



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## **The Greatest "Story" Ever Missed**

In the late 1800's, a man by the name of Orator Woodward purchased the Jell-O patent for a couple hundred dollars. After tirelessly marketing it, he came to the conclusion that it was a dead-end product. So he tried to sell the patent to an employee for \$35.00. The employee turned him down cold.

What a mistake!

Six years later, Woodward's company was selling \$1 million worth of Jell-O a year. The unnamed employee missed the chance of a lifetime!

The wristwatch has a similar story. In 1892 American watchmaker Robert Ingersoll had cornered the market on pocket watches. He sold them for \$1.00 a piece. And for nearly twenty years he owned the market. But then he heard of a wild idea of mounting a watch on a person's arm. He scoffed at the suggestion. Why would anyone want to wear a watch on his arm?

Within a couple of years the wristwatch sold in the millions and Ingersoll was bankrupt.

Then there's Hiram Johnson. During the 1920's, Johnson was twice offered to be placed on the Republican ticket as Vice President. Yet, he would hear nothing of it. If he couldn't be president, he wouldn't serve.

Members of his party pleaded with him, telling him that the man whom they were seeking to elect as president probably wouldn't live out his term. And if this occurred, he'd be the President. He still refused—and amazingly what he had been told came to pass. Warren Harding did not live out his term. And Calvin Coolidge became the thirtieth President of the United States.

On account of his pride, Hiram Johnson missed the opportunity of a life-time.

One could go on and on for history is filled with stories of such great "misses." History is full of people who looked at success in the face and yet fell asleep. They stood in the presence of greatness, and yet missed it.

In fact our text is one of the more tragic ones. Saul and his servant were looking for some lost donkeys in and around their home town. The text illustrates the spiritual blindness of Saul who was unacquainted with the things of the Lord.

1 Samuel 9:6, “And he [Saul’s servant] said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can shew us our way that we should go.”

## Finding Samuel

Now, Saul thought that his servant gave good advice, so he set out to find Samuel. It was here on Saul’s approach to Samuel we find that Saul missed the greatest story ever told!

1 Samuel 9:11, “**And as they went up the hill to the city**, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here?”

Recall that Saul and his servant are in the land of Zuph.<sup>1</sup> According to 1 Samuel 1:1 Zuph was the region which housed the city in which Samuel was raised, Ramah. Now on account of geography we are quite certain that the city of this text is not Ramah.<sup>2</sup>

1 Samuel 9:11, “And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here?”

This is where the explanation of verse 9 comes in.

1 Samuel 9:9, “(Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.)”

While for us this qualification is not necessary, for we understand that a seer and a prophet were one in the same in the ancient world, nevertheless I love that Scripture includes such clarifications. For they imply that God never intended this book to be given to a holy man for his eyes only. Rather, it was expected that God's word would be read and understood by all!

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 9:5

<sup>2</sup> Compare Keil and Delizche’s work on 1 Samuel 9:6 (*I & II Samuel*, Volume 2, page 89).

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

Accordingly to any and all who might not be familiar with the expression, *Is the seer here?*, we understand from verse 9 that Saul and his servant were simply inquiring as to the whereabouts of the prophet, Samuel.

1 Samuel 9:12-13, “**And they answered them, and said, He is; behold, he is before you: make haste now, for he came to day to the city; for there is a sacrifice of the people to day in the high place: As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat:** for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him.”

Samuel’s custom was that he would annually tour Israel.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of these visits was to oversee the worship of the people of God, judge between right and wrong, offer a yearly sacrifice, and generally to stay connected with the people. That is what he was doing in this particular city of Zuph.

## The Story

This brings us to the 'Story' that was missed on this occasion.

1 Samuel 9:13, “As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him.”

It is obvious from this text that Saul and his servant arrived at a holy time in the life of this city. What was going on was something into which angels longed to look. What was it?

We are clued into the occasion from the declaration that there was a sacrifice scheduled for the city that day<sup>4</sup> AND the repetition of three important words. Notice the text again:

1 Samuel 9:13, “As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice<sup>5</sup>; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him.”

What are the repeated words?

"Eat!"

Samuel had come to this city to bless and so possibly offer<sup>6</sup> NOT just any old sacrifice. NO! He was there

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<sup>3</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 7:16-17

<sup>4</sup> It amazes me that most commentators ignore this phraseology and assume that the verbiage implies a local, religious feast. Biblically speaking, a sacrifice is something offered by a priest on an altar. In this context, there is only one sacrifice that could be in mind here.

