

Abimelech

by Charles Alexander

Saul's story teaches us the importance of humility and trust in God, as well as the dangers of pride and disobedience.

Duration: 47:00

Scripture: 1 Samuel 9:6, Psalm 2:1, Psalm 19:7, Psalm 23:1, Psalm 110:1, Psalm 119:130, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Abimelech"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the anointing of Saul as the first king of Israel. Samuel, the prophet, pours the royal anointing oil on Saul's head, declaring him to be the deliverer of God's people. Samuel also gives Saul three signs to confirm his appointment as king. Saul, initially ignorant of divine ways, questions how they can approach a man of God without a gift. However, his servant suggests using a quarter shekel as a possible offering. The sermon also mentions another young man, David, who is composing the book of Psalms and laying the foundations of divine public praise. The preacher highlights the critical phase in Israel's history, as they are oppressed by the Philistines and forbidden from manufacturing weapons.

Transcript

We'll find our text this evening in the first book of Samuel, chapter 9, and verse 6. And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honorable man. All that he saith cometh surely to pass. Now let us go thither, peradventure we can, he can show us our way, that we should go.

Fine advice this from a servant to a man who was born to be king, but didn't at that moment know it. A mostly remarkable ending of a journey upon which the two men had set out with so little knowledge of what the journey would involve. Something so mundane and simple and trivial as the finding of a herd of straying asses, which had gone out of their accustomed territory, and they being valuable animals in those days.

Saul's father sent his son to find and collect the asses and to drive them home. For three days he sought and found them not, but he found what he didn't seek. He obtained that for which he was not looking.

He left home a farmer's son, and he came back an anointed king, and all in three days. The asses which had caused his journey had already been found, and his father was concerned about his son, and not about his property. It all seemed so strange that the providence of God should have gone so roundabout a

way to bring to pass so important a result.

After all if God wanted to find a king for Israel, and this king was Saul, he could have done what he afterwards did with Saul's successor. He could have sent Samuel to the very house where the young father lived. He could have gone through all the sons of Kish the Benjamite, until he had found Saul, just as later on he went through the sons of Jesse and found David.

Why go to all this trouble of sending a man on a fruitless errand, trying to find asses which weren't really lost, or certainly which were found by other people within a very short space of time, and so wandering on and on until they were perplexed as to what they ought to do. Would it not be more seemly for divine providence to find a more obvious and direct way to achieve its purposes. That of course is where we make the mistake.

Things are not trivial with God. There is nothing really trivial which happens to us in life. And every circumstance of our life can yield its quota of knowledge and understanding and learning and experience.

In these apparently small things, Saul was being taught that there was an unerring providence of God watching over him. And even when he knew it not, God was guiding and directing his steps, until ultimately he came to the place which God had selected that he should arrive. And there great things should take place.

How often it is in your life and mine, that apparently trivial and everyday circumstances bring us to a place of great decisions. We set out in the morning, not knowing the road upon which we are set will lead us to great conclusions. But the trivial things, the apparently small things of our lives, We are led onwards by divine providence till we come to the place where God's decisions are made known.

We all ought to learn by these things. For when the spirit of God causes them to be set down in writing in the holy book, you may depend upon it, there's a lesson in it. God's history is not like man's history.

God's history plunges right into the vitals of truth and of life. And everything which is recorded is a lesson. Every part of divine history is teaching and doctrine.

That's why when you read the historical books of the Bible, you mustn't read them just as history. You mustn't take them just as another history book telling you about wars and kings and mighty men and heroes. It's far more than that.

It's the divine hand at work in the affairs of men and bringing to pass his purposes of redemption. There is nothing beyond the providence of God. There is no circumstance which is too small for him, which doesn't have a part to play.

Some men say there is not a dewdrop which glitters on the grass in the morning. There's not a dead leaf which falls from the autumn tree. There is not a sparrow which falls from heaven.

