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The Workings of God on Behalf of His Kingdom, Part 4

What do the following items have in common?

- Microwave oven
- T. V. Dinners
- Bottled Oxygen
- The Personal Computer
- Freeze-dried milk
- Tank

All of these are the unintended by-products of the pursuit to land someone on the moon.

It is true! Scientists did not set out to create a more convenient way of cooking. Nor did they seek to develop a personal computer which could be used in the home. These and many other products were created to enable an astronaut to go into outer space. They are the unimagined blessings arising on account of the lofty goal of space travel.

Yet, if such blessings could arise on account of man ascending into the heavens, imagine the blessings if God condescended to the earth; brought forth His reign and rule to this planet; and extended His Kingdom Work in this world?

These benefits would be unimaginable. The Scriptures teach us that Christ has come “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). And that is exactly what we learn from our passage today.

In our continuing study of 1 Samuel 9 we have beheld the advancement of God’s kingdom on this earth. We have witnesses the working of God on behalf of His kingdom. And we have seen the key elements that

characterize the Messianic reign and rule of Christ. All these things began before time. They encompass the needs of God's people. And they are confirmed by His word.

The Mindset of Man

As we continue our study let us observe that when God does a Kingdom work, it always results in unimagined blessings for man! As we consider this, notice by way of preface the mindset of man as God extends His Kingdom.

1 Samuel 9:18, "Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is."

Based on what we already know about this story, let me ask you these questions:

- Why was Saul approaching Samuel here?
- What was it that consumed his mind?

An obvious answer to these would be that Saul was wondering about his father's donkeys.

As the story unfolds in this chapter we read of the lost donkeys of Kish, Saul's father.¹ We also see that his father commissioned him and a servant to find them. We read of Saul's diligence as he looked for three solid days, scouring the countryside in the hopes of finding the animals.² Then we read that his servant suggests that they inquire of THE prophet who reportedly was in one of the nearby cities.³

Saul thought this was a good idea and so they approached the city (verse 11a), inquired as to the whereabouts of the prophet (verse 11b), and then were directed to hurry inside to meet the prophet/priest before the sacrifice began (verse 12).

Accordingly in our text when Saul approached Samuel, what was it that consumed his thoughts and mind?

Let me ask you these questions:

- Was Saul thinking of the Lord and His Kingdom?
- Did Saul have any thought that he was on the precipice of an huge step forward in Redemptive History?
- Did he have any consideration of what God was doing?
- Did he know where God was taking him?
- Did he know what the Lord had ordained for him, his family, or Israel?

The answer to these questions is obvious. Saul wasn't thinking about God, His Kingdom, His glory, or His Christ. He had one thing in mind: Finding his dad's lost donkeys. He was simply honoring his father's request. He was recovering expensive animals. He was fulfilling the objective of his quest.

Selfish and Self-Centered

Now I want you to see that while Saul was a spiritually blind individual, selfish and self-centered, our day-to-day thoughts are little better!

¹ Compare 1 Samuel 9:3

² Compare 1 Samuel 9:4-5

³ Compare 1 Samuel 9:6

Even when we are at our best we are desperately consumed with this world and the things of the world. Aren't we?

This is why Paul exhorts the Christ this way:

Colossians 3:2, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

Even though we have been redeemed, we are quite attached to this world. For example, recall the Mount of Transfiguration. Christ took Peter, James, and John alone to a high mountain. And the veil which concealed Christ's glory was removed and the disciples got a glimpse of Jesus' true identity. Then we read this:

Matthew 17:2, "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."

Well during this holy moment in redemptive history, what was it that consumed Peter's heart and mind?

Matthew 17:4, "Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."

Peter was saying "let's set up shop, build some tabernacles, and make this mountain a tourist attraction. James and John can sell tickets. And I'll take care of crowd control."

Ok, this is a little silly. Yet I hope you see that Peter wasn't thinking of the things of the Lord. All he could think of was to build an earthly altar to house the beings before him! From this we see the mindset of man. At best it is earthly consumed with the things of this life.

