

A Lesser King
Courage to Lead Series
1 Samuel 10:17-27
Pastor Bryan Clark

So here's the question of the morning: *Is life better surrendered to Christ as king, or is life better with you practically functioning as your own king?* Let me word it a different way: *Is life better with Christ as king or with a lesser king in charge?* Now we all know the answer to the question. If we were going to put this on a quiz and distribute the quiz, probably every single person in the room would get the answer right. We know this!

But I would suggest to you; we *don't* know this! Because the answer to the question isn't what you put on a quiz. It's answered every single day in the most practical, everyday decisions that you make. All of us struggle in some way to practically function as our own king and run our own lives. So why do we do that? It's not because we're too busy. It's not because we lack discipline. It's not because we just get up in the morning and we don't think about it. It's because somewhere deep inside of us, we do believe that life is better with a lesser king in charge. It's helpful to realize that at the core of my being, there's still a part of me that believes that. That's why I live that way!

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 10. We're continuing on in our study of 1 Samuel. We ended the story at chapter 10, verse 16 last week.

Just a quick review: The nation of Israel has rejected God as king—we don't have to guess about that; the text tells us that several times—and have asked for a human king, what I've referred to as a “show” king. They want a king like the Gentiles, like the other nations have. God, through Samuel, has warned them that if they insist on a human king, it will cost them. They double-down and insist that's what they want. So God is going to give them what they want.

Last week, through Samuel, God identified Saul as that king and he was privately anointed. The text went to great lengths through Samuel and through signs that God gave Saul to remind us that God is still in this. He loves His people! They're His people; they're His inheritance. So, to say that God set Saul up to fail would simply be theologically incorrect. As a matter of fact, just the opposite is true. God actually did what was necessary in order to cause Saul to succeed. But Saul, as a person made in the image of God with a volitional will (a will to choose), still has to choose if he's going to trust God with that or not.

This story has that reminder of this mysterious tension we see from Genesis to Revelation (that we see in our own lives every day) between the sovereign will of God and people made in the image of God that exercise a volitional will. Somehow, both of those operate at the same time. There's always a mystery as to how that can be. God had a plan for Israel that included God as king. But now they want a human king. God's going to give them what they want, but God is still going to give Saul everything he needs to succeed. So, you have this tension between a sovereign God and people made in His image.

Now there's a reality to this in our own lives. There's a tendency to think that a sovereign God has a sovereign will for your life. So we'll think of that as an interstate. It's a path—a straight, efficient path between point “A” and point “B”. That's God's “A” plan for your life, and if you really trust

in Him and believe in Him, you'll get on the interstate and travel that plan. But the problem is, there are lots of off-ramps, and we find ourselves getting off that road and out into the county roads and getting stuck in the snow or stuck in the mud and getting lost and wandering around. Then we tend to think that because we got off the interstate, now we're on plan "B", or plan "C", or plan "D". In other words, we've blown our chance at plan "A", so now we're on the "B" team. Now we're in the minor leagues. Now we have to settle for something less than what God intended. If that were true, there wouldn't be a single person in this room that would be on the "A" team! There is no Christian that gets on the interstate and, throughout our lifetime as Christians, we travel perfectly between point "A" and point "B" and perfectly fulfill the sovereign will of God. We all get off. We all lose our way. We all make bad decisions. We all fail. So, if we're all subject to plan "B" and "C" and "D", then that's a very discouraging theology. The truth is, that's just bad theology.

The better theology is to realize that we're all strugglers. We're all sinners who've been made right by the power of Jesus, but we struggle. Sometimes we function as king of our own lives and we make a mess of things. We get off into the county roads and back roads and get stuck in the mud. The better way to think of God is kind of like Google Maps or Garmin or whatever you use. Whenever you make a wrong turn, the voice says, "Rerouting...rerouting...rerouting!" That's a better imagery of the Christian life. We get off; we go our own way, and we make a mess of things. But, God is *always* there! When you submit to Christ as king, he is constantly rerouting us back toward the path of life. That's the very essence of the Christian life. God's ultimate desire for you is not that you perform perfectly *for* Him. It's much more about cultivating a meaningful love relationship *with* Him.

