

1 Samuel 9:1-10:16 | “Looking for Donkeys, Finding a Prophet”

Preached on November 21, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to 1 Samuel 9, and we will be covering chapter 9 and part of chapter 10.

So a lot to cover this morning, but by looking at the broad sweep of this passage, it will actually help us to see what’s going on with greater clarity. *[pause]*

Last Sunday, we looked at the time when Israel demanded a king.

That was a not-so-good thing, and God makes that clear, yet he also *does* give them a king.

And it’s in the story that we will be looking at this morning that we will discover who that king is and the circumstances surrounding his anointing to kingship. *[pause]*

Let’s get right into it, shall we?

In verses 1-2, we are introduced to Saul and his background...

“There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth.

And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he.

From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.” *[pause]*

So we find out some interesting details about Saul.

He’s a Benjaminite.

This is interesting because Jacob predicted that a king was going to come out of Judah’s line.¹

So this sounds like already it may not end well for Saul. *[pause]*

But also, notice some other details, and these details show us that Saul is a king “like all the other nations”.

He comes from a wealthy family, he’s handsome, and he’s tall.

This is the type of king that Israel wanted and this is what our world looks for in leaders usually.

Wealth and good looks.

And we will see later on some other details about Saul that reflect a king like all the other nations. *[pause]*

¹ See Genesis 49:10.

So now that we know some about Saul, what happens next?

Verse 3 and following, “Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul’s father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, ‘Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys.’

And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them.

And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there.

Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, but did not find them.” *[pauseee]*

So Saul is sent on a mission with a servant to find lost donkeys, but they can’t seem to find them anywhere.

And we might think, “Eh, they’re just donkeys.”

But donkeys in that day were important for their financial value to a family. *[pause]*

And so every region that they go into comes up empty in their search.

They keep having hope that they will find these donkeys, but they don’t seem to be anywhere! *[pause]*

Do you ever go through this when you search for something that’s lost?

It’s like you are searching everywhere, but it’s nowhere to be found. *[pause]*

That’s when Saul stops the search and says in verse 5, “‘Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us.’

But he said to him, ‘Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go.’

Then Saul said to his servant, ‘But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?’

The servant answered Saul again, ‘Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way.’ *[pauseee]*

Here’s Saul thinking, “OK, let’s give up, my father’s going to be more worried about us than these donkeys.”

And the servant thinks of Samuel, who could help them find these donkeys. *[pause]*

But what’s very telling about Saul here is the fact that he doesn’t know of Samuel at all.

Samuel had been the nation's very popular prophet for years upon years, and yet here is Saul not aware of him, and yet his servant knows of him!

And also, Saul wants to give up on the search, while his servant sees the need for spiritual assistance to find the donkeys. *[pauseeee]*

Saul isn't really coming across as very spiritually discerning.

But once again, this is God giving Israel what they wanted.

They wanted a king "like all the other nations," well here's a spiritually undiscerning, wealthy, handsome, and tall leader.

That's just what the world values. *[pause]*

But going back to our story, Saul was out looking for donkeys, but now what's he doing? He's looking for a prophet.

And this change of course will end up bringing some surprising news and was so much better than finding some lost donkeys. *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever looked for something only to find something so much better?

I remember a couple times in my life where I went looking in some storage boxes for something that I thought for sure was there, and I couldn't seem to find it.

Yet in the midst of that search, I found some other item that I didn't even realize that I still had, and I'm like, "Yes, this is awesome! I totally forgot that I had this!"

So that's like Saul, he goes looking for donkeys, and he will never find them, but now he will find a prophet, and his life will change forever. *[pauseeee]*

So Saul and his servant head to the city where the man of God was, and we find out what happens starting in verse 11...

"As they went up the hill to the city, they met young women coming out to draw water and said to them, 'Is the seer here?'"

They answered, 'He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Hurry. He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place.'

As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat.

For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately.'

So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place." *[pauseeee]*

So Saul and his servant come into town at *just* the right moment, as these young women tell them how they can catch Samuel before he goes to eat.

But right before we are told about the meeting of Saul and Samuel, the narrator sort of changes the scene to tell us what happened *before* this meeting.

