

Behold the King 1 Samuel 9:1-10:27

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What do you do when you are seeking a clear sign from God? In 1 Samuel 8 we saw how the people of Israel asked God for a king like all the nations around them had. God told them how displeased he was with this request, but he decided to grant the request out of his mercy. Then he sent everyone home, and the question lingers, who will the king be? Now, in 1 Samuel 9 we see God saying, "Behold the king!" It gives us insight into God's way of directing events.

First, notice God's hand in the details and circumstances. We have a whole string of ordinary events that seem to contribute to Saul's appearance before Samuel. The donkeys escape and the chasing of him all over the countryside. The servant says, "There's this man of God who might help – and look I just happen to have enough silver left for a gift." They run into a bunch of ladies who just happen to know where the wise man is. It seems like a whole bunch of coincidences, until we get to 1 Samuel 9:15-16. There we find out that God had orchestrated this whole series of events in order to bring Saul before Samuel.

Saul had no idea what he was getting into when he got up that morning, but God had bigger plans. It is just like Moses Exodus 3. Moses ran away to Midian and became a shepherd there. One day, he was going after a sheep when something caught the corner of his eye. It was a bush that was burning. He took a closer look and saw that the flame wasn't consuming it. So he said, "That's very strange. I think I'll have a closer look." And then God spoke to him from the bush and everything changed. Moses got up thinking that day would be like every other day, but God orchestrated events to get him to the place of calling.

Moses did not seize power for himself just as Saul did not grasp for the kingship. God orchestrated events and brought his chosen man to Samuel so that he could be anointed.

A few years ago Thomas Cahill came out with his terrific book *How the Irish Saved Civilization*.¹ In it he tells the story of how, during the dark ages of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, much of classic civilization was preserved in Irish monasteries on that remote island that was considered a wild backwater by the Romans. While the European tribes under Alaric the Visigoth destroyed Rome in 410, it seemed that much of the splendor of that civilization was lost. But far away in Ireland, God raised up Patrick who Christianized much of the island – and from his movement, a whole new type of monasticism focused on learning and building libraries and copying texts arose. The Irish studied anything they could get their hands on, including the classics of Roman civilization. And a new kind of missionary movement arose through Colmcille so that a few centuries later much of the civilization that was thought to be lost re-emerged from the green isle intact. No one knew that this little un-regarded island would play such an important role in saving antiquity, but God raised up just the leader to do it.

So God showed his hand in the details, and he also showed his hand through the Holy Spirit. After their breakfast, Samuel anoints Saul in private and gives very specific predictions as to what will happen on the way home. He gives these predictions as a way of confirming Saul's calling as king. First, he will meet two men at a specific spot who will tell him that his donkeys are found and his father is worried. Then, at another specific spot, he will meet people carrying certain things and they will offer him two loaves of bread. Then, he will be met by a company of prophets, and he will be overcome with the Spirit of God and he will join the company. 1 Samuel 10:9-11 show the fulfillment of these prophecies.

The key here is the Holy Spirit. Saul gets a very bad reputation from his actions later in the book, but do not miss this here. He was given a portion of the Holy Spirit for a specific task. The Scripture says his heart was changed and he was given the Spirit of God with power.

¹ Cahill, Thomas. *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

Now, realize that this is not a kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde transformation – drink the magic potion and it changes you into a different person for a few hours. This is not Dr. Banner transforming into the Incredible Hulk whenever he gets angry. This is not magic we are dealing with. This is God graciously giving his Holy Spirit to empower his servant for a particular task. We see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in this new fervor for worship that Saul demonstrates.

John Wesley was a preacher for years, even going on missionary trips to the United States and back. But his ministry really did not take fire until he had the powerful experience in a Moravian meeting when he described feeling a “warming of the heart,” which he identified as the Holy Spirit. While all believers receive the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus, there are times and seasons when the Holy Spirit powerfully grips us and gives us confirmation, clarity, and encouragement. There are times when the Holy Spirit is undeniably present – and that is God’s great gift of comfort.

Finally, we see God’s hand in the clarity of his Word. Here we see this in 1 Samuel 10:17-26. God has warned the people that their desire for a king is not good, but he has also shown that he will be gracious to the people and grant a king who will deliver them from the Philistines. Even so, God has Samuel remind the people of their bad desire. Then God so orchestrates everything that he reminds the people that he, their one true God, is providing this king. But even then the people can not locate Saul, and so God has to reveal to them where he is located so they can acknowledge him. It is only by a direct word from the Lord that they are able to find their king.

Then Samuel has to remind them of the stipulations of kingship. These stipulations are related to the character that the king is supposed to exhibit according to Deuteronomy 17, such as being a servant to the people, subject to the word of God. The king was not absolutely sovereign over the people, but was subject to God’s word.

The great contrast between continental European monarchs and the English monarchs was in approach to the idea of absolute monarchy. European monarchs were generally absolute lords over their realm and they could amass as much power as they were able to handle by hook or by crook. But the English monarchy, beginning in 1215 with the Magna

Carta, began a process of putting itself under law and regulation. Over the years, the English parliament evolved into an institution that had greater balance on the monarchy than anything seen on the continent. On the continent the Bourbons of France so abused their power that they invited the French Revolution, and Ludwig of Bavaria bankrupted his country by building his famous castles.

The English idea fed into our own Constitution, as we hold our own chief executives under the law. Built into our Constitution are provisions for removal of the president, vice president, and congress members when they break the law. Every member of our government is under the Constitution – they are not laws unto themselves.

In the same way, the Israelite king was not a law unto himself – he had responsibilities to keep the law of God before the people. He could not do whatever he wanted. That is why in 1 Samuel 10:8 and 10:25 Samuel makes clear that Saul is supposed to be held in check by the prophetic word of God.

We are going to see that Saul fails miserably. He does unite the country and he successfully wages war against the Philistines, but he forgets that he is to be subject and servant rather than sovereign and master. He eventually seizes power for himself, and thus becomes corrupted. But God raises up Saul for a reason. He raises up Saul to give us a shadowy picture of what is to come.

Just as God orchestrated Saul's selection and kingship, so he also orchestrated the selection of an obscure family from Nazareth from which to raise up a different king. Just as God poured out the Holy Spirit upon Saul to confirm his ministry, so he showed the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at the start of this different king's ministry. Just as God reminded the people what the king was supposed to be through his word, so Jesus demonstrated what the king was supposed to be by living out the word. In all of these ways, God shouts to us, "Behold the king!"

And he uses these things in our lives as well. Have you not seen how the small events in your life have led you down unexpected paths to encounters with the living God? Have you not sensed the power of the Holy Spirit giving direction to your life? Have you not been floored with conviction and confirmation as you've read scripture or had it proclaimed to

you? That is all God working to provide you direction and God is saying to you as he works in your life, "Behold the King, Jesus Christ." Amen.