

Looking For the Delivering King, Pt. 1—Saul  
Pastor Ashley Brown  
Wasilla Bible Church  
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Ok, go ahead and turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 9. We're gonna be lookin' at 1 Samuel chapters 9-15 today. And we're continuing on the story of God's grace; and basically, the point that we are coming to is where we are going to be looking, along with the people of Israel, for the Delivering King, the one who is promised and who is to come. This week what we are going to do is we're going to look at the life of Saul. He was the first king of Israel and he was a failure, to put it bluntly. And then next week we're going to look at King David, who was debatably the most idealized, the ideal king except for one problem—he was still a sinner and he died. And so he could not intercede on behalf of his people and rule his people for all of eternity. But he pointed to a coming Delivering King who could and would do that—King Jesus. And so what's going to happen is this week we're going to look at Saul, next week we'll look at David, and then the week after that, right before Christmas, Larry is going to take us through looking at the coming Delivering King, the One who came and the One whose return we look forward to.

So, just to go through this real quickly, to remind you of where we are at in this whole process, things started off with a good creation gone bad. There has been a whole series of ups and downs, twists and turns, where people sin and then God responds in His grace; and as people continue to sin He responds with even greater grace. And where we left off two or three weeks ago with Larry was the book of Judges. Judges is one massive, long, death spiral down where things are getting worse and worse and worse, until it is probably the biggest crash landing in the Bible. Ok? The last few chapters of Judges are just gruesome. They're gruesome! And it's depressing, and it's something that you look at, but the summary statement...there is a refrain throughout Judges that "...*there was no king in Israel.*" And the summary statement of Judges...the whole book of Judges could be summed up with the last statement in chapter 21 verse 25, that "...*there was no king in Israel in those days, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*" Everybody did what they thought was right, and things just kept getting worse and worse and worse because there was no king who could deliver.

So what we're going to look at here is we're looking at...towards...the Delivering King, the One who would come. How we're going to do it—we're going to look at the life of Saul. And as we do so, as we look at this, what we're going to see is he ultimately was a failure. He did not do what he was intended to do, to point people towards God. Ok? So we're going to do a quick overview of his life, of his story, of the main part of his role in God's story. We're going to do this very quickly and then we'll look at where he failed, and we'll compare our lives to his and see...hopefully we do not go the same path that he did. Ok?

So, overview of Saul's story. First of all, he came from humble beginnings and he knew it. He, in chapter 9 verse 21 he...when Samuel told him that he was going to be the king, basically his response was, 'Why me? I'm from the tribe of Benjamin. That's the smallest, least important tribe. And not only that but my family, my clan in this tribe, is the smallest and least important. Why me?' He goes on in verse 10, or excuse me, verse 22 in chapter 10...I love this; when Samuel goes to finally crown him, what does Saul do? He runs and hides because he's scared of being in front of everybody or something, I don't know. They're lookin' for him, and Samuel is looking around, and it's like 'Where did Saul go?' And God says, 'Hey, go check the coat check', basically. 'He's hiding in the luggage, in the baggage.' He's buried himself in a bunch of bags so that he can try and hide, 'cause 'nobody'll look for me here.' And Samuel goes ahead, gets him, brings him out, and says 'Here's the king.' And everybody says, 'Woo hoo!' So that's what happens.

And then he finally leads his first battle, and the battle is against the Philistines. And he leads Israel to victory in chapter verse 13. The cool thing is he knows that it's not him, and he gives glory to God. In chapter 13...or...excuse me, in chapter 11 verse 13 he says that "...*today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel.*" He realizes it's God who's doing the work here. It's God who gets the credit for the victory.