Think of it this way: If I send one of my daughters down a path (so she's going down the "A" path) and she gets off, goes down some bad paths, ends up lost in the weeds, is lost for days, and I go searching for her and finally find her, is my primary concern that quickly as possible I try to get her back on the "A" path, or is it to restore the relationship? Now that I've found her and she's safe and we're once again reengaged in relationship, that's what matters the most! So now then, let's reroute together back to the right path. As a dad, what matters to me the most is that she's been found and she's safe and let's do this together. That's a much more correct imagery of the Christian life. God is consistently rerouting us again and again and again.

So, you have a sovereign God, and you have people made in His image that exercise their will. And somehow that mystery plays out in ordinary, everyday life. That is the Saul story. You have choices being made and God intervening and this positive/negative play back and forth, especially in chapters 8 to 12, which is the "rise to power" story of King Saul.

With that in mind, we jump back into the story. In verse 16, we ended without a lot of confidence in Saul. His uncle asked him, "What did Samuel say?" He tells him about the donkeys, but doesn't tell him anything about being privately anointed as king. So we find ourselves wondering: *Where is Saul in all of this?* Verse 17:

Thereafter Samuel called the people together to the LORD at Mizpah; and he said to the sons of Israel, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I brought Israel up from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the power of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' But you have today rejected your God, who delivers you from all your calamities and your distresses; yet you have said, 'No, but set a king over us!' Now therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans." (*NASB, 1Samuel 10:17-19)

So the last time we know that the nation gathered at Mizpah was about thirty years previous. The nation was broken. They were characterized by confession, by repentance; it was a time of revival! And out of that, God gave them a great victory over the Philistines. For the last thirty-ish years, it has been a time of peace and prosperity under Samuel as their leader.

But now you have a whole generation that's grown up under peace and prosperity. They haven't known what the previous generation experienced with the Philistines. And now they're bored with all of this. They want something different; they want something more. In their minds, "more" can be found in a lesser king.

There is some research out there these days that goes around this idea of what they call "Third Generation Christianity". It's the idea that there's a generation that comes to Christ out of the darkness. They've experienced the hope and the light of the gospel. They're excited about Jesus. They're excited about new life. They plug in; they get involved. It's a life-change story. They raise a second generation in this that still has a level of that excitement and that commitment and that passion. But, by the time you get to the third generation, that's all the third generation has ever known. It's: *Been there! Done that!* It's become routine, dull and boring. They become restless, and they're searching for something different, something more. They tend to be critical. They tend to be disconnected. Typically, the more they want is not found with Christ as king. They drift into the darkness. There's a season of darkness, and maybe the next generation (or the generation after that) finds their way back, and the cycle repeats itself.

It is a reminder that we, as Christian parents, have a very difficult assignment to try and make sure that doesn't happen with *our* children. In my thirty plus years as a pastor, that cycle seems really accurate to me. I've seen it over and over again. That's where the nation of Israel is. The last thing they knew, God was going to give them a king. Samuel gathers them at Mizpah. There had to be a high level of excitement, and Samuel gives them one more speech which, we would say, fits the prophetic template.

If you go back and look at a lot of the prophetic speeches, they fit a template. It starts with the reminder that God has been a great King. God delivered you from Egypt, from the Pharaohs, from the other kingdoms that oppressed you. God delivered you from your calamity and distresses, and for whatever reason, you've decided you want a lesser king. The text reminds us again—they're rejecting God as king; they want a human king like the Gentiles. So Samuel reminds them of that. Then in the template, in the place where typically the prophet then would bring forth judgment, is the introduction of Saul. There's no question in the template that what's being said is: *This is what God did for you. You've decided you don't want that. So, here is your judgment. I'm going to give you what you asked for.* That is the introduction, then, of Saul. Verse 20:

Thus Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. Then he brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the Matrite family was taken. And Saul the son of Kish was taken; but when they looked for him, he could not be found. Therefore they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?" So the LORD said, "Behold, he is hiding himself by the baggage." So they ran and took him from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? Surely there is no one like him among all the people." So all the people shouted and said, "Long live the king!" (Vs. 20-24)

So there's this process. You see it several times in the Old Testament, actually up until the New Testament in the book of Acts. It's referred to as "drawing lots". There is a lot of discussion; there are different ways they did this. Nobody quite knows what the methodology was here, but you start with the tribe, down to the family, and ultimately it ends up at Saul in fulfillment of what God told Samuel.

