

A travelling preacher up north was speaking at an evangelical church for the first time. He was very nervous because he didn't know most of the people there. But he took the meeting, and everything seemed to go well and he was pleased. Afterwards he was standing at the back of the church talking to people and shaking their hands as they gave him their verdicts on the meeting: "very good meeting", "very interesting". Then a 10 year-old boy came up to him, shook his hand, and said "too long" and walked off.

Some more of the congregation came and shook his hand – "challenging message", "lovely sermon". Then the boy came back – "boring", he said. Some others shook his hand – "encouraging word", "inspiring message, thanks." The boy came up to him a third time – "couldn't understand what you were going on about". By now the speaker was a little concerned, so he went up to an elder of the church and he said, "I'm a bit concerned about that little boy over there and what he's saying. The elder interrupted him, saying, "Oh don't worry about him, he just repeats what he hears everyone else saying!"

Fortunately there aren't any 10-year-old boys here tonight, but I'll try not to make it too long and boring for you, and I'm praying God will touch each of us with a message which will challenge us and inspire us to want to know him more.

As I said this morning, today's talks come from the first book of Samuel in the Old Testament and they complement each other as this morning's talk focused on the people of Israel's **request** for a human king, and in a moment we're going to look at what happened when God **granted** their request. Do get hold of a tape, or be really annoying and ask someone who was here to tell you all about it! Hopefully they won't say "too long" "boring" "couldn't understand what he was going on about"!

Turn with me then to **1 Samuel chapter 9**[p.279 in blue Bibles]

This morning we saw that the situation in Israel at the end of Samuel's time of leadership under the direction of God was not good. He'd appointed his sons as his successors, but **they** had become corrupt and had rejected the direction of God. We saw that that was a symptom of the human problem – we **all** have a natural tendency to want to go our own way, to get what we can, any way we can. Man naturally rejects God's way.

The elders of Israel saw that there was a problem, and came to Samuel as God's representative to set in motion a solution to the problem. But, instead of asking God for **his** solution, they came with a pre-determined answer to their request – "*we want a king such as all the other nations have.*"

They were rejecting **God's** leadership, in favour of having a king like the other nations around them. God's special people didn't think that having God in charge was sufficient – they asked for a king. And we saw that sometimes we ask God for things but we come with the answer we want fixed in our minds. We can't do that.

God was displeased with their request, but said he would grant them a king, after telling Saul to inform them of the consequences of such a request. And we saw that we are allowed to make choices and decisions which may not be what God wants, but if we are God's children, ultimately in his grace and mercy, he will work out his purposes for us.

At the end of chapter 8 everyone goes back to his home to wait for God to give them a king. So we come to chapter 9. [Read 9: 1 – 6, 15 - 17]

When I was little I used to get very embarrassed. I was very short, and I used to have sparrow legs and there was no fat or muscle on me. When we played games at school, two captains used to get chosen by the teacher and the rest of us used to stand in a line while gradually we were chosen for one team or the other – you been through that? It was invariably me or Greg Pike - the tallest, gangliest, most uncoordinated boy you've ever seen - who was the last to be chosen. Very embarrassing. I hated that process of choosing. Scarred me for life!

Here in chapter 9 God chooses his man to become king of Israel. What do we learn about his choice?

Well, the first two verses tell us of Saul's background and appearance. We read that he comes from good stock, he is descended from Kish - a man of high standing, from the tribe of Benjamin, he's one of the people. Saul himself is physically impressive, he stands out, he is without equal in Israel, taller than the rest. So this is a good start – these things would **appeal** to those around him. He's an impressive young man.

But how do we find him in the next verses? We find him minding his own business, wandering about the area, looking for his father's donkeys – a common, everyday task, nothing special. He and one of his father's servants looked all over for them, but couldn't find them.

Donkeys were important in Bible times – for carrying things, pulling things and for farming. Having lots of donkeys would have meant that Saul’s father was wealthy, so losing the donkeys would have been disastrous. Saul’s out looking for them.

They look all over the place, but eventually – in verse 5 – Saul wants to give up and go home, but his servant says to him, *“Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true.”* And he persuades him to seek his guidance. It is the servant who has heard of this man – Samuel – who had a reputation for discovering and speaking the truth. So we gather from this that Saul is at this stage ignorant of spiritual matters. He just wants to find his dad’s donkeys.

Saul listens to the servant’s suggestion – he’s nothing to lose – he’s already lost his father’s donkeys! They go looking for Samuel.