Well, the problem is he came from humble beginnings and he knew it, but he didn't exactly keep that mentality. What ends up happening...we also see that outwardly Saul was a person to be admired. Outwardly he was someone to be admired. In chapter 9 verse 2 and in chapter 10 verse 23 we see that Saul was literally taller than everybody else. He stood head and shoulders above everyone else in the nation. Ok? He's tall, dark, handsome. In fact, it tells us that he was so good looking that there was not another man in all of Israel who was better looking than Saul. Ok? If Saul was living in America today, instead of Johnny Depp being named People's Sexiest Man Alive, it would be Saul. Ok? That's basically Saul. Picture whatever; he's this suave, debonair...he's got...he's the

quiet, sensitive type, but still yet he's this strapping, young, valiant warrior who's just tall, dark, and handsome. And all the girls just swoon when he walks by. And all the men say, 'Man, I wish I could be like that.' That's who Saul is. Ok? So outwardly he looks real good.

The problem is, inwardly he was lacking. See, as he spends a little bit of time having success the true character and values of his heart start to come out. Ok? What we see is...and this plays out very well...in chapter twelve Samuel gives a farewell address. He basically says, 'Ok, I'm gonna start steppin' back into the background. You guys have your king now. Israel, remember this, and Saul, remember this.' Saul doesn't take those words to heart, and what we see is in chapter 13 this begins his descent, his big, downward spiral. Ok? What ends up happening in chapter 13 verses 5 through 8 is it says that the Philistines, ok, the typical arch nemesis of Israel at this point in time...the Philistines, they mustered, they gathered an army together to fight Israel. And there were thousands of them! And so when the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble, they saw that they were vastly outnumbered and they said, 'We are in trouble; these people intend to do serious bodily harm to us, and there's a whole lot more of them than there are of us,' so what do they do? They do the very sensible thing and they run like scared rabbits. They go and they hide themselves in caves, in holes, in rocks, in tombs, in cisterns, wherever they could hide, and the people were scattering from Saul. Saul has this army and he looks at it and he's like, 'Oh man, I've got this army, I can fight, and all of a sudden they see how many Philistines there are and they just start scatterin'.' And Saul is losing it. He's losing his army, his grand army that is supposed to repel these people who don't know God.

And what does Saul do? Well, he panics, basically. He had been given an opportunity. Quite honestly, I look at this and it reminds me of Gideon, who came before Saul. You know Gideon, the guy who started out with thousands, got whittled down by God to the point where it was a few hundred, and he went up against an army that was vastly superior to him, and there was a victory. Why? Because God wanted to work it in such a way that God got the credit, not Gideon. In the same way, God was planning to do the same thing here, and Saul was going to get to be Gideon. But instead, Saul panics and what does he do? He forces the situation. He doesn't wait on God as God had directed. And so he tells Samuel, when Samuel shows up, he says, 'Well, I saw that the people were scattering from me, and so I said 'Now the Philistines are gonna come, they're gonna wipe me out.' And so what do I do? I force the situation and I don't wait for you as you commanded, as God directed me, and instead I'm gonna do this burnt offering to try and appease the people and make them confident that, ok, God is with us. We can win.' Instead of following and obeying God's direction.

The thing is, his failure is only highlighted by Jonathan. What ends up happening...Samuel, he says, 'You aren't pursuing God's heart. You are not a man after God's own heart, and God is going to choose someone else who is concerned about God's glory, not his own.' And Samuel...excuse me, Saul just kind of starts getting a little bit despondent. And so he sits around chopping pomegranates or something. I don't know, whatever he's doing under the pomegranate tree, as he's sitting here despairing because he only has six hundred men and there's all these Philistines. Jonathan, his son, ends up getting tired of it. He's like, 'Man, forget this!' So he gets this crazy idea that he and his armor-bearer...Jonathan looks at him and he says, 'Ok, I've got a sword, you've got a shield. There's lots of Philistines out there. Let's go for it.' That's basically what he says in 1 Samuel 14. I don't have time to go there, but this is probably one of my favorite stories in all of scripture. And someday I hope I will get to preach it, but I can't today. So here's basically what happens. Jonathan looks at him at the beginning of chapter 14, and he says 'Let's go for it! Why? Because perhaps, perhaps the Lord will show up. Maybe God'll do something huge. Because God is not hindered, He is not restrained to save by many or by few. If God wants to He can use me with my sword and you with your shield, and He can wipe out this whole army. So let's go for it.' And he does just that. He begins this process where the Israelites rise up and God works through them to work a victory. Jonathan does what Saul failed to do. Jonathan is highlighting the failure in Saul's heart to believe in and follow God.