David said it best in Psalm 14.

Psalm 14:2-3, "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD."

Dimensional Differentiation

We could liken it to the difference between a two-dimensional world and a three-dimensional world. Those living in a two-dimensional world have limited movement. They can go forward and backward and right or left. They cannot go up or down. They live on a flat sheet of paper.

In a two-dimensional world the concept of up and down is theoretical at best. Most people would not understand it. And the few that could imagine a three-dimensional world, they probably would not be able to imagine what it would be like in a crowded room to be able to jump over a chair in order to get out of the dwelling

Ah, but then to transport an individual from this two-dimensional world to a three-dimensional world, it would be mind-boggling. They'd see things they could never have imagined. They'd do things they could never have dreamt.

And yet as soon as they were there, imagine if we moved them back to their two-dimensional existence?

Now as much as they might think of life in a three-dimensional universe, they'd be bound by their two-dimensional living. You might exhort them never to forget what life was like in our universe, but

- The pressures of their world
- The limitations of their life
- The cares and concerns

Would easily overwhelm them and so choke out much of their thoughts about our world.

Brothers and sisters in keeping with the analogy consider for a moment that we live in a three-dimensional world; yet there is another dimension, the Kingdom of God. And though in Christ we have been given eyes to see and ears to hear, nevertheless the coming world and its existence is easily choked out by the cares and concerns of this life.

Accordingly though we might be redeemed, the children of the living God, and the servants of the Most High; nevertheless I dare say that even when we are at our best, our day-to-day thoughts hardly go beyond the present age in which we live.

As we consider the workings of God on behalf of His kingdom we must do so recognizing this fact we are consumed with our present selfish needs. Just as Saul was consumed with pleasing his dad, protecting his wealth, and searching for his donkeys, we are just as consumed with making a living, rearing our children, and pleasing our friends, family, coaches, and peers.

This is what makes this passage that much more amazing. Consider, that while we, like Saul, are so earthly-minded notice what is on God's mind.

Fellowship

1 Samuel 9:19, "**And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day**, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart."

The key to understanding this text is recognizing that Samuel was speaking here not as the son of Elkanah and Hannah, or the disciple of Eli, or an individual wanting to make a good first impression on the future king. He was speaking AS A PROPHET AND PRIEST OF THE MOST HIGH GOD with the emphasis on his prophetic role since Samuel began his exhortation with "I am the seer, go up before me" (1 Samuel 9:19a).

How does this effect our interpretation of this text?

The command to sit and eat with Samuel here was nothing less than an invitation to sit and enjoy table fellowship with God. The prophet here serves as a representative of God!

In light of this let us consider the command and intention of God here.: "You shall eat with me today!"

In the Biblical context "eating with someone" held great significance. Serious charges were leveled against Christ when He walked the earth.

Matthew 9:11, "And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?"

In the culture of Judaism, table fellowship or eating together was far more than simply consuming some carbs. It was understood to be tacit approval or endorsement of the person and their activities. This is why the Pharisees had a problem with Christ eating with renowned sinners!

Paul's authority was questioned as an apostle. And he referenced the fact that at the outset of his public ministry, that he received the "right hand of fellowship" from Peter, James, and John.⁴ This means that they ate with him and thereby affirmed him!

The culmination of a worship service in the Old Testament was Table Fellowship. This was a time where God, represented by a priest, and the worshipper sat down and enjoyed a fellowship meal together. The message proclaimed at this meal was that peace was restored, and that God approved of the worshipper!

In light of this, when we read here that it was God's will for Samuel, representing the Lord, to eat a fellowship meal with Saul, we conclude that a large part of the outworking of God's Kingdom Work involves fellowshiping with the Lord Most High!

Accordingly you must see that this movement on the part of God in this passage was not haphazard. When God does a Kingdom Work one of the ultimate ends that He has in His mind is fellowship!

