

1 Samuel 9:1-10:16 // Lost Donkeys and the Secret Kingdom

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 June 2024

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] Yeah, you can find the reading on page 278 of your pew Bibles. Samuel anoints Saul. There was a Benjaminite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish, son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becherath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin.

Now, Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.

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 Shalim, 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 Zuth, 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.

[1 : 19] But the servant replied, Look, in this town there's a man of God. He's highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take.

Saul said to his servant, Well, if we go. What can we give the man? The food in our sacks is gone. We have no gift to take to the man of God. What do we have? And the servant answered him again. Look, he said, I have a quarter of a shekel of silver. I'll give it to the man of God so that he will tell us what way to take. Now, formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, Come, let us go to the seer, because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.

Good, Saul said to his servant. Come, let's go. So they set out for the town where the man of God was. As they were going up the hill to the town, they met some young women coming out to draw water, and they asked them, Is the seer here?

He is, they answered. He is ahead of you. Hurry now. He's just come to our town today, for the people have a sacrifice at the high place.

[2 : 34] As soon as you enter the town, you'll find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not begin eating until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice.

Afterwards, those who are invited will eat. Go up now. You should find him about this time. They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel coming towards them on his way up to the high place.

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 ruler over my people Israel. He will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on 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. Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?

[3 : 43] I am the seer, Samuel replied. Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and in the morning I will send you on your way and will tell you all that is in your heart.

As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them. They have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line?

As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart. And all these signs were fulfilled that day.

When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him. The Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying.

When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, What is this that has happened to the son of Kish?

[4 : 51] Is Saul also among the prophets? A man who lived there answered, And who is their father? So it became a saying, Is Saul also among the prophets?

After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place. Now Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, Where have you been?

Looking for the donkeys, he said. But when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel. Saul's uncle said, Tell me what Samuel said to you.

And 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Lamont, thanks for reading that.

[5 : 49] If you could keep your Bibles open at 1 Samuel chapter 9, that would be really helpful as we look through chapters 9 and 10 up to verse 16 of chapter 10.

And you can find an outline in the notice sheet, although we're going to look at the second and third points the other way around when we get there. So let's pray and ask for God's help.

Let's pray together. Merciful God and loving Heavenly Father, we know we need your help as we turn to your word now. As you speak to us, give us ears to hear, minds that are attentive to understand, hands and hearts that grasp your love for us and respond rightly to what you say.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in verse 1 of chapter 9, we meet a wealthy man in Israel, a man of standing, and he's called Kish.

And I've got a picture of him in my mind. Here he is. This is how I'm picturing him. I've only ever seen Clarkson's Farm once, but in the episode I watched, Jeremy Clarkson had lost some animals.

[6 : 59] He'd lost cows. They'd found a gap in the fence. And the episode proceeded with Clarkson and his buddy, who I think is the one who actually is the expert on the farm, wasting hours on end trying to get their cows back.

And you had this sense of the frustration, of the hours wasted. And the program, Clarkson's Farm, is very popular. I don't really know why, but maybe partly because it's an escape.

Sometimes that's what we want from TV. And in TV, like Clarkson's Farm, we see his struggles, and it seems inconsequential, and it distracts us from what's going on in our lives.

Well, we get to 1 Samuel chapter 9, and it starts remarkably like that, as though it's an escape from what's been going on. Here is an ordinary day on the farm of a man called Kish.

He sends off his son to find some donkeys that have gone missing. And there's the detailed futility of verses 3 and 4, that they go through the glens of Ephraim in verse 4, and on through the area of Shalisha, but they did not find them.

[8 : 07] They went on to the district of Shealim, but the donkeys were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, but they did not find them. And I love verse 5, because it's just so very real.

When they reached the district of Zuth, 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. That's just exactly what would have happened, isn't it?

And that's all well and good, but as a Bible reader, by now we're thinking, what on earth is going on here? Yeah, because if we just back up for a moment, we've been in this series in 1 Samuel, and God's people, Israel, are in a crisis.

Samuel has got old, he's put his sons in charge, and they are corrupt. And Israel has seen this happen before. The last judge before Samuel, or leader of the people, Eli, put his sons in charge, and it was a disaster, and they came under the judgment of God.

