

## Saul, the humble

Passages: 1 Samuel 10:1-12  
Matthew 11: 28-30

### **Let's pray.**

I've got a lot of books in my library on the subject of leadership; books with titles such as "Courageous Leadership", "Spiritual Leadership", "Intuitive Leadership" and "Values-Driven Leadership". These books speak about things like a leader's 'vision', 'preparation', 'conviction' and 'courage'. In general, they all attempt to turn *good leaders* into *great leaders* by encouraging a pro-active approach to leadership.

But when I read 1 Samuel 9 and 10, the story of how God chooses Saul to be the first King of Israel, qualities like 'vision', 'preparation', 'conviction' and 'courage' are never mentioned. In fact, you are given the impression that these things do not even matter! No, there is only one quality that God seems to be interested in, and that is *humility*!

Let's start with the opening verses of 1 Samuel 9.

*9 There was a Benjaminite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bekorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup> Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else. <sup>3</sup> Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, 'Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys.' <sup>4</sup> So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them. <sup>5</sup> When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, 'Come, let's go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us.' <sup>6</sup> But the servant replied, 'Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there*

*now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take.'*

What do you first see in this passage? Two obvious details stand out:  
v.1 -- Saul is from a prominent family. His father Kish was a ***“man of standing”***.  
v. 2-- Saul is also tall and handsome. ***“A head taller than anyone else.”***

But take notice! Although these two outward qualities are mentioned, they don't seem to have made Saul arrogant or proud. To the contrary, Saul shows an amazing degree of humility:

First, when his father's donkeys are lost, Saul humbly obeys his father's command to go and search for them.

Secondly, during the many days of their search, Saul is humble enough to sleep rough.

Third, after many days on the road, Saul is humbly aware that his father might be worried about him, so he begins to turn homeward.

Finally, Saul humbly listens to the advice of the servant and agrees to inquire of a 'seer' over the donkeys' whereabouts.

I've used the word *'humble'* to describe Saul because that is the general impression that you get from this passage. As CS Lewis once said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less." — And there's more of that same attitude to follow! Just look at verses 18-21 of chapter 9. As it turns out, 'the seer' is none other than the prophet, Samuel!

***18*** *Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, 'Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?'* ***19*** *'I am the seer,' Samuel replied. 'Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and in the morning I will send you on your way and will tell you all that is in your heart.'* ***20*** *As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line?'* ***21*** *Saul answered, 'But am I not a Benjaminite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?'*

Saul's humility shines through—In his own estimation, he's just a young

man from the *smallest family* in the *smallest tribe* of Israel. He has nothing to boast about! In fact, if you know the horrible history of his tribe, you'll understand why he mentions it with such humility. According to Judges 19 and 20, we read the awful story of a Levite and his concubine who, while travelling back to Bethlehem, spend the night in the town of Gibeah, in Benjamin...Saul's hometown. The concubine, however, gets gang-raped by men from the town. As retaliation for this crime, the other tribes of Israel gathered together and nearly wiped out the entire tribe of Benjamin. That's why Benjamin was the smallest tribe in Israel! And this is another reason for Saul's humility- He knows this history all too well and is ashamed for what his tribe had done.

But, once again, this is a good sign! After all, the only man that God can choose to be king over Israel is someone who is humble enough to know his place...a man who will not let the position go to his head! And you can understand why! Essentially, **Israel already has a King**—an invisible King whose name is *Yahweh*, the Lord God! Although Israel may want a king "like all the other nations", the new king of Israel must be humble enough to recognise his position is subordinate to God, the true King. This new king must be humble enough to submit himself to a higher power!