So here's what ends up happening. It ends with rejection by God. And this is the sad, tragic climax of Saul's life. Really, everything after [in] Saul's life from this point on is just resolution, where he continues to go further and further and further downhill. But in chapter 15 verse 23 it says,

*"Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,"*

...this is Samuel talking to Saul...

*"...the LORD has rejected you from being king of Israel."*

'You turned your back on God and you were pursuing other things. You aren't pursuing God's glory, so you are no longer going to be the king that God wanted you to be.' That's the tragic climax of Saul's life right there, that statement.

So what we're gonna do is we are gonna look at, here in the next few minutes, we're going to look over just some implications of Saul's life. What do we learn from his life? Because I think what we'll see is that it's something that pops out in Samuel's farewell address in chapter 12. And we're going to be here for a little bit looking at the tail few verses of chapter 12. In verse 21 Samuel tells the people of Israel and Saul, he says

*"Do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty."*

Don't turn aside. Follow God. That's it...let your heart chase after God, that's it. Don't turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver. I think this is probably one of the most concise, complete definitions of an idol that I am aware of in scripture. It's anything that our heart turns away from God to chase, and ultimately it will just leave us empty because it cannot profit or deliver us. Saul turned aside after idols. They left him empty, apart from God. And the sad thing is, we see some of the same sort of idols in his life that he followed after that are still in our lives here today. And 'our lives'—I'm including myself in this. Ok? So we're gonna look at these real quickly, and we're gonna go through 'em just and see. Why? Because I hope that you will not have the same tragic climax in your story that Saul has in his, where he turns away in a lack of faith from God; he turns away only to chase after idols and have that be the summary statement of the rest of his life, rather than pursuing and getting to know God deeper and deeper and deeper.

So here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna look at these real quickly. The first idol, idols that won't satisfy...it's the idol of people. Ok? This is where, in chapter 12 verse 24, Samuel refers to this in his farewell speech. He says,

*"Only fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with all your heart."*

Only fear the LORD; that's it. That's the only thing, only person you should fear, that you should have respect for, that you should listen to and heed and obey—God. That's it. When he's told that he's rejected, in chapter 15 verse 24, Saul responds, 'Yes, I've sinned; I've turned my back on God, I've ceased to obey God.' And the excuse that he gives, he says, 'I did this because I feared the people and I obeyed their voice. It mattered more to me what they said than what God said.' So the question I have of you is just this—does your feeling of satisfaction, peace, and self-worth come from other people, or does it come from God?

Now, before I let you off the hook real easily, how does this often play out? In my own life and in the lives of people around me that I've seen, there's a few very common ways that I've seen this play out. One is relationships. You know that you shouldn't be in a relationship with someone, but you can't bring yourself to break off that relationship because you just...you have too much emotional ties there. You can't picture being apart from them, even though you know you should not be with that person. Now I am not talking about walking out on a marriage. I wanna make that very clear. But you know that you need to not be with this person. They are only taking you further and further away from God. And whatta you do? Keep on with 'em. Why? Because, honestly, they have become an idol to you. They are god, and they are your source of satisfaction, peace, and self-worth.

Or here's another one, is work. We look at it, and I want to be the best in my field. Why? Because it matters. I get a great sense of satisfaction, peace, and self-worth based upon what other people's professional assessment of me in my field is. And so what do I do? I work longer hours than I actually need to work to provide for my family; and I'm talking providing for the needs of my family. I may justify it 'well, this gets all these extra things for my family', but really what it breaks down to is I'm working longer, harder hours because I wanna be the best. And I am sacrificing my family, I am sacrificing my children...child-sacrifice, so to speak...on the altar of other people's esteem as I worship at the idol at the temple of people.

