**Where Is Your Confidence?**

Well, we are continuing our study of the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. So, if you’ve brought your Bible with you turn there to chapter 8. Now, this morning we are going to see where the nation of Israel and especially one man, Saul, placed their confidence. And we are going to see them putting their confidence in all sorts of things, but they don’t put it in the Lord. And it’s easy for us to the same thing today. So, this morning, I want to ask you to reflect on where you place your confidence.

**<Arrow>** Let’s start out with a quick review to get us all back up to speed. We started this January in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, where we learned about the Creation of the world and how God created Adam and Eve to have this special relationship with them, but they doubt his goodness; they sin, and it breaks their relationship with Him. And mankind begins this descent into more and more evil. And from that point on, God is at work to save the human race, but it’s not easy. God chooses one man, Abraham, to make a covenant with and to re-establish His relationship with mankind through Abraham’s descendents. But they will have to wait to inherit the Promised Land, Canaan, because God wants to give the Canaanites an opportunity to turn to stop their evil practices. So, Abraham’s descendents spend 400 hundred years in Egypt and most of that in slavery. Then God uses Moses to miraculously bring them out of Egypt, but the people aren’t ready to be led as a nation under the direct rule of God, so they spend 40 more years wandering in the desert and learning to trust in God. Then the time to take the Promised Land is finally here and God again miraculously gives them victory. The nation of Israel is finally a reality; a nation that was intended to be a model community of love and goodness that the whole world would see and be attracted to. But it hasn’t been going very well and the people are constantly turning away to worship other gods. And this is where we find ourselves in 1 Samuel chapter 8. And you have to understand the bigger picture here to realize the significance of what happens next.

Look at the beginning of Chapter 8. We’re told that Samuel now is an old man, and that he appoints his sons to follow him as judges for Israel, but they don’t turn out so well, and the people are kind of tired of judges, so they’ve got a request. **<Arrow>**

“*So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, ‘You are old*.’” That’s kind of a blunt way to start a talk, isn’t it? “*you’re old*. *And your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have*.’” First Samuel 8:4

Verse 6, “*But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord.* *And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king*. *As they’ve done from the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you*.”

And now you understand the real tragedy of their request. God was offering the most wonderful opportunity ever given to a people since the Garden of Eden. This group of human beings was offered the chance to live freely in a community of love under the direct reign of God himself.

God is saying, “I want to give you the chance to live as free and equal subjects with great dignity and respect under my own love and personal rule. To be a people like no other people, not living in fear under the threat of force and the crushing hammer of power, but in community with me as your king.” And they say no.

That’s the real problem with this request. They’re saying to God, “We don’t trust that you’ll take care of us.” And God knows what’s going to happen with this king deal. So he tells Samuel in verse 9, “*Now listen to them, but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do*.”

And in verses 10-18 Samuel tells them what’s going to happen, “You get a king, and he will take your sons and make them into his soldiers. He’ll take your daughters and make them into his servants. He’ll take your possessions to enrich his treasury. And the power will be abused. You’ll be his slaves. That’s what human kings do in this world.

This is one of the strongest warnings about having a human being on the throne of a nation. And, in fact, during the Middle Ages many Kings did not like this passage of scripture and would sometimes forbid it from being read in churches, because it could undermine their power. **<Arrow>**

But the people won’t listen. I want you to notice why they want a king, verses 19 and 20. “*But the people refused to listen to Samuel. ‘No!’ they said. ‘We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations*.’” That’s a mature reason, isn’t it?

Did you ever try to pull that one when you were a kid? “All the other parents let their kids come home whenever they want to.” It’s like a bunch of ten-year-olds. “We want to be like all the other nations. All the other nations have a king.”

And the horrible irony is their whole mission was to **not** be like all the other nations. They were supposed to be different. They were supposed to be a community of light and love that would be a blessing to other nations that were walking in darkness and violence. And the very thing that God called them to be is what they ran 180 degrees the other way from. “*We want to be like all the other nations*.”

