

# Calling the King

## 1 Samuel 9:1-22

Saul was big and bashful and backward. It was not that he had no ambition. He just was settled and satisfied with his life on the farm.

There were cows to milk and sheep to shear, chickens to feed and wheat to cut. That was Saul's life. And he never imagined anything more.

But Saul's days on his father's farm were almost at an end. God had plans for the big man. In fact, the Lord had already spoken to His prophet about the matter.

...the Lord had revealed this to Samuel saying, "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin," Verse 16

The way God fetched Saul to Samuel was both simple and subtle. It started at breakfast. Saul's father paused between bites and shook his head. "The donkeys broke through a fence on the other side of the creek last night. Take Menachem and see if you can find them."

Saul knew what that meant. It was a job that would take days, not hours. The family farm was tucked into a little valley. On every side mountains rose up. So finding the herd meant scouring every nook and cranny of those mountains.

The big man's mother packed some food in a bag. And before the sun had climbed up the high blue dome of the sky, Saul and the servant were gone. They searched all that day and all the next. When darkness came, they lit a fire and curled up with night noises scratching at their ears. And in the morning, they continued their search.

They worked their way northwest, searching steep mountainsides and hidden glens. Finally, they came to the green foothills near the border of Benjamin's tribal territory. But still no sign of the herd.

Then they crossed the border into Ephraim and found a farm town named Zuph. Saul sensed nothing special about either the town or the time. But back when their calls were still echoing in the mountains the day before, God was speaking to his prophet.

Saul did not merely wander to Zuph. The sovereign God of all creation had carefully guided his steps to that place. It was a crossroads town for the big man: a day of decision.

It is the same spiritual spot to which our loving Lord guides each of us. It is the place where bright tomorrows begin.

## The Reason

When Samuel was still a young prophet, the five lords of Philistia sent their armies up against Israel. But God thundered from the heavens. And the Philistines scattered in terror.

Philistia was defeated that day. But that does not mean they gave up, gave in, or gave out. No, they limped back to their fortified cities to recover and regroup.

In time, they grew strong again. So the border raids on quiet Jewish villages started once more. And swarthy Philistine soldiers stole farmers and shopkeepers blind at the point of a sword.

To the lords of Philistia, Israel looked like an easy mark. Then as now, Israel was surrounded by enemies and without powerful allies.

But they were never really alone. They had an eternal Ally their enemies could not see. The great God of Heaven watched them every moment and listened hard for their prayers.

And in their agony and distress, the people of Israel had been crying out their only Ally, to the God of their fathers. So the Lord prepared to provide a prince who would deliver them from their enemies.

Now a day before Saul's coming, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel saying, "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he will deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me." Verse 15-16

God and Israel shared a fervent, one-sided love affair. Unlike their Lord's, Israel's affection for their God came and went like summer storms. When their skies were clear and breezes were soft, Israel was cold and callous toward their God.

But when storm clouds, like dark mountains, began to boil over the western horizon, neon fingers of lightning crackled across the sky, and winds moaned and wailed, it was another matter. Then the people of Israel fell down on their knees and cried out to God. They wept, looking to Him and longing for His help.

God knew how fickle and false Israel's affection for Him was. Earlier they openly rejected Him as their eternal King. They wanted an earthly king like all the unbelieving nations around them.

Nevertheless, the Lord of eternity never stopped loving those hard-hearted and self-centered people. They might not claim Him as their King, but he never stopped calling them His own people. He never stopped watching over them. He never stopped listening for their cries. And He never stopped loving them.

That was the reason God went to such trouble to bring a big farm boy to a day of decision. The Lord was about to call Saul to serve Him as Israel's captain and king. And God was doing so for no other reason than the fact that He loved His people so very much.

God is eternally the same. Yesterday, today and tomorrow, He does not change. And tragically, neither do His people.

We are still fickle, frail and false. We are still cold and confident when our lives are soft and smooth. And we still cry out to Him when we are beset by pain and problems.

Yet our God still cares. His great heart breaks when He seeks His people in pain. That was why He called and equipped Saul to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

God still sees people in pain. Some struggle with addictions. Others wander through dark clouds of depression and despair. Others weep because of broken marriages, broken homes and broken hearts.

Still others live with tension and torment instead of peace and serenity. They are shackled with sin and prisoners of guilt.

Even in death they find no relief. All that awaits them is the broken teeth and searing flesh of an endless, excruciating Hell.

And more than anything, God wants to deliver them from all their sorrow and their shame, from the despair and darkness of eternal death. That is why He sent His Son into this world. He sent Christ to live a perfect life, to shed His blood and lay down His life that He might bring life and light, peace and purpose to ever suffering soul.

Out of His love and compassion, God called Saul to deliverer His people from their enemies. But He does not call us to be deliverers. Our Savior has already overpowered our eternal enemy.

The chains that bind suffering souls have been broken. And the locks that keep them in slavery to sin and shame have been forever shattered.

But they do not know it. And they still suffer in the darkness as Satan's slaves. So God calls Christians to serve as heralds to announce the victory Christ has won for all mankind on the cross.

He calls people like you and me to go into those dark prison cells and set the captives free: to lead people out of suffering and sorrow into His marvelous light.

He calls us to tell people about Jesus' love.

## The Requirement

It was a special day in the city of Zuph. The streets were filled with farm families, visiting from the countryside. High on a hilltop overlooking the town, there was to be a sacrifice and celebration.

God's prophet had grown old. He walked with a limp down the cobbled streets of Zuph. But his mind was not on the sacrifice or the worship service. He was looking for the man God had chosen to deliver His people.

