

When Thrones Are Thrown Away

King Saul. He couldn't believe it. King Saul. KING Saul. That 'king' thing had a ring to it though. Why only a short time ago, he was searching for lost donkeys. Now, the most important people in Israel were searching for him, and here among the equipment he hid. Though he stood a good eight to ten inches taller than everyone else, he never imagined he'd stand in royal attire. One day a good-looking rich kid, the next a king. He'd never expected to wear a crown.

We can't really know all that Saul mused while this new position as king over Israel was thrust upon him, but we can learn some extremely powerful lessons in observing him. These points become especially sharp in comparing Saul with his successor, David. Now, many excellent comparisons have been presented over the years between these two men. Thus we'll seek herein to cover but a few points that have become exceptionally poignant to us recently and which we believe may have direct application for all.

To begin with, Saul and David were both 'nobodies' each of whom God clearly and specifically anointed to be king. Neither looked for the office. Both were from well-to-do families, and both are described in the Word as handsome men. Both had significant character flaws, and yet both exhibited greatness under the anointing of God. Both were revered by the people, hand-picked by God,

sought-out by the great prophet Samuel, and yet one – Saul, ended up a devastating failure, a classic illustration for all time of good gone bad – really bad. And this is laid out in scripture for the saints to ponder - for each of us, in following after Christ, will face similar choices.

Referring to 1 Samuel 15, Saul reigned a fairly long time – 42 years, but the kingdom was taken away from him considerably earlier when, on one of his first assignments from the Lord, he failed to do all that the Lord commanded. He was instructed to wipe out the Amalekites – everyone including the livestock. He, however, gave in to the people's desire to keep the best of the livestock claiming later that he saved them for sacrifices. He also failed to 'do in' Agag, the king of the Amalekites.

Samuel lambasted him, saying,
"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king." (1Sam 15:22,23)

Now, Saul had no problem with executing severe judgment upon the enemies of Israel. In addition, Saul would later spend years trying to kill David. He even killed dozens of Hebrew priests and threw a javelin

at his son in a fit of rage. Saul wasn't a milk-toast king so to speak. He was never squeamish on capital punishment. So why did he fail, and specifically what happened such that God had to rend the kingdom from him?

True, he rejected the word of the Lord – Samuel said so. True, he feared the opinions of the people – he said so himself (1Sam 15:24) Yet, these outward issues were the result of something going on in Saul that is perhaps not so obvious.

It would be easy to focus upon the fact that he was not completely obedient to God's instructions and from that platform build a 'doctrine' supporting a legalistic adherence to some set of do's and don't's. This would play well with religionists. But, that hypothesis would crumble as we consider David. You see, King David was plagued with sinful acts every bit as bad as this one of Saul's yet God never took the kingdom away from him. In fact, although He dealt with David's sin, He ultimately promised him eternal life – a heavenly home. What was it that God saw?

Even Samuel needed a reminder - for as he was sent to find and anoint the new king, he first saw Jesse's older son Eliab and was quite impressed. *"But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Sam 16:7)* What God saw in Saul was not so much the outward disobedience but a heart problem.

I'll suggest we have a hint of it in 1 Sam 16:1,2: *"Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons."*

And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me."

Yes, Sam saw it too – Saul would kill him if he heard of this new anointing. Saul, who once was mind-boggled just by the prospect of being a king had taken to it with such ferocity that it had captivated him. It owned him. It ruled him. God was a sideline for him; in his mind, the people had made him king – thus, he feared/respected their opinion more than God's. He held on to this position as king with the frantic tenacity of a desperate drowning man.

He later knew of God's call upon David to be king but fought against it tooth and nail. Nothing was as important to Saul as holding on to the earthly throne. And herein, is the difference between the two men.

David knew he was to be king many years in advance yet he never strove after it. He never attempted to overthrow Saul but rather gave him allegiance and considered him as God's anointed all his days. Kingship was thrust upon David, but it never 'stuck' to him as with Saul. Oh, David remained king, but he never held to it, never lusted to keep it at all costs – in fact, when his own son Absalom sought to dethrone him, he left Jerusalem. Several loyalists followed him including Zadok the priest but, "... the king

said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place. But if He says thus: "I have no delight in you," here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him." (2 Sam 15:25,26)

David could lay it down. Saul couldn't.

