

April 12: 1 Samuel 7-9 and Luke 13:1-21

The ark is retrieved by the men of Kiriat-h-jearim. Twenty years pass. A lot can happen in two decades. The house of Israel begins to seek The LORD, but they are only seeking Him half-heartedly. Samuel explains that they must give up their pagan practices. Their other gods and Ashtoreth poles have got to go. The people are obedient, they repent, and a sacrifice is made.

Samuel gets older and appoints his sons as judges over Israel. Unfortunately, Samuel's sons did not take after their father. They were dishonorable men, seeking ill-gotten gain, taking bribes, and perverting justice. The people see what these men are doing so they confront Samuel about installing a king. Samuel tries to dissuade them from gaining a king. He explains that the king can do pretty much whatever he wants. If he wants to take someone's land, then he can do just that. The people will not back down, though. They want a man that will judge over them and go out before them to fight their battles. The irony here is that God had already been doing that for them. They were seeking to put a fallible man in the place of God. Samuel is distraught over this and he does the only logical thing. He takes his concerns to The LORD. God tells him to listen to the people and give them a king.

Saul will be the first king of Israel. He is taller than everyone else in the land and will start off as a capable leader. We see some of his leadership skills when searching for the lost donkeys. One of his traveling companions suggests that they seek the man of God to tell them where the donkeys are. Saul asks what they will bring to the man, knowing that it was customary to present a gift to the seer. When Samuel sees Saul, he knows that he is the one that God has set apart to be king.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus tells the people about their need for repentance. He brings up two examples of tragedies. One was man made and the other was a natural disaster. Some Galileans had been slaughtered and their blood was mixed in with the pagan sacrifice. Some other people were crushed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. The people viewed the folks that fell in these tragedies as cursed because of their sin. Their thought was that these things happened as punishment. Jesus minces no words with them when He explains that the folks still living are no less sinful than the folks that perished. They all need to repent. As we walk this earth, we are going to run into rough times. They will happen. Those tough times are not necessarily because of our sin. Sometimes they just happen.

Jesus then tells the folks to embrace when the tough times hit. He gives the parable of the barren fig tree. The vineyard owner comes to the tree for three years and for three years, it bears no fruit. So he tells his worker to cut it down. The worker requests that he be able to fertilize it. In the original Hebrew the worker requests to "dung it up." Sometimes, things are going to get dunged up in our lives. Those can be times of spiritual growth if we let them be. Of course, that is a lot easier said than done!

April 13: 1 Samuel 10-12 and Luke 13:22-35

Saul is anointed king. Samuel pours the ceremonial oil over Saul's head, there is brief ceremony, and Saul is presented as king. Many of the people were thrilled that they have a king now.

Others were not so happy about it. Unlike the folks that were pleased by Saul's anointing, these unhappy folks did not bring the customary gift to their new king. Saul knew that there were those who hated him, but he said nothing.

An offensive is launched against Jabesh-gilead by Nahash the Ammonite. The men of Jabesh request a treaty with him, but the only treaty Nahash is interested in is gouging out the right eye of everyone and humiliating all of Israel. The men of Jabesh request nothing be done for seven days. If no one comes to rescue them, then they will surrender. Saul receives word and invades the Ammonite camp, leaving very few survivors.

Samuel delivers his final speech. He gives a brief history of the Israelites in the time of judges. He warns the people that they and the king must follow God. If they do this, then they will be blessed. If they rebel, The LORD's hand will be against them. Saul might be in charge, but he is not really in charge. God is. The people must not forget that.

In the Luke reading, Jesus tells about the narrow way to get into heaven. He warns about the people that will go to Him and say, "But we did all this stuff for you." Sadly, for them, they will not be recognized by Jesus. Unfortunately, there is no way for us to do enough good to get into heaven. That is all done through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. As believers, we should seek to do good works, but those works do not have any saving properties to them. Works are important because it shows what we believe, but we should not do them thinking that it will earn our way.

Jesus also laments over Jerusalem saying that she kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. The Old Testament prophets were despised by most of the people when they were walking the earth. They were hated because they were always telling the truth. The truth was ugly to the people because they had walked away from God and were leading to ruin. The people will do the same thing to Jesus. They will welcome Him, but eventually His sayings will become too hard. Rather than change their ways, they will give Him up to be crucified.

The truth does not become less truthful just because we do not like it!

