

The Gifts of Grace

1 Samuel 10:1-12

After the feast, Saul and Samuel sat on the roof. And under a shower of stars, the farm boy and the prophet talked. Then in the gray light of dawn, the old man walked with the two men across town to the city gate.

Just outside the gate, green fields stretched to the hills. And Saul sent the servant on ahead. The old prophet had a secret message for him.

Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on his head, kissed him and said, "Has not the Lord anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?" Verse 1

The old man reached up to pour warm oil over the tall farmer's head. Saul was surprised and astounded. And for good reason.

It was not as if being anointed was something brand new. In the tabernacle, priests were anointed with oil to ordain them to the God's service. And every priest knew exactly what it meant.

It was a sign they were set aside to serve God. That is why Samuel anointed Saul. The Lord called and commissioned Saul to serve Him by ruling over a people who were the personal possession of the living God.

But anointing was also a sign and a signal that God's Spirit would be poured out upon that person. And that was rare indeed.

On this side of the cross, the Holy Spirit is God's gracious gift to everyone who places personal trust in Jesus Christ. He is not merely with believers; He actually lives inside them.

But Saul lived long centuries before God's Son paid the price for man's sin. Then, the Holy Spirit did not live within anyone at all. He was only poured out upon a special few. And up to that moment, priests and prophets were the only ones so wonderfully empowered by God. But now the first God-appointed ruler joined them.

His head still wet with oil, Saul did not realize it. But from that very instant, his life would be forever changed. Never again would he be a simple, subsistence farmer. God had chosen him. And very soon, the Lord would also transform him.

When we come to Christ with confession and commitment, we are a lot like Saul. We have set our hearts, minds, and bodies aside to be used only and exclusively to serve God. Indeed, we have offered up our very lives to the Lord who loves us and died to save us.

And our lives are transformed like Saul's. It was less than a day's walk back to Saul's home at Gibeah. But it would be a day like no other.

For the first time in his life, he would experience gifts that only God's grace can give. And when we come to Christ, we do too.

God's Plan

Standing just outside the city gate, Samuel anointed Saul and announced that God had chosen the big farm boy to serve as Israel's first king. Then to prove that Saul could trust that glorious announcement, the old prophet added a detailed description of specific events the tall farmer would encounter on his way home.

First, on the way back to the farm Saul and the servant would pass by the tomb of the big man's ancient ancestor.

When you go from me today, then you will find two men close to Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, "The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. Now behold, your father has ceased to be concerned about the donkeys and is anxious for you, saying, 'What shall I do about my son?'"

Verse 2

Back at the farm, Saul's father was eaten up with worry. The donkey herd had been home for days. But his son was still gone. So the old farmer sent some men to try and find his son. And they would meet him, Samuel said, near Rachel's tomb.

Later on, Israel's new king would meet three men on their way to Bethel to worship God.

Then you will go on further from there, and you will come as far as the oak of Tabor, and there three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a jug of wine; and they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from their hand. Verses 3-4

The old prophet was not really predicting incidental events that would happen to Saul. No, Samuel was telling the farm boy the specific plans God had for Saul as he made his way back to the farm.

That was the new king's first lesson. Since he was called and commissioned to spend the rest of his life serving his Lord, God had a plan for his life.

And step by step, the Lord of the universe would direct his path and order his steps. But that was not unique, our God does the very same thing for everyone who gives himself to Him.

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:6 (NKJV)

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, Psalm 37:23 (NKJV)

This side of Heaven, no one knows what is around the next corner. Only God knows the future. So He does not leave it up to His children to decide which ways they should walk and which decisions they should make. Step by step, He directs their paths.

But that is not all He does. The Lord knew Saul would be worried about the donkeys. So God sent men from his father's farm to assure the new king the herd was back in the pasture, safe and sound.

Our Lord also knew Saul and his servant would be hungry as they hiked up into the mountains. So He sent some godly men to give them each a loaf of bread to eat as they traveled.

There was an important lesson in that for Saul. God not only directs the decisions and orders the paths of His servants. He also faithfully provides everything those who serve Him need. That is what God's word promises all those who love and live for Jesus Christ.

...my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

That is a glorious gift of the grace Christ purchased for us on the cross. He directs the paths of those who trust in Him. He watches over them. And He faithfully provides all they need.

God's Power

Samuel also said that as Saul approached his hometown, a third thing would happen. He would meet more men. And when he did, something wonderful would happen. God's Spirit would come upon him.

...the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you mightily, and you shall...be changed into another man. Verse 6

Years later, Samuel would describe Saul's mind-set when God first found him.

Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel?" 1 Samuel 15:17

Saul was every inch a farm boy when God first called him. He had neither the ability nor the inclination to lead men into battle, let alone rule over an entire nation.

But when God's Holy Spirit came upon him, Saul was wonderfully changed. He was given a new heart and granted abilities he never had before. And that is also God's promise to us.

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. Ezekiel 36:26 (ESV)

Leading armies into battle required courage and an understanding of military tactics. And reigning as Israel's king required leadership. But of himself, Saul had neither. He was a farmer, plain and simple. Yet God called the big man to do the very things which Saul could not do.

But that is always the case. Our Lord does not seek men with the natural abilities that are needed to serve Him. Instead, He calls people to serve Him in places which require abilities they do not possess.

Our God does that for good reason. His message to King Zerubbabel explains it best.

