

Thy will be done

1 Samuel 9-12

I hate it when parents brag about their kids. I hate it when they go on and on about how early their kid walked. And talked. How smart they are. How good at sports they are. I find it really annoying. Having said that. My kids are very very intelligent.

Let me tell you why.

When we're about to go out in the car somewhere and everyone's getting in . Sometimes I say to Liam. Who's five years old. Grade one. I say to Liam. How about I sit in the back. And you drive? And Liam's so intelligent...because he just looks at me. Like maybe I'm the one who should be in grade one. And he says no dad. I can't drive. In fact he thinks it's a great joke. AS IF DAD.

Five years old. And even he knows it would be lunacy for him to try to drive. His feet can't touch the pedals. He doesn't know the road rules. He knows what a disaster it would be for him to drive. And it's easy for any of us to see the problem with that.

But at the same time. In a less obvious way....it's easy to think like that. That you can somehow knock God out of the driver's seat. And drive yourself. And everything will be ok. That's exactly what happened with Adam and Eve. And that's what's happening as God's people march up to Samuel, and ask for a king to rule them in God's place. There's a not so polite SHOVE OVER.

And the question is.....What's he gonna do? There's a tension here because God's made it clear that as they ASK FOR a king. They're rejecting him. This is what they've always done he says to Samuel. From the day I brought them up out of Egypt.

Maybe it's just a bit bolder now. They're rejecting me God says. But at the same time God says..... listen to them. And he says. Give them what they want.

And the question is....what's that going to mean for God's people?

I wonder.....What would you do? I mean I think if it was up to me I would give them the most wreckless, violent dictatorial ruler I could find. So they'd come running back.

But that's not what happens. And as we meet Saul, whose name means asked for. God's going to be very gracious. And he's going to show yet again. What it really means for God's people to have him as their king.

So with that in mind. Lets meet Saul. As I said his name means asked for. And when you think about the fact that Israel asked for a king LIKE THE OTHER NATIONS.... Saul's appearance fits.

Because apart from where he comes from, the tribe of Benjamin. And his family. The first thing you learn about Saul is his appearance. Saul's an IMPRESSIVE YOUNG MAN.

He's a YOUNG MAN. Which of course means he's the opposite of Samuel, who's OLD. Which is why the elders said they needed someone else. And more than

that. He's an IMPRESSIVE young man. There according to verse 2 he's WITHOUT EQUAL among the Israelites – a head taller than any of the others.

You think about the difference between me, and say Ron. Who'd probably be the tallest of us. And then think about the tallest of the Israelites. Hundreds of thousands of them. And Saul is a that much taller again, than the tallest of them.

Now if you're thinking about a king like the other nations, if you're looking for a king who'll go out and fight your battles. Saul looks like he's all that. But at the same time. While Saul LOOKS IMPRESSIVE. His ACTIONS..... his words. His ATTITUDE... paint a bit of a different picture.

The search might be on for a king. But the future king is on a search for something far less majestic. He's not looking to be king. That's the last thing on his mind. He's on a quest.....for his dad's lost donkeys! And as things pan out, you might find yourself saying that's a reasonable association to be making.

But lets follow along on the journey. Saul's been sent off by his dad. And they look through Ephraim, then Shaalim, then a couple of other places. No luck. And here's the very first words of Saul, in verse 5. Here's the future king of Israel in action.

When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, "Come, let's go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us."

Great first words aren't they? Come on he says. Let's go back. Let's GIVE UP. Let's RETREAT.

And you've got to wonder..... what sort of a leader do we have here? Well don't make up your mind just yet.

Give him a bit of a chance. And we'll see what happens. The leader of the great donkey expedition's made his mind up to go back. But listen to what the SERVANT says.

But the servant replied, Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. LET'S GO THERE NOW. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take.

Do you see what just happened here? Tall Saul the master's son says to the little servant man. Time to go back. And the SERVANT says... NO. How about we DON'T.

And it seems. Saul's not really even the leader of this expedition of TWO. To find some lost animals.

They say first impressions count. And in Saul's case..... here's a guy who it seems.... lacks confidence. And who doesn't seem to be much of a leader.

Saul gives up. The servant takes the lead. And listen to Saul. Negative again. The servant suggests a trip to see the man of God. Saul says

'We haven't got anything to take to give him.'

And your impression's building.