It's sorta like a flashback to the day before, as verse 15 says, "Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed to Samuel:

'Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel.

He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me.'" [pauseeee]

Ah, now we have found the theme that runs throughout this story...it's...

Theme: God's providence at work.

Now what exactly is God's providence, as I will be mentioning it a lot this morning.

The Baker Evangelical Dictionary says, "Providence...is the sovereign, divine superintendence of all things, guiding them toward their divinely predetermined end."² [pause]

So this detail that God told Samuel that he was sending a Benjamite to him reveals that this meeting of Samuel and Saul wasn't a chance meeting.

It wasn't some coincidence.

It was God's providence at work.

God had *chosen* and *sent* Saul to Samuel. [pause]

This changes what we had thought about what happened up to this point, doesn't it?

We thought that it was just an ordinary day in the life of Saul.

We thought it was just some task of finding lost donkeys.

But it's much, much more.

It was all by the invisible hand of God, and this passage highlights something so very important, and it's this...

I. God's providence is at work on the most ordinary of days and amongst the smallest details of life.

² <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/providence-of-god.html>

What good news!

No day is too ordinary, no detail too small for God.

Nothing passes by his notice, but all things are under his control. *[pause]*

If the weather, the sun, the stars, and even the grass are under his command, then what is not?³

Whatever God wants to do, He does.⁴

And even the most seemingly random events, like lot casting, are from the Lord, Scripture says.⁵

We may plan our way, but the Lord establishes our steps.⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Saul thought this was just a task that his dad sent him to do, but God was actually sending him out.

He thought he was just looking for donkeys, but God had him looking for a prophet, instead. *[pause]*

Saul's servant just so happened to think of Samuel and has money in case he needs to pay him - that was from the Lord.

Saul gets into town just in time to catch Samuel, isn't that fascinating? *[pause]*

There are even more details that show the providence of God as you continue through the story...

Saul approaches Samuel and God tells Samuel that this is the man who he spoke about.

So Saul asks him where the seer is, and he tells him that he is the seer, and he tells him to go with him to eat, and in the morning he will tell him what's on his mind.

Then in verse 20, he states, “As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found.

And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's house?”

Saul answered, ‘Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?’ *[pause]*

So Samuel is given great insight into the situation and shows authority, as he knows that the donkeys are found, and has Saul wait to hear from him about some important matters.

³ See Job 37:6-13, Job 38:12, 32, Ps. 104:14, Ps. 148:8, Matt. 5:45.

⁴ A reference to Psalm 135:6.

⁵ A reference to Proverbs 16:33.

⁶ See Proverbs 16:9.

And that's when they go into the hall. *[pause]*

Saul is given a seat at the head of the table, and Samuel tells the cook to bring out a certain portion that he set aside.

But the providential detail that I want you to see is found in verse 24, "So the cook took up the leg and what was on it and set them before Saul.

And Samuel said, 'See, what was kept is set before you. Eat, because it was kept for you until the hour appointed, that you might eat with the guests.'" *[pause]*

Wow!

God's providential timing was so perfect that Samuel sets aside a portion of meat for Saul to eat with everyone else. *[pause]*

Samuel didn't have to wait for Saul.

He wasn't sitting at the table, checking the time, waiting for Saul to enter the door.

But right when they were going to eat, Saul is there, and the set aside portion of food is brought out for him.

The appointed hour is always *God's* appointed hour. *[pauseeee]*

Look at some more details that show the providence of God as you go even further...

Saul eats with Samuel, and then a bed is provided on the roof of the house for Saul.

Samuel wakes Saul up and they both go towards the outskirts of the city.

Samuel tells Saul to send his servant ahead of them so that he can make known the word of God to him.

That's when we enter chapter 10, and I want you to just listen to these extremely specific details that Samuel gives, starting in verse 1 of chapter 10...

"Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, 'Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?

And you shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies.

And this shall be the sign to you that the Lord has anointed you to be prince over his heritage.

When you depart from me today, you will meet two men by Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah, and they will say to you...

‘The donkeys that you went to seek are found, and now your father has ceased to care about the donkeys and is anxious about you, saying, ‘What shall I do about my son?’

