

The Otherness Of Gods Call

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[0 : 00] As we begin this chapter, if you're at all familiar with the story of 1 and 2 Samuel and the books of Kings, you'll know just why Samuel is so disheartened.

! Just before this, Samuel has for a number of years been watching the development of King Saul. And Saul had been ultimately a great disappointment. Samuel had placed so much hope that Saul would be the good king that he wanted him to be.

He had taken time to counsel him, to take God's word to him, to try and encourage him to follow in God's ways and God's patterns for life.

And yet, Saul went wrong. It really had come to its conclusion when he had gone to, once again, fight against the Amalekites, this great enemy of God's people historically for the previous maybe 350, 400 years.

And they had afflicted the children of Israel all the way back during their wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. And now the opportunity has come to extinguish them once and for all.

[1 : 24] And Saul fails. And in the midst of all of that failure and all of that enriching himself and the excuses that he makes to cover up for it, God says to Samuel, well, that's it.

I am finished with Saul. But God now has a new plan. God has another plan, a plan to bring about the kind of pattern that he wants.

And he sends Samuel on this mission to anoint the new king, the one who is going to redeem Israel, in a sense, the one who's going to make things better, make up for the failure.

And Samuel obeys, trembling, sets off, worried for his life because if Saul discovers that he's going to do this particular task from God, then he's a dead man.

And Saul will not tolerate such a thing happening. And so Samuel goes with great fear and trembling.

[2 : 30] The interesting thing of all of this is that in the Bible, the character of David, I don't mean his personal character, but I just mean the character, the individual, the character who appears in the story, is what we'd call a type of Christ.

What that means is there's things about David's life that point us very directly to Jesus. There are experiences in David's life that are almost, you could say, prophetic.

They carry us into the story of Jesus and help us to see things about the coming Messiah that are really important.

So just as in this chapter, David is anointed for a particular mission and task by God, so too, in a way, Jesus is anointed for that task and mission.

In fact, that's what his title as the Messiah means. He is the anointed one. And in Christ's case, in Jesus' case, it's an anointment as a prophet, one who brings God's word, as a priest, one who does the sacrificial work of an intermediary between us and God, and also as a king, one who will rule.

[3 : 50] And we'll come back to that point a little when we think about David as well. There's also the unseemliness of it. That's one of the first things we'll see, in fact, is that this is God's curious choosing.

That's one of the things that really stands out when we think about Jesus. The wise men, you remember, when they came to hear about the birth of this prince that has been born, they go to the palace in Jerusalem.

They say, where is the one who is to be the king? Where is he, this newborn king? And Herod is confused and perplexed because no such king has been born, and that's a threat to him.

And there is the unseemliness, then, of where the star leads the wise men to this tiny little insignificant village in Bethlehem. The unseemliness of what God chooses is actually really important.

And I suppose allied to that as well, there is the timing of God's choice. I mean, when God makes his choice, when God chooses, when God enacts, it does seem to us to be the wrong time.

[5 : 00] It seems like maybe there's unnecessary delays. And yet, we see ultimately in Jesus, perfection in God's timing. And in the fullness of God's purposes.

So, we'll come to these three points. Not in that order. We'll come, first of all, to think about God's curious choice, first of all. The interesting thing, I suppose, in this story is that when Samuel arrives in Bethlehem, the leaders of the town, the prominent men of Bethlehem, I don't know who the prominent men of Carloway are, but some ideas, I suppose, about who some of you might be, but the prominent men come out to meet him.

And they're fearful, because he's the judge. This is like the ultimate authority. It's like, you know, the police coming in force, or the army. And they're saying, why are you here?

And they're worried. And Samuel says, no, no, I've come in peace. I'm here to offer a sacrifice. And he begins to consecrate them for the sacrifice.

And it's only at that point that Jesse gets introduced into the story. Samuel also consecrates Jesse and his sons. And I think what you can take from that is that Jesse himself is not one of the prominent leaders of Bethlehem.

[6 : 17] It's almost like he's an afterthought. The rest of the leaders go out to meet Samuel, and then Jesse comes along afterwards. And then all of Jesse's family comes along afterwards, his seven sons who are all there.

And then in the end, after God has passed over all of these, David comes completely at the end of the story, completely insignificant. Looking on the outside, you might even think, well, there's maybe some sense in what God has asked Samuel to do here.

And Samuel makes that assumption. He sees, first of all, that the oldest of Jesse's sons, Eliab, comes in and he says, well, maybe this is the one that God has anointed. Eliab is a strong, upright, powerful man.

