

## Our God Reigns

1Samuel 9-10

Something that I have seen before but never tried myself is using a pottery wheel.

I find it mesmerizing to watch.

It starts with the potter slapping a lump of wet pottery clay on the wheel, which is like a small round table, and patting it down shaping it into what looks to me like a big dinner roll.

Once that is done the potter turns on the wheel which starts the clay spinning in a circle.

With the clay spinning the potter dips his hands in water allowing the excess water to be distributed over the lump of clay.

He then uses his hands to shape the clay into a bowl or pot or something like that.

One of the things that fascinates me about the process is that the centrifugal force of the spinning wheel allows the potter to shape a near perfect circle out of the lump of clay.

He works by carefully applying the right amount of pressure with his hands on both the inside and outside of vessel being shaped to create whatever it is that he is trying to make.

Depending on the skill of the potter some pretty impressive things can be made out of a simple lump of clay.

In our day clay pottery has been mostly relegated to the area of arts and crafts or a hobby.

In the ancient world though pottery was a much more central part of life.

Nearly everyone would have been very familiar with how clay vessels were made and so it is not surprising to find the pottery process in the pages of our bibles.

In the book of Jeremiah in chapter 18 the LORD sends the prophet to the potter's house to give him a picture.

Listen to what it says there (**Jeremiah 18:1-6**)

Or in Isaiah 64:8 where it says, "Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."

Those verses use the illustration of the potter's wheel to show us that God has the right and the ability to shape people according to His plans and purposes.

It is a reminder that the LORD our God Reigns from heaven over the affairs of the earth.

[He can raise up and bring down, He can bring healing and destruction, He removes people from thrones and He establishes them. We see that being practically worked out in our text this morning **1Samuel 9-10**. In these chapters we see the LORD move in order to make a man

named Saul the first king over the people of Israel. What happens to Saul here shows us some important lessons concerning the LORD's work in shaping our lives. Lesson number one is this...]

**Point #1 – God works through ordinary events. (9:1-10)**

The universe in which we live is being constantly governed by the LORD who directs all things by His power and knowledge and according to His good purposes.

The beginning of chapter nine introduces us to a man named Kish of the tribe of Benjamin.

Verse one calls him 'a man of standing' which likely means he was fairly well off and thought well of in his community.

Some commentators think it also implies he was a man bravery and valor on the battlefield.

Kish according to verse 2 had a son who was an "impressive young man...a head taller than anyone else" in Israel.

Like many people of his time Kish owned some donkeys which were important animals to everyday life in those days.

One day those donkeys got it into their heads to take an unauthorized vacation from the farm.

Given their value, there is only one thing to do and that is to go and look for them.

Kish sends his son Saul after the animals.

Looking for lost animals is about as ordinary event as you can get and God is working through it.

Saul and his servant looked for several days covering a substantial amount of territory and using up their food supply.

Saul tells his servant that it's time to head home, but the place where he makes that decision is close by a town where "a man of God" lives and the servant just happens to know that.

Saul in verse 7 expresses the concern that they have nothing to offer, but the servant just happens to have a small bit of silver which seems to be enough in the young man's mind according to verse 10.

What do we have then?

We have some lost donkeys, a father who tells his son to go look for them, a good but unsuccessful effort, and some pocket change which leads them go and look for Samuel to hear from the LORD.

A series of ordinary events that causes Saul to seek God.

[One of the significant things the LORD used in my life to bring me to an understanding of salvation by faith alone in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was corn detasseling.

It was my first summer job, it only lasted a few weeks, but God worked it out so that someone I was working with started a chain of events that resulted in me hearing and believing the gospel about six or seven months later. I have the hope of eternal life because of corn detasseling, amazing!]

I would encourage you to take some time and reflect on your life and think carefully about significant moments that seemed routine at the time.

An unexpected phone call, a broken down car, meeting someone in a store or while out for a walk, an off handed remark that stays with you, and alike.

Ordinary events that turned out to be life changing moments.

In addition to looking backwards we should also be looking ahead.

Who knows what is around the corner. Who knows what doing ordinary things for the glory of God will do in the world?

