

June 16, 2024

“Getting What We Want”

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

**Intro:**

Who among us doesn't like to get our way, at least some of the time? I won't ask for hands, but probably most of us, if given the choice, would choose to get our own way. We are all super nice people though, and so it goes without saying that none of us would ever strive to get our way more often than not...

We have been watching *Young Sheldon* on Netflix. The central character, Sheldon Cooper, has a knack for getting things to go the way he wants them to. In one of the more recent episodes we watched, Sheldon wanted to volunteer at a train museum. He was convinced not only that could he get the position, but that he deserved to get it because he knew more about trains than anyone else. I can't recall his second reason, but the third reason he thought he would have no problem getting the job was that he has a unique ability to wear people down. As good at wearing people down as Sheldon can be, it isn't really all that unique of an ability. I am sure we can all think of someone – maybe even ourselves – who is also quite capable of wearing people down in order to get what they think they are entitled to, or to get their own way.

This morning we are going to talk about prayer in this context, but we are going to get there through the moment in Israelite history where one king – Saul, was being replaced by another one – David.

**Ask and You Shall Receive:**

Some of you might be wondering how the narrative in 1 Samuel connects to this idea. Before we get there, let's take a moment to look at Jesus' instruction about prayer from the Gospel of Luke. In Luke chapter 11, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them about prayer. He begins by teaching them the Lord's Prayer, but then gives further explanation about persistence. The take-away from those verses in Luke 11:5-10 is that if we persist in asking God for something, we will eventually

get it, presumably because our persistence demonstrates how much we care about the issue we are praying about. And, of course, God will give us what we want because what we want is always a good thing, and God gives us good things. Right? Let's read quickly verses 11-13:

"You fathers – if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

God is only ever going to give us good things and will only ever answer "yes" to our prayers if we pray for good things – whether for ourselves or for someone else. If we don't receive what we have prayed for, that is a clear message that what we were praying for wasn't something good.

This is a common line of thinking and has led many Christians to teach and follow a prosperity version of Christianity, which promotes the message that we deserve to prosper and that God wants to see us prosper and so will bless us to make us prosper, and will always refuse requests that would lead to something that is not good for us.

### **The Samuel story:**

But the narrative we find in 1 Samuel tells something different. Not contradictory, but something that adds more depth to our understanding of how God acts through prayer. Let's take a stroll through the narrative....

Saul is the king of Israel. And more than this, he is the very first official king that they have ever had as a nation. Saul is a warrior, or should be. He is tall and in great physical shape. He would be imposing on the world stage and because of this, Israel as a nation would not be seen as an easy target for people to bully. But things aren't always as they seem. Yes, Saul is imposing, but he was never supposed to be in the position in the first place. It was never God's plan for the Israelites to have a king rule over them like the other nations did. The plan was

that God would be their ultimate leader. He would speak and lead and correct through the prophets, and the people would govern themselves by living out the 10 Commandments as the guide for interacting with God and with people. But the people wanted a king. They asked. They cajoled. They begged. They came up with reasons and arguments for why they should be given one. In short, they used their ability to wear someone down in order to get their way.

They did get their way. We don't often think about this, other than to shake our heads at their obviously mistaken behaviour. But it is significant to note that God did grant them what they were asking for. This was not a thing that would be to their benefit. This was not going to be a blessing. It was not going to help them prosper. In fact, God warns them in no uncertain terms that having a king like the other nations was going to cause them no end of oppression and difficulty. All of that fell on deaf ears and the Israelites kept on begging for a king.

So they got one. And we know that it wasn't a good thing. Saul started out well, but then went off the rails to the point that God stepped back in and took away his privilege to rule. This is what has happened as we pick things up in the passage we read earlier, 1 Samuel 15:34 - 16:13. God has rejected Saul and Samuel is off to Jesse's place to find and anoint the next king. What we usually focus on in that whole story – which begins back in chapter 8, is that Saul was a terrible king and that David was a great king and should have been the one on the throne in the first place. What we should be getting is that the people begged for a king, God said it was a bad idea, and they kept on begging until He relented and granted what they were asking for. He even went so far as to choose the one, Saul, who would be the king based on their expectations. What was God's ultimate response to all that was going on? 1 Samuel 15:35 says, "And the Lord was sorry he had ever made Saul king of Israel."

God does not always delight in giving us what we ask for. Let that sink in for a minute.

We are invited to pray and to ask God for things, but those things are not always good. Sometimes we know they are bad or selfish, yet we persist. Sometimes we don't know that they are bad. We genuinely think we are asking for something good, and we ask from a place of good motivation, but God knows it will not be good for us. Usually those prayers wouldn't get answered, except that we can be very persistent. And so God sometimes gives us what we ask for – and it makes him sad to do so because He knows the harm it will cause us.

There is good news though. The good news is that even though God does not always delight in giving us what we ask for, He is active in working for what is best for us. He could just force the good on us without us ever experiencing the bad, but if He did that we would not learn about consequences, nor would we learn to recognize what is good for us, or to discern God's voice when He asks if we are really sure that what we are asking for is something good.

Look at what happens after God rejects Saul as king. He takes the lead on sending the prophet Samuel out to find and anoint someone else for the position. This person, David, is nothing like Saul. He does not fit the image of what a king should be, according to the nations around Israel. But he is the one that God chooses. There will still be a king and that will still cause problems down the road, but in David the people have a better example of what it means to follow God and be a true Israelite, a people after God's own heart.

### **Conclusion:**

What do we take away from this?

- First, that God does answer prayer, and sometimes he gives the answer we want even if it is not the best thing for us. When that happens, it is a reminder that we need to listen more carefully to what God is trying to say to us.
- Second, we can know and find comfort in the fact that God is working for our good, even if we need to detour to experience some consequences. He does delight in us. This is a good thing. If the thing we insist we need is not the best thing for us, He is ready with an alternative answer that is good and will be

better when it goes badly. We need to be careful to not give up on God by blaming Him if something we asked for doesn't work out.

So, yes, be persistent. Ask God for anything, but when you do, also ask for the wisdom to hear and accept a word of caution in those times when what you ask for is not what will be best.

Let's pray.