

“A King in Waiting”

Based on 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

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Things didn't work out for Saul, the man whom God had appointed to be the first king of Israel. He offered up an unlawful sacrifice to God. He made rash oaths. He rebelled against what God instructed him to do. He was stubborn and greedy. He lacked the character of a king. And the people suffered for it. Saul is an example of wasted potential. Because of how Saul had performed as a king, the time was approaching toward crisis. These were challenging times for the people.

As Samuel the elder looked upon the state of the people, and the failures of the man he anointed to be king, he was struck with grief. It was so sad and disappointing how things had gone. Sitting alone at his house, Samuel wept, hurting for his people. But Samuel wasn't the only one who was grieving. God also was grieving over how things were turning out. In fact, we read in scripture that God regretted selecting Saul to be the king. How could God be regretful? Didn't the all-knowing God have prior knowledge that things would turn out this way? Regret presumes that things don't go as planned. So we learn something about God here. God selected Saul because God knew the potential Saul had to be a great and faithful king. That was the plan. But free will means that God's expectations don't always pan out. Even God can realize that in hindsight God would have done something different. It's not that God made a mistake. It's just that Saul failed to be who God knew he could be. And so, God grieved over Saul and regretted having him anointed.

But God did not stew in God's grief for long. Even though things didn't work out, God wasn't giving up. God was already at work, planning the next move, for the sake of God's people. God remains engaged, even though nothing is working out as God originally intended. You might remember that God never intended that the people have a king. God was their king. They didn't need a human king. But the people wanted to be like all the other peoples, so they demanded a king of their own. Even though this went against God's purposes, God responded to the pleas of the people and selected someone for Samuel to

anoint as king. It reminds me of where Paul describes the characteristics of love, saying that love does not insist on its own way.

Now that things have gone badly, God didn't petulantly say, "See, I told you so!" Until the people said to God that they no longer wanted a king, God knew that there would be need for another king to take Saul's place when he dies. So God went to work, to find someone to take Saul's place. That's another thing we learn about God. God works with what is, not with how God wishes things were. God deals with reality and works with the situation as it is to make things the best they can be. God is always at work trying to make the best of every situation. This demonstrates the grace and faithfulness of God. When Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden because of their rebellion, God provided clothing for them. When Moses shattered the stone tablets upon which were etched the Ten Commandments in his rage against the people who had made the golden calf, God later provided another set. And when the first king God provided failed to live up to what a king should be, God provided another. God never walks away. God keeps on doing what God can do to provide a future with hope.

Now while Samuel was still at home grieving, God was already prepared to move forward. That includes giving Samuel an assignment. God says to Samuel, "Why are you still grieving over Saul? I have rejected him as king. Fill your horn with oil and get yourself to Bethlehem." Was God irritated with Samuel? I don't think so. When God asked Samuel that question about why he is still grieving over Saul, I imagine God said that out of a place of empathy. After all, God had been grieving too. And I bet God was still grieving, even as God was preparing to move forward. Everyone grieves differently. And there is a need to be still and sit in our grief. But we can't sit in our grief forever. Even though grief lingers, we have to move forward with our lives. We have to keep on living. So I believe it is with gentleness that God asks the question of Samuel and gives him something to do that is helpful. God's assignment for Samuel is to take part in the next faithful step toward a better future for God's people. I can imagine that both God and now Samuel start taking the steps necessary to change things for the better even though the heaviness of grief remains on their hearts.

And move forward they did. God had seen enough. Saul was rejected by God as the king. Someone had to take Saul's place. A transition of leadership needed to occur. But God wasn't going to wait until Saul was dead to make the move. You remember earlier I said that God is always engaged, trying to make any situation better. What I mean is that God is constantly engaged and responding. It doesn't seem to be God's character to sit around and wait things out. Of course, God decided not to arrange for Saul's assassination either. Instead, God decided to go ahead and select Saul's replacement and have him anointed the king, even while Saul was still on the throne. God was getting things set up so that when Saul died, the transition to the next king would be as smooth as possible.

So Samuel goes to Bethlehem with a heifer for sacrifice as a means to get Jesse and his sons together. And as Jesse's first born son comes before Samuel, he pulls out his horn of oil, sure that this must be the one God has chosen. It makes perfect sense. Not only is Eliab the oldest son, but he looks like a king. He was tall, dark and handsome, so to speak. But he is not the one God has chosen. We find one of the best known passages of scripture, where God says, "The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." God knows what is most important about you and me, and that is what kind of person we are on the inside. And the good news here is that there is little we can do with our physical appearance, aside various body modifications. But there is a lot about what we can do on our inside. We can make our hearts grow larger and softer. We can engage in a process of maturity that makes us more and more beautiful and noble on the inside.

But there is something else I want to highlight. Like I said a minute ago, God didn't wait for Saul to die before taking action. God has David anointed king but David doesn't go straight to the throne. He becomes a king in waiting. And it will not be an easy path for David. In fact, he is about to enter into a time of great danger. He will face down Goliath. He will be engaged in battle. He will have to watch his back as Saul attempts to take his life. And through all the struggle that he will endure,

he knows that he has been anointed to be king. He knows who he is destined to be even as he patiently waits for his destiny to manifest.

There's one more thing I want to highlight about David. We read that when he was anointed by Samuel, that the Spirit came upon him and continued to pour out on him from that day forward. That does not typically happen in those days. Saul received an outpouring of the Spirit, but only on a couple occasions. For David it is non-stop. The Spirit will continue to come upon David day by day, an ever fresh outpouring of the Spirit of life. It is as if God is going all out to make sure that David has what he needs to be successful so that he doesn't turn out like Saul did. And, as it turns out, David becomes the gold standard when it comes to being king, in spite of his deep flaws. David was far from perfect. But with God's help, and that continuous outpouring of the Spirit, David was the best king Israel ever had.

And this is where I want to bring you and me into this story. If you think about it, our situation has some points of contact with David's. First of all, just as David is a king, you and I are royalty as well. You remember I talked about this a few weeks ago. Peter identifies us as a royal priesthood. Paul said that we are co-heirs with Christ, who is *our* king. We have a royal identity.

Second, just as the Spirit was poured continually onto David, so we are continuously receiving an outpouring of the Spirit. When the church came online that Pentecost, and the Spirit came down upon all who were gathered in that room, Peter declared that the Spirit is now being poured out on all people. The Spirit of God has been set loose in the world. That same Spirit is filling us, day by day. Oh we can squash the Spirit that is within us by our own willfulness or inattentiveness. But we are vessels of the Holy Spirit. Clay vessels to be sure. But the Spirit of God is being poured into us continuously, as God has determined to do. God does everything God knows to do to help us be all God desires us to be.

And last, just as David was a king in waiting, having to go through a time of struggle and danger during the time of transition until he became king, so we are royals in waiting. One day we will reign with Christ. But now we have to live out our lives in struggle and danger. We

know who we are. We are children of God. We are destined to share in the coming reign of God. Until then, we have to face our Goliaths. We have to fight some battles. We have to contend with the occasional betrayal. Sometimes some of us have to watch our backs. But as we live out our lives through this time of transition, from this life to the life to come, we can live it with confidence because we too have the Spirit of God to guide and strengthen us all along the way.