

1 Samuel 9:1-10:16

'God in the mundane'

Decisions, decisions

The last twelve months of our lives have been cluttered with decisions.

We've made some decisions that are what I would call big decisions.

For example, Heather and I decided that I should leave working in IT.

Given my age, this probably means that I'll never be able to return to it as a career.

We've both decided that we will leave Perth to go and work in Melbourne.

The implications of that decision are that we will leave our children and my mother behind.

We will leave you, the people we have grown to love and who have become our family in the Lord.

We've decided that Heather should go into fulltime Christian ministry and end her career in health services and management.

We've made decisions about housing and house loans.

...about car purchases.

...about where we are going to live.

...and about what church we are going to attend.

It has been a year of big decisions.

My experience with other Christians is that we as Christians seem to divide our decisions into big decisions and more mundane decisions.

Big decisions are such things as...

- What career we have.
- Who we marry.
- How many children we have.
- Where we live.
- How we manage our finances.

Much time, energy, research, praying, and thinking is spent on these decisions.

Somehow we think that if we get these things right then everything else will fall into place.

And sometimes there is a feeling that if we get these decisions wrong then we will destroy our lives.

Life is therefore divided into big decisions and the more mundane decisions.

The big decisions are those on which we spend much energy and over which we display much angst.

The small decisions are those we make on the run each day.

Now my own view is that the importance we give to such decisions is overrated.

And I think our story today gives us some insight into this issue.

So, let's turn to 1 Samuel 9 and take a look at the extraordinary events that are laid out there.

Remembering the context

Now it has been quite some time since we've had a look at 1 Samuel and so I think we should go back and put things into context.

So, please open your Bibles at 1 Samuel 1 and follow with me as we remember where we've been so far.

1 Samuel 1 opens with the story of a barren woman called Hannah.

In her barrenness, she calls out to God for help.

And God does indeed help her.
He gives her a son.
And she in turn gives her son, Samuel, to God.
Samuel enters apprenticeship with the priest Eli.
And he grows up to become a prophet.
Chapter 3 tells us that God begins to speak to him and that he begins to speak the word of God to the people of God.
Chapters 4 through to 7 tell us about the ark of the covenant.
Israel is engaged in war with the Philistines.
They lose a battle and decide that they would fare better if they had the ark with them.
In the end, they lose the battle and lose the ark.
But the Philistines have huge problems with ark and end up wanting to send it back.
The story serves to tell us that God doesn't need armies to win battles and that the people of God only need God to be secure.
However, chapter 8 tells us that the people of God think that they need more than just God.
They tell Samuel and God that they want a king just like the other nations around about them.
God tells them that their seeking for a king is a rejection of his kingship.
He also warns them that having a king will cause them great pain and hardship.
However, he tells them that he will give them a king.
This is how chapter 8 ends.
God has promised the people a king.
And they have all gone home.
They are waiting and Samuel is waiting and we are waiting to see how God grants their request.
How will God appoint a king?
Who will God appoint as king?
This is the focus of 1 Samuel 9 and 10.
So let's now turn to the story and see God at work.

1 Samuel 9:1-10:6

A story of quests

The story of 1 Samuel 9 and 10 is a story of three quests.
The first quest starts with verse 1.
Just as 1 Samuel 1 introduced us to an insignificant and barren woman, here we are introduced to, Kish, a man from the small and relatively insignificant tribe of Benjamin.
We are introduced to his son, Saul, who is far from insignificant in terms of appearance.
And we are also introduced to the quest: Kish has lost some donkeys and Saul is to seek the donkeys in the company of a servant.
So, off they go on their relatively mundane adventure.
And on the way all sorts of things happen to them and they meet all sorts of people.
First they search home territory.
Then they broaden the search into the district of Zuph.
In verse 5 Saul nearly abandons the quest.
But in verses 6 and 10 the servant overcomes the threats to the quest and persuades Saul to press on.
In the process we are introduced to the second quest.
The second quest is the quest to find a nameless prophet
The idea is that by solving this second quest they will solve the first quest.
So they press on in verse 11.
And as they do, they meet some girls who point them in the right direction.

