

“Faith or Fear?”
1 Samuel 13:1-15

¹ Saul was _ years old when he began to reign, and he reigned _ and two years over Israel. ² Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent. ³ Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear.” ⁴ And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. ⁵ And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. ⁶ When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, ⁷ and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. (ESV)

I’ve been gone for the past two weeks as most of you have noticed. Some of you may not have; the duller among you, I guess. But I’ve been gone, and the great thing is that the elders here have mandated that I take time off. Right? Against my wishes sometimes, but they mandated that I take time off. So people often ask, “What did you do these last two weeks?” Many of you know that we’re trying to sell our house. So, Judy and the girls went on a camping trip with some friends and that left me to stay with the house and keep it clean and take care of the dog. Many of you know that when a husband stays home by himself, it’s against every fiber in his being to keep the house clean. And yet, I had to. I had to keep my woodshop relatively clean. So, “What did you do for two weeks, Tommy?” The bottom line is that what I did for most of two weeks was I sat in front of the television watching the Democratic National Convention and then the Republican National Convention. What I did all during the day was I switched back and forth between the major cable news networks and saw how they were covering it. What was their spin on this speech or that speech? And that was fascinating. But what was even more interesting was the claim that every single one of them made. And the claim that all of them made was, “The Best Election Coverage.” You want the best election coverage, watch Fox. You want the best election coverage, watch MSNBC. If you want the best election coverage, watch CNN. No matter where you look, they claim that they have the best election coverage.

Well, today we’re starting First Samuel. I’m going to tell you starting today, you in this church, you are going to have the best election coverage. Starting today. Except the election we’re going to be considering is not the election of Barack Obama or John McCain, but the election of Israel’s king. As we talked about last year—you probably don’t remember, that’s why I have to preach every week—is that last year when we considered this Book of Samuel, we learned that historically it takes place in the time of the Judges. If you read the Book of Judges, it’s really wild book and some amazing things happen and wild things happen, but the verdict of the Book of Judges is that Israel needs a king. Remember the last sentence in the Book of Judges, all these horrible things had happened and the verdict is that, “Now Israel had no king and each man did what was right in his own eyes.” And the Book of Samuel picks up on the theme except that it adds something. The Book of Samuel is God’s word and it’s inspired by the Holy Spirit, but it was also written with a purpose by some human or humans and the purpose was to make the case for Israel to have a king, but not just any king, but David as king. It’s a paid political announcement, believe it or not. At the end you hear, “My name is God and I endorse this message.” Right?

Basically the writer of the Book of Samuel is making the case that Israel needs a king, and not just any king, but, in fact, David as king. That’s important to know because in the day, northern Israel and southern Israel would have bickered (and they did bicker and fight), and as you read the Books of Kings, where they thought the king of all Israel should come from the north. And some thought the king of all Israel should come from the south. And what we know from Samuel is that the king of all Israel for all time should come from Judah. In fact it should be David or one of his descendents. That’s how the Book is making a case for David. So we learned as we walked through it last year, but since this is the first time I’m talking about it this year, you’re going to get a little more background.

