



Honing in on the Heart!’ Sermon Series

Sermon #16:

‘From Donkeys Missing to a Divine Meeting!’

Wednesday, May 22nd, 2024

Last week in ‘Honing in on the Heart:

- Last week we took time to have an ‘overview’ sermon in introducing Saul from the first two verses in chapter 9.
 - *Tonight, we’ll be focusing on chapter 9 and how God used lost donkey’s to bring the future king and the spiritual leader of Israel together.*
- Last week’s message was entitled ***‘A Survey of Saul!’*** from 1st Samuel 9:1-2.
 - I asked the question: *How do these two verses introduce us to one of the main characters of the historical narrative, that is, 1st Samuel?*
 - **Point 1: *Descendents Listed. (V. 1)***
 - **Point 2: *Distinct Looks. (V. 2a)***

■ **Point 3: *Double Length. (V. 2b)***

- Based on last week’s message, were you able to think and reflect upon how important it is that our heart is much important than what we look like on the outside?

‘From Donkeys Missing to a Divine Meeting!’

1st Samuel 9:3-27

Sermon in a Sentence:

What starts out as a mission to find lost donkeys turns into a divine meeting between Samuel and the first king of Israel, Saul. In this scripture text we see that Saul was sent on a working mission, specific words were mentioned, searching took place wholeheartedly for the Man of God, Supernatural words were uttered that matter, and there was a special wonderful meal to welcome Saul.

Intro:

- Tonight we’ve come to a pretty obscure passage in scripture.
 - ***Tonight is one of those nights where we see God use something that we see as unusual and ‘odd’, and use it as a part of His overarching plan.***
- ***Tonight we will see how God uses Kish’s Donkeys going missing, to call Saul to the kingship of Israel.***
 - In this passage of scripture that we are studying tonight, I am reminded quite quickly of how God can use anything at any time to get our

attention and also, change our circumstances for His Glory, and not our own.

- ***Dale Ralph Davis*** wrote a great commentary of 1st Samuel, and when summarizing this passage we are going to read tonight, here's what he said:
 - ***'Providence is God's way of providing for the needs of His people. That's not all of it, but some of it. When I use 'providence' here I mean that wonderful, strange, mysterious, unguessable way Yahweh has of ruling His world and sustaining His people and His doing it, frequently, over, under, around, through, or in spite of the most common stuff of our lives or even the bias of our wills.'***
 - The providence of God is not something that we were meant to be able to figure out. It's when we see God do something, yet we have no clue or idea what He's doing.
 - I believe the great preacher of the 1800s, Alexander Maclaren, had a great thought on this passage and God's providence:
 - ***'Think of the chain of ordinary events which brought Saul to the little city, -the wandering of a drove of donkeys, the failure to get on their tracks, the accident of being in the land of Zuph when he got tired of the search, the suggestion of the servant; and behind***

all these and working through them, the will and Hand of God, thrusting this man, all unconscious, along a path which he knew not.'

- The Hand of God is often in situations that we had no idea about, but it's His hand that has guided us and provided for us, time and time again.
- I hope that we all can have a Divine Meeting with God, even when the Donkeys go missing in our lives:

****Read 1st Samuel 9:3-27****

Question to Ask:

What circumstances arise in this passage that were brought about by God, to show Samuel that Saul was to be the next king of Israel?

Point 1: *Sent on a Working Mission. (V. 3-4)*

- 'Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, "Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys." And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, but did not find them.' 1st Samuel 9:3-27
- Saul's Father, Kish, sends him on a trip, but this is a work trip to find the lost donkeys.