April 14: 1 Samuel 13- 14 and Luke 14:1-24

Saul becomes king when he is 30 years old and reigns for 42 years over Israel. Though he was the anointed and chosen king, he will not establish a dynastic rule. His sons will not inherit the throne. Instead, it will go to someone else and his line. It all comes down to a fatal mistake that Saul makes while out in the field. Saul has his troops gathered at Gilgal. Samuel has given his word that he will be there in seven days to make the sacrifice before they go into battle. Unfortunately, as time goes by, Saul becomes more and more worrisome about the upcoming battle. Seeing that Samuel is still not around, he makes the sacrifice himself. This might not seem like a big deal to us. However, in those days, the only person authorized to make the sacrifice was the priest. No exceptions. Samuel enters the camp, ready to perform the sacrifice, but he smells the scent of burnt meat lingering in the air. He goes to Saul and asks, "What did you do?" To his credit, Saul tells the truth. He was afraid of what was going to happen. Saul's problem is that he had more fear of what the Philistines might do to them on the battlefield than

he feared The LORD. I pray that we do not let the things of the world scare us into making hasty decisions. Some decisions we make will have lifelong consequences.

The Philistines advance, taking control of the pass at Michmash. Jonathan, Saul's son, decides to head to the Philistine Garrison without telling his father. He and his armor bearer kill about 20 men in their attack. While he is gone, Saul makes a proclamation that none of his men can eat anything before evening. Jonathan returns and not knowing what his father had proclaimed, dipped his spear in some honey to eat. His energy is renewed. The troops see this and tell him that Saul has forbidden eating anything. Jonathan says that his father has brought great trouble for the troops. At that, the men start killing the livestock nearby and eating it. Even though the animals are clean, the troops are still sinning because they have not properly prepared the meat. The Mosaic Law expressly forbid eating meat with blood in it. Saul seeks to correct this misstep by allowing them to properly prepare the meat.

Saul asks God if they should go after the Philistines. God does not answer. So, they decide to see who caused the sin that keeps God from speaking to them. After a short process, the sin of Jonathan is identified. Saul says that his son will die because he ate the honey when he was not supposed to. The people intervene and prevent Jonathan from being killed.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus calls out the religious leaders when He heals a man suffering on the Sabbath. He asks them bluntly if their son or an ox fell into a large hole on the Sabbath, would they wait until later to help? None of them have an answer. I think they did have an answer. They would help their sons out of the hole on the Sabbath because it is the right thing to do. However, they will not dare prove Jesus right in His teachings.

Jesus also teaches about the way of humility. When they enter a home for a meal, they should take the seat for the lowest person there. That way, the host might come in and move him to a higher seat. If the person goes immediately to the seat of honor, there might be someone more important that was invited. Then the host will have to embarrass that person, directing him to a lower seat. It is important for us not to become too puffed up with ourselves.

April 15: 1 Samuel 15-16 and Luke 14:25-35

Samuel gives instructions to Saul about how to handle the upcoming battle against the Amalekites. They are to destroy everything in the city of Amalek. Nothing is to remain. Saul and his troops go in and strike down the Amalekites. However, they see that the Amalekites had a lot of nice stuff. They had some good cattle, sheep, and other choice animals. Rather than following the command of destroying everything, they only destroy the worthless and unwanted things. They are not completely committed. Samuel goes to confront Saul. Samuel says that he has carried out God's instructions. Samuel simply replies, "Why do I hear the sound of sheep and cattle?" Saul tries to explain it away, saying that the troops brought all of this good stuff back so that they can sacrifice it to The LORD. Samuel then asks what The LORD takes more pleasure in, obedience or sacrifice? God takes more pleasure in obedience to Him and His commands. If we obey Him, then that spirit of sacrifice will also follow. Saul and these men were lying to themselves. They had no intention of sacrificing these animals to The LORD. They simply came up with that excuse to make it seem as if they were obedient.

Chapter 15 closes with the statement that God regrets making Saul king over Israel. This is not to say that God thought He made a mistake in doing what He did. God knew exactly what He was doing. God is all perfect and can play the long game much better than we can. Saul was more of a placeholder. God knew from the beginning that Saul would mess up.

Samuel is mourning Saul and his indiscretions. God asks Samuel how long he is going to cry about Saul. The LORD tells him to get up and go to the house of Jesse. One of his sons will become the new king of Israel. However, it is not Jesse's oldest son that will become king. Instead, it is David, the youngest. God makes a way for David to enter Saul's court. Saul was having a hard time of torment since the Spirit of The LORD had left him. So, to make himself feel better and calm his nerves, he called for David to play the lyre for him.