Remember you were introduced to this character named Samuel who would be the last judge of Israel, and he would be the one who would transition Israel from having judges to having kings. We know that God always intended Israel to have a king. God was Israel's king, but if you look at Genesis and Deuteronomy and the other Books of the law, God always intended them to have a king, but it would be a king who would serve under Him. In other words, it would be like a vice-regent, or a king who would govern Israel according to the Law of the Lord. So by the time we get to 1 Samuel 8 (last year we looked at it) Israel asks for a king, and the issue, the problem is not that they asked for a king. They didn't ask for any old king. They asked for a king not like God had intended Israel to have. But they asked for a king "like the other nations." Remember the Philistines were pressing them all about and they said, "Give us a king like the other nations." And God said, "You want a king like the other nations, I'm going to give you a king like the other nations." Remember, a king from the other nations will enslave your daughters and sons, he'll take the best of your produce, he'll take the best of your livestock, he'll take the best of your land, he'll take your sons and put them into the army, and take your daughters and make them in his harem. In other words, "You want a king like other nations, you can have that kind of a king, but just so you know, that kind of king is going to enslave you." In other words, when God is your king there's freedom, and when anything else is your king, there's slavery. God says, "If you want that kind of king, I'm going to give you a king like the other nations." And almost immediately he chooses a king for them from among Israel, who is like the other nations, and that was the young man by the name of Saul. Remember, Saul was a king like the other nations in that one, he was physically imposing. He was a head taller than the rest of Israel. But he was also spiritually dull. I'm not going to go into everything—you can read it—but Saul was not the sharpest tool in the shed when it came to spiritual things. And when God chose him, He said, "Here, you want a king? Here's your king." In chapter 12 Samuel gives his farewell address, and he says, "You've got your king, now all you have to do is obey the Lord." Follow the king and obey the Lord and you guys will be good to go. Trust in the Lord, the Lord your God will go before you. Trust in Him and obey Him. And that's it.

And today we pick up where it's Saul's first day on the job, practically speaking. It's amazing because Saul is not on the job for more than one day and he's already lost the kingdom. So as you look at today's text, we're going to look at three things. We're going to first look at Saul's predicament. The second thing we're going to look at is Saul's folly, and the third thing we will look at is Saul's future.

What's Saul's predicament? Let me read to you some of the text again. It says,

¹ *Saul was _ years old when he began to reign, and he reigned _ and two years over Israel. (ESV)*

To begin with, many people say, "Why is that blank?" No one really knows. Maybe at some point in the copying of the manuscript something was left out, or the author may have left it out intentionally.

What's interesting to me, when you look at Hebrew narratives, is that almost every narrative in Hebrew follows the exact same pattern. It starts out with a problem and then you have rising action and then you have a climax and then you have falling action and then you have a conclusion. Every single one of them follows that pattern. And so it's interesting to me when this Hebrew narrative opens up, they always open up with the problem. What's the first thing you hear? Problem: Saul. Saul is the problem.

While we don't know what they meant there by the numbers, Saul was probably about 37 years old. You can do the math when you compare Saul's children and such; probably about 37, and he's taken over. The Philistines are pressing in, and it says Saul chose 3,000 men of Israel, 2,000 were with Saul, 1,000 were with Jonathan. Another thing to point out to you here is where it says Saul chose 2,000 men and later on it says the Philistines gathered 30,000 chariots, the word in Hebrew "1,000" can also be translated as unit or fighting unit. And that may be more appropriate because there's no way the Philistines could have gathered 30,000 chariots, it would have been physically impossible. It makes a lot more sense when you hear that Saul, as his first job as king, since the king's job is to protect and defend Israel, he gathers to himself three fighting units, or three battalions if you want to use modern day language, and he's over two of them and Jonathan is over one of them. And you remember back in chapter 10 (here's where it gets interesting), you begin to see some of Saul's character. In chapter 10 Saul is given an order by Samuel to provoke the Philistines. Saul, you go and provoke the Philistines. You go and basically start a fight with them and then go to Gilgal and wait for me, and I will come and tell you what you

should do for the next seven days. Saul never did that, and yet we see here in the next few verses that Jonathan, his son does. As you look on Jonathan, he is probably the one who would have made a better king considering his faith and character. Jonathan goes and does Saul's dirty work. Jonathan provokes the Philistines and as soon as Jonathan provokes the Philistines, what does Saul do? Saul takes credit for it. In the big picture you could say, "Well, Jonathan worked for Saul so Saul had every right to take credit for it. It was his army." But I think the author probably wants us to see something different here when you look at the rest of the text. Saul is basically tacit. Jonathan goes and provokes the Philistines, and as soon as Jonathan provokes the Philistines, Saul very cluelessly goes and literally blows his own horn and says, "Saul has provoked the Philistines. Let all the Hebrews hear." That's where he begins to get into his predicament because you find out that Saul is not really that wise. After becoming the king and sort of spying out and seeing how strong the Philistines were, he basically assembled a fairly small army, provoked the Philistines, and then started to blow his own horn, not only so that Israel can hear, but so that the Philistines can hear. How did the Philistines respond? It says,