Just like Saul had been. Saul had stood head and shoulders, physically, his stature. He was bigger than everyone else. And the people had said, he's the one to lead us. He's a big, strong, powerful warrior.

He's the guy that we want. And they might have said the same thing about Eliab. In fact, as you go on into the next chapter, you see there, Eliab is again there on military service. He seems to be in a fairly prominent position within Saul's army.

[7 : 29] And he's certainly an experienced man of war. And he absolutely ridicules David for the absurd suggestion that somebody should go out and fight against Goliath. I mean, Eliab knows what he's talking about.

That's a suicide mission. Nobody's going out there, David. Don't be daft. Stop being a kid. Grow up. And that's the character of Eliab. He's decisive.

He's insightful in the ways of war. He's got a lot going for him. If you wanted to appoint a king at a time of war where the Philistines are gathered around about and are a grave enemy, you'd want someone like Eliab, wouldn't you?

Well, what if it wasn't Eliab then? Pass over Eliab. Maybe move on to the next brother. What about Shema? Or what about...

Well, what about any of them? And actually, if you go on reading in the story of David through the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel, as you read these stories, these are characters who come up time and time again.

[8 : 33] David appoints them as his generals. They're listed among David's so-called mighty men. They're formidable warriors. They're great men in their own way. But they're not the choice that God has made.

Instead, God passes over each one of them. Says to Samuel, no, you're looking on the outside. I'm looking on the heart. And that's what matters.

And so Samuel is forced to say to Jesse, look, God sent me to anoint one of your sons, but it's not any of them. Is there another? And Jesse says, well, yes, there is, but he's a kid.

He's just a young boy. You know, we could say maybe at most 15, maybe 13. Young child, still, who's out looking after the sheep.

It's not really that physically distinctive. As the chapter unfolds, we didn't read the whole of the chapter today, but the second half of this chapter is a little bit interesting because Saul suffers from

a judgment from God, effectively.

[9 : 53] And it expresses itself. Now, this isn't to say that all mental illness is a judgment from God. That's not what this passage is saying. But in Saul's case, it was. The Lord was afflicting Saul in this particular way.

There was a spirit from the Lord that has been sent to Tremendon. And in the midst of that, somebody has this idea and says, well, maybe we could find someone who's a skilled musician and maybe they'll ease Saul's temper when he's distressed.

And so somebody suggests David because David's a talented harpist. And so David comes with his harp and Saul's temper eases.

And along the way, he becomes Saul's armor bearer. And Saul has some high regard for him. But by the time you come round to the following chapter with Goliath, you're left with this kind of perplexing thing where Saul doesn't really recognize him.

So a little bit. But either there's a staggering of the two stories, they overlap maybe a little bit. But in any case, David is not somebody who stands out in Saul's memory in particular.

[11 : 02] Saul's not thinking, oh yeah, there's David. He's quite a charismatic fellow. He's quite a skilled fellow. He's quite a handsome fellow. He's quite a... You know, Saul's not thinking any of that.

He's just a guy. Just a kid. Kind of insignificant. Not really memorable. Apparently the kind of guy you'd want to have working for MI5 because you don't remember them.

You forget them. Be a great spy. He's so unmemorable. That's David. But even though he's not from a politically important family, even though he's not particularly physically distinctive, he does have some skills going for him.

He's a composer, a verse. He's a skilled shepherd. But above all of that, he's someone who knows God. He's someone who God speaks to and someone who in the providence of God and in the ordering of God's works is someone who listens to God.

And it's that expression that God uses about looking on the heart. that David is someone who in his heart seeks the heart of God.

[12 : 36] And we know, biblically speaking, that's not something that was intrinsic to David. It's a work of God's spirit. It's a work of God's grace in his life. It's God unfolding things in such a way that David is orientated towards him.

And David loves that. He delights in it. He loves to know his God. And it's into that setting that we need to kind of recognize where we should be to.

And this is perhaps what we should aspire to in our lives. Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians. He says, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being may boast in the presence of God.

Now, God is not in the habit of using necessarily great people in this world to accomplish his ends. He doesn't always use the people with the greatest talent, the greatest stature, the greatest strength to accomplish his ends.

[14 : 07] things. And that's not something that should leave you and I today dismayed. It's not something that should leave us feeling worthless.

Because the amazing thing is God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. And the story of David is not framed in the Bible as a story of an extraordinary standout guy who was absolutely phenomenal.

