**Saul proclaimed king**  29/5/22 dkm

Read: 1Samuel 10, James 3:13-4:10

Text: 1Samuel 10:17-27

Psalms: 145:13b-21, 68:19-27, 7:6-11, 18:46-50

There are over forty different tribes in the nation of Kenya. I have a Christian friend, a former student, who belongs to the Kikuyu tribe, which is the largest. Intertribal conflicts are not uncommon. As a democratic nation, they get to elect their president. But most people vote according to their tribe, so a Kikuyu man is generally elected president. Tribalism may prevent election of the best man as president. In fact, tribalism is often stirred up by politicians ahead of an election.

Israel was made up of twelve tribes of different sizes. Moses records the size of each tribe in Numbers 2. Benjamin was of comparable size at that time, but was decimated by a civil war recorded in Judges 20; the site of this war was the town of Gibeah, Saul’s home town. The elders of Israel had asked Samuel to make them a king so they could be like other nations. As their judge and prophet, Samuel felt rejected by the elders, but the Lord said He was the one they were rejecting. The Lord graciously agreed to their request/demand, but not before warning them of the consequences of having a human king like other nations.

Moreover, this human king would not ascend to the throne in the same was as pagan kings. They established their rule through fighting and a lot of bloodshed no doubt. In Israel, the people were wise enough to let Samuel, or the Lord, choose their king. Democracy would have resulted in a king from the largest tribe. Remember that before this time judges were chosen and empowered by the Lord as leaders of the nation. When the Lord told Samuel to make them a king, it would not be exactly like other nations. Samuel would make them a king but he would be chosen by the Lord. How would Samuel and the people know the man of God’s choice? How would they know the will of God?

In the previous chapter, we followed a donkey-keeper called Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, looking for lost donkeys but finding the prophet Samuel. The Lord spoke into the ear of Samuel, telling him to speak to Saul and anoint him as leader (9:15-16). Samuel gave Saul three signs to confirm his anointing as being from the Lord. But up to the middle of chapter 10, only Samuel and Saul knew about Saul being anointed. The Lord had spoken to Samuel, and Samuel obeyed the voice of the Lord. The Lord does not speak ‘in the ear’ today, but he does speak to us through his word, through the Bible. Be careful with Christians who claim to have ‘a word from the Lord’, a word that ends all discussion. Sometimes this ‘word from the Lord’ may be contrary to the Bible, like ‘a word’ telling them to divorce their spouse.

Samuel knew the will of God because God spoke ‘in his ear’, but why did he then keep this a secret? We see him gently dealing with Saul to convince him of God’s will; God does not force anyone to do his will. Samuel gave him signs, and allowed the Lord to touch Saul’s heart, which he did: ‘God changed Saul’s heart’ (10:9). Saul must have been sure it was God’s will for him to lead the nation, even if he was reluctant to accept this (10:21). But he did not force himself upon the people after he was anointed. Samuel would lead the people into the knowledge of God’s will by yet another sign from the Lord. It is amazing how God, in his own ways, works all things together for good, this good sometimes being to convince us of his will for our lives.

In the verses before us today, we see how the Lord finally made Saul king, with the people shouting, ‘Long live the king!’ (10:24). When the people gathered at Mizpah they heard the ‘historical facts’, which did not substantiate their call for a king. Our second subheading is, ‘Hidden among the luggage’, our third, ‘Held to account’ and our final subheading, ‘Held his peace’. Israel would have a king, but not like other nations.

**1. Historical facts**

People have very short memories, and our memories are often selective. The Lord’s memory is perfect, neither short nor selective. When Samuel called the people of Israel to assemble before the Lord at Mizpah, the Lord would remind them of a few historical facts. The last time they assembled before the Lord at Mizpah they saw the Lord thunder upon the Philistines and scatter them (7:5). God showed himself powerful to deliver them, but they rejected him and demanded a king.

Even since the Lord delivered the twelve tribes out of slavery in Egypt, he set in place a form of worship by which they would remember his grace towards them, and his power to deliver them from their enemies (10:18). But they turned away from the Lord and started worshipping other gods (7:3). The Lord would not have them worshiping other gods (Exod 20:2-5). But he would allow them to have a human king- with conditions. The conditions will be explained by Samuel as they assemble before the Lord at Mizpah. There are ‘essentials’ in our life and our worship as believers, and some things that are ‘non-essentials’. The first condition regarding a king was what has just been explained, namely that God was and will continue to be, their supreme ruler or ‘head of state’. God would choose a deputy-king or under-shepherd for them.

**2. Hidden in the luggage**

After explaining the Lord’s perspective on their demand for a king, Samuel proceeded to choose the man who would be king. He had already anointed this man, so this process was further confirmation for Samuel and for Saul, but it was the first the people saw with regard to their demand for a king. The process was one of elimination by lot, most probably with the Urim and Thummin from the breastplate of the priest.

