

Long Live the King?

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we're going to go back this morning to the chapter that we read in 1 Samuel chapter 10, because we're looking at different kind of steps in the Old Testament, some of the major steps in the Old Testament, and we're looking at why really God has given us the Old Testament and how it leads up to the coming of Jesus.

And recognizing the importance of the whole Bible and including the Old Testament, we know that it's there partly because it gives us beginnings, it tells us about beginnings, and we all need to know where we come from.

And that's important in an individual and in a cosmic way. And he tells us about that and who created this world, we saw that with the kids. And also he explains from the beginning, God does in His word, where it all went wrong.

And we know that, don't we, from the early chapters of Genesis and what that means for us, and the reality of good and evil in the world in which we live. But it also speaks about the unmistakable plan that God always was involved with His people, that He breaks into history, that He reveals His purposes and His commitment to save people, to redeem people, to destroy the power of evil and death in our lives.

And it's also about preparing for the coming of Jesus, who would be the one who would enable that to happen. So for me, this is, you may find this a really poor example, but it's a little bit like the cooking of a really tremendous dish, okay?

[1 : 3 7] Which I receive when it's all prepared and I sit down at a table to eat. Now, I don't know all the individual ingredients that have gone into preparing that dish and when they were added and why they were added, what flavor they bring.

I don't know how long the dish was cooked, but I do know it all comes together to make a fantastic tasting meal, and it tells me about my needs to eat, my appetites and the things that I long for and love and desire.

Now, that's a very imperfect illustration, but maybe it begins to help us understand that the Old Testament is like the preparation of a beautiful meal, and Jesus Himself is that meal that it prepares us and it readies us for the coming of Jesus.

Now, we don't necessarily understand all the different ingredients of the Old Testament or the timings of God or the necessity for every part of that story to be in the Old Testament, but we do know that it points us forward and prepares us for the coming of Jesus.

We do know that it tells us about God as the Creator, as the maker of the meal as it were, and it also tells us about myself and about my own appetites and needs, and it reflects my need of a Savior and of His grace.

[2 : 5 7] So in many ways, the Old Testament teaches about God and about the coming of Jesus and about myself, and it tells you about your... You might think there's not much in the Old Testament for you, but you know, people in the Old Testament are no different from people today, and so there's... it has a great deal to teach us.

And up till now in the series, we've looked at beginnings where it went wrong. We've looked at the covenant with Abraham, God's commitment to redeem a people. We've seen the slavery in Egypt, the Exodus, with the Passover, with the shedding of blood, pointing forward to Jesus and His shedding of blood.

We've got the promise of a homeland, land flowing with milk and honey, the ten words of the commandments of how to live as those who are rescued and redeemed by God's people.

And we've got the story of the judges, which John looked at last week, with all the chaos of the judges and the people just like a rollercoaster, they were near God far away from Him.

It was chaos. And then, and now, we come to the kings, okay?

[4 : 05] And what this reveals is about us and about the Old Testament people, humanity needs a king, okay? Humanity needs a king.

Every person needs a king. Now, I'm not speaking in narrow, monarchical terms per se. It was always very evident maybe this week with all the news about the royal family and the sadness of their experiences.

But I'm speaking in broader terms about your need and my need and society's need and individual's needs and the Old Testament people's needs for an inspirational leader, for a champion, for a Lord, for a king, for a God, for a father figure.

And that's really what this is all about. It's about humanity needing a king. And the paradoxical story of the Old Testament and of God's people in the Old Testament is that they rebelled against their king, God, who was their lord and who was their redeemer.

And they constantly set up idols and earthly kings made in the image that they wanted all through their history. And they often rejected God's model for them.

[5 : 18] We're going to look at that a little bit this morning. Because we recognize that it was always actually, it was always God's plan for His people to have a king.

It was always God's plan. He wanted and He would provide them with a king. In Genesis 29, He made this promise when He was talking about the various tribes, the scepter, that is the king scepter, will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from beneath his feet until he to whom it belongs shall come, and the obedience of the nation shall be his.