And God looked at him and said, there's somebody with great talents and skills. I can use him. The whole framing of this, before you get to the story about David and Goliath, is that this is a guy of insignificance, but through whom God works powerfully.

And today that should encourage us. That should inspire us in God's service. That should really change things for us. Because God uses the ordinary.

And he uses the ordinary in incredible ways. And to achieve incredible things. And like Paul says, he does that so that he gets the glory.

[15 : 32] glory. So that no human can boast. The outcome of it is that God is exalted. And so when we read the story of David in the Bible, we're not meant to.

That's why chapter 16 is at the beginning. We're not meant to look at the story of David and think, wow, didn't God do something incredible there with David? David was such a great guy and God used him.

Where many think, didn't God do something absolutely amazing in taking a shepherd and making him king? And that's the psalm we were just singing, Psalm 78, that's what it's about.

It's about the extraordinary work of God calling his people, the unfolding call of the Israelites back in the days of Abraham, right the way through the patriarchs, then leading them through out of Egypt, out of the desert, and into the promised land, and establishing them in the promised land over 300, 350 odd years, and then there's the calamity of Saul's leadership, and then God finally appoints someone who will shepherd his people.

And it's all about God's great work, God's great purpose is unfolding. And I don't know what particular missions God has called each one of you to.

[16:58] you. I don't know what calling God has placed upon your particular life, but I know this, it is extraordinary. He calls each and every one of his children, in fact, to extraordinary ministry, extraordinary works, despite their ordinariness.

And the reason I say that is because in one place in the New Testament, when Paul is looking at a church that is fractious and divided and can't agree on things and are really struggling, he says to that ordinary church, full of ordinary people, don't you know you will judge angels?

It's almost like Paul saying, get it into your heads. You are God's children. And as God's children, he has appointed you to royal work. There are missions for you to do in this world as royal ambassadors of the king that are really significant, really matter, just like there was for David.

So that's our second point that we come into. See, not only is there a curiousness to God's choice of who he calls, but there's also a calling to an incredibly significant task.

Again, the facts are pretty clear. David and his family, I don't think, maybe, grasped the full understanding and importance of what was happening here. Samuel arrives, he calls the family in, he passes them before him one by one and says, no, you're not the one I'm anointing, you're not the one I'm anointing.

[18:33] They must have been sitting there one by one thinking, anointing us for what? It's not on anyone's radar that Saul is going to stop being the king at any point. Nobody's suggesting that Samuel is here to organize a rebellion.

So you're kind of thinking, is Samuel losing it? Is he maybe just, is there a bit of senility in here? Is this wise? What is going on here?

Maybe they're thinking, well, the anointing is to one of the other offices that needed anointing.

Maybe it's an anointing to an office as prophet. Maybe that's what it is. And you might even think, well, that fits David, doesn't it?

That's where David's gifts are. He's talented as a musician. Maybe God's going to use him to use his music, to carry his message to the people in some kind of prophetic way.

Who knows? He's certainly not been anointed for a priesthood because he doesn't belong to the tribe of Levi. So he can't be a priest. But king? No way.

[19:35] Not David. This doesn't fit him. And strangely, it's only as time goes on that the call becomes more and more clear.

Not just to David, but to everyone around him. So maybe David privately in his own heart holds on to the promise. But it's not until many, many years later, 10, 15 years later, that at the cave of Adullam, that Saul realizes David is actually going to be the next king.

And there's a despair sets into Saul at that point. It's only after this, in fact, that Jonathan, Saul's son, kind of expects to fight alongside David in whatever the new kingdom is going to be, whatever the new kingdom is going to be organized.

Nobody up until that point was thinking David is going to be the next king. Only God has that plan. And everybody else on the outside thinks it's just not going to happen.

But again, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians this time, and he says, it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us and who has also put his seal on us and given us his spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

[20:57] And what Paul's writing there to the Corinthians is he's assuring them of his ministry towards them. And he says, it's not my ministry by my appointing. It's not me saying this is what I have to do.

It's not me arbitrarily deciding these are the things I'm up to. God has appointed this. God has ordained this. God has set this as the plan, as the pattern.

This is God's appointing. God has done it. And he does the same in us. He does the same where he calls us into his service.

And that service he invites us into, he invites us to follow it through with patience and humility. I think that's what's going on in Psalm 40.

I waited for the Lord my God and patiently to bear. at length to me he did incline his voice, his ear, my voice, and cry to hear. There's that sense in which God has called us to a particular place, a particular mission, a particular task.

