

1 SAMUEL 9

INTRODUCTION

This chapter seems so mundane considering the excitement of the previous chapters. We have had some exciting and sad stories so far in this book. There has been the tragedy of the ark being captured, the death through judgement of Eli and his sons, the return of the ark because of what was happening to those that held it.

Then we had the thrilling story of Israel's defeat of the Philistines and even the request for a King had something of intrigue about it. All those chapters had a certain excitement and an unknown element about them but when you first read chapter 9 it is so ordinary. It is about a normal family who lose some donkeys and go looking for them.

But the key to this incident is found in verses 15-16 because these verses explain the purpose of all these ordinary things. You remember in chapter 8 God's people Israel were looking for an earthly King like all the other nations and in spite of warnings about such a king they insisted on having one and so God gave them their request. In this chapter we see how God raises up that King how He provides the leadership for Israel.

He does this through ordinary people and through every day and mundane events in life. You see God's sovereign purposes are worked out and seen in his control of people and everyday events as we can clearly see in this chapter.

1. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS SEEN IN THE MUNDANE THINGS OF LIFE (vs. 1-4)

We are introduced to Kish who is Saul's father in verse one, we are told he is a man of standing, which means he was a man of influence and affluence; probably because he was a man of warfare, a good leader of men. Saul is introduced to us as an impressive young man (about 45 years old) without equal among the Israelites, he stood out because of the sheer height and perhaps the good looks of the man (v 2).

Now one day when Kish discovers that his donkeys were missing he sends Saul and one of his servants to look for them (v 3). In case anyone thinks is it worthwhile searching for stupid donkeys then we need to put in it its context and say today it would be like a farmer losing his tractor. Donkeys were precious work animals and probably made up much of his wealth.

So a very simple thing like losing some donkeys put a train of events into action that would take Saul to Samuel and eventually lead to Saul being Israel first earthly King. Saul and his servant spent three hot tiring days searching for the missing animals. They travelled northwards through the steep valleys of Ephraim and then circled around eventually travelled through the territory of Benjamin but without trace of finding the animals (vs. 3-4).

No doubt frustrated and exhausted and on the verge of giving up the search they came to the district of Zuph (v 5), they were less than three miles from home now and Saul became concerned about his father's feelings for by now he might start worrying about losing his son and his servant rather than some donkeys. No matter how precious his animals were to Kish the loss of his son would be greater so in order to put his father out of his concern Saul is keen to go home (v 5).

The servant however had an idea, which was really a final throw of the dice at trying to find the missing donkeys. The servant had heard that there was a man of God in the city that is a prophet

(v 6). He clearly did not know Samuel by name but knew of his reputation “so let’s give him a try he will know where the lost donkeys are” that is the thinking that is going on here.

It seems that Saul had been totally ignorant of Samuel’s existence up to this point and this ignorance cannot but strike us as strange seeing that Samuel lived so close to Saul’s hometown and had been such a blessing to the nation. This ignorance suggests that Kish and his family were unspiritual and were totally immersed in their own pursuits.

However of learning about Samuel, Saul is still concerned for they had nothing to give him for his services (v 7). Their food had gone and they had no gifts to take to Samuel. Giving a gift to a prophet was both customary and expected but thankfully the servant had something to give (v 8) and on this news Saul agrees to go and consult Samuel about the matter (v 10).

Now as Saul and his servant approached the city gates where Samuel was ministering they met some young women who were on their way to the well to draw water and so Saul asked them if they knew if the prophet was indeed in the town (v 11). The young women said that Samuel had arrived that day on one of his preaching missions and Saul and his servant were encouraged to hurry along and find Samuel (vs. 12-13).

So Saul and his servant enter the town and as they do they meet Samuel (v 14). It is all so mundane and to be truthful a little boring. But behind the details there is the Sovereign God working out his purposes. He needed to get Saul and Samuel together so that Saul could be appointed king but how does He do that? He does it through the everyday events of life. Look at this story why did the donkeys suddenly wander off and get lost? What made them do that?

Why did Kish choose Saul to be the one to go looking for them? Why was Saul blessed with such impressive physical features; the sort of features that would impress the people if you were the King (v 2)? Why could Saul and his servant not find those donkeys anyway? They certainly took their search seriously and covered a good distance but there was no sign of them.

Who informed Saul’s servant that Samuel was in the town, and why did Samuel go to that district on that day? How is it that the servant just happened to have some silver to give to Samuel otherwise they would not have went. You could not go to a prophet empty handed. Why did they happen to meet some women who were able to direct them to Samuel and how come just as Saul and his servant were entering the town they see Samuel?

Lots of questions lots of what might be called chance events but the reality is that God is the unseen mover in this story. He is the one controlling everything whether it is the lost donkeys so that they could not be found until Saul meets Samuel. God is directing Saul’s journey and Samuel’s journey so that they meet in the right place at the right time.

God himself arranged even the small detail of having a silver coin to give to Samuel. In other words there is not a single or multiple event that is not organised and planned by God for his purposes. If you are a believer then you can have complete confidence in a God who is in charge of everything for his own good purposes.

