

Opening Scripture: Psalm 2

Introduction: Adolph Hitler in Nazi Germany, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Kim il-Sung of North Korea, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Vladimir Lenin of Russia, Yechyah Sinwar of Hamas—what do all these evil tyrants have in common with the likes of Caesar who dissolved the Roman republic, or Napoleon who declared himself emperor of France, or the Muawiya Umayyad and the first Islamic Caliphate who invaded Israel in 661 AD, killing the Jews and taking their land—what do all of these tyrannical dictatorships have in common? From history, we can see the common threads:

- **First is political instability:** Economic and social discontent, a roiling social unrest fueled by the failures of past leadership.
- **Then there's the Militarization of political entities:** The mobilization of political parties into revolutionary fervor in the face of a power vacuum and the opportunity for a populist leader to fill that leadership void.
- **Next is the rise of a Tin Pot tyrant:** The centralization of power in the hands of a strong man who emerges and offers strength in place of weakness. They promise stability in the place of chaos. These leaders are usually men with a commanding presence and unshakable self-assurance.
- **The Honeymoon always ends:** Not too long after a promising man is chosen, installed, and begins governing, the façade falls away as their true intentions are revealed. These tyrants get tired of negotiating and compromise, so they seek to take unilateral control.
- **Repression of all dissent:** In order to maintain control, the new tyrant always cracks down on public debate, censoring the use of language deemed subversive to the new regime, the use of propaganda and control of information to shape public perception, and the erosion of any hope of self-governance by the people.
- **This is followed by Persecution of dissenting voices:** Nonconformists are labeled “rebels,” followed by a systematic persecution and extermination of anyone who speaks against the leader.

Transition: The text we're looking at over the coming weeks will have many of these same components: It's a story where there is a crisis, a flashpoint—a demand for a change in the way that Israel is governed. It's a story about the rise of an initially promising young man who would be King, but tragically, he will turn out like so many autocrats in history—persecuting the righteous and the innocent, suppressing dissent, causing the deaths of many soldiers and civilians and even God's priests. The promise of God-honoring, humble leadership is spoiled, and Saul becomes a man who thinks that he is above Torah law, that he is above God's rule. The Bible doesn't pull any punches. It shows us the horror and tragedy of this man's atrocious reign. A nation intended to be a theocracy with a human king who embodies God's gracious reign instead becomes a human autocracy—and that's the tragedy of the story of Saul. Because men just can't help themselves to what belongs only to God.

Let's look at the text, and then I'll draw some threads together from it...

First, there is a demand for a King (1 Samuel 8:1–9) Let's read the text, When Samuel grew old, he appointed his **sons as judges** over Israel. ² His firstborn son's name was **Joel and his second was Abijah**. They were judges in Beer-sheba. ³ However, his sons did not walk in his ways—they turned toward dishonest profit, took bribes, and **perverted justice**.⁴ So **all the elders of Israel gathered** together and went to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Therefore, **appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations** have." ⁶ When they said, "Give us a king to judge us," Samuel considered their demand wrong, so he prayed to the Lord. ⁷ But the Lord told him, "**Listen to the people and everything they say to you**. They have not rejected you; **they have rejected me** as their king. ⁸ They are doing the same thing to you that they have done to me, since the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, abandoning me and worshiping other gods.

- **Samuel used to travel the circuit—from town-to-town judging cases in Israel.** But now as an elderly man he can't do that anymore. Travel is getting more difficult for the old fella and he leaves the task of judging in Beer-sheba to his sons.
- **The elders of Israel were motivated by the failure of Samuel's sons Joel and Abijah.** Despite their promising names *Yo-El* meaning "YHWH is God" and *Avi-Yah* "Yahweh is my Father" these sons of Samuel were following old patterns, caught up in the corruption that often accompanies assuming positions of authority. You get the sense from the text that Israel just can't take this anymore. No more occasional judges who may or may not lead well. It's time for a change. It's time for new leadership and they demand that Samuel appoint a king in place of tribal judges.
- **God surprises Samuel, "Listen to what they're really saying. Read between the lines."** What they're really telling you is they don't want me to be their King. In asking for a human king, they are, in fact, rejecting my Sovereign rule. And they've been doing this since I led them by the hand out of Egypt.

