

Title: A Strange Coronation  
Text: 1 Samuel 10:17-27  
Theme: The gap between imagination and reality  
Series: 1 Samuel  
Prop Stmtnt: Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all.

Our series in 1 and 2 Samuel is fascinating. We are on the cusp of getting immersed in politics, power and personality and it will prove to be very engaging. However, as interesting and insightful it all is, these stories are here to help prepare us for the coming of the true King. The entire story line of the Bible is about Jesus because that is what life (your life) is to be about. If you learn the stories of 1 and 2 Samuel, but do not see how they relate to Jesus, or see how you are to relate to Jesus, then you really don't know the stories of 1 and 2 Samuel.

Read Text:

This week I read up on coronation services. The last coronation service that took place in England happened 7 years before I was born. It doesn't appear that Queen Elizabeth will ever die, so I may not see the next one either. Maybe if people would stop saying, "God save the queen" because God appears to keep answering that prayer. But, as a bit of historical nerd, I was interested to see the detailed plans of a coronation service and see the influence of this text on coronation services for the last almost 1,100 years. Now, you may know this but a monarch does not become the queen or king at the coronation service. They became the monarch when the previous one dies. That is called the ascension. If Queen Elizabeth dies and Prince Charles is still living, he will immediately ascend to the throne and will be king. His coronation service won't take place until later. The coronation is the public recognition of what has already taken. It sounds similar to New Testament baptism. Baptism is the public recognition and identification of someone who has come to faith in Christ and is now being identified as a brother or sister in Christ. But I am not suggesting that this text is about baptism.

There is some similarity here in the 2-part (ascension and coronation) process of becoming a monarch. Saul was anointed king by Samuel in private. God told Samuel to do it, he did it, and Saul is now the king. It's just that no one but Samuel and Saul know it. Besides, there is no throne to sit on, no crown to wear, no scepter to wield and no palace to live in. But, now, Saul has to be presented to the people as the king. So, the coronation service/event is planned and it is a rather strange coronation. It is outright deflating. Like with so many things in life, the expectations were high and reality did not quite make it that high. In fact, it wasn't even close.

This text has 3 parts that are connected by the words, "now, then and then." Verses 17-19 set the stage as Samuel attempts to remind the people of Israel of what the real situation is. Verses 20-24 explain the actual coronation event, which turns out to be a pretty big disappointment. In chapter 10 Saul has to go looking for the donkeys, and here on the biggest day of his life, people have to go looking for him. Like the donkeys, he took off and hid. Samuel has to be almost apoplectic. Then verses 25-27 basically leave us, rather unsettled. It reminded me of the dog

that always chased the mail truck. Do you know what I mean? You want to ask the dog, “if you ever catch the mail truck, what exactly are you going to do with it?” That is what seems to happen here. The people finally get to shout, “Long live the king.” Now what? “You are dismissed. You can go home now. Bye, thanks for coming.” The people go home, and even Saul goes home. Where else is he supposed to go? The entire text is full of disappointment and is a hard and needful dose of reality. Something that you and I are in constant need of. Here is the two-part question that I want you to ask of yourself. What do you expect and what should you expect? Verses 17-19 are like a reality check.

### 1. **What should you expect from God?** (17-19)

Mizpah actually means outlook or watchtower. It was a name given to certain locations that provided a commanding view of the area around and were aesthetically pleasing and militarily strategic. This particular Mizpah was located in the tribe of Benjamin and was the place where the nation gathered in Judges 21, before the 11 tribes went to war against the tribe of Benjamin and almost annihilated them. It was also the place where the people gathered in 1 Samuel 7 and renewed their commitment to God, were subsequently attacked by the Philistines and God directly intervened and brought Israel a great victory. Major events took place here, including the shedding of a lot of blood. Now, Samuel calls the people together “to the LORD at Mizpah.” We know what is about to take place because of what happened in chapter 9 and the first part of 10, but as far as the nation is concerned, the last thing they know is what happened at the end of chapter 8. Samuel tells them that he is going to get them a king and for them to sit tight and go home. The fact that he now calls them back together and that he calls them together at Mizpah makes it clear that another major event is about to take place, but in order to understand what it is and what it isn't, Samuel does what a prophet is called to do. He tells them the word of the LORD.

#### A. **When the mercy of God has been forgotten** (17-19a)

A wedding is supposed to be a joyous event. Often it is. A friend of mine told me that he knew that he was about to make a big mistake and that he should not marry this girl. He knew it and yet here he was and the wedding was about to take place. Everyone was getting in place. The guests were there, the bridal party, the reception was all set because everyone was ready to celebrate an event that in his heart he knew should not happen. So, here he was, going through the motions of what should be a wonderful occasion like he was disconnected from his own body. He was right. Long after the festivity of the event was over, he has lived with the consequences of his decision and to this day wishes he had not gotten married.