[22 : 08] But in order for him to get the glory, he does that in his own time. Even when we know it's what we're called to, even when we have a fair idea of what it is we should be doing, it's God's timing, and the reason that it's God's timing is because we need to learn in it that the significant roles God calls us to are not about us, they're about him.

And so the consecration that God has done in calling us to a special task, setting us apart to a special task, it is one that we do with patience and humility, waiting for him.

again, you see that in Jesus. You see it in the Garden of Gethsemane, chiefly, where the awful reality of what's going to happen the next day is dawning on Jesus himself.

And he says, Father, not my will, but yours be done. He reconciles himself to it. But that's come more than 30 years into the life of Jesus. 30 years by which there's a growing awareness that he is there to fulfill the law, to be the sacrifice, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

And what we're told in the Gospels is he grows into this. That the pattern is Jesus in the incarnation grows into the calling of God, learns it, settles into it, and ultimately in Gethsemane embraces it willfully and wholly.

[23 : 44] And our callings are perhaps the same. We might think that our callings are to great and wonderful tasks and not realize the costliness of them.

It's interesting that that's the way God speaks to Saul, I mean Paul, the apostle, on the Damascus road. Saul, on the Damascus road, when God sends, he's blinded, and God sends Ananias to lay his hands on him and heal him of his blindness.

God says to Ananias, I must show Saul the things that he must suffer. And the call of God sometimes is a difficult path that we have to go on.

It's sometimes a painful path that we have to go along. It was for David, it was for the apostle Paul, it was ultimately for Christ, and it will be for us as well.

A painful and at times difficult path to walk walk. Because God wants us to enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus.

[24 : 48] Paul says we must suffer with him if we want to be glorified with him. There are difficulties in serving God. There are challenges. And in all of these challenges we learn to trust in God, to wait upon him, to discover his faithfulness over what amounts really to a considerable time, which is really the last point.

The facts are that David was young when this happened, like I say at most 15, maybe a bit younger. It's at least 15 years before Saul is killed and Jonathan is killed.

And the people recognize David as the only successor to them. And David becomes king. 15 years waiting for the anointing to be fulfilled.

15 years where it's not often clear that that's what's going to happen. 15 years fleeing for his life. 15 years in fact going to his enemies, he goes down to Gath, he goes to Achish, his enemy, and has to feign madness before Achish in order to get away with his life.

He hires himself out as a mercenary to his enemies in order to survive and for his family and his loved ones to survive as well.

[26 : 26] God's love. He has to make all manner of costly choices along the way. And you might be thinking, well, that wasn't fair. It might feel like it's not fair to us.

When we're going through these kind of experiences waiting for God's appointed time for the things that we know he's called us to do. all these years, perhaps as a parent where you've been witnessing to your own children and they've still turned their backs on the gospel.

Has God really called you to a forlorn hope? All of these years of waiting, praying for your husband or your wife, that they come and know Jesus?

Do you give up? Do you stop? Do you tolerate what are sometimes the indignities of their rejection of the gospel?

What do you do? I think in all of these difficult times times where you're dealing with long-term illness, where you're dealing with disappointment, where you're grieving the lost opportunities, you learn like David did.

[28 : 04] you learn to build your faith. You learn to grow in patience.

You learn character. And these are all the things Paul talks about when he's talking about suffering and the experience of the church. God ordains these things in order for us to grow and to develop. And that was the path that David found himself on. And so for us, what do we do? Well, the answer is the same as it was for David.

God is still God. He still calls us to his service. He calls all of us to particular acts of ministry and service that we can't all itemize.

We can't go through everyone today and just say, this is what you're calling us. It's not our place. but the Lord does call us. He consecrates us. He sets us apart for that task. There is a uniqueness to God's call on each one of our particular lives.

[29 : 18] And along the way, there will be challenges. There will be difficult things for us to learn, difficult things for us to experience. So how do we cope? What do we do? And the answer lies right in the beginning of God's choice of David.

God's choice of David was not to look on the stature, not to look on the outside things, but on the inner things, on the heart of David.

And I come back to that for us. That's what matters today. Our hearts. Where are our hearts today? Where are our hearts looking?

Where do we find our satisfaction? Where do we find our refreshing where do we find the strength to continue in God's service, awaiting the time of his full appointing?

And it isn't looking to Jesus. We look to Christ as the one who gives us grace, and as the example of patience and faith and trust in God, the one who cries out to God through all of his sufferings and all of his trials and all of his temptations and who leans on his father and says, not my will, but yours be done.

[30 : 49] Let us look to Christ as we go on. Let's pray. Thank you.