

The Thread

WEEK 14- DEVOTION 1

"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" - Romans 10:14-15

The history of God's people is sometimes hard to watch. Over and over again, they blow it. Big time. (Now before we judge them, if we were in their shoes, you can bet we'd have a similar track record.) You'll see a little bit of that this week, and definitely more as you move on. But in spite of their crummy track record, God managed to work through His people.

See, God wanted to be the only king His people needed. They were a nation after Him. They were supposed to be a nation that, by its very identity, led others to know and fear the Lord. But they weren't satisfied with God's plan. They wanted a king like other nations. And God relented and gave them what they wanted. And while God still used the Israelites to make a name for Himself, it wasn't the same.

The Israelites were supposed to be a testimony to God and His character, and draw people to Him. It didn't work out perfectly. And so God in His wisdom knew that there would need to be a better way. God sent Jesus to be that way. And just like you see in this week's memory verse, God's Word is the way people find out about Jesus. God's Word is like the more perfect version of the Israelites. It draws people to God. Memorize these verses this week. They represent one of the best summaries of evangelism you'll find anywhere.

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WEEK 14- DEVOTION 2

"And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place." - 1 Samuel 3:8-9

Some years ago a cell phone company had a very famous advertising campaign built around the phrase, "Can You Hear Me Now." The sales pitch was that their company had better signal coverage, and you never had to worry about not being able to hear or understand what the person on the other end of the line was trying to say.

Read 1 Samuel 3. Young Samuel's problem was not that he could not hear a voice calling out to him; he just wasn't sure whom the voice belonged to. Twice he went to Eli thinking he had called him, but both times Eli told him to go back to bed. Eli soon realized Samuel was hearing the voice of God. He told the young boy to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Three quick thoughts:

- The voice of the Lord is always distinctive, speaking in peace and in perfect alignment with the Bible.
- Samuel made a declaration, "You are the Lord, I am your servant."
- To be able to hear God we must be listening for Him.

In your prayer time today, declare to the Lord that you are His servant, spend time listening instead of always doing the talking, and learn to distinguish clearly the voice of God.

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WEEK 14- DEVOTION 3

"But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, 'No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.' And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, 'Obey their voice and make them a king.' Samuel then said to the men of Israel, 'Go every man to his city.'" - 1 Samuel 8:19-22

Read 1 Samuel 8. Once the Israelites inhabited the Promised Land, they decided they wanted to have a king just like every other nation. God had led them out of slavery in Egypt, provided their every need while wandering in the wilderness, and given them great military leaders to win victory as they marched to their future homeland. After all God had done for them, they decided they wanted to be ruled by a king.

God's people made an interesting decision. They decided they wanted to be just like everyone else. They wanted a man to fight for them instead of God. And God finally told Samuel to let the people have what they wanted. In many ways the people in Samuel's day, some 3,000 years ago, were much like we are today. Their selfish thinking always led to bad results. As you pray today, ask God to lead your life and put His way of thinking and living ahead of yours. You will never go wrong by letting God be in control of your life.

Something to think about . . .

- How often have you stumbled in your Christian life because you wanted to be like others instead of who God uniquely created you to be?
- How often have you trusted in the opinions of people to help you through the tough times of life instead of first praying and seeking God's direction?
- Can you think of a time when things turned out just the way you wanted them to, and the result was a disaster because it was contrary to God's plan? What did that teach you?

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WEEK 14- DEVOTION 4

"And he said to the people of Israel, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' But 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.'" - 1 Samuel 10:18-19

It's probably already happened to you a few times in your life. You had a good friend you took places with you, and maybe even bought a gift for at Christmas or on a birthday. Maybe you helped the person out through a bad time in life. Then one day, this friend rejects you and no longer wants to be a friend. You're bummed out, and your thoughts are like, "And after all I did for them!"

Read 1 Samuel 10:17-27 and 1 Samuel 11:12-15. Maybe this is what was rolling through the mind of God when the Israelites demanded a king to lead them. (Probably not, but we would understand if it was.) After everything God had done for them, with the parting of the Red Sea and victories in the Promised Land, the Hebrew people more or less rejected God in favor of choosing to follow the lead of an ordinary man.

Do you know what God's ultimate response was to the people and their decision? God chose to keep on loving them! And that should be your response when people reject you. Tough? Yes! But then being a Christian is sometimes a tough thing to do.

Something to think about . . .

- Pray today for those people who have rejected you, or treated you badly, and ask God to help your response to be one of love.

The Thread

WEEK 14- DEVOTION 5

"But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.'" - 1 Samuel 16:7

If you were going to customize a quarterback for your favorite video game, how would you make him look? Tall and fast with a strong and accurate arm? Or short and slow with average arm? What if you were in charge of picking out a lead actor for an upcoming action movie? Would they be handsome and in great shape? Or the average looking with a bit of a gut? Now, what if you were picking a king? What would he look like?

Take a second and read 1 Samuel 15:10-11. Then read 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Samuel was confident that Eliab was going to be God's choice. He just knew it. But God reminded him that while people look at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart. Eliab and all of Jesse's other sons might have been taller and more handsome than David, but those weren't things God was looking for. God was going to use someone that had a heart that would follow Him. That's what was important to Him.

We're no different than Samuel. We all have preconceived notions about what type of person would fit into certain roles. We quickly look at people and size them up by their appearance. If they don't measure up to a certain standard, we write them off in no time. Maybe you should read 1 Samuel 16:7 again.

Something to think about . . .

- Why is it so easy for us to focus on people's appearance first?
- How do we begin to look past appearances and look at the heart?