

A King is Born

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much Fiona and Andy and Alistair as well. Good evening everyone, really good to see you this evening as we come to continue our studies in 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel chapter 11.

In 2002 there was a poll taken to find out who was the greatest ever Britain, and you may well be aware that the result of the poll was that Winston Churchill was voted as the greatest Britain.

Now if you'd asked someone in the early months of 1940 if Winston Churchill was going to be the greatest Britain ever, they would undoubtedly have laughed at you, because no one at that stage saw Winston Churchill, or very few people saw Winston Churchill as the great man that we would today.

The kind of things that were said about him before he became prime minister was that he was overbearing, he was villainous, he was unreliable, he had no judgment, and he was useless.

Some of these from the press, some of them from his fellow politicians. Very few people would have seen Winston Churchill as being a natural candidate to be prime minister, and certainly not as someone who could successfully lead the country through the Second World War.

[1 : 1 1] Let's go forward a few years to when Winston Churchill stepped down as prime minister, and these are the kind of things that were being said about him. He was a statesman, he was passionate, he was inspiring, he was courageous, he was a man of action.

A total turnaround in the public perception of a man. Why did that happen? Well, lots of reasons I'm sure, but I would suggest that for Winston Churchill, the sequence is something like this.

He was determined that evil shouldn't triumph. He firmly believed that the war was winnable. He managed to motivate other people to believe that the war was winnable too, and he successfully led them through it to victory.

I think there are some obvious parallels then as we come to our passage this evening and look at Saul. If you were here a couple of weeks ago when Alistair was taking us through the previous few chapters, you may remember that Saul had been anointed king by Samuel, and he had been chosen by an apparently random, not really random, but apparently random process among the tribes and the clans and so on.

The lot in the end fell on Saul as king. So in one sense he had been crowned and accepted as the king of the Israelites. But at the end of chapter 10, there are still some people saying, how can this fellow save us?

[2 : 3 8] What has he done? He's just a farmer's son from a remote part of the land. What has he done? What can he do to save our people? And it is in chapter 11 that we really see Saul coming to life and demonstrating his credentials.

Very similar to Churchill. He sees evil and he's determined it won't triumph. He believes that the victory can be won. He motivates others to follow him and he leads them through the battle.

And by the end of chapter 11, Saul is universally recognized as being the king and the rightful king. Now it has to be said, chapter 11 is very much the high point of Saul's life.

It is all downhill from then on. But chapter 11, he comes out very well as the one who is sent and was used by God and was able to deliver his people.

And he then gets the recognition of the whole nation. I think it's quite important when we come to a passage like this to see it as much as we can through the eyes of the people who were there at the time and those who would first have read the words that are recorded in 1 Samuel.

[3 : 50] So I want to spend just a few minutes looking at the geography and the history of this situation. So geography first, there's a map of Israel.

Not sure where you can see it, but hopefully at least you can see that running down the middle is the River Jordan with the Sea of Galilee at the top and the Dead Sea down the bottom. The tribes of Israel were split between the two sides of the River Jordan.

We mentioned that last Sunday at our vision evening. Two and a half tribes were on the west side of the Jordan, rather, and the remaining tribes were on the east side.

So Reuben and Gad and half tribe of Manasseh had chosen that particular land over on the right of your picture there and the other tribes that settled on the other side.

Now around them on both sides were enemies. The main enemies of the Israelites at that time were the Philistines. We've read about them already in 1 Samuel.

[4 : 54] And of course, when we come on to the story of David, the Philistines feature very strongly. They were the ones that posed the greatest threat to Israel as a whole. But on the east side, where the two and a half tribes were, there was another nation called the Ammonites.

Not as big, not as powerful as the Philistines, but nevertheless capable of coming in battle against the Israelites. And they were probably depending on the fact that the Philistines were occupying most of the tribes of Israel in defending themselves.

And rather opportunistically, they came and attacked the two and a half tribes that had settled there. When we read the Bible as we have it in most of our Bibles today, it looks as if they came specifically and attacked this town of Jabesh Gilead.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the scrolls which were discovered not that many years ago, which had much of the scripture in them. In these Dead Sea Scrolls, there are some extra verses at the start of chapter 11.

