

Sermon 18: 1 Samuel 16: God's ways are not our ways

OUTLINE

Samuel's mourning
David's anointing
Saul's demon

INTRODUCTION

The overarching truth that we can write over this next chapter is, 'God's ways are not our ways.' At several points we find ourselves confronted with a God who does things very differently to us. We come to the chapter of David's anointing. We have been drawing out the end of Saul's reign and finally come to the one God promised to choose. We will look at the three main characters and how God works in their lives, at Samuel's mourning; David's anointing and Saul's demon.

Samuel's mourning

Our chapter begins with God picking Samuel up off the floor, v1, 'The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.'" Saul is not dead but scripture has already written his epitaph. Why is Samuel mourning? There are probably a number of correct answers to that question.

Firstly, it could be that Samuel is mourning because of his paternal regard for Saul.

Secondly, it could be that Samuel is feeling a little sorry for himself and mixing a little self-pity as he feels a personal sense of failure.

Thirdly, Samuel may be prayerful in his mourning as he frets with concern over the future of Israel, now under the guidance of a rejected king.

Possibly Samuel was mourning for all of these reasons, but I would like you to note God's tone. There is certainly a note of rebuke. This is important to see. Because of psychology our emotions now define truth and are sacred and can never be challenged. The fact that God criticises Samuel's mourning goes against this trend. What we might want to call private and uncriticisable is being challenged.

There is a time for mourning, this is taught in Ecc. 3:4. Jesus Himself wept at Lazarus's tomb. But grief like any other emotion can be hijacked by sin. When we grieve apart from reason and refuse to allow the truths of scripture to enable to mourn as those who have hope not those who have no hope; or if we mourn to the point where we allow our emotions to lead us into sin. This is to grieve sinfully. To allow grief to justify revenge like in the case of the mafia mother; or to lead us into atheism and a criticism of God; this is when emotion has got the better of us and is sinful. Christians will feel pain and loss, in certain instances their loss will be more grievous, I think of the death of a lost loved one. But in all of our pains we also have consolation and can never fully enter into the life ending sorrow of those who do not have Christ. We have the comfort of heaven, the knowledge of God's fatherly providence in turning all things into good, and the comfort of His sovereignty which is infinitely wise and good even when we do not understand. There is no injustice that will not finally be repaid, and an inevitable 'happily ever after.' This does not deny us the right of pain and mourning. To grieve is to agree with God that the pain we feel is bad

and highlights that this is not how things ought to be. But all our grief must be done under the truth of God.

It seems in Samuel's case that he was stewing in his emotions to such an extent that God had to draw attention to the prolonged period of his mourning as being out of proportion to the situation. It seems as if Samuel's grief was an indirect criticism of God's decision. Look at the emphasis on how God has rejected Saul. In other words a perfectly just being who never overpunishes, who does all things wisely, and who makes no mistakes has done it. This should be sufficient that Samuel should not unnecessarily prolong his mourning. His mourning had become consistent with doubt not faith. As God addresses Samuel about his private mourning this reminds us that God can speak to us about any part of our lives.

But note in the same breath that God rebukes Samuel he also calls him to rise and anoint the next king. Anointing with oil was a widespread practice that indicated a covenant. In scriptural use it is typically used of those appointed to the holy offices of prophet, priest or king and is a symbol of the Spirit.

Samuel is concerned that Saul who is jealous for his public image will find out about this new king and will kill Samuel, v2. God commands him to conceal part of the truth from Saul, after all Saul is under judgement and God is not obliged to share all his plans with him. So Samuel goes to Bethlehem under the pretence of sacrificing. When he arrives in Bethlehem which would have been the equivalent of Temuka in terms of its size and importance, the elders come trembling because why should an important prophet come to Bethlehem unless it was trouble.

David's anointing

Samuel has been told that God has chosen one of Jesse's sons to be king, v1. When the festivities begin and Samuel sees Jesse's sons he is immediately drawn to the first born, v6-7, 'When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.' Remember when Saul was chosen he was tall and strong, now here is Eliab tall and strong and Samuel is impressed with the outward appearance that God must correct him. We really are getting a good look at Samuel's humanity in this chapter aren't we, his grief, fear and now shallow judgement.

