

## Introduction

Safety: it is the basic role asked of any government—safety within the country and especially from outside threat. Reference.com says it this way: “The role of any national government is to protect the safety and well-being of its citizens and the sovereignty of the country's borders.”

Safety is what the people of Israel wanted from a king. They had struggled for decades against invasion and domination by neighbors. They wanted a king to save them, to deliver them from their enemies and oppressors. They will meet their savior-king in our text and experience just what they had hoped for—a king who saves.

## Text

Though Samuel has anointed young Saul to be king, he has yet to make a public proclamation. Now he calls the tribes together at a place called Mizpah. Instead of introducing Saul and telling the story of how God has revealed Saul to him to be anointed, he uses a process that would have been accepted at that time as the indication that the new king was indeed chosen by God. Using a casting-by-lot system, the final lot rests on none other than Saul.

It was to be a dramatic revealing of Saul. No doubt Samuel intended to then tell his story to confirm Saul's appointment by God, but probably is taken aback by the no-show Saul. Where is the king chosen by God? He is hiding among the baggage. Note the effect Samuel would have intended.

But then, we the readers would not be too surprised. Saul has not been impressive in the little we've been exposed to him. His servant proves to be more leadership material than Saul. He never shows himself to be comfortable with Samuel's naming and anointing him king. Indeed, he keeps the episode of his anointing from his closest family. The indication is not so much that Saul is a humble man, but rather a timid man, what we might call a wimp.

But there is one thing going for Saul, and that is his appearance. He is tall and handsome. He may not act the part of a king, but he looks the part and that is what matters to the people.

The writer of 1 Samuel does not let us in on what Samuel is thinking about Saul, but he gives enough clues. The primary clue is in Samuel's opening remarks before he introduces the new king. Yet again, he reminds the people that their demand for a king is a rejection of the Lord God as their king, the Lord God who had already proved himself to be their savior, first from Egypt and then time and again from their neighbors.

Samuel is not the guy you want to introduce your candidacy for office. “Why you need anyone to hold this office, I don't know. It's only because you all are inept and unruly that you need someone to fill the position. But if you are going to insist, here is the person I endorse.”

No, Samuel is not enthusiastic about a king in the first place, and he subtly indicates that he is unimpressed with Saul. When Saul is pulled out of his hiding place, Samuel says, “*Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? There is none like him among all the people.*” “Do you see this good-looking guy? Is there anybody who does a better job of looking the part than him?” I can’t tell if Samuel is so much down on Saul as he is disdainful of the people, mocking them for their folly. They think Saul is great: “*And all the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’*” All right! We’ve got a king, and, wow, does he look like a king!

Samuel reads the rights and duties of the kingship, likely taken from Deuteronomy 17, and dismisses the people. Indeed, it is noteworthy the little fanfare that accompanies Saul’s introduction as king. Everybody goes back to their regular routine, including Saul. The only remark of note is the response of two different groups of men. One, noted to be men of valor, accept Saul and even attach themselves to him. The other, described as worthless fellows, despise him.

However unpromising Saul’s beginning as king seems, he is soon given the opportunity to prove himself, and he makes the most of it. When a city is threatened by the neighboring Ammonite army, Saul rallies the twelve tribes together, forms an army and leads them to total victory. Saul not only looks like a king; he acts like a king and saves his people.

He even acts like a noble king. Opportunity arises to take vengeance on the worthless fellows who had earlier shown public disdain of him, but Saul refuses. Furthermore, he acts like a righteous king. He proclaims before his people that “*the Lord has worked salvation in Israel.*” Here was Saul’s opportunity to glorify himself, but he properly gives the glory to God. Even Samuel had to be proud, and he indicates so by calling the people to “*renew the kingdom.*” This is the time that the people and Samuel make Saul king the right way, as part of a religious ceremony that honors the Lord.

And so, whereas the proclamation ceremony at Mizpah ended with doubt, the crowning ceremony at Gilgal ends with great rejoicing by all. A happy beginning to the new era of kingship.

## **Lessons**

Let us consider two lessons to take away from our passage.

### **1. What we accomplish rests not on what is within us but what the Lord does in us.**

It is clear from our writer that Saul does not possess kingly attributes. He is not particularly bright, not particularly industrious, and demonstrates only a spirit of timidity. Though we are told that only a “some worthless fellows” questioned out loud, “How can this man save us?” we have to wonder ourselves.

And yet, when the time comes to act as a courageous and charismatic leader, he does so. Did Saul have inner qualities that needed a crisis to bring them out? That does happen. Many mild-

mannered individuals have risen to the occasion when leadership was called for, just as many who seemed leaders failed when the test came. That is a common theme in fairy tales. The peasant boy is proved to have the qualities of a noble prince, when he is given an arduous task to fulfill.

But inner character is not attributed to Saul. We are told in 11:6, when Saul is told of the besieged city: “And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words.” Saul did not call on his inner John Wayne. The Holy Spirit came upon him, giving him the courage and the smarts to rally and to organize and to lead an army.

That is how Scripture and the people of God look at the whole subject matter of having the right character or spirit needed at the necessary time. Indeed, Saul realized what had happened, when he told the people “today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel.” It is the Lord who gives victory, the Lord who strengthens the arm, the Lord who gives wisdom, who makes brave.

