

Series: Life's Defining Moments

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

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1 Samuel 13

“When Everything Changed for Saul”

In the summer of 1874, William Wilberforce, an English politician, decided to take a long journey from England to Italy, across the Alps

- it would take many weeks by a horse drawn coach—so he had to choose a companion carefully
- he happened to bump into Isaac Milner, a former schoolmate
- who was now a professor and one of the smartest men in the world—and he accepted the invitation to travel with Wilberforce

But it turned out to be a defining moment—for something unexpected happened

- unbeknownst to Wilberforce, Milner was a devoted follower of Jesus—and after numerous conversations—Wilberforce came to realize he had been wrong about Christianity
- in giving his life to Christ—everything changed
- Wilberforce ended up becoming a committed believer; taking on the slave trade and seeing it come to its end

In all of our lives—there are these defining moments—turning points

- a conversation, an experience, an *instant where the past and the future collide*
- where there is a monumental potential for success or failure

The Old Testament kings are our working material—for each one has defining moments recorded for our instruction

We have begun with Saul—Israel's first king

- who also had his defining moments
- a God moment—a leadership moment...
- he stepped up and led the nation in victorious battle (chapter 11)
- the expectations were high—until 1 Samuel 13—where Saul's life began to fall apart—and everything changed

-there are FOUR indicators in his story that tell us when life is beginning to crash

1. SAUL LOST SIGHT OF HIS DIRECTION—read verses 1-4

- healthy people have a vision—have established a path, a strategy that even inspires others to follow
- but Saul seems to have lost his way—he seems to be going nowhere

- he sends 90+% of his fighting strength home, keeping a small retainer force
- all the while ignoring the imminent peril before him

-Saul is living in a wartime world acting like a peacetime king—*like all too many in the church oblivious to the spiritual war we are in—the threats we face—the times we are in*

-the times call us to be vigilant, at full strength—but too many churches are going through the motions

-it was not so with Saul's son Jonathan—he understood the times

-while others sat—Jonathan went on the attack

-*he was not afraid to splash cold water on one's complacency*

-in his mind—the Philistines have no right to set up garrisons on Israel's territory, intimidate the people of God!

-he will do this again in chapter 14—even if he has to go it alone

-for Jonathan believes in God for great things

-he knows that God is waiting for a man who will step out in faith—will confront the impossible

-*but Saul does not know this*

-Jonathan's attack in chapter 13 incurred the wrath of the Philistines—Israel became "odious"

-illustration—burnt popcorn—something must be done!!!

-the Philistines will not tolerate threats to their forces

-they are formidable—they have superior armies and weaponry—they alone have the latest technology (verse 19)

-they have giants like Goliath in their infantry—there is a history of these Philistine thugs pushing their way into the neighborhood at will

-they believe their gods are stronger than the God of Israel

-*Israel needs a fearless king to confront—one who is on a mission—one who has calculated the costs*

-*clearly knows where he is going—but SAUL IS WITHOUT AIM*

-a second indicator—

2. SAUL LOST SIGHT OF HIS POWER—*read verses 5-7*

-the Philistines came from the west—and then went out in three directions—effectively sealing off, "cramping" Saul (*see map*)

-so the men hid in self-made graves —they defected and deserted Saul—only 600 remain to face a numberless army

-Israel no longer acts like a nation in step with the Spirit

-there seems to be a memory lapse—they forgot what God had just done at Jabesh Gilead

-done against the Midianites under Gideon

-done against the Egyptians under Moses

-God does amazing things when people throw themselves on God—but this is not the case here

- no longer do we see a bold, Spirit empowered king—doing what the circumstances require—inspiring his men
- Saul is in retreat—not in advance
- eventually he will head back home to sit under a pomegranate tree
- like he is here at Gilgal—where the text suggests he is both paralyzed and powerless
- unaware of where the Spirit is—unaware of the power that is his for the asking
- why is he not calling out for a fresh rushing of the Spirit—where is the boldness we saw in chapter 11?

-Could this helplessness reflect some of us?

