

Sunday September 11th sermon: "King Saul Started Off Well -- Put Not Your Trust in Princes"

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

1 Samuel 8; Luke 4:14-30

When the Dobbs decision overturning Roe v. Wade was handed down just over two months ago, there was great rejoicing among God's people. In one fell swoop, the entire legal justification for murdering unborn babies was repudiated by the court.

This is an example of how God uses kings and rulers to accomplish His purposes, both good and bad. The king's heart is in God's hand, and God turns that heart whatever way God pleases!

For all his disorder, President Trump was under God's control, just like good presidents and bad ones, tyrants, and genocidal maniacs, as well as gentle rulers.

Often Trump was reckless, and seemed to have no real principles except pragmatism. He was a very poor judge of people, surrounding himself with sleazy and discreditable people, people who often went on to stab him in the back. Trump did many evils things as president, but some good things also.

Yet Mr. Trump appointed three justices to the Supreme Court who, at least in the case of abortion, were willing to follow our Constitution, and find that it does not guarantee any right to murder babies.

This is remarkable when we recall that it was Republican presidents who appointed pro-abortion justices O'Connor, Souter, Kennedy, and Robert.

In the old testament, there are many examples of how God used good kings and bad ones to accomplish His purposes.

Consider Israel's first king, Saul. The people demanded a king to rule over them.

God's prophet Samuel warned the people that kings would enslave the people, rob them of their property and money, and construct a great and expensive machine to serve themselves, and not the people.

But Israel would not heed his warnings.

The people of Israel were not willing to trust in God to rule over the land, or to lead them into battle.

And so they demanded a king, and God gave one to them.

After that, the history of Israel is one of downhill slide, from one king to another, until the people were marched off into foreign lands in captivity.

The failure of the king was rooted in the desires of the people!

So it has ever been with mankind. We think we know what we want and what is best for us, but we seldom are right about it.

Samuel gave Israel what it wanted, at God's direction. Saul, a Benjaminite, was tall and handsome.

But Saul was also shy and reluctant to become king. Samuel assured Saul that all the desire of Israel was for him, but Saul expressed his concern that he was a nobody from a lowly family.

But at first, God was with Saul. Samuel promised Saul that the Spirit of God would come upon the king, and God would turn Saul into a different man.

And indeed, when Saul finally agreed to be king, God gave him another heart.

But when it came time to announced Saul as king to the people, Saul was shy, and hid himself among the crowd's luggage. Indeed, the Lord Himself “ratted Saul out” and told the people where to find him hiding, and they did.

When Saul finally made his appearance, the people were satisfied, and cried out for God to save the king!

God surrounded Saul with men whose hearts God had touched.

But there were wicked men who scoffed at Saul, said he wouldn't be able to save Israel from its foes, and refused to treat him with the honor due their king.

But note this: Saul had a humble heart, and didn't retaliate against his political enemies, but rather, Saul held his peace.

Saul showed himself to have discretion, humility, peaceableness, and quiet confidence. Would that our rulers started out so well!

Next, God used Saul mightily to rescue His people! The Ammonites threatened to gouge out the eyes of the people of Jabesh Gilead in exchange for removing their seize against that city.

The men of that besieged city sent messengers to Saul for rescue. But Saul was still doing regular labor out in the field with the flocks.

When the messengers arrived, all the people wept. They had no courage or ability to organize a rescue attempt for their brethren under siege.

But when Saul came in from the field, and found out why the people wept, God's Spirit came upon him, and Saul became very angry indeed.

Note that this humble, quiet man was enraged against the wicked plans of the enemy, and his anger was from the Lord.

God's Spirit turned Saul into a brave and noble warrior to rescue the Lord's people that God had given Saul charge over.

Saul sent out a call for the people to assemble for war, and used a dramatic method to do so.

Scripture tells us that the fear of the LORD came upon all the people of Israel, so that they appeared to obey their king and go to battle to rescue their brethren.

Note how God takes credit for the people's change of heart toward Saul and for battle. God used Saul to call together the people, but it was God's Spirit that turned their hearts to obedience.

The men of Jabesh Gilead had little hope for rescue. The king of Ammon knew that nobody would come to save them, so he was in no rush either.

But when word came that Israel was on the move under king Saul, the besieged city rejoiced.

Sure enough, when Saul and his people engaged the Ammonites, those wicked people were completely routed, and Jabesh Gilead was rescued.

King Saul was vindicated. Indeed, the people of Israel were of a mind to round up those people who had derided Saul and disrespected him, and to put them all to death!

But Saul's discretion and humility were still intact. He refused to allow any of his political foes to be put to death, because, as he put it, the LORD has wrought salvation for His people!

Even in great victory, Saul was modest, and placed the credit where it belonged: God's mighty power to save!

And the people all rejoiced before their God.

Sadly, after a great beginning, Saul would degrade, and fall away from obedience to God, and the kingdom would be taken from him, and he would die a suicide in a battle lost.

But when the King of Glory appeared many centuries later, our Lord Jesus, the long promised Messiah, the people began immediately to reject Him. First in His own hometown, and ultimately almost all of the Jews, would turn against Jesus, because they did not want that Man to rule over them.

In Luke 4, we read of Christ's rejection in Nazareth. He began His preaching by identifying Himself as the One Who fulfills the promises of Isaiah for Messiah, to heal the broken hearted, open blind eyes, set free captives, and preach the gospel to Israel.

But they objected that Jesus was only the son of a simple carpenter, Joseph.

They adopted against Jesus the very scorn of the wicked people who had long ago scoffed that Saul could not save them.

No wonder the Apostle John remarked that Christ "came unto His Own, and His Own received Him not."

Isaiah had also lamented, that "when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him!" Most of the people admired Saul's height and handsomeness, but when Jesus came, they saw no reason to like Him or follow Him or obey Him.

But praise God, none of that rejection stopped Jesus from doing His great work of deliverance!

And unlike in Saul's case, God did not use the good hearts of the people to deliver Israel in Christ's time.

Rather, God worked through their evil hearts to accomplish the sacrifice of God's Lamb, the Lord Jesus, as an offering for our sin.

Peter would later proclaim, that Christ was delivered up by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God, and you, Israel, have taken Him by wicked hands and crucified and slain Him!

The people, with their wicked hearts and evil motives and cruelty, had slain the Holy One and the Just.

But like the people in Saul's day, believers today offer up peace offerings and greatly rejoice with our good King Jesus! We know that in Christ, God wrought a great victory for us, even while we were yet sinners, even while we were yet enemies of His!

This week, our friends in England and the Commonwealth nations are mourning the loss of Queen Elizabeth II. We puzzle over their fondness and love for her, because in our way of thinking, the Queen hardly does much of anything anymore. She never led her country on the battlefield, like her namesake is said to have done.

But now they must all say goodbye to her. They will remember her for a time, and then she will fade away into the history books, just like King Saul has done.

But not so our Lord Jesus! Our king is our very life and rejoicing, and must be for all eternity!

He is the King Who gave His life to save His people!

There's a substantial reason never to forget our Savior!

And because He lives forevermore, we will never have to say goodbye to our good King Jesus again! There will never be a time when we gather around to remember Him long died and gone, how noble He was, how much He loved us, how constant He was in desperate times to save us.

Instead, we meet with Him at the Lord's Table every week, and look forward one day soon to doing so in His physical presence!

One day soon, Jesus will come back and take all His people, living and raised up, unto Himself in joy and everlasting happiness!

No wonder Paul the Apostle cried out, "and so shall we **EVER BE WITH THE LORD!**"