Furthermore, the Lord delights in displaying his strength through those who are obviously weak. You know the story of Gideon. When the Lord commanded him to save Israel from the enemy of Midian, he protests how lowly a person he is. God does not rebuke him for low self-esteem. He does not cheer him on with a I-know-you-can-do-it speech. No, the Lord tells Gideon, “I will be with you.” God then, not only sends out a lowly man to be a military leader, but arranges the matter so that it is done by the fewest number. He whittles an army of 22,000 down to 300 to battle an army of 135,000.

The message is clear: whatever God calls a person to do, he will give that person the means to do it. God does not look around for the person that he thinks has the character and ability needed. He, out of his own secret counsel, determines whom he will call and then give his Spirit to carry out the calling.

But this truth applies more than to leadership. We might not all be given great, heroic feats to accomplish, but we all face personal battles. It may be health. It someday—if the Lord should tarry—will be death. There will be times in which your commitment to the Lord will be put to the test by having to make a decision for him that puts your job or your reputation on the line. That is increasingly happening to Christians in our own country.

And so you ask yourself, “Will I have the faith and the courage to glorify the Lord when such times come?” You worry that you will prove to be just as fearful as your unbelieving neighbor. At the moment of crisis, say at death, your faith will abandon you. And you worry for good reason. You know your weakness; you know how already you stumble. And look at the Apostle Peter, who utterly failed the test when the time came to identify with his Lord after his arrest.

Would you like me to answer the question for you? You will do fine. You will do fine as long as ...as long as you look not to yourself but to the Lord. And you are already doing that. How do I know? First, I see how you are grounding yourself in the solid doctrines of Scripture. I have yet to minister to any of you in sickness or some other trouble, and you do not attest that the Lord is sovereign and that he is good. You might be afraid; you might be anxious, and you know at least mentally what Scripture teaches.

It is having true knowledge of God that will deliver you through your hard times. You know that the Lord God is sovereign, that nothing is outside his control and so, however unsettling the circumstance may seem, you know that your God someone is working all things for his glory and for your good. You may not like what you are experiencing. You may not be praising the Lord in front of your neighbors, and, like Job, you will not curse your God.

Second, you will be fine because you pray. I don't know your prayer life. It may not be what it should be, and yet you do talk to God. You may not be articulate, but you pray what you are able, meaning that you still believe in him, you still believe he is listening, even that he cares for you.

You will be fine, but of course, not because of what I know about you but what I know about your Lord. He keeps his promises and so he will bring you through the fire. Listen to what the failure Peter would later testify.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:3–9

By his power, God is keeping you guarded by granting to you the faith that will not be extinguished and that will take you into glory. That is God's promise and he will keep it.

## **2. The true king is a true savior.**

The second lesson has to do with kingship. However unlikely it was to be done by timid Saul, and however extraordinary was the work of the Spirit of God, Saul accomplished what had been wanted from a king: to save his people.

When the people had demanded a king, they said that they wanted a king to judge them and “go out before us and fight our battles.” That is what they really wanted. Their history had been that of being invaded and oppressed by their enemies. They wanted a king to win victory over their enemies and to bring peace.

And Saul comes through. Even Samuel is impressed, who after Saul's victory leads the people to hold a true coronation ceremony. There is no one asking the question now, “How can this man save us?”

Victory over our enemies, peace from danger—that we all want and need from a king. Surely you can see where I am heading. We have such a Savior-King. In this season of remembering the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, all the more we should meditate upon and rejoice in the great victory over our enemies and the peace won for us.

We have been saved from our enemy Satan. He would have our souls, and yet he cannot capture us. We are in the hands of the King, and he has promised us that nothing and no one can snatch us out of those hands. Satan might still tempt and deceive. And so we are called to “put on the whole armor of God, that [we] may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). But our souls are protected by our King who won victory over the devil at the cross. Satan might inflict harm, but even that harm is controlled by our King so that in the end it works for our good. And so we are promised that “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under [our] feet (Rom. 16:20).

We have been saved from our enemy sin. On the cross “we know that our old self was crucified with [our King] in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (Rom. 6:6).

We have been saved from the power of death. And so our King assures us: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” John 11:25–26). Indeed, the day will come when death itself shall die. And so is the promise:

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting? 1 Cor. 15:54–55

We have been saved from Satan, sin, and death. And yet, there is more that is needed. We have peace from these enemies, but there remains a more important peace to attain—the peace of reconciliation with the God whom we have offended. And so our King has attained such peace.

Romans 5:9 tells us that “while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” and so we are now reconciled.” And by our faith in our King’s work we receive justification by faith and so “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is our only Savior-King, and the victory he has won is the only victory that matters for eternity. The victory he has won is the hardest victory to attain, yet he attained it. The victory he has won is what gives to us confidence and peace to fight our earthly and personal battles. Are you concerned for the cultural battle threatening our values? Fight bravely but as soldiers of your King under his command to love your enemies and to demonstrate to them the radical changes that your King’s love makes.

Are you concerned for the personal battles taking place in your heart as you fight against temptation and weakness of the flesh? Remember again, that your King will give to you his Spirit so that you are able to stand up under Satan’s attacks.

Remember this:

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

And nothing and no one can ever separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, our King. Rom. 8:33, 34, 39