



1 Samuel: All that Glitters is not Gold

Background

1 & 2 Samuel were originally one book. Because of their length they were put on 2 scrolls and eventually became 2 books in our Bibles.

It is set at the end of the period of the Judges. In the Hebrew Bible, Samuel comes after Judges. The Judges were a dark period in Israel's history. The final sentence of Judges sums up the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 21:25). Samuel is the narrative answer to the lack of a king. But we see that ultimately, human kingship only works when God is their King.

Author: unknown. Some think it is the prophet Nathan. Most likely it is a collection of writings possibly from Samuel/Nathan 10th cent BC which are later collected, edited and presented in their current form around 6th cent BC.

Key Themes

The book focuses on the heart. It is the humble who are exalted and the proud who will be dethroned. While "man looks at the outward appearance ... the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). It is the contrasting story of the rise and fall of 2 kings – King Saul and King David.

Both gain honour and status, but the key to whether their kingdoms continue or fail is whether they trust in God, repent after sin and turn to obey him or seek their own honour instead. God is ultimately the one who "brings low and exalts", he is the "judge of the ends of the earth" (1 Sam 2:7,10). At the end, it is David's throne and kingdom which lasts forever while Saul's disappears. This paves the way for expectations of a Messianic King in the line of David to come.



When God Calls

1 Samuel 2:12-3:21

Key verse: “those who honour me, I will honour, those who despise me, I will disdain.” (1 Sam 2:30)

Background

Priests: the priesthood was hereditary, passed down from father to son along descendants of Aaron. Their role was to be *holy* mediators between God and the people, and the people and God. As such they offered sacrifices on behalf of the people for worship & forgiveness, and they proclaimed God’s word to the people on behalf of God. Their whole life was to be holy to God.

Eating meat from the pot: When a worshipper came to offer peace offerings, the sign of devotion and relationship to God, the priests were allowed to take the breast and the thigh to eat (as part of their ‘wages’). The fat – the best part of the animal – was reserved for God. The priests were strictly forbidden from eating it (see Lev 7:23,25,30-34).

Pray

For you to tremble at God’s word rather than just discuss ideas.

Read 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25

1. The sons of Eli know God’s Word (they are reminded in v16,23), yet they refuse to obey it.
 - What is their sin? How is it described in v17?
 - What does showing contempt for God mean?
 - What are the consequences (v25).

Read 1 Samuel 2:27-34



2. Eli also knows God's word and he desires to keep it more than his sons. Yet, he is unwilling to offer more than a gentle rebuke to his sons and allows God's name to be dishonoured.
 - How does God describe his sin? (v29)
 - What are the consequences? (v29-34)
3. Nathaniel gave the example of how in the heat of our anger we dismiss the command 'love your enemies' and prefer our own bitterness. In what ways can God's word come to you – in encouragement or rebuke – and you show contempt for it? Why do we often not see it as contempt?
4. How can we end up honouring others rather than God because we don't want to 'rock the boat'?

Read 1 Samuel 2:21,26; 3:1-21

5. Though Samuel also doesn't know God yet (cf 2:12; 3:7), contrast his heart posture with that of Eli's sons. (Note how he responds to Eli and God's voice versus how Eli's sons respond to him).

What is God speaking to you in your current circumstances? How could you respond to that with contempt like Eli's sons? How is he calling you to respond like Samuel and honour God's word above you?

6. "Those who honour me I will honour, those who despise me, I will disdain" (2:30). The gospel tells us Jesus received the consequences for despising God, when he was the only one who had truly honoured him. But those who turn to him, receive not the disdain we deserve but the grace of the honour of being sons and daughters of God instead.
 - How does the gospel message give hope to you when you respond to God's Word more like Eli's sons than Samuel? How does it challenge you?
 - How does it enable you to respond well to God even when you don't want to hear what he's saying to you?

Pray

- For hearts that truly want to respond well to God and his word. To honour him above all others no matter what the cost.
- For specific areas in your life that God is challenging you to obey him in.



