

— IN SEARCH OF A KING —

Understanding 1 Samuel

Small group questions

1 Samuel 18-31 (focusing on ch 28) - The King is dead; Long live the King!

Leaders - if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer - please contact the preacher!

1. Apart from the decision to follow Christ, what is a life-shaping decision that you have made?

What is the passage about?

2. Flick through ch18-27. What are some of the matters of contention for David and Saul?
3. Reading through ch 28 now, what factors in v1-6 are tormenting Saul?
4. What do you think of the fact that God refuses to speak to Saul? What factors have led to this?
5. As Christians, we are forgiven but not perfect. What are some of the dangers of sin in the Christian life?
6. Why is it such a big deal that Saul wants to consult a medium? (Check out Lev 19:31; 20:6; 20:27)
7. What ought our attitude be to fortune tellers, mediums, horoscopes etc?
8. It is hard to imagine a more devastating message than Samuel's in v16-19. Saul is really a pathetic figure in this chapter. Why is it important that we don't look down our noses at him?

What does it teach us about God?

9. What do we learn in this chapter (and the wider book) about God's attitude to sin and sinners?
10. In what ways does David prove to be a better king than Saul?

While he was a great king, David could not be God's forever king. He had his moral failings, and he died. But just as David was God's gracious provision of a better king than Saul, so God would also graciously provide a better king than David...

How does it point us to Jesus?

11. In what ways is Jesus' kingship better than Saul's or David's?
12. How has Jesus' kingship changed everything for us with regard to sin and acceptance by God?

Conclusion

13. From this series on 1 Samuel, what is one point that you have taken to heart?
14. Give thanks for the wonderful kingship and atoning death of Jesus, who turns away God's wrath! Pray for one another that we might live lives that submit to Jesus' authority, to the glory of God the Father.

The King is Dead; Long Live the King! 1 Samuel 28

Opener: 1970, Western Australia, wheat farmer, Leonard Casley in dispute with the state govt re wheat production quotas. To get around it, he declared his farm an independent state, the Hutt River Province, and styled himself, Prince Leonard the First. Still going – though not recognised by the Australian government. I guess if you are disenchanted with the political scene in Australia, you can always apply to become one of Prince Leonard’s subjects! Details are on their website...

In the book of 1 Samuel, we see two different kinds of leadership: the people’s kind and God’s kind.

Context: If you’ve been with us over the last six weeks, we have been reading through 1 Sam together. We have seen it unfolding as a tale of two kings: Saul and David. And since ch 18, things have really hotted up between them:

Saul	David
The people’s king	God’s king
In line with the people’s heart/choice	In line with God’s heart/choice
Losing popularity	Gaining popularity
“Saul has killed his thousands...”	“...and David his tens of thousands!” Saul is JEALOUS!
Even his own son, Jonathan, is drifting away from him...	...and has thrown his allegiance behind David!
God’s Spirit has left him	God is helping David through the priests
Hunts David like a dog and tries to kill him	Spares Saul’s life – TWICE!
	Received help from God’s priests
Totally destroyed the priests who helped David (What he failed to do to the Amalekites!)	

Now, in ch 28, we see Saul’s final demise. As usual we are looking at the passage through the lens of three big questions:

What is the passage about?

What does it teach us about God?

How does it point us to Jesus?

WHAT IS THE PASSAGE ABOUT?

First, v1-6 SAUL’S PERFECT STORM

- V1-5 – The Philistines are on the march again... This time they want to do it properly. And who should be amongst them as their king’s personal bodyguard? DAVID! What?! He appears to have defected to the Philistines, but we know from ch27 that he is still loyal to God and his people...but Saul doesn’t know that.
- V3 – Samuel is dead: he had been Saul’s mentor in the good times, but as Saul drifted away from God, this relationship was broken too, and now it is too late for any repair or any advice from the prophet: he died back in ch 25
- V6 – He asks God for advice, but God is done talking to Saul. He won’t answer him by any channel.