Now, they made this request out of a real need. They really were in chaos and disorder. But it was a foolish request. And when Samuel gives them wise counsel, they should have listened. And they should have prayed, “Help us, God, we’re in pain. We know we need something. Maybe we don’t need a King. Not our will, but yours be done. We’ll submit to you, God. What do you want for us?” But they don’t pray that. They’re real stubborn: “*We want a king*.”

Don’t we do the same thing many times? We look for a human solution to a problem that only God can resolve. We have a problem or we’re in pain and we immediately move towards a solution that we can see and touch. And the risk is that we put that solution as our king and we remove God from the throne of our lives. And we say to God, ‘I don’t really trust you that you’ll take care of me, so I’m taking it into my own hands.’ Well, God agrees to give them a king. They are not ready to have him for their king.

But turn to chapter 9, here we meet the first King of Israel. The time of the judges is over and we get to see how this whole ‘give us a king deal’ is going to work out. 1 Samuel 9:1: “*There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of . so and so. .* .” The writer wants us to know that this man Kish is a man of some wealth and some prominence in the community--a man of standing from kind of a pedigree family.

“*He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites--a head taller than any of the others. Now, the donkeys belonging to Saul’s father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, ‘Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys*.’

“*So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them. When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, ‘Come, let’s go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us*.’”

Let’s stop there for a minute. The writer is kind of setting us up at the beginning of this chapter, because there’s this major contrast. Saul thinks he’s going out on a donkey hunt, and God is going to do what to Saul? Make him king. That’s one of the amazing and exciting things about our God. You never know what He’s going to do next.

So Saul finally says, “Let’s go back home.” But his servant says to him, “No, let’s go ask the prophet Samuel. Maybe he’ll tell us where to find the donkeys.”

Meanwhile, God is at work. Turn to 9:15: “*Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel: ‘About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me*.

“*When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, ‘This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people*.’

And then Samuel takes Saul aside to a great hall where a banquet is going on. He serves Saul as his honored guest. He gives him food that he had set aside especially for him. And the next morning, Samuel pulls Saul aside privately, just the two of them, and he pulls out a flask of oil, pours it over his head and says in chapter 10 verse 1, “*Has not the Lord anointed you king, ruler, leader over His people, Israel?*”

Now, I want you to try, if you would, to put yourself in Saul’s place for a moment. You’re out looking for donkeys. That’s all you’re doing. So you go to Samuel, and all you’re hoping to do is find the donkeys. And the next thing you know, this great religious leader is anointing you as king over the whole nation.

What do you do when God interrupts your life and assigns you a task you never dreamed of? What do you do when you’re out looking for donkeys and God says, “I want you to be king. I have a job for you that never even entered your mind. I want you to start a church or I want you to adopt that child or I want you to help the elderly in Kungsbacka or I want you to study to become a diakon (if you remember last week) or whatever it is that God just knocks you over the head with. How do you respond? Well, in a sense, this whole story we’re looking at today, is one man’s response.

And God knows that Saul is going to need some reassurance, so Samuel gives him three specific signs in ch 10 and they all come true. But I want you to notice Saul’s response to all this. Look down at 10:14. **<ARROW>**Saul leaves to go back home, verse 14,

 “*Now, Saul’s uncle asked him and his servant, ‘Where have you been?’ ‘Looking for the donkeys,’ he said. ‘But when we saw that they were not to be found, we went to Samuel.*’ *“Saul’s uncle said, ‘Tell me what Samuel said to you.’ Saul replied, ‘He assured us that the donkeys had been found.’ But he did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.”*

Now this is a little odd. Let me ask this question to just the women here. Have you ever asked a man, “How did your day go?” and have him leave out something important? Kathy, put your hand down. Well, I think Saul is setting a new record here. I would think that Saul at least might say something like, “Samuel said to me, ‘You’ll find the donkeys.’ Oh and, by the way, he took out a flask of oil, poured it over my head and said to me that I was going to be king! So that was kind of special.”