⁴ And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. ⁵ And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore . . . (ESV)

So now you're Saul. It's your first day on the job. You're supposed to provoke the Philistines. You assembled this tiny army, relatively speaking. You attack a Philistine garrison and then you look across the valley and what you see is thirty units of chariots, six units of cavalry, and infantry like the sand on the seashore. Now what are you going to do? There's a principle here that you're going to see. It's very easy to have faith when things are going well. Right? You want to meet a faithful Christian? Talk to someone in whose life things are going perfectly. Praise the Lord, things are going well! The real test of faith, the real challenge to faithfulness and to see whether or not you really understand the gospel is when things go badly. Remember Saul, as the king, was supposed to be the spiritual head over all of Israel. And so now Saul has this great opportunity to show how much he understands the gospel, and to show how faithful he is. Because, remember in some sense, let's assume Saul ordered Jonathan to attack, so Saul has now done what he's supposed to do. He's provoked the Philistines and now he's got to wait for seven days, except he's got another problem now. He didn't count on the Philistine's response being thirty chariot units and six cavalry, but also didn't count on the response of Israel. Notice how Israel responds in verse 6.

⁶ When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, ⁷ and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. (ESV)

So how did Saul's followers respond when they saw the Philistines? They hid. They hid in rocks, they hid in caves, and they hid in cisterns. They hid in any place there was to hide. They hid, and when the hiding places were used up, they fled across the Jordan. So now Saul, as king of Israel, is completely alone. I mean he has a few followers, but at the end of the day he's alone, and how faithful is he going to be when it's just him and God's promises? There's another place where you see that, do you not? In the New Testament? Where do you see the king who is hard pressed and he is facing the enemy and everyone has abandoned him—that was sort of fair weather—and only a few of his followers stayed with him? This king is named, Jesus. When he was hard pressed, when he was face-to-face with the enemy, when everyone had abandoned him, how did he respond? We'll talk about that in a minute. First I want to talk about how Saul responded.

How does Saul respond to this? How should he have responded? Well, he responds with folly, frankly. You see, Saul was in this position—he knew that God had promised, "I will be with you" and provoked the Philistines. Samuel would be there in seven days to tell him what to do. And then all of the people fled. Now what Saul could have done and should have done is he could have preached the gospel to them. By that I mean reminded them of the promises of God. He could have stopped them and said, "Stop! The Lord God said He is with us wherever we go. He is going to defeat the Philistines. He is the one who fights our battles, not me. Stay." Or, he could have at least preached that to himself. "God, you said you'd never fail me or forsake me. It's my first day

on the job and not looking too good.” He could have done any of that. What does he do instead? Let’s look at his folly.

⁸ *He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him.* ⁹ *So Saul said, “Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering.* ¹⁰ *As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him.* ¹¹ *Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash,* ¹² *I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.”*

