

Do whatever your hand finds to do

Introduction to the life of David Pt.5: The Rise of Saul

1 Samuel 10-11

Summary: The rise of Saul was enabled, empowered, and brought about by God, and yet it still only happened by means of effort, shrewdness, ability, and victory on Saul's part. God promised Saul the kingship, but the promise required Saul applying his hand to the effort. God gives us the same promise, and so we should strive with great urgency so that the power of God will work in us. Success is supplied by God, not our effort, but it comes only through our effort. The correct understanding of sovereignty and free will will increase effort and decrease worry and pride.

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1 Samuel 10:1-8 Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance? 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 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. ⁴ They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them. ⁵ "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, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. ⁶ The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. ⁷ Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. ⁸ "Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do."

Review

We are getting ready to do a study of the life of David, which begins half way through the book of 1 Samuel, so we are doing a survey of the first half of the book so we will be able to understand the context. In chapter seven we see the theocracy in Israel at its best. They had no king but God, and they were never better off. But not long after that they started to drift from God, and by chapter nine they had rejected God as their king. They wanted a king like the nations had – someone who could deliver them from their enemies without them having to worry about faithfulness to God. So they committed the terrible sin of rejecting God and asking for a replacement king.

The rise of Saul (hope)

Saul Anointed as King

Transformation of Saul

Chapters 9-12 describe the rise of Saul to the throne, and those chapters are full of hope. God, in His great mercy, gives Israel a second chance. He judged them by giving them the kind of man they wanted, but then He has mercy on them. He does not leave Saul the way he was. God sends Saul to Samuel via providence and Samuel lets him know that he is about to undergo a massive internal change.

10:6 The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.

Anointing

Then Samuel anointed Saul as king, and for the first time in Scripture we are introduced to the concept of “messiah” (“messiah” means “God’s anointed”). This is a very big deal.

1 Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance?

One thing you will notice is that godly men show very high honor to God’s anointed. Saul was an insignificant nobody prior to this, but the moment he becomes God’s anointed, Samuel (the greatest man in the world at that time, and one of the greatest men who has ever lived) gives him a kiss of homage. Later we will see David showing him great honor even while Saul is trying to kill him. So the very first thing we learn about “messiah” – God’s anointed, is that if you love God you will deeply honor him. And the principle behind that applies to anyone God has placed in authority.

True conversion

We only have to read a couple verses to see the fulfillment of Samuel’s prophesy about Saul becoming a different person.

9 As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day.

I read a lot of arguments this week for why this could not have been a true conversion. They say that all it means is that Saul’s attitude about being king was changed. He was persuaded to be willing to take the job.

I really do not think that is what the text is saying. - First, because it does not say that. If it were merely a case of Saul being persuaded to take the job there would be no need to use such extreme language (**changed into a different person; changed Saul's heart**). He could have just said Saul was persuaded to serve as king. Secondly, I do not think Saul was persuaded to serve as king. When the time came later for the king to be selected, and Saul was chosen, he was hiding.

And thirdly, the immediate action that followed his transformation was religious, not political. He was empowered by the Spirit to prophesy. It is significant that Samuel told him that there would be four signs to prove that this was really God's Word. And verse nine says that all four were fulfilled, but the writer only actually describes the fulfillment of the one about the transformation of his heart – because that's the main issue.

⁹ As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. ¹⁰ When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying. ¹¹ When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" ¹² A man who lived there answered, "And who is their father?" So it became a saying: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" ¹³ After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place.

When they keep asking the question, "Is Saul among the prophets?" the point is that they were surprised. This was not the kind of thing they would have expected to see their friend Saul doing. This was a man who had never even heard of Samuel - the greatest prophet and judge since Moses. Saul seems to have been just a profane, secular individual with no involvement with spiritual things. And God said, "I am going to transform his heart and make him a different man" and the result was the Holy Spirit come upon Him and He began speaking the Word of God as a prophet.

During the Clinton administration there was a major debate in our country over whether a man's character has any relevance to his ability to lead. In Scripture that is the only thing that matters. Every king's effectiveness as a leader was 100% dependent upon his character and what was in his heart. So changing Saul's heart was a great act of mercy on God's part.

Things are looking hopeful (second chance)

Israel rejected God, said "No!" to His warning, but then in His great compassion He gave them another chance to be faithful to Him. And He changed Saul's heart and made him a new man. So immediately after the prophesying incident Saul obeys the word of Samuel and goes to the high place.

Things are starting to look hopeful. And it gets more and more hopeful from here all the way through chapter 12, where they get the "second chance" speech from Samuel. That is the way God is. We make a train wreck out of our lives through sin, and yet, even though there are some permanent consequences that are bitter, still the Lord gives us another chance and offers to redeem our hopeless situation if we just return to Him with all our hearts.

Saul Publicly Crowned as King

Saul's reluctance

So now Saul has been anointed, God has miraculously confirmed His Word to Saul that he would be king, Saul is transformed and he prophesies and then goes to worship. And then he heads home. When he gets home and his uncle finds out that he spoke with Samuel, the uncle immediately wants to know what Samuel said. (It seems like Saul is the only one who has never heard of Samuel.)

¹⁵ Saul's uncle said, "Tell me what Samuel said to you." ¹⁶ Saul replied, "He assured us that the donkeys had been found." But he did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.

Why will he not tell him? Saul does not tell him because Saul is not so sure he wants to be king. Watch what happens when it is time for God to reveal publicly to the nation who the king will be.

17 Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the LORD at Mizpah 18 and said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.' 19 But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses. And you have said, 'No, set a king over us.' So now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and clans¹." ²⁰ When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. ²¹ Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was chosen. Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found.

