

10. The king who was led by donkeys

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We have tendency to think that only good things can lead good results. That is not completely correct. At the beginning it may seem like a bad thing, but it turns out to be a good thing. Many of us heard a phrase, "God works in a mysterious way." In part, I agree with it, but in most part, I'd like to say, "God will do whatever He desires without my permission or agreement." The fact is that I don't have to know and agree with what God is going to do. In most cases, I wouldn't agree with Him anyway due to my ignorance and depravity of man. Probably that is the reason why He doesn't ask me for my opinion. It is all about God's sovereignty.

Helen Roseveare, British medical missionary in the Congo uprising when the Mau-Mau revolutionaries invaded, was attacked. This pure, godly, gracious, innocent woman of God, was raped, assaulted, humiliated, hanging on with her life to a faith that would not be shaken. While recovering from that horrible event, Helen and the Lord grew closer together than they had ever been before. And she wrote a statement in the form of a question that every person needs to ask himself or herself: "Can you thank Me for trusting you with this experience, even if I never tell you why?"

This morning we meet one of our main characters, Saul who is coming into the picture. He was the type of guy the Israelites want as their king.

A. SAUL – PEOPLE'S CHOICE

1 Sam 9:1-2 There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.

Saul came from a prestigious family, and was born to wealth and influence. If being a king over Israel was all about image and appearances, Saul was the man. In 1 Samuel 8, the people of Israel had just rejected the Lord God as king over Israel, because they wanted a king like all the surrounding nations had. Saul was exactly the type of king that the people wanted. He was the king from central casting with a look, statue, family background, wealth and influence. So God is giving Israel the kind of leaders they wanted, but nothing more. He was the winner of Israeli people's choice award.

The name Saul means "asked of God." Israel was asking for a king, and Saul would indeed be the one "asked of God."

What is not mentioned in these first two verses is God. Saul came from a wealthy, influential family and was good looking. But there is nothing said about his relationship with the Lord God of Israel. There is nothing said because there was nothing to say!

1 Sam 9:3 Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. And Kish said to his son Saul, "Please, take one of the servants with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys."

A king will be led to the throne by the lost donkeys! We have no idea how God will use the seemingly normal (even annoying) circumstances of life.

There are two mistakes people make regarding God's guidance through circumstances. One mistake is to think every event of our lives is heavy with meaning from God. This is wrong, because though nothing happens by accident, not everything happens for a great purpose. The second mistake is to ignore the moving of God in our lives through circumstances. God wanted to use this situation to guide Saul, and God will often use circumstances in our lives the same way. We need to trust in God's goodness and in His ability to make all things work together for good (Romans 8:28).

1 Sam 9:4 So he passed through the mountains of Ephraim and through the land of Shalisha, but they did not find them. Then they passed through the land of Shaalim, and they were not there. Then he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they did not find them.

Those donkeys could have gone anywhere. But they went exactly where God wanted them to go. Saul went out to seek his father's donkeys, he didn't find them, but he found a crown.

1 Sam 9:5-6 When they had come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, let us return, lest my father cease caring about the donkeys and become worried about us." And he said to him, "Look now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honorable man; all that he says surely comes to pass. So let us go there; perhaps he can show us the way that we should go."

Their words are a great credit to Samuel. What a contrast to Saul! His reputation was well known as a man of God. What do people think about you and me? When they are looking for a man or a woman of God, would anyone come your way or mine?

1 Sam 9:7-10 Then Saul said to his servant, "But look, if we go, what shall we bring the man? For the bread in our vessels is all gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?" And the servant answered Saul again and said, "Look, I have here at hand one fourth of a shekel of silver. I will give that to the man of God, to tell us our way." (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he spoke thus: "Come, let us go to the seer"; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.) Then Saul said to his servant, "Well said; come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God was.

When consulting a prophet, it was common courtesy to bring a gift, whether modest or lavish.

1 Sam 9:11-13 As they went up the hill to the city, they met some young women going out to draw water, and said to them, "Is the seer here?" And they answered them and said, "Yes, there he is, just ahead of you. Hurry now; for today he came to this city, because there is a sacrifice of the people today on the high place. As soon as you come into the city, you will surely find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now therefore, go up, for about this time you will find him."