Here is where we see a stark difference between God's ways and ours. We are drawn to the exterior, God tests the interior, we love the wrapping and fixate on that God sees to the reality. When choosing a partner we prioritise beauty not godliness. When choosing a car we want aggressive styling not good fuel consumption. When we want a new pastor we want good looking, a powerful pulpit manner and theological savvy but not someone who is holy and prayerful. When choosing a church we evaluate the prettiness of the building, the class of people, whether there are enough parks or a program for the kids so I can listen to the sermon in peace and quiet instead of testing the preaching by the word and the people to see if they are demonstrating true love and discipleship. By this same weakness we are prey to advertisers and the empty promises of many things.

But notice how God passes over all the brothers and fixes on the least important. The one who watches the sheep, the youngest, the one who was thought not important enough to bring to the feast is the one who the Lord chose. God works through this unexpected means often. Just think of Jesus. He was born to an oppressed people, under the scandal

of a virgin birth, to poor parents, who lived in a town that bordered Gentile lands, was not educated at the best schools, hung out with drop outs and sinners, and died as a criminal. If you were going to defeat satan, sin and death and raise up a champion who would never fail and rule over a new creation for all eternity is this the CV you would be looking for.

So what is God looking for when He looks into David's heart. We know from 1 Sam. 13:14 that David was a man after God's own heart, what does this mean? Outwardly David was not bad looking but in his heart he was all for God's glory. The psalms are a testimony to a man passionate for God. This is what he was chosen for. We will see that David killed Goliath because he heard Goliath insulting God and wanted to vindicate God. At the heart of David was a man after God's heart. God is zealous for His glory and so was David. This is the best tool with which we can serve God. Greater than any rhetorical ability, any logical faculty, any personal presence, to have a heart for God's glory is the raw material that God seeks to use, the partners through whom He will work. This man with the right heart only gets named in v13 as David. Upon his anointing he receives the Spirit.

Saul's demon

David receives the Spirit but Saul loses it. Now at this point you would expect that Saul would die and David would take the throne, but once again God's ways are not ours. David needs training, he is a young man and not ready to lead and so God puts him in the strangest of places, Saul's throne room, to learn how to be king. Now in v14 when it says that the Spirit departed from Saul, this is not a statement about the Spirit in salvation but for service. From this point on Saul will not know the aid of the Spirit as the judges knew it. And when it talks about a harmful spirit coming from God. This does not mean that God has demons in heaven waiting for his orders. No it means that by secondary means the demons did God's will. God often employs evil men in His plans, they are free and pursuing their evil, but in God's wise providence they are, unknown to themselves, doing what God wants.

Now when you have demons afflicting you what do you need? Saul needed to repent and draw near to God but instead he is given a sedative to numb him. Like many modern treatments in psychology and psychiatry Saul's symptoms are treated but not the root of his problem which is primarily a spiritual problem needing repentance. They suggested a skilled musician to sooth him. Now don't get me wrong music is a good gift and great for soothing nerves at the end of a long day. But when your primary problem is not overwork but sin music can only numb and distract you from your true need. This is like spiking morphine without removing the cancer in surgery.

But in all this God is sovereign and David is suggested as the very man needed for Saul, v18, 'One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him.'" David at this point had only proven his warrior abilities in killing bears and lions, but this recommended him for the position. What we need to appreciate is God's way of ensuring the stability of Israel. David who has been anointed as the replacement is now by God's providence in the royal court. He is at hand to help out with Goliath, but also to stop the full effects of Saul's depression destabilising the nation. David will receive training in how to run a royal court but will also mature into manhood. David's anointing is much like Joseph's dreams. Joseph was told about his family bowing down to him but then had to wait 13 years for fulfilment, David has a similar wait. God's ways of patience and preparation are at work and are unlike our hasty preparations.

Can you see how God's ways are not like ours. Can you see that God is Lord over every area of your life? How He works in secret ways constantly working out His plans even while we are mourning on the floor? How He judges differently to us, looking on the heart? How God prepares us for service in long and round about ways instead of instant promotion? How God puts difficulty in our path as preparation? How God is able to use all for good? We learn much from meditating on this portion.