Our only hope for Israel, with the Philistines bearing down on them, these neighbors who wanted to invade, our only hope at this stage is that at the start of the book, Hannah made a prophecy in chapter 2, where she was clear that God would save his people by giving strength to his anointed king.

[9 : 26] Israel doesn't have a king at this stage, but Hannah has made that prophecy. Now, last week, the people asked Samuel to give them a king, but they asked for all the wrong reasons.

They want a king, not to lead them towards God, and get favor from God, but to replace God, to be a substitute for God. And God said to Samuel, at the end of chapter 8, listen to the people, and give them a king.

And then we get this extraordinary story of the lost donkeys. But our first point this morning is, Saul can't find the donkeys, but God's hidden hand is at work in ordinary ways.

So we get this twist in verse 6, because the servant, just as they're about to head away, has this bright idea. He says, look, in this town there is a man of God. He is highly respected, and everything he says comes true.

Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take. And Saul thinks to let his servant down gently. Nice try, but we've got nothing to give to this man of God.

[10:32] We've, even the food in our sacks, we've now run out, we've eaten it all. And then it just so happens, verse 8, the servant says, look, I have a quarter of a shekel of silver.

I'll give it to the man of God, so that he will tell us what way to take. It's as though he just seems to find it in his sack. What's this doing here?

This silver. So they head towards the town, and just as they're going up the hill towards it, it just so happens, they meet these women coming out to draw water, and the women say, you're right on time to meet the man.

He's not normally there, it turns out. Verse 12, he's ahead of you. He's just come to our town today. The people have got a sacrifice at the high place. As soon as you enter the town, you'll find him before he goes up to the high place to eat.

So in verse 14, they walk into the town, and they bump into Samuel, the prophet who leads the whole of the people of God, the spiritual leader of the nation, coming towards them at that very moment.

[11:37] In verse 18, Saul says to Samuel, would you please tell me where the seer's house is? It's a bit strange that Saul doesn't know what Samuel looks like, the leader of God's people.

He's still trying to find the seer. It does remind me of the moment in *The Empire Strikes Back*, when Luke Skywalker's trying to find the Jedi Master, and he's with Yoda, and he keeps saying, can you take me to him, and doesn't realize that Yoda is the Jedi Master.

If you haven't seen *The Empire Strikes Back*, don't worry about that. It's got nothing to do with this. But Saul, you see, is saying, where is the seer? And Samuel is the prophet that he needs.

But he's still trying to find donkeys. So what we're seeing all through the chapter is the view from below, the human eye view of what's going on in Saul's life. But because Samuel is there, who is the prophet through whom God speaks, we suddenly get the God's eye view, the view from above of what's been happening all along, why we have this curious series of events.

So the key for us is in verse 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 ruler over my people Israel.

[12:59] He will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. Why would he do that? God says, I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me. Samuel knows this is the man, so he tells Saul, as for the donkeys, verse 20, as for the donkeys you lost three days ago, don't worry about them, they've been found.

And then this key news for Saul, and to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line. The view from above, God has chosen this man to be his king.

And he's ordained everything in the chapter, the runaway donkeys, the exact places that they would go, and the time it would take to search for them. The women coming out from the town at just the right moment to meet them and direct them, so that Samuel coming out of the house at just the right time would bump into Saul.

It's a pattern of God at work that we see, again, ultimately fulfilled when he sends his ultimate forever king, the Messiah, Jesus, the king we really need.

So it's no accident that Luke tells us that in those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census be taken of the entire Roman world, just so that Joseph will need to take Mary down to the line of his ancestors, down to Bethlehem, because that's the town of David, where the Messiah needs to be born.

[14:30] And then the way that God ordains that, the whole cosmos, so that the wise men from the east follow the star, and they come and they go to Jerusalem, alerting Herod to the birth of a child who is the king of the Jews.

Herod sets about to kill the children, and Mary and Joseph have to flee to Egypt as refugees. But Matthew tells us all this took place because of the word of the prophet Hosea, that God had said, out of Egypt, I've called my son.

And Jesus would fulfill that promise. God's providence at work. That's what we call it, God's providence. That God isn't just at work in the miraculous, supernatural events where he breaks in. He's also at work all the time in our world through the ordinary, everyday working of all things. The people we meet, the places that we go.

So is God's providence only concerned with his chosen king, his Messiah, Saul, David, Jesus, ultimately? Or does it extend to lowly, everyday people?

