

Our series in 1 Samuel has been titled "Rise of the King." Which has a lot of meaning. It is the story of the rise of the monarchy.

It is the story of the rise of King Saul.

It is the story of the rise of King David.

And it is the story of the rise of the expectation that Jesus would be a king.

Today we are finally going to be introduced to Saul, our first king.

But this introduction is not at all what we expect.

Most people who grew up in church know the story of David being chosen as king.

Most of us forget the story of Saul being chosen.

And the reason is that this is a bizarre story.

It seems strange and almost out of place.

And the reason is because the story of Saul is not the story of someone who started great and ended poorly.

Our entire passage this morning is trying to tell us that Saul's story is a tragedy.

Saul looks like a king, but his moral failings point us to Christ.

If I was trying to be click-baity or attention-seeking, I might have named this sermon "Saul is the anti-Christ."

We typically tell the story of Saul as someone who started great, but ended poorly.

But, I think the Bible intends to tell us a different story.

You may disagree with me here and that's fine.

But I think these early stories in 1 Samuel make a lot more sense if we understand them as giving us hints that Saul will not be a good king.

Verse 1, **"There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth."**

Now remember, all of Israel is waiting for a king.

They have all been sent home from Samuel with the expectation that a king is coming.

So, we expect to be introduced to the king!

And here there is a man.
We get his name.
We get a list of his ancestors.
This is who we would think the king would come from.
This is good stock and a good family.
And he is a rich man.
Your translation may say "a man of substance."
Or a powerful person.
The Hebrew here is not just that he is rich and has servants.
It is telling us that this family is powerful and important.
They are already a part of the nobility.
He sounds just like a king already.

Verse 2, **"And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people."**

This is the man.
Finally, we are introduced to the king.
And he is better than Israel's expectations.
We hear right away that he is handsome.
He is better looking than anyone else in the whole country.
He is someone who we would be happy to put on TV.
He would make women swoon and men jealous.

And he is taller than anyone else.
He is the most impressive person in any room.
He stands literally above everyone else.
He looks exactly like a king should look.

Then our story really begins in 3, **"Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost."**

This is such a random aside; it is quite frankly humorous.

Here is the rich king from the good family who looks like a king, but he lost some donkeys.

It is a clue right away that something else is going on.

It is actually our second clue that there is a problem.

Our first clue should have been back in verse 1.

But I waited just because I find this so funny.

Our first clue is the tribe Saul is from.

He is from the tribe of Benjamin.

It is the smallest tribe.

When Jacob prophesied over his sons, who would be the twelve tribes of Israel, Benjamin was prophesied to be a ravenous wolf.

Which they fulfill in their history.

And Judah was prophesied in Genesis 49:10 **"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,"**

Judah is the tribe the kings should come from.

Judah is the tribe they should be expecting.

So already, Saul is not the right king.

God has chosen him, but his line cannot remain in power if God will keep His word.

This is our tell that Saul's dynasty is going to be short-lived.

The Messiah and king of kings cannot come from him.

Let us turn to the donkeys.

Because this whole story is just strange and funny.

Saul's father has lost his donkeys.

"So, Kish said to Saul his son, "Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys."

Saul is commissioned to go and look for them.

Notice though, that Saul has to be told to go and look for them.

It is hard to know how someone loses an entire flock of donkeys.

It certainly must be somebody's fault.

But we don't know the specifics.

I think the Bible is actually laying some breadcrumbs to make us think it is Saul's fault.

Because he does not take command and the lead.

He does not offer to go do it.

He has to be told to get off the couch and go look for them.

And someone needs to be sent with him.

Verse 4, **"And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin but did not find them."**

A whole lot of traveling and passing through without a trace of the donkeys.

You don't need to look at a map to get this.

The main thing is they are traveling all over the place with no luck.

They go all over the country and find nothing.

What are we to think of this?

Well, donkeys are not exactly stealthy.

They did not just disappear.

Now yes, God is using His providence to set up Saul as king.

But I think we are supposed to see Saul as an incompetent shepherd.

He is someone who cannot find donkeys when they go missing.

And after he looks all around he wants to give up.

Verse 5, **"When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, 'Come, let us go back, let my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us.'"**

Saul just wants to give up.

Like my children who tell me they can't find something because they have looked everywhere.

My response usually is, "You haven't looked everywhere, or you would have found it."

But Saul thinks he has a good reason.

He doesn't want his dad to worry.

But he does not seem overly worried about the donkeys.

And this matters for a particularly symbolic reason.

There is a dominant image in the ancient Near East for kings.

They are portrayed as shepherds of the people.

I also think of Moses.

He was called as the leader of Israel when he lost a sheep.

And he went to find it and instead found God in the burning bush

This is part of why Jesus is called "the good shepherd."

King's must be good shepherds.

But Saul is not.

He loses donkeys, he can't find them, and then he wants to give up.

