

## The One God Chooses

Last week the people of Israel asked Samuel for a king. Samuel knew it wasn't what the people needed. The Lord knew it wasn't what the people needed. But the people were adamant. They wanted a king. So after giving fair warning about how terrible having a king would be, God gave them what they wanted.

First he gave them Saul. Saul was everything the people thought a king should be. He was tall, and handsome, young and athletic. When Samuel brought Saul out and paraded him before the people, crying out, "Do you see the one whom the Lord has chosen?" the people were vindicated in their desire for a king. Clearly God was favoring their request. Look at this perfect specimen of humanity! Look at this man who would lead them and fight for them! If they had sent in for a mail-order king, God couldn't have fulfilled the brief any better. The people were delighted.

And things continued to look pretty good. Saul's first major battle was a huge success. When the king of the Ammonites laid siege to the town of Jabesh-Gilead, Saul brought together an army of nearly 400,000 men and laid a devastating defeat upon the Ammonites.

But then Saul went after a Philistine garrison, provoking the Philistines, who showed up at Gilgal with a mighty army, causing no small amount of angst in Israel. Samuel gave Saul instructions to wait for him so that he might make a sacrifice to the Lord and request the Lord's protection.

Saul and the people waited for seven days – the Philistines breathing down their neck all the time – but Samuel never showed. And the people – once so eager about their king – aren't quite so sure anymore. The prophet isn't even showing up for this guy. So they start to trickle

away, tired of waiting, unsure they want to stand behind this king who doesn't appear to know what he's doing.

Saul – in a panic – decides he'll just offer the sacrifice himself. Which might not seem like a big deal. He was offering a sacrifice after all.

Except he didn't do it as God commanded him to do it.

He didn't show patience.

He didn't rely on God.

He took matters into his own hands, made his kingship about him, not his relationship with Yahweh. So Samuel chastises Saul. Tells him that this is the end of his kingship as he knows it. Another king will arise who will be a man after God's own heart.

Which - as you can imagine – created a rather frosty relationship between Saul and Samuel. Samuel doesn't see Saul again, just weeps over Saul's behaviour as Saul does exactly what God had warned the people he would do – abuses his power and lives for himself.

God, too, is grieving over the fact that he allowed Saul to be King. But Saul's foolishness won't thwart God. One bad king won't undo what God has started. So he sends Samuel to Bethlehem, a place whose name means "the house of bread" - to seek out Jesse – the grandson of Ruth and Boaz – and to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king.

And God tells Samuel to be sneaky about it. There's a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety in the system at the moment. Samuel is afraid of Saul. The elders of the town – thinking Samuel is still working for Saul – are afraid of Samuel.

So God says, "Just get everyone together for a sacrifice. Lower the stakes, take down the temperature. And then see how I'll show up in the midst of you."

So they gather together – Samuel and Jesse and his sons and the elders of the town - and Samuel has Jesse show off his sons. First is Eliab – tall and good looking. Samuel’s pretty confident this is the one, but no. Apparently God doesn’t care all that much about whether people are tall and good looking – after all, you can imagine him telling Samuel, that didn’t work out so great with the last guy.

So then it’s Abinadab’s turn. But it’s not him either.

Shammah’s up. But again, Samuel shakes his head.

Four more sons parade by. I wonder if they knew what they were auditioning for.

I wonder what the elders made of it all, as they watched this strange processional.

I wonder if everyone held their breath as one by one, Jesse’s sons walk past this old man of God, casting him a sideways glance to try and read his expression.

I wonder if the anticipation built just a little more with each son.

But four more times Samuel says, “Not the one.” Which means he’s turned down seven men. Seven is the number of completion in Scripture. This should be it. These should be all the sons. Samuel turns to Jesse in desperation – is this everyone?

It’s not everyone. “There’s one more,” says Jesse, “but he’s out watching the sheep.”

There’s one more. The youngest. The eighth son. The outsider, not even thought of to be brought along.

David is sent for. And Samuel, and Jesse, and his sons, and the elders, wait. Wait for the messenger to go all the way to the field where the

sheep are grazing. Wait for them to come all the way back. The anticipation building. Will this be the one?

Onto the scene steps David. Now God might have said outward appearances don't matter, but our narrator can't help but tell us that David is a good-looking boy. But he is...a boy. The youngest of eight. Destined to a life of sheep-tending as his brothers take on the leadership of the family. Destined to be forgotten about, to be the last one to know anything. If ever there was a "spare" in a family of brothers, it's David.