[15:38] Well, the Bible assures us that God is providentially at work in all of our lives, fully in control, and he is deliberate and purposeful. Things happen for a reason.

If you're here and you're not yet a Christian, this could be a moment to reflect on why you've even come here this morning. It may be that the reasons that you've decided to be at church this morning seem very ordinary and mundane.

But could it be that God has been at work in your life to bring you here that you would reach out for him? Tonight, we're looking in our sermon series in Acts, Acts chapter 17, where it says to us that God has set the exact places and times that we've all lived.

And it says this in verse 27, God did this so that people would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him. He is not far from any one of us.

And for those of us who are Christians, Romans chapter 8 assures us, written to Christians trying to come to terms with suffering in their lives and thinking, why are we still suffering and people are dying when we've got assurance of the favor of God in Christ?

[16:49] And Paul says, in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, that they would be conformed to the image of Jesus. But in 1 Samuel 9, we needed the word of God to Samuel to make sense of the weak soul was having.

In other words, unless and until you have the words of God to explain what God is doing in your life, often it will remain obscure. Sometimes we simply can't know why things have happened.

Other times, you can look back and in God's kindness you can see, ah, it looked so ordinary, but God was unmistakably at work and it's encouraging that at times we can see that.

When I was working as a lawyer, I was in a firm where you got to go on a six-month placement to a different city. So I was based in London but you got to apply. I don't speak any other languages so I applied to Beijing because you didn't have to speak Chinese to go.

No one else applied to go to Beijing so I got to go. A few weeks after I found out that I was going to Beijing to work, I was on a train in England up the east coast from London and I was sat at a table on the train with a Lonely Planet guide to China and my Bible and a guy opposite me was a full train after a while said to me, what's going on here?

[18:12] And I said, well, I'm reading that because I'm a Christian and I'm reading that because I'm going to go and work in Beijing and we got chatting and he said, look, I'm a Christian as well and I know a guy in Beijing and can I put you in touch with him so that you've got contact with him when you go.

So he did and I said, that's fine and I got put in touch with this guy but he was a guy who kept getting contacted by people in the UK, America, Australia who'd had contact with Chinese people through church, international cafe, things like that who had then gone back to mainland China and he was trying to help them and encourage them to keep looking at Jesus.

So I got in touch with this guy and coming to Beijing, he said, well, funnily enough, there's a guy who became a Christian doing his law degree in Sheffield and he's now in Beijing and he's too far away in the city for me to meet up with him but maybe if you're working near him, you could meet him.

So when we got the further details, it just happened that this guy was working in the same skyscraper as me as a lawyer. So we got introduced and put in touch and we met up every week for lunch and we looked at Colossians together.

So we just worked through the Bible one-to-one through Colossians. In one way, it was very ordinary but it was a special time for us and we became friends and it encouraged him and hopefully and me and I got back to the UK.

[19:45] Then I got together with Kathy who I'm married to who's from Sheffield and I was telling her parents when I met them about this time in Beijing and the lawyer from Sheffield and they

opened their visitor's book for just their home and the guy who I'd been meeting in China had spent Christmas Day with them when he'd been in Sheffield.

So he knew Kathy from that experience. So we went out to meet him after we got married and stayed with him and for him this was all very encouraging that the family that had offered him hospitality when he was looking into Jesus in Sheffield were related to the random lawyer who'd ended up in Beijing in the same tale block reading Colossians.

So look, I tell that story because it's in lots of ways step by step was very ordinary. Was any of that miraculous? I don't think so and yet looking back God at work providentially ordaining the little decisions the guy I sat with on the train and working in the same part of a city as a guy who knew the Sheffield connection all of it just encouraging him in his walk with Jesus.

God at work mercifully among his people to save them and deliver them. What do we do with all of this? Well we need to remember as I just said that often without God's word as we had it here in 1 Samuel 9 we won't be able to join the dots and work out why things have been ordained in our lives the way they have.

But do you trust that God has achieved everything he wanted to achieve to raise up Jesus as the saviour of the world? That he has done that?

[21 : 33] And can you trust that if you are in Christ God is at work in your life deliberately purposefully in everything every day for good purposes?