[The truth is we have no idea, but the LORD does. We need to live like we believe that! I confess that is a struggle for me because it is very easy to fall into a pattern of doubt, it is very easy to be blind the significance of ordinary things in the hands of a sovereign God. So let's remind ourselves of this amazing truth every day. Let's wake up every day and ask the LORD to open our eyes to His glory in the ordinary. In Saul's case looking for lost donkeys led him to seek the LORD. That brings us to a second lesson which is that...]

### **Point #2 – Seeking the Lord can lead to unexpected places. (9:11-24)**

Because God's thoughts and ways are far different from our own we can often be surprised by the plans that He has for us.

According to verses 11-14 they took their tiny bit of silver headed into town and met some women on their way to collect water who were able to point them in Samuel's direction.

Samuel is not the least bit surprised the meet Saul (**Verses 16-17**).

God made it all happen.

Now Saul's expectation is to take this tiny amount of silver and give it to Samuel and maybe he can find out where the donkeys are and then go home.

Listen to what happens in **verses 19-20**.

Instead of spending the silver he gets invited to supper (a good thing since they had run out of food), he is told the donkeys were found, and he is told that "all the desire of Israel" has turned to him.

Saul's reaction in verse 21 is one of humility and surprise.

This has all come out of left field for him.

Verses 22-24 tell us that Samuel has Saul sit at the head of a banquet with thirty guests and then presents him with a choice piece of meat which he had set aside the day before on account of his foreknowledge of everything that would happen.

He goes to the prophet tired, hungry, with a bit of silver he borrowed from his servant in order to seek God's help in finding some donkeys and ends up as Samuel's guest of honour at a banquet.

That is amazing turn of events.

[This sort of thing happens all the time in the Bible. Do you think Noah ever imagined building a giant boat? Do you think Abraham ever expected to leave his father's house and go to an unknown land? When Moses grew up in Pharaoh's house did he predict turning into a shepherd in Midian? When he was a shepherd in Midian would he ever have thought he would go back to Egypt in order to be used by the LORD to free the Israelites from slavery? I seriously doubt it. God takes them to unexpected places.]

That happens to Saul here and it can happen to anyone who is seeking the LORD.

This is one of those passages in the bible that we need to be careful with because it would be very easy to turn this into a lesson that says, "Seek the Lord and win the lottery."

That would miss the point entirely. Yes good things happen to Saul here, but there is also a huge responsibility placed on him and there are great challenges ahead.

God's good purposes can look very different from person to person, and they often work out differently than we could ever guess.

[That is why the Bible tells us in the book of James to use the phrase, "If the Lord wills" when talking about the future. It is good to make plans that is the way of wisdom, but we must always accept that only God knows the future and if we set our hearts on seeking Him it could take us to places we would never have guessed. That is what happens to Saul, God chooses him to be the king of Israel and that decision shows us a third lesson. Here is the third lesson...]

### **Point #3 – Being chosen by God changes a person's life. (9:25-10:16)**

It is impossible to encounter the power of the Holy Spirit and remain the same.

*After the banquet wraps up Saul and Samuel hangout on Samuel's roof for a bit chatting.*

In ancient Israel the roof was used much like a back porch is in our day.

The next day just before Samuel sends Saul on his way we read this in **10:1-8**

Notice there are three signs that will be given to Saul. 1 – Men will tell you about the donkeys, 2- You will meet three men going to Bethel, and 3 – You will prophesy with the prophets at Gibeah (which was Saul's hometown).

Three is significant in the Bible and particularly the Old Testament.

Three fold repetition is often used for emphasis and to show superiority.

Having one sign is good, having two is better, and three is a way of saying to Saul that he can be absolutely certain that God has chosen him to be the king of Israel.

Now listen to what it says in verses 9-12.

He is a changed man and even the people in his hometown see it.

Except for the visible sign of prophecy the text is silent about what exactly this change is, it simply says his heart changed.

So far everything we have learned about this young man is positive.

He is physically impressive, he demonstrates love and obedience to his father, he shows humility, and he listens to what Samuel says.

There is no sense that the change is negative and so it is likely that whatever the change is it has come upon him for the purpose of enabling him to fulfill the role of king which God almighty has chosen him for.