As you know I lost certain things when in Zambia through what I consider my own foolishness, but the reality of it is that God organised such things to happen for his own purpose. Some of those purposes we may be able to work out but others we will have to leave in his hands in the knowledge that everything works according to God’s plans.

Every event in your life and mine are controlled by God himself even those unpleasant things that happen to us they are all controlled by the God who loves us and cares for us. Even those so-called chance encounters that lead to a job or a good opportunity or to a difficult moment, almighty

God for his purposes and glory controls them all. We simply have to learn to trust him and accept all that happens to us both good and bad as coming from his hand and they happen to us for our good and for his glory.

The reason we struggle to believe this truth is that we fail to trust God; we seem to think that God does things to harm us and although it is true that things happen to us that do harm us even those harmful things are designed for our ultimate good. God only does things for our ultimate good, notice I did not say for what we consider good. God's measurement of goodness and ours are very different because in the Christian even something like death is for our good.

Therefore we need to learn to trust God in every event in life to see everything as coming from his good hands and to depend on him to work out his purposes in our lives for his glory and for our ultimate good. Therefore trust God for He can be trusted.

2. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS SEEN IN HIS CHOICE (vs. 15-27)

But it is not just the various events of life that God is at work in for He is actively at work in appointing people first for salvation and then in doing his work. This is clearly seen in the appointment of Saul. Unknown to Saul but in his search for donkeys God had already taken the initiative to have Saul appoint as King. For on the day before Saul meets Samuel, God tells Samuel about Saul even though his name is not mentioned (v 16).

Likewise when Saul and Samuel meet, God confirms to Samuel that this is the man (v 17). It is clear that Saul and Samuel had never met before for Saul asks directions from Samuel to the prophet's house before he is told by Samuel that he is speaking to the prophet (v 19).

Samuel tells Saul that he is to eat with him as a guest of honour and as for those missing donkeys he is not to worry for they are not missing any longer (v 20). Samuel gives a strong hint in verse 20 of God's purposes for Saul to which Saul responds in great humility (v 21). Why should he receive such recognition coming from such a small and insignificant tribe?

But you see God has chosen him He chooses the weak and insignificant people of this world to fulfil his purposes. Therefore Samuel and Saul and a few selected guests enjoy a meal together where Saul is the focus of attention. Saul and Samuel talk together before Saul's servant is sent on ahead of Saul for God has a message for Saul (v 27) a message that we will consider next time when we look at chapter 10 but for now the point is that God is the one who chooses his people, He appoints those who should lead his people.

Therefore the application is very simple. First the only reason you are a Christian is that God has taken the initiative in choosing you. This choice took place in eternity (Ephesians 1:4) and becomes a reality in time. Before we were converted we did not know that God had chosen us but He worked out our personal circumstances so that we would hear the gospel and eventually in time would respond to that gospel.

But the only reason we responded is because of God's choice in the first place. That fact should fill us with gratitude and it should encourage us to pray that God will show to his church those that He has chosen to salvation and we ought to pray that some of those chosen ones will be sinners who live in this area.

It is also an encouragement to know that when God chooses someone for salvation then they will receive salvation and therefore as we share the gospel in this area we should have confidence in the fact that those that God chooses will be saved. But we also need to remember that God's

choice is unlike our choices. We choose the best and most gifted and talented etc but God chooses the weak and the insignificant for salvation.

Yes some He chooses are people of prominence but the vast majority are unknowns; people like you and me because God specialises in taking the weak people in this world to accomplish his purposes (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Therefore we must not judge people on their standard of living or on their upbringing, we must preach the gospel to all in the knowledge that it is usually the unknowns of this world that God in his grace reaches out to in salvation.

But there is a final application that I want to make before we finish. Just as God's people are chosen for salvation then some of God's people are chosen to be leaders of God's people. The leaders in God's church are the Elders and God has given to us the qualifications that a church should look for in men before they appoint them to the Eldership (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

God in effect says you cannot chose a man to be a Elder because of his age or experience although those are valuable things but he must meet God's standards.

There were too many churches in the past that chose Elders and pastors on personality rather than on godliness and gifts. It is God who decides who are to be his under shepherds in his church and just as God brought Saul and Samuel together then God can also bring Elders and Pastors and churches together.

Therefore what every church should be doing is praying for Elders to be appointed in our churches, there is a real shortage of men for the pastoral ministry and there is a shortage of men in general for the function of Eldership. What is going to change this situation? There are some things that churches can do to help fill the shortages but ultimately we need to petition God that He would raise up men with the gifts and graces to become Elders in our churches. We need men who have wisdom and understanding in order to lead and pastor God's people. Can God fill the gaps in our churches? Of course He can for if He can work all the details out to appoint Saul as the first King of Israel, then He can work in our circumstances and lives to appoint men who will lead and care for his flock.

Our failure is often one of disbelief, we do not really believe that God is sovereign and in control for if we did believe that then we would pray more, and expect more from God and simply trust God more.

May God enable us to believe wholeheartedly in the sovereignty of God and may our belief be seen in practise both in the circumstances that we face and in the people that we meet.

May his sovereignty be seen in his church as He works out his purposes for our good and for his glory? May He raise up for us men who will fill the gaps in our churches and may we be people who believe and who demonstrate our belief in our praying?

Amen