

WHO NEEDS A KING?

Turn to 1 Samuel 2. What do you need from God? If God were like Santa Claus, and He would give you what you asked for, on the condition that you believed that this is what you really needed from God, what would you ask for? What do think you need from God?

Now, this question was a set-up. God is not like Santa Claus, and this sermon is not about what you think you need from God. It is about what God thinks you need from Him. In the Bible, Christmas is about what God thinks his people need. His people thought they needed the Messiah, and they were right, but even then they were wrong. They believed they needed a certain kind of Messiah. God sent a very different kind of Messiah.

Perhaps the hardest thing about trusting God is to trust his decisions about what we need. This sermon won't go far without us trusting God that much.

We Need a King

Christmas is about God giving his people a king. \There is much about God giving us a Savior; but the birth stories have even more about God giving his people a king. Did you know that God believes we very badly need a good King? Well, he does. It is a big part of Christmas.

It starts in 1 and 2 Samuel. In 1 and 2 Samuel we read about the search for good leadership for God's people that will last. This begins with Eli the priest

Eli and his Priestly Line – 1 Samuel 2

Eli was an old high priest at the beginning of Samuel, and Samuel was just a boy. Eli was a good man, but his sons were evil priests. Let's read what God thought about that.

1 Samuel 2:12, 17–18 Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord . . . This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt. But Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod.

Eli warned his sons, but he did not stop them. He could have stopped them, but he did not. So man of God came and gave God's message to Eli the father.

1 Samuel 2:29–30, 35. "Why do you scorn my sacrifice? Why do you honour your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering? The Lord, the God of Israel, declares to you: 'I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.' But now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained . . . ³⁵ I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always.

God says, I promised that your family would minister before me forever, but that does not work if you despise my ways. I will find a faithful priest, and his family will minister always.

Samuel and his Priestly Line – 1 Samuel 8:1–5

Samuel took over for Eli's sons. He followed God all his life, but not his sons.

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 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."

God wanted Samuel's line to last forever, but it did not even last two generations.

Saul and his Royal Line – 1 Samuel 13:13–14

Saul started off as one who obeyed God in everything. But that did not last long. Samuel the priest told Saul to wait until he, Samuel, came to offer the burnt offering. Samuel would come in seven days. It was getting on in the seventh day, and Samuel had not come, so King Saul offered the burnt offering himself. Samuel showed up just as Saul was finishing. Let's read what God has to say about this.

"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. But 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."

If you had obeyed, Saul, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But you did not obey, so it will not endure. The Lord has found a man after his own heart and appointed him.

David and his Royal line – 2 Samuel 7

After Saul, God tries David. The rest of 1 Samuel (31 chapters long) is the story of king Saul struggling, and of David submitting to God in a way that is very impressive. David is a wonderful poet, a great warrior, and loves God with all his heart. At the very end of 1 Samuel, King Saul and his sons are killed in war. 2 Samuel is the story of David's kingship.

David starts by conquering the Philistines, taking Jerusalem, making Jerusalem the capital of Israel, and building a palace for himself there. He brought the ark of God to Jerusalem, and put it in God's tent in Jerusalem. Then David felt very bad about this. He lived in a palace, and God's Presence lived in a Tent. David decided to build Temple for the God of Israel.

Now this is the important part. Before David had time to start this Temple, the prophet Nathan comes to David and gives him God's message. It is a play on the word "house," that works in Hebrew and sort of in English, too. House can mean a building, and it can also mean a family line.

Through Nathan, God says to David: "You want to build me a house? I never asked for a house. You will not build me a house. Your son will build me a house. But I am delighted with how you have lived, and that you want to build me a house, so I will build your house. I am promising to make the house of David last forever. One of your descendants will rule my people forever."

Here's the last sentence of what God said to David (2 Sam 7:16): *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.*

David rules well for 3 more chapters in 2 Samuel, chaps 8–10. Here's what happens after that. David commits adultery with Bathsheba. David has her husband Uriah killed in battle. David's illegitimate son dies as God's discipline on David. One of David's sons rapes his step-sister. David does nothing. The girl's full brother Absalom kills the rapist in revenge. David neither punishes nor forgives Absalom. Absalom leads a rebellion against his father David, and almost takes over Israel.

David flees for his life, and eventually gets the throne back. Absalom dies in that battle. Someone else leads a rebellion against David, and David manages to put that one down, too. And so on. There are good stories in here, too, a few stories of obedience and praise.

So, is David better than Eli? No. Is David better than Samuel? No. Were David's sons any better than Eli's sons or Samuel's sons? Were they any better than Saul? No. Saul's son Jonathan was better than any of David's sons.

David's descendants ruled Judah for another 400 years, and they were so bad that God sent the whole bunch into exile. That is the conclusion of David and his line. God kept trying to find a line of rulers who would lead his people well. He couldn't get one. Finally God just picked a David, a good man and said, "Your offspring will rule forever." But David was not better, and his offspring were worse than David.

But God knew by this point that he could not wait for a faithful line of leaders. If God wanted a line of leaders, then God needed to pick a line and work with that line, no matter what they did. When our failures become greater, God becomes more gracious. So God told David that he would stay with David's line, period. And he did.

So Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus, tracing the line of Jesus from Abraham to David to Joseph. But at the critical point, the genealogy fails! Joseph is not the father of Jesus. Mary's pregnant, but Joseph is not the father. She's conceives by the work of the Holy Spirit. What's the point of tracing David's line up to Joseph?

Joseph Adopts Jesus as His Son – Matthew 1:18–25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

My Bible calls this paragraph “Joseph accepts Jesus as his son.” That’s a good title. I’ve changed it to “Joseph Adopts Jesus as his Son,” which is a bit stronger. Jesus could be the Son of God without Joseph obeying the angel, but Jesus could not be the Messiah, the Christ. Joseph took Jesus as his own son.

The angel told Joseph to do two things: Joseph, take Mary as your wife, and Joseph, you name that boy. In our language, Joseph needed to adopt the child that was in Mary’s womb.

That was the only way that Jesus God’s Son would get into David’s line, which means that Joseph adopting Jesus was the only way Jesus could be the Messiah, the promised David king. Joseph’s obedience to the angel was and is crucial.

(I’ve heard some say that the genealogy in Luke’s Gospel was Mary’s genealogy not Joseph’s genealogy, so that Jesus was in David’s line by both Joseph and Mary. That is not true. The genealogy in the Gospel of Luke is also David’s genealogy. Luke is entirely clear about that.)

“Joseph, take Mary as your wife. Yes, she’s pregnant, and yes, that child is not yours. But the child is from God, and you are to take Mary as your wife.” “And, Joseph, you name that boy.” It was possible for Joseph to take Mary as his wife but still not make the child his, because after all Joseph was not the child’s father. Joseph could have taken Mary but rejected the child.

In that day, the father named the child. By naming the child, any name, Joseph made the infant his child. In the Bible, names matter, and in the Bible, who gives the name also matters. When Joseph named the boy, he made himself the dad and he made Mary’s boy his son.

And that is how Jesus got into David’s line; and that is how Jesus could also be the Messiah, the Christ. Joseph adopted Jesus by doing the two things the angel said: take pregnant Mary as your wife, and you yourself name that child. The last line of Matthew 1 says that Joseph gave the baby the name “Jesus.” That line is not an afterthought, it is an essential.

Enduring Leadership

God thinks his people need leadership that won't fail. 1 and 2 Samuel show us four lines of leadership that failed. Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David. To David God said, "I'll stick with your line, your "house," even if it fails." And it did fail, and when it had failed long enough, God took David's line off the throne. But God did not forget his promise to David.

Eventually God transplanted his own Son into David's line, God grafted his own Son onto David's family tree, so that he could keep his promise to David and finally give us an enduring faithful leader. Never again would his people be like lost sheep, wandering without a shepherd.

Joseph's simple obedience in Matthew 1 is huge here. He took Mary as his wife and he himself named the child. In this way Joseph brought Jesus into David's line.

Now we have a king, and such a King! "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." In Revelation 1 we read he is the Ruler of the kings of the earth. We profess this when we say, "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life." We are baptized because say that openly and we choose to put that truth at the center of our lives.

There's a lot of comfort in having a king like this, and comfort even in that confession. Let's make sure we take hold of that comfort and encouragement and confidence.

God thinks his people need leadership that won't fail. Jesus is also our High Priest. Eli's line of priests failed, and so did Samuel's. Now we have a High Priest who lives forever to sympathetically intercede for you and me. This last week he did that for you, and for me. We have a High Priest who lives forever so that you and I can always come boldly to God's grace throne. There's comfort in having a priest like this, and encouragement. Take hold of that.

God thinks his people need leaders that will always be faithful. Our church is led by elders. James the Lord's brother says that we all fail in many ways, and that includes me and every elder that this church has ever had. We all fail in many ways. Sorry, folks, that's as good as it gets. Not that you need to be told this, because it plain to you.

But did you know that all elders were under-shepherds? Peter calls himself an elder, and on that basis he instructs elders to be good shepherds of the flock. And then Peter says that Jesus the chief shepherd will reward faithful elders. Jesus is the chief shepherd and elder, and you are in his care. Earlier in 1 Peter we read, "you were all like sheep going astray, but now you have come to the shepherd and overseer of your souls."

Faithful leadership: Jesus is your chief elder and shepherd; Jesus is the shepherd and overseer of your soul.

God gave us Jesus to be all this, our King of kings, sympathetic High Priest, shepherd and overseer of our souls. God gave us Jesus of Nazareth, born to Mary, named by Joseph. This is the one God thinks we need. He is with us every day. He's Jesus, because he saves us from our sins. He's Emmanuel, God with us, even if most of the time we don't believe it. Let's take him at his word. Amen.

PRAYER: How great you are, God our Father! There is no one like you, there is no God like you. There is no king like your Son, no priest like your Son, no elder or shepherd like your Son. And who is more fortunate than your people? You reached as far as each of us to bring us to yourself. You have established us as your holy people forever. How great you are, God our Father. Thank you for giving us Jesus. Amen.

BENEDICTION: To him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. Go it God's peace to love and serve the Lord.