It is impossible to stay the same after having such an experience of being overwhelmed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[I know it is dangerous to use a food illustration at this stage in the service with a pot luck happening afterwards, but I'm going to test our resolve and do it anyway. How many people like Jell-O? I'm a fan myself. To make Jell-O you boil some water and then mix in the powder stir it until it's dissolved and put it in the fridge until it becomes a delicious semi-solid substance. Once that powder goes into the water it is changed with no going back.]

In a much more serious and significant way that is how it is for someone chosen by Lord.

When that realization becomes clear and when the power of the Holy Spirit is experienced like this it changes a person.

It is impossible to stay the same after that.

That is true here of Saul being changed for the purpose of being a king, how much more is that true of someone changed for the purpose of salvation.

When the Spirit really and truly opens our eyes to our sin and how wretched we are, when He teaches us about the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and how He died to take away our sins, when He shows us the glory of an empty tomb, and gives us the assurance of the return of Jesus to raise the dead and free the whole of creation from the tyranny of rebellion against God we are forever changed.

I can think of no bigger change than to be changed from being spiritually dead to spiritually alive.

From being a child of the devil to a child of God.

[That happens because Almighty God chooses to act in your life. Now don't waste your life as some do wringing your hands and wondering whether or not God really chose you. No, instead ask yourself "Am I really changed" because that is what happens when you're chosen. Listen, what this text clearly shows us is that the LORD is in charge. He is working through ordinary events, He is the one doing unexpected things, and He is the one that changes lives. That brings us to one final lesson and it is about how God reigns. In 10:17-27 Samuel announces to the nation that Saul is the king they have asked for and what is said here reminds us that...]

**Point #4 – God governs His people with grace. (10:17-27)**

Failure and foolishness are common themes among the people of God and yet He is patient, willing to forgive, restore, and point us to what is right and good.

Verse 17 tells us that Samuel summons the people of Israel to 'Mizpah'.

That is the same place he called the people many years before when he challenged them to be fully devoted to the LORD which was followed by God giving them victory over their enemies and peace for a number of years.

"Mizpah" means 'Watchtower' which makes this the perfect place to issue the warning of verses 18-19.

He reminds them that their desire for 'king' was a rejection of the LORD.

To be confronted about unrepentant sin is an act of grace because it gives us another opportunity to turn from things that God hates.

After reminding them of what their desire for a king means, Samuel proceeds to go through a process to select a king.

Most commentators think he casts lots here (which is sort of like rolling dice).

That might sound kind of random to us, but we need to remember that this process is being determined by God.

After a several rounds the lot falls to Saul, but no one can find him because he is hiding among the baggage according to verse 22.

Not exactly the picture of a valiant warrior, but even so we read this in **10:23-24**.

His height and appearance are exactly what the people want in a king.

The whole feel to this is ominous.

There is just the sense here that even though the people are happy on the day Saul is made king, they won't be happy for long.

They are about to get what they deserve but even here there is a significant measure of grace given to both the people and to Saul, listen to **verses 25-27**.

You see it is not the asking for a king that is the problem, it is the kind of king they are asking for that is the problem.

Samuel reminds them about what God's word says about being a godly king. He is certainly referring to Deuteronomy 17 here.

That passages says the king must be an Israelite, he must not own many horses, he must not have many wives, he is not to lead the people back to Egypt, he is to write out by hand his own copy of God's law, and read it every day.

That is amazing grace.

Even though in their hearts the people have set themselves up for trouble God still graciously calls them and their new king towards something better.

On top of that even though Saul seems a bit cowardly hiding amongst the bags, God moves in the heart of some of the men to be devoted to him, and finally we see Saul being wise enough to stay silent before his detractors.

All of this is by God's grace.

The people deserve to go right into disaster, but the LORD is gracious to them.

*That is the reason brothers and sisters we can rejoice in the fact that Our God Reigns.*

If we got what we deserved there would only be sorrow for us before the throne of the LORD.

It is because of His kindness and mercy that *He works all things for the good of those that love Him and are called according to His purpose.*

It is because of His grace that He guides and directs our lives in ways we would not have imagined.

It is because of His grace that He chooses us before the foundation of the world to be changed into the likeness of His dear Son.

It is by His grace that Our God Reigns.