Taking God out of the box

1 Samuel 4:1-5:7

Background

Ark of the covenant: A wooden box overlaid with gold which represented: a) God's holy rule – it was the footstool of the throne of God and to be kept hidden from view (Num 4:5,20) b) God's covenant with his people – tablets of 10 commandments were inside c) God's mercy – it was the place of sprinkling the blood of sacrifice for cleansing the people's sin.

Battle: warfare was seen to be between human armies AND their gods. Victory showed the power of one god over another. Pagan nations would place an image of the defeated god in their temples as a sign of their god's domination.

Read 1 Samuel 4:1-5

The Israelites

“Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.” (4:3)

1. Remembering how Eli's sons had been treating God (ch 2) and what the ark represented, how are the Israelites viewing God?
2. In what ways can we seek to 'use' God to get what we want from him instead of truly honouring and worshipping Him as God in our lives?

Judgement

Read 1 Samuel 4:10-11, 17-21

So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers.¹¹ And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died....¹⁷ He who brought the news answered and said, “Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.



¹⁸ As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backwards from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel for forty years. ¹⁹ Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth... ²¹ And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed^[a] from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured

3. YHWH looks defeated, their religious leaders are dead – it feels like God has left the room. Remembering in ch 2:31-34, God promised the end of Eli's priesthood, what is God trying to show the people?
4. Have you ever felt like 'God has left the room'? How did you respond? Why? What does this story show you about God's ways?

Read 1 Samuel 5:1-7

5. The Philistines attribute their success to their god, Dagon. What is God showing about himself? Why do the Philistines keep propping up their idol?
6. When in your life have you seen God expose the foolishness of the idols we often worship instead of God? (e.g. control, money, career success, other's approval). How do we stop continually propping them up and allow God to be God in these areas?

Read 1 Samuel 7:3-4

³And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "**If you are returning to the Lord** with all your heart, 1)**then put away the foreign gods** and the Ashtaroth from among you and 2) **direct your heart to the Lord** and 3) **serve him only**, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." ⁴ So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only.

7. Here Samuel gives us 3 things that repentance involves in order to let God be God. In what way is repentance here different from merely confessing your sins? What does it mean practically for you to 'put away foreign gods', 'direct your heart to the LORD' and 'serve him only'? Be specific for what you could do this week.

E.g the idol of control.

- a) 'Putting it away' could mean surrendering our desire to be in control of our finances.
- b) Directing our heart could mean taking the time to find specific Scriptures about money and trusting God and spending time thinking, meditating and then bringing them to mind when we're tempted to retake control.



c) Serving him only can mean actively giving money away in an intentional and deliberate way to specific needs – even though it may feel painful or scary.

8. In what ways does this story about God's 'defeat' and his subsequent victory and call for repentance parallel Good Friday and Easter Sunday? How can you rejoice in Jesus through this passage?

Pray in response

In particular, pray for grace in how God is specifically and practically calling you to respond to Him.



The Rejected King

1 Samuel 8

Pray

For God to open your hearts to him and to transform you through his Word.

Sermon summary

Israel rejected God as king not in their request for a king but in that they sought to get their king in their way instead of seeking God to provide.

Background

Samuel has shown that it is those who turn to God instead of trusting in themselves who God honours and brings victory to. Hannah was exalted (ch 1-2), Eli and his sons and the Philistines were brought low (ch4-5). When Israel turned to God in repentance, he gave them victory (ch 7). In this passage, Samuel's sons are just like Eli's sons, wicked and rebellious. Faced with the insecurity of no strong leader, the Israelite elders look around for solutions.

NOTE:

In Deuteronomy 17, God had promised that he would give Israel a king like the nations had, but one whose character would be different - not acquiring excessive wealth or wives or exalting himself above the people, but reading God's Word daily "that he might learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law." (Dt 17:19)

Read 1 Samuel 8:1-9

1. Have you ever really wanted something only to find out later that when you got it, it didn't live up to your expectations?
2. In the context of the ongoing conflict with the Philistines and Samuel's sons behaviour, why do you think the Israelites want "a king to judge us like the nations?"(v5)
3. What is wrong with this request given that God had promised that he would give the Israelites a king (see NOTE above)?(v6-8) How is trying to fix a legitimate problem using your own wisdom without relying on God rejecting God as King?

