



+ This Sunday we continued our series in first Samuel as we reached the inevitable story where the people learn that Saul was not the king they needed.

+ The Lord is your true king (12v13-25)

- We began halfway through a speech from Samuel as he had been urging the people of God to not turn their backs on him. Where he had been seeking to persuade them rationally that their desiring and asking for a king was the wrong thing to do, what finally seems to persuade the people of God that this is correct is that the Lord performs a miracle of thunder and rain during the harvest months.

- Then the people are cut to the heart and repentant but their confession is quickly followed by the assurance of grace and forgiveness from Samuel. Even though the people of God had mucked up God will not quickly turn his back on them. The foundational reason he will not turn his back is because of his 'name'. God's name is his revelation of himself and his character - because of who he is as a covenant making and keeping God, he will stick by his people.

- We noted that this is a helpful structure for our confession as the people of God. It's right that we come to him recognising how we are falling short and have not lived as we ought to, but also recognising the reality of his patience and kindness and forgiveness even though we don't deserve it.

We finished the section noting the final verse has an ominous ring to it as Samuel warns the people and their king, that if they continue to turn their backs on the Lord there will be consequences as his patience is not unlimited or eternal. This warning should give us concerns as we read chapter 13...

+ Saul is the wrong king (13v1-15)

- Chapter 13 potentially begins on a hopeful note as we read in some detail of Saul's armies. It seems like we are meant to draw 2 clear parallels with the account of a Judge named Gideon. Gideon had his army shrunk down to 300 men so he would know his victory was not due to military might or strength, but rather to the Lord. Also here Saul's army is 3000 men and many are sent home to arrive at this number..

- From that potentially hopeful vantage point though, our optimism quickly dries up,

initially because Jonathan not Saul led the initial charge against the Philistines. It ought to have been their commander-in-chief but it wasn't. As well as that, Saul seems to take the credit for the victory. Is he the kind of leader who shirks responsibility but claims the credit for other people's successes?

- From here on in, it goes downhill-the Israelites scatter and hide or leave the land as the Philistines are riled following their initial defeat. The language used of them is the language of 'blessing' - they are 'As numerous as the sand on the sea shore'. The people of God are experiencing blessing reversal as their enemies are in the ascendancy.

- As the story progresses we see more of Saul's failure in detail. He had been told by Samuel to wait seven days and then Samuel would arrive and perform the necessary sacrifices before battle, however Saul is impatient, not waiting as he had been instructed and he performs the sacrifices himself.

- Samuel is angry with him as he has sought to worship God and perform sacrifices in a way that he saw fit rather than the way that God's prophet has prescribed. We must approach God only ever on his terms because of his righteousness and our sin. God has outlined how his people are able to relate to him we have no room for creativity here, according to the pages of scripture!

- As Samuel asks Saul what he has done so we see Saul again shirking responsibility and blaming everyone else except himself. It was the Israelites' fault, Samuel's fault, the Philistines' fault and he felt compelled! He is unwilling or unable to see his own culpability we found his response is just like Adam in the garden in Genesis 3. Here we see Saul not being a king after God's own heart, but rather being a king who is like Adam and who serves self.

- This is the king they wanted rather than the king they needed. From here on in the trajectory of Saul is not a good one. Saul will be replaced by David who is a man after God's heart, but is still not sinless. As he is later confronted following his adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent actions he is repentant in a way that Saul is not, but is still not the perfect king we need.

- Once again the passage leaves us crying out for Jesus who is not only sinless, but a king who deals with the sin of his people as he dies in their place on the cross. He is the true king that we need.

Here are some questions to begin your group discussion...

- What has this book been teaching us about the nature of God? What about the nature of leadership?
- What have been the key challenges for you so far? How about the encouragements?
- How does Samuel characterise the sins of the people and the nature of God in chapter 12? How does confession and assurance work?
- What do you make of Saul's sin in this passage? Why is it taken so seriously? What did he do wrong? How does it apply to us?
- Why does Saul respond as he does? Again what does that teach us about him?
- How does this passage leave us longing for Christ?