

THE PLAN OF LIFE

I Samuel 16:1-13

Intro

This morning's passage has several names that would be very familiar to most folks who have been in and around the stories of the Old Testament. The thing is, for many of us, just because we know the names, does not mean that we know who they are.

It is with this in mind that we start this sermon by giving a little bit of background on who the names are.

To begin with Samuel was a warrior prophet who acted as the bridge between the period of time when Israel was a loose connection of tribes that was ruled by people of God called Judges, and the first monarchy. Samuel attained national leadership after driving the enemy out and bringing peace to the land. He would then periodically travel from town to town to rule on cases that needed to be brought before him. This was the role of leadership that he knew most of his life.

However, in his older age, the people began to come to him and requested to be ruled by a king (much like all of the nations around them). Samuel told the people the problems that would occur if they persisted in this track, but they continued to ask for a monarchy. Samuel then followed God's instructions and anointed Israel's first king, Saul, who was selected because of his military prowess.

Even though Samuel's leadership status had taken a step down, he continued to be God's prophet. It is acting in this role that Samuel tells Saul to destroy the kingdom of Amalek, and leave nothing. Saul hears this order but does not obey. He allows leaders to live and he takes the spoils of victory back to Israel.

This disobedience causes Saul to lose favor in the sight of God and Samuel tells Saul that God "has rejected [him] from being king over Israel", and that the monarchy will be given "to a neighbor of [Saul's], who is better than [Saul]." Samuel grieves over this Saul's loss of favor, but, as we will hear, God selects Samuel to head to Bethlehem to meet with a man named Jesse. It will be one of his sons that God will select to become the next king.

This fills us in on who everyone is and how we've gotten to this particular passage.

However, what I would like you to take particular notice of who is passed over. Try and think about the confusion that they must feel at having Samuel there, clearly looking to select one of them, only to select the one who was thought of to be the least of them. The scripture reads this way.

I Samuel 16:1-13

16 The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ²Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵He said, "Peaceably; I have come to

sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD."

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

"The Plan of Life"

One of the overriding indications that we get from scripture is that God knows what is going to happen in regards to our existence.

In Genesis (18:16-19) we hear how the descendants of Abraham are going to become a great nation, long before it actually takes place.

Throughout the journey of Moses (Exodus 9:16, Numbers 21:34) we are hear how that which seems so uncertain and unlikely is already guaranteed.

We hear this understanding in a prayer from the lips of Job as he says, "our days are determined" (Job 14:5).

The Psalmist declares a similar sentiment as he states in Psalm 139:16, "In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed."

The prophets also declare this truth. Isaiah says as much when he proclaims, "Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass" (Isaiah 37:26) and, "I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have planned, and I will do it." (Isaiah 46:11). We also hear from God (in regard to the prophet Jeremiah) that, "Before [God] formed [Jeremiah] in the womb [God] knew [him], and before [Jeremiah] was born [God] consecrated [him]; [God] appointed [Jeremiah] a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

What all of these passages (and all of the others that I did not mention) point out to us is that God knows; some would even see this as God being in control.

This is also the message that we are able to derive from the scripture that we heard this morning. Samuel, who has been grieving over the loss of Saul to the temptation of earthly possessions, is told by God, essentially, "Look get over it, for before that all took place, a new leader had already been selected. I have provided for myself a king." So Samuel picks himself up and travels to the city of Bethlehem to meet Jesse and discover which of his sons God has selected to rule.

Something that speaks to just how powerful Samuel was in his younger days when he was the last of the judges over Israel, is how the elders of the city come to him trembling. They think that he is coming to pass judgment, if not on the entire town, than certainly on one of its inhabitants. Thankfully, they quickly come to find out that Samuel comes in peace. Samuel doesn't explain why he is there (in fact, he doesn't explain his mission and actions to the one whom he eventually anoints either) but he is allowed into the town where he meets with Jesse and begins the process of discovering who God had already chosen.

To Samuel's surprise it is not any of seven sons who he initially meets, but is, in fact, the youngest, who was deemed so worthy of being considered for Samuel's selection, that he was out watching the sheep. As we know, this youngest of sons, David is then recognized as the one whom God has already selected as the next king through an anointing ceremony that is not explained to anyone (including David) and is done in the presence of the seven brothers who were passed over.

This was the plan of life that God had for David.

We aren't told why David is selected beyond the cryptic statement that, "the Lord looks on the heart". It is a mystery, especially in light of how erratic David's leadership would ultimately become. Yes, he continued to come back to God, but the reason that he had to come back was because of all of the times that he so grievously wandered away from the Lord. He was a great king; he was also a great sinner.

However, as you look at the long view of history we know that it is out of the lineage of David that an even greater leader emerges, and that is the person of Jesus Christ. It took a very long time for this development to come to fruition (David died around 1000 years before Jesus was born), and didn't make any earthly sense when the initial selection of David as king was made, and yet it was so. God knows what is to come and whether we acknowledge it or not, this plan for life is coming to realization, even in our day and time.

As I look out from behind this pulpit, I feel honored to say that I know portions of many of your stories of life. In many cases that means that means that I know some wonderful stories.

But that also means that I know some real difficulties as well. From untimely and tragic deaths, to unexpected diagnoses, to levels of sadness or turmoil that are hard to articulate, let alone understand.

Some people look at these sorts of realities and ask, 'if there is a God, why would He ever allow these sorts of things to take place?'

But even those who do believe still struggle with how to understand events that don't make sense, or seem to be so obviously evil.

As I have been taught and as I believe, God knows the length of our days, and has known them from even before we were conceived in the womb. If this were not so, it would not say in the opening verses of Ephesians that God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love." Even though this statement was made to the individuals of the church at Ephesus, it is also true for all those who come to respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit so as to place their faith in Jesus Christ. We have been chosen before the foundation of the world.

But that doesn't mean that everything that happens in the midst of life will make sense, or even be of God. God knows all and carries us through it all...and there are a whole lot that will never make sense. It is especially in these times when we are hurt, and angered, and saddened, that we must dig deeper into our faith and learn to trust, even in heart wrenching times, in the supportive guidance of God for a plan of life that we may not want to have any part in.

We must learn to trust in God's knowing hand. Samuel learned this as he anointed the one who would become the second king of Israel. We have experienced that as we have journeyed through our days. We face this reality again and again as bad things happen to good people, and as tragedies lean upon the innocent. It may not make any sense... and that is not ours to know. We are to place our trust in the One who watches over each of us and rest assured that in due course, in God's time, we will be able to see how God was with us even through the most nonsensical times in our lives.

There are moments when it is not easy to understand the workings of what we see as a divine plan, but the plan for life that is known by the Creator of all, is one that will ultimately be able to reveal the totality of God's redemptive working.

Let us trust in that, even now.

After Sermon Prayer

God, there are moments when we simple do not understand why things happen when they do. These days that we know are too often in that emotional space. Lord, we pray for Your Spirit to move in our lives so that we might be able to trust in the plan that You have laid out for creation. Then, beyond that, fill us with Your love so that we might be able to stand with one another, truly stand together as a family of faith so that we are able to hold each other up in those times when we are unable to understand and trust in what You have laid before us. Lord, help us to be there for one another and You have been there for us, even before the beginning of time. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.