So it points to Judah being the tribe which have a king, and that points forward to Jesus, who would be the king and who usher in his kingdom.

And we also know in Deuteronomy, as God speaks here to the people, God says to them, when you enter the land, the Lord your God is giving you, you shall take possession of it and be settled in it and you shall say, let us have a king over us, like all the nations around us.

Be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from your own fellow Israelites, not a foreigner and so on. Then He says, when He takes the throne of the kingdom, He is to write for Himself in a scroll a copy of this law taken from that of the Levitical priests.

[6 : 41] So God even gave instructions about the kind of king that they should have. And He was to be a vice king, not like all the different kings around them that were despotic and demanded all the power and glory.

Their king was to be a king under God's authority, different from all the nations around them. He was not to, there's a great chapter that I'll mention later, where it explains all the wrong things that a king would do, and He was not to abuse His power.

He was not to return people to slavery. He wasn't to have many wives. He wasn't to enrich Himself. He was to have a heart for God, and He was to be equal with His brothers.

So the model that God had was very different from the nations around them. And you know that speaks forward for us. I'm going to apply it as we go along today, that we have come as Christians to know the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we are His people, and we are His family with God as our heavenly Father. And that's the ultimate fulfillment of what God has always wanted for His people, always His plan that we would know Jesus as the King of our hearts, the King of our lives, and the King of our church.

[8 : 01] And He's a different kind of king, isn't He? Just like God wanted the Old Testament kings of Israel to be different. Jesus is different, a million fold, isn't He? He's not like any other power broker that we know.

He's the King that came to die. He's the King that came to serve. And as His people, we also should be different because we follow the King of Kings, different from all the nations around us.

So God always planned a king for His people. But the people of Israel at this point in the story we read, and we only read a bit of it, they wanted a king for all the wrong reasons.

See in the chapter before, two chapters before we read, so the elders of Israel gathered together and saw that Ramah, they said to Him, You're old and Your sons don't follow our ways, Your ways.

Now appoint as a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have. And we also read in chapter 10, verse 23 and 24, that they said, then they ran to Samuel, the prophet, and said to Him, they introduced Him to Saul.

[9 : 14] And when He stood among the people, He was taller than any of the other people, but from the shoulders upwards. And Samuel said to the people, Do you see whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like Him among all the people.

And all the people shouted, Long live the King! And so we find that the people wanted a king for all the wrong reasons. They said, Look, the judges period has been a nightmare.

And Samuel, you're an old prophet, you're not going to be here much longer and we don't like Your sons, we want a king, a king like all the other nations around us have.

And the reality was that they were rejecting God as their king. God goes on to speak about that, and Samuel does as well, we'll mention that later as well.

But they rejected God's rule and authority over them. They thought a monarch, a king, other than God, would give them prosperity, protection, and the power that they didn't think God could give them.

[10 : 17] And what's interesting is that they were, in other words, they were wanting what God already promised them, but they wanted it on their own terms, with their own king, just like the nations around them.

God wasn't good enough. They spoke to Samuel about that, and Samuel warned them in chapter 8, you can go and read it at some time when you have time, verses 10 to 18.

He tells them, if they want a king like everyone else, this is what their king will do. They demanded a king, even though it was for the wrong reasons.

And you know there's a great lesson there for us in terms of our relationship with God, is that we too can want to be like all the other nations, like everybody else around us and not trust God.

We think God's not enough for us, that we need to do things our own way. We need to make our own plans. We need to have authority over our own lives, and that God isn't really worth trusting.

[11 : 19] We want the prosperity and the protection and the power to live our lives, but God isn't doing it for us.

We want to do it our own way. But in so doing, all the desires we have, God will give us them as we align ourselves to His will, and all the things we're looking for in life without God, God promises when we follow Him and do things His way.

Sinful selfishness is never good for us at whatever level. You might shrink this right down to macro level in your own life. It might not be in the same context as the kings, but it's so easy for us to want something that God promises, but want it for the wrong reasons and the wrong time and in the wrong way.