It means that as Christians we never have to live with regret about kind of sliding doors moments. We don't have to think to ourselves you know if only if only I'd applied for that job that I didn't go for or moved to that city or chosen different subjects at school or said yes when that person asked me out or put my kid in that other school or become a Christian earlier or no we can trust God that he is merciful and he is sovereignly at work ordaining the steps that we take and if we're in Christ then through his hidden hand of providence he is at work in our lives for good.

That's our first point. Secondly Israel is up against it but God's hidden hand means his words can all be trusted. Samuel anoints Saul as leader but I think we can take it as king in chapter 10 verse 1 even though we're not told he's the king yet.

Chapter 10 verse 1 Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him saying Has not the Lord anointed you ruler over his inheritance?

And then he gives Saul words of assurance and words of authority from God. So in verse 2 of chapter 10 he gives these three signs for Saul to look for that will assure him that whatever God says will happen will happen.

[23 : 17] He says when you leave me today you'll meet two men near Rachel's tomb at Zelzor on the border of Benjamin and they're going to tell him that the donkeys that he went to look for have been found his dad's worried about him.

Then he's going to go verse 3 on from there to this great tree of Tabor and three men are going to pass by on the way to worship God at Bethel and they're going to have three goats with them and three loaves and a skin of wine and then they're going to offer two loaves of their bread to him in verse 4 and he needs to accept them from them.

Then he's going to go verse 5 to Gibeah of God where there is a Philistine outpost and he'll meet some prophets there. And the places that Saul's going to go to here seem very interesting.

So Rachel's tomb that he'll go to for the first sign on the route home well Rachel was the wife of Jacob who became named Israel the father of the whole nation.

So being back at Rachel's tomb reminds him of God's promises to his people. Then he goes on to the tree where the men are on the way to worship God at Bethel.

[24 : 30] Well that's the hill where Jacob met with God and God gave the promises that Israel builds his identity on that God would secure them as his people a great nation.

But then he goes on to Gibeah of God which is where Saul's home is and Gibeah of God is the hill of God and there's a Philistine garrison there. What is Saul to make of these three places?

Well one thing is to think things are not quite right in Israel. this is the people that God had made these great promises to but here we are with a Philistine garrison right in the middle of the promised land.

Why does Saul need to hear that? Because God is communicating that he will keep his promises, he will deliver his people and he's going to do it through his king and Saul is now that king.

Then in verse nine we read this, as Saul turned to leave Samuel God changed Saul's heart and all these signs were fulfilled that day. In other words everything God says will happen, happens. [25 : 35] And we need to trust that today as well. It can seem difficult to trust Jesus' promises. Jesus promised when Peter saw that he was the Messiah he said I will build my church and not even the gates of Hades will prevail against it.

So you see the picture there in that promise? That it's like people's souls are lost. They're in Hades. They're locked in by Satan.

And Jesus is saying I will build my church and the gates of Hades cannot stand against it. It's as though it's like a hostage situation all around the world as lost souls are in the domain of darkness. But Jesus says as the word is proclaimed about him he will build his church and he will rescue lost people into his kingdom and not even the gates of hell can prevail against him.

So difficult to trust that promise isn't it when all around us the church is ridiculed, mocked, there's antagonism, there's hostility, people don't seem interested in Jesus but we can trust him because all of God's words are true.

[26 : 46] And sometimes we need that reassurance. Think about Jesus himself and the signs he gives to assure his disciples that he is in control. It gets to the Thursday of his final week and he says to Peter and John go into the city and when you go there you'll see a man and he'll be carrying a jar of water and he'll meet you and you need to follow him.

And when you see him go into a house say to the owner of the house the teacher asks where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples and he'll show you a large room upstairs all furnished ready for us and they go in and they find it exactly as Jesus said it would be. It's going to look in the next few days as though Jesus has lost control. He needs them to see he is completely in control. His words of reassurance. God's words can always be trusted and his words carry great authority.

So all through this chapter we're seeing that God's king Saul is under the authority of God's word through the prophet Samuel. Samuel is telling him exactly what to do.

So by the end of chapter 9 he sends the servant on ahead Samuel in verse 27 and then he says but you stay here for a while so that I may give you a message from God.

[28 : 05] It's literally that I may give you the word of God. Then he anoints him king and then over the page you see verse 8 as the prophet is giving the word of authority to Saul.

Verse 8 go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.