- Man was created for fellowship (Genesis 1:27).
- Fellowship occupied God and his children prior to the fall (Genesis 3:8).
- Adam and Eve ran from God's fellowship after the fall (Genesis 3:10).
- Man was banned from fellowship on account of his wickedness (Genesis 3:24)
- God deigned to redeem us in Christ for fellowship!

John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

And it will be this that occupies a large part of eternity future.

Revelation 21:3, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

When we read here of the advent of God's Kingdom work we are not surprised that it began with table-fellowship! This always is the by-product of God's Kingdom Work!

This is such an important truth! A large part of God's Kingdom work revolves around fellowshiping with His children.

First it gives key insight into what God is doing in this world in our lives. Here we thought He was concerned about our ability to find our father's donkeys, our consequent worldly wealth, and the like. When in reality the donkeys are of little importance. What ranks high on His list of priorities is fellowship with us!

In light of this, it should be obvious that this is what we ought also to be about fellowshiping with God! Oh may we define a tragedy or a blessing in terms of our fellowship with God. May we come to see that this is what we ought to be after!

The remainder of verse 19 and the beginning of verse 29 give us the testifying marks of Samuel's prophetic

⁴ Compare Galatians 2:9

call.

1 Samuel 9:19-20, “.And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, **and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found.** And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father’s house?”

Recall last week that part of what constituted a valid call to the prophetic office was the ability to predict the future⁵ and to do the miraculous.⁶ The fact that Samuel informed Saul that his donkeys had been found ****and**** tell Saul what was on his mind is proof that Samuel was whom he claimed to be, a Prophet of the Most High God.

A Lot More

Now this brings us to a second benefit that arises when God does a Kingdom work- not only do we enjoy fellowship with God, but we get a whole lot more.

1 Samuel 9:20, “.And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. **And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father’s house?**”

The meaning of this verse is somewhat clouded.⁷ It could be that Samuel is saying this: “What is the desire of Israel, it is a king, and thus it is you!” In this case we'd translate the text, “And on whom is the desire of Israel” (as the KJV and the NIV do) or it could be that Samuel is saying this: “When it comes to the typical Jewish longing as it relates to life wealth, security, family, and health this and much more has been reserved for you and your family” (this is the take of the RSV and ESV).

So, which is it? What is Samuel saying here? What's the promise in this context?

When it comes to the answer I side with the majority of commentators here. If Samuel was saying that Saul is the answer to Israel's desire for a king, the reference to Saul's “father's household” being the “desire of Israel” doesn't make sense. Saul and Saul alone would be the answer to the request of Israel for a king in 1 Samuel 8:5. To include NOT Saul's children⁸ BUT Saul's father and his father's household doesn't fit if the “desire” here again has reference to a king, and hence I cannot accept this interpretation.

But if Samuel is saying that part of God's work would end with Saul enjoying that which was on the heart and mind of most Israelites:

- Family.
- Success.
- Security.
- Wealth.
- Prosperity.
- Popularity.

It makes only natural sense that these blessing would also be enjoyed by the ones closest to Saul, his father's household. And that's exactly what is promised here!

⁵ Compare Deuteronomy 18:21-22

⁶ Compare Deuteronomy 13:1-4

⁷ Commentators are divided on the meaning of this verse.

⁸ This fits if the monarchy is in view here.

Accordingly notice one of the consequences when it comes to the out-working of God's Kingdom is that God blesses a man with family, security, wealth, success, and much, much more!

You say, "Hold on... you are starting to sound like a health and wealth preacher."

Maybe... but then again maybe not.

The health/wealth preacher is not wrong in his teaching that it is God's will for us to be

- Healthy.
- Wealthy.
- Powerful.
- Successful.
- And the like.

Their error is misunderstanding the timing of these blessings. It is NOT God's intention unilaterally to bless His children with these things in this life.