In the New Testament reading Jesus warns the people about the cost of following Him. Faith should cost us something. As believers, our allegiance should be first and foremost to Him. Before they decide to follow Him, they must calculate the cost. As believers, we are called to take up our crosses daily and die to self. As believers, God is going to call us to do some things that the world may find foolish. We must be prepared for that.

April 16: 1 Samuel 17-18 and Luke 15:1-10

The Israelites are still engaged in battle with the Philistines. The Philistines have a giant warrior named Goliath that comes out and taunts the Israelites. The Philistines propose that if the Israelites have a man that can come out and defeat Goliath, then they will surrender and become Israel's servants. However, if Goliath defeats the Israelite, the Israelites will surrender and serve the Philistines. No one in the camp is willing to fight Goliath.

One day, David comes to the Israelite camp to bring some food. He hears Goliath taunting the Israelites. His brothers explain what Saul will do for whoever kills Goliath. David decides that he will take the uncircumcised Philistine on. He is rebuked when he says he will do this, but David explains that he has fought off a variety of wild animals to protect the flock. Goliath is just like one of these wild animals and he will take him down. Let's keep this in mind when God sends us battles. Perhaps He is using them to prepare us to slay our giants.

David is brought before Saul. Saul tries to put David in his royal armor, but when David tries them on, he is not comfortable with the equipment, so he doffs it and goes back to what he is most comfortable with. Rather than take a sword and shield out, he takes his sling and five stones. The stones would have been about the size of a tennis ball and smooth. This would allow the projectile to fly straight. David goes out to fight against Goliath. Goliath sees the boy's youth and how handsome he is and hurls insults at David. David takes his sling and one stone and sinks the stone into Goliath's forehead. The giant falls to the ground. David runs up to him, takes Goliath's sword, and cuts off the giant's head. The Philistines run in terror.

Jonathan, Saul's son, dedicates himself to David. At first, this is not a problem since Saul is pleased with David. That does not last. Instead, Saul decides that he wants to kill David. He tries to kill David twice by a spear, but it does not work. David escapes. Realizing that his

daughter Michal loves David, Saul offers her in marriage. He thinks he will trap David by demanding that he defeat 100 Philistines and bring back proof of their execution. David takes a group and kills 200 Philistines and brings back the proof. Michal loves David, for a time.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus explains the joy of a sinful person coming to have faith in Him. If one sheep leaves the flock of 100, then the shepherd will leave the 99 to go find the one lost sheep. He rejoices when he finds the sheep. As believers, we should rejoice when we see the lost repent and come to Christ. We are already God's people, there was rejoicing when we came to Him. Now, we can rejoice when we see others come to Him. If we expect that we will have folks making a fuss over our faith, then we are making the Gospel about us. The Gospel is not about us.

April 17: 1 Samuel 19-21 and Luke 15:11-32

Saul gives orders to his son and servants to kill David. Jonathan is a friend of David, so he warns David about Saul and his intentions. Jonathan stands up to Saul, reminding him of the blessings that David brought Saul. First and foremost, it was David that defeated Goliath. Saul has a change of heart, but only briefly. Later, Saul sends his servants to kill David in his home. David flees. His wife Michal (Saul's daughter) puts the household idol with some goat hair on the bed. When Saul's men show up, she informs them that David is sick. They take the news to Saul and he orders that David be brought on the bed so that he can kill him there. When they find the idol in the bed and not David, Saul confronts Michal. Michal does not ask why her father would be trying to kill her husband. Instead, she insinuates that if she did not help him escape, he would kill her.

Jonathan is meanwhile trying to help David. They come up with a clandestine plan to get word to David if Saul is still looking to kill him. On the first night of the festival, Saul keeps his cool. He assumes that David is ceremonially unclean. The second day of the festival comes and David is still not present. This throws Saul into a rage. Jonathan goes to the field, sends his arrows and gives the secret message to his messenger chasing after the arrows. Saul learns that Jonathan has been helping David and then tries to kill him! Saul's hatred of David and his desire to see him killed has brought him to the point that he will threaten the life of his son!

David continues to evade Saul. However, he is well known and is easily recognized.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son. The son goes to the father and asks for his inheritance up front. Essentially, the child is saying that the father is essentially dead to him and he wants what is coming to him now. After he gets his money, he squanders his fortune. Eventually, he hits rock bottom, looking to the pigs' feeding trough with envy. At that, he decides to head back home to his father. The father is pleased that his son has come back and has decided to live as his son again. So the father throws a party for his son. The son that did not leave sees the fuss being made over his brother's return and becomes jealous. The son that did not leave does not realize the blessing he has by staying by the father's side the entire time. He did not reach that point of destitution like his brother had. When repentant lost people come to The LORD, we can make a big deal about it! It's great to see people come to know who God is and make Him Lord of their lives.