Then you shall go on from there farther and come to the oak of Tabor.

Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine.

And they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you shall accept from their hand.

After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim, where there is a garrison of the Philistines.

And there, as soon as you come to the city, you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying.

Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.

Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you.” *[pauseeee]*

Amazing! Talk about the providence of God over even the smallest of details!

Samuel didn’t give some general signs to Saul, but such precise signs that it would be impossible to make up or guess.

These signs show the hand of God in the most tiny details. *[pauseeeee]*

Saul’s going to meet two men by Rachel’s tomb.

OK, that’s sort of general and could easily happen on any other day, I guess.

But that’s not all, for these two men will tell him that his donkeys are found. *[pause]*

That’s just the first sign.

Then there’s the second, as there’s going to be 3 men that he meets at Bethel, and Samuel gives details as to what each will be carrying.

One carrying 3 young goats, another 3 loaves of bread, and another a skin a wine.

“Oh, and by the way, they are going to give you 2 of those loaves of bread.” *[pause]*

And the third sign is you are to meet a group of prophets and the Spirit is going to rush upon you and cause you to prophesy.

You could go on and on about these details, but it’s crazy.

God works even the smallest details on the most seemingly ordinary days for his purposes.

[pause]

That's our God!

Nothing catches him by surprise.

There is no stray detail that He did not see coming, which wrecks his plan. *[pauseeee]*

You know, there's that common idiom, "the devil is in the details."

Well according to our story, it's actually, "God is in the details," for he works his good plans even through the little details of life.

And you know, sometimes he works in unexpected ways. *[pause]*

Saul thought these were just some lost donkeys, yet little did he know that these lost donkeys were used by God to bring him to the one to anoint him prince over Israel. *[pauseeee]*

You ever hear stories of how someone talks about how they were having a conversation with someone and years later they say to that person...

"You know you said something that I have never forgotten and it has impacted me and my Christian walk to this day."

And the person who said it doesn't even remember saying it because it was just an ordinary conversation to them.

Yet that seemingly ordinary statement was used by God in an unexpected way for His glory. *[pauseeee]*

Do you ever overlook the seemingly ordinary days and details of your life?

Maybe God is doing something big through the ordinary days and details. *[pause]*

You think it's just another day at work, but it's a divinely ordained day of God.

You think it's just another trip to the store, but it's a divinely orchestrated moment from the Lord. *[pause]*

Think about all the small, tiny details of your life that have led you up to this point.

Think of all the details that led you to marry whoever you married, or get the job that you got, or to live in Clearfield right here, right now.

So many details that came together. *[pause]*

God is providentially working in even the smallest details. *[pauseeeee]*

Maybe you are like Saul, just living your life, doing a simple task, like trying to find donkeys.

And yet God is working that detail to lead you to something very important in your life. *[pause]*

You think you are looking for donkeys, but God works it into something so much more amazing than you could have ever imagined. *[pause]*

For Saul it was leading him to the prophet Samuel.

I don't know what it is for you, but I know that God works in the details to accomplish his good purposes.

Truly as Scripture says, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good."⁷ *[pause]*

Praise God that He is God over the details!

This truth gives us great comfort, for we know that our God is in control of *everything*, even seemingly routine things.

His plans will come to be, and He is doing something good and grand in the details, if only you could see the big picture that they make up. *[pause]*

But that's the thing - we don't always see what he's doing, and that leads me to the second truth that comes out of this story...

II. God's providence is at work, even when few see it.

The fact is that we don't always see God's providence at work.

John Piper once said, "God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them."⁸

There are so many overlooked details in your life that God *has* used or *is* using.

And it's not until the end that you will get to see how all of these little details added up to something magnificent. *[pause]*

We *especially* don't see what God is doing as we are in the middle of the details.

Saul didn't see what God was doing in the middle of the details that led him to meet up with Samuel, but looking back, he could see how they were working for a greater purpose. *[pause]*

He thought it was a normal day, only to find out that it would be a life-changing day for him.

⁷ Romans 8:28.

⁸ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-always-doing-10000-things-in-your-life>.

