



Series: 1 Samuel

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Speaker: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

Text: 1 Samuel 9-11

Title: Chasing Donkeys & Finding Destiny

Intro

Thank you for praying & for joining us at our Wednesday night prayer gathering. It was powerful ya'll. YOU showed up, and the Spirit of God showed up. Don't know how else to say it.

That's the most people we've ever had for a non-Sunday morning event. What a powerful time of testimony, of people bringing & leaving burdens on the altar, of leaving sin on the altar, reports of a couple people physically healed, and above all I believe God was glorified by his people praying to him.

And the party continues today because it's the last Sunday of the month which means we have people getting baptized! At both campuses. A great week in our church man.

Wednesday was Ash Wednesday. The beginning of a season in the church calendar called Lent. It's the 40 days leading up to Easter. And the idea of Lent is to focus our hearts on our need for the victory Christ wins for us in the cross and resurrection. And the WAY we build that NEED into our lives is through fasting. Where we replace physical food with drawing near to Jesus who calls himself the bread of life. So, prayer becomes our food, and our souls are strengthened as our physical bodies are weakened. It's very powerful and here's what we are suggesting. Every Wednesday we are going to fast and pray as a church. Don't just fast ok. This isn't like a Christian diet. Fast & PRAY. We are encouraging you to start with one meal each Wednesday and just try it. See what God has for you. Go to mercycharlotte.com/fast to get our fasting guide and learn more about it. I can't wait to hear what God does in your life through this. Some of ya'll are like when are we gonna have another prayer & worship night? Well, I will see you on Good Friday!

There's a question I love to ask people when we sit down together. I don't get a lot of time with any one person other than my family and my community group so when we are together, I like to ask: **What is God doing in your life right now?** Well, that's a bit of a funny question because there are two answers that are both right - One is the longer answer where you recount what he is teaching you from the bible, you talk about prayer burdens, maybe some situations and



decisions that are teaching you about who he is. And I love those because I learn so much about a person's story & their relationship with God through that one question. But there is another answer that is brutally honest and equally true. What is God doing in your life? "I DON'T KNOW!"

I really would like to know, but if I'm honest there feels like a gap between me just living my life and me understanding God's big plan. I'd like to know God's plan so I could know what to do with my life. Or maybe you are just wanting some confirmation God is even real at all. Today's scripture is going to be great for you.

Because Today's passage displays a feeling of when you are at like the widest part of the gap between living my life and understanding God's plan. Have you ever had one of those moments where you are sitting in a situation and you just pause, usually defeated, and say 'what am I even doing with my life?' Like the absurdity & maybe downright humility of the situation makes you wonder how far have I veered off of the right path? Surely this isn't God's plan for me. This isn't God's plan for ANYBODY. God has got to be like "oh, no. go back 3 spaces."

Recent Example - I'm eating at taco bell. That's it. That's the whole illustration. What am I even doing with my life?

Well, today we meet the second of our 3 main figures in 1 Samuel. Today we meet Saul. And he finds himself in the most 'what am I doing with my life' situation. Tracking down lost donkeys through the wilderness. And it's in unsuccessfully chasing donkeys that he discovers God's destiny for him. Something WAY bigger than he set out to find. And I'm going to TRY to show you why a guy chasing donkeys in the wilderness 3k years ago carries really helpful truth for your life.

here's our main idea today that we'll see come together as we look at the strange rise of king Saul.

We follow God's unknowable plan by obeying God's knowable word.

I think you are going to find a lot of comfort & freedom in not knowing God's plan. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Here's the set up. I'm going to take about 15 minutes and walk us through chapters 9-11. I won't read every verse. I'll do some plot summarizing and try to keep our attention on what I believe are the key mile markers in here. THEN, I'm going to show you what we Saul's rise to power teaches us about God's plan for us. The story works like 3 acts of a play. Saul's private anointing, his public selection, then his first military victory.



1 There was a prominent man of Benjamin named Kish son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, son of a Benjaminite. **2** He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man. There was no one more impressive among the Israelites than he. He stood a head taller than anyone else.