So now Saul is chosen. They look around and they can't find him anywhere. They ask God, "Is he here?" And then, the key statement: *Behold, Israel! Behold your king! He's hiding in the luggage.* (laughter) It's interesting that the text says they *ran* to get him. There's a high level of excitement! They run; they get their king; they set him up before them. Samuel identifies that he's head and shoulders taller than anyone else. The consistent reference to the physical attributes of Saul was, again, a reminder that God was hearing what they were asking for. And what they were asking for was a "show" king—a king that was very impressive on the outside. So God is legitimately giving them what they're asking for! And the people respond. That is *exactly* what they're asking for, and they shout, "**Long live the king!**"

I want to go back to that moment when God introduces them to their king. This is now the public coronation of their new king. It's a really important statement in understanding the point of the text when they ask, "Is the king here?" After this introduction of how awesome God has been as their king, there's almost a level of sarcasm. Using the word "behold" is really important to understand because God is saying, "*Behold! Check it out. This is your new king!*" And the new king is hiding in the luggage...in the baggage...in the gear? These people traveled a long way. They probably just piled up their stuff. And Saul (who now heard this coming) still was not buying into it and is hiding in the baggage. They have rejected God as king, and they are willing to settle for a lesser king. How could anyone believe that life will get better with a lesser king in charge?

It's interesting to go through some of the commentaries and read their comments on this moment in the story. I was surprised at how many attributed Saul hiding in the baggage to Saul's *humility*. I cannot make sense of that at all. Humility is a virtue; it flows out of deep character. Is that how Saul has been presented? In my opinion, to arrive at that conclusion you have to ignore all the ways the text has presented Saul, and, you have to completely change the biblical definition of humility. Saul has been presented as one defined by indecision...by fear...by insecurity. So now, out of fear and an unwillingness to believe what God said to him through Samuel and to the signs, he's *hiding!* ...still not willing to accept his call.

I want to talk for a minute about this idea of humility. Humility is one of those terms that we throw around, but it's hard to define, and it's really hard to measure. About the time you think you're really good at humility, you're probably not anymore. It's hard to process. Humility (at least biblical humility) is not thinking poorly of yourself. It's not thinking low thoughts of yourself. It's not kicking a rock and saying, "Oh, I'm no good and I'm so humble." It's not that kind of fake humility. Humility is actually rooted in the core message of the gospel. As a matter of fact, biblically speaking, the only possibility of true humility is rooted in the message of the gospel of grace—understanding that I was a sinner in need of a savior and no amount of religious performance or good works could change that.

So the whole message of Christmas is that God sent his Son into world ultimately to be nailed to a cross in payment for my sin, was buried, rose again, and offers me the forgiveness of my sin and an invitation to enter into a deeply meaningful relationship with God. Having now been restored to a relationship with God, I find my significance and my value in being rightly related to God. It's what God intended all the way back in Genesis 2—understanding now that my significance or my

value is not based on my performance. It's not based on how I measure up against anyone else. It is rooted into my relationship with God. And, because it's on the basis of grace, it is secure; it is settled once and for all. Therefore that frees me up. I don't have to spend every day focused on myself; I don't have to constantly measure myself up against everyone else. I'm actually set free to love my neighbor as myself. Paul says in Philippians, "...to think of others as more important than yourself." Paul says in Romans 12:3, "...not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think." It's all rooted to this message of grace. So the message of the gospel of grace has, within it, the framework to create a truly humble spirit—*because I have nothing to be arrogant about. Christ did it for me. It's safe. It's secure. Therefore, I can live out of that truth.*