April 18: 1 Samuel 22-24 and Luke 16: 1-18

Saul's paranoia is increasing. He desperately wants to get rid of David. Saul was in Gibran, sitting under a tree. He yells at his troops because his son had made a pact with David and no one told him about it. At this, Doeg the Edomite remembers seeing David in Nob. He tells Saul about how the priests in Nob helped David when he was fleeing. Saul sends messengers to the priests to summon them. The priests arrive and the king orders that his men kill them all. None of them will raise their sword against the priests. Doeg does, though. He slaughters 85 of them. Only one escapes and take the news to David.

David finds out that the Philistines are fighting against Keisha. He asks God if he should launch an attack. The LORD tells him to take up arms against the Philistines. David is obedient. Saul finds out that David is there and thinks that God has handed David over to him. David manages to escape and finds himself in a cave. While Saul is chasing him down, he enters the cave that David and his men are hiding in so that he can relieve himself. David's men see this and tell David that God has handed Saul over to him. Their reasoning is that clearly God wanted David to kill Saul right then and there. David shows considerable restraint and discernment. He will not kill the king. However, he does cut off a corner of his robe that he later shows Saul as proof that he could have killed him, but did not. If we had the opportunity to remove an enemy in our life would we show such restraint?

In the New Testament reading, Jesus tells the parable of the dishonest manager. The manager is about to be fired and he must give account for how he has handled the money. He has the clients come in and adjust their accounts, gaining their favor. There are four proposals on what that looked like:

1. He dropped the price to gain favor with the debtors.
2. He removed the interest charges on the debt.
3. He removed his commission off the transaction.
4. He reduced the debt back to what it should have been in the first place.

Whatever he did, it must have been legitimate since he had to give an account to his boss. One lesson to be learned by this particular parable is to be faithful with what God has given us. Whether God has given us a little or a lot, we are called to use it for Him and His glory, not for ill gotten gain. If we are faithful with little, we can be trusted with much. If we cannot be trusted with little, can we really be trusted with a lot?

April 19: 1 Samuel 25-26 and Luke 16:19-31

Samuel passes away. All of Israel gathers to mourn him. Afterwards, David went to the Wilderness of Paran. While he is there he learns that Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, is shearing sheep. The shearing of sheep was a festive occasion because wool was a valuable commodity. Nabal should have been in a better mood to help David out. However, Nabal compares David to a runaway slave and refuses help. David is enraged when he receives Nabal's answer, telling his men to take up their swords. David does not take vengeance because one of Nabal's men is

smart enough to tell Abigail, his wife, about her husband's folly. She brings gifts to David and his anger subsides. After her encounter with David, Abigail returns home to find that Nabal is drunk from the festivities. When he wakes up the following morning, she tells him about what has happened. Nabal hears it, has a seizure, becomes paralyzed, and dies 10 days later. David learns that Abigail is now a widow, so he sends his men to offer his marriage proposal. She agrees. David also marries Ahinoam. Meanwhile, Michal has been given by Saul to Palti.

We see Saul struggle more with his inner demons about David. Even though Saul had promised earlier that he would not harm David after his life was spared, Saul is back on the hunt. David and his men come upon Saul while he is sleeping. Abishai, one of David's men, requests to take Saul's spear and thrust him through. His thought is that the king has been delivered by The LORD. All he needs to do is run him through with the spear once. David again spares Saul's life. However, they take his spear and his water jug. Then they confront Saul's bodyguard, asking why he did not protect the king. Again Saul claims that he will not harm David.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is living in excess. All of his needs are met. He has plenty. Meanwhile, poor Lazarus sits outside the gates, destitute. He longs to eat the scraps of the rich man, but instead the dogs come and lick his sores. Lazarus and the rich man die. The rich man suffers in the fiery pit. Lazarus is taken up into heaven with Abraham. The rich man looks beyond the divide and asks Abraham for relief. He is told that they cannot cross the chasm. The rich man then requests that he be sent to warn his five brothers. Abraham explains that they have Moses and the prophets. If they listen to them, they will be okay. The rich man retorts, explaining that if he is raised from the dead, they will believe and repent. Again Abraham denies the request and informs him that if they don't listen to Moses, they will not be convinced even if a person is brought back from the dead.

In our lives, some people will not believe no matter how much evidence is given to them. It does not mean that we should stop presenting the evidence. However, when people fail to come to belief, we should not consider that our failure. As sad as it is, some folks will just not come to believe.