

Saul's Anointing: A Case of Wasted Opportunities in Light of Gods' Gifts 1 Samuel 10

"But today, you have rejected your God, who saves...and you have said to Him, 'Set a king over us!'"

Introduction: "Nothing is more expensive than a missed opportunity" – H. Jackson Brown

In 1954, a man named Walter chauffeured his friend Arthur down to the lightly populated area known as Orange County, an area full of small farms, dirt roads, and orchards. Coming to a small clearing where bulldozers had cleared an area, Walter explained his vision to Arthur about a great gathering spot for families to come and experience merry-go-rounds, railroads, adventure, and nostalgia. Arthur thought to himself, *"My poor deluded friend! He's going to put a bunch of merry-go-rounds and roller-coasters out here, forty-five minutes from L.A. He'll go broke! But out of respect for our friendship, I didn't say what I was thinking."* Walter went on to encourage Arthur to buy up all the land around the sight of future fun, assured that in a year or two it would be worth 10x's what he paid for it. *"Well, I was too smart to get caught up in Walt's enthusiasm! I didn't buy any real estate around Disneyland—and by being so 'smart,' I passed up a chance to make millions!"* Walter was Walt Disney, Arthur was Art Linkletter, and the rest is history.

In 1976, the founder of Atari, Nolan Bushnell, was offered a 33% share in a startup company of a friend of his called Apple for \$50,000. He declined. Though worth \$50 million today after selling Atari and Chuck E Cheese, his share would be worth over \$160 billion! Or Matt Damon, who would have more than doubled his current net worth had he accepted an offer from James Cameron to act in his then upcoming film called *Avatar*, which he was offered 10% of the entire box office take. What did Matty leave on the table? Only a cool \$250 million. Missed opportunities can be costly.

We can all relate at some level with opportunities we missed out on, relationships we regret, or resources that we wasted. But typically the cost of these is material or monetary at best, or heartache at worst. But there is another type of wasted opportunity that every person faces, and that has to do with the time they have been given on this earth, the reality of whom they will serve, and the assurance of where they will spend eternity. God is gracious, offers Himself up by faith, but there is an inevitable end of His patience: *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."* 2 Peter 3:9-10.

As we come to 1 Samuel 10, we see a case of massive wasted opportunity, where Saul is not only anointed as king, but given every opportunity to succeed. He had God given stature, will be given the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, but would NOT take advantage of these resources. He was like a few friends of mine growing up who squandered athletic ability by refusing to train hard (SO FRUSTRATING to those without it!) or those who were given every advantage in education and career path only to chase after meaningless pursuits. The **goal of the morning** is to see these misses in Israel's past so that we do not repeat the same mistakes.

ASSURANCES & RESOURCES GIVEN, BUT NO TRUE CHANGE PRODUCED (10:1-16)

Signs given to assure (1-8) – As we closed out chapter 9, we saw Saul entering the land of Zuph in the area of Benjamin, the backyard where Saul grew up. Saul entered the city hoping to find help finding his missing donkey's and was instead ushered into a feast at Samuel's house, where he was the honored guest, a place to spend the night, and news that the donkey's had been found.

