

1 Samuel 10:17-27

Intro Behold the Man July 6, 2008

One of the more difficult aspects of being a pastor is the work of watching over the lives of people committed to living in community. Feelings can be hurt and lives troubled as sinners such as us not only worship together, but also live transparent lives before one another.

Small things can become big. What appears to be a small scrap in life may become a major point of aggravation over time. When I say a small scrap, I mean just that, a parking lot incident, scratched paint, a dented bumper, may well evolve into a major division between brothers and sisters. It's hard to admit when we are wrong. So, I must play the parent in the squabble.

In light of that, Jay Nelson, would you come up here, there's something we need to talk about.

I want to let everyone know that Jay is moving toward ordination in the PCA, he is under the care of the Session of which he is a member. This summer he is studying for his licensure exams and will be, Lord willing, coming under care of the Presbytery and be licensed to preach, which he will be doing this in Madison and Pardeeville. I want to pray for our brother now and encourage you to pray for him, too. (Pray)

Jay, before you go down, I have some questions for you. In light of what I said before I called you up here and in light of what I just said (and meant every word of it) ...

How does it feel to be singled out like this in front of all these people?

If you did hit a car, would you hide, especially if you knew this was coming?

What if you hit the car something wrong, I knew it, and called you out but rewarded you?

How would you feel being singled out, identified? If you knew that what you were being called out for was some failure that would now become public, how would that make you feel? What if, then, having done something wrong, you are praised and not mistakenly, but the wrong is covered over and the honor truly belongs to you?

That is what we have in 1 Samuel 10. Saul is at last publicly recognized as the king of Israel. Yet his response was to hide ... and for good reason. What we see in that instance when the prophet Samuel points out Saul and proclaims him the man God has chosen king is a wonderful example of God's mercy shining out in a dark world. READ 1 Samuel 10:17-27 (Pray)

The day of reckoning has come. Would Saul be crowned king or Israel judged a traitor?

Up to this point Saul's anointing as king has been a well-kept secret.

His own servant was sent ahead while Samuel poured the oil on Saul's head in private, identifying him as the leader of Israel. Signs were given to Saul to confirm God's calling, but none of the participants in those signs seemed aware of how they were a part of God's providential provision in the political process. When Saul arrived home in Gibeah he neither told his uncle Samuel's words nor fulfilled Samuel's commands to rid the country of the Philistines.

We are left wondering what kind of clueless king Saul is. He fails from the start.

This will be a secret no longer as Samuel calls all Israel to gather at the great convocation in Mizpah. Why there? They've been there before. Back in 1 Samuel 7 they came there for a time of national repentance. Recall how they failed to obey God and lived in fear of their enemies, the Philistines. There they fasted and poured out water and it was then and there the Philistine army decided to attack. It was there that God routed the Philistines and in that area was erected the Ebenezer, commemorating God as their stone of help.

But that was thirty years ago. Would the place evoke memories of times past when God was honored? So Samuel begins to speak of the Lord's past mercies. His words evoke the establishment of the covenant at Sinai, rehearsing God's redemptive acts in delivering their ancestors from Egypt and from all their oppressors since. God's faithfulness was highlighted.

What Samuel says next calls them out as a people who have turned their backs on God. For all God has done for them...they have rebuffed His mercy, rejecting the promise keeping God who repeatedly rescued them. Their rejection is the seemingly simple request: "Set a king over us!"

They want to be like the nations around them...to fit in. They wanted to not be constrained to wait for God's guiding hand, but trust one of their own to take care of them. Samuel has made their sin clear, but they want to move ahead with the rebellion and God permits it to be so.

Saul is already anointed, but no one knows. The elders of Israel instructed Samuel to take care of the selection (8:5). But it is not really up to Samuel. God providentially brings Saul to Samuel's hometown at an opportune moment and instructs the aging prophet to make this man from Benjamin Israel's new king.

Samuel could have simply announced the results, that Saul is king. But in order to continue to demonstrate God's sovereignty over the process lots are cast to identify the man. We don't know the process he used. But the assumption is, as Proverbs 16:33 says: The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

So the people of Israel are gathered on that great plain according to their tribes and clans. Of the 12 tribes, Benjamin is selected and from that tribe the clan of the Matrites are identified. The process continues as others are eliminated and Saul, the son of Kish is taken by lot.