Evidently Samuel is using lots to reveal God's choice. The opening verses of Hebrews say that in past times God spoke through the prophets in various ways, and one of those ways was by means of the casting of lots. And it is kind of ominous the way he does it. The only other time the process happened was when they were trying to find out who was responsible for a hidden sin that was bringing the wrath of God upon Israel. They went tribe by tribe, then clan by clan, then family by family until they pinpointed Achen as the offender. And he was then put to death. So it is a little bit ominous that God uses the same method for revealing who this king is that Israel wanted instead of God. According to the normal Old Testament prophetic speech pattern, verse 20 would be the normal place for the announcement of judgment (following the indictment of verses 18-19). What comes instead is this selection process. When you read it you are not sure if it is a wonderful, joyous thing or an announcement of judgment. Depending upon how Israel and the new king respond, it could go either way. So they go through the whole process and it comes down to the end, and the man ends up being none other than the big tall son of Kish – Saul. But he is not present. It was not like a raffle, where if the winner is not there they just pick another number.

²² So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?"

All the people are standing there ready to lift up a huge cheer and start in with “Long live the King!” and Saul is not even there. You will never believe where he was. Saul was hiding in the baggage. This is the subtle clue from the text that tipped me off that he was not really sure he wanted to be the king.

So there is big, long, lanky Saul trying to crouch behind some suitcases where no one can find him. And they probably never would have found him except that something gave him away.

²² So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?" And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage."

There's nothing worse than playing hide and seek against God

Don't resist your calling

What are we to make of Saul's reluctance? Is it godly humility? Or disobedient resistance of God's will? I believe it is the latter. True humility is not reluctant to obey God. God had made it crystal clear that Saul was to be king. He got it straight from the mouth of Samuel himself, and then it was confirmed with miracles.

¹ This is the word ELEPHIM, which is the normal Hebrew word for “thousands.” The usage here shows that in the early days it was a term that referred not to the number 1000 but to a family grouping. For this reason it cannot be used in Samuel to calculate the size of population or armies. (Baldwin, 93)

But once you know for sure you are called to something, any reluctance is sin. God became angry with Moses when Moses did not think he was equal to the task of confronting Pharaoh and freeing the children of Israel. When your Maker calls you to do something it is not a good idea to instruct Him with regard to whether He has made a good choice.

²³ They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. ²⁴ Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

Regulations GOD IS STILL KING

²⁵ Samuel explained to the people the regulations of the kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the LORD. Then Samuel dismissed the people, each to his own home.

Interesting – now that Saul is the king, Samuel is still in charge.² Samuel says when the meeting is over and tells all the people to go home. And they all obey him – everyone goes back home, including Saul!

²⁶ Saul also went to his home in Gibeah

Samuel says, "Okay, now you have your king. Now go home" and Saul says, "Okay" and heads back to Gibeah to plow his fields.

I love the little statement at the end of verse 26.

²⁶ Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched.

Isn't that a great image? Instead of saying He changed their hearts, it says He touched them. All it takes is a touch from the finger of God and a man is changed.

But not everyone's heart was touched. There was some negative polling data on Saul's early approval ratings.

²⁷ But some troublemakers said, "How can this fellow save us?" They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent.

That verse gives us insight into a couple things. First, it shows the people were still missing the point. If Israel was going to be saved it was not going to be "this fellow" who would do it. Now that there was a king they were just as dependent upon God for deliverance as ever. No king could save them from anything.

The other thing it points to is the fact that there was still some skepticism about Saul. It was going to take more than just Samuel's word for everyone to really get behind the Saul administration. Obtaining the royal power God had promised was not going to be easy. It required some effort and some time and some ingenuity and some work, and some name recognition and the endorsement of Samuel and, most importantly, a major military victory. And that comes in chapter 11.

² One of the main purposes of this book is to show that despite the advent of the monarchy in Israel, God is still her king. It is noteworthy that among Israel's neighboring cultures the kingship was an essential ingredient of creation. The Egyptians believed monarchy was rooted in the very order of nature, and the Mesopotamians thought it was necessary for human civilization. But in Jewish history it comes thousands of years after the creation, and is not seen as a necessary thing at all. (Arnold, 168)

Saul established as king

Deliverance

11:1-15 Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead.

The Philistines were Israel's enemies on the west, and the Ammonites were Israel's enemies on the east. So the king of the Ammonites attacks Jabesh Gilead.

And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you."

They would rather be slaves to their enemy than rely on God.

² But Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel." ³ The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you."

War was so brutal in those days that they would go to great lengths to avoid actually fighting. And Nahash seems to be betting on the fact that Israel would not come to their aid. (And if it had not been for Saul, they probably would not have.)

⁴ When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. ⁵ Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with the people? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said. ⁶ When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger.

If you are attacking Israel and the Spirit of the Lord comes upon their leader, look out. You are about to get spanked.

Saul has been laying low. But now it is time for him to act. So he borrows a technique from the book of Judges.

7 He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel."

Kind of a gross method of instituting a draft, but at least he cut up an animal instead of a human being like in the book of Judges. It also seems to be a decision on Saul's part to give up farming. Killing your oxen would be like a farmer today disassembling his combine or tractor and sending the parts all over the country. Evidently Saul is leaving farming and will be "kinging" full time now.

Saul saved all his political capital up to this point, and here is spends it all. He threatens harm, he invokes Samuel, so if you do not follow Saul you are not following Samuel, and he really tightens the screws on everyone. Time is of the essence, and there is no time for subtle methods. And it worked.

Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they turned out as one man.

A threat like that was not guaranteed to work by any means. But it worked because God made it work. God had promised that whatever Saul put his hand to would be a success. So the people were afraid of Saul's threat because God moved in their hearts. Saul had to come up with the idea, he had to

give up his oxen, he had to go to a lot of trouble to get the word out quickly to the whole nation, he had to put everything on the line for the effort, but when Saul did all that God supplied the success.

⁸ When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and the men of Judah thirty thousand.