3. SAUL LOST SIGHT OF HIS ROLE—read verses 8-9

- Saul wanted to do the right thing
- he understood that this was God's army—and there are rules that come with leading it
- Samuel established this protocol from the beginning—10:8
- don't attempt anything until you have sought God's will, God's permission, God's blessing—and waited

- but Samuel—the man of God—is a no show
- it was time to *take matters into his own hands*—shift roles
- Saul decided to be Samuel

- but it was more—Saul decided to be God
- when we cross lines, break rules, grab for power...
- when we begin to believe it all depends upon us—we begin to play God
- Saul assumed it depended upon him—and so he overreached (just like we can)
- but Saul is not God—he is not the priest
- he is authorized to lead armies—only Samuel has the authority, the role to mediate, lead Israel to worship

-a fourth indicator of a life that is crashing—

4. SAUL LOST SIGHT OF HIS RESPONSIBILITY

-Samuel finally came—and it was a defining moment for Saul—read verses 10-11a

- clearly—Samuel's delay served as Saul's test—will Saul be a responsible king?
- a. the first responsibility of a king is to listen to the voice of God—Saul was anointed for this purpose—15:1
- this is the price of belonging to God—waiting, listening
- the king is not a free man with policy options—he is constrained by promises, duty
- he is not free to play God
- he is under the mandate of divine authority and divine will

-but Saul is not waiting—not listening
-he has deserted principle to serve expediency!

b. his second responsibility is to own up to things—read 11b-12

-rather than admit sin and ask for forgiveness
-Saul did what arrogant leaders do—he justified his misjudgments—threw others under the bus
-the troops were deserting him; Samuel was late; the Philistines threatened
-and then—in a rather pathetic way—he described this act in mere obligatory terms
-“I did this to “appease”, “flatter” God—lit “put God in a gentle mood”
-this was a man who did not know God!

-every leader sins—but those who cannot see that they are the problem...
-who refuse to accept responsibility—who never show remorse— will find they have nothing left to lead
-and in this moment, Saul’s course was radically altered—read verses 13-15

-in quick succession—

1. Saul was confronted with his moral stupidity
2. charged with going contrary to God’s will
3. and then God released Saul from his holy calling—(with a player to be named later)

-his career, his future effectively came to an end

So what explains Saul’s gradual implosion?

-how does a man lose his way—lose his grip
-cross lines—and abandon responsibility?
-maybe you are losing your way—your grip—

A. SAUL NEVER FOCUSED ON THE INTERIOR

-Saul had this impressive exterior—we’re told this from the beginning—9:1
-again in chapter 10—when they went out and searched for him at his coronation
-the *only* thing said about Saul was that he was taller than everyone else—10:23
-it was all cosmetic—all about appearance, height, looks, physical stature—but nothing is ever said about his heart
-Saul is an empty suit—an “empty chest”—a lightweight on the world stage
-he has not developed the heart
-he has not understood that it is from the heart we make our choices
-and the tests that come with life are now surfacing the void that is underneath

-illustration—some years ago David Gergen wrote about recent flawed presidents like Nixon and Clinton

-*executives who did not pay attention to the executive center of their lives—THE HEART*

-men who HAD NO TRUE NORTH

-Saul had no true north—no “field” to orient his compass

B. SAUL NEVER OWNED HIS FAITH

- from the beginning—Saul was spiritually barren
- oblivious to who Samuel was—Israel's spiritual leader—though he lived next door
- nothing of God was aspired, nothing pursued by Saul
- there is no evidence of any spiritual initiative anywhere*
- nowhere do read that Saul was a man after God's heart

- Saul's faith was like something put on—like a piece of clothing borrowed from someone else's closet
- it did not flow from a deep inner well
- rather than believe in God for great things—he reduced God to rite and ceremony

HOW DO WE AVOID THIS?

1. We need to give our best efforts to developing the interior
 - directing our greatest leadership energy not over others—but over ourselves
 - attending to “heart renovation” (Willard)
 - inviting Jesus to enter and have His way with a malformed heart
 - this will determine our ultimate success

 - this requires the disciplines of solitude, prayer, Word
 - where we become aware of unhealthy blind spots, weaknesses that can derail
 - confront narcissistic behaviors, greed, lusts
 - it requires the discipline of avoiding distractions
 - people today are swimming in a stream of constant texts*
 - all of which can pull us away from the most important communication of all*
2. We need to own our faith
 - it can't be our parents—or our spouses—or our church's

 - Only then—will we have direction—experience power
 - discern our role—and live within our boundaries

CONCLUSION

How much energy is directed to the heart?

Are you the owner, the co-owner, the renter of your faith?

-if not—you will set yourself up for your own defining moment

LG QUESTIONS

- 1) There were at least four areas Saul had vision impairment—he lost sight of direction, power, role, responsibility. If there is any vision impairment in your life, which one do you resonate with most?
- 2) Why did Samuel keep Saul waiting?
- 3) What prevents a life from becoming hollow? What disciplines do you keep to prevent this?
- 4) When did you own your faith?