But there's a small problem...tall-Saul could not be found.

The people wondered if there was some mistake. Perhaps another was to be chosen. They asked God who was to be their king. God responds: "Look, he's hiding among the baggage."

Scholars speculate as to why Saul hid himself. It may be fear of a job too big to handle. As Shakespeare's Henry IV says: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

Or it could have been humility, false or true, that drove him to hide. That many eyes would make even an extrovert shudder. Some point to Saul's humility at earlier expressed in the last chapter when he is identified as the heir apparent, for he came from such a paltry tribe as that of Benjamin and he did not speak of the good news to his uncle.

There is another possibility. Saul had good reason to hide, for he could easily conclude that his coronation day was also his judgment day. The place, the words and the tone of the event had all the markings of trouble. What happens at a place like this?

Thirty years ago, the people repented, but not now. Now they are insistent on their own way. Not a good sign. But there was another gathering at Mizpah (Judges 20). Some years before (a generation or two?) all Israel gathered at this place, all but the tribe of Benjamin. There a Levite told how he and his concubine came to the town of Gibeah (sound familiar...see v26) and some lowlifes of that town demanded the Levite come out, for these degenerates wished to rape him. The Levite, in similar bad form, sent out his concubine for them to abuse her and they did. He found her the next morning, dead on his doorstep. He proceeded to cut up her body and send it to all the tribes of Israel.

In light of that horrific crime, Israel gathered to punish the reprobates of Gibeah, but the tribe of Benjamin refused to turn over their brothers. So all of Israel went to war against Benjamin, nearly wiping out the entire tribe. This is why I don't think Saul in 9:21 is self-effacing as to his origins. It is like asking a fellow to run for President and he sheepishly reminds you that his name is Andrew Hitler.

So, here you are at Mizpah, the site of a great assembly in which the filth of certain citizens of Gibeah are highlighted. Do you think Saul has reason to be scared?

But there is more. The vocabulary and events here conjure up another great gathering. In Joshua 7, after a stunning defeat at Ai, it is clear there is sin in the camp. So Joshua gathers all Israel together and proceeds by lot to identify the sinful man who took what was forbidden from the city of Jericho. Joshua went from tribe, to clan, to household until Achan was found.

When he is taken, the people run to his tent and take what was forbidden among their baggage (Joshua 7:11,22). How might Saul feel, having been taken by lot, and the people going to seek him out, especially in light of the fact that he has already been disobedient to God's command and not gone to battle against the Philistines?

But what happens next highlights not Saul's sinfulness, but God's mercy.

Despite the failures of his hometown, his clan, his tribe...his own failures in fulfilling what God had called him to do, how he neither spoke or acted as he should have done...Samuel announces not his sin, but God's choice of him as king. He is the one the Lord has chosen, to which the people give the ancient shout of acclamation: "Long live the king!"

To finalize the coronation, Samuel rehearsed the rights and duties of those who will sit on this throne. Unlike the other nations, this king must abide by God's decrees (Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

This is no absolute monarch, for that belongs to God alone. The power of Israel's king was circumscribed. It was a constitutional monarchy guided by God's Law. His is a regent, serving at the behest of the Sovereign Lord, who established a covenant with His people.

With that the people are sent home. Saul goes back to Gibeah along with men who will serve him, men of valor, of strength, men whose hearts were, like Saul's, now changed.

There were other men, worthless men whose hearts were not in favor of this new king from Benjamin. Their disdain was evidenced by their refusal to show filial obedience in the form of a simple present for their new king. Yet Saul did not respond in anger, but held his peace.

Again we see a wonderful ending to what at first could be seen as an embarrassment.

Does this mean that Saul is really a good guy after all? Should we expect everything to turn out right, even though it had a rocky start?

Why do we need to know this?

It is easy to shake our heads at hiding Saul, who is, as they say, all foam, no beer. You know that he carries a warning sign that says: "Objects in mirror are dumber than they appear."

