

Sunday, October 9th sermon: “King Saul Descends into Paranoia -- Put Not Your Trust in Princes (part 5)”

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS, by John Pittman Hey

1 Samuel 14; Revelation 7:13-17

Samuel warned the Israelites that if they continued to sin, God would destroy both the people and their king.

A king, or any other institution, cannot shield the people from punishment for their sins against God. No one can "institutionalize" justice, peace, and happiness except our Lord Jesus!

King Saul started off well. He was humble, prudent, obedient to God, and brave for his people against the enemy.

But Saul quickly began to wobble, when he disobeyed the commandment regarding the sacrifice. He was afraid the people would desert him in the face of a vast host of the Philistines, and he decided to make an offering in order to keep the people from leaving.

Soon after that, Saul descended into rash behavior, ill-considered actions that provoked the people to sin, and then, in a paranoid manner, seeking to enforce his foolish dictates in order to vindicate himself. The people finally had to put a stop to Saul before he put his own valiant son Jonathan to death for no good reason.

Saul at first sought to consult with the Lord, but the Philistines were in retreat following Jonathan's exploits against the garrison, so Saul did not consult the Lord, but pursued the Philistines.

Saul spoiled that great victory by making a foolish order, that no one eat anything all day during the rush and heat and exertion of the running battle.

This resulted in the people growing weak and faint, and when evening was come, they rushed to kill and eat of the prey they had seized, without draining the blood, which was a gross, notorious sin against God's commandment.

Saul took note of the people's sin, and tried to put a stop to it, but did not acknowledge the crucial part his rash order had played in provoking the people to sin.

Once again, the king's sin led the people into sin, confirming the toxic cycle Samuel had warned would occur between the people and their king. The people sin, the king sins, and each in turn provokes the other to sin, so that the very institution the people created to save them from the consequences of their sin, in fact, makes the sin of the people worse.

Saul then decides to pursue the Philistines into the night, but the priest counsels that he first consult with God. But God will not give Saul an answer.

Saul then descends into a paranoid inquisition. Rather than wait for God to respond, or even drop his plan to consult with God and proceed to pursue the Philistines, Saul decides to seek out who has sinned and caused God to refuse to reply to his question.

Saul makes yet another rash oath: he swears before God to kill whoever has committed the sin. Saul commences an investigation, and soon focuses on his own son Jonathan as the culprit.

Rather than acknowledge the gross sin of the people in eating blood, and Saul's own fault in that matter, Saul was more incensed by the fact that Jonathan had eaten a little honey, not knowing the king's commandment. Saul swore to put Jonathan to death for it!

Saul apparently never learned discretion and the necessity that God's name not be taken in vain in the blurting out of ill-considered oaths to commit acts of violence. Saul ignored the tragic story of Jephthah and his foolish oath to sacrifice the first thing that came out of his house to greet him upon his return from the battle.

Rather than focus on his and his people's obvious sin against God, Saul focuses on some slight against his own foolish order.

Saul's threat to kill his son Jonathan was one step too far for the people. After all, Jonathan was the Lord's instrument to begin the great victory Israel had won that day against the Philistines!

Saul soon found out that his people could swear solemn oaths to God just the same as he could! They foreswore any violence against Jonathan, and Saul had to capitulate to the people's demand.

The people thus lost confidence in their new king, in his judgment and reasonableness.

Saul went from prudence and modesty and humility to unreasonable demands for personal loyalty. He had become in just two years, cranky, vacillating, and paranoid.

How different is our Lord Jesus! He showed Himself to be gentle and prudent. In Luke 4, early in His ministry, the Lord Jesus embraced the kindness, the gentleness, the wisdom and good judgment, that Isaiah had foretold of Messiah.

But the people rejected Christ anyway!

Jesus described how He lays no unreasonable burdens upon His people, for His yoke is easy, and His burden is light! He gives rest to the heavy laden who come to Him by faith!

Jesus has no personality disorders or paranoia, and is not stupid nor cruel to His people! He does not crush the weak and the fearful, but rather He succors them.

It is interesting to note the compassion that Jesus shows for His people's physical needs. He fed the multitudes on multiple occasions, in one case explicitly stating that they were weak with

hunger, and He would not send them home without food, lest they faint on the way. He wrought miracles to ensure the safety of His people from physical want.

Christ was unlike Saul, who issued rash and foolish commandments that served no useful purpose, but deprived the people of sustaining food to eat, and provoked them to sin.

Indeed, Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, who foretold that Messiah would feed His flock like a shepherd, and carry the lambs in His arms, and gently lead those that are with young!

Saul was so preoccupied with his own orders, that he had no feeling of the duty he had toward His people, to have compassion on them, and to treat them with fairness and reasonableness.

In the eternity that is to come, our Good King Jesus does not lose His care for His loved ones. His people will never hunger nor thirst, for, as the Apostle John put it, the Lamb shall feed them!

Saul had to be restrained from killing his own son for a trivial and unintentional slight.

But our Lord Jesus pardons His people for our offenses by His dying for His people!

Our King is our Great God, much mightier than King Saul, yet our King pardons our sins, and He has compassion upon us, because He delights in mercy! Our King subdues our iniquities, and casts our sins into the depths of the sea!

Praise God, nobody ever has to stop Jesus from doing anything rash or foolish or unjust or selfish!

Nobody ever needs to restrain the Savior, or question His judgment or sanity or even reasonableness.

And around this table, we recall and celebrate how our Lord Jesus feeds His people with what we chiefly need – His body and His blood – spiritual food indeed, for our souls!

We do not faint, for our Good King Jesus provides us that Food which gives unto us life eternal!