The servant says. Look. Here in my hand. What do you know? It's a quarter of a shekel of silver.

Not much commitment. Not much leadership. Not much resourcefulness. From our future leader.

And things don't really improve. Saul and the servant meet up with Samuel. And keep in mind the fact that Samuel's judged Israel HIS WHOLE LIFE. And Saul comes up to Samuel. You can read it there in verse 18. Saul goes right up to Samuel the prophet, the most famous person in Israel, the leader of the nation. And says.

Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?"

Are you for real?

Can you imagine a fresh new member of parliament waltzing up to Kevin Rudd and asking if he could point him to the man in charge? There's something not right here.

And you'd have to say from first impressions. Although Saul looks impressive. He's more like the bumbling secret agent Maxwell Smart of control...than he is like special agent James Bond.

And you've gotta wonder where it's all leading. But as you think about that. Just hold that thought for a moment. There's one thing that is clear. It's clear that God's at work. It might not be quite clear what we've got here in Saul. But it's quite clear that God's the one pulling all the strings.

God says to Samuel. Listen to them. Give them a king. And that's exactly what he's doing. From the search for the donkeys. To the servants suggestion. To the coin in the hand. To meeting some women at the well. To the meeting in the street. Every part of it. Is God...working..his purposes...out.

And if you're in any doubt it's made even clearer in verse 17. As Samuel and Saul meet. Samuel catches sight of Saul for the first time. All 6 foot 23 of him.

God says "This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people."

Or more literally. He will restrain my people. Which may actually be more appropriate.

And there's a short exchange. Could you tell me where the seer is.

And maybe you can hear the contempt in Samuel's voice

I AM THE SEER.

You big dufus.

And the scene plays out.

They go up to the high place with Samuel. Where there's a great feast. And two special seats and a special cut of meat.. already set aside.

Because God's at work.

Safe to say Saul's got NO IDEA what's happening. Until the next day after a stay overnight at Samuel's place. When there at the start of chapter 10. Samuel pours oil over Saul's head.

Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?"

And Saul might not get the crown until chapter 12. But with the anointing of oil....the deal's sealed. ASKED FOR.....will be the king the people asked for.

And God's working out his purposes.

Now...fast forward to the end of chapter 10. Samuel summons the whole nation. And reminds them what they've done. You've rejected God as your king. And after they haul Saul out from behind the carts where he's hiding. Again. Not a good look. Saul presents him and says – here's your man. THIS IS YOUR KING.

But as he does..... listen carefully to what God says in verse 24. You made an evil choice he says. You asked for a king. And you rejected me.

Now here's Saul. Verse 24 "Do you see the man THE LORD has chosen?"

Just keep that in mind. Saul is the Lord's appointed. Anointed King.

Which means their REAL KING. Hasn't abdicated just yet.

But I guess appearances count. And the people love THE LORD'S choice. Long live the king they shout.

God's finally come 'round to our way of thinking.

And Samuel sends everyone home. Including their new king.

And there's an important little bit of information. And that is. Some men of valour went with Saul. Some men who's hearts God had touched. But some others. Verse 27 troublemakers. Literally sons of worthlessness.

Despised him. And brought him no gifts. So just keep that in mind. Because the last sons of worthlessness we came across were the sons of Eli. And here's another bunch of worthless men. Who reject their king. We'll come back to that.

Now as it turns out.

As a parallel to this whole story. There's an immanent danger to the nation.

His name is Nahash. And he's the violent. Terrible king of the Ammonites from the east. And he's terrorizing the people of Israel from a place called Jabesh Gilead. You see that in the first verse of chapter 11. But I just want you to flick up to chapter 12. And verse 12. Samuel's just recounted the times God's saved his people. And he says

But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, "No, we want a king to rule over us" even though the Lord your God a was your king.

See there's an extra bit of information. Flashback to the request for a king – a king LIKE THE NATIONS. And they've got someone IN PARTICULAR... in mind. We want someone LIKE THAT.

That's what's behind this whole search for a king. Nahash the powerful, threatening Ammonite king is knocking at the door. And so they come running to Samuel. We need a king like that

Come back to chapter 11 and see the kind of king they've got in mind.

Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him. Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you."

But Nahash the Ammonite replied, I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.

That's the kind of king they're up against. And so they come to Samuel. We need a king like that. To go out and fight for us.