Some of your Bibles may have them as a footnote to chapter 11. And these scrolls say that what actually happened was that the Ammonites came and they attacked the two and a half tribes.

[6 : 11] They defeated them. They gouged out the right eyes of most of the men there. And the ones who were actually there in Jabesh Gilead at the end were those who had escaped from the Ammonites and were taking shelter there.

And they were being besieged and were to suffer the same fate as the others. Most scholars seem to think that that is a genuine account of things.

It's not in the scripture as we have it. Probably right that it's not because it's not the focus of this chapter. But maybe quite interesting background that the people who were there were the survivors possibly of a bigger attack, which already had claimed many of their compatriots.

So that's the geography. We have the two and a half tribes. They're kind of isolated from the rest. And they have been attacked. And Jabesh Gilead is being besieged. And there are the two key towns in this story.

Jabesh Gilead we've talked about and Gebeah, which is where Saul is, which is just a bit north of Jerusalem. And these two towns are significant because they come up before in our Bibles.

[7 : 24] In one of the most unsavory episodes in the history of Israel in Judges 19 to 21, these towns play a pivotal part. So let me just very briefly describe and summarize what happened.

It's not very edifying, but it's important that we understand what was going on there. So there was an attack on the concubine of a Levite at Gebeah.

She was repeatedly raped and eventually died of what had been done to her. The Israelites then waged war against the tribe of Benjamin, which refused to release to them the men who had done this.

So there was a big civil war in Israel, which eventually, after a bit of a battle, the main armies of Israel won against the Benjamites, almost entirely destroyed the Benjamites, but then got to the point where they were saying, well, we don't really want one of the tribes of Israel to disappear completely.

We need to do something about this. And what they said they would do was they would find a town in Israel that hadn't sent any soldiers to fight in the war, and they would take women from that to be wives for the Benjamites.

[8 : 30] And they found that Jabesh Gilead was the one place in Israel which hadn't sent soldiers to the war, and they went and slaughtered most of the people of that town and brought some of the women back to be wives for the Benjamites.

As I say, a very unsavory time in the land of Israel. Horrific that God's people should get involved in these things. Why is that significant to this chapter, apart from the thing that there are two towns that are there?

Well, three things I would suggest. There's probably more we could look at, but three things I'd suggest that are maybe relevant. The first is that the people of Jabesh Gilead and the people of Gebeah may well have been related because the Benjamite woman had been brought back to populate the land.

So Saul may have been descended from one of the women who was taken from Jabesh Gilead. They were kinfolk, and perhaps that's why the plea went out to Gebeah, which happened to be Saul's town.

Second thing is I think there's a bit of an irony here, and I'm sure that irony wouldn't be lost on the people at the time. Here was the town that had refused to go out and fight for Israel, and it's pleading for Israel to come and fight for it.

[9 : 44] So the town that refused to fight is asking others to come and to fight for it. But thirdly, and probably most significantly, when we look at chapters 19 and 21 of Judges, chapter 19 begins with the words, In those days Israel had no king.

Chapter 21 ends with the words, In those days Israel had no king. Everyone did as they saw fit. So people would look back on Judges 19 to 21, and they would say, This is what happens when you don't have a king.

You get anarchy, you get wickedness, you get all sorts of things happening. And they would say, Ah, but now we do have a king. And look what happens when we have a king.

He goes out, and he rescued his people, and he restores order. So the events way back in Judges, I think, have some significance when we look at 1 Samuel.

For us, though, perhaps not quite as much as for the Israelites to begin with. It is history for us. It's perhaps, for some of us, at least interesting history. But it is not, I think, the main lesson we're going to get from this chapter.

[10 : 53] So let's just walk through it. And four points I want to make, and I think the lessons from them will be fairly obvious. So we're talking about God's chosen king.

It's all chosen by God. And the first thing we note about him is that he is anointed with the Spirit. That's in verse 6. So why did I start at verse 6 and not at verse 1?