But listen, this is very interesting. God gave them what they wanted. God gave them what they wanted.

Do you see verse 24, whom the Lord has chosen, there is none like Him among the people, long live the King.

[12 : 42] God gave them what they wanted, even though their motives for wanting a king at this time was wrong. He gave them someone who was impressive on the outside.

Because you had a son named Saul, a handsome young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than everyone else.

That's what they wanted. They wanted someone who was big and strong and had a six pack and was going to lead the world and was taller than everyone else, a really impressive leader. That's what they wanted, and that's what He gave them.

That's what He gave them. And he's anointed at the beginning of chapter 10 by God. God anoints him.

And in chapter 12, when Samuel's last speech, it's interesting, Samuel kind of sums it up beautifully. He says, when you saw Nephesh, king of the Ammonites, was moving against him, you said to me, no, we want a king to rule over us, even though the Lord your God was your king.

[13 : 46] Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for. See, the Lord has set a king over you. You see that? Samuel speaks about the fact their desire was wrong for having a king, and yet God gave them a king, and this was the one that he appointed.

The kind of king they wanted, he gave them. This is interesting, I think, for us, because it didn't mean that he approved of what they were doing at that time.

It didn't mean they approved of their motives, but he gave them what they wanted. And in his mercy, he used Saul as a king for them to defeat the Philistines and to protect them and to give them that kingdom that they wanted.

God gave them what they wanted. Now, I'm going to apply that again as we go through in our own lives, you know? God sometimes gives us what we want.

We can be impressed by things, impressive things on the outside. That's what they were. They were impressed with what Saul was like on the outside. It's actually very interesting to compare them with their next king, David, don't we?

[15 : 00] He was a little squirt, he was a little shepherd boy, he wasn't strong and muscly, and yet he was the man after God's own heart. But we haven't, Thomas will probably deal with that next week when we look at David.

But we can also be really impressed with what we see on the outside and wanting to be like everyone else. And sometimes we chase after that.

What's really impressive to everybody else and what looks good. And we might even pray for that, but at the same time be rejecting God's way and rejecting God's purposes.

But can I say, be very careful what you ask for and even what you pray for, because God granting your request, God answering your prayer, isn't always about Him blessing what you're asking for.

It might be to expose your obstinacy and it might be that He wants to show you your heart and expose that your way isn't the best way.

[16 : 06] And that's a really great Old Testament lesson that we can take for our own lives. I remember years ago watching a film. I don't know what film it was, can't remember anything else about it.

But all I remember was there was a little boy in this film, probably about 10 or 11 years old, and he was smoking a cigarette and his dad caught him smoking a cigarette in the back garden.

And he thought he was really going to be up for it. He was going to get punished for smoking a cigarette in the back garden. But his dad said, come on in, son. No, come on in by the fire.

And he took him down by the fire side, he sat him down and he said, now you're like a young man here and he broke out two big fat cigars.

And he said, now you're a man and you're smoking a cigarette. Why don't you smoke a cigar with me by the fire side? And he cut off the front of it and he gave his son a big fat cigar, this 12-year-old son, and he lit it up and his son said, no, I don't want to.

[17 : 05] No, no, no, you smoke the cigarette. Give you a big cigar to smoke. And he lit it up and he said, now take a good big suck here. And of course the father was smoking a cigar, isn't this beautiful, isn't this great?

And the boy was going greener and greener and feeling sicker and sicker, he said, I can't smoke anymore. You go on, finish it off. And of course the moral of that story is, of course, that the child never smoked again because his father gave him what he thought he wanted, what he thought was cool and what looked good on the outside.

But of course it was a disaster. But as parents we know that sometimes, don't we? Sometimes we step back and we have to give our, I'll be careful what I say here, but sometimes we have to, we just recognize that people need to make their own mistakes and really that's what God is saying here.

But He doesn't want that for us, but that is sometimes the only way we learn. God gave them what they wanted. And we see the kind of king that Saul was in the story of Saul as it unfolds.