- *Donkeys at this time were extremely valuable due to the fact that they were as one scholar describes them ‘beasts of burden’.*
 - They did hard work and were essential for successful farming.
- *The fact that Kish sends his son and a servant, show how valuable these donkeys were.*
 - We don’t know how they were let out to roam, but somehow, God orchestrated the circumstance in a way where they were let out.
- The phrase ‘Take one of the young men with you’, is important to look at in the Hebrew.
 - **Word Study**
 - The phrase ‘young man’ comes from the Hebrew word **‘Na’ar’** נַעַר which means young man, but can also be translated as ‘the first of the servants’ or ‘the head servant.’
- *So, Kish sends essential workers on his farm, on a working mission.*
 - *Because if the donkeys were missing, they would be limited anyway in the work that they would be able to do.*
- As this search develops, Dr. David Garland shared an interesting thought concerning the irony that can be seen in this passage:
 - *‘Just as Saul son of Kish was sent to ‘look for’ donkeys that temporarily could not be ‘found’, so also the people intent on making him king ‘looked for’ the bashful and reluctant Saul son of Kish, who temporarily could not be ‘found’*”
- So, verse 4 indicates their journey through that mountainous region in search for the donkeys.
 - *Saul and the servant went between the borderlands of Benjamin and Ephraim, but could not find the donkeys.*
 - The locations of Shalisha and Shaalim we are not sure of and seem to be obscure.
 - But, these names could be related to the names of the Asherite Clans in 1st Chronicles 7:30 and 1st Chronicles 36-37.
 - *The name ‘ZUPH’ that is mentioned in verse 5 is worth mentioning.*
 - Zuph was the 3rd great grandfather of Samuel that was mentioned back in 1st Samuel 1:1.
 - This land was named after him and was the area of land that was near the hometown of Samuel, Ramathiam-Zophim.
 - *By God’s providence, while searching for the donkeys, Saul had landed in the*

land of Samuel. Who he would meet shortly.

Point 2: *Specific Words Mentioned. (V. 5-10)*

- ‘When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant[a] who was with him, “Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us.” 6 But he said to him, “Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go.” 7 Then Saul said to his servant, “But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?” 8 The servant answered Saul again, “Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel[b] of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way.” 9 (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, “Come, let us go to the seer,” for today’s “prophet” was formerly called a seer.) 10 And Saul said to his servant, “Well said; come, let us go.” So they went to the city where the man of God was.’
- ***So, they arrive at the land of Samuel, and Saul wants to turn around.***
 - ***Verse 5 shows us that while his father, Kish, certainly cares about the donkeys, we know he cared more about the well being of Saul and the servant, so Saul thinks they need to go***

ahead and turn around. (Verse 20 reveals they were gone for 3 days on this quest)

- ***These words that are mentioned here in verse 6 by the servant are evidence that God can and does use people as His mouthpiece and to guide us and direct us where we need to go.***

- ‘But he said to him, “Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go.” 1st Samuel 9:6

- ***This verse shows us the magnitude of the impact we can have as believers to non-believers.***

- Odds are, this servant is not a Jew, but, he heard that there was a man of God in a nearby town.

- ***It seems to me that the reason this servant wanted to talk to Samuel, is that they felt the Man of God would somehow have advice or guidance on how to find these donkeys.***

- Oftentimes, those that have nothing to do with the Church or Christians, will look to the Church for guidance and support when needed most.
 - ***We need to be ready to help when they do.***