As a nation we drift farther and farther away from God, and more and more into secularism and the fruit of that (the effect of that) is evident on the news every night. We have this racial tension just seeping through the cracks all over in our nation. Our leaders are trying to figure out what's happening. Part of what's happening is that secularism, as a world view, simply has no structure by which we come together, equal as one. The system is selfish and individualized by its definition. As a matter of fact, the Bible would say that only the gospel has a framework where our belief system says: *Because this is on the basis of God's grace, we are all equal in Christ—whether you're rich or whether you're poor...whether you're Black, whether you're White or whether you're Middle Eastern...whether you've been wildly successful or a struggler your whole life. Because this is on the basis of God's grace, we come together and we are equal in Christ!* That is the basis by which races come together. That is the basis by which communities come together. We actually have a belief system that lays a foundation that makes that possible.

At the core of that is what defines "humility". If that's true, I simply have no basis for pride and arrogance. There's nobody "more than"; there's nobody "less than". If God uses me to accomplish something significant for the kingdom, it cannot be a basis for significance. It cannot be a basis for pride. Those things are rooted in my relationship with God. They're settled. They're all by grace. God using you to accomplish something does not make you "more than" or "less than". There's simply a heart of gratitude that God would use me to make a difference in the world. It's equally true that when God calls you to a high and holy calling (a calling that you could not fulfill apart from the presence of Christ in your life), but you choose *not* to respond to that calling, that is *not* humility. Hiding in the baggage is *not* humility. It's disbelief! You're simply unwilling to trust God when he says, "I'll give you what you need to fulfill your calling." It's your insecurities talking. It's your fear talking. It's your inadequacies talking—and you're allowing those things to control your life. That is not humility!

You can see why this is such a core part of the Christian life. If we don't get this figured out, it's very hard for God to use us to accomplish something in the world. So, Saul's hiding in the baggage. He's struggling to accept this call. Verse 25:

Then Samuel told the people the ordinances of the kingdom, and wrote them in the book and placed it before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his house. Saul also went to his house at Gibeah; and the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him. But certain worthless men said, "How can this one deliver us?" And they despised him and did not bring him any present. But he kept silent. (Vs. 25-27)

First of all: The idea of the **ordinances of the kingdom**. He wrote them in a book and put them somewhere—maybe in the makeshift tabernacle, maybe where the ark was—somewhere to take care of them. There's quite a bit of discussion about what exactly this was. I think the most

obvious is that this is the exact same word...mishpat... that we had in chapter 8, that is typically translated as *justice*. When Samuel said, “Okay, you need to understand this will be the *justice* of the human king.” Then he went through that whole list of things. I think this is the same word. So Samuel is going back with everything he said when he warned them; he’s writing them down in the book, and he’s putting the book somewhere for safe keeping.

People have a tendency to ignore God’s warnings. Then they make a mess of their lives and cry out, and somehow the mess is God’s fault. We’re going through that as a nation. We kick God to the curb; bad things happen, and somehow it’s God’s fault! Someday the nation of Israel is going to come back. They’re going to whine and complain, and somehow it’s God’s fault! And the book will be pulled out as a reminder. *Samuel warned you that this will be the consequence of your choice. He warned you three times and you wouldn’t listen. Here it is in writing!* I think that’s what the book is.

We’re told, then, that Saul goes home to Gibeah, about three miles north of Jerusalem, and with him, some **valiant men** whose hearts God had changed. They were [kind of] the Secret Service. Saul was now king. He was vulnerable. The Philistines would want him dead. God raises up those who will protect him.

But then there are some **worthless men** (exact words used to describe Eli’s sons—sons of Belial.) The pagans were saying, “How can *this* man...?” They’ve *known* Saul. Maybe they grew up with him, and they’re saying, “There’s just no way this guy can be our king!” So they’re not willing to bring a gift; they’re not buying into it. They are Saul’s critics. And Saul remains silent.

Those who think Saul was humble when he was hiding in the baggage think this is a great leadership move by remaining silent. I don’t think so. I think it more reflects his insecurity, his indecision. As a matter of fact, Saul probably feels like the critics are right, so that’s adding to his fears and insecurities and he becomes passive and says nothing. Whether or not Saul will learn to trust God, we’ll have to wait and see in the chapters ahead.