- A total of 330,000. You should know that in Samuel the word translated “thousand” is also the word for “clan.” So it could be that it was 330 clans, or 330 detachments. But either way it is a huge army. There was only one other time from Genesis through Kings that we see an army this big.³

⁹ They told the messengers who had come, "Say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, 'By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be delivered.'" When the messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, they were elated. ¹⁰ They said to the Ammonites, "Tomorrow we will surrender to you, and you can do to us whatever seems good to you." ¹¹ The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

Saul shows himself to be a capable general. He uses some pretty good tactics, and wins big.

Full acceptance of Saul

¹² The people then said to Samuel, "Who was it that asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring these men to us and we will put them to death." ¹³ But Saul said, "No one shall be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel." ¹⁴ Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship." ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

Application

Realization of God's work through human effort

When Saul was anointed the Holy Spirit came upon him in power. But the release of that power was tied to Saul's own efforts.

10:7 Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

God told Saul, “When you put your hand to something I am going to bless it.” It is conditional. There will be no success until Saul’s hand actually finds something to do. When Saul finally made his move, and he made an effort to muster the people for war, it worked. And when he tried his battle strategies, they worked. The source of the success was the Holy Spirit, not Saul’s human efforts. However, God was not willing to grant that success apart from Saul’s efforts.

Perhaps you have the same promise

It makes you wonder if perhaps the Lord has given that same blessing to some of you in this very room - He has decided that whatever you put your hand to in His kingdom He will grant great success; but you do not realize it because you are not really putting your hand to much of anything. Maybe God

³ The battle when the 11 tribes came after Benjamin in Judges 20:17.

has determined that if you went on the mission field, or started a prayer group at your kids' school, or did something to help the poor, or took over the youth ministry, or whatever - God would grant success if you would just do it. Now, God's idea of success and our idea of success do not always match – so the outcome may not look like success to you. But the promise that God will work through you when you put your hand to something should motivate you to put your hand to something.

Balancing providence

This is a good balance to our study last week on providence. Human reasoning would assume that if God controls everything, our effort does not really matter, or that there is no real urgency. That is as wrong as it can be.

Even though from the eternal perspective God has predetermined everything, from the temporal perspective, outcomes still remain dependant upon human effort in a real way, so that the attainment of them is actually in jeopardy if we do not strive in the ways God has commanded us to strive. Do not ever assume that just because you are doing what God called you to do, that you are going to have success even with a half-hearted effort.

Test for orthodoxy: the doctrines should move you toward more effort and humility and less worry

If you are ever wondering if you are on the right track in understanding God's sovereignty and human free will and responsibility, here's a test: A proper understanding will cause an increase in how hard you work and a decrease in both worry and pride. If your view on God's sovereignty causes you to have less urgency and motivation to labor hard, you are off track. And if your view on free will and human responsibility causes you to worry and fret over things outside of your control, you are off track.⁴ And if your view results in you being puffed up with pride when you work harder and accomplish more than everyone else, you are off track. This biblical view of those doctrines should generate both joyful trust and earnest, urgent, passionate zeal to work hard. And the more the success, the more humble it should make you.

Success comes from God alone and not from our efforts, but the means by which God brings it about is our effort.

2 Cor.3:6 He has made us competent as ministers

God's grace comes in the form of enablement and competence. So if we believe something is accomplished by grace, that is all the more reason to work all the harder for it is accomplishment. Because if grace comes in the form of enablement, and the means by which the goal is accomplished is human effort, then the more I desire the grace the more effort I will put forth.

If a king announced that you could have as much as you want, however you must be willing to do the hard work of bringing a wheelbarrow to the palace doors and hauling off load after load, you would be all the more motivated to get in shape and get started wheeling loads back to your house. The wheelbarrow is human effort. The gold is success in serving God. The wheelbarrow does not create the gold. Your work is not the source of the success. But if the king decides that will be the means by which the gold is delivered, then you will be zealous about hauling loads in that wheelbarrow.

And the reason all your faithful wheelbarrow hauling does not generate pride is because not only is human effort the means by which God delivers much of His grace, but it is also the *effect* of grace. The

⁴⁴ If your view of God's sovereignty causes you not to have anxiety in your soul over things outside of your control, that is good. But if your view of sovereignty causes you not to have anxiety in your soul over things over which you can have influence, that is bad. Listen to the anxiety in the soul of Paul:

Acts 20:30-32 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. ³² "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

effort itself is a work of God. When God gives you grace, you can tell you have received it by the fact that the intensity of your effort increases.

1 Cor.15:10 his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them

The effect of God's grace in his life was that it made him work harder. So the harder you work, the further in debt you are to God because you are borrowing that much more grace.

God has given us the same promise

Now, the most important question for us as we consider what the implications of this text are for our lives is this: has God made the same promise to us that He made to Saul? Has God poured out His Spirit on us in power and then said to us, "Do whatever your hand finds to do and you will have success"? I would like to suggest that the answer to that question is yes. God has poured out His Spirit on us in power and He has made that very same promise to us.

Now at this point someone might say, "Wait a minute – do you mean to say that there is an absolute promise that I can do anything – without qualification, and God will grant success?" No. It is not without qualification for you, nor was it without qualification for Saul. When God said to Saul, "Do whatever your hand finds to do" that did not mean Saul was free to do absolutely anything. Let's look at that passage again.

⁷ Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. ⁸ "Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do."

Verse seven says he can do whatever he wants, and verse eight says he has to follow Samuel's orders. That is not a contradiction; it is an important principle that the writer brings up repeatedly in these chapters. God is making it clear how the kingship in Israel is to function. God is the king. And the human king is not an absolute sovereign – he is still under God. And so in Israel the prophet of God tells the king what to do; the king does not tell the prophet what to do.

So the promise was not, "You are free to do anything you want." The promise was tied to Saul's calling. God was saying, "Your efforts to take the throne will succeed, because I have called you to take the throne." And God has made the same promise to us. As we put forth effort to fulfill what He has called us to do, we will enjoy success and bear much fruit because He will be with us just like He was with Saul.