Herein is the great lesson for all of us – it's about letting go and holding on. This world is a 'sticky' place filled with 'sticky' stuff. It sticks to the heart, and when it does it tempts us to hold on to it at all costs – even at the cost of the soul. On top of that, God Himself often gives us good things -- relationships, ministries, material goods, etc. that He sometimes later tests us with – will we adhere to them more than to Him? Or will we let go of them when He requires it and hold on to Him?

Even in heaven, we find those who have been given glorious crowns casting them before the throne of God. (Rev 4:9-11) And as a consequence, I'll suggest that those who are truly heavenly minded behave in like manner not just in heaven but here on earth as well. You see, even Jesus, Who the scripture says will subdue all things will then in turn surrender it all to Father God. (1 Cor 15:25-28)

It's not that God gives just to take away. In fact, the Bible says that the gifts and callings of God are for keeps (Rom 11:29). But He does test us from time to time to see what we're holding on to – the gifts or the Giver. What has God given you?

Good stuff and maybe ...some difficulty – so what are you holding on to? If God is leading you to -- can you truly let it go. Abraham did with Isaac. Moses did with Egypt. David did with the kingdom. Paul did with his 'stuff and status'. Jesus did with His life. Father God did with His Son.

Now the great thing is that those good things which God has given – when you can truly let go of them in obedience to His will -- in placing God at the center of your heart's deepest desire – you will one day see God return to you much more.

As for the sticky stuff of the world – keeping God in that central role makes you 'stick-resistant'. You can 'use stuff and love people' rather than the other way around.

Knowing what and when to let go and what and when to hold on – a key discipleship lesson. Lip-service doesn't count. Appearances don't matter. God sees the heart and knows the truth. Is an earthly throne sticking to you that shouldn't be? Conversely, are you holding on to what you should be - your faith, your Father?

I was so inspired when I learned of a wonderful brother who sincerely sensed the call of God to leave his position as senior pastor of a huge church in southern California to help a struggling little congregation of a couple dozen believers in a foreign country. (Obviously, I'm not advocating this for every pastor!) But this man heard the call and laid down the 'big ministry' for the 'small' (though what's big and small in God's eyes can be quite different than man's!). Interestingly enough, God later called Him back to help

pastor an even larger work than the one he'd laid down.

Many of us can 'lay it down' when the cost is small but personal investment seems to increase the 'stick-value' of our earthly thrones. My pastor tells the story of a church meeting in which a man got up and gave a moving testimony of how, when he was just a young man with only \$10 in his pocket, that he gave that \$10 to the Lord. Now, some thirty years later, he was a multi-millionaire. Asserting that God had honored his faith, he claimed, "I'm sure it's because I just gave it all to the Lord." At that, a sweet old saint chimed in, "And I dare you to do it again!"

Jesus plainly said, "...suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace." (i.e. he knows when to surrender his throne.) "In the same way," (that is, when God requires it) "any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 14:31-35)

May God grant us ears to hear, to discern. May we have hearts filled with heaven, with God's good and perfect ways, with the relentless love found in Christ. May we handle the 'thrones' so to speak of God's

blessings as David did his. In contrast to Saul, may we hold tightly to the Lord and keep only a 'loose grip' on the things of this life.

Surrender

By Marc James

*I'm giving You my heart,
and all that is within
I lay it all down
for the sake of You my King
I'm giving You my dreams,
I'm laying down my rights
I'm giving up my pride,
for the promise of new life*

*And I surrender,
All to You
All to You*

*And I surrender
All to You
All to You*

*I'm singing You this song,
I'm waiting at the cross
All the world holds dear,
I count it all as loss
For the sake of knowing You,
For the glory of Your Name
To know the lasting joy,
even sharing in Your pain*