Just a couple of things as we close this up: I think probably every single person in this room, when we read through this story, realizes this is *so* painfully obvious! There is no way life is going to be better with a lesser king. We’re thinking, “What is *wrong* with these people? How come they don’t *get it*?” And yet, we all struggle to see this in our own lives. Every day we struggle with the decision as to whether or not life is better surrendered to Christ as king, or whether it’s better with a lesser king in charge—meaning *me*. Somehow it’s painfully obvious in everyone else’s story, but it’s such a struggle in our own story.

Here’s the wonderful truth of this story: No matter how many times the people rejected God or turned away from God, God didn’t reject them! God never turned away from them. God was continually meeting them where they were, seeking to reroute them back to trust Him and to experience the life He wanted for them. There is a reminder that no matter how far “off the road” you get, no matter how many times you have rejected God, no matter how many times you’ve turned your back on God, no matter what sins you’ve committed, no matter what your struggles are, no matter how much of a mess you have made—*God has never forsaken you! God has never turned His back on you! God has never walked away from you! God is always right there!* When you seek to surrender to Christ as king, He’s the first one to meet you there and to begin rerouting your journey back to the pathway your soul longs for. Failure is never final in God’s economy.

So this morning, no matter what your story, no matter what messes you've made, no matter what sins you've committed, no matter what's been done to you—the past is past! God patiently awaits today. If you're willing to surrender to Christ as king, then let us begin today rerouting back to the path of life. It seems to me, at Christmas time, *that* is something to celebrate!

Our Father, we celebrate Your patience, Your grace, and Your mercy. God, no matter what our story has been, today could be the beginning of rerouting back on the path with Christ as king to experience the life that our soul longs for. God, that would be my prayer for every single one of us here this morning—that this Christmas season we would very intentionally and courageously surrender to Christ as king, in our most ordinary, everyday decisions of life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. Do you think it is possible to travel the narrow path (God's path) but while traveling that path you often practically function as your own king? Why or why not?
2. Can you share times in your life when you were determined to have your way and run your own life? What was the result?
3. Can you share times in your life when you surrendered to Christ as King in your life and lived surrendered to Him? What was the result?
4. Is there one path that God has for us and either we follow it or we miss out or is God constantly rerouting our travel route as He meets us where we are and moves us forward according to His will?

Bible Study

1. Review I Samuel 8-10:17. How do you see God interacting with His people in this story as He responds to the choices they make? How does this line up with your answer to question #4 above?
2. Read I Samuel 10:17-20. What have the people experienced with God as King and what are they asking for now? Compare Judges 6:7-10. Why would they make such a choice? How is it similar or different for us?
3. Read I Samuel 10:20-24. Clearly we are told again and again that Saul was the one God choose to be King. However, we are also reminded God choose according to what the people asked for, they wanted a show king. (The consistent reference to Saul's external qualities is the way the text reveals what the people were asking for) In what way is our culture similar today in celebrating leaders according to image and brand and externals? What do we get in the culture as a result? Do you think the Christian sub-culture has been influenced by this external celebrity culture? In what way? What are the dangers?
4. Why do you think Saul was hiding in the baggage? What do we know about Saul so far that would influence your conclusion? Was Saul just being humble or fearful? What's the difference?

5. Define humility. According to the Bible, what is the basis of true humility?
6. Read I Samuel 10:25-27. What do you think is the point of this paragraph in the story? How does this paragraph picture what one can expect if God calls you to be a leader?

Application

1. List three reasons why a Christian might settle for a lesser king? Is life ever better with a lesser king?
2. What is necessary for you to respond to God's call on your life with true humility? Can God ever use you greatly if you fail to learn what true humility is? Why or why not?
3. The truth is we all wander from the path in our Christian lives. That means God is always rerouting us back on the path He has for us. Since the past is past there's nothing gained by dwelling on it. What can you do to focus on what God has for you today? Is failure ever final in God's eyes?