John 16:33, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. **In the world ye shall have tribulation:** but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Hebrews 11:36-38, "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

1 Corinthians 4:13, "Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."

Truly God has not deigned to give His children unilaterally the comforts of His Kingdom in this life. If you might enjoy some of these things, as did Saul, it is but a foretaste of the glorious inheritance that someday will be ours in full. RATHER, it is God's intention unilaterally to bless His children with these things in the age to come. After Christ's disciples asked "what's in it for us since we left everything to follow you, Christ said this:

Matthew 19:29, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Paul exhorted the Corinthians thus:

1 Corinthians 6:3, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?"

Speaking of the physical blessing we shall receive at Christ's return we read this:

Revelation 21:4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

It is God's will to give His children the desire of the nations- and not just His children, but also their

households⁹ THAT BROTHERS AND SISTERS IS ONE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF GOD'S KINGDOM WORK IN THE LIVES OF HIS CHILDREN!

I hope you see from this passage another characteristic of God's Kingdom Work: It Results in Unimagined Blessings for Man!

1 Corinthians 2:9, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Wonder

How does one apply a passage like this?

Many thoughts come to my mind. The first one is the thought of wonder! That's where Paul's meditation of the truth of our text brought him. When he considered that at best he barely had a mind set on the things above, and yet it didn't matter, God's plans for us are not thwarted or detoured by our feebleness. He wrote these incredible words:

Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Think for a moment here. As unworthy as you may feel this day, nevertheless as a recipient of God's love we know from our text that God's plans for us are beyond what our pea-brains can comprehend!

Now you meditate on this for any length of time, and you will respond as did Paul, in wonder, praise, and worship.

Comfort

Then there is the thought of COMFORT!

Understand that at every moment of your life, God's providences have been hand-selected that you might enjoy "...all that is desirable in Israel?" If God were to answer the questions so frequently posed to Him like these:

- Why?
- Why did you do this?
- Why did you take that away?
- I thought you loved me and had wonderful plans for my life?

God's answer to this would be thus:

- Be patient; you are not in the final state!
- That is where My plans for you will be fulfilled!
- In and through all things I am working to bring about your best and My glory- which will not be realized until the second coming!

And so be comforted brothers and sisters. God is presently working out His plan that you and I might enjoy to

⁹ Compare Genesis 17:9, Acts 2:39; 16:31

the utmost “the desire of Israel.”

Encouragement

And finally there is the thought of ENCOURAGEMENT! Recall the words of Paul.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.”

Family of God, consider the “wreath” that someday will adorn your brow “the desire of”

- Eternal life.
- Joy.
- Wealth.
- Health.
- Fellowship with Christ.

In light of this, how ought we to run?

1 Corinthians 9:26-27, “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

May our knowledge of God's Kingdom Workings in this life embolden us with similar zeal, knowing that our work in the Lord is not in vain!

I want to close with the words of William Cowper whom I quoted last week. Recall that he lived in the 18th century and himself struggled many long days with sorrow, discouragement, and suffering. Listen to the words which God taught him to say after so many trials¹⁰

“Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings [this is not in reference to literal singing, but the living out of the new life which in Scripture is called a “New Song” (Psalm 40:3)]; it is the Lord, who rises with healing in his wings: when comforts are declining, He grants the soul again a season of clear shining, to cheer it after rain.

“In holy contemplation we sweetly then pursue the theme of God's salvation, and find it ever new; set free from present sorrow, we cheerfully can say, “Let the unknown tomorrow bring with it what it may.”

“It can bring with it nothing but He will bear us through; who gives the lilies clothing will clothe His people too: beneath the spreading heavens no creature but is fed; and He who feeds the ravens will give His children bread.

“Though vine nor fig tree neither their wonted fruit shall bear, though all the field should wither, nor flocks nor herds be there; yet God the same abideth, His praise shall tune my voice, for, while in Him confiding, I cannot but rejoice.”

¹⁰ The New Trinity Hymnal, Hymn #621

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

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

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th 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.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 11, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.