**SAMUEL ANOINTS SAUL**

 1 Samuel 10:1-27 Key Verse: 10:1

*“Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul’s head and kissed him, saying, ‘Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?’”*

In the last passage, we saw how God orchestrated the events that led to Saul meeting Samuel, starting from Saul being sent to look for his father’s lost donkeys. Saul was the man God had chosen to be Israel’s first king. Israel’s motive in asking for a king was not right, which Samuel, Israel’s spiritual leader and shepherd, understood very well. Nonetheless, the Lord told Samuel to listen to the people and anoint the one the Lord chose. Fundamentally, the Lord had compassion on his people; he heard his people’s cry and would lead them step by step, even with a king.

From what we saw last week, Saul showed great potential. In today’s passage, we see how Saul is anointed as king by Samuel and then publicly confirmed as king. Saul’s anointing is accompanied by some very interesting and miraculous signs. These signs can teach us spiritual realities, about the anointing we have from the Holy Spirit, and about how God equips those who receive his mission. Let’s pray that we may be empowered by God’s anointing.

1. Signs of God’s anointing (1-13)

After Samuel met Saul and the joined his dinner party, as we saw in last week’s passage, they sat on the roof and talked for a long time. The next morning, as Saul was getting ready to go back to his father, Samuel sent Saul’s servant on ahead so that he and Saul could be alone. This is the moment where today’s passage starts. Look at Chapter 10 verse 1. *“Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul’s head and kissed him, saying, ‘Has not the Lord anointed you ruler over his inheritance?’”* The ritual of anointing someone by pouring oil on them was the way God gave for those who had been chosen for an important calling, to make it official. Priests were anointed with oil to begin their life of service, and now Saul was anointed to open the era of his kingship. Samuel did this in obedience to the Lord’s command, despite his misgivings about Israel’s wanting a king just to be like all the other nations.

From what Samuel says here, you can see that he understands the true meaning of anointing. He says, “Has not the Lord anointed you ruler over his inheritance?” Samuel is saying that the anointing he gave Saul with oil is just a sign—that the real anointing has been done by the Lord when he chose Saul. The Lord’s anointing is not just a ritual but a conveying of blessing and power that is necessary to carry out one’s mission. Without the Lord’s anointing, Saul could by no means be king over the Lord’s people.

How did Saul react at this moment to suddenly being anointed as King of Israel? The passage doesn’t record him saying anything; maybe he was silent because he was just overwhelmed. Samuel knew that Saul needed to be built up in faith that God had indeed chosen him. So in verses 3 through 6, Samuel gives Saul directions about where to go after he leaves, with prophecies about three specific encounters Saul will have on his way. Each of them is a sign that proves God’s choice of Saul and demonstrates some aspect of God’s gifts and calling.

The first is in verse 2. *“When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel’s tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, ‘The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, “What shall I do about my son?”’”* Samuel predicts how many people Saul will meet in a certain place and exactly what they will say. There is no human way Samuel could know this. It is a divine revelation to him from God who sees and knows everything. The content of this sign also has a meaning; the donkeys being found by someone else indicates the change that was happening in Saul’s life. Saul’s business with the donkeys as his father’s son was concluded, and now it is time for Saul to turn to the business of the kingship.

The second direction and sign are given in verses 3 and 4. *“Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to worship God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine.****4****They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them.”* Meeting worshipers bringing their offerings could remind Saul that Israel’s purpose as God’s people was to worship God. Worshiping God should be the goal of everything he, as king, would lead them to do. Also, the worshipers gave Saul a portion of their offerings. This could teach Saul that as king, he would be God’s representative, and his portion from now on from the Lord.

The third sign would be the most unusual and the most meaningful. Look at verse 5. *“After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying.”* On his journey, it seems like Saul would get dangerously close to enemy territory—where there was a Philistine outpost. But interestingly, the place was called “Gibeah of God”, so it was also associated with worship of the Lord—it says there was a high place there. There, Saul would meet a procession of prophets who were prophesying as they walked, accompanied by musical instruments.

When we think of prophets in the Old Testament, we mainly think of the most famous speaking and writing prophets whose words are recorded in the Bible for us to read. But these were not the only ones. In every age, the Lord gifted people to speak his words and predict the future prophetically. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, they would prophesy and would even prophesy to music! We know that many of the prophecies and psalms we read as poetry in the Bible were originally set to music.