John 15:5 If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit

When Jesus told the disciples in Luke chapter five that He would make them fishers of men, it was right after He had just given them net-ripping, boat-sinking success at fishing. When we labor hard at what we were called to do, God grants abundant success. In the Old Testament, any time you read about the Spirit coming upon a person it is followed by a description of awesome success. That is why the promise in John 14:17 – that God's Spirit would now reside in us all the time, was such an unbelievable promise.

So what does that mean for us? God said to Saul:

⁷ ...do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

And we have the same promise.

Jesus said **Surely I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age.** (Mt.28:20)

For Saul it meant that once he began putting forth effort, God would bless those efforts. For us it means the same thing.

Col.1:24 - 2:2 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, ... 28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. 2:2 ...that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ

Paul says, “I labor, struggling...” And then he says, “his energy ... powerfully works in me.” So God’s energy powerfully working happened when Paul labored and struggled.

And Paul labored and struggled because he understood that if he did not he would forfeit the powerful working of God through him, and the people would not be encouragement, would not have unity of love, and would not have understanding and knowledge of Christ. And the possibility of those things failing to be accomplished was such a concern to Paul that he was willing to suffer incredible agony to bring it about. The urgency of the work burned in his soul.

2 Cor.11:28-29 I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

God forgive us for twisting the wonderful doctrine of sovereignty into an excuse for dull affections and passionless living.

Do you desire the experience of the power of almighty God coursing through you? Then put your hand to something that requires divine power. Seated all around you there are people who are becoming deeply discouraged. Some are not even here because they have dropped out of the fellowship, others are in danger of being led astray through error, others are being enticed by various temptations and are right on the precipice of disaster. Rescuing people from problems like that is not easy. - If you give them a few words of encouragement off the top of your head that won’t do it. It requires a lot more work than that.

Think of how hard our task is. If there were just one person in your life in need of grace, how much time and effort would be required. But you have so many. You are fighting to overcome the thick chains of enslaving sins, and ignorance about God, and lack of motivation in people’s hearts, and deeply rooted evil desires – and failure to overcome all that could result in eternal disaster for the person. Your duty is to bring their dull, nearsighted hearts to see the glory of God. You must convince them of the delightful superiority of God’s grace over what their flesh treasures. That is not easy. It is not easy to bring people to give up their most treasured idols and their dearest pleasures. We are not going to save anyone from hell with a few vague platitudes.

We are going up against an enemy who has defeated some of the strongest, most spiritually vibrant men and women who have ever lived. He is smarter than us, stronger than us, more experienced, more motivated, and he has deceived and destroyed people by the millions. And our fight is against not only him but a host of rulers, authorities, powers and spiritual forces in the heavenly realms. And they will only be defeated through a skilled use of the Sword of the Spirit. That is a book that has over 31,000 verses - was written in foreign, ancient languages in a very different culture and addresses some of the most difficult topics imaginable. The well is deep and our brains are shallow – skilled use of the Sword of the Spirit will not come without very hard work.

The task of ministry is so hard that even someone as gifted as the Apostle Paul had to work and strive and labor and struggle with everything that was within him. He had to beat his body and make it his slave just to avoid total disqualification. The work of the ministry is so hard that even the Son of God Himself had to work hard and rise early and stay up late. The battle is so fierce that even Jesus Himself needed angels to come and attend to Him at one point.

Finding out that a task is incredibly hard might discourage action if it is an optional task. But if it is an essential task, the harder it is the more that should motivate us. If you find out that it is hard to swim 50 yards underwater, you may be discouraged from trying. But if you have to swim 50 yards or drown, the difficulty just increases your motivation to put forth effort. The task the Lord has given us is extremely difficult, and it is more important even than saving yourself from drowning.

Does anyone here want the power of God to work powerfully in you? Then let your joyful hope for that drive you to labor and strive. Instead of wasting hours at a time, let's wring every drop out of every moment of the day in His service. If there really is more grace to be had if we are more earnest, Oh how earnest should we be! If there really is a greater likelihood of a person finding joy in God if we labor and strive on his behalf, how hard should we labor and strive! If it is really true that a soul could spend eternity in heaven instead of hell if we pray hard and diligently and share the gospel passionately, Oh how intense should be our efforts! If there really is an opportunity to experience God's mighty power flowing through us today if we work hard, Oh how hard should we work! If there is a chance of bringing the Lord's blessing and favor down on my family through my efforts to teach them and lead them in prayer and worship, Oh how relentless should be my attempts to lead them! If it is really true that we are actually capable of bringing God honor or dishonor through the way we do our jobs each day, Oh how hard should we strive for excellence! If fellowship with God really is available for those who seek Him with their whole heart throughout the day, Oh how we should strive to overcome the million distractions that would make us forget to seek Him! Jesus said:

Jn.9:4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

Our time in this world is very short. Let's devote ourselves to an energy level in our work that is fitting given the importance of the work, the urgency of the work, the difficulty of the work, the shortness of the time; and let's live in a way that reflects our desire for His strength to work powerfully in us.

Benediction: 1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

The Rise of Saul

1 Samuel 10-12 Day 1

1 Samuel 10:1 Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance?"

⁶ The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.

⁹ As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day.

²⁰ When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen.

²¹ Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was chosen. Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. ²² So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?" And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage."

²⁴ Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the King!"

²⁷ But some troublemakers said, "How can this fellow save us?" They despised him and brought him no gifts

11:5 Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with the people?

¹¹ The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

¹² The people then said to Samuel, "Who was it that asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring these men to us and we will put them to death." ¹³ But Saul said, "No one shall be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel."

¹⁴ Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship." ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

Saul's rise to the kingship began when he was anointed privately by Samuel. But he didn't just sit down on the throne and begin ruling the next day. What God determined would happen did not happen all at once, but over time in stages.

First there was a private confirmation for Saul that this was God's calling for him. And that confirmation included the changing of Saul's heart. Then Saul went home and didn't tell anyone about the fact that God had made him king.