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts. Zechariah 4:6

God always uses vessels that are cracked and crumbling: men who are utterly incapable of serving Him. More important than that, He calls people who know they are weak and without strength and wisdom.

Saul was called to lead Israel's armies in battle against their enemies. And we are appointed to the same task. However, Christ calls Christians to wage war, not against flesh and blood human beings, but against Satan's spiritual forces of darkness, despair and death.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12

But Satan's power and intelligence are vastly superior to ours. So we would have absolutely no chance of defeating him if we attempted to wage war against him with our own puny abilities.

The devil can only be defeated by a power that is greater than his own. And only God Himself is stronger than Satan.

That is why God calls Christians to serve Him who know how ignorant and unqualified they are. He knows those who understand they are incapable of serving by their own power are the only ones who will trust His Spirit to work through them.

And the more we know how unqualified we are, the more utterly and absolutely we will rely upon the infinite power of His Spirit within us. Like Saul, we are forced to trust God. We have no other choice.

But knowing he was unqualified was not to breathe any insecurity into Saul. Samuel told the big farm boy, he had nothing to worry about. No matter what God required of him, His Spirit would enable him to do.

Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. Verse 7 (NIV)

The same promise applies to believers who serve the Savior today. Whatever our God requires of us, we can be sure He will enable us to do. His Spirit is within us. And His Spirit is all-powerful.

God's Praise

As Saul made his way back to his father's farm, everything happened precisely as Samuel said it would.

Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day. Verse 9

The last sign was both startling and stirring. When Saul was almost home, he met a company of prophets. They had been worshipping God. And as they returned home, they still were.

When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them. Verse 10

God's Spirit swept over Saul like a wild prairie fire. And Saul was endowed with all the abilities the big man needed to fulfill the Lord's call and commission. But that is not all the Spirit did.

The little cluster of prophets were walking home playing music and pouring out their love for the Lord in praise. Suddenly, without even thinking about it, Saul joined them.

God's Word teaches us that every believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit. That means God's Spirit comes to live within the body of each person who places personal trust in Jesus Christ.

But the book of Acts also describes times and occasions when the apostles were also filled with the Holy Spirit. And each time, the tense of the verb indicates the filling took place that very moment.

Peter was filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost when he stood up to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish pilgrims who crowded the temple courtyard. Months later, he stood before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. And once again, in a moment of time, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The lesson for believers today is important. There is one and only one baptism of the Holy Spirit. But there can and should be, indeed there must be, many occasions when Christians are filled with God's Spirit.

Paul compared that overflowing presence of the Holy Spirit with being drunk with wine.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 (NIV)

The common denominator between drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit is control. An excess of alcohol takes control of a person's emotions and inhibitions.

And God does the same thing when we are filled with His Spirit. He marvelously changes the way we feel and act. More than that, He also gives us the ability to please God.

But even that is not all. God's Spirit also gives us the desire to honor and exalt, to serve and stand for our loving Lord. *...it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:13*

With Saul, that rush of God's Spirit made him want to worship and praise God. And the Spirit will do the very same thing within us.

However, we must not be confused when we read that Saul prophesied along with that company of prophets. Prophesying is more than merely predicting the future. The word is best defined as speaking or singing under the inspiration of God.

That is what Saul did. He found that he could not contain words of worship and praise. And when we are filled and controlled by God's Spirit, we will want to do the same thing.

No one will have to urge us to pour out praise to God. No one will have to goad us into singing songs of worship, either.

God's Spirit will melt away our inhibitions and reluctance. And we will be filled with an overwhelming desire to praise our Lord.

But we must remember. No one can make themselves drunk. Only alcohol can do that. In the same way, no one can fill themselves with the Holy Spirit. God must do that.

Saul was near his home. So the people on the road were all his neighbors. Most of them had known the big farm boy all his life. So the sight of him worshiping and praising God both surprised and astounded them.

Those people knew Saul very well. They knew he was backward and bashful. He was a simple farm boy. Never before had he displayed a desire to worship and praise God.

But now he was doing just that. And he did not seem to care that all his neighbors were watching. So the people could not help but express their surprise.

It came about, when all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the prophets, that the people said to one another, "What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" A man there said, "Now, who is their father?"

Therefore it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" Verses 11-12

That question was an expression of surprise that can be taken in a positive or negative sense. Some of Saul's neighbors asked that question to express their wonder. "Isn't it wonderful? God has given Saul a new heart. He is so in love with the Lord that he joins his praise with the prophets."

But others were not so kind. They asked the questions with disdain and ridicule. "Saul belongs on the farm with cattle and sheep. What is he doing worshiping and praising among these prophets? And what kind of prophets can they be if a man like Saul is their leader?"

There is an important lesson in the fact that the questions Saul's neighbors asked can be taken two ways. Both are true and valid.

When we give ourselves completely to God and worship Him without worrying about what people think or how they might react, some of them will respond in positive ways. They will look at us, know we have been changed, and praise God.

At the same time, other people will respond with sneers and snarls. And they will ridicule us for worshiping God with a whole heart.

But neither compliments nor criticism should be allowed to turn our heads. If we are filled with God's Spirit, we should worship and praise God just the same.

In fact, if we really do serve God and God alone, that is just what we must do. Both motivated and empowered by His Spirit within us, we must openly and proudly praise our loving Lord.

And no one can be allowed to stand in the way.