To understand these details, you gotta know the bigger picture. See Saul is being set up as a contrast to the next king...king David. Today Saul is a good guy, but only rising so he can fall hard. Saul looks like the kind of King Israel demanded. We saw last week Israel demand a king from God. And God is gonna give them over to that desire. They want a big strong king. David is going to be just the opposite. He's going to be a small weakling. And in a couple weeks we'll see God say, "people look at outward appearances, but the lord looks at the heart." Today, chapters 9-11, things will go well for Saul. It won't be til next week we see his troubles. But they will come.

3 One day the donkeys of Saul's father Kish wandered off. Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go look for the donkeys." **4** Saul and his servant went through the hill country of Ephraim and then through the region of Shalishah, but they didn't find them. They went through the region of Shaalim—nothing. Then they went through the Benjaminite region but still didn't find them. **5** When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was

with him, "Come on, let's go back, or my father will stop worrying about the donkeys and start worrying about us."

What am I even doing with my life? I'm out in the wilderness chasing donkeys. Unsuccessfully. Let's just go home cause dad is gonna start worrying. Defeated, probably a little humiliated. Financially this is going to hurt. WHAT IS HAPPENING.

The next few verses tell us the servant had heard about a man of God. A seer. Who lived nearby. That's Samuel. He says let's go ask him "have you seen my donkeys?" Saul says well my mom told me to always bring something as a gift when you are a guest. He says I've got some money. So off they go. And eventually they find their way to Samuel's house.

15 Now the day before Saul's arrival, the Lord had informed Samuel, **16** "At this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel. He will save them from the Philistines because I have seen the affliction of my people, for their cry has come to me." **17** When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord told him, "Here is the man I told you about; he will govern my people."

RIGHT HERE listen up. Saul thought he was sent by his dad to find some donkeys. Was he? Yes. But who do you think sent the donkeys away? Who do you think put Saul on his father's mind as the one to go searching for them. I WILL SEND YOU A MAN. And then the Lord said see - I told you. That tall farmer



all frustrated looking walking in here trying to figure out where he is and what is going on.

18 Saul approached Samuel in the city gate and asked, "Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?"¹⁹ "I am the seer," Samuel answered. "Go up ahead of me to the high place and eat with me today. When I send you off in the morning, I'll tell you everything that's in your heart. 20 As for the donkeys that wandered away from you three days ago, don't worry about them because they've been found. And who does all Israel desire but you and all your father's family?"

Guys. That is a mind melting moment. Saul looks over his shoulder like...surely you aren't talking to me. I mean I heard you say donkeys. And I can't imagine there are others doing what I'm doing. But I am certainly not desirable. 3-day donkey hunt in the wilderness does not make one desirable.

21 Saul responded, "Am I not a Benjaminite from the smallest of Israel's tribes and isn't my clan the least important of all the clans of the Benjaminite tribe? So why have you said something like this to me?"

Nobody DESIRES BENJAMINITES. That's the tribe that the other tribes joined up and went to war against and almost wiped them out entirely. They were the smallest tribe left. Who does Israel desire? Really anybody else. But Samuel insisted. And he sat Saul at the head of the table with 30 men

he had already invited. Pulled out the best portion of meat & served it to him. This is symbolic of what will come the next day. Saul is the chosen one. Saul lays his head down that night as Samuel's honored guest like I don't know what is happening.

Next morning Samuel calls Saul up to the roof and here's what happens.

1 Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it out on Saul's head, kissed him, and said, "Hasn't the Lord anointed you ruler over his inheritance?"

Anointing, in this case, is a way of symbolically setting someone aside for God's assignment. The Lord has set aside Saul as king. As ruler over Israel. And to confirm this is not some crazy talk by a crazy old man - Samuel says you will see 3 signs on your journey home.

Couple of guys at Rachel's grave will tell you what happened to your donkeys. 3 guys at the oak of tabor will give you some food. And then when you get to your hometown, you'll meet some prophets who have killer entrance music. And the spirit of God will come on you and you will Prophecy with them.

And it all happened. And it was so crazy people came up with a new saying for "well I'll be" - "is Saul also among the prophets?"



Then there is this hilarious conversation between Saul & his uncle where Saul seems like a teenage boy.