But your heavenly Father knows about it. And in his eyes on the sparrow, I know he watches me. You may not exclude anything from the all-embracing and all-seeing providence of God.

For after all, a dead leaf can cause a calamity. A stone casually thrown in the way can upset a horse and kill its rider. A man drew a bow at a venture when the battle was in its hottest.

And he let the arrow go to where it would. And it came into the heart of Israel's king. And no arrow was more surely guided by the hand of God than that was that arrow that was fired at a venture into the heart of the Israelitish host.

It has happened again and again in history. Our own English carols, 900 years ago at the Battle of Hastings, which decided not only who should be king of England, but what course our civilization should take. And eventually laid the groundwork of that nation which God had particularly selected in reformation times to be the citadel of divine truth in century after century.

A certain man in the northern ranks drew a bow at a venture and fired it high into the sky. It found its unerring target. And Harold, the Saxon king, the last of the Saxon kings, was laid low.

And all history was changed. Had he lived, undoubtedly William the Conqueror would have been William the Slain and the Overcome. Because William the Northern was up against one of the strategic geniuses of the age.

So it happens that the providence of God in history and in your individual lives, you may not discount any circumstance that arises. God is in it all. He's guiding and directing our path and all in relation to his grand scheme of redemption.

At the time when Saul was called to be king, history had reached one of its critical phases amongst the people of Israel on account of their sins, they had fallen under the heel of a very mighty and a dreaded fall. The Philistines, who at that time were garrisoning the country, had placed bodies of troops in various parts of Palestine in order to keep the people down. They had forbidden the manufacture of weapons.

There were no weapons in the hands of the people of God. They were altogether in the power of their dreaded falls. They could do nothing about it.

They cried to God for deliverance. And God in his mercy raised them up a captain, this young man whose name was Saul. We face greater issues today than were ever provided for in Saul's day.

In the place of the dreaded Philistines, we have legions of devils whose commission from the prince of hell is to destroy truth from the face of the earth. Not by the hand of war, not by the hand of persecution, but by the delusion and errors which have destroyed the evangelical faith over so great a part of the world. Some of us are looking to the hand of God to see what he will do at such a time as this.

We may not look to London or to a crowd of discredited men there. We may not look to evangelical leaders, for somehow we have a feeling that we've been badly let down. But we may look to God, and we do look to God.

And perhaps deliverance will rise from an unexpected quarter. And perhaps too from a despised quarter. For when Saul first was introduced to the men of Israel, they looked at him, despite the fact that he stood six foot six in his stocking feet, head and shoulders above all the rest of the men of Israel.

A giant of a man, and yet a very bashful and reserved man at that time. They thought of his family and the tribe he came from. They said, this insignificant man, nothing of royalty about him, will this creature save us from the Philistine? And so they despised the provision which God had made.

And that has often been the case. But we ought not to discount ordinary men. It sometimes pleases God to take the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence.

It may be the prayers of some obscure womenfolk, faithful before the Lord, as we believe in the goodness and mercy of God to his praise and glory, we have under this roof tonight. Who are busy in prayer, and never failing in prayer, in some secret place that God will return to his people in power, and raise up and bless his word once more. Maybe through their instrumentality great things will be done.

Why? When God would deliver his people in the days of Saul? What went first? A herd of wandering asses brought God's deliverer face to face with the man who ordained him and sent him on his course. Somebody has said that the ass is a very, very wise creature. You search throughout the holy scriptures, and you'll find that the ass is a very, very important animal indeed.

It was upon an ass that the Lord rode into Jerusalem. An ass is the only common animal that we've ever heard about, who ever spoke, and spoke by the power of God. The dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet Balaam.

Again and again, God has used asses to do his work. And there are a few of them on two legs who are going round and about today. At least they do not, they are not approved very much by the judgment of men.