Read 1 Samuel 8:10-18



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4. The Israelites expect this king to *give* them victory, provide security and to be a strong leader for them (v20). In reality, God states that he will take from them and enslave them. Why do you think the Israelites still ‘refuse to obey the voice of Samuel’ and insist on having a king in their way like the nations?
5. What are the kind of ‘kings’ the people around you look to to provide them with security? Why are they so attractive? (like Saul 9:1-2). In what ways can they lead to slavery?
6. How do you get influenced in your own life to look for the same kind of kings? How can they enslave you? Why do we find it so difficult to allow God to be our King in these areas of our lives? What are the specific lies and fears that lead you to want to ‘be like the nations’ – to get sucked into comparison rather than trusting God?
7. We change through intentional repentance. This means turning away from sin and turning to God. Both confession but also a change of heart and action. We will not do so until we have the ‘expulsive power of a new affection’. Until we see Jesus as better than the things we are tempted to trust in, until we fight the lies we believe with gospel truth, we will not hate our sin that much but rather continue to fall back into our same old sinful patterns.

Consider the ‘kings’ you trust in, what they offer and how they enslave you. Then compare them to Jesus and the gospel truth. In what ways is Jesus a better king?

King: <i>being liked by friends/family</i>	King: <i>Jesus</i>
Promise: <i>a sense of belonging, love and acceptance. To feel valued and significant.</i>	Promise: <i>a sense of belonging, love, forgiveness and acceptance in spite of knowing your shame. Deep value and significance because of his love for us.</i>
Slavery: <i>fear of their opinion. Fear of saying ‘no’ or speaking out. Guilt that you are too cowardly to stand up to them. Stress and anxiety whenever there is conflict. Covering up shame so people don’t find out about your failings.</i>	Freedom: <i>in Spirit-fuelled obedience there is peace, joy and transformed lives to truly love our friends and family. There may be trials but his grace is sufficient for you.</i>

Pray

For Jesus to capture your heart with a new affection for him, which is willing to truly trust him with the most precious areas of insecurity and fear in your life.



Where We Focus

1 Samuel 16-17

Background

God has rejected Saul because he sought to honour himself above God. Samuel now comes to anoint a new king of Israel.

Warmer

You're on the board to choose the next CEO of your company. What do you look for? What would impress you?

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

1. As Samuel looks at Eliab (*the firstborn, a soldier, and impressive looking - 16:7;17:13*), what are his first thoughts about his suitability for the role? Why does he think like that? What does God say instead? (v6-7) Where is God's focus?
2. What is Jesse's attitude towards David's (*the youngest, a lowly shepherd, looks boyish*) suitability?(v11)
3. From what we see in 17:34-36, what has God been working in David unknown to everyone (other than God) through the most mundane, dead-end circumstances of looking after sheep? In what ways does this qualify him to be God's king?
4. Who do you look down on because their 'outward appearance' isn't that impressive?

Read 1 Samuel 17:1-11;19-51

5. In response to Goliath's boastful challenge (v8-10,42-44), contrast the Israelite army's response (v11,24,33) and David's response (v26,34-37,45-47).What is the difference between them?
6. Goliath looks big in the Israelites eyes, and YHWH is small. But for David, he has learnt through years of tiny moments of trust that YHWH is a big and powerful God. And Goliath in the light of Him is small.



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7. What in your life is 'big' at the moment? What fills the windscreen of your thoughts and heart? What feels too big for you to handle? How big is God in your thinking in relation to that?
8. Jesus comes to defeat the ultimate Goliaths of sin, death and the devil. He is our victory over every struggle and every sin.
 - What does it mean for you to actively focus on him this week?
 - How can you fill your heart and mind with him, his love, his power and place your other challenges in light of who he is?
 - How have you seen his faithfulness in the past as an encouragement to trust him with your present?

Pray

Spend time praying to have a bigger vision of God in your heart and mind.



