

# SAUL, THE PEOPLE'S KING

**+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God is the one true King, and He alone is able to lead His people as they need.

**+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

1 Samuel 7–10

**+ SETTING:**

God raised up Samuel to judge His people and to call them to repentance. Under Samuel's leadership, Israel experienced freedom from the surrounding nations, restoration of land, and revival in worship. During his lifetime, Samuel traveled throughout the nation to ensure the people were faithful to the covenant the Lord had made with them. But when Samuel was old, his sons, whom he had appointed as judges, proved to be wicked leaders who took advantage of the people (1 Sam. 8:3). So the Israelites, in their discontentment, demanded to have a king like the nations around them.

# DAY 1

## READ:

1 Samuel 7-8

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 8:4-5

## NOTES

Discontentment is the enemy of joy. Of course, none of us sets out to be unhappy with our circumstances, but our hearts have the tendency to drift toward ungratefulness when we fail to guard them from the influence of idols. This truth is evident in the history of Israel. Rather than turning to Yahweh and asking for His help when Samuel's sons failed to judge faithfully, they demanded a king like all the other nations had.

Their request didn't arise suddenly in their hearts. Rather, both the demand itself and the elders' tone suggest a desire that had been brewing for some time. Instead of confessing their sinful desires and walking in repentance, however, the people commanded Samuel to gratify their lusts. But as Israel's story reveals, no person, place, or possession will ever satisfy the longing of the human heart. As the Church Father Augustine prayed, "The thought of you [God] stirs him [man] so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this is part of why the apostle John ended his first epistle with the exhortation that his readers should guard themselves from idols (1 John 5:21). Likewise, wise Solomon advised his sons to guard their hearts with special and deliberate care because the heart, both physical and metaphorical, is the wellspring of life in us (Prov. 4:23). Knowing our hearts are prone to wander, we must be ever vigilant to protect them from the constant bombardments of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Otherwise, we will slowly grow more and more discontent, even abandoning God Himself, just as Israel did.

**What lusts (desires) most frequently cry out for satisfaction in your life? What practical steps will you take to guard your heart against these desires?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

1 Samuel 9:1-2

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 9:2

## NOTES

When I was in junior high, a new kid to the school joined the football team. He was tall, fast, and he boasted of having excellent receiver's hands. No one on our team looked as much like a real athlete as this kid. But then came the first day of training camp. No doubt, the kid looked the part, but the first time the football was thrown his way, it was evident he could not play the part—he simply could not catch the ball. All our hopes and dreams of having a star wide receiver came crashing down that day.

We find a similar predicament when the author of 1 Samuel introduces Saul, the son of Kish. This impressive young man was tall, a head taller than anyone else. Saul looked like a king for sure, but could he lead like a king? It should catch our attention that the author emphasized Saul's outward appearance rather than his inward character. While we do not want to spoil the rest of the story, the author seemed to paint a quick picture of a man who looked kingly but would not act so.

As we will come to see and be reminded of, human beings look at a person's outward appearance, but the Lord always sees and judges the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Therefore, we ought to care about our personal holiness, both inside and out.

Speaking at the ordination of one Dan Edwards, Robert Murray McCheyne stated, "Mr. Edwards, do not forget the inner man, the heart. The cavalry officer knows that his life depends upon his saber, so he keeps it clean. Every stain he wipes off with the greatest care. Mr. Edwards, you are God's chosen instrument. According to your purity, so shall be your success. It is not great talent; it is not great ideas that God uses; it is great likeness to Jesus Christ. Mr. Edwards, a holy man is an awesome weapon in the hand of God."<sup>2</sup>

**Are there areas in your life where you have settled for outward appearances rather than pressing on in conformity to Christ? If so, what will you do about this contradiction?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

1 Samuel 9:3–10:16

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 10:9–10

NOTES

Having the right equipment is vital for getting the job done right. Whether you are framing a house, replacing a flat tire, or painting a landscape, failure to acquire the appropriate tools can leave you wet, stranded, or staring indefinitely at a blank canvas.

Such was the potential case for Israel's newly anointed king, Saul. Though Saul looked like a king, he simply did not have the necessary qualities to serve as the prince of Yahweh's people. But that is precisely what God specializes in—taking unqualified sinners and using them for His glory. In Saul's case, God changed his heart so that he would have what was necessary to serve as the monarch of Israel. As history reveals, Saul was far from being a godly king. Nevertheless, God used him to deliver His people from their enemies, something that would not have taken place had God not equipped him for service.

Thankfully, we have something Saul never had—the new covenant blessing of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The same power that raised Christ from the dead lives inside each believer. As a result, we have what is needed to grow in faithfulness to Christ our King. As God is working in us, we can work out our salvation to accomplish God's will for us (Phil. 2:12-13). In and of ourselves, we do not have the equipment needed to obey or serve the Lord. Yet God graciously gives His Spirit to all who call on Christ in faith so that we might live the rest of our lives by His grace and for His glory.

**Have you turned from your sins and trusted in Christ as Lord? If not, will you today? If you have, how are you taking advantage of the "equipment" given to you in the Holy Spirit?**

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For you will certainly carry out God's purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or John."<sup>3</sup>

—C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

# DAY 4

## READ:

1 Samuel 10:17-19

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 10:18-19

## NOTES

When I was growing up, one of the unspoken rites of passage in my family was when Dad let you sit by yourself in the tree-stand while hunting. I remember being super excited the first time he left me alone in the woods (I was a mighty hunter after all . . . ). But as the light began to fade and the chill of night came on, I did not feel so mighty anymore. In fact, the more time passed, the less I cared about seeing “the big one.” I just wanted to be safe and warm. There were moments when I was tempted to panic, but knowing Dad to be a man of his word, I was confident he would come back for me. And sure enough, just as the last sliver of light faded, I heard Dad whistle to let me know he was in the area. And as soon as I heard Dad call, I suddenly felt like a mighty hunter once again!