- The fact that the servant says ‘he is a man who is held in honor’, doesn’t mean he has a prior interaction with Samuel, but that the reputation of Samuel had spread to him, so that he knew to find him and hopefully, he could help with this situation concerning the donkeys.
 - *John Woodhouse makes a strong observation on how Saul fits into all of this: ‘Saul was seeking lost donkeys. He had no idea where this journey would lead. His lack of awareness of Samuel was part of his general ignorance of what was going on.’*
- *Then in verse 7, Saul doesn’t understand how they are going to be able to pay this ‘man of God’ when they get to him.*
 - ‘Then Saul said to his servant, “But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?”
 - *This verse also shows that they had been on the hunt for the donkeys for quite some time.*
 - They were out of food, and they didn’t seem to bring any money.
 - *Even these non-believers, so to speak, know that it was custom in ancient days that when you seek a prophet, it was common courtesy to bring a gift.*
 - Amos 7:12 gives us evidence of this
- *In verse 8, the servant is one step ahead of Saul, because he has something that they can give to this highly reputable and respectable man of God that they have heard about.*
 - ‘The servant answered Saul again, “Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel[b] of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way.”
 - *In the Hebrew, this verse literally reads ‘There is found in my hand a quarter of a shekel’*
 - *In the Hebrew text, it alludes to the fact that the servant didn’t just have this shekel, but that it appeared.*
 - This is not an ordinary story. This is a story where God’s hand of providence is very much present.
 - *Remember, that because God is in control, things don’t just ‘happen’.*
- *Verses 9 & 10 give us some added information from the narrator, and shows us an important fact about the man of God that is getting ready to come into the picture.*
 - ‘(Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, “Come, let us go to the seer,” for today’s “prophet” was formerly called a seer.) **10** And Saul said to his servant, “Well said; come, let us go.” So they went to the city where the man of God was.’

- *In this passage, we see the appearance of three terms that are all referring to the same prophetic office:*
 - ‘Seer’, ‘prophet’, and ‘man of God’.
 - **The narrator has done this for a reason to show that Samuel is often (and rightfully so), called ‘the last of the judges and first of the prophets.’**
- *When it comes to the OT, verse 9 is extremely rare.*
 - According to many scholars, including Dr. David Garland, verse 9 is the only example in the OT of a Semantic change, which is by definition, explanatory substitution of one word for another.
- *This is done by the narrator so that his audience knows what’s being discussed.*
 - A ‘seer’ in the Hebrew means one who sees, but with spiritual eyes.
 - The ‘prophet’ was one who was called by God to be His spokesman.
- **At this point, Saul decides to go with his father’s servant to find this man. Little does Saul know what is getting ready to unfold, but God surely knows.**

Point 3: Searching Wholeheartedly for the Man. (V. 11-14)

- ‘As they went up the hill to the city, they met young women coming out to draw water and said to them, “Is

the seer here?” 12 They answered, “He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Hurry. He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place. 13 As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately.” 14 So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place.’

- **Saul and the servant are on the manhunt for the seer, the man of God, prophet, whatever you want to refer to who will undoubtedly be Samuel.**
 - John Woodhouse pointed out that these verses are very similar to other men in scripture that were on a search **‘Anyone familiar with Biblical history will recall that there have been a number of occasions when an encounter with young women at a well turned out to be significant. The stories of Isaac, Jacob, and Moses each include a scene like this that was a defining moment in their life.’**
- **Because the women were going out to draw water, it was in the evening that they arrived at ‘the hill city’, which was more than likely, Ramah.** (Ramah in the Hebrew means height)
 - ‘And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of

evening, the time when women go out to draw water.’ Genesis 24:11

- Robert D. Bergen brings out a good point concerning the conversation that was started with these young women in verse 11.
 - ***‘Timeless social customs in the Middle East prevented men from having much contact with women in public, but women were permitted to speak even with total strangers under the circumstances presented here.’***
- In verses 12-13, we see that the women give a detailed answer as to where the man of God that these two strangers were searching for, was.
 - ‘They answered, “He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Hurry. He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place. 13 As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately.”
 - ***We were told earlier in this book that Samuel was a traveling judge for the nation. So while his hometown was Ramah, doesn’t necessarily mean that he was always there.***

- ‘And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. 17 Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD.’ 1st Samuel 7:16-17
- So, if Saul and the servant had been a day earlier, they would have missed this meeting with Samuel.
 - ***This is all part of God’s plan that He put together.***
- Before the temple was built, it was acceptable for the people to offer sacrifices at high places.
 - ***Once the temple is built, this won’t be allowed anymore.***
 - ‘The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD.’ 1 Kings 3:2
 - ***Remember, the place where they worshiped at Shiloh had been destroyed.***
- The urgency in the young women’s expressions, show that they had arrived at just the right time to be able to meet with the spiritual leader of Israel.