This is exactly what we see in the next passage! Saul is willing to submit to God's authority as it comes to him in the person of Samuel, the prophet! Look at **1 Samuel 10:1-7**

*10 Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, 'Has not the LORD anointed you ruler over his inheritance?'* [HYPERLINK "<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20sam%2010:1-7&version=NIVUK>" \ "fen-

*NIVUK-7420a" \o "See footnote a" a] 2 When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, "The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, 'What shall I do about my son?'"*

*3 'Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to worship God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves*

*of bread, and another a skin of wine.* <sup>4</sup> *They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them.*

<sup>5</sup> *‘After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying.* <sup>6</sup> *The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.* <sup>7</sup> *Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.*

What do you see in these verses? First, Saul humbly accepts *Samuel’s anointing*. Second, he humbly accepts *Samuel’s instructions*. In fact, it seems that Saul is silently accepting everything that is going on around him, aware that God is behind it all! He is being moved from place to place (from Rachel’s tomb, to the great tree of Tabor, and finally to Gibeah) by none other than *the Word of God!* In other words, Saul is ***not*** in control- He is ***not*** making his own choices—rather, He humbly yields to God’s hand! He is in submission to Someone who is far greater than himself!

Look, now, at verses **9 and 10 of 1 Samuel 10**.

<sup>9</sup> *As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day.* <sup>10</sup> *When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying.*

Here is the culmination of a long succession of humble actions that started with Saul’s obedience to his father in the search for his donkeys. Each of these actions has moved him a step closer to this last, most powerful, encounter with God. Here is the final demonstration of Saul’s humility, the one that puts a seal on all the others! Saul is humbly allowing God to take control of His life. Indeed, there can be no greater *act of humility* in any person’s life than to bow the knee and accept the transforming touch of God!

As Augustine once said; ***Should you ask me what is the first thing in***

*religion; I should reply that the first, second, and third thing therein is humility.*

Although it may have started with a bizarre journey, every step was a test of humility, leading him to the place where he was ready to receive an entirely new heart through the in-filling of God's Holy Spirit. This was the attitude that God was looking for in the selection of Israel's new king: not 'vision', 'preparation', 'conviction' or 'courage'. These, of course, would all follow, but not because Saul was naturally prepared in these areas! It would only be as Saul continued to live before God *in humble submission to the Spirit*—only then would he be divinely equipped and empowered with all these others attributes of leadership.

So, does this story have any relevance to us, today? Let me make three points:

I think we can firmly say that, as far as God is concerned, **humility is the greatest quality needed in those who lead His people**. Without humility, a leader will end up trusting in himself. Without humility, a leader will be unwilling to receive the necessary transformation that comes from submission to the Holy Spirit. This was the story of Saul!

Sadly, as we shall see next week, something went wrong and he lost this humble attitude. As a result, God took away his right to be king! Indeed, the OT ends with disaster! Why? Because the kings of Israel have no humility! They will not submit themselves to God—they will not obey His Word!

That's why, when **Jesus** comes on the scene, something is radically different about Him! From the start, He displayed a humility not seen amongst Israel's leadership. It was his humility that set him apart from the other teachers and rabbis! "***Come unto Me***", he told the crowds, "***for I am humble and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls!***"

As he gradually took up his kingly role in Israel, he consistently trusted not in Himself but in the Word of His Father. Resisting the various opinions of men, Jesus would humbly trust in the Father even to the cross! As Paul said in his letter to the Philippians, even though Jesus was "***...in very nature God, (He) did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;***<sup>7</sup> ***rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being***

*made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!*

The point Paul is making is obvious—The most important aspect of Jesus’ kingly leadership was His humility...His submission to the will of His Father...even to death.

But it must be quickly added, here, that Paul’s words about *Jesus* are ultimately words *for us all!* Paul insists that **every Christian is a leader** ...and Jesus’ humility in leadership is a model for us all! Paul writes; *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. <sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...”*

This is so important for us to remember! The same Spirit that fell upon Saul has fallen on us all—By that Spirit, Jesus has formed us all into “*kings and priests*” to God. We are “*the priesthood of all believers*”. There is, therefore, a constant call to live in submission to God’s Spirit that we might be *continually changed and transformed*. It also means that we have all been given a gift of ministry. We are all *leaders* ...in our homes, workplaces and the market... as we humbly trust God to work through us in His world.

Let’s pray