Saul is a pathetic figure here, and I feel sorry for him. And isn’t it God’s nature to have mercy and forgive? But think about it. God has chosen David to be the next king...and Saul is trying to murder him, repeatedly. The army of Israel should be God’s instrument to punish God’s enemies, but Saul is using them to hunt for David!

Not only that, but did I mention the bit about killing a whole village of priests?

And the worst part is that he is unrepentant. He doesn’t care, and he’ll show that in a minute.

It reminds me of 1 Peter 3:7, where Peter is telling Christian husbands how to love their wives, and he says:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will **hinder** your **prayers**.

- If you are abusing your wife, who is a child of the living God, don't expect God to listen to your prayers!
- Or with Saul here, with his flagrant disobedience of God and his abuse of God's anointed man, David, it is not surprising that God will not answer him!
- ***A lesson for us: we all sin frequently and need to confess our sins to God, but if we are sinning in an unrepentant way, not caring, it's hurting our relationship with God.***

Next, v7-14 – SAUL'S DESPERATE MEASURE

- BACKGROUND INFORMATION: consulting a medium, a person who contacts the dead – or claims to – is a big no-no for God's people – check it out in Leviticus:

Leviticus 19:31

“Do not turn to **mediums** or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 20:6

“I will set my face against anyone who turns to **mediums** and spiritists to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people.

Leviticus 20:27

“A man or woman who is a **medium** or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.”

- Saul knew it was bad: v3 – he had driven out the mediums and spiritists
- And yet, here he is in v6, asking his men where he can find one!
- His men know where to find one, he goes there – in disguise...at night – don't want anyone to know that the king of Israel is breaking his own law and God's law
- And the woman herself protests! – v9
- And at Saul's request, she goes ahead and calls up Samuel...and Samuel comes.

I don't want to get sidetracked here by talking about the ins and outs of contacting the dead. There are more important things for our twenty minutes. But while it's there, I need to say, if you are getting your information about the future from a supernatural source other than God, that's not OK. It's an affront to God, he hates it, and you are potentially exposing yourself to great harm. Are you into seances/ fortune tellers/ psychics/ horoscopes? It's time to repent and turn back to God.

- Does this mean that mediums really can drag people out of heaven to talk to them? Probably not...but God is taking this opportunity to send his prophet to Saul one last time...

And it's not pretty...Because now we see

SAUL'S COMPLETE FALL – V15-25

Samuel does appear to Saul...and he rebukes him.

“Why have you disturbed me?” v15

And Saul answers: The Philistines are fighting me, God won't answer me, tell me what to do!

But he doesn't get the answer he is looking for. There's no message of hope, no advice on how to win the battle, only God's terrible judgement.

- V16 – why bother me when you are God's enemy?
- V17 – I already told you this would happen, back in ch15, God has torn the kingdom away from you and given it to David – you know, the guy you are trying to murder...
- V18 – WHY ISN'T GOD SPEAKING TO YOU? WHY HAS HE GIVEN THE KINGDOM TO DAVID? it's because you failed to carry out God's mission in ch15 and totally destroy the Amalekites...AND THAT'S NOT ALL
- V19 – TOMORROW – Israel will belong to the Philistines/ your army will be smashed/ YOU AND YOUR SONS WILL BE DEAD!!!
- That is devastating. In the rest of the chapter, Saul is a defeated figure. The king who should be in the royal palace is in the house of a witch. Should be dressed in royal robes, but he's here in disguise. Should be feasting at his own table. Instead he's eating his last supper on earth with the medium and his bodyguards. When the action starts, Saul and his sons all die. Saul falls on his own sword. His actions have betrayed himself to his bitter end: rejection by God and a shameful death.

Illustration: This is like the driver who has seen all of those road safety ads on TV, they've seen the crosses by the side of the road where others have come to grief, and yet they get behind the wheel after too many beers and wrap their car around a tree. It's sad. It's horrible. And the “I told you so,” just doesn't help anyone.