Later Samuel gathered the people together and announced the anointing to them. At this time the opinion polls were mixed, and Saul just went home along with everyone else after the meeting.

Later still we find Saul working the fields. He appears to have no kingly role at all. But when a crisis arises he steps forward and shows some leadership, the people rally behind him, by the promised power of God's Spirit he is successful, and then the public support is much stronger. After this, Samuel gathers the people to reaffirm Saul's kingship.

This is often the way God works. He calls you to something by letting you know it's something He wants you to do. One of the ways He lets you know is by doing a work in your heart and changing your desires. But just because God has called you to that thing doesn't mean everyone else is aware of it, or that the timing is now. For Saul, he came into power by what appeared to be very natural means – getting some name recognition and an important supporter (Samuel), then waiting for the right time, then showing leadership in a crisis, having success, etc. Those are all the same ways a secular person would put himself in a position of power. Just because God is placing someone in a certain position does not mean the natural means of gaining that position are going to be bypassed. For example, God may call someone to be a pastor, but he still has to go through the process of getting an education, finding a church, going through the interview process, etc. And it is dead wrong, once God has made it clear that is your destiny, to assume that little or no effort is required. There is no difference in the amount of effort that is required to achieve something God has said will for sure happen as to achieve something God has not revealed as His plan. And even when God has shown that something is His will, the realization of that thing should still be thought of as being dependent upon faithfulness in whatever efforts God has set as requirements for the attainment of that thing.

Oh, the glorious mystery of the outworking of Your providence, dear God! Human reasoning would assume that once something is certain, effort does not matter. But You have not made it thus. You can announce something as certain, but still let it remain dependant upon human effort in a real way, so that the attainment of it is actually in jeopardy if we do not strive in the ways You have commanded us to strive.

Protect me, dear God, from presumptuously assuming that halfhearted effort will meet with success just because I'm doing something You have commissioned me to do. You have promised the blessing of Your presence to me if I seek You; protect me from the error of assuming I will therefore enjoy Your presence if I seek You half-heartedly. You have promised to build up the saints by means of Your Word; protect me from assuming that will happen even if I am lazy and shoddy in my preparation for sermons and counseling. You have promised to build Your church; protect me from thinking it will happen by itself if we just carry one lackadaisically.

And on the other hand, when I have sought with all my heart, and prepared with great earnestness and faithfulness, and worked in ministry with passion and zeal and wearying effort, protect me from thinking the success is supplied by my efforts rather than by Your grace. Help me remember that my efforts, while they are required, are not the source of success. And without Your grace, those efforts would come to nothing.

Understanding the truth about Your providential work should cause humility and dependence, since all success is supplied only by Your grace; and it should also motivate earnestness and zealous effort, since the outcomes are dependent upon passionate work. So Father please, when I think about Your providence in a way that causes pride in my heart or in a way that diminishes my sense of urgency, let those serve as warnings that I have drifted into error.

And today, dear God, let my fellowship with You come through enjoyment of this wonderful attribute – sovereignty that is not subject to human frailty on the one hand, but that does not render human effort meaningless on the other. By some act of Your infinite wisdom that is far beyond my understanding, You have made it so that my decisions and actions and effort and zeal really are important, and really do determine outcomes, and that there is a real danger if I fail – but at the same time there is zero chance of Your perfect plan being derailed in the slightest instance, and I can have full confidence in You!

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Sovereignty that is not subject to human frailty on the one hand, but that does not render human effort meaningless on the other

Promise to trust: He will give me meaningful work with real, important outcomes (good and bad), but still keep His promises intact even if I fail.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Confidence, courage, Motivation, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

The Rise of Saul

1 Samuel 10-12 Day 2

Even though God had anointed Saul and had announced to him that he would be king, still, it didn't happen until Saul demonstrated leadership and put forth considerable effort to lead Israel to victory. A correct understanding of foreordination and the sovereignty of God will drive us to increase, not decrease effort.

1 Samuel 10:7 do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

God will bring about His purposes, but He will do so by means of Saul's efforts. The efforts are not the source of the success (without the promise of v.7 all of Saul's efforts would come to nothing); the source of success is God. But the means by which God brings it about is human effort. God's grace comes in the form of enablement. And so if we believe something is accomplished by grace, that is all the more reason to work all the harder for its accomplishment.

1 Cor.15:10 his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them

Col.1:24 - 2:2 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, ... ²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. 2:2 ...that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ

Paul did not conclude that since it is God's energy it will accomplish God's purposes no matter what, therefore it didn't really matter how hard Paul worked. Paul still believed that the encouragement, unity of love, understanding and knowledge of Christ were all dependent upon

his hard work. And the possibility of those things failing to be accomplished was such a concern to Paul that he was willing to suffer incredible agony to bring it about.

God accomplishes many of His purposes by giving us grace in the form of competence.

2 Cor.3:5-6 our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers

And that should cause us to be motivated to work hard.

1 Timothy 4:10 ...for this we labor and strive

We demonstrate faithfulness to God by the effort we put into the outworking of His grace in our lives. This is true for every kind of effort – physical exertion, mental exertion, earnestness in prayer – even ingenuity and shrewdness.

Luke 16:8-11 he people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

God has predestined and predetermined everything that will happen. But from our perspective, prior to it happening, God wants us to think about outcomes as being dependent upon effort. This should even cause a kind of anxiety in our hearts. We should never worry about whether God will fulfill His promises to bless our efforts, but we should be concerned enough so that we are motivated to put forth the effort.

We should be greatly distressed over spiritual calamities. The possibility that some people may be led astray should cause us extreme anxiety.