But Saul says nothing about that. And there are indications in the text that Saul is really going to struggle trusting God for the task God assigns him. When Samuel first approaches him, he says, “*Are not the hearts of all of Israel turned towards you?*” Saul’s immediate response in 9:21 is, “*But I’m a Benjamite. That’s the smallest tribe in Israel, and my clan is the least of all the tribes of Benjamin*.”

Another indication of what looks like a kind of trust challenge for Saul is in 1 Samuel 10:20. This is kind of an inaugural ceremony. Saul has already been chosen king. That’s settled. Samuel has told him about that. But this is the public inauguration, and the scene is actually kind of comical. **<ARROW>**Here’s the text so you know I’m not making it up.

 “*When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri’s clan was chosen. Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen*.” So everybody knows Saul is going to be the new king. “*But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. So they inquired further of the Lord, ‘Has the man come here yet?’” Is Saul around? “And the Lord said, ‘Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage*.’”

This is not a picture of somebody brimming with confidence. “Anybody seen Saul the new king?” Nobody can find him. They’re all looking. Finally, God has to tell them. “He’s over there, go look in the baggage.”

And here’s where we find the first signs of a problem. Saul has some insecurities that run so deep that he has a hard time believing that God can work through him. Even after giving him 3 signs, Saul isn’t sure he can handle it because he’s not placing his confidence in the Lord. Instead he looks at his own abilities and his family and status and he doesn’t see much there, so he’s afraid. **<ARROW>** And that’s our first lesson: putting our confidence in our human pedigree: our own abilities or family name, or our status in the eyes of others.

So Saul becomes king. At first, everything goes well. He wins a victory against the Ammonites. That is his greatest moment as king. And then trouble starts. Israel is at war with the Philistines. Now, turn over to chapter 13 verse 5. These verses are not going to come up on the screen.

Israel is in a very bad situation. “*The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore*. *They went up and camped at Michmash, east of Beth Aven. When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard-pressed*,” now notice their response, “*they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns*.”

Now, the Philistines had the advantage in the arm race; they had the technological edge because they controlled iron technology. Look over at 13:19. “*Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole of Israel, because the Philistines had said, ‘Otherwise the Hebrews would make swords or spears!’”* The Israelites had to go down to the Philistines to get their tools sharpened.

Look at Verse 22. This is unbelievable. “*So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them.*” OK, there are two swords and two spears in the whole army of the Israelites and they’re going up against the Philistines--3,000 chariots, and soldiers, numerous as sand on the seashore. Now look at 13:7. **<ARROW>**

 “*Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul’s men began to scatter*.”

The only hope Israel has is to trust God, to obey God. They’re not going to win this battle otherwise, and everybody knows that. Samuel was very clear with Saul about God’s instructions. “*to go to Gilgal and wait seven days. I will come and offer a sacrifice and instruct you on what God wants you to do*.” Saul, your job is to wait. Got it?” “Yes,” “What’s your job, Saul?” “Wait.” “How long?” “Seven days.”

Now it’s the seventh day. Samuel has not come yet. Saul thinks maybe he’s not going to come at all. Things get a little rocky, the soldiers start defecting, moral is bad. Saul had one job to do. God just asked him to do one thing: wait. And he doesn’t do it.

He disobeys God. He offers the sacrifice on his own. The sin here really is impatience. He just will not wait for God’s timetable. God is going to deliver his people. But before we get too judgmental with Saul with this point, anybody here ever get impatient? Anybody here ever get tired of waiting for God’s timing in your life and do something stupid? You see, Saul is anxious like so many of us get. But instead of bringing his anxiety before God, he allows fear and anxiety to drive him to impatience and then he disobeys. He offers the sacrifice himself. Samuel comes and says verse 11, “*Saul, what have you done?*”

Now here’s his 2nd mistake. Instead of acknowledging what he did and repenting and being honest, Saul says, “*When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you didn’t come at the set time*”--it’s kind of your fault Samuel--“*I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favor*.”

Literally the phrase that Saul uses is, “I have not put God in a gentle mood.” That’s the literal Hebrew phrase. That’s his picture of God--somebody that he has to kind of manipulate or try to control or get into a gentle mood, so that God will do what Saul wants him to. Samuel says, “*You’ve acted foolishly. You’ve disobeyed the command of the Lord*.” That’s always a foolish thing to do--always.