- **Formally Anointed – but still a secret** – On the way out of the city, Samuel pulled Saul aside (9:27), sent his servant on ahead, and made known to him the word of God. HE was to be prince over Israel, to reign over them and save them from the hand of their enemies. There are two things that are interesting about this scene: 1) Good news is shrouded in secrecy, but not really in a happy way. There are good secrets kept about exciting events, like the French's 50th anniversary party. Then there are bad secrets about exciting events, like finding out you came into some money at the expense of the death of a loved one. This whole coronation of Saul does not come off in a rejoicing way, but one shrouded in a veil of sadness; 2) It is clear Saul is overwhelmed, as he would keep this a secret from his family and hide during the public announcement.
- **Geography is key** – If we look at a map, we can see the importance of where these events took place, not just for this chapter but for those to come. Look at verse 5, as Saul was instructed to go to **Gibeath-elohim** (which meant “*hill of God*”), where there was a **Philistine garrison**. We also know there was a garrison in **Geba** (1 Sam 13:3), which Jonathan, Saul's son, would have a military victory. The Philistines were embedded in the land, not just on the outskirts, and one of Saul's primary and first assignments as king would be to rid the land of enemies. This would be a test of **faith, trust, and courage**, qualities shown by Jonathan and eventually David, and that which Saul lacked immensely.
- **Three amazingly specific signs** – God's grace and providence is shown in blessing His own people, and even in those who oppose Him. God brings sunshine and rain on the righteous and unrighteous, gives us marriage and laughter and sports and beauty that is enjoyed by believer and unbeliever alike. Though Saul's anointing as king was God's response to the evil request of His people, He still gave Saul **assurance as king**. This is seen in the **three intensely specific signs given to Saul to reassure him in his task**. 1) He would meet two men by **Rachel's tomb** (Gen. 35:20) who would tell him the donkeys were found and his father was indeed worried. 2) Next, by the Oak of Tabor (somewhere on the way to Bethel, but a place all locals would have known), he would meet 3 men with 3 goats and 3 loaves of bread, and give Saul 2 of them; 3) Finally, when approaching Gibeah, he would encounter a group of prophets coming down from the high place, and Saul would join in their singing and prophesying. Verse 9 tells us ALL of these signs came to pass that day. Let's talk about the third one briefly:

Saul was given resources to succeed in the task God had for him. He was going to have the **Spirit of the LORD rush on him** (10:6), he would prophecy (6), and he would be given another heart (10:9). As this all unfolded, he prophesied and worshipped in such a way that all those who saw wondered aloud whether this was the same Saul they knew, the son of Kish?!?? They were amazed so much that they created a Proverb, a cultural saying “Is even Saul among the prophets”, which meant “*will wonders never cease?*”. One would think this would signal a redeemed man ready to lead Israel in battle AND worship, but that is clearly NOT the case. Here is what we have to know about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the OT.

The Holy Spirit would minister to a person for a specific task and often for a finite amount of time – We saw the Spirit come on **Bezalel** in Exodus 31:2, along with ability, knowledge and intelligence to build, craft and beautify the Tabernacle. In **Judges 14:6**, the Spirit rushed on Samson at the beginning of his judgeship and he struck down 30 Philistines. But the Spirit could also leave a person, especially in the midst of disobedience. In **1 Samuel 16:14** we'll see that the Spirit will depart from Saul, would come onto David, and was replaced with a harmful Spirit. David saw this and feared it after his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 51:11). In other words, just having the Spirit in the OT did not ASSURE salvation, as it does today in the New Testament or New Covenant era. When someone is saved today, they are given the Spirit, indwelt permanently by Him (Romans 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14), assuring us of salvation (Rom. 8:15-17), interceding for us (Rom. 8:26-27), gifting us (1 Cor. 12:11) and helping us understand and apply Scripture (1 Cor. 2:12).

Saul also prophesied and worshipped, which was legitimate, but not sealing. In Numbers 11:29, Moses said he wished all people would be able to prophesy, since it is a good thing, but in 1 Kings 18:28, the same word was used of the prophets of Baal as they *cried out* and cut themselves, trying to have their gods hear and respond to them (which of course, they could not).

Here is a small but important point. We must be careful when we apply what happened in the OT with what happened in the NT and even now, since God was dealing directly with Israel, not the church. However, it is a bit interesting that Saul was able to perform these ecstatic, external, seen-by-all acts, for a time, but his heart was NOT truly changed. Sometimes, when we share the gospel with others or people make a commitment to Christ, they hope for some external or emotional change: *feeling a special peace, or passion, or speaking in tongues, or SOMETHING!* Now, God DOES change our emotions and affections for Him in salvation, but that is not what HE gives for assurance. He gives us the Spirit so that we will have the ability to understand Scripture, to worship, to obey, to follow, learn, and mature. Following Christ IS a turning from your life as it was to obey Him in everything, committed by faith to serve Him alone. An ecstatic experience alone that does not yield obedience, a love for Christ and others, and new appetite for Scripture is simply that, an experience, not transformation.