Application:

The worst thing we can do when we read this book is to look down our noses at Saul. Remember, this is the people's king: the sort that they wanted. He's a king in their own image. I think he shows us what we are like at our worst.

Disregarding God's word/ seeking our glory, not God's glory/ choosing to disobey/ blaming others for our disobedience.

How are you going with God? Are you still walking closely with him? Is he your number one?

These are good questions to keep in mind as we think about the second of our big questions:

WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

There are two major things it teaches us about God.

The **first** one is, God takes sin seriously. We've already discovered that in ch 15 with God's terrible judgement on the Amalekites.

Here it is again, in a different form. Saul repeatedly sinned against God, following his own will, not God's will. The result? Cut off from God, cut off from life. Is that true in an eternal sense? I can't say, but it doesn't look good. God is serious about sin.

The **second** thing is, God has graciously provided a better king.

Nothing takes God by surprise. He knew what would happen when the people demanded a king. He knew where their sort of king would lead them. He knew what Saul would do, how he would disobey and lead his nation into disaster.

But he always had a better plan. He knew the people's king would be a train wreck. But he had already lined up a replacement. David, the one who trusted in God's salvation plan/ the one through whom God delivered his people from Goliath/ the one who showed mercy even on the one who was trying to kill him: this David will be the new king over Israel!

But not even David could fulfil all of the expectations of God's anointed. In the next book of Samuel, we see how even David, as great a king as he was, could fall into dreadful sin. But unlike Saul, he would repent.

David was a great king, but he wasn't perfect. He could not be the forever king.

But God has graciously provided a better king.

Which leads us directly to our third big question:

HOW DOES THE PASSAGE POINT US TO JESUS?

God has graciously provided a better king, and that king is Jesus.

He is our king, if we have bowed the knee to him.

He is our king, who represents us before God.

He is our king, betrayed not by his own sin, but by a friend.

He is our king who had no sin of his own, and yet took the penalty for ours.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the **righteousness of God**.

(2 Cor 5:21)

Our Disregarding God's word/ seeking our glory, not God's glory/ choosing to disobey/ blaming others for our disobedience. All if this, Jesus has taken away, nailing it to the cross.

Illustration: Wars of the Roses – for a time, England had two kings. Battles raged on with people deciding which king to support: Edward IV or Henry VI, and hope like crazy that they would be on the winning side!

Application: which one is your king? Saul or David: the people's choice, or God's choice?

Or rather, who is your king: yourself or Jesus?

You know how God looks at rebellion. Don't stay a rebel! Come instead to his banner of peace. Jesus, who saves us from the coming wrath. It's time to Admit your rebellion/ throw yourself on God's mercy/ submit to King Jesus/ know forgiveness, peace and eternal life that your risen king has won for you!

- Well lets bring things to a close... and as I do so – I want to recap – albeit **briefly** - the implications of the past **six weeks**.
- **Week # 1** – as we met the boy Samuel, from humble beginnings like Jesus, we were challenged to ✖ **Humble ourselves before the Lord and he will lift us up.**
- **Week # 2** – as both the Philistines and Israel did battle with the ark of the covenant, both had to learn – and we too – that like it or not – ✖**God is King!** And he calls us to **draw near to him.**
- **Week # 3** – we saw that as God gives Israel the King they want, we all need to be aware that God sometimes give **us** what **we** want – but that **like Israel** – ✖we may **get** what we **want** but **lose** what we **had**.
- ✖**Week 4** – Saul is **anointed, elected and confirmed** as King... God's doing entirely
- **Week # 5** – we saw the seriousness of sin, and thought about the cross, where God's wrath and mercy meet

- **Week #6** – as the boy **David** goes against that **giant Philistine** armed with a **stone** and a **sling** and **wins** – and we realise that is **all God's doing** – we saw it was ✕ an **awesome rescue from an awesome God** which points us forward to an even more awesome rescue, the Son of God, the great king, dying on the cross, shattering death and sin and opening the gate to eternal life for all of his subjects.
- **So, who is your king? Our challenge for today. Bow before the king of heaven ...and LIVE!**