Learning to wait for God

1 Samuel 23-24

Background

God's people wanted a king. Saul was chosen but his rule was more about his own honour than God's. So God rejected him, and anointed David as the future king (waiting in the wings). David does well, winning battle after battle, and the people's honour and love. Saul becomes jealous and seeks to eradicate David who has to flee for his life into the Judean desert for at least 7 years. 1 Samuel 22-30 are all about this period of time.

1 Samuel 23:1-14 sees David deliver the city of Keilah from the Philistines but escapes before they betray him to Saul.

Intro

In what ways are you having to wait right now? How do you normally respond to waiting?

Read 1 Samuel 23:14-29

1. Jonathan, the heir to the throne, risks his life to “strengthen/encourage David *in God*” by saying “Do not fear..you shall be king.” (v16-17). Why is Jonathan's attitude so remarkable? How would his words and his attitude encourage David in the midst of his waiting?
2. Who are you being a 'Jonathan' to right now? Who needs your encouragement and willingness to think of others before themselves?

Read 1 Samuel 24:1-22

This passage is full of irony. Saul comes to attack David, vastly outnumbering him, and yet nature calls, so he wanders into the very cave where David and his men and makes himself a sitting duck.

3. Given the traumatic nature of the last few years for David and his men at Saul's hands, compare how David's men are thinking about this opportunity and David's response (v4) to how David finally responds to this scenario (v5-7). What is most important for them versus for David?



NB: Chris mentioned 4 possible thoughts: we need this, Saul deserves justice, I'm entitled to it, I won't get another chance. You might like to consider how persuasive 'doing what's good in your eyes' is especially when times have been hard or the wait has been long.

4. When have you been in (or presently are in) a scenario where you've been tempted to take matters into your own hands? It could be:
 - your response to someone who's hurt you,
 - a moment where your conscience called you to make a costly decision,
 - an opportunity which was attractive but would result in unhelpful or potentially spiritually unhealthy consequences,
 - a period of waiting or uncertainty where you want to make things happen.

How did you respond? Or how are you responding? How have you seen God's faithfulness when you have trusted him?

5. David is not passive. He confronts Saul with his actions and the reality of his innocence. But he entrusts judgement to God. Saul declares "You are more righteous than I for you have repaid me with good, while I have repaid you with evil" (v17). David's trust in God leads to him truly loving his enemy Saul. Consider how David's response to Saul mirrors a tiny portion of how Jesus responds to you.

In what ways is Jesus' love for us more beautiful than David's for Saul?

6. How is God calling you to trust him? What promises of God do you need to hold on to? What do you need to do this week to gain a bigger vision of Jesus and walk trusting him?

Pray

- Spend time praising God for his faithfulness to you.
- Confess areas where you are entitled or struggling to wait with trust.
- Pray for a big vision of God's faithfulness and the courage to trust him now.



The Dark Night of the Soul

1 Samuel 28:3-25

Pray

For us to encounter God's through his word

Summary

Through the life of Saul, we see that by trying to save ourselves and preserve our lives apart from God, it is the way of darkness, ultimately leading to death.

Background

Despite being anointed by God as Israel's king, Saul's story is coming to a sad end. His reign seems to be worsening, his "rival" David has fled to join with the Philistines after relentless persecution from Saul. He's also facing an army that threatens his kingdom, and worst of all, the spirit of God has already departed him. Saul faces the consequences of his actions

Note:

The Witch of Endor: this passage is not encouraging people to trust in occult practices. But it recognises there are real, dark spiritual powers. God, here, through causing Samuel to appear (which surprises even the witch) is able to co-opt even evil methods (which seek spiritual knowledge and control of the future apart from God) to bring his message of judgement to Saul.

Read 1 Samuel 28:3-6

1. What were some of the negative circumstances that Saul suddenly faced as the King of Israel? Putting ourselves in his shoes, how must he have felt?
2. In 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, Saul is described as not seeking guidance from the Lord. What was Saul's response when he was in a deep crisis threatening his kingdom? Where is the focus? Is it on himself or on God?
3. How do we react when we are in a crisis of stress?
 - Is the focus and our priorities on God himself or fixing our problems with or without God?