Yet we can identify with this guy. The errors we see here are not that easy to avoid. What took place 3000 years ago at Mizpah could just as easily take place here at Cornerstone, because we have the same heart. You and I are no different than Saul and Israel that day at Mizpah.

Like Israel, you and I become fixated on what we want. We know what is best for us, despite God's commands to the contrary. How often has God rescued you from your enemies, including the enemy of you? How often then, later, you set aside God's Word when you have a better idea?

What would be said, if today, here, I, as a prophet with direct communication from God, were to call each of you out and begin to identify each and every failure of yours from this past week? If you knew that is what would happen, you wouldn't be hiding out in the parking lot. You won't show up at all!

But God would be just to point out all my failures. Some of them are blaring enough that my family sees them. But most are well hidden from site. But God knows them all. I know only some.

But like Saul, God does call you out, but not to pour his wrath on you, but His love. It is then and there that he publicly identifies you as His child, His friend. But like Saul, he doesn't stop there. God then instructs us, having warned us of our infidelity, we are told that now we are His, here are our rights and duties. We are kings, serving at the behest of our sovereign.

This is what we heard earlier from 1 Peter 2.

In the first chapter Peter declares that we belong to God by his mercy. It is not based on our merits, our performance, our ability to raise ourselves to a level of acceptability. It is because of His great mercy (1:3)

In light of what God has done, in light of his choice of us, of his calling us out of the crowd to be his own, setting aside our sin onto His Son and making us His child, God sets forth the rights and duties that belong to us.

So we put aside all malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander

Not an easy thing to do for a bunch of malicious, deceitful, hypocritical, envious slanderers like you and I. How can this be done? Verse 4 – we find our strength in this living stone, Jesus Christ and we are just the small stone attached to Him so that we find our standing, our acceptance in Him alone.

How does this affect us? If you and I deserve to have our failures pointed out by God the Judge, yet he calls us to Himself as (v9) a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

What does this do for God? It causes us to again and again shout out the brilliance of his grace in taking us from darkness into His light. This brings us back around as to how we are now going to live in light of this grace.

But as wonderful as that sounds, how can I be sure that the hammer won't fall sometime. How can I be sure that while today He may call me to serve as a prince under the authority of Christ the King, but if I mess up just a tad more than Saul, he won't finally say "Enough!" How do I know I can live, as He wants?

The answer comes in v22

When the lot fell on Saul and he was not to be found, the people asked the obvious question: "Is there another?" (like the door prize: "contestant must be present to win"). I am sure they wondered that there must be a mistake, for it could not be someone from Benjamin, someone from Gibeah. We know what those people are like.

God pointed out Saul, that he was the man whom God had chosen. There is Saul, hiding like Adam in the garden, for fear of God's call. But God's call ends in grace and not judgment. The one fearful of wrath receives mercy.

But there is another man who would come, one chosen out of the tribes of Israel who would receive the judgment that Saul deserves, that you and I deserve. There is a man on whom the lot fell, as did God's wrath. There was to be another, one to whom the people would reject and not proclaim Him as king.

The final answer as to why Saul did not receive judgment, but received the mercy of God came a thousand years later

At another great convocation a man was singled out not for adulation, but to be whipped and mocked. He received a crown of thorns and on his bloodied back was placed a robe. When this chosen One was presented to the people, he was introduced by Pilate in John 19:5

With Saul came the adulation of people who desired his rule. When Christ was presented he was rejected. Rather than "Long live the king!" the people shouted: "Crucify!" But this was not a crowd out of control or political power run amok. God designed all that took place, for Jesus was the one singled out for our judgment.

Jesus stood not head and shoulders above the rest, looking the part of a leader. Instead Jesus comes head bloodied by the crown of thrones and shoulders by the whip, hands scared by the nails, side pierced by the lance. His blood was shed so that we might live. Look at him again.

Behold the man...this is the one who takes on all our failures so that we are called out, chosen to be sons and daughters of the Living God.

Behold the man...who suffered in our place, whose perfect life if credited to us so that we are accepted.

Behold the man...we are nourished and feed by his death.