So what’s his folly? He starts out good. He does wait the seven days, but at the end of the seven days Samuel is not there. Or at least the seventh day in the morning Samuel is not there. So what does Saul do instead of reminding himself of the promises of God, reminding himself that this is what God said, this is what I’m supposed to be obedient to? Saul is either doing one of two things. If you remember back in chapters 2 and 3 of this Book when Israel was fighting the Philistines before, they thought, “Let’s bring the Ark to the front, to the battle lines. Maybe if we do this it will do either one of two things. It will either constrain God to come to our aid, or it will at least make the people feel good about it. The people will see this and be encouraged.” And so Saul, instead of being faithful, instead of being obedient, what he does is he begins to do Samuel’s job. Remember Saul is the king, he’s not the priest and according to Israel’s law only the priest could offer these sacrifices. And Saul instead says, “Let’s do the burnt offering now.” By the way, there are two offerings, burnt offerings and peace offerings. He says, “Let’s do the burnt offering now.” And he was either doing that because he was trying to provoke God into acting or he was trying to get the attention of the people and to try to make them feel better about the battle. “I haven’t forgotten. I’ve done everything I can to get God’s attention and He’s just not here.” So he offers the burnt offering. On one hand as we look at Saul, he’s a tragic figure in a sense, because he really isn’t evil in the sense we look at someone who is just proactively going out to do the wrong thing. He’s just so spiritually dull, and he doesn’t get it. He is constantly making mistakes and doing stupid things. And so he does this burnt offering. I almost feel bad for Saul because as soon as he finishes the burnt offering, the smoke has not even cleared, then Samuel shows up. If he had just come an hour earlier, maybe Saul would have been okay. But he didn’t. The timing was horrible, at least for Saul. And Samuel shows up and asks a pretty simple question, “What are you doing here?” And Saul’s response tells you everything about Saul that you need to know as to why he shouldn’t be Israel’s king. But also it tells you everything you need to know, or at least it hints at what you need to know about why David should be Israel’s king. Notice how Saul responds. He responds to this question, “What have you done?” by saying

¹¹ . . . *“When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash,* ¹² *I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.”*

The first thing I want you to notice is what predominant pronoun that is used when Saul speaks. It’s “me.” “When I saw the Philistines come against me, and you didn’t come for me.” It’s me, me, me, me. He does not say, “When I saw the Philistines come against us and I worried that we would be defeated.” Saul is predominantly worried about one thing, and that is himself.

And another thing, (I say this to my kids sometimes), you know when you say, “What’s going on here? What have you done?” They start to talk and I say, “Wait one second.” And I’ll ask them, I’ll say, “Is this an excuse or an explanation?” In other words, is there an excuse for what you’re doing or are you trying to explain to me what you did even though there was no excuse. So what you’re getting here from Saul is not an excuse, but it’s an explanation. We know he thought he was doing wrong because of the very last sentence there. He says, “When I went down, I saw that we’d not asked for the Lord’s favor and so I forced myself, I compelled myself, I knew I shouldn’t have done it but I needed the Lord’s favor so I forced myself to do it.” Do you notice what’s not here in any of Saul’s words? He blame-shifts. The first thing he says, “Everything was against me. The people left me. You didn’t show up. It’s everyone else’s fault. And so I was doing my best, so I forced myself to make these sacrifices so that I wasn’t defeated.” What do you not hear from Saul at all in any of these words? It’s the key to

understanding why David is the king and Saul won't be the king. You don't hear any repentance at all. You don't hear any kind of sorrow. You don't hear any kind of, "You busted me. I've done wrong." If you understand that, you can understand why Samuel's words to him don't sound so harsh. Saul has been disobedient and he knows it. He has been unfaithful and he knows it, and now he is being called on it, and so instead of actually owning up to it, he makes excuses for it. He makes excuses for his sin instead of owning his sin. You see, all of us sin, the Bible says we're all sinners, and even David is going to sin. In fact, David is going to sin bigger than any king in Israel in many ways, at least more publicly. In just one instance, for example, remember the incident with Bathsheba where he looks across at the roof of another man, Uriah, and sees Bathsheba. He takes Bathsheba, another man's wife, to have her and to know her, and she becomes pregnant with his child. Instead of owning up to it he sends her husband to the front line and tells everyone to step back. He basically murders an innocent man. And when David is confronted by Nathan the prophet, what does he say? He tells him a story about sheep. There's one king who had many sheep and someone who had one ewe and the king took it. He said, "What would you do?" And David said, "I'd kill that man!" Remember how Nathan said, "You are the man." Do you remember David's response? Completely different than anything you ever hear from Saul. David's first response to being caught in this huge public, horrible sin was, "I have sinned against the Lord." So with Saul you get excuses, you get blame-shifting, you get everything else but owning of sin. And with David you get immediately, "I have sinned against the Lord." And the question is, would Saul have maintained the kingdom if he had not, because David maintained the kingdom in spite of his sin. But David was willing to admit his sin and own up to it. Saul's not. So what's going to happen with him? There's a sense Saul is sort of self-righteous here, and according to the measure he judges with, judges himself, with that measure he'll be judged. It's like, "Saul, do you want to rely on your self-righteousness and your own sense of goodness and blaming everyone else? Then by that measure you'll be judged." Then notice what Samuel says to him. This is Saul's future we're heading into.