And yet this is the one whom God chooses. This is the one God anoints to be king. With David, the wait is over. Out of the house of bread, God provides a new king for his people.

And this all worked out...for a time. Until David, too, strayed from God's ways, followed his own heart instead of God's. It would be a pattern followed by every king after him – some would be mostly righteous, some would be somewhat righteous, some would be evil. God's warnings about what human kings would be like would continue to come true, played out over centuries of war, hostility, a separation of Israel into two kingdoms, hardship on the people, and finally, exile.

And all the while, the people will wait. They'll tell stories of another king, a Messiah, a deliverer, the one promised by Yahweh, the one who is coming. But when will this king come? What will this king look like? How will this king appear on the scene?

David probably went down in the history books as being a great king, majestic, remembered for his prowess in battle, his righteousness, his greatness. Perhaps the people forgot where David came from, how it all started.

Otherwise they might not have been so surprised that this new king, this perfect king, this Messiah, came into the world, not on a white horse flanked by soldiers, but born to a young mother in a room full of cows.

He didn't stride into the temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be king but grew up making tables and chairs in a tiny town called Bethlehem.

He wasn't big and tall and strapping, but according to Isaiah, "had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."

Jesus was, by all accounts, a nobody. An outsider. Someone not even to be considered. Not king-material.

But God has demonstrated time and time again in his story that his ways are not like our ways. God has a tendency to show up in surprising ways, to use surprising people to further his purposes, the unexpected ones, the forgotten ones, the outsiders.

And so this unlikely outsider...was the King. Is the King. The Messiah. The anointed one – the Christ. The one after God's own heart, for he was, himself, God.

After so many years of waiting, from out of the house of bread, God provided a king. And so Simeon, upon taking the baby Jesus in his arms at the temple, can finally say, "Lord, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

And as God's Spirit came to rest upon David, so too did the Spirit come upon Christ in his baptism. Christ was not anointed by a prophet, but by the Father. Called forth into his ministry of announcing the Good News

that in him, the Kingdom of Heaven had drawn near. And that Kingdom is eternal, everlasting, not dependent on human rulers and kings, on the faults and foibles of the Davids and Sauls of this world.

This Kingdom is our inheritance.

It is for this Kingdom, in all its fullness, that we now wait.

Waiting for the day when our King returns.

When God provides, once more, for his people. A new heaven and a new earth. The Kingdom in all its completeness, perfectness, shalom. We long for this day. We anticipate this day.

But in the meantime – while we wait – God yet provides. For Christ is King, not just 2000 years ago, and not just when the new creation is perfectly inaugurated, but right now.

The Heidelberg Catechism Question 31 asks, “Why is he- that is Jesus – called ‘Christ,’ meaning ‘anointed?’ The authors answer: “Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance; our only high priest who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.”

Christ is our eternal king, governing us by his Word and Spirit, guarding and keeping us right now in the freedom he has won for us.

We will face trials and hardships in this life – and Christ is yet king.

We will be tempted and tried in this life – and Christ is yet king.

We will despair over human leaders and institutions and establishments and denominations – and Christ is yet king.

We will become sick, we will lose the people we love, we will grow weary and anxious – and Christ is yet king.

We will consider the evidence and believe that the world is going to hell in a handbasket – and Christ is yet king.

He sits at the right hand of God the Father, and everything – every square inch of creation – is placed under his dominion and his rule. Our future, our past, and our present are held fast by him. Governed by him.

Does that mean we won't suffer? No. But it means that suffering never has the final word. For Christ is king even over death. His power is resurrection power.

And by our own anointing of the Spirit, we are united with him, and so we share in his resurrection power. We are given life. We are given everything that we need to stand fast even amidst suffering. We are called to be prophets, priests, and kings, to serve in the kingdom, to declare through our words and our deeds that Christ is Lord over all.

We regularly pray the words, "Give us this day our daily bread." And as we do so, we're likely thinking about our earthly sustenance, the things we need to survive, like food and shelter and water. But it is also a spiritual plea. A request that God might give us everything we stand in need of to face the trials of each day, to withstand temptation and evil, to guide us in our journey, to strengthen us in our individual and collective callings.

And out of the house of bread, God provides. Provides a Savior and a King. Who watches over us and governs us, who holds us fast, who gives us his Spirit to comfort and guide.

Out of the house of bread, God provides.

So as we close, let us pray together using the words our Saviour taught us:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever,  
Amen.

Rise to sing – children welcome to go to the Multipurpose room for the remainder of the service.