Application: We should begin every prayer request with "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" (Matt 6:10). Why did Jesus put that phrase right at the beginning of the disciples' petitionary prayer in Matthew 6:9–13? Because we think we know what's best for us. We are led by our intuitions, our desires, our rationale. We instinctively think, "That would be a good thing for God to do for me." And we think, "That's something I want." And we reason, "And here are all the reasons why it's a good idea." We become apologists for our will and our kingdoms.

But Jesus taught us to fundamentally reorient ourselves to HIS will and the HIS Kingdom. Now, it may be that what I suspect is needed is the right answer, what I desire is something the LORD desires and wants for me, and that my reasons are sound biblical

and wise.

But as a finite, imperfect human being who lacks omniscience, I can trust God's revealed Word where it speaks. I can trust godly wisdom where the Word doesn't speak. I can trust his decisions when I don't understand his reasons. I trust his character.

Fundamentally, the problem that Israel has isn't just a leadership problem. It's not tactical—it's not governmental—it's spiritual. Like the Exodus Jews in the Sinai desert, they just want what they want. And they don't want to live under God's law and his rule.

Second, there is a warning about the high costs of some answered prayers (1 Samuel 8:10–18) God instructed Samuel to lay it out for them—tell them what the price tag will be to their families, their lands, their sons and daughters in this. Samuel told all the Lord's words to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, "These are the rights of the king who will reign over you: **He will take your sons** and put them to his use in his chariots, on his horses, or running in front of his chariots. ¹²He can appoint them for his use as commanders of thousands or commanders of fifties, **to plow his ground and reap his harvest, or to make his weapons of war and the equipment for his chariots.** ¹³He can **take your daughters to become perfumers, cooks, and bakers.** ¹⁴He can **take your best fields, vineyards, and olive orchards** and give them to his servants. ¹⁵He can **take a tenth of your grain and your vineyards** and give them to his officials and servants. ¹⁶He can **take your male servants, your female servants, your best cattle, and your donkeys** and use them for his work. ¹⁷He can **take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves can become his servants.** ¹⁸When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you've chosen for yourselves, but the Lord won't answer you on that day." Are we seeing a pattern here? The premature installation of a leader who isn't ready for the job and a nation who isn't ready for this step—is disastrous. Because he will *take* from you, and in return, he will give you a big fat headache. This king will bring misery and ruin and shame to you and God; on that day, you will cry out again for a better solution. And I won't listen to you. That doesn't mean God won't hear their prayers; he hears all prayers. It means, "I'm not going to do what you want me to do. Instead, I will install a king of my choosing." It's not that God doesn't want them to have a king; as we'll discover in a minute, that was always the plan. It's just that they are demanding a king on their terms and in their timing.

Illus. It's like when your kids come and ask you for a dog. They've thought it through so far as they know. "Well, Dad, I really need a dog because dogs are fun, and they love you, and you can play with them and love them back." And they give you all their reasons why you should go get them that little puppy they saw in the Window at the Pet store. But as a parent, you know the reality. You know what it's going to cost. Cutting a hole in my back door for a dog door, the cost of food, yard training, and all the messes you'll have to clean up, all the items of clothing you'll find chewed up and strewn across the yard, the incessant barking, the cleaning up in the yard after they do their business,

the walking, the feeding, occasional trash can turn over and rummaged through. These, I say to my little boy, are all the reasons why having a dog is a horrible, horrible idea. And he just can't fathom it. All he can see is the love he will have for that little animal and the loyalty that creature will have for him. So, I get him the dog anyway.

But what do I mean by the "high cost" of answered prayer? If God answers prayer "yes," isn't that His will for us? The majority of answers to our prayers are because God wills something for us. But sometimes...

Application: Sometimes, God answers prayer to teach us to never ask for that again. Be careful what you wish for.

The people of Israel in chapter 8 just want a new dog. A new thing that will bring them fulfillment and happiness and peace throughout the land—but they haven't counted the cost of getting God's will in their own timing and on their own terms. And Samuel tells them what it's going to cost them.

This story introduces us to two major threads of theology that run through the Bible and run right through this story.