But who knows, they may be speaking yet with God's voice, and the divine purposes and deliverances brought to pass through them. Samuel, the prophet of whom we often speak and sing about his childhood, hushed was the evening hymn, the temple courts were dark, the lamp was burning dim before the sacred ark, when suddenly a voice divine rang through the silence of the shrine. And the voice said, Samuel, Samuel, and that child of the temple, so faithful and so pure, was now an old man.

And he'd seen Israel decline. He'd been abused by God for his deliverance, but now he was an old man, and there was none to come after him. And the strange thing is this, that Samuel, great man though he was, was completely unknown to this man's soul.

He knew nothing about Samuel. He'd been brought up in ignorance of him. I don't know who was to blame for this, whether this was the pattern of the times, whether this was the atmosphere of thought and information which existed during the time of the Philistine occupation, whether someone had failed at home, his father or his mother, to teach him the great facts of Israel's history and their present condition.

For he didn't live far away from Samuel. It had taken him only three days to get there, and most of those three days were taken up in wanderings and inquiries. A young man like that could have gone from his father's farm to where Samuel was in twenty-four hours, yet he didn't know him, knew nothing about him, didn't know his name, but the certainty he had within you.

He said, I happen to know, sir, that in this very town that we have now arrived at, there is a man of God, and whatever he says comes to pass. Maybe he'll be able to help us. Let us read the word again.

Behold, now, there is in this city a man of God, and he's an honorable man. All that he saith cometh surely to pass. Now let us go thither peradventure.

He can show us our way that we should go. And Saul was so ignorant of the divine ways at that time, that he said, now how can we go to see this man? We've got no gift to give to him. We can't go without something in our hand.

We can't get our fortunes told without crossing somebody's palm with silver. More well, said the servant, who had more money about him than apparently his master had. For his master's pockets were empty, but he had a quarter shekel in his pocket.

He had a two bob piece. And he produced, and looked at it, and he says, maybe that will be enough. He says, take it, sir, and we'll go to thee, to the seer, to the man of God, and we'll see whether he'll accept it from us.

They didn't know how much they had been anticipated. They didn't know the kind of man they were dealing with. You couldn't give silver or anything else to Samuel.

He wasn't there for bribery and corruption. He took nothing from the people. He wouldn't have it said that he'd impoverished anybody, or he'd have done any service merely for what he got out of it.

In any event, he anticipated them. For when they went to the city, having been directed by the maidens whom they met upon the way, a man came out to them and said, Whom do you seek? They said, We seek Samuel, the seer. Well, I am the seer.

You're speaking to him now. And I'm expecting you. Everything is prepared.

Come inside. There's a feast ready for you. There's a position prepared at the feast for you.

And he sat them down, and there was a special portion which was already in the oven for the principal guest that was expected, and that guest was Saul. Was ever a man so surrounded by tokens of the divine providence and mercy and care as Saul when he first came to the Lord and to the Lord's servants? If ever a man ought to have been convinced that his ways were directed by God, if ever a man ought to have resolved in his soul, From now onward, this God will be my God. He's watching over me even when I didn't know him.

He sent his servant whom I ought to have known but didn't know. I brought a quarter-sheffle in my hand to give him, and I've no business to insult the man by bringing it in my hand. I find he gives all things and receives nothing.

He ought to have marked these things. Then when they took their departure on the following day, and Samuel said, send the servant out of here shot and I shot for the time being. And so he led him aside from the high road, and he took a bottle of oil from his pocket, and he said to Saul, now kneel down, and Saul knelt down.

And he poured the oil, the royal anointing oil of kingship upon his head. And he said, rise King Saul, the Lord has appointed you to be the deliverer of his people. What we haven't read in the following chapter, he gave him sundry instruction.

He gave him three signs. He said, when you leave me from here, he says, three men will meet you. They'll do certain things, and other things beside.

He foretold that he would come to a certain place, and there the Spirit of God would come upon him. And so it was that he entered upon a school of the prophets, who were going up to the house of God at Shiloh at that time. Prophesying as they went, and Saul fell in with them, and went with them to the solemn and holy convention that night.