When Saul came into the presence of these musical prophets, something incredible would happen. Look at verse 6: *“The Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.”* And this is exactly what happened, as it says a little further down in verse 10: *“When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying.”* I wonder what Saul’s singing voice sounded like as he prophesied; maybe it was very deep.

Why did God do this to Saul? What is the meaning of it? First of all, this shows that Saul’s anointing was the work of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit gave him, at least temporarily, the gift of prophecy. We can learn more about the meaning of this prophesying from people’s reaction to it. Look at verse 11. *“When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, ‘What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?’”* Here we see that, for people who knew Saul before, prophesying like this was the last thing they expected to find him doing. We know he was normally very quiet. Verse 12 tells that this line, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”, became from that point on a saying in Israel, a quote that people would repeat. Whenever someone suddenly showed a skill in something they had never been seen to do before, people would say, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” It means something like, “I didn’t know he had it in him.”

This sign of prophecy also shows that, by his Spirit, the Lord would be able to use Saul in ways that were beyond his natural gifts and abilities. And in Christ, the same Holy Spirit can work in us to empower us to do things beyond our own ability. We know that at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and empowered Jesus’ apostles to speak in new languages they had never spoken in before. It happens among us; I heard that the Holy Spirit gave Ester the gift of improvisational piano playing at a time in her life when she was almost despairing. Who knows who among us might also be “among the prophets”! It might be the person we least expect.

This power of the Spirit was also indicated by Samuel’s words in verse 6 when he predicted these events, saying, “You will be changed into a different person.” Now, this doesn’t mean that the Lord would completely change or override Saul’s personality, except maybe for that short time while he was prophesying. But it is true that the Holy Spirit’s work changes people. The passage also describes this change in verse 9 when it says “God changed Saul’s heart.”

Has God changed your heart? When we come to Christ in repentance, the Lord does change our heart, softening it and opening it to his grace where formerly it was hardened in sin. It is the testimony of everyone who has been touched by Jesus’ grace, that they say “I am not the same!” My favorite verse for expressing this is the well-known 2 Corinthians 5:17: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* The Lord gave Saul a taste of this changing power. For us, knowing how the Holy Spirit can make us new, knowing how the Lord can use anyone who has been called in Christ for anything he has in mind, we should not feel any sense of limitation about our life, regardless of what we have succeeded or failed at in the past. If Saul can be among the prophets, anybody can.

1. Saul is presented to Israel (14-27)

How did Saul respond to these amazing developments in his life? Once again, he was very quiet about it. In verse 14, Saul meets his uncle, who asks where he has been. Saul tells him about looking for the donkeys and meeting Samuel, but he only says that Samuel told him the donkeys had been found—as if that was the only important thing that happened! Why didn’t Saul say anything about being anointed as king of all Israel? In this case, I think there is some wisdom to Saul’s silence. Because he knows that this choice is all from God, there is nothing Saul needs to do to promote himself. Samuel had told him to wait for the next step, and Saul is doing exactly that.

But news of this magnitude was never meant to stay a secret. After his personal anointing as king, Saul needed to be presented to Israel publicly. Once again, it was Samuel who arranged this, calling all of Israel together again at Mizpah like he did in Chapter 7 when they first turned back to the Lord. When the tribes gathered, Samuel reminded them of the Lord who brought them out of Egypt, and clearly said that their asking for a king was a rejection of the Lord. But then Samuel had them present themselves by tribes and clans for choosing a king.

The king was to be selected by a process of casting lots. This was a seemingly random process, kind of like drawing straws. The lots would be cast first to choose one tribe out of the twelve, and then narrow it down by clan and then family and finally to the one God had chosen. But wait! Hasn’t Saul already been chosen as king and anointed? Then why would Samuel do this casting of lots, when the laws of probability tell us that it’s much more likely that someone who is not Saul will end up holding the lucky straw? It’s because Samuel knew that Israel needed to see directly that this king was God’s choice, not his choice. So, with great faith, Samuel started the process of casting lots, believing that the Lord would make the lot come out to Saul—and the Lord did exactly that.

