

Title: What is Going On?  
Text: 1 Samuel 9.1-10.16  
Theme: The amazing mercy of God  
Series: 1 Samuel  
Prop Stmtnt: The multiple providences of God show the amazing mercy of God.

Read Text:

1 Samuel 9.1-10.16 is an entire unit. After some brief genealogy that introduces us to what we can only assume are some important characters, the section begins with a conversation between a father and a son (Kish and Saul) and ends with a conversation between an uncle and his nephew (Abner and Saul). Those two conversations were about donkeys. But, the conversations in between were a lot more than about donkeys.

I have talked with some of you who were asked to retire before you were ready to but, before you left, you were assigned to train the person who would replace you. It is like a kick in the gut followed by a kick in the teeth, right? I've got to think that some of this is going on with Samuel. The people, that he spent his entire life serving (from a little boy in the Tabernacle, through some very turbulent times) and has been hugely successful, now want someone else, and not his sons. They want a king and God tells Samuel to listen to them and find them a king. The man, that the Lord has chosen is young (that was a given), is wealthy (unlike Samuel?), is tall (clearly taller than Samuel and everyone else, is handsome (more so than anyone). Tall, dark, handsome, wealthy and CLUELESS! Oh, my goodness, this guy is clueless! Samuel has to be just shaking his head and wondering, "God, what on earth are you thinking?!" This isn't a GQ model; this is a king. But we're getting a little ahead of the story. Let's back up.

The nation is excited that they are going to be getting a king! The talk shows, news reports, and tabloids are full of speculation. History professors are interviewed and all of the "experts" weigh in on which tribe would be the best choice. Las Vegas bookies have it coming from Judah. Meanwhile the Israeli paparazzi are dogging Samuel's every step and breathlessly reporting on his every moment. They are looking for any deviation from his normal routine that will give them some clue as to who the king will be. Ok, so I made some of that up, obviously, but that is how the world has always responded to these sorts of things. The nation is waiting to answer the question – Who should be the king? This is a really big deal and it's obvious from the text. And I don't think that I am reading too much into it since Samuel is vague and a bit cryptic. He invites Saul to a meal with 30 people. He tells the cook ahead of time to set aside a special piece and portion, which Samuel then directs to be given to Saul. But at the meal Samuel does not reveal to anyone what the Lord had told him. Later, in private, with Saul alone, Samuel anoints him and tells him that he has been chosen to be king. The public pronouncement and coronation will come later. What happens here is in preparation for that. But, why? Why does it unfold like this?

## **1. Six General observations:**

I am going to make six general observations from this text. There are more, but I am going to limit my list to six, then I am going to tell you what I think the big idea is. Usually, I tell you the big idea at the beginning of the sermon, but I want to take you through the process of discovery that I went through this week so that you can not only see what is here, but I am really hopeful that seeing it, will help you savor it. I really want you to understand and love, agree and trust, discover and delight because you are once again just amazed at what God does and even more at why God does it. These 6 observations are taking us somewhere and my conclusion will be the main points of the sermon.

### **A. Chapter 9 changes abruptly.**

- We go from the elders of Israel to a family in Benjamin
- We go from Samuel to Kish (it's not Samuel's sons, but Kish's son)
- A genealogy from the tribe of Benjamin raises our eyebrows.

Saul was correct (9.21) the tribe of Benjamin had issues. It was not only small to begin with, but it was infamously problematic (end of the book of Judges) and managed to be the reason for a civil war that killed over 65,000 men. Over 25,000 of them were from the tribe of Benjamin that left only 600 men from that tribe. To say that this tribe had an inferiority complex was clearly an understatement. It had a terrible reputation and would be about the last place that you would go looking for a king. – Or would it? (more on that later)

### **B. The situation is very usual (looking for some lost donkeys)**

Saul is not looking to be king. Saul is looking for his donkeys. You could entitle this chapter, looking for donkeys and finding a throne. Saul does not have the crown on his mind at all. In fact, Saul may not have even known Samuel's name. Neither he nor the servant refer to Samuel by name. Saul clearly does not know who he is when he meets him (9.18) because Samuel has to introduce himself to Saul (9.19). Verse 4 is telling us information that the reader probably wonders why it is there. We know that this matters in some way, but we just don't know why just yet.

### **C. The text is mostly dialogue with many people involved. (Kish, Saul, a servant, young women, The Lord, Samuel, A man who lived there, a crowd, and Saul's uncle)**

### **D. There is a lot of detail.**

Why so much detail? Why so much attention given to the route that Saul and his servant take, then to what Saul and his servant say, and to what the young women say when none of it sounds important or out of the ordinary.

