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What situations make you feel insecure?

If nothing's coming to mind, here's some other ways of asking that question:

What keeps you up at night?

What nightmares do you have?

I'm 30 I've been out of school for 8 years, but for a long time, I would have dreams where I thought I was still a student and it's the end of the semester, and I've forgotten about a class, usually it's a math or foreign language class. And I have to go to the professor and admit I hadn't done any of the assignments and try against the odds to get help. Or I'd have dreams about finding out that I never got my degree, there were classes or internships I had missed or no one had told be about. Now eventually I'd wake myself up and remind myself that I've graduated, I passed all my classes. I have my degree, that time of my life is over. But those dreams would remind me that academic success was a big source of insecurity in my life, that there was real fear of falling behind, of looking unintelligent, of being embarrassed, of making a big mistake, of not having it all together.

And the character we'll be studying today, like many of us, seriously grappled with his insecurities. That's King Saul.

Saul is most famous for his back and forth, adversarial relationship with his successor David. He threw spears at David, persecuted David, sent David on the run. He's the archetype of a paranoid king clinging to power, he's one of the most famous antagonists of the Bible. But Saul was a character in his own right before David entered the picture, and it's that part of his story that I want to focus on today.

Saul's story is prefaced by what is going on with the Israelites in that period.

1 Samuel 8:1-9, 19-20

8 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. ² The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. ³ But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”

⁶ But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. ⁷ And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights...”

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”

So Samuel who has lead Israel both Spiritually as High Priest and Politically as judge for decades is nearing his end, and his sons aren't fit to succeed him on either end.

The elders are worried.

They are nervous about what is to come after Samuel dies, and they want a political resolution before things go south. The resolution they want is to officially turn Israel into a monarchy like its neighbors. **The elders want a powerful leader that will bring security and success to Israel.** Even when Samuel warns them about what this choice means, they've made up their minds.

1 Samuel 9:1-2

“There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bekorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. ² Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.”

Saul comes from a respected family. Saul's family were nobles, they had some money and influence. They were from a junior clan of the smallest tribe of Israel. They would have been like a small town family of politicians, doctors or lawyers. Not the wealthiest or most powerful by far, but well known locally or regionally

Saul is physically impressive. He's very tall and handsome, he's the type of guy that stands out, that people notice easily.

1 Samuel 9:17-21

¹⁷ When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, “This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.”

¹⁸ Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, “Would you please tell me where the seer’s house is?”

¹⁹ “I am the seer,” Samuel replied. “Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and in the morning I will send you on your way and will tell you all that is in your heart. ²⁰ As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line?”

²¹ 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 to me?”

Saul is modest, he’s humble, he had no ambitions to be a king or anything like that, before Samuel gave him the word. Now for any type of leader, that is a quality to look for. I used to be a minister on a college campus, and like every university there was a student government. Let me tell you, it’s crazy how much power-tripping and ego you can witness on a scale that small. There were impeachment proceedings, there were disputed election results, it was nuts. Guys, your job is to spend student fees on fun projects and show up at meetings, calm down.

1 Samuel 10:9-11

⁹ As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. ¹⁰ When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying. ¹¹ When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, “What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?”

Saul is a spiritual man, in fact you could even say that **Saul is spirit-filled**. Now a lot of celebrities or politicians here in the U.S. bring up their faith, but very often their lifestyle or values bring that faith into doubt. It’s rare to find someone in the spotlight who is a genuine Christian overall, finding someone on that level who is also openly full of the spirit is almost unheard of.

Those are Saul’s positive qualities that we can see before he becomes king, but there’s more that we can see afterwards.

1 Samuel 11:1-7, 11

Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, “Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you.”

² But Nahash the Ammonite replied, “I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.”

³ The elders of Jabesh said to him, “Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you.”

⁴ When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. ⁵ Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, “What is wrong with everyone? Why are they weeping?” Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said.

⁶ When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger. ⁷ He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, “This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.” Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out together as one...

¹¹ The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.”

First thing we see here is that **Saul is hard-working**; even though he’s been chosen as king, he was out in the fields like a regular farmer.

Second is that **Saul is decisive**; he’s a man of action. He doesn’t need to deliberate on how to respond, he doesn’t need to pull any teeth to rally his people. Saul communicates clearly and starkly what’s at stake and the Israelites get the message. And he leads them to victory.

1 Samuel 11:12-13

¹² The people then said to Samuel, “Who was it that asked, ‘Shall Saul reign over us?’ Turn these men over to us so that we may put them to death.”

¹³ But Saul said, “No one will be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel.”

Saul is gracious. When his naysayers are confronted by his success in defeating the Ammonites, instead of punishing them as is his right as king, Saul chooses to forgive instead.

1 Samuel 14: 47-48

⁴⁷ After Saul had assumed rule over Israel, he fought against their enemies on every side: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment on them. ⁴⁸ He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, delivering Israel from the hands of those who had plundered them.

Saul is a successful military leader, not just once, but many times over. He helps lead his people to a level of security and regional power that they had previously never reached. The Israelites are winning wars on every front.

In summary, Saul has a lot of admirable qualities. Qualities that actually make him not just an average leader, but an exceptionally good leader.

Saul comes from a **good family**, he's **good looking**, he's **modest**, he's **full of the Holy Spirit**, he's **hard-working**, he's **decisive**, he's **gracious**, he has a **winning record**. Forget Trump or Harris, I'm voting for this guy!