They indicate that there are some important events going on and that the prophet will be there to kick them off.

In verse 15 we are introduced to the third quest.

The person who is doing this seeking this time is not Saul, but Samuel the prophet.

He is on the look out for a man from the tribe of Benjamin.

A man who will fulfil the quest of the people of God who want a king.

A man who will be the leader of God's people.

A man whom God will use to deliver his people.

He doesn't know who the man is.

But we do.

After all, we've been following him in his quests.

Then, in verse 17 Samuel's quest is resolved.

He sees Saul and God tells him that this is the man.

He is the one who will govern or restrain (ESV) God's people.

In verses 18 and 19 Saul's quest is resolved.

He finds Samuel and Samuel says that he is the seer that Saul is seeking.

The only quest that has to be resolved now is the one about the donkeys.

But Samuel puts this aside for the moment.

He promises that it will be resolved, but some other things need to happen first.

Saul is then introduced to some of what God wants of him.

We are then told of the cultic meal that the girls had mentioned.

And through a discussion between Samuel and the cook, we find out that Saul is to be the guest of honour.

Then, in verse 25, we are told that Samuel and Saul have a private conversation.

We presume it is about the kingship but we are kept in the dark about its content.

The servant is then sent on ahead.

And in chapter 10, Samuel tells Saul about four persons or groups of persons that he will meet on the way home.

First, he will meet two men who will tell him that his original quest has been resolved: the donkeys have been found.

Second, he will meet three men who will offer him food.

Third, he will meet a group of prophets and he will prophesy in their company.

And four, he will meet God.

The Spirit of God will come upon him in power and he will be changed into a different person.

The fulfilment of these signs will signify to Saul that God is with him.

Verses 9ff tell us that God worked in Saul's heart.

The signs were fulfilled.

In verse 14, Saul meets his uncle.

In ancient Israelite family structures, an uncle is the next in line after a father in terms of authority.

His uncle asks Saul for information about what Samuel said.

Saul tells his uncle that Samuel had told him that his quest for donkeys was over.

But Saul does not tell his uncle, and he does not tell us, what Samuel said to him on the rooftop.

The narrator of the story tell us that it was about he kingship but this is all that he tells us.

It is worth noting that verse 16 is the first time in the whole story that kingship has been mentioned.

We've heard about rulers and leaders but no one, not even God, has mentioned kings.

Things to note

- The main point

So, there is the story in a nutshell.

What I'd like to do now is to point out three things about the story.

First, I want you to notice the main point.

The main point is a very important point.

God is doing something very important here.

He has heard the request of his people.

He has heard, and he is answering it.

Look at verse 16.

God tells Samuel that he is to anoint a leader over his people.

The word 'anoint' is the word from which get the word 'Messiah' or 'Christ'.

God is in the process of finding an anointed one, a Messiah, a Christ.

And the first one of these is Saul.

God is making a very important appointment.

And the story of the rest of the Bible from this point on is going to be about a quest to find someone who will truly fulfil this great calling.

The rest of the Bible is going to be about a quest for an anointed king who will indeed deliver God's people from their worst enemies.

It is going to be about a quest for him upon whom God's Spirit rests forever.

So, this is the first point.

God is making a very important appointment.

Saul is the answer to the people's request for a king.

- A subsidiary point

However, there is a subsidiary point that needs to be made here.

I wonder if you noticed something about the story as we went through it.

Who do you think is at the top of the order in terms of authority?

Well, the story is clear, isn't it?

God is at the top of the hierarchy.

He is the one who directs everything.

He is the one to whom everyone must be subject.

And who is the next on the list?

Who is God's primary agent?

Who represents God?

Again, the story is clear, isn't it?

Samuel is next in order.

He is God's representative.

As God's prophet, he is the one who directs and controls.

He stands in God's presence and speaks God's word.

And who is next after Samuel?