Acts 20:30-32 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. ³² "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

2 Cor.11:28-29 I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Dear Father in heaven, forgive me for my laziness, indifference, smugness, and lack of concern for those things which are of great concern to You. Where matters are clearly out of my hands, and I can do nothing to affect them, it is good for me to rest in the knowledge of Your sovereignty, and not to fret. But in those things where You have called me to act, You have actually placed the responsibility of outcomes on my shoulders, and have called me to labor and strive and to increase in effort and energy and shrewdness and wisdom and skill and earnestness in prayer, and the development of my gifts, and just plain hard work. Forgive me, dear God, when instead of using the doctrine of Your sovereignty as a comfort in areas over

which I have no control, I have instead used it to quiet my conscience in areas where I could possibly do something but I do not want to put forth the effort.

Wake up, O my soul! Why are you so sluggish within me? Why so unmoved by souls that will spend eternity in hell and that could be in heaven instead if I would just share the gospel with them and pray earnestly for them? Why are you so lackadaisical about brothers and sisters in Christ who are trapped in various sins, or who are becoming discouraged, or who have dropped out of the fellowship, or who are in danger of being led astray through error, or who are being enticed by various temptations and who are right on the precipice of disaster?

Wake up, O my soul! Why is your motivation so easily overcome? Do you not know that you cannot decline spiritually to your hurt alone? Don't you realize that if you skip your time with the Lord, if you pray less, seek God with less earnestness so that you receive less grace – that will do great harm not only to you but to every single person you know and with whom you will come in contact? Do their eternal souls mean nothing to you? Is the work of God a small thing in your eyes? Are those souls worth the blood of Christ but not worth your effort and energy and labor and tears? If you let your heart cool is it likely to be able to warm the hearts of others?

Paul walked through Athens and was greatly troubled in spirit when he saw the idols. Do you see the lostness of the world and the idolatry even among saints and just write it off as the norm? Jesus entered Jerusalem and wept out of deep, excruciating longing for their salvation. Do you have contentment and comfort in your heart, not caring that they will go to hell as long as you are safe? If so, perhaps you aren't as safe as you imagine!

"We are seeking to uphold the world, to save it from the curse of God, to perfect the creation, to attain the ends of Christ's death, to save ourselves and others from damnation, to overcome the devil, and demolish his kingdom, to set up the kingdom of Christ, and to attain and help others to the kingdom of glory. And are these works to be done with a careless mind, or a lazy hand? O see, then, that this work be done with all your might! Study hard, for the well is deep, and our brains are shallow....Let Paul's words ring continually in your ears, 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!' Ever think with yourselves what lieth upon your hands: 'If I do not bestir myself, Satan may prevail, and the people everlasting perish, and their blood be required at my hand. By avoiding labor and suffering, I shall draw on myself a thousands times more than I avoid; whereas, by present diligence, I shall prepare for future blessedness.' No man was ever a loser by God. "⁵

Wake up, O my soul! Have you forgotten this a war? Did you forget you are fighting against rulers and authorities and powers and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms? Are you unaware of your responsibility to watch the backs of your fellow soldiers? Will you allow them to be taken by the enemy because you went to sleep on your watch? Your enemy is subtle; you must be shrewd. He is relentless; you must persevere and endure. He is sly; you must be vigilant.

Wake up, O my soul! Will you waste hours at a time in recreation that does not edify, as though the work were small and easily and quickly done? If there were just one person in your life in need of grace, how much time and effort would be required. But you have so many. And for everything you say to them the soldiers of the enemy will say ten times as much to contradict it. You are fighting to overcome passions and evil desires and the thick chains of enslaving sins, and ignorance about God, and lack of motivation – and failure to overcome all that could result in eternal disaster for the person. You must bring their dull, nearsighted hearts to see the

⁵ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, Ch.2, section 2, 2.

glory of God. You must convince them of the delightful superiority of God's grace over what their flesh treasures. Do you really have so much time to waste? Will you "encourage" or "exhort" a friend in need off the top of your head without any real thought or study or preparation or earnest prayer? Is the work really that easily done? Will people give up their most treasured idols and their dearest pleasures because of a few thoughtless sentences from you? Do Paul and Jesus have to labor and strive and wake up early and stay up all night and agonize in prayer to accomplish the work, but you can do it in a few minutes with a half-hearted effort? Are you so much stronger than they?

Wake up, O my soul! Are heaven and hell such small, unimportant things that you can be content to speak of them in vague, imprecise, generalities with a half-hearted, sleepy tone? Would you shout loudly to save someone from a temporal, physical fire, but mumble empty platitudes to save them from eternal fire? Do you even believe what you are saying? If someone in your circle of influence falls into spiritual disaster and God requires you to give an account, what will you say?

Proverbs 24:11-12 Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. ¹² If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?

Wake up, O my soul! Do you really need so much recreation and entertainment? Is it so important for you to horde your time and strength? Rest is good if it enables greater effort. But beyond that what good is it? What do you have time and strength for, but to lay them out for God? Is not the purpose of a candle to burn? Is it possible to understand anything of the worth of souls, and of the preciousness of the blood which was shed for them, and the degree of glory and reward that is at stake, and the agony and eternity of hell – is it possible to understand any of that and then spend hours of time trifling with worthless, trivial pursuits and idle conversation about nothing? Have you not already lost enough time? Must you waste even more? Look at how people on their death bed wish for more time. If they could buy it with money, what price would they not pay. Some men have cut off limbs with a pocket knife in order to extend the number of their days on this earth. And yet you can afford to trifle away the hours and willfully cast off the greatest works of God?

Oh dear God, how I need Your grace! That grace that so powerfully worked in Paul, grace that drove him to work hard day and night, grace that generated anxiety over spiritual things that brought him to tears so often. How wonderful it is, dear Lord, that Your grace is not without effect! You don't command us to work and then leave us to our own natural strength. Your grace works powerfully. Work it powerfully in me, dear Father. Help me put off laziness and indifference. Give me the grace I need to see the importance and urgency of the work. Give me the faith I need to be confident in the gifts and calling You have given me, so I won't hesitate. Give me the hope I need to actually be motivated by the rewards You offer. Fill me with love for You and Yours that will drive me to joyfully pay any price to do Your will.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God of powerful grace

Promise to trust: His grace will work powerfully in me

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Confidence, courage, Motivation, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

The Rise of Saul

1 Samuel 10-12 Day 3

1 Samuel 10:1 Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance?"

6 The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power...

7 ...do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

The anointing with oil symbolized, among other things, the outpouring of God's Spirit on a person. And the outpouring of God's Spirit came with divine enablement to accomplish great things in God's service. It was this spiritual enablement that was the power behind the promise of v.7.