Verse 6, **"But he said to him, "Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go."**

We need to see that the servant brings up Samuel.

Saul does not.

The servant doesn't even mention his name.

It's not clear if he knows his name.

But he did say that they've heard there's a man of God right here.

Any everybody likes him, and he always says what's true.

And the servant suggests maybe we should ask him what to do?

It is a wonderful suggestion.

It is exactly what they should do.

It even is what they will do.

But I want you to see that Saul seems to not know who Samuel is.

Saul is not the one who suggests they go to Samuel, and Saul does not appear to know that Samuel is here.

And this is even though we have already seen in the book that all of Israel knows about Samuel.

The entire nation should know that he is the high priest.

He is the prophet of God, whose words have never fallen to the ground.

He is the one who is righteous.
He is the one who told him what to do with the ark returned.
Yet Saul doesn't know anything about him.
What does this say about a spiritual state?
I don't think it's good.

Verse 7, **"Then Saul said to his servant, 'But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?'"** ⁸ **The servant answered Saul again, 'Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way.'"**

I also think it's funny Saul thinks they need to bring him money.
They have this back-and-forth about what are we supposed to pay him?
Now I ask you, is there anything in the Bible about paying the prophets?
If we ever seen a true prophet of God, say they love to tell you what God wants but first give me a gift?
I think this is further evidence of Saul's spiritual blindness.
He thinks hearing from God costs money.

This reminds me of President JFK.
He famously never carried a wallet or ever handled money.
He just walked through and said he wanted to buy things and other people took care of it.
Remember, Saul is a rich man.
Yet, it is humorous that he has no money.
Only his servant has money.
So, his servant is expected to pay.

Verse 9, **"(Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, 'Come, let us go to the seer,' for today's 'prophet' was formerly called a seer)."**

We didn't get this weird back-and-forth about how they called prophets seers in that day.
There's a whole bunch of different interpretations on that.

I think that this again shows us the spiritual state of the nation.
They become even a little superstitious about the prophet.
At the very least, they have not developed spiritually like they should.

Verse 10, **"And Saul said to his servant, 'Well said; come, let us go.' So they went to the city where the man of God was."**

Saul decides to agree with a servant.
And they go to where Samuel is.

Verse 11, **"As they went up the hill to the city, they met young women coming out to draw water and said to them, 'Is the seer here?'"**

And as they're going up the hill, ascending to where the man of God is some young women come.
There are always interesting things happening in the Bible when young women come to draw water.
Often this is where marriage proposals happen.
But they just ask about Samuel.

Verse 12, **"They answered, 'He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Hurry. He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place.'"**

And they are told he is.
He's actually right up there.
And they need to hurry up because the people are going to sacrifice today.
They have come at a time of worship.

Verse 13, **"As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately."**

There's a whole lot going on in here.
Some of this I think is laying the groundwork for what is going to come in the future.

There's this expectation that before the sacrifice you wait for the prophet. Before you eat, you wait for the prophet. This is what the people are doing and later, so is going to get in big trouble for not doing this.

Verse 14, **"So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place."**

And so they do when they come up and they see Samuel is coming. We are leading to what we've been building up to.

Verse 15, **"Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed to Samuel: ¹⁶ 'Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me.'"**

I'll come back to this in a little bit.

There's a whole lot here to unpack.

But the main thing to see is that Samuel knows exactly who Saul is. God has already told Samuel exactly at this moment he will see Saul. This is the man who has been chosen to be king and here is what he is going to do.

Verse 17, **"When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord told him, 'Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people.'"**

Samuel knows exactly who Saul is and Saul has no idea.

He is asking him for directions, not realizing he is talking to the prophet. As soon as I saw, you will see him God says this is him.

Verse 18, **"Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, 'Tell me where is the house of the seer?'"**

There again is irony here.

Samuel has spiritual vision and knows exactly who Saul is.

But Saul has no idea.

He doesn't even recognize that he is talking to the prophet.
He is totally spiritually blind.
He has had all of this preparation. He should expect to see the prophet.
Here again, he seems to not know what's going on.

Verse 19, **"Samuel answered Saul, "I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind."**

But Saul is invited.

He's going to go to the high place and today he will eat with the prophet.
And tomorrow he will prophesy.

Notice that Samuel doesn't ask for anything.

He tells him what he will give him.

Verse 20, **"As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's house?"**

And encourages them yeah those donkeys they're found.

He said you don't need to worry your thing about them anymore.

They're much bigger things for you to think about because you're gonna be the king.

Verse 21, **"Saul answered, "Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?"**

On the surface this might seem like a good response.

It seems like something humble.

But I think, based on the way, Saul has been acting and based on how he will act in the next couple chapters.

It seems as if this is actually a false humility.

This is the same kind of response that Zachariah gave or Sarah gave when God told them that they would experience miracles, and they would say why me?

