

ONCE UPON A THRONE
“Saul, the First King: Anointed, Anxious and Afraid”

We have begun a new sermon series: *Once Upon a Throne*. This series plays upon our long-term interest in royalty and in their lives. Israel wanted a king. The people wanted to be like all the other nations, rather than to stand apart as a people chosen by God to live by faith. The stories of our biblical rulers are filled with redemption and loss, rebellion, and faithfulness. The “players” include kings and queens, priests and prophets and the people longing for a better life. While in our American culture we don’t have royalty, we have the same need to idolize and worship our leaders as the “fix” or “solution.” The gift of our Hebrew scripture is that it always shows the people of God in all their “glory” good and evil, faithful, and unfaithful. Over the next few weeks, the readings themselves will be lengthy as we try and cover a great deal of the stories within 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings and 1st and 2nd Chronicles. Last week we heard how God was willing to give the people what they wanted: a king. This week, we are introduced to the first king anointed by Samuel: Saul. Saul was a tall and handsome king, but God’s favor is withdrawn, and Saul is driven by his own mood swings, and his deep fear and hatred of David. His is a sad story, but it is also part and parcel of David’s story. This week, we look at Saul and his nervousness that keeps him from living into being the king that Israel was seeking and the favor of God. May this week, you find yourself trusting in God and in God alone. - Pastor Cindy Watson

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: “Saul, the First King: Anointed, Anxious and Afraid.”

Daily Prayer

Eternal God, lead me now out of the familiar setting of my doubts and fears, beyond my pride and my need to be secure into a strange and graceful ease with my true proportions and with yours; that in boundless silence I may grow strong enough to endure and flexible enough to share Your grace.

Amen (taken from *Guerrillas of Grace*, by Ted Loder)

STUDY GUIDE

Monday, June 14, 2021 1 Samuel 9:1-19, 10: 1-21, 14: 47-52 Saul Chosen, Anointed as King

Saul is chosen as king and anointed. He is tall. He is handsome. He is rich. Saul is everything that people expect in a king. There was no “election” involved, but certainly it has been proven over the centuries that good looks and money often play into who gets to “lead.” Being tall is also helpful! Samuel anoints Saul to be king and introduces him to the people. The rights and duties of kingship are established and then of course, there are those who were “unimpressed.” Nonetheless, Israel, had a king, literally one whom they could “look up to” and be unafraid to follow into battle. It all looks good. *As you reflect, what do you think of Saul’s credentials? What do you look for in terms of leadership? List some things you find important.*

Tuesday, June 15, 2021 1 Samuel 13: 1-15, 1 Samuel 15: 1-35 God Rejects Saul as King

Saul’s anxious nature becomes apparent early. Saul fails to listen and do what God wants. Samuel asks for Saul to wait for him. Instead, Saul is impatient and performs the offering to God himself. He is nervous, frightened and refuses to wait on Samuel. In a most bloody example (chapter 15), Saul goes to war and kills everyone EXCEPT the king and the best of the livestock and other valuables. One can certainly argue whether or not the God we believe in would command such a thing, but what is apparent is Saul’s greed and disobedience keeping the “best” for himself. Saul was interested in what was good for Saul. Of course, he had excuses for keeping the “good stuff.” Samuel was unimpressed and his words that he would love the kingdom were devastating for Saul. Saul said he was sorry, but it doesn’t change what will occur in the future. *Are there times when you, like Saul, are anxious and push to complete things when waiting would be better? Have you ever done anything that you knew was not what God wanted but something you wanted? Were there consequences?*

Wednesday, June 16, 2021 1 Samuel 16: 1, 14-23, 18: 6-16 David soothes Saul.

Saul’s jealousy, Saul’s instability, his anxiousness, his mood swings were becoming apparent and visible. It is described as “an evil spirit from the Lord” that tormented him. I think for many people, fear and anxiety feel like God is against them. Certainly, these scriptures would point that direction. But our faith in Christ reminds us that God is always with us. To help Saul with his moods, David is introduced to the court and his playing soothes Saul. Saul’s jealousy begins to take hold and with his anxious and tormented spirit he lashes out. His mood swings from love to fear, from hatred to awe. Mental illness was not something known in the biblical world. Today, we still are not as supportive as we might be, but there is help. At the church we are in partnership with Friends University’s Marriage and Family therapy program and have therapy student interns who offer free counseling. If you need of help, please call 317-267-6244, Ext. 304 or e-mail, studentmft@firstwchita.org. *In today’s readings, what moods or emotions did you see? How would you describe Saul in the midst of these changes? How do you respond to people who have swinging moods and emotions?*

Thursday, June 17, 2021 1 Samuel 24: 1-22, 26: 1-25 David spares Saul’s life twice

In these two readings we see David’s response to Saul’s hatred and jealousy. If you read more of 1 Samuel, there are more examples of David’s mercy. See how David responds to Saul’s persecution. Saul is unsettled and tormented. David chooses again and again NOT to retaliate. David was hounded, hunted, and treated like a criminal for no reason other than he was more popular than Saul. David could have let his popularity go to his head, gone against his king (even though David himself was anointed). Instead, he submitted to the authority of his tormented monarch. He trusted that God would lead him and when the time was right, he would fulfill his own calling. *Do you see any similarities between this story and leadership today in any avenue (social, political, or religious?) Would you do what David did? Would you respond with grace, or would you just leave?*

Friday, June 18, 2021 1 Samuel 28: 3-20, 31: 1-13, 2 Samuel 1: 1-12 Witch of Endor, death of Saul

Saul’s fear drove him to such desperation. He felt no connection with God and Samuel had died. So, one of the most interesting stories of his life comes with his consultation with the “witch” or “medium” of Endor. He had her bring Samuel back from the dead but received no relief from Samuel’s word. The end of Saul’s life is sad and tragic. *As you think through Saul’s life, what pops out at you the most? Have you ever been so desperate or afraid that you did unthankful things that went against your own values?*