We don't have time to look at that today. If you have time go and read it. It's very interesting because we see that God grieves ultimately over Saul and over his life.

[18 : 27] God does use him, it's amazing. But I wonder if we get a hint about the character of Saul in verse 22, even in this chapter when he's anointed. In verse 22 it says, So they inquired again of the Lord, is there a man still to come when the Lord said, Behold, he's hidden himself among the luggage.

Now it's just a hint, isn't it? But here's this impressive six-pack tall big man. And yet when he's been asked to, as anointed as king, he's timid and he's afraid and he's hiding and he lacks the identity and the trust in God to take up this mantle.

And what we see in poor Saul's life is he's vain and he modelled himself exactly on all the other kings who demand popularity, who demand to be well known, who craves to be accepted.

He lacks the confidence of being anointed by God. He lacks the trust in God and he tries to do things his own way and then tries to patch up and say, No, I was trying to obey God honestly.

You know, in chapter 13, when they're facing the Philistines, he doesn't wait for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice, which was the priestly role.

[19 : 49] He does it himself, knocks Samuel out of the way and say, I'll be the priest, I'll do it. And then he makes a foolish vow later on that is crazy and then in chapter 15, when he's tasked to lead the Israelites to destroy the Amalekites in that solemn and frightening chapter, he doesn't do what God commands.

He leaves bits out and he tries to patch up by saying, Oh, I was really, I was really just worshiping God. But God's grieved by him because he doesn't have a new heart.

And when David comes along, we know that he's murderously jealous, isn't he? He's become that tyrant. He always demands to be accepted.

He reminds me a little bit of Prince Charming in Shrek. You know, with Prince Charming, who's always, his plans are being thwarted and the people don't really like him and Shrek keeps getting in the way and all these kind of things.

And I think there's that insecurity about Saul as well at a much deeper level. And that speaks about human nature, doesn't it?

[20 : 58] And it speaks about us when we love ourselves and when we try and usurp God and try and even please God by, but at the same time by being disobedient, by rejecting his salvation in Christ, when we're pursuing popularity at the expense of obedience to God, when we know better than God, when obedience is well down the list of our priorities, we can learn from Saul.

God was grieved by Saul's life. He ripped the kingdom from him, said the kingdom will not be established with your children and your generation. He was grieved. He repented of him, that just means he was deeply grieved and yet we see how patient and merciful and time patient he was with Saul, but he ultimately seems to be rejected.

But the Old Testament gives us pictures of people that's a mirror to our own hearts, the sinfulness of our own hearts that needs to be changed and transformed so that obedience to our Savior and Lord and Jesus matters.

Okay, we come to the last point. You've done very well in sticking with me in a difficult passage when we're only giving a very brief summary.

Is that we see that in this passage also, or in the whole story of the Kings, particularly Saul, God weaves his own purposes into their desires.

[22 : 32] So he takes this, the desires of the Old Testament people, he's a one-eyed king like all the other kings around us, which was a wrong desire at the wrong time and in the wrong way.

He weaves his own purposes into that and he over rules them. And he uses Saul to defeat Israel's enemies, the Philistines and the Amalekites.

He empowers him, as we saw in that passage, that he was anointed and he was given, his heart was changed at one point by the spirit of God that he was given, and he had many opportunities to return to his God.

But he uses the Israelites' wrong motives for seeking a king at that time to prepare them for a king after their own heart, after his own heart, the shepherd boy.

To show them a better way, a servant, shepherd, king. But ultimately even the shepherd boy would fail them.

[23 : 41] And that was to prepare them for the best king, the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ, the shepherd, servant, king.

So we see that the Old Testament in all its progressive steps is teaching us about ourselves, it's teaching us about God, it's teaching us about its purpose and plan, and ultimately bringing us to recognize the centrality of Jesus.

So all through that early history of humanity, it's not all of the history of humanity, it's just the history of God's working among His people, but it brings us to recognize Jesus.