If you turn over to chapter 15, Saul once again is given very clear instructions from God through Samuel. This battle is an act of judgment from God upon the Amalekites. They had been involved in tremendous violence and wickedness against Israel. They & their possessions are to be utterly destroyed. No one from Israel is to profit from this battle.

But once again, Saul uses human wisdom and greed and he doesn’t obey the Lord. He saves some of the best of the cattle and sheep for himself and his men.

So Samuel goes to confront Saul. Now Saul knows he’s done something wrong when Samuel comes. How is he going to respond? Did you ever see a kid who knows he’s done wrong, but hopes to get away with it by acting like a picture of innocence and virtue? Well, here’s what Saul is going to do. Look at Verse 13. “*When Samuel reached him, Saul said, ‘The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord’s instructions!*’”

“We sure do love the Lord, don’t we Samuel?” He’s using all this hyper spiritual language. He’s just blowing smoke. Samuel’s old, but not that old. Verse 14, I love this. “*But Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?*’” Look at v 15. Saul answered, “*The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites*”--it wasn’t my idea; the soldiers did it--“*And they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God but we totally destroyed the rest*.”

Notice this: “To sacrifice”--not just to the Lord, but “to the Lord **your** God, Samuel. You should be happy.” Then he says, “We didn’t just destroy the rest, we totally destroyed the rest.”

In verse 16 Samuel says a single word: Stop! He can’t stand to listen to Saul try to spin the truth anymore and he confronts him once again with the truth that Saul did it for financial gain. But Saul continues to argue, verse 20 “*But I did obey the Lord*”, and not only is he disobeying God, but he’s also denying the truth.

**<ARROW>** So Samuel speaks these great words. These are some of the greatest words ever uttered by a human being, Verse 22-- “*But Samuel replied: ‘Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*’”

All of the other religions get it wrong. There is one God, and he cannot be manipulated by any human actions. And He is concerned with your heart and your character and your ethics. Most of all, He wants your obedience. More than any one sacrifice, more than he wants a lot of good things like going to church, memorizing Bible verses –more than that he wants an obedient heart.

**<ARROW>** And this leads us to our second point. Saul puts his confidence in human intelligence more than trusting in the word of the Lord. It’s time to make the sacrifice, my men are deserting, and Samuel isn’t here. So, what’s the logical thing to do, I’ll make the sacrifice myself. It makes sense, but he doesn’t obey the word of the Lord. And later, Saul said to himself, it doesn’t make sense to kill these cows and sheep, I could sell them for a lot of money or I’ll breed them with my other sheep. So, I’ll spare these animals.

Sometimes God’s word will be clear to us, but it might not make sense to our human intelligence. And at that point, we will have to make a decision to obey God’s word or not. Maybe you’re like me and Saul and it’s difficult to obey God when it comes to finances. God, I don’t see how you are going to provide, so I’m going to do it for you and stop giving to the church. Then when all my bills are paid, I’ll start giving back to you. It makes sense from our perspective, but it’s not obeying God’s Word.

Saul never really faces the truth here and Samuel tells him “*The Lord has rejected you as king*.” This is a final decision.

Now, when Samuel says these words to Saul, this is a crossroads moment. Saul has a choice to make. Saul could accept God’s word with humility and grace. He could accept God’s decision, and do the best job possible in the time he has left to make a transition to whoever the next leader will be. But he doesn’t do that.

He grabs on to Samuel’s robe and won’t let go, as if somehow he could, by holding onto that robe, hold onto all the power and the glory and the crown that he can’t stand to lose. And he rips the robe. And Samuel says, “*This is a picture of what’s happened. God has torn the kingdom from you*.”

You’ve got to understand the irony of Saul’s life. God calls him to be king, and he hides in the baggage. God calls him to let go of the crown, and Saul grabs on and he won’t let go. He never gives God a submitted heart, not really.