### **E. When the LORD speaks, we begin to see what is going on. (9.15)**

Everything changes with verse 15. Now we realize again that all of the ordinary events of life are under the direction of God's sovereignty. God uses the seemingly free acts of people to carry out his detailed plan and it is detailed. The donkeys got loose and ran away. Kish tells his son and a servant to go find them. How do you go look for donkeys? Where do you go? They start their search. The servant remembers that there is a seer (a prophet) who may be in the nearby town who might be able to help. The prophet happens to be there and Saul and the servant "happen" to run into a group of young women who "happen" to know where the prophet is and where they can find him. Verse 15 makes it clear that none of this just happens, though it seems that way to everyone.

This is a great example of what we call the providence of God. God uses the seemingly free acts of people to carry out his divine plan. This is what I want you get from this text. Yes, God is sovereign and he is over all things. God has the position, the authority, the right, the privilege, and the power to do whatever he wants to do. This is what we mean when we speak of the sovereignty of God. But, the providence of God speaks more to the "why" he does what he does. There is always a purpose. And that purpose is good!

I like how one group of elders in a local church explained it:

*We believe that God upholds and governs all things – from galaxies to subatomic particles, from the forces of nature to the movements of nations, and from the public plans of politicians to the secret acts of solitary persons – all in accord with his eternal, all-wise purposes to glorify Himself, yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly, but that his ordaining and governing all things is compatible with the moral accountability of all persons created in his image."*

#### **F. God kind of gives them a king that they want.**

On the one hand, we can see how Saul would be a prospect for king. He looks good. He is big, strong and handsome. On the other hand, he does not appear to be an ego-maniac. In fact, he is surprised by the idea, and certainly hesitant to say anything about it. It seems that he is overwhelmed, which is understandable and verified in the next text. When you put all of this together you get the big idea of what have to see.

### **2. The Big Idea:**

The big idea of this text is the mind-blowing, heart-expanding, head-shaking, astounding and God-glorifying mercy of God.

What do you call it when the sailors on a ship rebel against the commander and take over the ship? Mutiny. What happens to the sailors if they are caught? What do you call it when the citizens of a kingdom, rebel against their king and attempt to overthrow him? Treason. What happens to people who commit treason? In chapter 8, the elders of Israel (representing the nation) commit treason against their King. They deserve to die. Rebelling against the King, the

good King, the wise King, the powerful Creator-King is insane. But, they do it. What is God going to do? Is God going to be vindictive? Is God going to treat them like they deserve? Is God going to treat them like they (and you and me) treat one another? God does not give them what they deserve. God does not abandon them and leave them to experience the full weight of the consequences of their treason. God works through every detail to govern and ordain so that they get some of the consequences of their decisions without being destroyed. God is merciful even in our poor decisions. When we make poor decisions, things do not work out. The fact that things do not work out is frustrating because it reveals that we were wrong and we are very prideful and stubborn and don't like to admit it. This king thing is not going to work out, so what is God doing? God is graciously giving his people and this king every chance to succeed. There is no malice here on the part of God. The attention of detail that God provides demonstrates the ongoing care that He has for his people, for Samuel and also for Saul. God could abandon his people, but he doesn't.

Let me give you two scenarios:

A prodigal son rebels against his parents and on his way out the door, his dad says, "You are dead to me. Never step foot in this house again and don't bother coming to my funeral or waiting for anything from the estate. You had your chance."

A prodigal son rebels against his parents and on his way out the door, his dad says, "Son, I love you, I have always loved you and will always love you, no matter what. This home, like my heart will always be open to you. When life does not go like you think, you can always come home. There will always be a chair for you at the table."

Which of those two encourages repentance? Which of those two is attractive? Which of those two is merciful, understanding, tender and yet resolved?

People accuse the God of the OT of being condemning, harsh, and terrifying. They point to passages like 1 Samuel 15 where God tells Saul to kill the Amalekites. I plan to spend an entire sermon addressing this command and the others like it. But, 1 Samuel 15 is not the default response of God. God's mercy is on a hair trigger while his justice is on a very long fuse. This is so clear in this text and in the storyline of Scripture. There is no malice here on the part of God. God is giving his people every chance to succeed. If this does not work out, and it won't, you can't blame God. Therefore, because of the mercy of God; because of this amazing mercy of God, this has to be really helpful to Samuel.

- A. **To Samuel** – keep trusting me and do not let your heart get hard in spite of your disappointment.