The little town was filled with visitors. And each time Samuel saw an unfamiliar face, he asked God, "Is he the one?" But the still, small voice of God was silent in his ear.

Then near the city gate, Samuel saw a big, handsome farmer striding down the street. And somehow the old prophet knew. This was the man God had chosen and fetched for him to anoint.

When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord (answered) him, "Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall rule over My people." Verse 17

Samuel did not realize it. But he still had one last lesson to learn. Saul was tall and strong and strikingly handsome. And the old prophet was impressed by the farm boy's appearance.

Years later at Bethlehem not long before he died, Samuel would make the same mistake. Sent to anoint the man God selected to succeed Saul, the old prophet would once again be impressed by the appearance of a man.

Jesse's eldest son, Eliab, was almost as tall as Saul. His eyes were clear and his chin was chipped out of granite. Surely, Samuel thought, this has to be the man God has chosen.

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." 1 Samuel 16:7

Our God still weighs the hearts of men. He searches the world over for people whose hearts are pure and perfect. And He hungers to pour the power of His presence into those who are completely committed and determined to serve Him whatever the cost might be.

...the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. 2 Chronicles 16:9

It was the servant's idea. Why not ask the old prophet, people called the seer, to help them find the donkeys.

Saul did not realize God had brought him to Zuph. He did not know God was calling him, either. He didn't even know Samuel.

Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, "Please tell me where the seer's house is." 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 in the morning I will let you go, and will tell you all that is on your mind. Verse 19

Then Samuel smiled and laid a gnarled old hand on the farm boy's shoulder.

“As for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s household?” Verse 20  
Saul had the same problem many of us do. It is a matter of focus, really. We are so absorbed and consumed with everyday problems, we cannot seem to see anything else.

That was the case with Saul. All he could think about was his father’s lost herd of donkeys.

It was not that the big man was not willing to trust God. After all, he was perfectly willing to trust the Lord to help him find the donkeys. In fact, that was why he and his servant stood on the streets of Zuph asking an old man to direct them to the seer’s house.

Saul did not have much money, just a half shekel. But he was willing to offer up everything he had to get God’s help. That is how completely the farm boy believed the Lord could solve his problems.

And that was good. It is still positive and praiseworthy to trust God to help us solve our everyday problems.

But God has more in mind for us than finding donkeys. He wants to do much more for us than help us find our car keys, put food on the table, and even restore broken relationships. He wants give us all the grace and glory of Heaven.

Samuel told Saul that God was ready to give him all that was delightful and desirable in Israel. But if the big farm boy was ever to experience God’s blessings, he had to stop worrying and wondering, fretting and fuming about the donkeys. He had to lift his eyes up above his everyday problems.

God could take care of the donkeys. In fact, He already had. They were already safe and sound at his father’s farm.

Saul had not mentioned his father’s missing herd to the old prophet. So only God could have told Samuel about them. Now the big man had to trust the prophet’s words about more important matters than donkeys.

And so do we. Our Savior paid a terrible price to purchase the power and presence of God for us. And our eternal heavenly Father is not only willing to give us His kingdom. He is eager to do so. Jesus said so.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:32 (ESV)

Our blessed Lord is the one and only King over that everlasting kingdom. It is His inheritance. Now, if we receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we are adopted into God’s family as His children. And as God’s children, we share in Christ’s legacy of love and life.

Samuel took Saul with him to the sacrifice. Afterwards, the old man gave the farm boy a seat at the head of the table.

Then Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who were invited, who were about thirty men. Verse 22

God’s beloved Son would like do the very same thing with us. He would glorify us by giving us a seat of honor at His eternal table.

..just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, Luke 22:29-30

God had great and marvelous plans for Saul. But before the farm boy could experience those blessings, he had to lift his eyes above his everyday problems.

His aspirations in life had to be more than to simply survive. He had to look upon himself, not as a simple farmer, but as a servant of the living God.

There is no greater honor in life than serving God. But we must accept the call our Lord would whisper in our ear.

Otherwise, we will spend our lives looking for lost donkeys.

## The Reaction

It was not as if Saul did not understand what the old prophet meant. He knew Samuel was saying God had selected him to serve as captain and king over all Israel.

It was not as if Saul did not believe God really did call men to serve Him in great and glorious places, either. The big farm boy's problem was much closer to home. He could not accept that God would call him.

Saul replied, "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 to me in this way?" Verse 21

The book of Judges describes debauchery and a disastrous war that nearly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin. So Saul's people were more than merely small in number. They were also loathed by the rest of God's people.

And the tall farm boy's family was the bottom rung in Benjamin. It did not seem possible that the great God of Heaven would want to raise someone like him to the throne of Israel.

But He did. Then and now, God does not seek the best and the brightest. He looks for those who are frail and foolish. He calls and commissions not the greatest, but the least.

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NIV)

Many of us feel just as Saul did. We know how weak and wayward we are. Our understanding is dim, and our strength is so slight. Surely, the Lord of all creation would not call us to serve Him.

But that is never an acceptable excuse. Our God knows better than anyone how weak and unworthy they are. He does not call us in spite of that fact, either. He calls us because we know how unworthy and wicked we are.

God knew that Saul had no choice but to trust in Him. That was what made the big farm boy the perfect candidate for king. Not because of his size and stature, but because he knew he could only stand and serve with God's help.

That is also what God seeks in us. He would give us great and glorious blessings, spiritual riches so great we cannot even imagine them.

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV)

But we must dare to believe God really is calling us.