And all that night he lay along upon the ground, prophesying with them, so that the word went round amongst Israel in later days. Is Saul also among the prophets? All these wonderful things happened to him, and yet, and this is the important thing, beloved, and yet in spite of it all, he was an unchanged, unregenerate, and unconverted man. Within two years, he disobeyed God, in a most important particular.

He had shown that he was no man of faith. What the lesson of that may be. We could speak of Samuel's great love for Saul.

Though early he discovered the weakness of the man whom he had anointed to be king, he went down to the grave, sorrowing for Saul, and still praying for him. Yet prayers and tears unavailing for a heart that was finally hardened against God and truth. And it all looked so different at the beginning.

There was a nobility in Saul's nature. There was a kind of refinement about him too. There was a bravery and a courage in the face of fearsome odds.

And nobody can but admire a brave man, whatever else he may be. And Saul was all that. He was a modest man to begin with, when ultimately, having been chosen by God, he was eventually chosen by lot, by the men of Israel.

As they cast their lots, and cast their votes, and it came out unanimous for Saul, the son of King. And they sought to put upon him the royal purple, and they couldn't find him. He disappeared from the camp and from the solemn assembly.

And they sent scouts out all over the place, looking for the man they wanted to sit upon the throne. And they found him hiding amongst the scouts. So modest he was.

So shy and bashful and retiring. So aware of his own weakness and unsuitability, and his need for a greater power than he had himself. And yet, casting all this away, with all these modest and humble advantages to begin with, still an unconverted man.

Still unyielding to the Word of God. For the first time that it happened in his life, when his own interests clashed with the prerogatives of God. He did what pleased him in his own eye.

And broke out from the limits which God had prescribed for him. A sad story. There are some men who go down to hell, and you can scarcely find tears to weep.

There are other men who go on that dark some road, and every step they take is bathed with the tears of their friends. So it was with Saul. And not Samuel alone wept for that man, and loved him.

But the man eventually whom Saul treated with greater cruelty and injustice than any other man he met in his life. Or that any other man I suppose has ever been dealt with short of the Son of God himself. The young man David, who became king eventually in his stead.

It was a noble age, you know. When noble men could look each other in the face. David who loved Saul's eldest son Jonathan, so that their love for each other became proverbial as it is to this day.

David who loved Saul despite the fact that Saul sought to destroy him, and hunted him like a partridge upon the hillside. And again and again when his enemy was almost given into his hands, and the men who with David said, just speak the word. He's asleep lying there.

One thrust of my spear and he'll never even speak. And nobody will know anything about it. But David said, touch not the Lord's anointing.

And then when ultimately in the crisis of defeat, the agony of a lost battle, Saul committed suicide. And Jonathan his son was slain. There was uttered by David that great lyric that you find in the word of God, which is quoted by literary men, by political men, by statesmen down to this latest day.

Tell it not in Gath. Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon. How are the mighty fallen? How indeed.

They were great days. They were noble times. There were many, many great men who lived at that time.

A far greater age than this age in which we live. There's very, very little nobility in our society today, dear friends. There's very little mutual self-respect away in the High Court of Parliament.

There are very few distinguished and honorable men there. Grievous though it is that we should have to say these things, our lost greatness is only advertised by the fact that the leaders of the nation belong to whatever party they will, are men without vision, too many cases men without God too. Men who are not guided by the word of God.

So it is that our country, by the judgment of God for its sins, is in a state of serious and perhaps irrecoverable decline and weakness. And Saul, the man who started out with so great advantages, prayers and tears unavailing upon his behalf, treads the dark pathway down to an irretrievable hell. Saul among the prophets now becomes Saul, the prey of evil spirits.