That is the sense of this event. It is very easy for the excitement of getting a king to overshadow the reason why this is even taking place. Look at the middle of verse 18. “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel...” God is telling you this so that you will have a realistic view of what is happening. Here are the facts. I have been exceedingly merciful to you. You have demonstrated over and over that you are just as pagan as the Egyptians and the Canaanites. They have

received justice and I have been merciful to you and here you are, acting with complete disregard for my mercy. What do you think is going to happen? “You have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses.” (19)

#### **B. When the rule of God has been rejected (19b)**

The mercy of God has been rejected and therefore, the rule of God has been rejected. “Set a king over us.” So, let’s put this together now. They are saying that we don’t want this merciful God to rule over us. How do you think this is going to work out? If you reject the greatest because he isn’t what you want and demand something else, what will his replacement be like?

Many of you are blessed with a really good spouse. He/she is not Jesus, but they are good, but you don’t see it. What you see is all the ways in which he/she is not what you want. In some cases, what you want is selfish and it is a grace of God that he doesn’t give you what you want. But, if you only focus on what you think you should have or the ways in which your spouse does not measure up (which no spouse is perfect), then you are simply repeating Genesis 3. Instead of enjoying the entire garden and all of the graces of God, you look at the one thing that isn’t what you want and you get fixated on that. Instead of delighting in God and enjoying your spouse, you are constantly critical and complaining and forget all of their good qualities and you fail to appreciate them, fail to encourage them, fail to pray for them because you sadly see them as the enemy instead of your soulmate. There will always be a snake in the garden who is ready to affirm your complaints and agree with your pettiness, then smoke you like a joint, use you and walk away. Don’t be blind to what you have.

#### **C. When you have to give an account (19c)**

So, God gathers Israel together and tells them this. When you look at the various speeches that prophets make, they follow this two-fold pattern. 1) God lays out a detailed case of the failures of his people and therefore, their expectation of God’s judgment. 2) Then God explains why he is going to punish them the way does. This is what sets us up for verses 20-24. We expect to hear what God’s judgement is. What is it? It is God, giving them a king. Last week and this week, I’m trying to impress this upon you. God is merciful. His mercy does not negate his justice, but even in his just wrath, he remembers mercy. God warns them again. It is merciful of God to do that. It is merciful of God to gather them together and tell them that what they have done is wrong. So,...

#### **D. What do you expect and what do you get?**

What do you expect God to do? Do you expect him to destroy them? Do you expect him to ignore it? He does neither. He holds them accountable for their sin. He tells them that and, in his punishment, he gives them what they want. But he does not dance at the reception. This really takes the steam out of the entire event. At this point, God does not come right out and say it, but he could have. He could have said, Samuel is now going to pick for you a king who

will be my hand of judgment upon you. So, God allows them to experience the consequences of their decisions, but in a context of God's mercies. In other words, even in wrath, God remembers mercy. (Hab 3.2) In another example of the providence and mercy of God, Samuel casts lots which will be the means by which the leader, already anointed will be selected in front of the nation. What is casting lots? Casting lots is mentioned almost 50 times in the Bible, with the majority of those in the OT. It was a process that was normally seen as random (like the rolling of dice or flipping a coin) to determine what to do. Proverbs 16.33 says that even the casting of lots is under the control of God. That is clear here and this is a reminder of the providence and kindness of God to Samuel. Think about this. Samuel anointed Saul in private. Samuel had a lot of relational capital built up with the people, but we all know that people are very prone to distrust and a lifetime of integrity can be dismissed with one accusation or disagreement. If Samuel's sons were guilty of taking bribes and now, the son of a wealthy man is selected to be king, it would be very suspicious, particularly to those who were from other tribes or who thought there were better choices. Samuel could have said that the LORD picked Saul, which was true. But for the selection to take place by lots, in front of the nation, made it clear that Samuel did not make this choice, the LORD did. That is a kindness to Samuel.

## 2. What should you expect from a leader? (20-24)

One of the things that has contributed to bit of frustration for Cathi is my eternal optimism. She hears an unusual banging coming from the furnace or a particularly strong odor coming from the garage and she wants to me to check it out and fix it. My default response is, "It'll be fine." I don't know why I say that, because I'm not sure I can ever remember that being the case. Even when I am confronted with obvious facts stating otherwise, it is easy for me to dismiss them and hope that they just go away. So, I imagine what it would be like if Cathi and I were attending this coronation ceremony for Saul. I would be like, "Hey, we got a king. That dude is big. No one is going to mess with him. This might work out." And she would be, "Are you kidding me? When he was chosen, he wasn't even around and from what I heard, Samuel had already anointed him at least a week ago. He knew this was going to happen and he was hiding. What kind of a leader is that?" To which I would say, "Give the guy a break. He's nervous. I would be nervous. He probably had to go to the bathroom." "Honey, he was in the baggage, not the bathroom. This is not going to work." And once again, she would be right.

Even an optimist like me would have to admit that this was a really poor way to start. But, after all, what did you expect? Think about that. What do you expect from a leader and what should you expect from a leader? Here is a nation full of insecure people who feel threatened by their enemies. From this pool of insecure people, they want a king to be selected. If the pool is insecure, then no one should be surprised that the king is insecure. What should you expect from a leader? Insecurity!