- *Since Samuel was a priest, He was offering sacrifices at the time Saul and the servant arrived.*
 - So, verse 14 shows us that Saul and the servant follow the instructions of these ladies at the well, and they find Samuel just where the ladies said that they would.
 - ‘So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place.’ 1 Samuel 9:14
- *They had found the man they were looking for, now we see that God had already told Samuel what was going to occur that day.*
 - Tonight we’ve seen that Saul was sent on a working mission, specific words were mentioned, they searched wholeheartedly for the man, and now...

Point 4: *Supernatural Words that Matter. (V. 15-21)*

- ‘Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed to Samuel: **16** “Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince[c] over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen[d] my people, because their cry has come to me.” **17** When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD told him, “Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is

who shall restrain my people.” **18** Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, “Tell me where is the house of the seer?” **19** Samuel answered Saul, “I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. **20** As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s house?” **21** Saul answered, “Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?”

- *Just a day before this, God had prepared Samuel’s heart for what was going to happen in this moment.*
 - Always remember that God may be prepping and preparing you today, for something that might not happen until tomorrow. Always be ready.
- *Though Samuel was not for the idea of a King for Israel, he is obeying the Lord in what God is directing Him to do.*
 - W.W. said *‘Samuel couldn’t say he was happy about the changes going on in Israel, but he was obedient to the Lord.’*
 - I wonder if Saul was able to realize at this point, that the lost donkeys, failed search, had all led to this moment.

- ***Saul thought he would get a revelation from the seer (which he did), but the man of God was about to give Saul a revelation from God Himself.***

- God is doing things in our lives right now that don't make any sense. But one day it will. While you're upset about the 'lost' donkeys in your life that you're searching for, God may be preparing you for a Divine Meeting with Him.

- ***In verses 15 & 16, we are shown how the Hand of God has turned this all around.***

- In what God spoke to Samuel the day before, He revealed that Saul was the one who was to be anointed as the first King of Israel.
- So, Samuel was prepared and it shows in how he engages Saul in their first conversation.

- ***Verse 17 shows us what God had in mind for Saul to do.***

- ****Word Study****

- The english word 'restrain' here in the ESV is quite interesting.

- It comes from the Hebrew word **'Atsar'**

עָצַר which is translated here as **restrain**, and in other translations, it's translated as **'govern'**.

- This Hebrew verb occurs 46 times in the Hebrew OT and every time, except this time it has a negative connotation.

- In 2 Kings 17:4 and Jeremiah 33:1 it suggests imprisonment.
- In Job 4:2 it suggests silencing.
- In 2 Kings 4:24 it suggests holding back.

- Scholar Robert D. Bergen said ***'1 Samuel 9:17 is the only location in Scripture where the word can be taken to mean 'rule'. By employing the verb here, the writer was suggesting that the Lord had determined to use Saul's career as a means of punishing the nation.'***

- As we will see in the rest of 1 Samuel, Saul will eventually fulfill all the meanings of this verb.

- ***Verse 18 is one of the most telling verses in all of 1st Samuel when it comes to Saul's Spiritual condition before becoming King.***

- 'Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, "Tell me where is the house of the seer?"'

- ***Samuel was not doubt one of the most recognizable figures in all of Israel at this time.***

- He was the main spiritual leader in all the land. And Saul lived only 5 miles away from Samuel, yet he approached this man as a total stranger.