- **Mission Clarity** – “Now when these signs meet you, **do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.** Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.” (10:7-8) – Saul was supposed to get to work, primarily in beginning to scrap with the Philistines with the assurance that God would be with him. Drive out the enemy, establish purity in worship, and lead the people in the word of God – that was the mission! Now, hold onto this for a few weeks because it has bearing on chapter 13, as Jonathan puts this into action but at the first sign of struggle and counter attack, Saul folds under the pressure. Leadership is NOT for the fainthearted, you will always face opposition, and those that lead by conviction and faith will persevere.

Secrecy held reveals (14-16) – After prophesying, Saul met his uncle who asked the simple question, “*What did Samuel tell you?*”, to which Saul told a half-truth (or a full lie?). He told his uncle about the donkeys being found, but again, kept the whole matter about the kingship hidden or secret. This could be seen as a sign of humility, but Saul will prove over and over again that it was not humility but fear that kept him away from leading. But this would not stop God from putting him on the throne, giving the people what they wanted, and even blessing the people in certain ways.

CALL TO CONFESSION, BUT STUBBORN COMMITMENT HELD (10:17-24)

A hopeful repeat of past repentance (17-19) – Samuel calling all of Israel to **Mizpah** had special significance. Anytime Israel was all gathered in one place, it signaled corporate solidarity and unity, and they were always healthiest and most effective when unified. But Mizpah itself held its own significance. If you remember back to a dark part of Israel's not too distant past from this event, the nation gathered **against** the tribe of Benjamin, men of whom ashamedly and abhorrently toward the concubine of a Levite. This event is so gross it's hard to repeat, but it was such a thing *"that has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt"* (Judges 19:30). Israel gathered 400,000 men against 26,000 soldiers of Benjamin, and the total loss was over 40,000 deaths in Israel and 25,100 deaths in Benjamin. This was a dark time in this place, as sin had reached a zenith and God punished the whole nation.

But a better historical marker happened at Mizpah in 1 Samuel 7. It was here, at the outset of Samuel's leadership, that the people in one voice said, **"we have sinned against the LORD"**. They turned from their idols, returned to the LORD with all their heart, and served Him only, ushering in a generation of victory and worship. As Israel gathered once again there was hope that this could be a time of change, repentance, and renewed following of their God...*but it was not to be, as the people held stubbornly to their rebellious ways.*

God reminded the people of their past, how He repeatedly delivered, saved, and brought the people out from the clutches of their enemies to the land of promise. He then reminded them that **"today, you have rejected your God, who saves you from ALL your calamities and your distresses, and you have said to him, 'Set a king over us'. Now, therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your thousands."** (10:19) – Perhaps there was a pause, a dramatic silence given to see if the people would walk in wisdom and humility and declare once again **"WE HAVE SINNED AGAINST THE LORD"** and experience the sweet freedom of God's forgiveness and the joy of restoration! But Israel proved to be too much like us today, where we would rather grip our sin like a hand full of water, only to open it and realize there is nothing there, instead of yielding to a gracious God. Today, my friends, do not hold stubbornly to your sin, but confess it, ask for forgiveness, and turn from it to follow our God through Jesus Christ.

Clear choice, but hidden reality (20-22) – So the people went through the formal process of **drawing or taking lots**, a way of understanding God's will through the choosing of stones (Num. 26:55; Josh 18:6; Prov. 16:33). This was the exact process that Israel participated in according to **Joshua 7** as they first came into the Promised Land and been defeated by the puny city called Ai (see, no one can defeat Ai!) Trying to understand what happened, the nation was pared down to a tribe, to a clan, to a family, to a man. This pointed to the fact that Achan had coveted and stolen the devoted items from Jericho, hidden them, and thus bore the wrath of God. God stoned and then burned Achan and his family, calling the place the **Valley of Achor**, which means "valley of trouble".