So what goes wrong with this guy? **What happened to Saul?**

We can see a red flag about Saul on the day his kingship begins.

1 Samuel 10:20-24

²⁰ When Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. ²¹ Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was taken. Finally Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. ²² So they inquired further of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?"

And the Lord said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies."

²³ They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. ²⁴ Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people."

Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

When it's Saul's time to be presented as King before the tribes and clans of Israel, he can't be found. In fact, Saul was so well hidden that the people present had to ask God where he was.

Which indicates that **Saul had some apprehension about becoming King**. Once again, it's was a role that he did not ask for or expect to have. He could have been feeling very insecure about becoming king. I mean it's only the most powerful, most responsible position in all of Israel, and he's the first one to ever occupy it, how hard can it be?

Once Saul's established as King, we see this insecurity re-emerge.

1 Samuel 13:5-14

⁵The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand^[a] chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Mikmash, east of Beth Aven. ⁶When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. 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 Mikmash, 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 have done a foolish thing," 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 ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

The Philistines and Israel are at war, and the fighting is rough. The odds are not in Israel's favor. Saul is waiting for Samuel to come to Gilgal and perform an offering to seek God's favor, but after 7 days Samuel isn't there, so Saul performs his own offering.

If I were Saul, I can imagine growing impatient, I can imagine feeling nervous, antsy. Saul is likely quite aware how many people are watching his actions, how people are waiting to see if this war succeeds or fails. Remember, Saul is the first King. He wasn't born into this role. He's

profoundly aware of how fragile his rule is. He knows that something that is given can easily be lost. To sum it up, Saul is under an incredible amount of pressure.

There's a couple theories as to what exactly went wrong here, with Saul performing the offering before Samuel arrived, but they all boil down to the same reality:

In spite of all of his strengths, Saul still fails as a leader.

In a difficult situation, Saul chose to do things his way instead of the right way.

In the face of pressure, Saul took matters into his own hands instead of placing them in God's hands.

Saul trusted his own power more than God's power.

And it's this action that causes the Kingdom to be removed from Saul and his line. And later on, for David to be chosen by God as Saul's successor, and Saul's famous conflict with David to begin.

There's a few different applications of Saul's story that we can have today

One application is our personal leadership

As far as I know, no one here is a monarch, or the leader of a nation; if you are, I could be wrong, I'm still a little new here. But I do know that there's people here in positions of leadership. There's educators, there's business owners, there's pastors, volunteer leaders, there's the leaders of small groups, musical groups, sports teams, there's parents, grandparents, there's older siblings. A lot of people here can check off a few of those roles, some people can check off most of them. There's a lot of leaders in this room.

For anyone in any position of leadership, influence, power, let's ask ourselves:

How do you lead when you're under pressure?

How do you lead when there's no easy choices left?

How do you lead when you're afraid?

When you have to choose between your way and the right way, which do you pick?

When you can either take matters into your hands and feel secure, or put them into God's hands and feel insecure, what do you do?

When things get difficult, whose power do you trust in more? God's or your own?

If you're like me, it's really easy to try and control things yourself. It's really easy to pick my way over the right way.

Another application is political

As Samuel said when Saul became King: "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Saul was a admirable man at the start. His story is a reminder that:

Even the most noble, effective, exceptional leaders are likely to fall short. Our leaders are still human, their flaws and the pressures of the roles they serve in will have an impact. When the tough decisions come, when they are up against a wall, they will all most likely choose what is expedient, what is easy, what is convenient, what serves their interests, over what is right.

And remember it wasn't just Saul who was insecure, but the Israelites themselves. They told Samuel, "No...We want a king over us."

So in addition,

Saul's story is a warning about what happens when God's followers choose to put more hope in a political system than in Him.

Does that mean don't vote? No. Does that mean be politically disengaged? Also, No.

But here's what we need to do

We need to have more hope in God and His Kingdom than in Election Day's outcome.

We need to prioritize our Heavenly citizenship over our Earthly citizenship.

Like the Israelites, it can easy to be impatient, to feel insecure about our present political reality, and want a King, or a President, to solve our problems now, but even the best fall far short of the one we call the Lord. Even the greatest leaders are not worthy of investing our hopes in. But in Jesus, we have a king that will never fail. Jesus is all powerful, loving, just, faithful, righteous, holy, in unison with the Father and the Holy Spirit. **In King Jesus, we always have a King worth hoping in.**

Lastly, one way of knowing we have solid leadership here at CIC is what we heard from Pastor Randall earlier. If you're someone who is really concerned about what's going to happen after

Tuesday, if you're really a big supporter of one side or another, you might not have been very appreciative of what Pastor had to say. But in spite of the pressure to cave and join one side or another this election, or just to stay silent and say nothing at all, he decided to stand with truth and speak God's perspective. Pastor chose what is right over what is easy.

Response

I want us to sit with this story, I want us to ask ourselves those questions.

When you're faced with difficult choices, whose power do you trust in more? God's or your own?

And I also want us to ask:

Are you putting your hope in God's Heavenly Kingdom or our Earthly Kingdom?

For many in this room that have been following Jesus for a while, these are good questions to meditate on and make changes as a result.

For others here, these questions might be totally foreign, or maybe you haven't asked yourself them in a very long time. For some of you your security might be nowhere near God's hands and your hope is nowhere near God's Kingdom and King Jesus. The only power you've ever been able to trust is yourself. If this is where you are, I want to extend the opportunity to accept him as King and Savior.