Is Saul the domain of raging evil powers, vindictive cruelty and murder no longer beyond him? Envy and pride claimed him and a towering passion to which he had given freest reign eventually mastered him and dominated his most noble periods and times. Sometimes he recovered his steps for a moment as when he found out that David could have slain him but David had spared his life. Read the account and you will see how Saul lifted up his voice and wept.

One of the lucid moments when the Spirit of God still penetrated his hardened soul and yet he remained unconverted. At times melted to tears because of his own sins, groaning within himself because of the disasters he brought upon his own soul and yet finding no way of return as he saw of all who wept but found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears. Oh, it's a dangerous thing indeed to turn aside from the ways of God.

Very few backsliders ever return. I have known quite a few in my day. I have seldom known a successful return from the fields of backsliding.

I know men who have been prayed for, women who have been prayed for again and again and again but there has been no return. It's a dangerous thing to turn your back upon the living God and to go your own way when God in His mercy has surrounded you with His providence and with His goodness and has brought you to a point in the road. Don't despise the day of grace when your heart is tender and susceptible to divine impression.

Don't let that day pass. Don't procrastinate. Don't put it off.

Earnestly seek the Lord with all your heart and don't rest until you know that the issue is settled and that you've found that which you seek. For God will try you to see whether you're really seeking it. He may try you over years.

You may be subject to cruel deprivation and sorrow. For God will test and test to know what is in your heart and to prove to you exactly what you are as to whether you will at any cost press on to Christ and salvation. Don't despise the day of grace.

Souls are hardly one. Christ had to go to the cross to redeem. He had to pass through the garden of agony and distress.

He had to be forsaken of His friends, spit upon and bruised. I gave my back to the smiters, He said, and my cheeks to them that plucked out the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

Souls are not easily won or redeemed. Faith is not that common in this world that it's easy come by. You can't believe when you like.

You can't repent when you choose. It must be as and when the Spirit of God in His providential time is dealing with you. Don't be surprised that people who pretend to spiritual gifts and may even have some lofty spiritual experiences fall away and are eventually lost.

Remember that Saul prophesied amongst the sons of the prophets. Remember he had deep and moving and seraphic spiritual experiences yet wasn't saved. It's not enough for people, especially young people, to go hot foot after spiritual gifts, charismatic effusions, and all kinds of religious excitements and prodigies.

God requires one thing only of you and that's repentance and faith. And the two always go together. Is Saul also among the prophets? But he's found tonight amongst the devils.

Did he look like a candidate for heaven? You'll find him moaning in the caverns of the lost tonight where he will be for all eternity. Just over the hill from where Saul lived there was another young man at that very time meditating upon divine grace. Playing his harp upon the hillside as he was minding his father's sheep.

Composing those imperishable lyrics that we know as the book of Psalms. Laying the foundations of divine public praise for all future generations and compiling in that marvelous book we know as the book of Psalms. Compiling there a manual of prayer and praise and thanksgiving which is the marvel of all creation.

This was David. We turn to that book of David and we sometimes try to pick out those Psalms which perhaps he was composing just at that time. There are certain Psalms we know exactly the circumstances the period of his life when he did compose them.

Either from the headings to them or from the contents of them. We know for instance in Psalm 51 that he prayed that great prayer which is now cast in the form of a Psalm after he had committed his great sin late on in life. But the difference between Saul's sin and David's sin was this that David was grieved unto repentance but Saul went away from Samuel in the day when Samuel rebuked him angry in his heart at having been called to account for anything which he had done.

Oh beware dear friend of resentment when you are found out in sin or when the finger is pointed at you in justice and in accusation beware of resentment if you are found out in sin. Then there is only one thing to do and that is to go to the Saviour. And so it was with David.

After thy loving kindness Lord have mercy upon me for thy compassion's grace blot out all mine iniquity. We cleanse from sin and truly wash from mine iniquity for my transgressions I confess my sin I ever sinned against thee the only have I sinned in thy sight done this ill that when thou speak'st thou may'st be just and clear in judging still. Do thou with this upsprinkle me I shall be cleansed so yea wash thou me and then I shall be whiter than the snow.

