

First Advent Service

The First Three Kings of Israel

Text: 1 Samuel 13:7-14 (NIV)

⁷Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. ⁸He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. ⁹So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. ¹⁰Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. ¹¹"What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, ¹²I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." ¹³"You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. ¹⁴But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

Theme: Saul, the Humble King who Exalted Himself

After Israel settled in the Promised Land, God was their king. At times He raised up judges and filled them with His Spirit to deliver His people from their enemies, but God made it clear that He was their king. However, this wasn't good enough for Israel. They wanted to have a king, just like all the nations around them. Samuel warned them that they would soon complain about the taxes and that the king would draft their sons into his army, but the people would not relent. They wanted a king. God said that if they wanted a king, they would get a king and suffer the consequences. None of their kings were perfect. They all had at least some flaw. This Advent Season we will be looking at the first three kings of Israel and compare them with Jesus, the King of Kings. Tonight we will look at Saul, the Humble King who Exalted Himself.

I. The Kingship of Saul.

He started as a very humble king. His father Kish was a man of high standing among the tribe of Benjamin. One day his donkeys ran away. Saul and a servant searched for them for a long time. Eventually, they came to the prophet Samuel to see if he could help them. God told Samuel that Saul was the one whom He had chosen to be king over Israel. When Samuel told Saul that he would be king, Saul answered, "*But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing?*" (1 Sa 9:21f) But Samuel took a flask of oil and anointed Saul king over Israel. When he wanted to introduce Saul to the people, Saul was so shy that he hid among the baggage. Saul was an impressive man, a head taller than anyone else, but he was also very humbled to be chosen to be the first king of Israel. When He was first introduced as king, there were troublemakers who despised him. After Saul won his first victory against the Philistines, some people wanted to put those troublemakers to death, but Saul was also gracious in victory. He said, "*No one shall be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel.*" Notice that he didn't even take credit for the victory. He gave all the glory to God. He started very humbly.

But eventually he exalted himself. A battle against the Philistines had gone badly. The Israelites were scattered. Samuel had told Saul to wait 7 days for him, but Saul got impatient. He took the sacrifices to the Lord and offered them himself. Just then Samuel arrived and asked, “*What have you done?*” (13:11) Saul disobeyed God’s command by offering the sacrifice himself, rather than waiting for the prophet. Because of that, the kingdom was taken from him. A man after the Lord’s heart would become king after Saul rather than one of Saul’s sons. The man who began so humbly was rejected because He rejected God’s Word and exalted himself before the Lord.

II. Jesus on the other hand remained the humble king.

Like Saul His reign began very humbly. He was born in a barn and laid in a manger because no one would open up a room for His poor parents. King Herod forced His family to flee to Egypt. Then they moved to Nazareth where He lived in obscurity for the next 30 years. Just like Saul was hidden among the baggage, Jesus was hidden in the hill country of Galilee. When He began His ministry, Nathaniel remarked, “*Nazareth, can anything good come from there?*” (Jn 1:46) The men whom He called to be His apostles were fishermen, a tax collector, and other people of low standing. It all began very humbly.

But unlike Saul Jesus fulfilled God’s command. His Father willed that He would offer His sinless life on the cross as the payment for all of our sins. Jesus dreaded the cross. Just before He was betrayed, He begged His Father to find another way. But when Judas came, He allowed Himself to be arrested. He was beaten and nailed to that cross. The people taunted Him to come down, but He remained there to pay for all the sins of the whole world. Paul put it this way in this evening’s epistle lesson, “⁶ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!* (Phil 2) Jesus remained perfectly obedient to His Father until He fulfilled every last part of the Father’s will. He was able to die with the words, “*It is finished.*”

For that reason, His Father raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand in Heaven, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. He is the King and Lord of Lords. He did not exalt Himself. He humbled Himself, but His Father exalted Him to the highest place in the universe.

III. This King is the One who will never let us down.

After Saul exalted himself, things started to go downhill for Israel. It got to the point that the Philistines were constantly oppressing the Israelites. Israel was not even allowed to have a blacksmith in the entire country because the Philistines feared that they might make weapons instead of plows. Things were so bad that no soldier in Saul’s army was equipped with a sword or a spear. (1 Sa 13:16ff) There were other times when Saul defeated Israel’s enemies, but it was always a mixed bag.

However, the one who trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame. It is tempting to be like Saul and to think that we know better than God’s Word. We sometimes think that the commandments are outdated. We wonder whether we can rely on God at all times. We doubt that even God can forgive some of our sins. When we talk about eternal life, we aren’t always so sure. We pray, and we

sometimes wonder how much good it will do. Like Saul it is tempting to think that we need to take things into our own hands. After all Benjamin Franklin said, “God helps those who help themselves.

But as Christians our trust is always in Jesus, our King. Our Psalm this evening is clear, “³ *No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame.*” (Ps 25:3) He hears all of our prayers in Jesus’ name. He forgives all of our sins for Jesus’ sake. He delivers His people from all evil. He blesses us in ways that we never expected. In the end He gives us the gift of eternal life. When we cling to Jesus, we find that the victory is always ours through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In tonight’s Psalm we also prayed, “*Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.*” Jesus is the King who is always faithful to His people. Don’t be like Saul who exalted Himself and doubted God’s Word. Trust in our Savior, and He will exalt you from your sins and all the evils of this world. Jesus is the humble King, who came not to exalt Himself, but so that He could raise us up and give us a share in His kingdom. We exalt Him in thanksgiving that He has exalted us.

Amen.

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