He thought his servant just so happened to think of how a prophet could help them in their search for the donkeys, only to realize that God was behind that. *[pause]*

When you are in the middle of a trial or hardship, you think, “This is *pointless*,” but then you look back and say, “Wow, God used that to mold me into the person I am now.”

When you get that job that you don’t want, and work it for 6 months and move on, you think, “This stage of my life is wasted.”

But then you look back and say, “Wow, if it wasn’t for that job, I wouldn’t have been prepared for this job that I have now.” *[pause]*

God wants to teach us through this story that even when it doesn’t seem like He is working, He is at work.

And even though you may never know it, God is doing something.

In fact, in this lifetime few may even see what God is doing through certain situations, but that doesn’t negate the fact that God is at work. *[pauseeee]*

Consider the story as we go on...

In verse 14 of chapter 10, it says, “Saul’s uncle said to him and to his servant, ‘Where did you go?’

And he said, ‘To seek the donkeys. And when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel.’

And Saul’s uncle said, ‘Please tell me what Samuel said to you.’

And Saul said to his uncle, ‘He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found.’ But about the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything.” *[pause]*

There’s no need to get into if this was right or wrong for Saul to do, but what I want to focus on is the fact that Saul’s uncle doesn’t find out what happened with the anointing of Saul.

So in this whole story, only two people know what truly happened - Samuel and Saul.

Everyone else thought that it was just another day. *[pause]*

Saul’s father just thought, “I sent my son to find my lost donkeys, and they were found by someone else.”

The women who told Saul where Samuel was just thought, “A stranger came and we gave him directions to find Samuel.”

The 30 people eating in the hall and even the cook just thought, “A special guest of Samuel’s came and ate with us.”

And even Saul's servant who was with him all day was sent ahead and didn't see his anointing.

So even he probably thought, "Well that was an interesting journey, I have no idea what all of this means, but it definitely was an odd couple of days." *[pause]*

You see, God's providence is at work, even when few see it.

Everyone else thought it was just a normal day, a normal encounter with a tall and handsome man, a normal meal, a normal visitor.

But it was so much more!

God was working, though few actually saw what He was doing. *[pauseeeee]*

We don't always know what God is doing, and so often it looks like He's doing nothing, but He is indeed at work!

This is a truth that you can rest your life upon!

This is a truth that can dispel your fears and anxieties.

It's a truth that can give great comfort and peace. *[pause]*

This understanding of God's providence changes our mindset about the so-called ordinary moments.

We realize that they may not be as ordinary as we thought. *[pause]*

What if we changed our mindset to understand them as divinely ordained conversations?

What if we thought, "This person didn't just show up in my office by chance, but this is an opportunity for me to make an impact in their life for Christ."

"This person didn't just need help with a flat tire, this is a moment that God wants to use in both of our lives." *[pause]*

What about if we saw our trials as divinely ordained trials?

"This isn't a waste of time where I just feel pain, suffer through it, and move on to more comforting days."

"This is something that God wants to work in me to mold me more into the likeness of His Son."

"This is something that God wants to use in my life to then help a number of people as they go through the same thing later on." *[pauseee]*

Even though we may not ever see it in this lifetime, let's trust His providential working in the world, even amongst the small details and ordinary days. *[pause]*

The apparently ordinary days, the seemingly small details, and the perplexing trials that you encounter are not as meaningless as you thought.

Because you have a Lord who is working in ways that you can't see and among moments that you overlook and forget about.

And this understanding of God can then lead us to say, "Lord, I don't know what You are doing in this, but I will trust You."

"Lord, use this ordinary day of mine for Your glory. Help me not to think of it as a waste, but let me take advantage of the opportunities it gives for Your glory." *[pauseeeeeee]*

There's one more truth that comes out of this story about God's providence, and it's this...

III. God's providence is at work for His people.

God doesn't do things haphazardly.

He doesn't work in random, unplanned ways.

He works with a purpose and plan.

And His purpose and plan involves providentially working for His people, which is ultimately for His glory. *[pause]*

And what we find in this passage is that very thing...