Meanwhile, we read in verse 15 that God has forewarned Samuel that today will be the day when God will reveal the man he has chosen to be king of Israel. So when Saul appears in verse 17, he isn’t surprised when the Lord says to him, *“This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.”*

So one minute Saul is wandering through the countryside, looking for donkeys; the next minute he is being pointed out as being God’s chosen king for his people. Unbelievable! Who would have thought it? Certainly not Saul – he says in verse 21, *“But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?”* ‘Who me? King of Israel?’

Saul’s reason for being out on the road, and for being in the very area where Samuel lived was merely to look for the donkeys; but God had another purpose for him in all of this. Saul went looking for Samuel out of self-interest – it wasn’t even his idea - but God had brought him here to be prepared for kingship.

The message from this is that God meets **all** who seek him, no matter what their initial motive. I’m sure there are times you can think of in your own life, when you’ve done something out of purely selfish motives, or at least innocent motives, but God has met you in a completely different way, he has worked his purposes out for you.

Perhaps you’ve gone into a church to escape the rain; perhaps you’ve come to church to please a friend or neighbour; perhaps you heard that there was a meal on offer cooked by a renowned chef; perhaps you felt lonely one evening and went looking for friendship.

Then God stepped in – he spoke to you, through what was being talked about; or someone showed you the love of God for the first time; or you heard a song and the words touched your heart. Whatever your motive for being there, God wanted you there to tell you about his love for you in Jesus. Whatever your reason for being here **now**, God is telling you that he loves you so much, that his son died on a cross, so that you could know him.

God draws us to himself in this way. But even **after** we become Christians, he uses common occurrences to lead us where he wants. Sometimes we think that things just happen to us, but God uses both good events and seemingly bad events to shape us and prepare us to serve him.

Just over two years ago, I had two months off work because of stress which resulted in high blood pressure. During that time, I realised that God was speaking to me. He showed me that I was spending too much time on my secular job, and far too little concentrating on my service of him. God used that situation to lead me into greater service of him. He took that event and used it to fulfil his purposes in my life.

That's what God does – he works his purposes out in us, even when we don't realise it. That's what he is doing here for Saul. God has much greater things in store for him than looking after his father's donkeys.

What is God doing for you now – do you know God's leading? Do you hear his voice? Is he showing you that he wants you to love him and follow and serve him? Who me? Yes you. Listen to him – he has a wonderful purpose for your life.

Jesus says in John chapter 6, verse 37, "*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*" No matter why **you** think you are here, God is speaking to you, he will never drive you away.

Let's move on. **Chapter 10**, verse 1. [Read 10:1 – 9]

Samuel anointed Saul with oil. The coronation was to come later, and that was a political act establishing the king as ruler; but this anointing with oil was the religious act which indicated that the king was God's representative to the people. As the oil was poured over his head, it symbolised the presence of God's Spirit in his life, and showed his responsibility to lead the people through God's wisdom.

What would Saul have been thinking at this time? King of Israel? Who me? You're joking – I don't even know God really. Surely not – little me?

So Samuel gives him a message from God to show Saul that he can trust Samuel's words. The first two events he talks about will show him that these things about him being the king of Israel are coming true.

Firstly he will meet some men who will tell him that the donkeys he was looking for have been found, so he is not to worry about this any more – his problem solved. And secondly, people who he has never met will come up to him on his journey and offer him food and drink – is this perhaps a sign of things to come, where people will bring him gifts to acknowledge him as king?

The third event Samuel talks about, will change Saul's life. This will involve a personal encounter with God. He will meet a procession of prophets, men of God, proclaiming God's truth and praising God, and Samuel says in verse 6, *"The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will prophecy with them, and you will be changed into a different person."* You will be changed into a different person. And we read in verse 9 that these things did happen, *"God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day."*

God broke into Saul's life. He changed his heart. The Spirit of God came upon him in power, and changed him into a different person. This is what God does. When God draws you to himself, when he reveals his truth to you by his Spirit, there is no way that you can stay the same person. You change into a different person, you are 'born again', the Bible says. You become a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come. God changes people's hearts, that's what he does. When a person recognises the truth that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, no-one comes to the Father but through him, the Spirit of God moves in, and that person is made new.

And it can happen in an instant. We've been looking recently at the events at the beginning of Acts, where God's Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles and filled them with power, and thousands were added to the church.

Look at the other Saul who became Paul in the New Testament; he was out to persecute all Christians until he met with the power of God in that blinding light on the road to Damascus. After that he was a new person, he was a different person – instrumental in the growth of the early church.

But this is a personal encounter. Saul here had a personal encounter with God. I well remember the day God spoke to **my** heart in power one Easter Sunday evening. I'd gone on what we called a houseparty – lots of young people like I was in the Yorkshire Dales for a weekend.