14 Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, "Where did you go?" "To look for the donkeys," Saul answered. "When we saw they weren't there, we went to Samuel."

15 "Tell me," Saul's uncle asked, "what did Samuel say to you?" 16 Saul told him, "He assured us the donkeys had been found." However, Saul did not tell him what Samuel had said about the matter of kingship.

Saul is back in his bed at home after the craziest week ever. What seemed like chasing donkeys into the middle of nowhere was actually the path God had laid out to put him in the middle of everything. And from there the scene shifts to his public confirmation.

Samuel pulls all the tribes of Israel together and reminds them that what is about to happen...is a fruit of their rejection of God. A foreshadowing that whoever gets selected...this won't end well. It can't. Rebellion never ends well.

17 Samuel summoned the people to the Lord at Mizpah 18 and said to the Israelites, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel out of Egypt, and I rescued you from the power of the Egyptians and all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' 19 But today you have rejected your

God, who saves you from all your troubles and afflictions. You said to him, 'You must set a king over us.' Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and clans."

So, they cast lots. Without explaining lots, think 12 tribes and you are rolling two dice and each tribe has a number. That's not exactly it but the pure randomness of it is the idea. That this put everything in God's hands and left no room for man's meddling. Which reinforces our whole point here that what seems random and uncontrollable is actually God's plan all along.

20 Samuel had all the tribes of Israel come forward, and the tribe of Benjamin was selected. 21 Then he had the tribe of Benjamin come forward by its clans, and the Matrite clan was selected. Finally, Saul son of Kish was selected. But when they searched for him, they could not find him. (Intentionally making him sound like his donkeys. Now who is stubborn and lost?)

22 They again inquired of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?" The Lord replied, "There he is, hidden among the supplies."

Saul is hiding from the Lord. Hiding from his destiny. We aren't sure why. Likely fear. He's a farmer and now he's going to lead all of Israel? This is frightening & overwhelming.



23 They ran and got him from there. When he stood among the people, he stood a head taller than anyone else. 24 Samuel said to all the people, “Do you see the one the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among the entire population.”

This is the kind of king you rebellious people want. Tall Saul. Remember what we said last week. Just because God gives it to you does not mean he’s endorsing your desire. He may be allowing your desire to your own peril. Israel’s response should sound ominous to us.

And all the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

The wrong king. A shadow is forming over Israel. It’s just a small cloud right now.

25 Samuel proclaimed to the people the rights of kingship. He wrote them on a scroll, which he placed in the presence of the Lord. Then Samuel sent all the people home.

Listen this is actually really really important. God gave them a king BUT, then gave the king boundaries. This is different than the “he will take” stuff from last week. That was a warning to Israel about how a king behaves. This is a warning to the king about the authority HE submits to. Catch that? Even the king submits to authority. And for Saul this is big. Because it’s been a wild week of What is happening? From chasing donkeys to

finding his life’s destiny. And now he’s told...even here on the throne...You submit to God’s word. Because even the king submits to God.

That brings us to the 3rd movement in Today’s narrative. Saul has been anointed as king, he’s been publicly chosen & warned, and now the enemy that they were so scared of comes knocking. It’s a real enemy. Nahash the Ammonite. He’s so scary the border people of Israel just say “we surrender, let’s not fight. Let’s talk terms.” Well, he says “I’ll let you live but I’m going to gouge out everyone’s right eye.” So, they say “can we have a week to think on that? So, they send out messengers to go looking for help. Saul is back home, farming. Hasn’t been coronated yet. Just chosen. He’s coming in from the field when he hears the news.

6 When Saul heard these words, the Spirit of God suddenly came powerfully on him, and his anger burned furiously. 7 He took a team of oxen, cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout the territory of Israel by messengers who said, “This is what will be done to the ox of anyone who doesn’t march behind Saul and Samuel.” As a result, the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they went out united.

