

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Week 4 - Day 3: We Want a King

“To the young, I would whisper that the Bible is a myth. I would convince the children that man created God instead of the other way around. I’d confide that what’s bad is good and what’s good is square. And the old, I would teach to pray after me, “Our Father, which are in Washington [D.C.]” – If I were the Devil by Paul Harvey

In our world today, we are traversing many issues that concern the government. Debates are currently raging on about different styles of leadership, theories of governance, authoritative structures, and power dynamics amongst a wide variety of other issues. Can the solution to the human problem be found in the latest governmental system? Can we resolve our societal issues with the latest and greatest theories about the world or is there something deeper going on?

At the end of Judges, we see a growing nation engaging in this exact debate. "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit." Israel was hungry for a new type of governance that would bring unity, justice, law, and order to the community. Even Moses encourages Israel leaders to develop a healthy structure of governance:

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 “When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.

“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

Even though Moses advocates for this monarchical leadership style for God’s kingdom people, he warns Israel to look for a leader whose heart would not be “lifted above his brothers,” in pride and would humbly listen and obey God’s commandments as the true king.

It's not the governing structure that Moses was concerned about at all. It was the **humility** or **pride** of Israel's king that would make all the difference. These two themes drive the entire conversation of 1st and 2nd Samuel.

The book that documents Israel's most powerful kings ironically starts with a humble woman named Hannah! In the opening story, Hannah's beautiful picture of humility before the Lord suggests that God's blessings flow upon the humble (Hannah is blessed with a child) while God's judgment will fall on the prideful (Eli's family downfall) This is captured in Hannah's song of praise:

1 Samuel 2:3-4, 10 Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.

...The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

Notice that the **proud** are denounced but the **humble** will be exalted by the Lord! This extends to the anointed one ("Messiah" in Hebrew) who would become Israel's king!

Next, Hannah's son Samuel is blessed for humbly following the Lord's voice amidst Eli's family of priests who had become prideful and corrupt. The Lord exalts Samuel's humility by turning him into a key representative for the people of Israel as a prophet, a priest-like figure (though he was not from the tribe of Levi), and a judge.

1 Samuel 3:19-20 And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.

1 Samuel 7:9 So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him.

1 Samuel 7:15 Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life

However, Samuel's sons were not so faithful to the Lord in this immense role of representing the God of Israel causing Israel to look for a solution in a new system of governance. Like their neighbors, they desired one unified king to rule over them! However, God saw their true motive:

1 Samuel 8:7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

Instead of turning to God, who was reigning as King over His people the entire time, they continued to look to their earthly structure of authority to solve the issue of evil. Samuel warned that this power came with the great potential for abuse:

1 Samuel 8:11-18 “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”

The people had become *proud*, forgotten their God, and looked toward human governance to solve their problems. Different era, same pattern of sin! As a result, Saul (which quite literally means “asked for” in Hebrew) is chosen out of the *humble tribe of Benjamin* as a well-built man who would look the part of king over Israel. However, Saul was just as sinful as any other human. Here are two different situations where Saul disobeys the word of the Lord from Samuel:

Samuel’s Instructions

1 Samuel 10:8 *Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.”*

Saul’s Actions

1 Samuel 13:8-9 *He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, “Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering.*

Samuel’s Instructions

1 Samuel 15:3 *Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’ ”*

Saul’s Actions

1 Samuel 15:8-9 *And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs,*

and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

Notice the common denominator? Saul's ***pride*** influenced him to take control of the offering meant for Samuel, spare good resources, and ultimately disobey the true King. For this reason, God took away the kingdom of Israel away from Saul:

1 Samuel 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king."

What follows is the tragic descent of Saul as an evil spirit overtakes him, as he violently seeks to kill the next king who would take his place, as he engages in sorcery to consult Samuel from the grave, and as he and his three sons fall to their death on the same day.

The life of Saul and the new era of monarchy in Israel challenges God's Kingdom people to adopt a posture of ***humility*** and resist our ***prideful*** tendencies as we set our eyes on the one who is really on the throne! How do we do this? The story of God's kingdom in the Bible is relentlessly pointing out that God is entirely in control of a much bigger narrative than we know! That means that no matter who is wielding the power on earth, God's kingdom purposes will never be thwarted!

It may take us a while to develop this lens in our life, but consider how God uses Saul to move God's kingdom story forward. We are left to wonder who was going to be humble enough to ***perfectly*** follow God's command and love the kingdom family, strong enough to ***perfectly*** resist human pride, and ultimately lead Israel to the promised blessings of God? Who would become this humble "anointed one" (Messiah) and when will he come to establish His kingdom rule?

-AJ Vanegas

Share the Gospel: Israel wanted a king who would bring unity, justice, law, and order to the chosen people of God. In this new structure of government over God's people, it was going to take a king overflowing with humility, someone after God's own heart, who would be able to govern God's people and reflect His loving commands.

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers: