

FATHER'S DAY 2011

Saul, A Fond and Foolish King

I Samuel 8-15 (selected verses)

It's Father's day and since having spent some time with my granddaughter in Lincoln and for whatever reason, I began to wonder what she would remember, what she would think about me long after I'm dead and gone.

Probably my epitaph would simply be Papa Bubbles because we both get so excited, so thrilled playing with bubbles.

As we celebrate father's day let me share other father epitaphs I've heard. He carried pictures of his children, where his money use to be.

He couldn't get on the phone, into the bathroom, or out of his house.

To another man, not good enough by far, but still ok, this father, his daughter gave away. His grandchildren of course will be, smarter than everyone else's, that you'll see.

And here are a couple that the men of the Coffee Club might have written about their fathers; To provide for his family and make it through, this father did, what he had to do.

Dad, he was a quiet man who made sure we had plenty to eat,
And his care for mother, now that was sweet.

Dad worked us hard or so it did seem, yet we always found time to eat ice cream.

No matter how late, Dad waited up for us at night, and he always heard us too, even without the light.

You know the best things you can give to your children are godly values, godly habits, and good memories. These men remember that times were hard but they knew they were loved and taken care of.

When you think about it you know it is hard on some men not to have children but it is harder on children not to have a father, a good and godly father.

So many children in our day and age have been abandoned and abused; mom and dad have separated or been divorced, and maybe work or the service, or even an early death has taken dad out of the home. How do they learn to trust-trust anyone let alone God?

We know that if a child is going to get a good start on their faith journey they need to see something of God in their fathers, otherwise they'll have trouble seeing God as their Father.

Well, today we look at the life of King Saul
as we continue our series from I and II Samuel, "Israel's Great Kings."

And Saul will be a good example for us.

Unfortunately it is a good example of how not to be a great father, a great king, and a godly person. Saul was a fond but foolish and so Saul's son Jonathan and his daughters probably had a hard time seeing something of God in him.

And Saul's epithet is not very complimentary.

It's in the last part of verse 21 in I Samuel 26,

"Surely I have acted like a fool and erred greatly."

And unfortunately it is very true.

Like most of us, Saul wasn't all bad, nor all good.

As a leader he was gifted and humble in the beginning

but his insecurity, immaturity, and irresponsibility caused him err in the end.

We'll look at three incidents in Saul's life

today not even mentioning the foolish things he said and tried to do to David.

First let's set the stage for Saul's coronation as king.

Last week Pastor Eldon talked about Samuel the great prophet of Israel.

Israel wasn't a democracy where the people ruled, nor a monarchy where a king ruled

but Israel was a theocracy where God ruled through prophets and priests

some were good and great like Samuel, some not so good and great.

Israel wanted change. Here is what they told Samuel, I Samuel 8.5,

"They said to him, 'You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.'"

Did you catch the three reasons?

Samuel was old, his sons were corrupt,

Samuel's sons, like Eli's didn't turn out so well.

I guess great Bible heroes, even pastor's don't automatically make good fathers.

And third reason Israel wanted change was to be **"such as all the other nations."**

Samuel was naturally upset, actually he was crushed."

He takes his concern to God in prayer.

And God basically says, this is nothing new, verse 7,

"And the Lord told him; 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.'"

Then God basically shrugs his shoulder, throws up his hands,

and tells Samuel to give them what they want, a king.

But like a caring father with a teenager bent on doing his own thing no matter what,

God instructs Samuel to warn them one last time of consequences of actually having a human king.

Samuel's warning found in I Samuel 8.10-17 goes right in one ear and out the other.

Verses 19-20 tell us that the people don't care what the new king is going to take from them,

they're feeling invincible, and they throw caution to the wind-bring on the new king.

Rejecting your God-given identity and trying to build a life, a family, a community, or especially a nation on what the Jones think or do, or so you can be like the Jones is a disaster in the making, an accident waiting to happen.

And Saul's life will be, but not at first. In fact things go quite well at first. We read that Saul, the new King comes from good stock, his dad was a solid soldier, and Saul himself was according to I Samuel 9.2, (MSG) **"...a most handsome young man. There was none finer-he literally stood head and shoulders above the crowd."**

That means he was an ideal candidate for King, with no skeletons in his closets. And Saul does start well.

Saul gets his marching orders from Samuel and a new heart from God, I Samuel 10.8-9, **"Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do."**

As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart..."

With that going for him he becomes more courageous and capable, decisive when making decisions, and brave in battle.

And he is a winner, he defeats the dreaded Ammonites. So almost overnight he becomes a celebrity. He is a hit with the people and the press, his popularity numbers soared.

Even Samuel gets on the bandwagon. Here is part of Samuel's endorsement speech, I S 10.24, **"Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people."**

So with his political star on the rise, and God in his pocket, he puts out a call to the people, asking them to put feet to their faith and meet him at Gilgal.

He picks a fight with the arch enemy the Philistines and the people rally. That is until they began to look at their opponents and think about their limits.

The Philistines are well trained seasoned soldiers-the Israelites, not so seasoned and well trained. The Philistines have chariots, lots of chariots (that's like tanks)-the Israelites have none.

The Philistines have iron weapons-the Israelites, bronze. Hummm...it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that iron cuts through bronze like scissors through paper.

The response is predictable, I Samuel 13.6-7, **"When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical (they were outnumbered) and that their army was hard pressed, (they were outgunned) they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns."**

**Some even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.
Saul remained at Gilgal , and all the troops with him were quaking with fear.”**

Remember God’s order to Saul, wait for Samuel.

But with the number of troops running for cover, turning tail, hiding in caves, and hitting the trail,
Well maybe Saul has no skeletons in his closets but he had a few cracks in his character.

Insecure in his relationship with God, he compensates, he tries to take control, I Samuel 13.9,
“So he said, ‘Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.”

That’s a big no-no.

Priests were the ones to offer sacrifices not kings.

The Hebrew kings were given their God-given battle plans by the prophets,
And then made their sacrifices, sacrifices that were symbols of submission, not bribery.

That differed from the pagan kings.

They decided who, when, and where to attack and then sacrificed to their gods to gain favor.

For some when tsunami like waves of insecurity, panic, and self-preservation hit,

It washes aside and washes away God’s presence, protection, and peace.

Things simply just are going to get worse. And they do in Saul’s case.

Samuel finally shows up, confronts Saul and Saul’s defense, I Samuel 13.11-12,

“What have you done? Asked Samuel.

Saul replied, When I saw that the men were scattering ,

and that you did not come at the set time,

and that the philistines were assembling at Micmash,

I thought, now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal,

and I have not sought the Lords’s favor.

So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.”

Basically his appeal was, “What was I suppose to do?

You were late, the Philistines were here and here and here, and our guys were deserting.

So what if I took things into my own hands.

Hey I think I did pretty good under the circumstances.”

Samuel responds in I Samuel 13.13, **“You have acted foolishly, Samuel said.”**

And then Samuel tells Saul his welcome has worn out. God is going to make a change.

Saul doesn’t fall to his knees in humility or even begin to beg for forgiveness.

His head is still held high as he counts his troops, ready to march on,

for his own agenda, not God’s; in his own strength, not God’s.

And that’s not a good idea.

He forgot that the called man should obedient rather than ambitious, God led rather than self-driven.

Blinded by his own ambition he charges on. Interesting though, he continues to be successful and his job rating continue to remain high thanks to grace of God.

Yet, Saul becomes more and more competitive rather than becoming more and more committed. When you hear about his next stunt you'll probably think he should be committed.

Do you ever say something just to say something, because you have to say something, even though it isn't the thing to say. And when it come out, it comes out sounding very foolish.

To boost his standing and build his ego
Saul issues a very ill conceived and counterproductive order to the troops, and it backfires.

It is both immature and irresponsible, Samuel 14.24,
"Now the men of Israel were under distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats food before evening come, before I have avenged myself on my enemies. So none of the troops tasted food.'"

The troops need food.
The order would not only not only weaken the men's bodies, but their moral as well.

Well Saul's son Jonathan unknowingly disobeys the command.
He snacks on some honey, gains strength, wins the battle,
but then is threaten by his father because he broke the oath.
The troops plead his case and Jonathan is spared.

Saul has dodged another bullet.
Despite the ill conceived order, Saul is still showing some success and doing well in the polls.
God takes another chance to try to rebuild His relationship with Saul.

I Samuel 15.2-3a, **"This is what the Lord says, 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they laid waylaid them as they came from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them.'"**

We're then told Saul wins, but only captures King Agag, and spares the best sheep and cows.

Guess God's reaction, I Samuel 15. 10-11,
"The the word of the Lord came to Samuel; I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions. Samuel was troubled and cried out to the Lord all that night."

Troubled and cried out are translated incensed or burning with anger.

Samuel stomps down to see Saul looking for some regret, some remorse, some repentance but what he gets is a bunch of rationalization, at least that is the nice word for it.

Saul isn't thinking the same way that Samuel is.

Here is Saul's spin on his disobedience, his spin on his sin, I Samuel 15.13-15,

**"When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you!
I have carried out the Lord's instructions.**

But Samuel said, 'What is that bleating of sheep in my ears?

What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?

**Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites;
they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God,
but we totally destroyed the rest."**

Don't you hate being lied to.

How many times have parents said, "just don't lie to me."

Lying insults your intelligence and erodes any foundation of trust in a relationship.

Well, basically Samuel finally says to Saul, "ENOUGH ALREADY."

In I S 15.16, **"Why did you not obey the Lord?"**

It's like saying, "SHUT UP, FOOL."

But Saul persists with his flimsy fib in I Samuel 15.20-21, defending himself,

claiming he did obey, he did the job he was sent to do,

so what if the soldiers saved back a few choice sheep and cattle-what's wrong with that?

Isn't it sad. Saul was so gifted, so gifted.

And in the end thinks he has it all together.

That can happen to any of us, can't it?

Our lives are about trusting and obeying God.

I think that would be a good way to end today, making a statement about trust and obedience.

So let's stand and sing Trust and Obey.