<sup>5</sup> In 1 Samuel 13:8-10 this involved the offering of a sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Samuel 9:13 is the only mention of a priest "blessing the sacrifice." Accordingly, there is wide speculation as to what this

to oversee a sacrifice which involved the people quite dramatically.

What was the sacrifice?

In the Old Testament sacrificial system recall that there were three movements in a complete worship service. These movements did not always occur, but when they did they proclaimed an incredible message.<sup>7</sup>

The first movement, which we have identified as the Sin Offering, addressed our sin. Here the worshipper took an animal to the altar. The he confessed his sin and cut the animal's throat. The priest then took the animal, dissected it, arranged the viscera on the altar, and then took the remains as support for himself.

The second movement, the Burnt Offering, addressed ones devotion. Here another lamb would be sacrificed. But this time the entire animal would be offered on the altar as a symbol of consecration/devotion. Neither the priest nor the worshipper partook of this animal.

The third movement, the Peace offering, addressed ones fellowship. Another lamb would be sacrificed. Its viscera would be arranged on the altar as an offering unto the Lord. BUT this time the worshipper himself took the animal home and there enjoyed a fellowship meal with his local priest. This was to symbolize that the fellowship between God and man had been restored.

Now it is important to note that of the three sacrifices, the last one, the peace offering, would be rarely observed. See animals were expensive, and so you weekly could not afford to offer three animals. Accordingly in Bible times, the typical worshipper only participated in a peace offering but once a year, specifically when it was prescribed by God.

Now when was a peace offering prescribed by God?

Well unlike the other sacrifices which were strictly regulated as to their frequency, the peace offering was NOT prescribed. GOD DID NOT FORCE HIS FELLOWSHIP UPON HIS PEOPLE!

The principle is no different today. If you want to fellowship with God, you must do so NOT out of compulsion BUT out of love.

And yet there was one exception, a peace offering was required during Passover/the Day of Atonement.<sup>8</sup>

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means (one commentator even suggests the anachronistic notion that Samuel was saying grace over the meal). It could refer to Samuel praying before the meal or to Samuel actually offering the sacrifice.

<sup>7</sup> Recall the three types of sacrifices offered...

a. **Expiatory Offerings**: which included the **sin offering** (Leviticus 4:1-35; 6:24-30) and the **guilt offering** (Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-7).

b. **Consecratory Offerings**: which included a **burnt offering**, (Leviticus 1:3-17; 6:8-13), a **cereal offering** (Leviticus 2; 6:14-23), and a **drink/libation offering** (Numbers 15:1-16).

c. **Communal Offerings**: which included a **peace offering** (Leviticus 3; 7:11-36; Amos. 5:22), a **wave offering** (Exodus 29:24-27; Lev. 7:30, 34), a **thank offering** (Leviticus. 7:12, 13, 15; 22:29), a **votive offering** (Numbers 6:17-20), a **freewill offering** (Leviticus 7:16; 22:18, 21, 23; 23:28; Numbers 15:3; 29:39; Deuteronomy 12:6, 17), and an **ordination offering** (Exodus 29:19-34; Leviticus 8:22-32).

\*Note: The votive offering differed from a freewill offering in that a freewill offering was the bare minimum that one could bring to the holy convocations (which took place three times a year, Exodus 23:16; 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:10, 16, 17; 2 Chronicles 35:8; Ezra 3:5). In contrast, a votive offering was the ritual expression of a vow.

<sup>8</sup> The Day of Atonement coincided with the Feast of Booths which required a peace offering. Compare Leviticus 23:19-20

This was a specialized peace offering in which the entire nation participated once yearly.

Now at the time of 1 Samuel there was no centralized altar on which would be sacrificed a yearly Passover lamb by the people of God en masse (as in later Old Testament history). Yet this did not stop Israel from offering once yearly a peace offering unto the Lord. It wasn't national; the evidence indicates that it was regional! Local cities would yearly stop their work and gather at a local altar. Here they would bring a peace offering which would be presented to the Lord. After the officiant dissected the animal, the body would be returned to the worshipper. And then the entire community would enjoy a fellowship meal with God.

This is what Samuel's yearly circuit was all about! And that was the occasion of the meal in our text! Clearly a sacrifice was taking place here. This sacrifice involved the eating of a meal together. Thus we can conclude that the sacrifice in this text is a peace offering.<sup>9</sup>

So what is the "Story" into which Saul and his servant stumbled? What's behind this particular offering in the Old Testament sacrificial system?

On account of the sinfulness of man, we were banished from the presence of God.<sup>10</sup> Man was banned specifically from enjoying the love-relationship Adam and Eve with God as they walked together in the Garden of Eden.<sup>11</sup>

And yet God's will would not be thwarted. He created us to fellowship with Him and He did not let our sin thwart that purpose. So, according to His eternal plan, conceived before creation, He Himself became man. He perfectly obeyed the law and so fulfilled the Covenant of Works, because He never sinned. And He offered Himself as a sacrifice in our place on the cross.

Because of our sin, we (all of mankind) ought to spend eternity in hell suffering under the righteous punishment of God. Nevertheless God took the place of His children on the cross. He took our punishment. And He died in our place. And He did all of this so that He might be with us.<sup>12</sup> He did this so that we might enjoy fellowship together.<sup>13</sup> He did this so that there might be a communion lived out between God and man.<sup>14</sup> He did this so that we might be His people and He our God.<sup>15</sup>

This was God's plan from the beginning.

Ephesians 3:11, "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Therefore, everything given to us in the Old Testament is intended to foreshadow this incredible plan to redeem a people to Himself. The Sin Offering taught us of God's answer to our sin. The Burnt Offering instructed us as to the privilege of devotion. The Peace Offering spoke of the fellowship which now was possible between God and man. James Alexander wrote this:

"All altars and priesthood, all unblemished victims and sprinkling of blood, every sin-offering,

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<sup>9</sup> Mary J. Evans concludes this in *New International Bible Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, page 45

<sup>10</sup> Compare Genesis 3:24

<sup>11</sup> Compare Genesis 3:8

<sup>12</sup> Compare Matthew 1:23

<sup>13</sup> Compare John 17:3

<sup>14</sup> Compare 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

<sup>15</sup> Compare Revelation 21:2-3

scapegoat, basin and hyssop-branch, whispered of the dying love that was to come... There has been a reverberation of holy echoes in the arches of all temples, betokening the descent of divine compassion... Christ dying for the ungodly is the central radiant point... of the world's history, of gospel theology, and of sound experience.”<sup>16</sup>

Saul and his servant stumbled into a city which was participating in a "Story" which proclaimed God's love for His sinning people. It proclaimed God's will to fellowship with them. It declared God's plan to offer His Son as our Peace Offering. It proclaimed this by the glorious privilege that belongs to each and every child of God, supping at a table with their Lord!

## The Sad Response

Oh! What a wonderful opportunity for Saul and his servant. Yet notice the sad response.

1 Samuel 9:14, “And they went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place.”

The flavor of this passage is that Saul and his servant rushed to the village and the next verse shows his rushing right up to Samuel and inquiring as to the whereabouts of the prophet.

What this passage is showing is that of a childish impetuosity on the part of Saul arising from a blindness/insensitivity to the things of the Lord. Never mind that the city is engaged in a high and holy time and that Samuel would have been in preparation for the sacrifice. Or that the "seer" would have been available the next day for inquiry into lost donkeys, Samuel was going nowhere soon.

NO! Saul's donkeys are lost; his needs have yet to be met. If this means intruding upon the worship of God, the fellowship of God with His people, that's the cost!

I hope you see from this that in Saul's world; he already was at the center of it. As a result he missed the Greatest Story ever told. Notice what Saul could have done. As the text indicates in vv. 15ff and based our knowledge of Jewish culture, Saul could have participated in the meal and drama and fellowshiped with Christ. He could have sat at a table with his Lord and communed with Him.

But as it is, he missed it! It is little wonder that this would be his undoing just months later.

As the installed king of Israel, Saul when he saw that his army was fleeing such that they needed a "pick me up," Saul didn't wait for the priestly blessing (as the townsfolk in our text). Rather, his needs dictated that a sacrifice be offered, and so he offered it.

1 Samuel 13:8-9, “And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.”

I hope you see it! In this text, Saul missed the Greatest Story Ever Told! He had lost his donkeys and needed to find them. The story of Christ, our peace offering, was therefore quite irrelevant to him!

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in a sermon James Alexander preached on John 15:13-14 entitled, *Dying for Friends*. The Inheritance Publishers, page 14.

And that raises an important question this morning, "Have you been missing the Greatest Story Ever Told?"

Do you understand that the God of this universe has deigned to sup with you? Draw near to you in fellowship? Walk with you as you go? A covenant right that you possess this moment is knowing Christ as you might know any man?