From the tribes of Israel the tribe of Benjamin was chosen (10:20). From this tribe the family of Matri was chosen, and finally Saul, the son of Kish, was chosen. Choosing by lot was not a matter of chance. The people understood that God controlled the way the ‘dice’ fell. Jesus’ disciples employed this method of choosing a replacement for Judas, but not before applying certain qualifications (Acts 1:26). The Bible teaches that, ‘A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps’ (Prov 16:9). We might paraphrase, ‘Man proposes but God disposes’.

A brief moment of embarrassment followed the choosing of Saul- Saul could not be found. Embarrassing and also ironic when we remember that not long before this Saul was looking for lost donkeys. Saul tried to lose himself at the last moment; was he shy or was he humble? He could not hide from the Lord, of course. A quick prayer was answered, ‘There he is, hidden among the equipment or supplies’ (10:22). Saul was brought forward without protest to stand before the people. They saw that he was a head taller than everyone else (10:23, cf. 9:2). While the Lord looks on the heart, people look on the outside, and these people were impressed by this very tall young man. They all shouted, ‘Long live the king!’, although the praise of some was not long lived, as we will see.

The first king of Israel was chosen by the Lord. The people did not vote. The use of lots was not a lottery as such, but the appointed way of determining the will of God in those days. Samuel made it clear to the people, as Saul stood before them, that he was chosen by the Lord (10:24). We know that the Lord had earlier spoken to Samuel, and had also prepared Saul by giving him the Spirit of the Lord. This public choosing of Saul was but another element in the process of knowing the will of the Lord in the matter of making a king.

**3. Held to account**

The king of Israel was not only chosen by the Lord; he would also be held accountable by the Lord. In foretelling that the people would want a king like other nations, Moses laid down the condition that this king write a copy of the law given through Moses, and read and obey it every day (Deut 17:18-20). When proclaiming Saul king, Samuel explained to the people the regulations regarding royalty and wrote these in a book, which he set before the Lord (10:25). We are not told what Samuel wrote but the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 17, and his own words back in chapter 8, may well have featured in this book. While given as a warning to the people, these words would also serve as a reminder to the king of how not to behave as ruler of the nation. ‘Laid up before the Lord’ probably means that it was kept safe and secure in the house of the Lord.

Kings of other nations were often a law unto themselves. Whatever the laws of the land, they as sovereign were able change these laws. But the king of Israel was to fear the Lord, and acknowledge God as sovereign (Deut 17:19). He was to obey God’s holy law, just like the general population. If, or when, he turned away from these laws, he would be held accountable to the Lord. God would send his prophet or priest to remind the king of his accountability before the sovereign Lord.

Convinced that Mary, Queen of Scots, was subject to the laws of God, John Knox called for charges of murder and adultery to be brought against her. At that time (1560’s) most believed the sovereign to be the law. ‘Knox however, had this strange notion that a sovereign was under law, subject to trial by law and judgment by the people’ (Davis).

Thankfully our constitution, like that of the USA, was framed by men who feared God so incorporates Biblical principles. The number of God-fearing men in our parliament is decreasing, so changes to our constitution and laws no longer reflect Biblical principles; for example, marriage law. Our politicians are of course, accountable to the people, but let them also know that they are accountable to almighty God. Let every man and woman in this world, including you and me, know that we are accountable to God, according to the laws set down in in God’s word, the Bible. John Knox was absolutely right.

God’s law is not the means by which we are saved, but it is the law by which we will be judged, unless, by the grace of God, we have repented and been forgiven, and our names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

**4. Held his peace**

‘Politics’ they say, ‘is a tough business’. It is also a dangerous in many countries, even in seemingly democratic nations; just look at what happens to opponents of the ruler in Russia! Monarchies are particularly open to abuse of power, which may extend to murder, as noted with Mary, Queen of Scots. When Saul was proclaimed king of Israel all the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’ (10:24). After this proclamation, Saul went back to Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched (10:26).

But the ‘all’ was not exactly all because some trouble makers despised Saul, saying, ‘How can this man save us’ (10:27). They despised the Lord’s anointed. The Lord did not act to judge them at this point in time, and neither did Saul. Saul ‘held his peace’ (10:27). Saul would need wisdom from above in order to lead this nation, this nation of God’s people (James 3:17). He will hear a call to put these rebels to death in the next chapter (11:12).

Our Lord Jesus is the perfect king, but in this fallen world he brought, and continues to bring, division, with many rejecting him. ‘Is this not the carpenter’s son?’ his own people said (Matt 13:55), while the elders said, ‘Who gave you authority to do these things’ (Matt 21:23). As Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time great crowds proclaimed him king, but a few days later they were calling for him to be crucified. Fallen man is fickle, and rebellious towards authority. We do not like submitting to others, even those appointed by the Lord and especially not to the Lord himself. But the sooner we submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the sooner we will know the joy of the Lord and the peace that he gives.