

Group Notes

Text: 1 Samuel 9.14-10.27

Saul's Rise

Context and Background

Context: The books of 1-2 Samuel have been called some of the most honest historical writing in existence. The books chronicle the transition of the Israelite people from a loose confederation of tribes to a group of people led by a single monarch. The present text provides the events that served as the hinge between Israel as a loose confederation of tribes and Israel as a united nation. Precipitated by a crisis in leadership, Israel approached Samuel asking for a king like the nations around them (1 Sam. 8). In so doing, they choose to reject God as king (Dt. 6.13; 10.12-13; 13.4). Rather than distancing Himself from Israel, God demonstrated grace (1 Sam. 8.22). God chose to work with Israel, moving them back to Himself through a King. Thus, God set about choosing the king for Israel (1 Sam. 9-10).

Interestingly, God choose a man from a tribe that was spiritually depraved, a man that was an incompetent shepherd, a man unable to think on his feet (1 Sam. 9.1-10; Judges 19-21). God's choice did not seem to make sense, to Saul or to the rest of the people. Why would God chose a man like Saul to be the king? What purpose could God have in choosing someone who is anything other than kingly material to be king?

Background (The young Saul): The man God chose to be king of Israel was named Saul, a man from the tribe of Benjamin. At this time, the tribe of Benjamin was considered to be the most spiritually depraved all of the tribes of Israel, a reality that led to their near annihilation at the hands of their fellow Israelites (See Judges 19-21). Saul himself seems to be a man who has little spiritual awareness. Samuel is known as the prophet of Israel (1 Sam. 3.21; 7.3-17), and yet Saul has no awareness of him, indicating that Saul does not participate in the religious life of Israel (1 Sam. 9.5-7). Further, Saul seems to be somewhat obtuse, unaware of when he is in need of spiritual help, relying on his servant to indicate the need to turn to God for help (1 Sam. 9.5-6). Likewise, Saul is portrayed as an incompetent shepherd, one who is unable to find three large animals (1 Sam. 9.3-4), and one who is unable to think on his feet to solve dilemmas before him (1 Sam. 9.7-10). Though the author of 1 Samuel notes that Saul is striking in his appearance (1 Sam. 9.2; 10.23), Saul seems to be somewhat insecure as an individual (1 Sam. 10.22, 27). Saul's portrayal in the text is anything but flattering. Save for his good looks and striking appearance, Saul is anything but kingly material, a point made by his detractors (1 Sam. 10.27). God did not choose someone that would have been highly attractational and charismatic to be the king, but then, this may have been the point (1 Sam. 10.17-19). God's concern with Israel's desire for a king was that it was rooted in a rejection of Him (1 Sam. 8.7-9; 10.18-19). Could it be that God has chosen one who appears undesirable as a means of maintaining the focus of His people upon Himself?

The Text

An Unlikely Encounter (1 Sam. 9.14-10.8): While looking for his father's donkey's, Saul and his servant decided to ask for Samuel's help in locating the straying animals. Upon arriving in the town in which Samuel was staying, Saul and his servant bumped into Samuel as he was on his way to a sacrifice. The day before this encounter, God had told Samuel that he would meet the man God desired to be the king of Israel. Seeing Saul, Samuel declared that before him was the one whom would govern Israel. This statement shocked Saul as he replied that he was from the smallest tribe of Israel, certainly not one fit to be king (See *Background—The young Saul*). Rather than debating with Saul, Samuel directs him to attend the sacrifice as the guest of honor, basically taking the place reserved for one like the king. After the sacrifice, Samuel took Saul aside and anointed him as king, something of a semi-formal ceremony symbolizing God's favor and choosing. Recognizing Saul's doubt, Samuel provided three signs that would occur which when completed would serve to verify God's choosing of Saul and His presence with him.