Or here's one other. You look at your family, and you look at your kids, and you can't admit that your child is a sinner. 'No, they're a good kid—they just got in with the wrong crowd.' Here's the problem with that statement...your child *is* the wrong crowd. They're a sinner. We all are. Here's just a thought, why I say that. Ok, you look at little Johnny and you say, 'Well, he's a good kid. He just got in with the wrong crowd.' Well guess what little Jimmy...you're talkin', you're lookin' at Johnny's friends and you say, 'Man, that little Jimmy, he's the wrong crowd. It's his fault.' What do you think little Jimmy's mom is saying? She's saying, 'My little Jimmy, he's a good kid. He just got in with the wrong crowd.' And the wrong crowd she's talkin' about is your little Johnny. But you can't admit that because all of a sudden it would eat away at your sense of satisfaction, peace, and self-worth, because you have placed your value in your child. We're worshipping an idol of people. It's a common thing.

We're gonna look at a second idol here that plays out in Saul's life—the idol of religion. This is one...man! We could do a whole sermon series on this, but...yeah, the idol of religion. Basically, in chapter 12 verse 24, Samuel in his farewell address goes on and he says,

*“Only fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with all your heart.”*

Worship Him is the idea. And what ends up happening is Saul, when he rejects God...chapter 15 verse 30...he talks of...it's very interesting. What he does is he says, 'Yes, I've sinned, yet honor me. I've sinned, I've rejected God, I've sought after my own glory. But still yet, honor me.' He's concerned about his own glory, his own honor; and how is he gonna do it? He wants Samuel to go with him so that he can do the religious thing and bow down before the "LORD your God." The crazy thing is Saul is just using religion. It's his way...it is a way that he is using to increase his own glory.

We see the same thing in our culture today. We go to church why? 'Because it makes me feel good about myself. It makes me a fine, upstanding citizen. It's another box that I can check to earn favor with God, or to make myself look good.' Whatever it may be, we're using religion...we're worshipping this idea of religion. Why? To boost ourselves up. What ends up happening, the question that I'd ask you is this—how do you respond when you don't receive the blessings you deserve, that you *feel* you deserve in life? Something goes badly; something bad happens in your life; or maybe something that you expected to happen good doesn't happen. Maybe you don't get that promotion, or whatever else. How do you respond? Is it something you look at and you say, 'What's up, God? Why? Why is this happening?' In effect, what is lying under that question...and that is a natural question to ask...but if you keep going there and that is the pattern of your life what I would suggest to you is this. Underlying that question that you continually keep asking again and again and again... 'Why? What's up? I don't deserve this!' It's probably because you actually are looking at it and basically what you're saying to God is 'Hey, I've done the right things. I've checked the right blocks. I go to church, I'm a good person, I don't really do bad things, I don't cheat on my taxes, whatever else it is,' and you say, 'God, You owe me.' In effect, you are putting yourself above God, and you are expecting God to answer to you, and He hasn't kept up His end of the bargain.

Makes me think of Matthew chapter 7, verse 21-23. What ends up happening is Jesus says, 'In the last days, in the day of judgment there will be many people', and He's talking about religious people, ministry leaders and all of this, 'who come and say "LORD, LORD, didn't I do this in Your name? But I did this, I did that; I did all these amazing things, and all for You. You gotta let me in."' 'You owe me' is basically what they're saying. 'It's all about me.' And He says, 'Depart from Me, because I never knew you. I never knew you.' Do you approach religion as though it is something up here that just...you're going to serve the religious things. Why? Because in checking the block it somehow glorifies yourself, makes you a better person than others around you.

We're gonna look at one other idol just real briefly here in Saul's life. We see this in chapter 12 verse 24 in Samuel's farewell address. He says...he's talking about 'Now listen, there's gonna be hard times that come,' and what he says is, 'Consider, when those hard times come, consider the great things God has done for you in the past. Don't forget what God has done for you.' What ends up happening just shortly after that...Saul, when the Philistines start coming and the people start scattering, and here is... If Saul had just looked back and even remembered just Gideon, just that one thing, ok, or even remembered the battle that he had won back in chapter 11, where he said, 'God won the victory!'...if he had remembered that, this would not have happened. The people start scattering, he panics, and so he turns his back on God and chooses to follow his own path because he placed his security in the number of men, the number of swords, the number of arms that he had instead of in God. He trusted and worshipped the idol of material security, things that he thought would deliver.