And the intention then of the Old Testament is to expose your need and mind of a Savior, that our hearts, without Christ, are no different from the Israelites or from Saul, that our hearts need to be changed.

We often just look on what's nice on the outside, but we're to seek the God who wants us to recognize our hearts need to be changed, and that is a gift that comes from Him as we put our trust in Him to change the sinfulness of our hearts because of what Jesus has done on our behalf.

[24 : 55] It's to question who rules your life today. Think about it, you know, okay, we don't have a king, maybe we don't even think the politicians rule over us and that's fair enough, but who rules your heart?

Who rules your decision making and mine? Who is it? Is it King Jesus? How high up the priorities of your life is King Jesus?

The Old Testament reveals our longings for protection, for prosperity, and for power to change. And very often we grab these things or grab what we think will give us these things, but at the same time reject God who promises these things as we entrust our hearts and lives to Him.

You might find your sinful cravings unsatisfied. That's because God wants to change your cravings and He wants to give you desires that He promises to satisfy.

Life promises, not death promises, and our sinful cravings always lead to death. So we need to be aware of mimicking the world, the unbelieving world around us.

[26 : 18] As individuals, isn't that so easy for us to do? I just want to be like everybody else. I want all the kind of things that they want. We've got to be aware of mimicking the world as a church and by coveting things that are not the priority that God has for us as a church.

And we have to understand God's mercy and His patience as He dealt with Saul, but not presume on it. Not go from here and say, well, it doesn't matter, I live.

God will forgive me anyway. Isn't that what we say sometimes? God will forgive me anyway. And we presume on His goodness and don't recognize that He empowers us by His Holy Spirit to be changed, to be constantly forgiven, moving forward, transformed into His likeness.

We've moved from death to life as Christians. Christ is the King of kings of our lives and we're called to live it. And if you're not a Christian, can I ask you to consider who is King of your life, to whom you give obedience?

And that might well be just, you might just be self enthroned. You might not think that there's anyone else that you particularly care about or respond to, but it could be just that self enthronement, is it?

[27 : 40] Couldn't it be? Just that I'm the most important. I just make the decisions. I don't rely on anyone else and he says, no, you're created to rely and love and serve the King of kings who left Lory and the throne room and was nailed to a tree to take the wrath and the sin and the death that we deserve.

I do think we can learn from the kings in the Old Testament and there's a lot of complexity in it, but yet there's a clear purpose and progression and plan in God's revelation to us.

Amen. Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer. Lord God, we pray today that you would take your word and that you would bless it to us.

We thank you for it and we know that it is your breathed word, your living word. It is difficult, sometimes you don't understand it, it seems culturally so far away from us and yet we see you working your purposes and your plan.

Bless it to us we pray, anoint us with your spirit as we seek to live your way, not our own way and we know that takes a whole transformation. Lord, I thank you today for this last week that has passed for the seven days of prayer that we've enjoyed every morning and for the times together, sweet and refreshing.

[29 : 06] We pray that you would bless these times, that you would help us to persevere in prayer and that we would see answers to our prayers. I pray Lord God today also and we pray today for trouble in this world that we see so much from people and from nations and kingdoms that have rejected the kingship of Jesus and are going their own way.

And the trouble individually and in families and in communities and in nations, we think of the trouble in Northern Ireland in these days, the renewed trouble.

I grew up in this church, sitting in this church with my dad praying every day and all the ministers in all the churches in the 70s and 80s pleading for peace in Northern Ireland.

And now we find ourselves again praying for an upsurge in the violence they are praying against it and praying for new peace. Pray for what's happening in Myanmar and in Hong Kong and in North Korea where there's just seems to be deep, deep poverty and starvation and despair.

Where evil seems to reign in these places. We pray for King Jesus and for the patience of God as the sovereign. We pray for the gospel to break out in these places and we thank you that one day there will be justice served and righteousness will reign.

[30 : 29] And may we be part of that as God's children who have entered God's kingdom through the only way through Jesus Christ. We ask it in His precious name.

Amen.