

Work With What You Have **I Samuel 11:1-12:23**

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Pastoral Prayers

Lord we give you praise and thanksgiving for the way you move and respond to our prayers. When hope seems at an end, you suddenly break through. When we are about to give up, you encourage us. When no options seem open to us, you give new opportunities. We praise you for the families that have experienced your power in this way this week lord – families that have had new employment opportunities and new ministry opportunities opened up to them. Guard them and keep them and bless them indeed.

Lord, sometimes we try so hard, and seem to get nowhere. We plan and we work and we try to do everything right, but then the results seem meager. We put together a wonderful event, and nobody shows. We work very hard on expressing ourselves, and nobody understands. And we're left feeling lonely and embarrassed and frustrated. Enter into that pain and provide healing. Jesus died that we might be redeemed and renewed – redeem all our efforts Lord. We know that all things work to the good for those who are in Christ. When we're disappointed with results, help us to have faith that you are there working in ways that we cannot understand – and that you will be glorified.

Lord, be with those who are sick and in the hospital. It is so hard to sing with joy or speak of your goodness when our bodies are in pain or decline. Only you can give the faith to persevere in praise even through the pain. Ultimately, only you can grant healing, both of the soul and of the body. This is our prayer for those who are sick and infirm.

I Samuel 11:1-12:23

Thus far, we've seen that Israel has begged God for a king just like all the other nations have. And God has given them Saul. So far, we have seen that Saul was physically impressive. But he left a lot to be desired. He's shy and doesn't show initiative. After being anointed king in a private ceremony, and having the spirit of God rush upon him, he goes home and hides his secret. He takes no counsel, doesn't ask his father's or his uncle's advice, he just says nothing. Then when Israel is assembled to confirm the king, and he is selected by the casting of the

lots, he is nowhere to be found. They eventually find him hiding among the baggage. Though he looked good, he had a real problem taking initiative.

And then he has this incredible explosive personality. The rescue call comes from Jabesh Gilead, and, empowered by the spirit to respond, he first explodes in anger. He then sends an unmistakable message to the rest of Israel. It's a gruesome message that calls to mind gangster movies like the Godfather or the Sopranos more than a hero of the faith. We'll see this anger again later when Saul starts hurling spears at David and when Saul contrives elaborate plots to have David killed.

What we have here is a terribly flawed man. And yet God uses him to deliver the people. As the text says, it was the Holy Spirit that came upon Saul, the Israelites won the day. In the ensuing celebration, Saul expressed magnanimity toward his detractors and he gave all the glory to the Lord.

Then Samuel reminds the people of the wrong they've done in asking for a king. This is supposed to be a renewal ceremony, but Samuel pulls it all out. The people are cut to the heart, they know they've done wrong – and Samuel tells them “don't be afraid – you have done evil, but don't turn away.” And he gives them the great hope, “For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own.” And then he promises his ongoing intercession.

Now here's the basic lesson from this whole passage, as I see it. God works with what he has available to him in his people. Think about the strangeness – God gives them a deliverer, but he's shy and has a hot temper. The Israelites are renewing the kingship, and Samuel reminds them that their desire for a king was a bad thing. Nothing in this passage makes Israel or Saul look particularly good. However everything in this passage points to the truth that God is continuing to work through both Saul and Israel.

That is a profound spiritual truth. That is the basic message of Grace. You don't have to clean yourself up to be used by God. God grabs hold of you and then he cleans you up. This is the main message in Philippians 2:12-13 “... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” The only way we can continue to work out our salvation is when we know that God is at work within us in the first place.

In 1501, the Board of Works of Florence, Italy, commissioned Michelangelo for a unique project. They owned a unique block of Carrere marble thirteen and a half feet high. It had been purchased by the city over 100 years ago for some forgotten project, but because the block was so irregularly shaped, no sculptor could do anything with it. It was thought to be useless – they approached Michelangelo to see if there was anything that could be carved out of it. After two

and a half years of work on this flawed piece of stone, Michelangelo produced his famous sculpture of David (*The Renaissance* by Will Durant, pp. 467-468). The great sculptor was able to work with what he had to create a masterpiece. He described his process as searching to find the figure concealed beneath the stone. He didn't focus on the limitations within the stone, he focused on what possibilities there were within the stone. And in so doing, he created an enduring masterpiece.

Now I have to point out that in this passage the Spirit comes upon Saul, and the people have to ask Samuel to intercede for them. Remember, this was a time in history that when God wanted to do something, he gave the Holy Spirit to the leader he raised up to do it. The Holy Spirit was given out in parcels, not to the whole people. We see this all through Judges and we see that as a claim in the prophets – for example Isaiah 61:1 “The spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me; because the Lord has appointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...” In those days, the Holy Spirit was only given to a select few, and those few were mediators between God and man.

However, now Jesus Christ is our mediator. He is the one who stands before God's throne for us. For those of you who have been reading through the M'Cheyne reading plan, you were reading through Galatians this week, and if you read closely, you received a profound sense of how by our faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit lives within each believer:

In Galatians we read:

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard? (3:5).

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (3:14).

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (3:26).

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts -- the Spirit who calls out 'abba, father' (4:6).

My point being this – each one of you, if you have faith in Jesus Christ, has the Holy Spirit within you. This is the Holy Spirit who guides you and instructs you. This is the Holy Spirit who enables you to respond to God's word. This is the Holy Spirit who grows the fruit of the spirit within you “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22). (I confess that every time someone ticks me off, I clench my teeth and under my breath, I mutter this verse to myself like a mantra). You have personal access

now. You don't have to wait for God to raise up a particular leader. In other words, God works with what he has – that's you and me.

This week I attended a seminar presented by partners for *Sacred Spaces*, and I heard a talk by Mike Mather, the pastor of Broadway Methodist Church in Indianapolis. He was talking about their inner city ministry. They had a food pantry where the poor would come in and get some kitchen supplies. And they would ask questions about how much they made, and how much their monthly bills were. Basically, they made the recipients prove how poor they were.

But then, one Pentecost, they had the idea that if the Holy Spirit has indeed been poured out to all believers, that perhaps rather than focusing on limitations, they ought to focus on how rich they were. For their food pantry, they started asking people what they could do – what kind of things they were good at. People at first didn't say much, but after relentless barraging, they began to share.

For instance, one woman named Adele said she was a good cook. They said "prove it." "How?" she replied. "We'll supply the kitchen and all the supplies, you come cook for our pastor and a few of our leaders. She did, and it was good. The next week, she was cooking for a church event being held at a local hospital and the next month at another church event. Then a local organization wanted to hold an all day seminar at the church, and the pastor said "Fine, but you have to use our caterer." – He then went and bought Adele business cards, which she gave to every person at that meeting. And then business really began to roll in.

They took their idea to the youth looking for work that summer. They gave them the job titles of "animators of the human spirit" and told them to find out the talents of their neighbors and invest them in the community.

I find that incredibly inspiring. They were not focused on the lack but on the abundance. They recognize that we're all incomplete; we're all walking around with a hole in our soul. We're all sinners in need of redemption. But a part of the good news is that Jesus Christ does redeem us. So the challenge for each of us is this. If we've been given the Holy Spirit through faith – and If God delights in working with what he has (and thus transforming what He has) then what is it that God has given you.

How are you letting God use you to promote truth and goodness and beauty for His praise. Where is God calling forth his glory from within you – and then, where are you calling forth that glory from within others.