Because they just don't think God's up to it.

So now all the pieces are in place. It's the ruthless king of the Ammonites. UP against the king of God's choice. The king the people ASKED FOR.

Time for a showdown. Well it could be...except for the fact that no one thinks to tell Saul. Which is a bit surprising in the circumstances.

Nahash says. I'll only make a treaty if I can gouge your eyes out. And verse 3 the elders say. How about you give us seven days in case someone comes to our rescue? And again. God must be at work. Nahash agrees. Alright then. You're on. He's so confident. So arrogant. He's toying with them. Seven days it is.

And so they send messengers out to all Israel just in case someone can come to their rescue. But no-one thinks to tell the king!

Saul has to ask to find out what's going on? Which means. When the rubber hits the road. They may well shout long live the king. But no-one thinks God's king is up to the task. The one THEY ASKED FOR.. they don't even ask to save them.

But remember he is God's choice. And remember....God's working out his purposes. And as Saul hears the news. The Spirit of God comes on him in power. He burns with anger. And he gets to work. He slaughters a pair of oxen. And cuts them into twelve pieces. And he sends the pieces around Israel with a threat. Come out with Samuel and Saul. Or else.

And the words of Hannah's song are coming to life.

1 Samuel 2:10 "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

And the threat of the Lord's anointed.... Is now greater than the threat of another king.

Verse 7 says the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they turned out as one man. 330 000 frightened fighting men turn out.....

And there's a great victory. Under God's chosen king. Who in the end. Isn't very much like the kings of the nations at all.

He's NOT like the kings of the nations. Because he's the king who's under the king.

Which is the whole point.

Why would you ask the only one who's got the power, and the knowledge. And your good in mind. To step aside. Because you think you can manage yourself.

What a mistake to make.

And fortunately for God's people. He's not prepared to do that. Even though they reject him. Over and over.

Fortunately he OVER-RULES in our favour. And he delivers his people from themselves and their enemies.

And when you and I pray the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. When we pray those words. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. That's exactly what we're asking for isn't it? We're asking for him to over-rule.

God loves us asking. But we need to say. Thy will be done don't we.

God please listen. But PLEASE OVER-RULE. According to your good purposes.

Because you know what's good for me. A whole lot better than I do.

Heaven forbid God should do what I ASK. Or what YOU ASK. Without over-ruling!

God's demonstrated his trustworthiness. And he calls on his people to trust. And to trust his king. Which can be a tough thing to do. When there's a violent king breathing down your neck. Tough thing to do. In a whole lot of situations.

But it's also the right thing to do. It's the smart thing to do.

Don't go pushing the king aside.

Because God delivers his people. He's up for it.

The worthless men who wouldn't follow Saul. There at the end of chapter 11.

After the victory some people remember. Who was it that asked. Shall Saul reign over us? Bring these men to us and we will put them to death."

Which is IRONIC. Because that's exactly what they've done to God their king. They REJECTED HIM. Here's God's people condemning themselves with their own words. They're indicting themselves.

But God's king says no. No one shall be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel.

The day of deliverance. Is the day God over-rules. And rescues his people from themselves. Because he won't reject his people. Listen to the way God speaks to Samuel in chapter 9.

1 Samuel 9:16 ¹⁶ "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over MY PEOPLE Israel; he will deliver MY PEOPLE from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon MY PEOPLE, for their cry has reached me."

Step by step by step God's working out HIS PURPOSES...for HIS PEOPLE. And over-ruling for their good. Step by step by step...

All the way to the cross. Where king Jesus goes out to fight for his people. Despite themselves. You remember those words Jesus calls out from the cross. Father

forgive them. Because they don't know what they're doing. Don't put them to death today. On the day of deliverance. They're MY PEOPLE.

That's why Paul can say those words in Romans 8.28

And we know that in all things...ALL THINGS...God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

If God's with us. Who can be against us? he says in verse 31.

They're not empty words are they?

They're the words of someone who's ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED. That God's king will deliver him. Who's convinced that it's worth every bit of blood sweat and tears in serving him.

And after the victory that's become abundantly clear. And God's people go straight from the battle field. To a place called Gilgal.

And they wipe the egg off their faces. And they say WE HAVE BEEN foolish.

And they promise that God's king. Will be their king. Your will be done they say.

And all the people said. Amen.