

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, we live each day expecting it to unfold in roughly the same manner as every other day, and that we will be able to do what we usually do and find peace within the order of our lives. We are grateful for these routines, but dear Lord Jesus, if we have become too reliant on them and have stopped being open to Your guidance, break them down and remould them. We open ourselves up to the possibilities of change by the power of the Holy Spirit, and we trust You, for You do all things for our ultimate good. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: TRANSPORT

1. For yourself

Personal mobility is something we take for granted; so praise God for your freedom of movement

2. For your friends and family

Pray for people you know who are not mobile, or have difficulty with mobility. Pray for God's healing and blessing

3. For the church and its work

Pray for the church, that it will always be a place where people who have difficulty with mobility will be free and able to come. Pray for the church's work to help those who are housebound

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray that your country will be generous towards people who are not mobile either because of age or because of illness or difficulties since birth. Pray that godly people will make their presence felt for good within your country's social and care services, whether public or private

Meditation

Jesus, You are the brightness which fills my life,
When all around seems dull and cloudy.

Jesus, You are the colour which expands my vision,
Bringing meaning and life to all I see.

Jesus, You are the brilliance which designed the world,
Revealing Yourself through all You've made.

Jesus, You are the complexity which intrigues us,
Leading us to search for more and more.

Jesus, You are the happiness which floods our souls,
Leaving us to want more of God's good gifts.

Jesus, You are the kindness which surpasses generosity,
And all Your good gifts are undeserved.

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Samuel 16: 1-5

¹ The LORD said to Samuel,

'How long will you grieve for Saul, now that I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.'

² But Samuel said,

'How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me!'

The LORD said,

'Take a heifer with you and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the LORD." ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I point out to you.'

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the town came trembling to meet him; they asked,

'Do you come in peace?'

⁵ Samuel replied,

'Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.'

Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

Review

The Lord instructs the prophet Samuel to seek a new king of Israel to subvert the wayward king Saul. It is a secretive, covert operation, fraught with danger; Saul cannot be allowed to know what is going on behind his back!

Chapter 16 of 1 Samuel comes at a critical time for the life of the people of Israel. The people had pleaded with Samuel to anoint them a King, and he had brought this request to the Lord and pleaded their case (1 Samuel 8). The result was the anointing of Israel's first king, King Saul, but after some initial success, Saul proved to be a man who was interested more in his own opinions than God's will. Chapter 15 of 1 Samuel is a torrid story of anguish, in which Saul abjectly fails to comply with the instructions he had been given by God, and Samuel is forced to challenge Saul and ultimately break with him. The heartrending climax of this chapter reads as follows;

'As Samuel turned to go away, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, "the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbour of yours, who is better than you."' (1 Samuel 15:27-28)

So, in our passage today, the Lord calls Samuel to put into action this prophetic word. He must travel to Bethlehem to one house in particular, to the house of a man named Jesse, to anoint one of his sons to be the new King of Israel. Moreover, he must act with care and discretion, for to anoint someone else would be seen as an act of treason by King Saul. Samuel is clearly deeply concerned about what the Lord has called him to do, but he is faithful and obedient, and does what is required of him. He lived a dangerous life doing the Lord's will for the people of Israel, but as this story shows, Samuel was always willing to go 'out on a limb' in order to be obedient to God's prophetic call.

Today's story begins with the Lord speaking to Samuel plainly (16:1). Ever since he was a youth, Samuel had both listened for the Lord and heard him speak in straightforward language (chapter 3); so the Lord now speaks to him about the important matter of anointing a new King in Israel, and it was no time for Samuel to be coy about God's Word, or misunderstand it. He reacted immediately, saying, *'How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me!'* (16:2). As the story continues, we gain the distinct impression that everything is now being done in secret. The new King is indeed found and anointed, but in secret, and it will be many days and years yet before he can claim his full rights as Israel's King (see 2 Samuel 5).

The way Samuel goes about anointing King David interesting, and different from the way he had earlier anointed King Saul (chapter 8). The Lord has already identified the man to be anointed, and he is the son of a Benjaminite, named Jesse. Samuel was instructed to go and meet Jesse with a heifer, ready for sacrifice. In those days, God was worshipped through sacrificial worship either at the shrine of Israel, the 'Tabernacle', or in private homesteads, as here. But the purpose of the sacrificial meal was not just worship, it was the anointing of one of Jesse's sons, but the prophet Samuel would have to rely upon God's guidance as to which one. This story is typical of God's guidance. God gives sufficient direction to enable the prophet

Samuel to do his task, but the complete work lies just beyond his immediate vision, and the prophet must exercise faith and trust in God if the final objective is to be achieved.

In obedience, Samuel arrives at Bethlehem (16:4), where he is met by the elders of the town, who come 'trembling' to meet him. Why did they tremble at the sight of Samuel? What do they know about his God-given task? It may be that Saul's failings as a King of all Israel were beginning to be widely known, and the dispute between him and the prophet Samuel after the battle against Amalek may also have been known (15:17-35). So although King Saul continued to lead Israel officially, those who followed the intrigues of royal court would have expected that the prophet Samuel might reappear somewhere and make a move towards replacing the stubborn and now ineffective King Saul. From what we know of the story, this is the only possible explanation of the trembling of the town elders.

Samuel now calls the elders to consecrate themselves, for this was necessary before the people of Israel would be ready to worship God, but there is one more thing to do as he prepares to fulfil God's will. He selects Jesse publicly (16:5), and consecrates him and his sons for the sacrificial meal. All was now ready for God to act in dramatic power, and anoint a new king over Israel, a man who would be faithful and true. The stage is set for the anointing of David, possibly the greatest and most godly leader of Israel's history.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What can we learn in this passage of Scripture about obedient to God? What does this passage teach about the work of the Prophet?
2. Read through 1 Samuel 15 to gain a picture of why God felt it necessary to replace King Saul. Discuss in your group the reasons for the failure of King Saul.
3. To what extent is the worship of God we offer today 'sacrificial'?

Discipleship challenges

- *Have you ever been asked by God to do something 'on spec', or unexpected? If you have not been asked to do anything unexpected, it is because you have not been ready for it? Think about these things, and pray to the Lord your God, asking that you might be ready to do His will, whenever He might ask.*
- *If someone has received an anointing for the Lord, does this mean that this person cannot be challenged? Does it mean that he or she will never do things wrong? When it is right to withdraw the Lord's blessing from those who may have done God's will, but have failed? Who is the arbiter of such things within your church? It is difficult to think about such things but they are important; just as important now as in Old Testament times*

Final Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You guide us along the pathway of life in many different ways, and we do not understand all of them. If it is necessary for us to do something unexpected, give us the courage to follow Your guidance and to do Your will. Also, if it is necessary for us to stay where we are and remain in obedience to your will, give us the humility to accept Your wisdom. We offer ourselves to You this day. AMEN