Listen to the words spoken to the body of Christ, not all people, but to His bride:

Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

To dine with God... what a thought! To sit at His feet as did Mary or the disciples and hear the glorious words which drip from His mouth. To live your life as before His banqueting table.

Now you must see, brothers and sisters, this is not a privilege confined only to the worthy. NO! Scripture indicates it is the prerogative of each and every child of God.

How do we open the door?

## **Dialogue with God**

How do we not miss the Greatest Story Ever Told?

We talked about it in the series on fellowshiping with God, I refer you there for Scriptural support to the following. First it involves dialoging with God whereby we read His word. We strive NOT to mark a check box on our list of things to do BUT genuinely to endeavor to commune with God through His word.

If we are going to fellowship with God, if we are going to participate in a peace offering, we must get into His word. It is the portal by which we behold His face and affections! It also involves longing for God to genuinely influence/change us unto our spiritual growth in grace.

This is risky.

See if we are not willing to allow our innermost thoughts to be open and laid bare before God, have we really opened the door to fellowship?

Truly, we must be willing as we spend time with God in His word to confess anything God might convict us of. We need to turn from any sin He might expose. If we are not willing to spend time with God, our quiet times will be nothing more than the tea parties we used to have as children.

## **Reliance upon Christ**

Opening the door also involves a hearty reliance upon Christ.

See how can we genuinely fellowship with God if we are playing a game? Or acting as if our works have earned us the right to enter into His presence?

Indeed! The grace of God sets us free from playing acting. By God's grace we can stand before the Lord without fear of rejection knowing of God's unmerited and unconditional love. By God's grace we know that no matter how defiled we might be, God's accepts us as His child.

Oh Christian, you cannot open the door to fellowship if you don't rest upon the righteousness of Christ as that which alone gives you the right to draw near to Him in grace.

## **Walking with God**

Opening the door also involves walking with God! Because God is a Person who has deigned to draw near to His children, let our thinking be forever changed. One does not take God out of a magic box and use Him when he needs Him. God is a free, independent, moral Being who has drawn near to us in grace.

Accordingly, let us not make-believe, but let us know that He is ever and always with us, as a close companion might be if they accompanied you to work. Accordingly, as we know His mind as it is revealed to us in His word

- Talk to Him.
- Rely upon Him.
- Ask Him questions.
- Listen to His answer as He speaks by and with His word.

Do this, not just in a Quiet Time, but as you go! Christ is standing at the door knocking. If we would but open it, He would enter into our lives and dine with us!

Yet this brings us to the amazing thing about Revelation 3:20. As Christians we have known about this text from our youth. We have enjoyed the effects of an open door in our walk with God. We have dined with God on numerous occasions. We have participated in the peace offering.

But of late, we've allowed the door to remain closed. Maybe it is because of our

- Pride.
- An unwillingness to confess our sin.
- Disbelief, again because we have forgotten the gospel we just don't feel worthy to fellowship with God.
- Laziness.
- A perception of our inability.

These things may be real in your life and certainly, if present, will have a negative impact on opening the door to fellowship. But for most of us today, I think rather that it is because we are so preoccupied.

Saul missed the greatest "Story" ever told because he was preoccupied. He was preoccupied with the errand his father had sent him on. He was worried that the hours had turned into days. He thought his father must be worried. And after all just a quick conversation with the prophet is all he needed. He didn't want to fellowship with the Creator.

And today, many a Christian will go to their grave with similar cares and concerns. We are preoccupied with

- Sports, entertainment, information, such that we are always tuning into the radio or TV.
- The tasks of the day, such that we don't have time to dine with God in the morning.
- Tomorrow and what must happen today to secure it.
- The daily grind, as was Martha who chided her sister for sitting at Christ's feet when there were so many dishes to wash and clothes to fold.
- Finding a donkey!

Brothers and sisters, by providence you have sat under this teaching today. Accordingly take this sermon as a divine calling to cease and desist. That doesn't mean, "Be irresponsible to the valid callings of life." Rather, it means that we must also not be irresponsible when it comes to our relationship with God.

If in looking for the donkeys of life you find that you are too busy for a fellowship meal, then brothers and sisters you are too busy. Especially during this time of year, let us slow down that we might not just celebrate the advent of Christ, but ourselves participate in the Greatest Story Ever Told.

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and the these notes can be found at [Missing the Greatest Story](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on December 10, 2006. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.