This is to remind us of the time of the judges. The only other person the spirit rushes on like this is Samson. This hacking the ox to pieces & mailing it is to remind us of the last thing that



came out of Saul's hometown. See Gibeah is mentioned in Judges 19-21. A man and his concubine (like a wife but she's property) are traveling home after reconciling. She had been unfaithful to him & fled but he went to lovingly bring her home. Well, on the way back they stay in Gibeah, and the men there attack the place he's staying & rape his concubine & kill her. Leave her dead on his doorstep. The next day he cuts her into 12 pieces and sends her throughout Israel. This is what rallies the tribes of Israel. They rally against the tribe of Benjamin because of this sin. Well now the Spirit of God is redeeming that memory and saying Salvation is coming out of Gibeah instead of debauchery. But still, if you get mail from Gibeah...don't open it.

Well, the threat works. A really large army is assembled. And they go to work.

11 The next day Saul organized the troops into three divisions. During the morning watch, they invaded the Ammonite camp and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. There were survivors, but they were so scattered that no two of them were left together.

No eyeballs getting gouged out today. They celebrate.

12 Afterward, the people said to Samuel, "Who said that Saul should not reign over us? Give us those men so we can kill

them!" **13** But Saul ordered, "No one will be executed this day, for today the Lord has provided deliverance in Israel."

So, they go to Gilgal - a sacred site in Israel (Joshua's ebenezzer after lord takes them through the Jordan on dry ground) - and Samuel leads them in a coronation but calls it a renewing of the kingship. Why? Because even as they coronate Saul, Samuel wants them to renew their allegiance to God as their true king. Talk about that in a minute. So here we sit a short while after farmer Saul stood frustrated in the wilderness chasing donkeys, he's now sitting as victorious king over all of Israel. Wild & Strange. Ok now to answer the question: How in the world does this help us?

3 things you can learn about God's plan from Saul's strange rise to power:

God is working. in your life. Right now.

I kept looking for a cleverer memorable way to say this but then I realized sometimes we need to be reminded of and encouraged with simple truth. And maybe this is new to you because you are new to the Bible & church. This truth is absolutely central to the Christian faith. We believe there is a God who created the world & everything in it. And he didn't set it in motion and then step back and let it go like some kind of divine clock maker letting it tick on its own. No, we believe he not only put it all together, but HE actively governs the world now!



all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.”

Colossians 1:17 CSB

“In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will,”

Ephesians 1:11 CSB

What I’m trying to say is that our God is a hands-on God. He’s there. And his providence isn’t just big picture. It’s intensely focused on you. And some of you need that hope today. Jesus says “Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” Matthew 10:29-31

If he goes to the trouble to oversee the sparrow’s life certainly, he will care for you. So, if you feel frustrated right now like you are out in the wilderness chasing donkeys...I want to encourage you that your Heavenly Father sees you. He’s working. in your life. right now. He knows where the donkeys are & he’s taking care of that. And I don’t know what he has for you, but I know HE KNOWS. And not only does he know, he is actively loving you in this moment. Like a father he

is saying I’ve got you out here in the wilderness so that you will have nowhere else to turn but me.

Some of you those donkeys are your grown kids. They are being a real stubborn...donkey. And I need you to know God is working in THEIR LIFE. You need to keep praying & trust them to God. Some of you have friends, siblings, parents and you need to do the same. Some of you are chasing career dreams or healing or marriage or whatever. And I just need you to know God is working in the search. He’s taking you somewhere. And according to Romans 8 he is working all things for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

And I have a real desire to talk to those of you searching right now. Maybe you cannot believe you are in church today. Of all places. You wandered in here because a friend said let’s try church. Maybe God can help. And my job is to say like Samuel - We’ve been expecting you. In fact, there is a table God has prepared for you. In fact, the table is so central to God’s relationship with you. It’s a table where like Saul’s table it is filled with others in God’s kingdom.

Jesus sat down at a table with his disciples and invites you to that table. You don’t sit at the head of it. You couldn’t handle the throne. You can’t handle the throne of your own life let alone of God’s kingdom. At the head sits the true and good



king. And he says to his disciples and extends the offer to you - The murmurings of your soul are in fact the echoes of reality. God is real & eternity is real. He really does have something for you. You thought you were wandering but he was really drawing you to his table. But to sit with him you must sit under his authority. He's the king. Not you. The king calls for your surrender to him. To trust him.