Well, let me put some up on the screen. You may not be able to read all of this. I'm hoping you can read some of it. But it gives something of the structure of this passage. I find more and more, as I study the Bible, you come across passages like this where there's a bit of a symmetry to what the Bible says.

So in this passage, in verse 1 of the chapter, God's people are being attacked. In verses 12 to 13, they're rescued. Verse 2, the Ammonites threaten. Verse 11, they flee.

Verse 3, Jabesh Gilead promises to surrender to the Ammonites. Verse 10, it does exactly the same thing. Verse 4, messengers bring bad news. Verse 6, messengers bring good news.

[11 : 56] Verse 5 is about Paul's question and response. And verses 7 to 8, Paul's instruction and the response. And then in the middle, you have verse 6.

And when you see this kind of structure, and there's a single verse or a single passage in the middle, that is one that is good to focus on because that is probably the key part of the passage.

And the key bit in this passage is that the Spirit of God comes powerfully upon Saul. The ESV says, and I think it's a good translation, the Spirit rushes on Saul.

This description of the coming of the Spirit is only used of two people in the Old Testament. One is Saul, and the other is Samson. We all know Samson and his great feats and what happened when the Spirit came on him.

And again, for the readers of this passage, I'm sure they were supposed to think back to Samson and say, here's another man who's like Samson. And when the Spirit comes powerfully on him, he does great things.

[13 : 02] But the important thing is as God's anointed, God had sent the Spirit to be with Saul. Now the Spirit had come on Saul in chapter 10, but that appears to have been quite temporary.

It appears now that the Spirit comes on Saul and remains there until David is anointed king a few chapters ahead. God's man has been prepared for his work by having the Spirit of God coming on him.

Now we're going to be looking forward in quite a few places this evening to the Lord Jesus, and this is one of them. At the Lord's baptism, you'll remember the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove.

And he then goes out and he preaches in the synagogue and he starts by saying the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him. And he then preached good news and so on, the rest of it, in Luke chapter 4.

The Spirit came down as vindication, as validation of the Lord's calling and his person. And throughout his life, he walked in tune with the Spirit.

[14 : 12] He did what was right. We also have the Spirit. The description of the Spirit rushing on Saul in some ways might be reminiscent of what happened the day of Pentecost when there were the tongues of fire the Spirit came down upon the first believers.

We haven't had the same experience that they did, but as those who have trusted the Lord Jesus and those who are following him, we also have the Spirit.

We have the Spirit within us as our counselor, as our guide, as our empowerer. And I think it's interesting to note what happens in verse 6 when the Spirit comes on Saul.

Then he says, when Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him and he burned with anger. When we think of the Spirit and what this work of the Spirit is in our lives, we quite often think of the Spirit as teaching us the truth, as leading us into all truth, as being the one who produces fruit in our lives, as being the one who gives us gifts to serve the church.

Perhaps we don't think quite so often of the Spirit as being the one who can make us burn with anger. But should that not be the case?

- [15 : 35] Remember, in John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus says that the Spirit will convict the power of the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. Talking about the world there equally applies, I think, to us.

The Spirit convicts us of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. And so the Spirit in our lives has brought us to the point of trusting in Jesus and seeking to live for him.

But does he not also show us the injustice and the evil that there is in the world around us? Does he not show us how the world is oppressed by someone who is utterly evil and utterly against God's people as these Ammonites were in the days of Saul?

And when he does that, should that rouse us into action? Can we be left indifferent as we see injustice, as we see suffering, as we see evil apparently triumphing in our world?

If we have the passion that comes from the Spirit, that God's name may be glorified, that his justice may be upheld, that right may be done in our world.

- [16 : 52] That is the first point at which the Spirit then moves us and empowers us to go out and to do something about it. Because of course, Saul didn't stop with just burning with anger.

He went and he managed to get all the people of Israel behind him and he went out to the battle and he was triumphant. And as we see injustice around us in the world, as we see the grip of the evil one, we should be filled with the burning desire that God's name should be glorified and that we should be those who are able to help doing it.

