

Blessings Come When God Does The Choosing

A Sermon by Pr. David Johnson

You've most likely heard the old adage, "Those who don't learn from the past are destined to repeat it." The idea is that you should take the past, or at least the lessons from the past, with you as you move forward into the future. Now that is a needed exhortation, especially in our day and age when so few lessons seem to be learned, because so few people are willing to acknowledge any fault or take responsibility. It's also amazing how much of the current political and economic ranting is devoid of many of the lessons of the past.

However, there is one element from the past that God doesn't want packed for our future journeys, and that element is *Sin*. Those who saw the movie *The Pilgrim's Progress* (or read the book) saw that truth vividly portrayed. And our Old Testament lesson from 1 Samuel describes this reality even more fully.

But to fully understand situation, we have to go all the way back to chapter 8. Samuel had grown old and was at the end of his ministry. He appointed his sons, Joel and Abijah, as successors. Sadly, however, Samuel's sons didn't share Samuel's heart for the Lord nor his call to ministry, and they were corrupt in their dealings.

The people, not excited about their future leadership began to grumble for a king. They wanted to be like all their neighbors and have a king of their very own, who was like all the other kings. Now God told Samuel to warn the people of the consequences of a secular rather than a divine monarchy, but the people would hear nothing of it. They wanted a human king.

So in 1 Samuel 9, God gave them their king, a king chosen almost entirely for his physical and military stature, like all the other nations had. And from that moment on, the nation of Israel began to slide into a spiritual pit on the coat-tails of a prideful, and spiritually double-minded King Saul. This continued until we reach the activities of chapter 15, when Saul fell into outright blatant disobedience and deception. It was at this point that God removed His divine blessing and anointing from Saul.

1 Samuel 15:22-23 Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. ²³"For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king."

1 Samuel 15:35 Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Samuel was overcome with grief for the loss of Saul. He had such potential, but instead, had brought terrible calamity to the nation of Israel. Rather than leading the nation in righteousness by truth and deed, Saul had brought even further compromise to an already sin-sick

corporate soul. God had washed His hands, so to speak, of Saul, and even regretted ever making him king. What a powerful denouncement. But Samuel still struggled.

1 Samuel 16:1a Now the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel?"

Though Samuel is well aware of Saul's defiance and rebellion, none-the-less, he is having a hard time moving on. He is reluctant to let go of the concept of Saul as king. Oh, how often we struggle to let go of a person, or a plan, especially when we've experienced God's blessing through their ministry in the past. How do you let go of something God chose previously, without losing a bit of your own soul in the process?

"But we've always done it that way!"

(The seven last words of a dying church)

However, in God's eyes, it was time to move on. God challenged Samuel to come to his senses, "Why are you still holding on to something I have rejected?" In fact, this is made startlingly clear a few verses later:

1 Samuel 16:14 Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him.

God was not only done with Saul as king, but eventually He gave Saul completely over to the consequences of his sinful motivations. He left Saul alone with his own demons. God gave Saul exactly what he had been pursuing, and there is no scarier judgment than that.

1 Samuel 16:1b Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons.

God never leaves us in a vacuum. If God commands us to move on from the past, even one that was chosen by Him, He will always lead us to greener pastures. If God is displeased with a leader, a program, a pastor, or a church; He will show us who or what He's chosen for our future. For Samuel, and the people of Israel, this meant a new king, and not one of their own design.

1 Samuel 16:2-3 But Samuel said, "How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' ³ You shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you."

How quickly we become afraid, especially of those around us. This *Fear of Man* can be a crippling thing, driving us to wallow in self-doubt, make bad choices, or even run from the clear direction of God. We create all kinds of reasons to not obey, assuming the worst consequences for even the simplest circumstances. But when we follow the direction of God, it can be utterly astonishing how creative and successful His plans can be.

1 Samuel 16:4-5 So Samuel did what the Lord said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, "Do you come in peace?" ⁵ He said, "In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

Be aware that whenever you commit your ways to God, there will always be naysayers, accusers, and even the occasional violent opponent. But don't let that scare or deter you. Instead, put on your big-boy or big-girl pants and get to work. When Samuel came to town, the leaders knew that this man of God could mean trouble, and attempted to lock him into an approved plan of least resistance. They wanted to make sure Samuel wouldn't be trouble, especially considering Saul was still king. But Samuel was undeterred, and pressed on with God's plan, focusing instead on the object of his new direction; the family of Jesse.

1 Samuel 16:6-11 When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." ⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either." ⁹ Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either." ¹⁰ Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." ¹¹ And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."

How often have you chosen a path that looked sensible and right, only to find out that the result was not what you expected? How many couples marry "Mr. or Ms. Right," only to find out later that they were now locked into a very painful relationship? We are so likely to stand defiantly before our family and friends rationalizing our decisions with something like Samuel's, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before me."

But God knows best and is soon quick to remind us that our best perceptions often result in less-than-favorable outcomes. Which is exactly what He does to Samuel:

"Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (v.7)

Saul had fulfilled every possible human standard, and then some. He was tall, strong, an experienced warrior, and a charismatic leader. But he lacked one thing God wanted more than anything else; a heart that longed for Him. But that wasn't what was important to the leads of Israel, and God gave them what they wanted (which He often does to teach us a lesson). But this time, God was going to do the choosing, and by His own priorities. And 7 times Samuel is told, "The Lord has not chosen this one."

1 Samuel 16:12-13 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon

David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

Samuel knew he wasn't at Jesse's house for just a nice bar-b-que. God had told him that the next king would come from that household. But none of the sons he'd seen so far were acceptable. So where is God's solution? Did God fail Samuel? No.

We're often distracted by the "also-rans" of the world, and miss God's anointed. We measure the candidates for a job or leadership by the same human standards used to choose Saul. We pick our paths because it looks good, it makes sense, it "all adds up." We are satisfied with close-enough, when God challenges us to wait for what's best.

As one pastor once told me, "We often confuse what's good, for what's God. The problem is simply one extra O." But when we wait for God's direction, it makes all the difference in our success, for it's a path He can bless.

1 Samuel 16:13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.