- Asking Samuel where the seer was, not knowing that the seer was standing right in front of him.
- ***The contrast that the narrator paints here is striking.***
 - Samuel knows much about this tall young man.
 - Saul knows absolutely nothing, which truly shows us the spiritual blindness that Saul possessed.
 - ***The spiritual blindness that Saul had would show itself even more when he wouldn't be able to ready people properly.***
 - ***Especially as it relates to the relationships Saul would have with Johnathan, David, and Ahimelech.***
- In the last verse of chapter 9, we see that Samuel says he wants to make the Word of God known to Saul, which further shows that Saul did not know it, or the Lord at this time.
- ***In verses 19 & 20, Saul gets more information than he was originally seeking.***
 - ‘Samuel answered Saul, “I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. **20** As

for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's house?”

- Samuel tells Saul that the Donkeys were taken care of, now there are going to be new things that Saul would have to set his mind to.
 - ***Like becoming the king of Israel.***
- ***In verse 21, we see Saul's response. I'm sure he was shocked and dumbfounded at what this older gentleman was saying to him.***
 - ‘Saul answered, “Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?”
 - ***Saul is a farm boy. At this point, he's a humble country boy. So he knew he had no hereditary pathways for greatness, and has no idea why Samuel is talking to him like this.***
 - I'm sure the servant was shocked as well, especially considering he had been an instrument that God used.
 - While Saul was reluctant, he was about to be led to a feast by the decisive Samuel.

Point 5: *Special and Wonderful Meal. (V. 22-27)*

- ‘Then Samuel took Saul and his young man and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, who were about thirty persons. 23 And Samuel said to the cook, “Bring the portion I gave you, of which I said to you, ‘Put it aside.’” 24 So the cook took up the leg and what was on it and set them before Saul. And Samuel said, “See, what was kept is set before you. Eat, because it was kept for you until the hour appointed, that you might eat with the guests.” So Saul ate with Samuel that day. 25 And when they came down from the high place into the city, a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down to sleep.[f] 26 Then at the break of dawn[g] Samuel called to Saul on the roof, “Up, that I may send you on your way.” So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street. 27 As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to pass on before us, and when he has passed on, stop here yourself for a while, that I may make known to you the word of God.”
- ***Saul and the servant are made as guests of honor at this event.***
 - We do not know what event this was, but we do know that the people that were their were invited guests.
- ***Verse 23 and 24 support the fact that this hour was appointed. This was something that God had put together so Samuel acted accordingly.***

- This was so Saul could see that while he was looking for donkeys, God was making plans for you that you are seeing fulfilled now even as you eat.

- ***Then verse 25-26 show us that Samuel had a conversation with Saul on the roof of his home.***

- Verse 27 goes on to reveal that Samuel wanted to talk to Saul alone, about what all this was really about. We will see that next week in chapter 10 as the story continues.
- What is alluded to in verse 27, would become the anointing of Saul as king and communication from God would be received.
 - ***How incredible it really is to read a passage such as this one and know that God is always working out the details. We’ve got to be like Samuel. Listen and follow in His instructions.***

Conclusion:

- Maybe tonight, the ‘donkey’s’ in your life have gone missing.
 - ***Maybe you don’t know why.***
 - ***The donkeys in your life could be your children, spouse, possessions, career, favorite hobbies, health, a variety of different things.***
 - But I believe we’ve seen tonight, that even when Donkeys go missing, there’s a divine appointment that God may be working on.

- ***God may allow the donkeys in your life to go missing so that you find Him in the midst of pursuing the donkeys.***
 - Without this mission, it's likely Saul wouldn't have gotten to know Samuel and ultimately gotten to know God.
- ***When the Donkeys do go missing, it's an opportunity for God to show up and show out.***
 - Are the donkeys missing in your life tonight and you feel as if you're wandering in the wilderness?
- Don't forget:
 - ***Point 1: Sent on a Working Mission. (V. 3-4)***
 - ***Point 2: Specific Words Mentioned. (V. 5-10)***
 - ***Point 3: Searching Wholeheartedly for the Man. (V. 11-14)***
 - ***Point 4: Supernatural Words that Matter. (V. 15-21)***
 - ***Point 5: Special and Wonderful Meal. (V. 22-27)***