Yesterday's devotional (it's length notwithstanding) was incomplete. It focused mainly on duty. But if knowledge of duty, by itself, were enough to motivate us to fulfill that duty, we would never experience any guilt over failure to fulfill our duty. The fact that we frequently do shows that it is very possible to be aware of duty and yet not be sufficiently motivated to fulfill it. Knowledge of duty is crucial, but something more is also needed.

That something more is delight. When I see my duty as a painful drudgery, even when the urgency and importance of it is expressed to me in the strongest terms I will probably still either neglect it altogether, or work at it with much less zeal and passion than I should. People who fulfill a duty as they ought are people who are driven by passionate desire for not only the final fulfillment of the duty, but also for the very process of carrying it out. Delight in the process of carrying out the duty is what will enable you to carry it out as your should and to overcome obstacles when they arise.

Furthermore, God will accept nothing less than delightedness in our service. He would rather we not serve at all than to serve while saying, "What a burden" (Mal.1:10ff). So it is absolutely essential that we find a way to take delight in our duty, since delight is itself part of our duty.

The key to how that is done is in 1 Sam.1:1,7. When we carry out the Lord's work it is the Spirit of God working through us that enables us. The more we love the Lord, and the more awareness and consciousness we have of the fact that He is at work in us when we serve Him, the more delightful will be the sensation of being worked through by the Holy Spirit. The goal is to learn to love that feeling – to learn to enjoy being empowered. To be thrilled at the realization that you are, in a particular moment of service, in the hands of a God who does superhuman things through frail humans.

In order to enjoy that, first it is helpful to realize how superhuman the task really is. When our task seems easily doable in normal human strength, we will not be very cognizant of the power of the Holy Spirit coursing through us as we do it. But if it is exceedingly evident that when we attempt to encourage a discouraged soul, or to bring a sinning person to repentance, or honor God through our worship, or help someone whose soul is adverse to some truth about God to love that truth, or to achieve something of eternal value and significance – when it is clear that such things require superhuman power, and we believe that such power is promised and all we have to do to experience it flowing through us is set our hands to the work – how that will thrill

our hearts. (Remember, God promised success at whatever Saul's hand found to do, but that success didn't come until Saul's hand actually found something to do! The fulfillment of the promise was always available, but was not enacted until Saul's hands started moving.)

Dear Father, help me become addicted to that more than daredevils are addicted to adrenalin, or overeaters to food. Help me to remember all this dear God. I have to be constantly reminded how hard the work is, otherwise I won't appreciate Your power at work in me. If I am able to move a mountain, but in my eyes that mountain looks like a pebble, it will do nothing to make me learn to enjoy Your awesome power coursing through me. And if I see that it is indeed a mountain and so I don't even try to move it, again, I won't learn to enjoy the experience of Your strength powerfully at work in me. Overwhelm me, dear God, with the enormity of my duty, then motivate me with the urgency of my responsibility, then remind me of the joy of having Your power flow through me, so that I will be moved to actually put my hand to the plow.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Omnipotence that flows through human vessels.

Promise to trust: He will give me meaningful work with real, important outcomes (good and bad), but still keep His promises in tact even if I fail.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Confidence, courage, Motivation, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

The Rise of Saul

1 Samuel 10-12 Day 4

So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel. ¹⁹ **The people all said to Samuel,** "Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king." ²⁰ "Do not be afraid," Samuel replied. "You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart." ²¹ Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. ²² For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.

Good morning dear Lord God,

What an amazing and wonderful and shocking combination of statements is v.20: **Do not be afraid," Samuel replied. "You have done all this evil...** The indictment, "You have done all this evil" would seem to make the comfort, "Do not be afraid" impossible. But You, Oh Lord, are a God who forgives and redeems for the sake of Your great name. Even in the case of long-term, repeated, persistent, habitual failure You forgive and cleanse and restore and redeem.

First, forgiveness. You do not remember my past sin against me or punish me. You do not deal with me according to my great sin. You allow Your anger to pass, and You look upon Your servant again with favor.

And beyond that, You cleanse. You not only overlook the sin, but You wash me and cleanse me and work in my heart to eliminate evil. I groan in this life because that work is only partial in

this life, and the battle with the flesh continues until the grave; but at the same time I rejoice in the process of being cleansed and sanctified by the touch of Your holy hand.

And beyond that, You restore. Amazingly, after sending the locust to devour my life in chastisement, You promise to restore the years the locust have eaten! (Joel 2:25) What kind of parent cuts a child's allowance in discipline and then promises to repay it? What kind of judge justly sentences me to prison for my crime and then promises to repay me for all that's lost during my time in prison? What infinite, overflowing, unending supply of grace! You are the God who restores and who gives back what You take away. Thank You, dear Father, for the things You have restored in my life. Given the mountain of offences I've committed against You my life should be an absolute wasteland, devoid of any grace. It should be hell itself. Instead You take some things away for a short time and then shower me with grace even greater than what was taken away. As I look around and see the grace in my life, all the material gifts from You, family, church, spiritual gifts, spiritual resources, great Bible teachers, close friends, good health, a sound mind, peace, joy, contentment, safety, wellbeing, hope – all of it stands as a gigantic monument to Your inexplicable, mysterious, unfathomable, unimaginable, indescribable grace.