Question that I'd ask you here is what gives you comfort about the future? What makes you feel confident that things will work out ok in the end? Is it the fact that you or your spouse has a good job that pays the bills? Maybe you have health insurance and so you don't have to worry about the medical stuff. Or maybe it's the retirement plan. Maybe it's that you finally have this dream house that you've always wanted, and so things are just good now. What comforts you about the future? If it's anything other than God, and your trust that He will be faithful, if you are placing your trust in something else, probably I'm guessing it's a material idol. You may be worshipping this idol of material security.

One other question, and this'll be the...this is the last kind of question before we wrap up. If God told you to give up everything...or just any one thing...this very moment and walk away, would you? Now some of you may be sitting here and saying, 'Nope, I wouldn't give everything up,' at least you're being honest, ok? You're being honest, and I'll leave that between you and God. You guys work it out. Ok? God is perfectly capable of doing that with you. If you're saying 'Yes,' I'm not gonna let you loose that easily. 'Yes, I would give everything up', or 'I would give up

one thing, whatever, for God', I'm gonna press you just a little bit to consider this. If that's the case, I'm going to challenge you to actually put it on the table and say, 'Here God, it's Yours. I'm steppin' back. Is there anything You want me to give up?'

Over the next few weeks, maybe between now and Christmas, pray every single day and say, "God, I'm putting it all on the table. Is there anything You want me to give up for Your glory?" Make that your Christmas present to Jesus, to King Jesus. And here's...what does that look like? I don't know. Only God does. But maybe it's a thing. Maybe it's the job that you have been working, and it's great, and it provides for your family, but God wants you to walk away from that so that you can spend more time with your family, or so that you can actually spend more time investing in something else in the kingdom of heaven that God wants you to invest in. I don't know. Maybe it's something that God would have you get rid of. Your house that is your perfect dream house, but He wants you to move somewhere else so that you can use those resources for something in His kingdom. I don't know. Maybe it's this whole thing of family and friends—maybe He wants you to give up the community here that you live in, where you are surrounded by all your family and friends and you feel a comfort security net, so that you can actually go and move to some other place, maybe even the other side of the globe, to share the gospel with people who don't have a chance to even hear it. I don't know. That's only something that you and God can talk about. Maybe it's even just the dream of what the future looks like...the job you dream about having, the place you dream about living, the live you dream for yourself, and you're gonna give that up. If God told you to give up everything this moment and walk away to follow Him, would you do it? Even though it means you have an uncertain future, and all of a sudden your security is gone?

Sad thing about Saul's story is that it has a tragic climax. Summary statement of Judges, that 'there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes'—that could summarize Saul's life in many ways. There was no Delivering King in his heart, and he did what was right in his own eyes. As a result, this is where I would just leave you with this verse. Chapter 12 verse 21 of 1 Samuel, where Samuel said, 'Don't turn aside after empty things, things that cannot deliver, things that cannot profit, because they're empty.' You chase after them, you pursue them, and it will just leave you dry and empty. Don't do it. It's a waste; it's a tragic waste. What's the climax of your story?

Let's stand.

I always get a little bit nervous if I have to preach some sort of a little bit heavier sermon, but that's just something that God takes us through in scripture. As we go out from here this week I'm just gonna challenge you to go ahead and think through, and pray through, this song that we're going to pray and sing together here. Because ultimately the question is are you willing to go ahead and step out and follow God wherever He takes you, whether that's right here, whether it's somewhere else, whether it's your job, whether it's ... Outside of these walls are you ready to step out of here and follow and give witness to the one Delivering King who will not leave you empty? And so I'm going to invite you to sing this prayer with us, where we promise and we commit ourselves to giving witness to that Delivering King, King Jesus.

[Congregation sings the prayer song.]

Go in the grace of God.