Knowing Dad to be a man of his word, I endured the isolation and cold until he returned. Israel, on the other hand, failed to remember God’s past faithfulness, and so, they demanded a king to lead them. As Samuel reminded them, Yahweh had delivered them every step of their journey out of Egypt and into the promised land. In other words, they had zero reason to doubt God’s goodness or faithfulness in their present situation. But their failure to recall His reliability led them to make irrational decisions that would have monumental consequences.

As John Piper notes, “Confidence in someone’s future reliability is grounded in a history of past faithfulness. This is also the way it is with God.” Thus, Israel “forsook their faith in God’s future grace because they stopped remembering his past grace.”<sup>4</sup> In short, if you are going to continue following Jesus, you must look back to remember God’s past faithfulness. His grace has been, is, and always will be sufficient.

**What are some ways God has shown Himself faithful in your own past? How will God’s past graces in your life encourage you in the face of present challenges and an unknown future?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

1 Samuel 10:20-27

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 10:20-24

NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #54: CHRIST AS KING

God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

We saw throughout the book of Judges how the Lord raised up judges to liberate and defend His people. As the downward cycle of sin progressed among the Israelites, so too did a downward cycle of virtue progress through the judges. In essence, it would seem the Lord raised up the judges the people deserved—people who were equally as flawed as they were.

If this was true, then the ministry of Samuel was a gracious reprieve as he faithfully judged Israel all of his life (7:15-17). But his preserving influence would not last, as he too would die. Rightly fearing the wreck that would come from Samuel's wicked sons being left in charge over Israel (recalling the fallout of Eli's wicked sons; see 1 Sam. 2-4), the Israelites made a wrong turn, setting their hopes on a human king instead of their divine Deliverer. And here we return to the pattern of the people getting the deliverer they deserved.

When the people requested a king, Samuel considered it an offense—and it was. But the Lord clarified that it was an offense against Him first and foremost—a rejection (8:6-8)! And when Samuel repeated this accusation just prior to the selection process of their new king (10:18-19), the Israelites did not respond with fear, trepidation, and remorse. In fact, they didn't seem to have any emotions at all except for eager anticipation of getting what they wanted—a king like those of the pagan nations surrounding them. And what they got was an impressive young man by stature but who was initially marked by fear (recall Gideon; see Judg. 6). And later, Saul would prove himself a maker of rash decisions and one who lacked remorse for his own disobedience.

As sinful human beings, we often live under the rule of our own deserved “deliverers,” but in Jesus Christ, like Samuel, we have a gracious reprieve, receiving the Judge and Savior we don't deserve and whose loving rule lasts for eternity because He died and rose again.

**What actions will you take to honor King Jesus, who died and rose again for your salvation and eternal life?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self. The one, therefore, glories in itself, the other in the Lord; the one seeks glory from men, the other finds its highest glory in God, the Witness of our conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, 'Thou are my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.'"<sup>5</sup>

-Augustine (354-430)

### **POINT 1: An earthly king is demanded by the people** (1 Sam. 8:4-9).

The people's demand for a king was \_\_\_\_\_ by the Lord, but it also revealed the concern of their hearts—they wanted to be like the \_\_\_\_\_.

**?** What are some of the lures of the world that attract and tempt God's people?

In desiring to be like the nations, the people of Israel once again rejected God's \_\_\_\_\_ and, more importantly, God Himself as their rightful \_\_\_\_\_.

**?** Why should we view all sin as an implicit rejection of God as our rightful King?

### **POINT 2: An impressive king is anointed for the people** (1 Sam. 9:1-2; 10:1-10).

Saul was a physically impressive man, but his qualifying credentials came from the Lord, who \_\_\_\_\_ Saul and changed his \_\_\_\_\_.

**?** How does Saul's anointing as king compare to a believer's qualification for service?

### **POINT 3: A reluctant king is presented to the people** (1 Sam. 10:17-24).

Israel \_\_\_\_\_ and rebelled against God by demanding a king, and God's \_\_\_\_\_ here was to give them exactly what they wanted—an impressive, earthly king. But they also got a king who was fearful and who eventually would rebel against the Lord.



What are some ways you have experienced God's discipline?

**ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #54:  
CHRIST AS KING**

NOTES

God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would \_\_\_\_\_ His people and \_\_\_\_\_ all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the \_\_\_\_\_ .

**MY RESPONSE**

Because we have trusted in Christ, the King of kings, for our salvation, we seek to put away all disobedience and submit to Him so that the world too might experience redemption through Him and enter into God's kingdom.

- **HEAD:** When you think about God, do you imagine an angry tyrant or a loving father? Why? How does your perspective need to change?
- **HEART:** What steps will you take to foster a deeper, more intimate relationship with Jesus, your Savior and King?
- **HANDS:** Where have you been reluctant to obey the Lord, and how will you obey now in honor of King Jesus?

**VOICES from  
CHURCH HISTORY**

"There were thus two things which the Savior did for us by becoming Man. He banished death from us and made us anew; and, invisible and imperceptible as in Himself He is, He became visible through His works and revealed Himself as the Word of the Father, the Ruler and King of the whole creation."<sup>6</sup>

-Athanasius (c. 293-373)