Samuel is about to be pushed off "the throne." Pretty soon the headlines will be all about Saul and not Samuel. Samuel is about to be "old-what's-his-name." Samuel did not like this and was very clear about it. Samuel is decidedly unexcited about this. What is he going to do now? What do judges do when they are no longer wanted or needed? For Samuel, the answer is clear –

look at God. After all, it was God's reign that was rejected. It was God's warnings that were ignored. It was God's kindnesses and faithfulness that were forgotten. What does God do? God is merciful and involved. Our feelings would be hurt and we would tend to leave and hide in a corner, feel sorry for ourselves and wish ill on everyone else. Samuel has a great example to follow. If God is not vindictive, Samuel shouldn't be. He can remain involved and pray, and do the right thing. His disappointment is huge, no doubt, but disappointment does not have to become bitterness. Disappointment massaged with mercy becomes grace that may lead to repentance.

Some of you find yourself in a situation similar to Samuel. You feel neglected, unappreciated and your wisdom is ignored. Your disappointment is threatening to rule you and steal your joy. It does not have to be that way. Look to the Lord. How did God respond here?

**B. To Saul** – you must trust me, not yourself (opportunity)

Saul is really overwhelmed. But, what does the Lord do. He provides 3 detailed signs to make Saul aware that what is happening is not by mistake. These signs are not like fortune cookies that tell you that tomorrow something good will happen to you. 1) 2 men will meet you by Rachel's tomb and they will say to you, "The donkeys that you went to seek are found, and now your father has ceased to care about the donkeys and is anxious about you saying, 'What shall I do about my son?'" 2) When you go from there to the oak at Tabor, 3 men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there, one carrying three young goats, another carrying 3 loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine. They will greet you and give you 2 loaves of bread. These first two signs are very distinct and more than a coincidence. The third sign is clearly supernatural. 3) Saul you will join with a group of prophets and you will prophesy. Then Saul is given directions. Go to Gilgal and wait for 7 days, then I (Samuel) will come to you and show you what to do.

Some of you are facing a situation in which you are in over your head. You are tempted to run away. This was not your plan. This is way out of your comfort zone. However, you are not in this by accident. Like Saul, it is by design. It is designed to cause you to look to and lean on the Lord. God is in the details. God's mercy is evident in the details. Look for God's hands in the details and let those be reminders to keep you trusting in him.

**C. To the People** – you should have trusted me and maybe will next time.

I am giving you exactly what you want. I am giving you a king after man's heart. If you could elect someone who looked the part – this would be it. I am caring for him and giving him every reason to trust in me. I am caring for Samuel and helping him to remain supportive of Saul. At the same time, I am reminding you that you did not trust me and therefore, the road ahead of you is going to be rough. Don't forget that I can and must be trusted.

The Question: So, what is going on and what does that mean?

### **3. Three Applications**

#### **A. A lot more than you will ever know.**

There is always a lot more going on than what you and I know and that's a good thing. God is working all things together for good. Even the immediate bad helps create the ultimate good. When something happens, we ask "why". The answer isn't just one thing. God does multiple things all at the same time. The people reject God and God uses their rejection as a means to begin a monarchy, that will not go well, but will result in a King who will go well. God overruled their sin to put into motion a plan that would bring salvation through Jesus. This does not make their sin less sinful; it makes God's grace even more amazing.

Therefore, it should not surprise us that when this ultimate King comes, that he is also rejected. They rejected God as the King because they couldn't see him, so when he showed up as the King they could see, they rejected him too. But just as God used their rejection to begin the monarchy, he overruled the rejection of Christ, and his death on the cross as the means by which our sins could be pardoned. Who would have thought? God is in the details and is carrying out the details of your life for a glorious end. Stay the course.

#### **B. Do the next right thing.**

This was true for Samuel and for Saul. Samuel was told by God what he needed to know for the next step. The same thing was true for Saul. Both were players in a very big plan. Neither understood the entire plan, but both had a part to play and that play involved doing the next right thing. This pandemic has been going on for 2 years now. We all feel a quart low. We have lost some good people. We are tired of the instability and uncertainty. We are tired of conflicting information and tired of arguments. But, at the same time, this has been a refining process. We have stopped making assumptions about next year, next month or even next week. All we can do is in the moment, do the next right thing. Look at the decision(s) that is/are before you. What is the most God-honoring response you can have? What is the most God-honoring thing you can do? If God is in the details, and He is, He will give you the grace to do the next right thing.

#### **C. Trust God, no matter what.**

Your life is in his hands. Look at those hands. Can you trust hands with nail-scars? What do those mean? They mean love. They mean sacrifice. They mean forgiveness. They mean affection. They mean grace. They mean providence. The amazing providences of God display the amazing mercies of God.