Well, at the beginning of the story, Saul is under the direction of his family, isn't he?

But by the end of the story things are very different.

His father is no longer his human father.

It is his spiritual director, Samuel.

But more than that, it is God who chose him, who appointed him, and whose Spirit has now come upon him.

Saul is now under the direction of God.

And so the story ends with Saul's uncle being kept in the dark by Saul.

Saul is now under a different leadership.

This point is very important.

You see, Israel had asked for a king like all the other nations.

But God has not given them exactly what they wanted.

God has given them some of what they wanted.
They have a leader who will rescue them from their enemies.
But their leader is a leader who is not a free agent.
He is a man under authority.
He is someone who lives under the authority of God.
He is someone who lives under the word of God.
And this is illustrated in this passage by the fact that Samuel the prophet oversees his appointment and actions.
A king in Israel is not an autonomous agent.
A king in Israel is a king who stands under the word of God.
He is a king who is governed by the word of God.

- An incidental point?

But I want to make one more point about this passage.
I wonder if you noticed something else about this passage.
It is not the main point of the passage, but it arises from the way the story is told.
You see, one of the striking things about this passage is the number of characters in it.
It is a very unusual passage in terms of human involvement.
Sure, we get God and Samuel and Saul.
But we also get Saul's father, the servant, the girls, the cook, the two men with news, the three men with food, the prophets, and the uncle.
God is doing a very important thing here.
And in the process he involves all sorts of people in various ways in the process.
They are all integrally sewn into the process.
They are all fundamentally important in the process.
They don't know it, but God is using them and their actions in one great action.
Kish doesn't know it, but sending his son on a quest for some lost donkeys will fundamentally change his relationship with his son.
It will fundamentally change the life of his son and the life of the people of God.
The servant doesn't know it, but his initiative in persuading Saul to get some help from a nameless seer is the mechanism God uses to put Saul and Samuel in touch with each other.
It is God's means for bringing Saul to Samuel to be anointed and informed about his new role.
The girls are also part of this process.
And so it is with the rest of the characters in the story.
But this is not only true in 1 Samuel 9 and 10.
This is the way things are in the story of the Bible from beginning to end.
God has a purpose, a plan for his world.
And God uses ordinary people going about ordinary lives in accomplishing this purpose.

God in the mundane

And it is this that I want to close with.
You see, what the Bible is doing as it tells us stories like this is that it is communicating that the ordinary and the mundane are saturated with purpose.
In a world where God is sovereign, nothing happens that is outside his control.
And if this is the case, then everything in life is sacred.
The ordinary, the mundane, the humdrum... these are the places where God is active.
These are the places where he is working out his purposes.
And so it is that when we exercise hospitality, we may often find that we are entertaining angels unawares.

When we act in a godly manner in our workplace, we may be drawing them nearer to the things of God.

When we choose to spend time with our families we may be laying groundwork for the longterm future of those families.

Can you see what I'm saying?

The decisions I mentioned at the beginning are not the big ones.

In fact, most of those decisions are decisions that people never had to make for themselves up until the last two or three generations.

The decisions about career, who you married, how many children you had, where you lived, and what you did with money were all largely determined by birth.

And that's why the Bible doesn't address them very much.

You see, as far as God is concerned, the really important decisions are the everyday.

Am I going to follow and serve Jesus today?

Am I going to act justly today?

Am I going to live rightly with my wife, my husband, my children, my employer, my employees, and my government?

Am I going to love people just as I have been loved by God?

Am I going to accept others, just as I have been accepted by God?

Am I going to watch things on television that will not hurt my relationship with God or others?

Am I going to help this person who is in need?

Am I going to use my money on myself in this situation?

Am I going to study as an act of worship?

Am I going to use my time in this manner or that manner?

Can you see what I'm saying?

It is in the ordinary and the mundane that God is so often so active.

It is here that he wants us to give our energy and focus in terms of decision making.

He wants us to decide for him in these.

These are the ones to concentrate on.

For it is through these decisions that he works out his purposes in his world.