I went because I was a shy and lonely boy looking for friendship. But God had different ideas. In that service the speaker was talking about Jesus' death on the cross, and that he'd died for my sins. My sins. God impressed that on my heart in a powerful way. He died for my sins. God changed my heart, and he made me and is **still** making me a different person.

Who me? Yes, even me.

This is what God does. The Spirit of God comes upon you in power and makes you a different person. Do you know anything of this in your life? I pray you do. How we need God's Spirit to make us new, only then will we know God's presence and love.

Saul thought he was trying to find his father's donkeys – but what he **actually** found was God. He was made into a different person, now he can live in the light of God's presence, and lead God's people in the light of the knowledge of God.

All that remains then is the unveiling of Israel's king to his people, and we read of this in **verses 17 - 24**. [Read]

Imagine the scene. Imagine the excitement – today's the day when the people will find out who is going to be their king. They've all been summoned to Mizpah where Samuel will bring God's decision. Nobody knows (apart from Samuel and Saul) who it is going to be. As they walked along the road to Mizpah, I'm sure rumours will have started, they will have been guessing amongst themselves who was going to be chosen. Some will have been thinking it could possibly be **them**. How exciting – at last they were going to have a king like all the other nations around them.

The first words Samuel says to them in verse 18 onwards will have surprised some of them – that they have **rejected** the God who saves them from all calamities and distresses – but it doesn't put them off – they just want their king. Why would anyone prefer the rule of a man to the rule of almighty God? Because they didn't know him. They want, and they are to get a king for the first time.

They go through the process of choosing. We don't know exactly how, but it's clear that the people recognise this as God's choice, they recognise that God remains sovereign in choosing their king. At the outset of the process, every man was in the running, but gradually the tribe of Benjamin was chosen, then Matri's clan, then Kish's family and finally his son Saul was chosen.

But where is he? They wonder where he is, and notice in verse 22 it is the Lord who tells them where to look. Just as an aside - isn't it good to read incidents like this in the Bible – it's so true to life, and humour has a place in life, so it has its place in the Bible too.

Where is Saul? Hiding among the baggage! We've already been told that he is tall and stands out above everyone, so the idea of him hiding in the baggage is a humorous one – you can imagine him sitting amongst the baggage (hands over eyes), “you can't see me, I'm not here”!

But why is he hiding anyway? Samuel has already told him that he is to be king, and has anointed him; so he must be **expecting** this to happen. So why hide?

Remember back at the beginning of chapter 9, Saul was described, but only his family background and his physical appearance – both impressive. Nothing is said of his personality and character. When Samuel told him he was God's chosen king, he said “Who me? I'm only a Benjamite, from the least of all the clans.” Perhaps he was even now having those same thoughts: “Surely this can't be right, there's some mistake. I'm just an ordinary man – one of the people – there's nothing special about me. King? Me? Who am **I**? Perhaps if I hide they'll choose another man more fit to be king.”

In God's kingdom there is a place for usefulness but also usable-ness – usefulness is where God takes our strengths and abilities and uses them for his glory; but usable-ness is where God takes our weaknesses and makes us strong. We can be used by God as we practice the skills and talents that we have naturally; but our weaknesses remind us that we need almighty God in control, his power can use our weakness to reveal himself to others – we can be **useful** to God in our strengths, but also **usable** for God in our weaknesses.

Who me? Yes, even me. Who you? Yes, you too. You say, “But I have no strengths, and I'm so weak.” In the hands of God, he can do great things through you. If you are a Christian, and know his forgiveness and salvation, he has begun a work in you – he has made you new, and will equip you for **every good work**. Like those disciples that Jesus called, he will make you fishers of men. He takes you as you are, and provides all you need to serve him now, where you are.

Let's remember what Paul says, “*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” [Ephesians 2:10] You are useful to God in your strengths. In fact we have a **responsibility** to use our gifts for God.

But you are also usable in your weaknesses – trust in God’s provision, rather than dwelling on your inadequacies. Like Paul let’s say, “*I can do **everything** through him who gives me strength.*” [Philippians 4:13] Who me? Yes you.

Saul was physically strong, but he lacked confidence, he was indecisive. But God chose him. He was daunted, even afraid perhaps of what lay ahead. But God was to give him the strength he would need.

Let’s bring this to a close. In the way God made his choice of Saul, we have seen that God can use seemingly innocent situations and use them for his purposes; we’ve seen that when God places his hands on you, you become a changed person, a new person; we’ve seen that when God chooses you, he uses all of you – strengths and weaknesses – to fulfil his purposes for you, for those around you and to bring glory to himself.

Has he done this for you? Only you and God know that. Can he do that for you? Yes he most certainly can. No matter what stage we’re at, no matter where we stand in relation to God at this moment, he can do and he wants to do more **for** you, **in** you and **through** you.

Who me?