At one level, that might be in seeking to bring about social justice. Probably not on a national, international scale for most of us, but where we are, just recognizing where there are things that are wrong and seeking to put them right.

It should also mean that we have a real passion for those who are under the control of the evil one, for those who are in mortal danger if they don't put their trust in the Lord Jesus.

It should be something that makes us all the more determined to go out and to witness and to tell others about him and to see them brought to know the Saviour.

- [18 : 07] We too should be filled with the Spirit and that should affect first our attitudes to things round about us and then our actions as the Lord teaches us, leads us and empowers us to go out and to serve him.

God's chosen king is filled with the Spirit. The second thing we learn about God's chosen king, Saul, in this case, is that he rescues his people.

Three times in this passage it talks about the people being rescued or being delivered. Verse 3, the people of Jabesh, they're being surrounded by the Ammonites and they say if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you.

So the need for rescue is recognized right at the start of the chapter. Down in verse 9, Saul has gathered the troops together, the armies of Israel are marching out and they say to the men of Gilead, by this time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be rescued.

So the need for rescue has been identified, the rescue has been promised and then in verse 13, Saul says, no one will be put to death today for this day the Lord has rescued Israel.

- [19 : 32] The need's identified, rescue is promised and the rescue is then brought about. And that is what establishes Saul as the king in Israel.

Again, very clear application as we think about the Lord Jesus. There was a terrible need for rescue for mankind. As sin has got into our world, as all of us are under the penalty of sin without the Lord Jesus, we needed to be rescued.

That rescue comes to us, is promised to us throughout the Old Testament of the Bible. Right through from Genesis chapter 3 onwards, we see the promise of the Messiah, the Redeemer, the one who would come and rescue his people.

And then of course in the Gospels and the New Testament, we see how that rescue happens. It happens through the Lord Jesus. And as Saul says, not taking the credit for himself, the Lord has rescued Israel.

So we can say, the Lord has rescued me, the Lord has rescued all of us from the terrible fate that awaited us if we remained in our sins.

[20 : 47] God promises to rescue his people and he fulfills that promise and for us he fulfills it particularly through the Lord Jesus. God's chosen king is filled with the Spirit and he rescues his people.

Third thing we noticed from this passage is that God's chosen king shows mercy to the undeserving. Now we noted at the end of chapter 10, we had these people who were saying, we don't want Saul to be our king.

What good is this man to us? He's not going to be able to do anything to rescue us. And so in chapter 11, the people of Saul had his victory.

They were saying to Samuel, well let's bring these people out and let's put them to death because they are traitors. They wouldn't accept God's chosen king. They deserve nothing less than death.

Interesting, it was said to Samuel, but it was Saul who pronounced the words of forgiveness. No one will be put to death today for this day the Lord has rescued Israel.

[21 : 55] I think the acclaim that Saul received after this was at least partly because of what he did at this point. Yes, it was because of the great victory that he won and the way he had led his army into battle.

But he also showed the qualities which are necessary in God's king. That quality of mercy and of forgiveness and of being willing to give people another chance.

Now again, as we read through the account of Saul later on, we don't see this in evidence quite so much but in this chapter I think we do. There is a real mercy there for those who don't deserve it.

And of course, as we look forward to the Lord Jesus, what do we see? We see mercy for those who are undeserving. As the Lord Jesus hangs on the cross, he prays for the forgiveness of those who have crucified him.

As Saul is on the Damascus road going out to persecute and to kill the Christians, the Lord appears to him and shows mercy to him as Paul would describe himself the chief of sinners.

[23 : 07] And all of us undeserving as we are, sinful as we are. If we have put our trust in the Lord Jesus, then he has shown mercy to us despite the fact that we never deserved it.

So also mercy to the undeserving is evidence of being God's chosen king. And then finally, God's chosen king is filled with the spirit.

He rescued his people. He shows mercy to the undeserving and at the end he's acclaimed as king. So in verse 14, Samuel says to the people, come let us go to Gilgal and renew our kingship.

They'll go up to Gilgal and they make Saul king in the presence of the Lord and they make sacrifices and have a great celebration. Saul is established as the king in Israel.