### A. **Insecurity** (masked or revealed)

We all fight insecurity and the only real solution for our insecurity is our union with Christ. Apart from that, we tend to give in to it, or try to cover it up and both of those responses tend

to be disastrous. This will be played out hugely in the life of Saul. At this point we don't know much about Saul. He did not seek this position. He doesn't seem to want it. At this point it has not gone to his head. He is not desperate for power and is not scheming for influence. In fact, it is quite the opposite. As I said last week, the guy is clueless. He did not seek to be king, is not ready to be king and doesn't want to be king. So, he hides among the baggage, hoping that the lot will fall on to someone else and then he will never have to tell anyone that he was chosen as king. But no, the God who chose him, ordained the lot to fall on him, expect, he wasn't there. Maybe they read the lot wrong. So, they asked again. Is there a man still to come? Is it someone else, maybe? No. The LORD said, "Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage." So, they ran and took him. Saul did not want this and clearly had no clue as to what he was going to do.

Insecurity is our soul's response to the reality of our situation. The truth is, I am prone to failure. I am part of the fallen creation. I am a sinner. I am prone to weakness, sickness, stupidity, and am vulnerable to all of the consequences of living in a sin-cursed world. I do not know everything, can't do everything, and am at the mercy of just about everything. Just like you. If that is all that I have and am, then of course I am going to be insecure. We need to know that about each other and give each other space with that. At the same time, we need to fight this insecurity with the good news of the gospel. So, while I am a sinner, because of what Christ has done for me, and the fact that I have trusted in Christ, I am justified. I am declared righteous. I have a standing with God in Christ. I am his child. I have been adopted. I have an eternal inheritance that cannot be taken away. And while I am weak, he is strong. In fact, it is in my weakness that his strength is revealed. I don't need to make much of me and pretend that I am awesome. What a foolish thing to do. I am not awesome. God is. If I try to make much of me, I am lying to you, and you will be seriously let down. But if I make much of God, you won't be let down. I cannot guarantee that I won't get sick. In fact, I can pretty much guarantee that I will get sick and I will die. But I will then live forever.

But, if you are not confident that you are in Christ, then you are insecure and you should be insecure. But that insecurity then makes you vulnerable to trusting in the wrong things or the wrong people.

### **B. Temptation to trust for the wrong reasons**

This whole scene is quite the let down. This handsome, but embarrassingly reluctant king, is now presented publicly. What was Samuel supposed to say? If you were Samuel, what would you say? Congratulations? Or this is glorious day! I have such confidence in this man! You can't say anything like that. So, he simply points out the obvious. The guy is tall and he is handsome. Do you see him? There is none like him among all the people. So, they shout, "Long live the king!" The entire thing really appears to be half-hearted at best and with good reason. I know the text does not explicitly say that, but the fact that at the end of the next chapter that they feel like they need to have another coronation ceremony makes it pretty clear to me that this original one was rather unimpressive.

### 3. What should you expect from a kingdom? (25-27)

Every earthly kingdom and every earthly king are going to be a disappointment. This text is such a good reality check for us. There is no family without problems. No church without struggles. No organization, army, government, business, volunteer group, school, bible college, seminary, homeschooling co-op or Christian camp that has perfect people. What should you expect from a kingdom? It is all here.

#### **A. Internal struggles**

Samuel writes down the rights and duties of a kingship because kings are prone to overstep their bounds and end up resenting and destroying the very people they are called to protect. He then lays it up before the Lord. I am not sure what that means exactly except that he calls upon the Lord as a witness to the King and the people to live up to their commitments. But, Samuel has to do that because he knows that both the king and the people will quickly break the trust with one another. The people want a king because they can't solve all their own problems. They are going to get a king who can't solve them either. This is going to add to their angst. And there is already angst.

#### **B. Dissension**

Already the choice of Saul was ridiculed, like every new head coach of the Lions is ridiculed by local sports shows. He hasn't even done anything. Well, that's the point. He hasn't done anything. How can he save us?

#### **C. Uncertainty**

Then everyone is dismissed to go home. Saul also went home. In the beginning of the next chapter, we find out that he went back to farming. What kind of a king is this? There are at least a few guys who decide to go with him in order to protect him, but other than that, nothing has really changed. Like the dog who caught the mail truck, now what? It is going to take a national crisis to force this reluctant king into action, and we don't have to wait very long for that to happen. More on that, next week.

I can remember as a kid, that it was considered bad form to vote for yourself if you were running for a position in school. The idea was that people who want the office, shouldn't be trusted with the office because ambition creates monsters. Therefore, only people who don't want power can be trusted with it. If that was universally true, then Saul may turn out to be a surprise in a good way. But it is not universally true. Power is like the one ring that rules them all. It appears to corrupt and destroy all who have it. We all live with disappointment. Ask yourself, what did you expect?