In order for Saul to be the right king for the people he has to obey the prophet the word of God. God's words bring us assurance and they carry authority.

We must obey them. But is Saul really up to the task? That's our third point this morning. Saul is a bit dubious but God's hidden hand will equip his king.

So let's pick things up again at verse 9 of chapter 10. As Saul turned to leave Samuel God changed Saul's heart and all these signs were fulfilled that day.

[29 : 10] God changes Saul's heart so that he is a different person and can fulfill what God's calling him to do. And then in verse 10 when he and his servants arrived at Gibeah a procession of prophets met him the spirit of God came powerfully upon him and he joined in their prophesying.

When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets they asked each other what is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?

A man who lived there answered and who is their father? So it became a saying. Is Saul also among the prophets? You can imagine when things surprising happened instead of saying well I never or never in a month of Sundays is Saul also among the prophets?

Such an extraordinary thing. What's going on? It's that God is equipping his servant the king by his spirit to do the task God has called him to do.

And that's true even with this man Saul where there are some warning lights on the dashboard about him. He's being appointed to be king which is the shepherd of God's people and he can't find lost donkeys.

[30 : 23] He's described at the beginning of chapter 9 as a very tall man taller than anyone else. And I know some of you are tall. There's nothing wrong with being tall today but in Samuel that is a bit alarming because in the beginning of the book when Hannah described what God's

righteousness is like she said how God takes down the proud and he exalts those who humbly trust him.

And the word she uses for proud is the word for tall. Sometimes in Samuel's time tall is proud. So Saul is unconvincing and yet we see here that God will fully equip him for everything he's calling him to do.

Well fast forward to God's forever king Jesus and we see him as exactly the king we need. Nothing dubious about him. A man who humbly entrusted himself to his father and ours.

And Mark tells us that at his baptism he came up out of the water and the spirit of the Lord came upon him. Equipping him for everything God was calling him to. And then where's the next place he goes?

He goes into the wilderness to take on the devil. Being tempted by Satan and equipped to defeat our greatest enemy as he doesn't sin.

[31 : 44] God delivers us through the king he's appointed and equipped. Folks our time is almost gone but just notice at the end that Saul heads home and we know by now that God is doing something momentous here for Israel.

Here is their first king. In God's mercy. mercy. Filled by the spirit. But notice as well how easy it would have been to miss the whole thing.

In chapter 10 verse 1 Samuel anointed Saul in secret even his servant didn't see it he sent him on ahead. God doesn't use the word king about him the whole way through.

And then at the end Saul gets back and his uncle greets him at the farm. Uncle Abner who we'll meet a lot later in the book. And Abner says where have you been? And Saul says I was out looking for the donkeys but we couldn't find them so we went to see Samuel.

And his uncle asks him what did Samuel say to you? And then we read in verse 16 that Saul says he told us that the donkeys had been found but he did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.

[32 : 56] It's literally he did not tell his uncle the news of the kingdom. kingdom. It's the first actual mention since chapter 8 of the king or the kingdom. Saul hasn't been called a king yet.

We've had the view from above. We can see what God's doing. But for everyone else in Israel looking from below like Uncle Abner God's saving work is a secret.

They're still thinking about the donkeys. And people around us are like that today. Going through life working hard watching the Euros. vaguely aware of the church as an institution.

Maybe aware of Jesus as a historical figure. And completely unaware that the big thing that the living God is doing in our world today is establishing his kingdom.

Saving people as they come to meet Jesus and put their trust in him. It's all too easy to focus on the donkeys. On the thing that can be seen. And miss the secret work.

[33 : 56] The hidden work of the kingdom. But our privilege is that when we go to Jesus he says the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you.

And we're reminded this morning that God is at work by his hidden hand. Often in seemingly ordinary ways through his providence. To keep his words.

To save his people. Through his spirit filled anointed king. Let's pray together. Almighty God and gracious heavenly father we praise you that you are fully in control and ordain and work together in all things for the good of those who love you.

We praise you for Jesus our matchless king our righteous king who has come to deliver us to redeem us that you display your mercy through him.

May we trust that your hand is at work in our lives through all the ordinary everyday ups and downs and may we take your word as our authority trusting your promises and keeping your commands.

[35 : 10] We ask these things for Jesus name's sake. offerings leading from all other journeys funds and prayers and let's encourage you