***The Journey of the Heart: Give us a King!***

**Context**

In the long story of the People of God, the emergence of the monarchy sits at about half-way between Abraham and Jesus of Nazareth. It is the one of the most significant political developments of our sacred history, and probably shares top billing with the adoption of Christianity by the Roman emperor Constantine.

The political upheaval wrought by the Reformation would be next, and compared to these great pivot points of Jewish and then Christian history, our current cultural debates pale in comparison.

The people cross into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua after the death of Moses. A period of about 200 years of the “judges” takes us up to 1000 BCE and the appointment of a king.[[1]](#endnote-1)

In order to understand this journey we have to recall that history is characterized by the rise and fall of powers. Egypt rises for two millennia, but it is declining by the time of Moses. That is why Moses can get away from Egypt by travelling up to Canaan, only 800 hundred kilometers away. Egypt’s control over the area was gone. Local, mostly autonomous tribes occupy Canaan.

As it was, the tribes of Israel could only dwell in the hill country of Canaan for generations and eventually they became strong enough to occupy the fertile valleys as well. The only political framework is a tribal confederation, in which God raises up charismatic “judges.”

The power of God comes upon the judges personally. Gideon slays the many with the few, Samson tears a lion apart with his bare hands, Deborah defeats the Canaanites at the Battle of Megiddo with only half of the tribes answering the call.[[2]](#endnote-2)

They speak the word of the Lord, direct military campaigns and chastise Israelites for worshiping local pagan deities and marrying the local girls. This is the Book of Judges in the Bible.

But the confederation is never effective as a political structure.

And other powers were rising to threaten the young confederation. Philistines (Samson), Midianites (Arab raiders from the east who came on fleets of camels) and so on. Judges 6:5 says they would come with tents as numerous as locusts and with camels that could not be counted. They laid waste the land.

For a development of such a political nature it seems a bit out of sync to be describing the years of Israelite history surrounding the establishment of the monarchy as a “Journey of the Heart,” but that is actually how the Book of Samuel describes it.

Now kings are the common currency of the ANE for nearly all cultures that survived. The Pentateuch speaks of **hundreds** of kings in its story, but never, never for Israel, until the confederacy was collapsing under the pressure of foreign powers. The story of Deborah and Megiddo is proof, only half the tribes chose to defend the country against the powerful Canaanites at the Battle of Megiddo.

And yet, there was a powerful culture of anti-monarchy, because God had set in place a different plan: the plan of the judges.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In the Text

In spite of all of this, the people petition Samuel (the last judge!) for a king.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” (1 Sam 8:5)

What follows is one of the most interesting and difficult scenarios in the whole of the Bible.

Obviously, the advantage of a king was that all the tribes would be united under one banner and all would fight for one, all would pay the taxes necessary for a standing army, and all authority would reside in one person, and that person would be followed in power by his son.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Samuel his old, his sons are corrupt, and the people crave the stability of a king… appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations (1 Sam 8:5).

Samuel consults with the Lord who sighs heavily, says they have always treated me this way. …from the day I brought them up out of Egypt, to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods… (1 Sam 8:8).

Three times in chapter 8 God says, ‘go ahead, give them what they ask! Give them a king’ (vss 6, 9, 22). Saul is proclaimed king after they find him hiding in the baggage when Samuel visits his family, and so the drama begins afresh.

This isn’t the first time a king arose however. We won’t pause to talk too long about the story of Abimelech in Judges 9.[[5]](#endnote-5) Despots take power. When God gives power good flourishes.

Why do the people of Israel disobey the word of the Lord through Samuel? In our story today the people are engaging in realpolitik - “politics or diplomacy based primarily… on the circumstances rather than explicit ideological notions or moral and ethical premises.” (Wikipedia)

The people sized up the political situation and believed the consolidation of the tribal confederacy into a monarchy was the only way to survive in at dangerous world.

They were probably right about that. That what makes this passage so challenging. God gives in it seems; and yet He does not cease to love and guide and protect. Interesting and helpful.

Parent/child analogy – this reads like a conversation between a parent and a teen.

My Dad was a very good man. A hard-working man in an ordinary job, a Presbyterian elder. A man in whom there was no religious enthusiasm; the Presbyterians with whom I grew up didn’t do enthusiasm. But he was a man of principle. I never heard him swear.

He had this annoying habit of usually being right. He had this tremendous common sense and I resented it sometimes because I wanted to mount up on wings and fly to the wind. I almost never did what he told me to do. I usually did the opposite because I didn’t want to be like my Dad.

What my Dad had, and what every mom and dad have, when faced with that one piece of logic your clever teen seizes on, and what God had in this circumstance…. is ***context***. The Lord saw the whole, the people only saw what their limited minds and will and desires could see. A life of surrender to God is understanding that He always knows the context.

**From the Text**

As we talked last week about what the Bible means by the word “heart” we learned that it encompasses the Intellect, Memories, Emotions, Desires and Will. That is, the totality of the human anthropology, the sacred interior landscape in which we conduct the journey of the heart. We said we have these traits because we are created in the image of God.