¹³ And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." ¹⁵ And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. . . (ESV)

So what does he say to him first of all? He says, "You have done foolishly." And when he says that, it's bigger than just, "You made a stupid mistake." Because if you read throughout the Bible, folly or foolishness (especially in Proverbs) really is used of someone who is morally or spiritually bankrupt. In other words, Samuel is saying to Saul, "Saul, it's clear that you just don't get it. You don't get it. And here you're supposed to be king over all of Israel and you don't have a clue. You're morally and spiritually bankrupt. You don't understand the gospel at all. And here's how I know you don't understand God's promises to you, is you have not obeyed."

You see, he's not just deposing him from his kingdom because he failed to obey, it's because his failure to obey shows that he does not understand God's promises. His failure to obey is really the symptom of his lack of faith. You see, Saul said, "I didn't have the Lord's favor and so therefore I did this." What Samuel is saying implicitly is, "If you understood that you already had the Lord's favor, you would have obeyed." In other words, Saul had the Lord's favor the whole time, and because he had the Lord's favor he should have been able to obey. He says, "Because of this your kingdom is not going to endure forever." Would it have endured if he had obeyed? We'll never know. But what we do know is that God has elected some other king who at this point in the Book is unnamed, but all Israel would have known who they were talking about. God has chosen a man after his own heart to lead his people.

I don't know what you've been taught, what this means to be "a man after God's own heart." It's in some ways ambiguous. David was a man after God's own heart, and that's who he's talking about. But there are a number of ways this could be translated as well. It can mean a man after God's own heart, in other words a man who loves God and a man who is faithful, and a man who wants to trust God and believe him and all this kind of stuff. Part of it is that. But the simple meaning is: the man that he wants, or the right man for the job. That's another way to translate, "a man after God's own heart." So, on one hand the way we typically think of it is correct. But

another way to translate it is just, “the right man for the job.” Saul, because of your lack of faith and your lack of understanding, you’re the wrong man for the job. But God has chosen the right man for the job. Who’s the right man for the job? It’s David. It’s the one who would be faithful, the one who would own his sin. Ultimately as we speak of our lives, “Who’s the right man for the job?”

The whole point of the Book of Judges, we talked about before, is that Israel needs a king, and also that you need a king. In the Book of Samuel says that Israel needs a king, and not just any king but a king like David. What the Book of Samuel it says to us as well, “You need a king and not just any king, but you need a king like David.” A king like David that we have goes by the name of Jesus. He’s David’s great Son. He’s the one who in the face of His enemies and the face of certain death was faithful. He stayed there. He obeyed God, and in fact He was obedient even to death on the cross. He’s the man after God’s own heart. Not only was He the man after God’s own heart, He possessed God’s own heart. Not only did He possess God’s own heart, but He was the right man for the job. Jesus was the right king that we needed because the job to be done was not just to own His sin, because He didn’t have any, but to own our sin. Is there someone who could own our sin, who would own our sin on our behalf and would it be acceptable to God? We have a king named Jesus Who was willing to own our sin. He was the right man for the job, completely faithful. When He went to the cross and rose from the dead, He took your sin with Him and He rose you with him. And now you can stand with Him. Think about that.