1. Even In judgment, God's redeeming grace is possible. Consider some of the more well-known stories of God judging people in the Bible.

- **Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6–9):** God's judgment came in the form of a global flood due to the wickedness on the Earth. Noah and his family, however, found favor in God's eyes and were saved by building an ark. This act of judgment led to the preservation of humanity and the covenant with God.
- **The Israelites in the wilderness (Numbers 21:5):** They get all the way out into the Sinai Peninsula and realize we don't have a food or water source—that land is barren and arid. So, they complain to God, "Why has the LORD led us into a wilderness to die? There's no bread, no food, no water—nothing but sand and sagebrush as far as the eye can see." And in the midst of their grumbling, complaining, and fear, God graciously supplies them all that they need. They are there because God needs to purge Egypt out of them. And in the process he graciously provides.
- **The Prophet Jonah (Book of Jonah):** Jonah is suffocating, hair and skin being burned off by the gastric juices in this great fish that swallowed him—this is a judgment from God. And he cries out and the LORD causes the fish to belch him up on the beach. God sent Jonah to deliver a message of judgment and hold that offer of repentance to the city of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh repented after hearing Jonah's warning, and God showed them mercy instead of destroying the city. God's grace was present in the midst of the announcement of judgment.
- **King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4):** God's judgment humbled King

Nebuchadnezzar, who had become prideful and arrogant. He was temporarily afflicted with a mental disorder, but through this judgment, he came to acknowledge God's sovereignty and was ultimately restored.

- **The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32):** The parable illustrates that the son's sinful behavior and squandering of his inheritance led him to hit rock bottom. His repentance and return to his father's house led to a celebration of his salvation, demonstrating God's grace and mercy.

How about you? Remember when you were at your lowest, most desperate hour? Nowhere to turn all the things you trusted in to give your life meaning and purpose and fulfillment just evaporated like smoke. And after wrecking you, God saved you in Christ. You found forgiveness for your sins, pardon for the many debts of sin you had racked up, you found the Savior and the King who is Lord and God over all forever praised.

Listen, if you're an unbeliever and you're sitting here and you don't know Jesus, and maybe you think, "You don't know, Pastor Jeff, I've really blown it." And I'm here to tell you God can save you in the midst of your consequences. That doesn't mean you'll be saved from the aftermath of your decisions, but God will save you from continuing to heap misery on yourself and ultimately redeem your entire life in the resurrection. And oftentimes, God restores us.

Illus. I have a friend who made some pretty bad choices with his first marriage. He came home one day, and she had packed up her stuff; she left and never looked back. He was devastated. He spent two years wandering like a nomad in a dry and arid desert and couldn't get it together. After God completely emptied him, he was ready to come back to Jesus. He embraced the cross, and once again, the joy of the Lord became his strength. And right after this, he met a young woman who was absolutely amazing. He has spent the last 30 years giving himself fully to her and her alone and she to him, and other than his children and precious grandchildren, this woman has been the greatest gift he could imagine. His life is full of God's abundance. And he is grateful for God's grace showing up right at the end of his rope.

The odd thing about 1 Sam 8 is that even in the midst of God's judgment on them (yes, Saul was a judgment), God has set into motion a plan to redeem Israel in King David. God's gracious, redeeming love shows up right here in the middle of judgment.

2. In times of confusion, God's providence is unfailing. God has always planned to raise up a human king to rule in Saul's place. The problem wasn't Israel's request, it was *motive, timing, and terms*. How remarkable that God used their sinful actions to bring about his purposes. God is so clearly orchestrating all this while simultaneously taking into account their choices and their actions, most of which are sinful.

This is what we call the doctrine of Providence: God's continuous, purposeful control and care over all creation, orchestrating everything (events, people, and circumstances) to ultimately bring the praise of His glory through a redeemed people. What makes providence possible is that God is the creator of all things. God oversees, manages, and directs all things to the accomplishment of his intended purposes. And God has, from eternity past, purposed to have a people who experience the elation of expressing their praises to God for his redeeming grace.