Here, the same process took place, as the tribe of Benjamin was chosen, the clan of the Matrites, and finally Saul the son of Kish was called out. God made what was hidden known, to all the nation, without a doubt. Even in spite of their rejection, they could rally behind God's choice, battle the Philistines, and renew pure worship. There could be a rising from the ashes, a comeback story to tell generations to come. **The problem** – *Saul could not be found! Oops. Was he sick, looking for more donkeys, what?*

Nope, he was hiding in the storeroom with all the luggage. The people had to ask the LORD, and He replied. I would have loved to hear the tone of the LORD when He said “**Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage**”, but suffice to say, this was not a reason for celebrating. This was an ironic start to his kingship, one that became a microcosm of his reign.

Irony of a confident shout (23-24) – Getting called to the carpet by the LORD, being reminded of God’s care in the past, and having their newly allotted king hide in the baggage, one would think it would give the people pause about the decision they were about to make. But never underestimate the power of sinful, stubborn, rebellion in the human heart! Coming out from the baggage, they brought the unknown (to most) Saul in front of them, and lo and behold, he was **taller than any other Israelite from the shoulders upward!** In a statement of deep irony, Samuel said, ‘*do you see him? See, who God has chosen? There is no one like him among the people!*’ And the people’s words revealed their heart, “**Long live the king!**”. The people of Israel missed an opportunity because they missed the point! They should have remembered that the scepter of kingship would not depart from **Judah, not Benjamin** (Gen. 49:10). They should have listened to the Lord and their leader in Samuel. But they wanted something tangible, NOW, and something like everyone else around them. Not only would they miss out on blessing, they would have to endure the negative impact on Saul’s kingship.

CLARITY IN THE MIDST OF PRESSURE, BUT NO FOLLOW THROUGH (10:25-27)

God’s divine design for a kingdom – Giving Saul every opportunity to succeed, Samuel reviewed the rights and duties of the kingship for Israel, a paradigm for leadership that far transcended Saul’s rule. If Saul were wise, he would have listened to Samuel’s voice. **Deuteronomy 17:14-20** laid out specific laws for the governing of God’s people. It included:

- God would choose him and he would be from Israel itself
- He should not acquire horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt
- Should not acquire many wives who would turn his heart away from God (see: Solomon)
- Should not acquire excess silver and gold for himself
- He should write a personal copy of the Law to be able to read and study it all the days of his life
- He should keep the Law himself so he would **fear the LORD**
- He should NOT elevate himself above his brothers, so that in doing all of these, he may continue long in his kingdom.

Saul, like all who lead in government, had an opportunity to do what was right in God’s eyes, which would have been the best for all people. Leading is difficult, and there will always be those who oppose, here referred to as **worthless fellows** who despised Saul before he even began, and God provided supporters, here given as **men of valor whose hearts God had touched**. The reality is, almost every king of Israel (in both the united and divided monarchy) failed in each of these ways, as do most of those who God has placed in governmental positions. We remember this, that as believers we follow imperfect people in a broken system who rebel against God’s command, we **submit** (Rom. 13:1) to governing authorities because we follow God’s will (1 Pet. 2:13-15), giving honor to those God has placed over us (1 Pet. 2:17). But it also means we await a day that we will have a true king over us, who will rule with perfect justice and bring peace, fulfilling all that God has designed for a true and everlasting kingdom.

What opportunities do we miss? None of us want to waste the opportunity to walk rightly with the Lord, whether you have been a believer for years or are still contemplating who is God of your life. God gives us every opportunity to turn to Him, to confess our idols and sins and receive forgiveness, being restored to Him. What a gift! Remember, ***“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”*** (James 4:4) Are we enemies of God or are we considered a friend? Israel chose to be like the world. Let us learn from their mistake.