At the end of chapter 15 are two very sad verses. Look at verse 34. “*Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him*.” They didn’t see each other again although Samuel mourned for Saul and all that Saul might have been, and all that Saul could have done. “*And the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.*”

Well, things go from bad to worse, and Saul goes through a complete psychological and emotional collapse. And if you read his story. It’s very painful. He experiences the complete disintegration of his personality. He goes into a very deep depression with very violent mood swings--from sorrow for the mess that he has become, to just defiant, homicidal anger, paranoia.

His final descent begins in chapter 28, so turn there now. Verse 3, “*Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land. The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart*.” That’s one of the themes of his life.

“*He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, ‘Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.’ ‘There is one in Endor,’ they said*.’”

Now in verse 7, literally when Saul says he wants a woman who is a medium, he says, “a woman with a pit.” The way it worked was like this. Some people had access to caves--sometimes just like fissures in the ground--and they would use them to set themselves up in a kind of business and claim that they had access to spirits down in the underworld.

And Saul himself had outlawed this. But now he was troubled. The Philistines now had proceeded north and they were close. He was terrified, and he wants a crystal ball. So his advisors find this woman, but she says, “No, I can’t do this. King Saul has outlawed this behavior.” This is the irony. Saul here is breaking his own law. He says, “The king will never find out.” He’s in a disguise. So she agrees.

**<ARROW>** Now, our last lesson here is that Saul couldn’t get an answer from God because of his own sin, so he turned to other human religions like this medium. And today, many people look to the stars, or psychics, horoscopes, or other occult practices to find answers. And God is very clear that we are to stay away from these types of practices. In Deuteronomy 18:10-11 it tells Israel that no one is supposed to get involved in these things. The Bible teaches us that there exists evil spirits whose ultimate goal is to turn you away from the true God. And God doesn’t want this to happen, so he tells us to stay away from any occultic practices.

Now, the final part of the story is actually almost comical. The idea of the story is that this medium is pretty much a fake. And this is the way that it worked in those days. Somebody would come to this medium, and she would say, “Who do you want to see?” “I want to see my dead wife,” So she’d take them to the pit. “Look down there. Do you see her?” “No, I don’t see anything.” “Well I see her. What do you want me to ask her? I’ll ask her anything, and she’ll talk to me and I’ll tell you.” And that’s the way it would work. It was just a sham deal, but she’d make money off of it.

That’s by way of background. Saul comes and says, “I want to see Samuel.” She says, “OK, let’s go to the pit.” They look down in the pit. Saul says, “Bring up Samuel.” Look at verse 12. “*When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice*.” Why does she cry out? Because there was somebody there! The pit is working, and it’s the last thing in the world she expected. It’s never happened before. It completely freaks her out.

So Samuel comes up, but this is God at work. And He tells Saul what’s going to happen, and it’s not good. Saul finds out that God is at the end of his patience, and the time for David, for a new king, has come and Saul’s time is over. He’s had over four decades. He’s done enough damage. And the next day there’s going to be a horrible battle, and Saul is going to die. And that’s what happened.

Now the question you’re got to ask yourself is how did it come to this? How could Saul sink this low? He was God’s choice to be king, but he ends up abandoned, paranoid, desperate, running in disguise to a fraudulent psychic for guidance for God’s people.

And it’s a funny thing about Saul. He didn’t set out to be a bad king. He just never got around to giving God his full confidence. He just didn’t trust God. Do you? Do you really trust God more than your own abilities and intelligence? Not that God can’t use those things in us, but our trust first has to be in God and not anyone or anything else.

I hope you don’t make the same mistake that Saul made. I hope that if God is setting a task before you, you don’t hide in the baggage. I hope that if God is saying “Wait” to you, “just wait. Just trust me and wait,” that you don’t give in to your anxiety and do something stupid. I hope that if you’ve been disobedient to God that you don’t try to spin it. You don’t try to hide it. You just come to the cross and confess it. I hope you start each day by giving God your full confidence rather than reading your horoscope everyday.

Lance pray and invite others to come up and light candle and pray together.