And beyond that, You not only forgive, cleanse, and restore, but You also redeem. You take the very destruction I have created and turn it into something marvelous. You don't just restore me in spite of the mess I've made; but You then make something beautiful out of the mess itself! You use it all for Your own ends, to accomplish the wonderful and marvelous things that bring about Your great, eternal purposes. Your goodness is greater even than my evil. Your ability to redeem is greater even than my seemingly unlimited ability to destroy.

Let every blessing I see today remind me of these four amazing truths. Each one seems too good to be true, and yet the next one is even greater! PPRR – Pardon, Purify, Restore, Redeem. Let it sink in today dear God. Enable Your servant to think about it often enough and deeply enough today that I might have a conscious awareness of the experience of these four astonishing attributes today; that I might take great delight in them and enjoy them so thoroughly that it increases my love for You, dear God.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Sovereignty that is not subject to human frailty on the one hand, but that does not render human effort meaningless on the other

Promise to trust: He will give me meaningful work with real, important outcomes (good and bad), but still keep His promises in tact even if I fail.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Confidence, courage, Motivation, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

The Rise of Saul

1 Samuel 10-12 Day 5

¹⁶ "Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! ¹⁷ Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call upon the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king." ¹⁸ Then Samuel called upon the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain.

Imagine God in heaven during the creation asking Himself this question: “Should I maintain full control of everything, or should I let human beings have some control?” To us that would seem like a dilemma because on the one hand, if God keeps full control to Himself and gives no control to human beings, then our decisions are meaningless. In fact, we couldn’t really even make decisions. The “decisions” of a robot are not real decisions – they are just programmed responses. It would seem that if God maintained 100% control then nothing would be riding on me and my faithfulness or unfaithfulness. If I can’t do anything that will make actual, real changes on outcomes, then it really does not matter what I do or don’t do.

Picture a little child sitting on his father’s lap in the car. The child thinks he’s driving – his hands are on the wheel; but in reality his father is driving. And if the child makes a mistake – turns in the wrong place, there will be no negative consequence at all, because the father will just take over. If God maintains 100% control and gives humans no real control, then my whole life is like a child pretending to drive but not really driving. And nothing I do matters. Now think of the other side of the dilemma. If on the other hand God says, “I want my creatures to have the dignity of causation. I want to give them the privilege of meaning, so that their decisions and actions really matter. I want to give them some control over things so that there is a real possibility of great outcomes or horrible outcomes depending upon their choices and actions.” The problem on that side is this: Now your life has meaning and significance; your decisions and actions really do matter, but now you can no longer trust God in everything. If God has relinquished some of His control, then we can’t trust God to do good in those areas. So you lose your job and you want to be able to have full confidence that God is doing what is best and is working all things together for good for you, but God says, “Sorry. The best thing would have been for you not to lose your job. What happened is not ultimately in your best interests, but there’s nothing I can do about it, because I relinquished control of that over to some human beings who decided to lay you off.” If God relinquished control in some area, then in that area God could make us no promises. All those wonderful things we learned last week about providence – none of those would apply in that area where God gave up control.

So that’s the dilemma – either God maintains full control and our decisions are meaningless, or He gives us some control and we can no longer trust in Him. So, what did God do when He faced that dilemma? He never did face it. That is not a dilemma for God, because of one of His attributes. And as I said, I don’t know of a name for this attribute, so for lack of a better term I’ll call it God’s control-granting sovereignty. God has the ability to grant you actual, real control over events and outcomes without giving up the slightest bit of His total sovereign control over everything. He can make it so on the one hand you and I have a measure of control over what happens to Agape Bible Church. If we make certain decisions this fellowship could be destroyed and be an occasion for people to blaspheme God, and if we make different decisions this fellowship could thrive and flourish and be used by God to save many souls and bring many saints to greater holiness. But on the other hand, while all that is true, God still maintains full control so we can trust Him completely with our wellbeing. God can make it so that on the one hand election and predestination are realities, and yet at the same time our effort or lack of effort in evangelism will actually result in more or fewer souls in heaven.

Oh dear God what a spectacularly encouraging and motivating attribute! At the same moment I can fully trust You in everything and yet still have meaningful decision making such that huge, eternally important outcomes are actually riding on my shoulders.

Lord, I am amazed at the things You will allow to go undone if I fail to do them. If I steer the car off the road You don’t just grab the wheel and correct it. Often You will let that car go

careening off the road and crash. You will make sure that it fulfills Your perfect purposes when it does crash, but You will also allow some very horrible things to result as a consequence of my failure. You have placed in my hands something awesome – real decision making ability that is important and really does determine outcomes. The real possibility of horrible failure makes successes meaningful.

Let this truth move my heart as it should, dear Father. Let it give me indefatigable zeal and passion in serving You each day. Instead of eagerly anticipating being done with my work so I can waste time, let me instead wring every drop out of every moment of the day in Your service. If there really is more grace to be had if I am more earnest, Oh Lord, how earnest should I be! If there really is a greater likelihood of a person finding joy in You if I labor and strive on his behalf, how hard should I work! If it's really true that a soul could spend eternity in heaven instead of hell if I pray hard and diligently and share the gospel passionately, Oh how intense should be my efforts! If there is an opportunity to experience Your mighty power flowing through me today if I work hard, Oh how hard should I work! If there is a chance of bringing Your blessing and favor down on my family through my efforts to teach them and lead them in prayer and worship, Oh how relentless should be my attempts to lead! If it's really true that I am actually capable of bringing You honor or dishonor through the way I do my job each day, Oh how hard I would strive for excellence! If fellowship with You really is available for those who seek You with their whole heart throughout the day, Oh how I should strive to overcome the million distractions that would make me forget to seek You!

Awaken my soul, dear God, to these amazing possibilities that my motivation level might match what I claim to believe.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Sovereignty that is not subject to human frailty on the one hand, but that does not render human effort meaningless on the other

Promise to trust: He will give me meaningful work with real, important outcomes (good and bad), but still keep His promises in tact even if I fail.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: zeal