God has been orchestrating the entire story to lead to the King of his choosing and his purposes. Jesus has been chosen from eternity past. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to David for an everlasting king over an everlasting kingdom, and He shall reign forever, and ever AMEN! Amen means "That's it. That's the end of the story." How does Jesus fulfill that promise? Please indulge me for the next 3 minutes.

- **In His Royal Lineage:** 2 Samuel 7:12–13, 16 "When your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up after you **your descendant**, who will come from **your body**, and I will establish **his kingdom**... I will establish the throne of his kingdom **forever**... 16 Your house and kingdom will **endure before me forever**, and your throne will be **established forever**." Isaiah 11:1–2 "Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him." (Matthew 1:1–16; Luke 3:23–31). Jesus is a descendant of David through both Mary and Joseph, as documented in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. This fulfills the requirement that the Messiah would be from the "house of David."
- **His Title as Messiah:** Isaiah 9:6 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Matthew 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 2:11). Jesus was recognized as the Messiah, the anointed one, by His followers. He was called the Son of David.
- **Proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God:** Daniel 2:44 ""In the days of those kings, the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself endure forever" (Mark 1:14–15; Luke 17:20–21). Jesus came preaching the "Kingdom of God" or the "Kingdom of Heaven," indicating the arrival of a spiritual kingdom that transcends earthly boundaries and is everlasting. Why do we need a king? Why would Israel need a king of God's choosing? Because we live in a state of self-rule (sin). Remember what God told Samuel, "They've rejected me as King from the very beginning."
- **His Sacrificial Death:** Isaiah 53:5 "But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds...and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us

all” (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 15:3). Jesus died for our sins so that we would not have to face the punishment for our transgressions. This, Paul says, is what I passed on to you as most important: that **Christ (Christos, Meshiach)** the anointed King died for our sins, was buried according to Scripture, and was raised to life the third day according to the Scriptures.

- **His Resurrection and Ascension:** Psalm 16:10 “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption” (Acts 1:9–11): After His crucifixion, Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God, which speaks of His eternal and heavenly rule.
- **His Second Coming:** Zechariah 14:4 “On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward” (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 19:11). Jesus will return in the future to establish His everlasting kingdom on Earth, where He will reign as the eternal King. When Christ returns, he won’t be a suffering servant. He will be the exalted, conquering Lord of all.

This is where this entire story is headed. To Christ the eternal and everlasting King of kings and Lord of lords.

Let me ask some clarifying questions today...

(1) Do you tend to try and control every aspect of your life, or are you able to trust in God's providence and let go of your need for control? The reason I will never own a self-driving car is because I don't trust it, but I do trust myself—my skills and my own judgment. That's fundamentally why I can't take my hands off the wheel. But have you learned in life that there is so much out of control? Can you relinquish your grip and trust the providential hand of the LORD?

(2) Can you think of a time when you faced a dire situation and later realized how God's providence was at work in your life? If you haven't had that experience, I want to invite you to the adventure of faith. To embark on a life of trusting Jesus.

(3) Are there any situations or decisions in your life right now that you need to place in God's hands and trust in His providence? Confess them and right them down. Commit to regularly giving it over to the LORD.

Small group questions:

- Are there areas in your life where you struggle to trust in God's providence? What can you do to surrender those areas to God?

- How can you be a source of hope and encouragement to others who may be going through difficult times, reminding them of God's providence?
- Reflect on the idea that God's providence is not just about individual circumstances but also about His grand plan for humanity. How does this perspective impact your personal practice of faith?
- What practical exercises or habits can you incorporate into your life to remind yourself regularly of God's providence and sovereignty? Meditation on God's word, gathering regularly in worship, solitude and gratefulness etc.
- What are some practical steps you can take to deepen your trust in God's providence in your daily life, especially during difficult times?
- Sabbath rest. The whole idea of “Shebat” in the OT was not just to recuperate for six days of backbreaking labor—but was to teach people to slow down, take time, and put margin in their life for needful things. And today, we’ve entered a spiritual rest where we rest from the burden of judgment for sins; we rest from our fears of the permanency of death; we *shebat* when we worship corporately. When we sing and make melodies in our hearts together, we rest from the worries and pressures of this life.
How can you practice the discipline of sabbath rest from worry this week?