Read 1 Samuel 28: 7-19

4. What does Saul's desperation lead him to do? Contrast that with his previous ruling in v3 to expel the mediums & spiritists.

- What small steps led him to this point?

Revisiting Saul:

- **1 Samuel 13:** *Saul put his honour before God. Offered sacrifices himself because he feared his men leaving him. No repentance.*
- **1 Samuel 15:** *Saul disobeyed God to destroy the Amalekites. Refuses to repent multiple times when confronted - his honour is too important for him.*
- **1 Samuel 18 - 27:** *Saul is jealous of David and tries to repeatedly kill him. He can't take having a rival to his own throne.*

- How might he justify it in his heart?

5. What does Samuel say about the consequences of Saul's actions? (v16-19)?

6. Saul ends up consulting a medium against his own law which was punishable by death. Over time, he crosses line after line, he descends deeper into a darker place. What "small" sins do we easily justify?

- What could the consequence of that sin lead to?
- What could your heart be desiring ?

(E.g. You join the gossip about your unpopular boss or colleague because you seek the approval of the group. Over time, your colleague or boss finds out and feels hurt by the comments, making it difficult to work with them.)

(Note to leader: Think of an example in your own life)



Read 1 Samuel 28: 20-25

Entering into the night (v25) can sometimes be used by the authors of the Bible to show a darkness of the heart & death (e.g. “It was night” was used to describe the situation after Judas goes to betray Jesus). Jesus entered the darkness at Calvary for us (Luke 23), taking on all of our sins & punishment so that we can enter the light.

7. Jesus has already entered the darkness and prevailed, transforming darkness into light, so we're never too far gone. Knowing that, what gospel promises from God might speak light to our specific situation or temptation? (E.g. God will provide, your identity is as a child of God, etc) Spend a few moments writing it down and share it with the rest of the CG.

8. As a CG, how can you support each other to hold onto the promises of God in this coming week?

Pray

To not take lightly our own sin and for us to see God's promises speak into our situation.



God's Victory Amidst Darkness

Pray

For us to encounter God through his word and spirit.

Summary

In the midst of great suffering, God chooses to show his grace to David and his ultimate victory over pain, sin & darkness.

Background

David settles in the Philistine town of Ziklag with his men after fleeing Saul. He and his men join up with the Philistine army for the fight against Israel but are turned away before they head back to Ziklag.

Read 1 Samuel 30:1-6

1. David and his men have constantly been on the run for the past 7 years and now face mutiny from his men (v6). How must David felt when he came back to Ziklag?
2. When Saul is under threat (1 Samuel 28), he demands things from God come save him then goes about fixing the problem himself. Saul also consults God using the generic term when he is under threat from the Philistine while David uses God's name "Yahweh", indicating a deep personal familiarity (v6) . Compared to Saul, how does David turn to God during this time?
3. What might it look like to strengthen ourselves in God in the midst of a trial or suffering?

Suggestions on what might it look like:

- Going for a prayer walk in a park
- Getting into God's word
- Praying the Psalms
- Memorizing the Psalms
- Listening to worship music
- Reading a book that points you to God



Read 1 Samuel 30: 7-25

4. God chooses to use small seemingly arbitrary or bad circumstances to bring about his plans for his servants. How did God help David find the Amalekite raiders and defeat them (v13-14, 16)? What does it tell us about God's character & sovereignty?

Read: From Joseph to David to Jesus, God consistently uses what was meant for evil or defeat to bring about a glorious victory or blessing. Jesus' being nailed at cross in what seemed as a defeat, was in fact his greatest victory of death, over sin, and over darkness.

5. God remains steadfast in his love to us and remains in control even when it doesn't feel like it. How has God shown grace & providence to you in the past during times of trials or suffering?

Respond

Break off into small groups.

a) How did the story of David resonate with where you are right now?

b) What does it look like to strengthen yourself in God this week and not try to fix our problems by ourselves like Saul? Share and pray for each other.

Pray

For us to turn to God this week depending on his promises