as David did that “he who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” (1 Thess 5:24).