An Unlikely King (1 Sam. 10.9-27): Leaving Samuel's presence, Saul turned to go home. In so doing, God began to move in Saul and in the events around him. God completed the signs as spoken by Samuel, verifying for Saul that God truly had chosen him as king. However, when asked by his uncle about his whereabouts, Saul remained silent, refusing to speak about the events that had transpired. Samuel summoned the people to Mizpah for the purpose of revealing the king of Israel. Samuel began his address to the people by reminding them of God's ultimate desire to be king and His proven track record of supporting and protecting His people. The refusal of the people is a reminder of their need for spiritual renewal, but God's granting of their request serves as a reminder of God's unfaithful grace. Lots are cast as the means of verifying God's choice. These lots would more likely have been colored stones, though what might be in view are the priestly Urim and Thummin (See Deut. 33.8; Num. 27.12-23; 1 Sam. 14.41). Such a method of choosing leaders or verifying guilt was not unheard of in ancient Israel or in the early church (Num. 27.12-23; Acts 1.23-26). The lot eventually came to Saul, however, he was hiding among the baggage. Upon further inquiry the people found Saul and brought him out before the people. While visually striking and accepted as the king by most, some were less than impressed. This was not the kind of king they had in mind, someone who looked good but was from a small tribe and hid in the baggage. This kind of person was not going to be able to save them. Perhaps, this was just the point.

Application: God wants it all. He wants to be first in our lives, to have His people make decisions that put Him first (Dt. 6.12; 10.12-13; 1.4; Matt. 22.37-40; Luke 9.23-24). This single idea permeates much of what God does in and through our lives, coloring how He intersects our ordinariness. When God moves, He often does so in ways that seem impossible, in ways that make us question what God is trying to do. He chooses people like Saul to be kings. This doesn't make any sense. How can a man like Saul be king? How can a man like Saul deliver the people? He can't. That is the point. By putting a man like Saul into power, God moves in a way that makes it unmistakable that His people need Him, and that anything that happens comes only from God. In so doing, God's people are forced to keep their eyes on Him. God still works in the same way today. Paul states that God intentionally chooses to work through those that are not influential, not noble, but rather chooses to work through the lowly and despised. He does this so that in no way will anyone be able to boast. In no way can life become anything other than all about Him (1 Cor. 1.26-31). This truth holds both hope and promise for our lives and God's involvement in them. First, God really is moving to intersect our lives so we have what is best, Himself. Second, as God moves, He chooses to use ordinary people to do extraordinary things. In so doing, He moves people to what is best, Himself.

Finding God in the Ordinary

Discussion Guide 4

1 Samuel 9.14-10.27

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- Describe a time when you felt insignificant or ill-prepared. What was this like for you?
- Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes *(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)*

Setting the Stage: *God wants it all. No, God's not on an ego trip. He wants it all because He is the best and He wants the best for His people. Therefore, when God see us, all He can desire for us is Himself. He wants it all because that is best for us. This desire of God permeates much of what God does in and through our lives, coloring how He intersects our ordinariness. God moves in ways that ensure that He gets it all. He reaches out and calls people who don't have it all, the nobodies, the broken, the obtuse, the illegitimate, insecure, and ill-prepared. Most of us shrink back when we hear His call. Who are we to serve God? When not called, we howl about those who are. "Who are they? They can't lead. They can't serve. Doesn't God know who they are, really?" Actually, He does. Maybe, just maybe, that is the point.*

- Read 1 Samuel 9.14-10.27.
- God chose Saul to be the king of Israel. What responses were made to God's choice?
- What do you imagine motivated each of these responses? (Note: consider using the background notes for further insights.)
- If you were God, would you have chosen Saul? Can you elaborate?
- Where, if anywhere, do you see God still using people like Saul?
- Read 1 Corinthians 1.26-31.
- What do you learn about God's desire to choose people like Saul? What, if anything, is striking about this desire?
- If God chose you, would He be able to use you to draw the focus of others back to Himself? Can you elaborate?
- What, if anything, might God be calling you to do? How might you respond so that He remains the focus?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- Prayer requests
- Group Prayer time
- House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)