

1 Samuel 9:27–10:13 — Stand Thou Still a While

What It Is Like When the Word of God Comes to a Man: Three Marks, Three Men Going to Bethel, and David the Fourth

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 9:27–10:13

“Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us — and he passed on — but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.

“Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?”

“And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart... And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.”

Stand Still a While: The Word of God Meets the Soul

Samuel’s instruction to Saul at the end of chapter 9 is an individual message. He sends the servant on ahead. He takes Saul aside. Stand thou still awhile, that I may show thee the word of God. It is not a lecture, not a quotation of many scriptures. It is the word of God brought to bear on a particular man’s soul on a particular day. The lesson here is what it looks like when the word of God truly meets a soul. Not the reading of words as words, but God himself speaking through his word to the heart.

There is a difference between reading the Bible and the word of God meeting the soul. A person may read through the Old Testament from cover to cover and find

that it goes in one ear and out the other because the soul is not there. The Bible is words, and words are read, but the confrontation does not happen. Then there is another occasion — a verse, a sentence, a chapter — and the soul knows: God has spoken. The Lord Jesus said, him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. When that word meets the soul, the soul knows it has heard the word of God. That is what happened to Saul, son of Kish, on this day.

Three Marks When the Word of God Comes

First mark: it separates. Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on Saul's head. The oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit; the anointing is the setting apart for the function God has in mind. When the word of God truly meets the soul, it does not leave us where we were. It sets us apart. There were many shepherds in Israel, but when Samuel anointed David, David was separated out from them all — distinct, set apart, the one marked for what God had in mind. If after reading the scriptures or hearing a word, one finds nothing has separated him for God, nothing has been set apart, the word has not yet met the soul in that sense.

Second mark: it communicates the love of God. Samuel did not have to kiss Saul, and it is unlikely that in his own heart he had any great natural affection for this fleshly man whose character he appears to have seen through from the beginning. But he kissed him. Why? Because God loves us. God loved Saul, son of Kish, a man who wasted his life and died in disgrace at the hands of the Philistines. God loved him. When the word of God comes to the soul for the purpose of obedience, it is not an academic exercise or a cold transaction. The love of God is communicated in it.

Third mark: it lets a man know that God knows everything about him. When the Lord Jesus met the woman of Samaria at the well, she went back to the city saying, come see a man who told me all things that ever I did. He told her her history. In the case of Saul, son of Kish, Samuel told him everything that was

going to happen for the rest of the day. Not in the form of commandments — the thou shalt of this passage are not the thou shalt of Sinai, commanding obedience. They are the thou shalt of divine foreknowledge: this is what you are going to do. God knows everything about us, past and future. Nothing is hidden from him.

A Wasted Life: The First Thing God Tells Us

What does God's knowledge of Saul reveal? First, that his life had been wasted. Two men as witnesses — in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every matter be established — would confirm to him: the asses which thou wentest to seek are found. What had Saul done with his whole life up to this point? The Bible says nothing of his life until his father told him to go seek the asses. He went, could not find them, stayed so long his father became worried. He was a seeker of asses who could not find them. David was a keeper of sheep who slew the lion and the bear.

This is what God's word tells every man about himself when it truly meets the soul: you have been an utter failure in everything done in the flesh. Not pleasant to hear. We would rather describe ourselves as intrepid seekers, people of worthy purposes and noble aims. But the flesh and all its efforts are simply failure. Only what is done for Christ will last. Everything else is seeking asses and not finding them. Go on forward from thence, says verse 3 — move on from the record of a wasted life. The oak of Tabor awaits: J.N. Darby's translation has oak rather than plain, and where there is a tree in the scriptures, one does well to think of the cross of Christ. That is where the soul needs to be brought when it has seen the ruin of its own history.

Three Men Going Up to God: A Picture of the Gospel

At the oak of Tabor, three men are going up to God, to Bethel — to the house of God. They are the strangest three men in Scripture. One carries three kids, one carries three loaves of bread, one carries a bottle of wine. They give Saul two of the loaves — in the mouth of two witnesses, adequate testimony — and he receives them.

The man with the three kids is a very strange shepherd. Shepherds do not carry kids; they use a stick and the goats walk. Three kids, alive — for they were going to God, and God from Old Testament times was a God of sacrifice. Why did they not give Saul one of the three goats? He was a fleshly man who needed one. Because they only had three. There were exactly three, and they were going to God. The one who would give him what he needed for the atonement of his sin would have to come from somewhere else.

The man with the three loaves gave two. One remained with him. In the New Testament the one loaf and the cup set before us at the remembrance of the Lord Jesus speak of his body and his blood. Here in the Old Testament, quietly and almost without comment, the loaf and the wine appear together in the hands of a man going up to God. The bread and the wine are here long before the upper room, setting before us in figure what the Lord would do in laying down his body and pouring out his blood.

The Downward Company: Another Direction Entirely

After the three men going up, Saul comes to the hill of God — where the garrison of the Philistines is. The Philistines were people who had entered the land without crossing Jordan, without passing through Gilgal, without the cutting off of the flesh. They brought their idols with them and behaved as though they owned the place. And there at the hill of God, Saul encounters a company of prophets coming down from the high place, with musicians playing before them, prophesying with great fanfare.

The three men were going up to God. This company was coming down. The direction is different. They were an organized, impressive, musical, descending company. And the music touched the emotions without reaching the conscience. Saul, as a thoroughly fleshly man, found his place among them immediately. He joined the downward company and prophesied. And the people said with a taunt: is Saul also among the prophets? And who is their father? The jeer asks a pointed question — not what these prophets say, but whose they are, who their spiritual father is. There is nothing in Scripture about what they prophesied. Not one word of it was preserved.

Verse 6 says Saul was turned into another man. Not into a man of God. He was changed, different from before, but not a man of God. Never in his recorded life did Saul, son of Kish, become a man of God. The word of God met him that day, the anointing set him apart, the bread and wine were put into his hands, the love of God was communicated — and he ended up following the downward band playing music toward the city. There is such a thing as having received adequate testimony and not walking in it.

Gilgal Delayed and the Fourth Man

Verse 8 gives Samuel's instruction: thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal. But there is no time given for this. By the record of 1 Samuel 13, it appears to have been some two years before Saul went to Gilgal — and when he did, he sinned there by not waiting for Samuel. There is something in the flesh that resists going to Gilgal, the place of the cutting off of the flesh and self-judgment. Israel had to return to Gilgal over and over to find its victories. We are never wiser than the scripture that brings us back to it.

First Samuel 16:20 provides a beautiful closing thought. Jesse sent David to King Saul with an ass laden with bread, a kid, and a bottle of wine. The same elements as the three men — but now the father sends a fourth man. Matthew, Mark, and

Luke set before us the gospel, the good news of the Son of God — the sacrifice for sinners, whose body was given and whose blood was shed. And then a fourth comes, sent by the father. That is David. David was sent by Jesse his father to Saul with bread, and a kid, and wine. Four men altogether, and the fourth was the one sent by the father. Saul had seen all four of them and their testimony. May God give us ears to hear when his word comes, and grace to go the upward road.

Stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.