The lot fell to Saul, and—wait, where was Saul? Saul was not where he was supposed to be with his clan and family. To the people’s credit, when they couldn’t find Saul, they inquired of the Lord as to where he was. This shows they believed that the Lord had indeed chosen who was to be their king, regardless of this difficulty in finding him. Their assumption was that Saul was simply late in arriving, because their question to the Lord was “Has the man come here yet?” But Saul wasn’t late—he was hiding! What can we say about this? Here, Saul’s character is shown to be shy to a fault, beyond modesty to the point of timidity. He knows this is the time to step forward into God’s calling, but he is trying to avoid it. But nobody can hide from God’s calling for long. When the people inquired of the Lord, the Lord, who sees everything, gave away Saul’s hiding place. When they asked if Saul was there yet, Lord said, “Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies.” You can play hide-and-seek with God if you want to, but he will always win.

So they found Saul and brought him out and everyone got their first look at their new king. Verse 23 says, *“as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others.”* We already knew about Saul’s height, but here we see the impression it made on his countrymen. Samuel said, *“Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.”* (24) Physical characteristics are not necessarily a sign of God’s calling, but here Samuel presents Saul’s appearance as such a sign, and the people were very excited that God had given them such an impressive-looking king. They shouted “Long live the king!”, an expression that so many people have used in so many countries all throughout history.

So now, for better or for worse, Israel is more like other countries. But Samuel was too good a shepherd to just let the people run with their worldly idea of a king. In the ceremony, Samuel takes one super important action. Look at verse 25a. *“Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord.”* For God’s people, choosing a king was not simply to give one person absolute power to do what he pleased. The kingship had rights but also duties—responsibilities. And those rights and duties were not just assumed but written down and kept in a holy place. Israel was to be a people ruled ultimately by God, and that meant that God’s word and law had the final authority, even over the king.

Our previous messages have pointed out that requirements for Israel’s kingship are written in Deuteronomy chapter 17. I’ll quote some of them. The king had to be an Israelite, not a foreigner; he couldn’t tell the people to go back to Egypt. Deuteronomy 17:17 says, *“He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.”* Most important of all, Deuteronomy 17:18-20 say, *“When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests.****19****It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees****20****and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left.”* In those times, it was common for a nation’s leader to portray him- or herself as a god in flesh, far above the level of normal people. And apparently, many people believed that. But God told Israel that their king would be a sinner who needed Bible study to make the right choices. We may not be called to be king of a nation, but even the humblest calling in Christ comes with both blessings and responsibilities, and those are written in the word of God. So we absolutely should do what God ordered the king of Israel to do and read that word all the days of our life and follow it carefully.

We don’t see Saul actually do any official acts as king in this passage. That has to wait for next week. But immediately after his coronation, he began to both gather supporters and to hear the words of detractors. Verse 26 says, *“Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched.”* There were people present who could discern the work of God’s spirit in choosing Saul, and they responded to that with action, volunteering themselves for serving Saul’s government. The verse says they were valiant men, meaning courageous. These would become Saul’s generals and advisors to support him in the battles he would fight for Israel. Men of courage are always needed in the work of God.

There were also detractors of Saul’s kingship, even from the beginning. Verse 27 says, *“But some scoundrels said, ‘How can this fellow save us?’ They despised him and brought him no gifts.”* The author tells us they said this not out of honest curiosity but because they were scoundrels; they are jealous of the power Saul has received and refuse to participate just out of selfishness. To his credit, Saul did not try to punish the people who said these things; He kept silent, giving room for the Lord to be his advocate.

I thought a little more about the detractors’ question, “How can this fellow save us?” By calling him a “fellow”, they indicate that he is a human being just like them, which is true. In fact, Saul could not save them by his own power; he would need God’s help. But God was indeed willing to use Saul greatly to help Israel, as we saw through the signs he gave in today’s passage. We know that later Saul will fall away from grace; but that will be his own responsibility for how he uses the gifts and blessings God gave him. The Lord, for his part, was faithful to give Saul everything he needed for a very important mission.

Lastly, we must remember that no Saul or even David could ultimately save their people, due to the limits of sinful human nature. The only one who can save us eternally is Jesus. Jesus was far above us, in heaven with God the Father, but Jesus came down and took on flesh to become our fellow, sharing our humanity and all its joys and sufferings, so he could provide atonement for our sins and send us the Holy Spirit to make us new.

Today, we learned about God’s anointing of Saul to equip him for the role of Israel’s king. The gospel teaches that the true anointing from the Lord is the gift of the Holy Spirit, which we receive through faith in Christ. This anointing can empower us to do greater things for God and his people than we imagined we could do. May God help us to believe that God will use us by his anointing and courageously join in his work as he moves our hearts.