I didn’t get these traits from a psychology textbook or pop devotional theology. These are what Old Testament scholars identify as the ways in which the Bible conceives of who we are and how we are knit together. That is, this is biblical theology about human anthropology.

These various aspects of our created being aren’t isolated from one another. Rather, we are a glorious, a wondrous amalgamation of mind, memories, emotions, wants and will. We are wonderfully made! We rejoice to live before God in the wholeness of who we are. We bring it all, like Miss Ivy.

In our story today about the inauguration of the monarchy, the people of Israel have settled all of these parts of their being on having a king. They **think** they need one, they have lots of **memories** that inform their thinking, they **want** one and they **will have it**! Even though it doesn’t seem to be God’s plan A! If you don’t find that conundrum interesting either you aren’t listening or I’m not making myself clear!

It is pointless to ask what salvation history would have looked like had the people bent their will to the advice of God.

I think the first thing we learn is this: Who we are, what we think, want and do is tremendously important for our journey of the heart.

Slide for screen:

Think

 Want

 Do

God hath loved us so much that he gives to us this marvelous humanity, this ability to shape the world according to what we think, want and do!

God knows this… and that is why he seeks out a man after his own heart to be the ruler of the people. He must have a king who understands his mind and heart because being a human being can be a powerful, potent blessing. And it has the power to be a curse if the will is not surrendered to God.

The man of God says to Eli the priest in 1 Sam 2:35 …I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind.

What happens when we don’t conform ourselves to God’s heart and mind? The history that follows on the peoples’ decision to go against Plan A is a messy, fraught and painful history. What happens when these God-given faculties are bent and corrupted by sin? What happens when we fail to seek alignment with God’s heart and mind?

We get sin and wickedness and unrighteousness (and other biblical ideas that sound outdated to us, but aren’t). We get injustice and war. We get graveyards at residential schools, we get public lies, we get crazy conspiracies that befuddle peoples’ minds and hearts. We lose the common language of decency and right-ness.

Unredeemed will is a terrible thing. It can lead us to dark and destructive places. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil!

Three weeks ago when we were discussing The Mystery of the Church Age (May 16, 2021) we said the most important thing for the church in this age is right-ness.

Right-ness as in holy, ethical, moral, blameless conduct working through love and grace. Without it we have a house built on sand.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!” (Matt 7:24-27)

The other thing we learn is this. The people of Israel chose realpolitik over God. They choose politics based on expediency rather than loyalty to their divine king and all that he commands in moral and ethical righteousness.

Today, it seems to me that we have a pandemic alright, a pandemic of expediency and playing to current political polls and desires rather than commitment to deep moral and ethical principles.

We need a return to principle founded on the rock of righteousness not just in our journey of the heart but all across society. May God deliver us from evil indeed-by the alignment of our heart with the heart of God! I think society needs the Christian church to be, once again, a centred, solid and upright influence our communities - more than ever. We have confidence that we have to re-earn.

 Here we proclaim the gospel. That redemption of the inner landscape is possible through the grace of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said before his Ascension repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations (Luke 24:47).

Thy Kingdom come thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

And we will, like the Psalmist in our Psalm 138 for the week says, I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; (intellect, memories, emotions, desires and will) before the gods I sing your praise.

Amen

1. By the way, 1 Samuel is the story of the prophet Samuel (chapters 1-12) and Saul, the first king (chapters 13-31). 2 Samuel is mostly the story of the kingship of David, really kicking in about chapter 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Megiddo is the city that guards the Valley of Jezreel, the main trade route to the rest of Asia. This is the city of Rev 16:16 where battle of Armageddon (“hill of Megiddo”) is fought. Even though Deborah leads the tribes to victory, only half of the tribes answered her call. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Judges ruled the tribes by divine appointment, *not by dynastic succession*. Their authority arose from the spiritual power that possessed them and by the immediacy of their connection to Yahweh. The spirit of the Lord, Judges tells us (6:34), took possession of Gideon.

Judges tells us (14:6) that the spirit of the Lord rushed on the legendary Samson, and he tore apart a lion bare-handed. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The NT reflects this tipping point in Israelite history, because Jesus, as Paul says in his speech in Antioch in Acts 13:22ff, will be the Son of David: …[God] made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, ‘I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.’  Of this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. The kingship of David leads, in time, to the birth of the Messiah, his “son” and heir of the eternal throne of David. And as the first verse of the New Testament announces: An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt 1:1) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Short story, the difference is that Abimelech takes power in that disastrous chapter of Israel’s history is a good example of the unredeemed will wreaking havoc on God’s people. History’s despots have taken power. In our current chapter on Samuel and Saul, Yahweh gives power. When the people heard Jesus speak about forgiving sins in Matthew 9 they were filled with awe, and glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings. That is another sermon someday.

The only OT parable that I can think of occurs there on the lips of young Jotham, whose brothers Abimelech puts to death. See Judges 9:7ff. It is a colorful parable, a warning against choosing an unwise king, likening him to a bramble bush. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)