In fact, C.S. Lewis likened becoming a Christian to a soldier coming to the victorious king and laying down his weapons in surrender. I surrender, I'm your servant. The difference is this king picks you up as you kneel and says welcome home son welcome home daughter. You were made for this kingdom.

You follow God's unknowable plan
by following his knowable word...
And God is gracious.

See there's no way Saul knew what a king should do next. So even Saul is given authority. God's word, written down, for him to obey. And there's a foreshadow in that too. That when his spirit wants to TAKE from his people, he is bound to the authority of God's word to bless them. And God in his kindness has given you that same thing. You cannot know the future. You are not meant to. You would not believe it even if you were told. And if you were told, you'd try to control it. God has intentionally created a GAP between your

KNOWLEDGE and your EXPERIENCE. You can know everything, but you can't know what happens next. And THAT RIGHT THERE is either going to stir FEAR in you or COURAGE.

So, to you I offer Proverbs 3:5-6. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight."
Proverbs 3:5-6

The application step today is to OBEY the God who is WORKING in your life. In his kindness he has given you his word. His guide for flourishing in this world. And you obeying his word while NOT KNOWING what is going to happen - That's called faith. I'll follow him, and he will work it out.

So, in the part time minimum wage job...high school student, college student...where you are making scraps doing menial labor...What does God's word say to do? It says 1 Corinthians 10:31 do it to the glory of God. So, fold the shirt, make the fries, watch the kids, shovel the horse manure at the farm you work at or clean the golf carts at the course you work at to the glory of God! And trust that as you give your best to that job...and then come home and do homework because you want to do school to the glory of God...and then do your chores around the house because you want to honor your father and mother to the glory of God...GOD IS WORKING in all



of that! He's got you! He's doing something in you & through you. And you are following his plan by following his word. And like the psalmist says you can say at night I lay down & sleep & wake again only because the Lord sustains you.

Single adults. You are waiting. And maybe dating feels like searching in the wilderness. For some donkey. I just want you to hear God loves you. And the pursuit is not bad or wrong. And God is working. He sees you; He loves you. He's got a plan in the waiting.

Parents of young kids as the monotony of diapers and discipline and lack of sleep and all that...I'll never forget changing a poopy diaper looking at my daughter as I'm so tired and sleep deprived and then looking up and saying to the glory of God! There is a selflessness God is cultivating in you through this!

God is gracious - Tie his grace & forgiveness in here.

Jesus is the true savior king.

you should know - there is an enemy out there. Who wants to do more than gouge out your right eye. He wants to take your very soul for all eternity. You think Nahash the Ammonite is bad? No, he's just a man. But there is an enemy the Devil who is out to devour you.

"Be sober minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour." 1 Peter 5:8

I think this is the hardest part for some to believe. God seems feasible but the Devil seems too mythical. Maybe what I want to ask you is have you ever wondered why that is? Why it seems so hard to believe in a real ruler of the evil realm who is out to harm you? Who commands demons to take you down? Perhaps if we believed strongly in such a being we would become more dependent on God. I think our cynicism towards the supernatural is the great lie multiple generations of Christians have bought into. You only need a hero if there's a villain. Take away the villain and who needs the hero? Some of you need to confess to God your lack of belief in the devil. That's a weird prayer. But his word says he's real and you've functioned like he isn't. Or if he is, you are strong enough to handle him on your own.

By the way this villain - you cannot defeat him. Because listen like I've told you several times in this narrative you and I are not Samuel, Saul, or David. We can learn from walking in their shoes for a minute but at the end of the day our perspective is that of Israel. The people of God prone to rebel against him but who he graciously saves for the sake of his glory. And God in his grace goes out to battle against this enemy. God goes up on the cross to pay for your sin. He goes into the grave to battle death and comes out victorious. And Revelation says at the end of all days he will bring a final victory over the Devil,



and we will share in that victory forever at where? In God's throne room in heaven...around a table.

The beauty of the gospel is that GOD was expecting you. And I want to welcome you home today. Today, receive the good news of the kingdom of God. Sinners and Saints alike. Sit back

down and rest at the table. Psalm 23 you prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. I have fellowship with God in the heights of the battle. Jesus gathered around the table with his disciples. And in heaven we gather