It is a response, not of humility, but of a lack of faith and disbelief.
He is not the humbleness of all the clans; he is rich.
Surely there's a poorer clan that he knows of.

Verse 22, **"Then Samuel took Saul and his young man and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, who were about thirty persons."**

So they are brought in and they get seated at the head and honored.

Verse 23, **"And Samuel said to the cook, 'Bring the portion I gave you, of which I said to you, 'Put it aside.''" 24 So the cook took up the leg and what was on it and set them before Saul. And Samuel said, "See, what was kept is set before you. Eat, because it was kept for you until the hour appointed, that you might eat with the guests."**
So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

And the feast has brought before them.

And Samuel already set aside a special meal for Saul.

Because I knew you were coming.

Verse 25, **"And when they came down from the high place into the city, a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down to sleep. 26 Then at the break of dawn Samuel called to Saul on the roof, 'Up, that I may send you on your way.'" So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street."**

Again Saul is called to arise.

It's called to follow Samuel then come back.

Verse 27, **"As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, 'Tell the servant to pass on before us, and when he has passed on, stop here yourself for a while, that I may make known to you the word of God.'"**

And before he goes home, God wants to teach him.

And he wants to teach him what it needs to become king.

What the word of God is that he can follow it.

I recognize again this is a strange passage.
It is one that doesn't make a ton of sense just on its face.
This is one that I've had to study a lot over and over again.
I don't think this is just here to show us God in control of every little thing.
Even though he is and that you're bringing a great comfort.

I think this is here to set up who Saul is.
To begin our expectation that he is not going to be a great king.
We are reading a tragedy.
And it is not just to tell us that's all is going to be bad. It is also
foreshadowing how good of a king Jesus will be.

Saul is the bad Shepherd, who no matter how hard he tries, cannot find
the donkeys he has lost.
Jesus is the good Shepherd.
Jesus is the shepherd who leaves the 99 to go after the one.
And Jesus does not lose the one.
Jesus seeks us and seeks us and seeks us until he finds us.
He doesn't give up when he gets hard and think oh well I guess they
wanted to stay lost.
Jesus gives up everything.

Jesus doesn't wander around with servants, expecting them to pay for
him.
He actually serves himself.
His last night on earth He washes his disciples feet.
Jesus is willing to pay with his own life, with his own blood.
Jesus is spiritually blind and doesn't know what's happening.
Jesus always recognizes every person in front of him. He has the hairs on
their head numbered..
He knows all of their days.
He knows all of their thoughts and their hopes and their dreams and their
fears.

Jesus is not the richest.

Jesus was not born into the best family.

During most of Jesus's ministry, he was homeless.

He completely depended on the generosity of others like the women who would feed him and house them.

He did not even own a donkey when it came time for the triumphant entry. Instead, he had to go and borrow one.

And his own life when he was born, he was born in a manger with the animals.

Because they were far more important people than his family who deserved the best rooms.

And so when Jesus's parents came to visit, they got to sleep on the couch out in the living room room.

Jesus was not the most handsome.

In fact, he was someone that none of us would give a second thought to.

He is someone that never would be cast in a movie or a TV show.

If Jesus himself showed up to audition for Jesus, he probably wouldn't get the role.

Jesus is not from the tribe of Benjamin but Judah.

Jesus fulfills all of the prophecies in the expectations of scripture.

And it's not just that he comes from the right tribe to Israel, but he is the son of God.

He is born as truly, God, and truly man that he may save us.

Saul is the kind of king that Israel wants and expects.

They want the tallest, the strongest the best.

And they get what they ask for and it's going to be bad.

Jesus is not at all we expected not at all we want yet is just what we need.

This was part of the problem with Jesus that he faced.

The Pharisees and the leaders in the elders of Israel, wanted someone to conquer.

They want a Messiah like the other nations.

They want a king who would be strong and recover the economy and strengthen the borders and defeat their enemies so they could be safe and secure.

And instead of Jesus, came to save us from a much more serious enemy. I said Jesus came to defeat the powers of sin at darkness and he did so through suffer suffering, humiliation.

See, Jesus never had a false humility.

He never lied or doubted what God wanted.

But he did humble himself.

He was willing to be born as a man and a poor man.

He was willing to walk around and I have to hang out with us.

So what do we do with the Strange story with the sheep?

This is what I think the main thing is.

I think it's meant to set up a lot of the rest of the book and set up a lot of the rest of the Bible.

It's here to show us that the story is going to be a tragedy.

And it's a warning sign that we need to recalibrate our expectations for what good and righteous kings are.

We need to recalibrate our expectations for what the king of Kings will be.

There are many ways he will be radically different than how Saul is as king.

I think part of the story is to build the yearning and longing and the expectation that there has to be a better king than this.

And we have that same expectation even when we get to David, though he will be better.

We will still think man, there has to be a better king than this.

Until we finally get to Jesus, when we realize there is no better king than this.