A high place was an elevated site of worship located on a hill or on an artificial platform in a temple. The Canaanites were known for building their places of worship on hills. Nevertheless, pious Israelites appear to have used such facilities legitimately after the destruction of Shiloh and before the construction of Solomon's temple. Sadly, the misuse of such high places to worship false gods eventually undermined the worship of God and contributed to the rise of idolatry in Israel.

B. SAUL MEETS SAMUEL

1 Sam 9:14-17 So they went up to the city. As they were coming into the city, there was Samuel, coming out toward them on his way up to the high place. Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear the day before Saul came, saying, "Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to me." And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, "There he is, the man of whom I spoke to you. This one shall reign over My people."

Because Samuel has been whispering to God's ear through his prayers, he could hear God's whisper to his ears.

Meanwhile the Lord had revealed to Samuel that Saul was on his way and that he was the people's choice for king. This does not mean that Saul satisfied God's ultimate requirements but only that He was graciously letting the people have their own way.

What a compassion of God toward the very people who rejected Him as their leader, yet He still cares about His people.

It seems significant that Saul is referred to here as "commander" (which can also mean "chief" or "leader"), rather than as king. The royal throne ultimately belonged to the line of Judah. And indeed God used Saul to defeat the Philistines in chapter 11.

In His sovereign knowledge, God prepare Saul's father's donkeys to lead Saul and his servant to come to the town where Samuel happened to be there. In His infinite wisdom, God instructs Samuel whom he were supposed to meet.

1 Sam 9:18-21 Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, "Please tell me, where is the seer's house?" And Samuel answered Saul and said, "I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for you shall eat with me today; and tomorrow I will let you go and will tell you all that is in your heart. But as for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not be anxious about them, for they have been found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on you and on all your father's house?" And Saul answered and said, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?"

This was a genuinely humble response from Saul, even though it wasn't completely honest. But as he was lifted up as king down the road, his humility left him.

C. PREPARING SAUL FOR THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL

1 Sam 9:22-24 Now Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall, and had them sit in the place of honor among those who were invited; there were about thirty persons. And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion which I gave you, of which I said to you, 'Set it apart.'" So the cook took up the thigh with its upper part and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, "Here it is, what was kept back. It was set apart for you. Eat; for until this time it has been kept for you, since I said I invited the people." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

In that culture, any dinner had a special seating protocol. The seat of honor was always on a particular side next to the host. At the same time, every meal had a special portion that would be given to the one the host wanted to honor. Saul was specially honored at this meal.

Giving Saul the thigh meat was intended to honor him in the presence of the other guests.

KJV translates it as 'shoulder,' while other versions translates as 'leg' or 'thigh.' The original Hebrew word for this word is 'showq.' The main point of this meat is that a choice portion of animal with a lot of meat and it represents the power.

1 Sam 9:25-27 When they had come down from the high place into the city, Samuel spoke with Saul on the top of the house. They arose early; and it was about the dawning of the day that Samuel called to Saul on the top of the house, saying, "Get up, that I may send you on your way." And Saul arose, and both of them went outside, he and Samuel. As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead of us." And he went on. "But you stand here awhile, that I may announce to you the word of God."

I am sure that Samuel taught Saul about being the king of Israel and explain why and what to do when he becomes the king.

D. APPLICATIONS

The sovereignty of God carries the meager plans of our lives for His great purpose.

Saul had no idea he was being guided by God, but he was. The same is true in our lives. In the sovereignty of God, He has a plan and a purpose for us right where we are at, and we should submit to God and get in with His plan. It is important for us to learn that the smallest things in our lives are as much arranged by the God of providence as the most startling events.

No matter how we try to manipulate our God or force Him to do something we want, God already knew what we are going to say or do to Him. From the experiences of dumb mistakes of mine and kind and merciful hands of God, I've learned that it is the best choice of action to simply trust and obey His will.

As Helen Roseveare, British medical missionary whom I mentioned before was asked by God, I'd like to ask you and myself this same question: "Can you thank Me for trusting you with this experience, even if I never tell you why?"