In all succeeding days and generations I don't suppose a day has passed from the time that David composed that psalm to our present day when someone somewhere in the world doesn't quote his word and say oh Lord cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

Some people wonder at the sin which David committed how can a Christian man commit such a sin as he committed where he was a king he was placed in slippery places it was easy to find facilities for kings for sinning for kings are set in slippery places indeed but at least he will say this that as a result of his repentance we have a form of words which is suited to every sinner's lips and there's no one here this evening but what might be indebted to David in his deep repentance after his great sin but when we think of his pure youth dear friends we cannot but suppose that he was lying upon the hillside at night time when that flash of divine inspiration came to him which he put into words in that great 19th Psalm I quote from the Metrical Version the heavens God's glory do declare the

skies his hand works preach day utter speech to day and night to night doth knowledge teach there is no speech nor tongue to which their voice doth not extend their line is gone through all the earth their words to the world's end and then passing from the heavens and the glory of God he thinks of the majesty of the divine word and law God's law is perfect and converts the soul in sin that lies God's testimony is most sure and makes the simple wise why don't we use the Psalms more than we do why don't we read them more than we do why don't we sing them more than we do I was brought upon the prose version of the Psalms as I sang in the choir in the Church of England I got rather wearied of them I rather like the Metrical Psalms I like the Psalms in verse that can be set to our simple tunes

and not to old fashioned chants but everybody has their own feeling about it some people think the precise reverse but what matters is so long as we make use of them somehow for they far surpass the best of our hymns the very finest of our human compositions pale into significance beside the 23rd Psalm the 19th Psalm the 2nd Psalm the 110th Psalm and a myriad more that we can quote The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want He makes me down to lie in pastures green He leadeth me the quiet waters by so we might go on but I find I have to draw to an immediate conclusion there is one question I'm sure in all your minds which we may answer now as we close you say David would have stood or Saul would have stood if he had known David's grace if God had dealt with Saul precisely as he dealt with David

Saul would have stood he would have repented of his sins he would have come back again how was it that with all those advantages Saul should fail why was it that God didn't support by his grace a poor weak erring man like Saul whereas he brought David home listen dear friend there is a region in life where we have no business to ask the question why or demand of God a reason we cannot direct the spirit of God after the distribution of his gifts of grace we cannot give counsel to God as to where he should distribute his favors nor can we complain to God of anything which he doesn't do all we can say about is this in the

mystery of divine grace withheld from Saul and yet so abundantly bestowed upon David see that you be not that man see that you be not that woman who under the advantages

that Saul had yet hardened your heart against God and against truth but if there is a lesson to be learned from David remember this that there was something about David from the beginning that apparently is not to be noted in Saul and that is that from his earliest days he thought upon his way he looked to God he saw the glory of God in everything that was around him he early learned to love God and His word and His way and it stood him in good stead to the end of his life you may say oh well that was the grace of God working with him undoubtedly well perhaps the grace of God is working with you but don't stop half way if you have any interest at all in Christ pursue it to the end until you know that Christ is yours and you are Christ's forever and forever don't stop upon the road don't

take anything for granted see that you be not amongst those who cast away the early promise which God has bestowed and turn your back upon convictions which have come from the Holy Spirit of God Himself God is presiding over our way in His hands His wise hands and good hands all things are held and comprehended you depend upon Him for grace as you depend for your daily breath your momentary breath and life see that you do not neglect your God see that you learn to praise Him to trust Him to come to the Saviour that He has provided to call upon the name of Christ whom He has given for the atonement of your sins despise not the gifts of grace turn unto Him all with all your heart and remember the gracious words of David how He from the depths of the experience has taught us that we may

always return to Him we may always come that He is always willing and able to receive us God grant it may be so with everyone Amen We close by singing the hymn number 562 562 The Lord's my shepherd I am not one He makes me down to lie

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