God shows his love and care for His people through the providential anointing of Saul, who will save them from their enemies. *[pause]*

Though they shouldn't have demanded a king and though they were a rebellious people, yet they were still God's *beloved* people. *[pause]*

Notice how many times that God talks about Israel as HIS people.

In 1 Samuel 9:16, he says, "my people" three times, and then once more in verse 17.

And then also in verse 1 of chapter 10 Samuel anoints Saul but says that Israel is God's people, "the people of the Lord," "his heritage." *[pause]*

The people are God's, they are HIS people, and God will actually use Saul to save his people from their surrounding enemies since he heard their cry.

This is the loving care of God for His people.

He providentially works for His people, providing them with what they need. *[pause]*

Isn't that such a comforting thing?

As one of God's people, we can know that God providentially works for us!

He has worked in our lives up to this point, leading us to Himself and saving us through Christ.

He continues to work in our lives, providing everything that we need.

And He will work in our lives sanctifying us, bringing us home, and giving us resurrected bodies someday.

This is our Lord! Our caring, loving, providing Lord! *[pause]*

And one critical way in which he provides for His people is by the Spirit. *[pause]*

Starting in verse 9 of chapter 10, we see the part where the Spirit rushes upon Saul.

It says, "When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart. And all these signs came to pass that day.

When they came to Gibeah, behold, a group of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied among them.

And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, 'What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?'

And a man of the place answered, 'And who is their father?' Therefore it became a proverb, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' *[pauseeee]*

God changes Saul's heart and then the Spirit rushes upon him, causing him to prophesy.

This demonstrates that it is God alone who can change hearts and empower us to serve Him.

It's His Spirit that's needed.

And the truth is: He has the power to change and empower even the most unlikely of people. *[pause]*

Saul began prophesying and the people are so shocked by this that they make up a saying that becomes a proverb.

They say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

And this saying came to be used anytime someone was caught off guard by something very unexpected. *[pause]*

Saul prophesying was a very unlikely, surprising thing and it just goes to show what God can do.

He can change and empower *anyone*. *[pause]*

Saul was changed and empowered for the new role that he was going into, and God can change and empower you for the role that He has for your life.

But it all depends on God's powerful working through the Spirit. *[pauseeee]*

We desperately need God to work in our lives, and He does!

He changes and empowers us for service through the Spirit. *[pause]*

Praise God that He providentially works for His people, giving us a new heart and empowering us for ministry by His Spirit.

So much so, that people look at our lives and are astonished at what God can do. *[pause]*

Maybe people look at your life, and they are surprised at the change that God has done, and they say, "Is he also among the Christians?"

Or as I look at my own life, I was very unlikely to be a preacher because I was extremely shy and quiet...

...Yet as a testament to what God can do in a life, people could say of me, "Is Matt Brown also among the preachers?" *[pause]*

But that's our God, doing what no one else can do, changing hearts like no one else can do, empowering like no one else can do.

And this is part of the way that He providentially cares and provides for His people, the church.

He changes and empowers people to witness to others, to encourage, to teach, and to build up the church with our spiritual gifts.

Praise God that He cares and provides for His people, so that we can continually remember that...

God's providence is always at work in the world for His people!

And the greatest display of this providence at work for His people was through Christ.

He promised and provided a Messiah, His own Son, to come to this world, take on flesh, live the life that we couldn't live, and die on the Cross for our sins.

And then he rose again in power.

Through the providence of God working all things to bring His Son to the point of death and resurrection, we are saved. *[pause]*

That's the providential care that He shows to sinners like us.

We can be forgiven through Christ and given eternal life.

So turn from your sins and trust in what Christ has done for you, and you will receive these great and marvelous things. *[pause]*

What a God we serve!

He is the One who can turn a search for lost donkeys into an anointing of Israel's first king.

That's the power and control, and yet also the love and gentleness of the Lord.

The One who can guide the smallest details into the biggest of plans, shows love to the smallest of people like us, and empowers us to play a part in His biggest of plans.

Who are we that we should deserve such care, such love, such purpose?

And that's a testament to His grace.

So will you trust Him in the seemingly ordinary days, and seemingly small details of life?

Will you trust Him, even though you may not see what He is doing?

And will you trust Him that He is providentially caring for you through it all?