But I think there's more to these verses than that. This isn't just about Saul being recognized as king. Because what Samuel says is let's go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.

[24 : 19] Gilgal is significant because it's the place the Israelites came to when they crossed over the Jordan on their way to Jericho and where they received God's assurance and God's blessing as they went to the promised land.

And they go back there and Samuel says we're going to renew the kingship and what is significant about their kingship compared with every other kingship in the world at that time, what was significant is that it was in the presence of the Lord and it was recognizing that the ultimate king is not Saul, it is the Lord God.

And so they have this ceremony where yes, Saul is made king but he's made king in the presence of the Lord with suitable oaths and then they make sacrifices to the Lord and recognize that actually the great king is not just Saul, it is the great God of heaven, he is the Lord God, he is the king over all.

And we come today and we recognize one who is acclaimed as king. One who died once for our sins, was gloriously raised to life and now is seated at God's right hand and is king of kings and lord of lords.

And we look at him and we say he is the one to whom we owe allegiance, whom we should be following and obeying and living for. He is the king of kings.

[25 : 48] Coronation of our queen was in 1953, 65 years ago the coronation this year. I was looking this week through the kind of script or the order of service for the coronation and I was struck that nine times during that service it was stated that God or the Lord Jesus is the eternal king.

Several other times he referred to as king as well. This was the coronation of the queen of our land and yet at that coronation it was recognized there is one who is much greater than her.

There is one under whom she sits. You probably see in the queen's left hand there there is what's called the orb. The orb is like a small globe with a cross on the top and it's a very significant part of the service.

As the Archbishop of Canterbury presented it to the queen this is what he said. Receive this orb set under the cross and remember that the whole world is subject to the power and empire of Christ our redeemer.

The whole world is subject to the power and empire of Christ our redeemer. And I have to say to all appearances our queen has remembered that and has sought to live for God and to live as a Christian even as she reigns over this land.

[27 : 17] And the question then I suppose for all of us is that's how we live. Do we remember every day that we are subject to the power and empire of Christ our redeemer?

Is our desire to obey him in every way we can to live for him and to serve him and to see his name honoured and glorified that others too may recognise that he is our king and that he is the king of kings and lord of lords.

That is what he demands of us that is what he deserves from us as the one who has saved us has rescued us from the grip of sin and of the evil one.

It is for us to owe allegiance to him and to be faithful servants and subjects of his and to recognise that he is indeed the one who is worthy of all our praise and of all the glory.

So God's chosen king he's filled with the spirit he rescues his people he shows mercy to the undeserving and he's acclaimed as king.

[28 : 34] We can give thanks that at least for one chapter that was true of Saul. We can give thanks so much more that that is eternally true of our Lord Jesus.

That he came to earth that he was full of the spirit and that he lived by the spirit he did what was needed to rescue us from our sins and to give us hope for the future.

He showed us mercy when we deserve nothing but judgement from God and then it is for all of us to acclaim him as king and to serve him and to live for him.

And my voice is going so let's leave it at that point and let's pray together. Our Father we thank you for our Lord Jesus. We thank you that he is a king who is so much greater than Saul or any other monarch who has ever ruled on this earth.

And we thank you that we can look back and we can see in Saul and in others a very pale shadow in some of the things they did of the greatness of the Lord Jesus. And we want to say that we love him and that we want to serve him and to live for him.

[29 : 48] And we pray that you will truly fill us with the spirit that we may have that great passion to go out and in our world to see Christ as proclaimed as king and to work against the works of the evil one and to help others to escape from his grip and from the inevitable punishment of those who reject the Lord Jesus.

Thank you for being with us as we've studied together. We again pray for Derek and for other members of his family. We pray that you will be a real comfort to them over the coming days.

We thank you again for Elma. We thank you for her life of faithful service, for the hospitality she offered for many years, for her great concern, for the underprivileged, for her generosity and for her desire to serve the Lord and to be with his people.

We thank you that for her it is now much better and we pray that may be a great comfort to the family over the coming days. So we give you thanks for this time together. We commit ourselves to you now in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Amen.