

Thoughts from an Elderly Servant of God

My name is Samuel and I have lived through some amazing times in my long life.

There is, however, one especially significant occasion that I want to talk about this morning but, first, I think that you need to know a bit more about me and my role as Judge of the people of Israel following on from Judges like Jephthah, Samson and my predecessor and mentor, Eli. The role of Judge was to govern the people of my nation as a spiritual leader.

My mother's name was Hannah. She was desperate to have children but it seemed to be the case that this could not happen. She prayed fervently to God and she promised that she would dedicate any male child to the permanent service of God. Her prayers were miraculously answered and such is the nature of prayer that God heard her and answered her prayer. I have never underestimated the power of prayer and God's willingness to listen and answer prayer.

And so it was that my mother fulfilled her vow and, in her own words, lent me to be a servant of God for the rest of my life. This was to be my calling and I soon learnt how important it was to recognise my vocation to be a minister of the Lord. Being called by God to work for Him may be challenging but it is both a privilege and a responsibility. I have heeded my vocation and I have sought to be obedient to the will of God in pursuing it.

Very early on when I was still quite young and serving in the temple, I was blessed through hearing God speaking to me. I did not realise what was happening at first as such happenings were unusual at that time. The message that I was given to pass on to Eli, the High Priest, was not easy to convey. However, it did teach me that, while it is important to pray to a God who hears us, it is equally vital to listen to God's voice as He has spoken to me through worship, prayer and reading and through being aware of His presence in all that I see and do.

I eventually succeeded Eli as Judge of my people. There were many problems and difficulties to contend with but God continued to guide me but as I got older and since my sons were, sadly, not fit to follow in my footsteps, a cry went up from the Elders of Israel that we should have a king to be our ruler to be like our surrounding nations all of which had kings who, particularly, could lead them out in battle. God

encouraged me to explain to His people why such a move would create all sorts of problems for them but they did not heed these warnings and so it came to pass that God said to me that there could be a King of Israel. I was led to anoint Saul to be the first such king.

I very much regret that it was soon apparent that the Lord's warnings proved to be accurate. How important it is to follow in the way that God leads and not proceed with our own misguided plans.

Saul persisted in his faithless and disobedient ways and, in particular, sought to establish a reign of fear and terror throughout the land. And so it was that God lost patience with Saul and rejected him as king. The Lord then instructed me to go to Bethlehem to see Jesse. He was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth. I was sent as I was told by the Lord that He would point out one of Jesse's sons to be a new King of Israel. You can readily understand why the prospect of this mission filled me with great anxiety and trepidation. What would Saul make of such an assignment if he heard about it? Surely, knowing his reputation, he would kill me.

As ever, God gave me his guidance and provided a way in which I could safely make this journey to Bethlehem without incurring Saul's wrath. God can be relied upon to give guidance in difficult situations if He is asked.

I, therefore, set out on the road to Bethlehem to accomplish God's errand. This is the significant occasion that I referred to earlier. When I reached my destination, I was met by the elders of the city and they were just as worried as I had been about my visit. They were also aware of Saul's reign of cruelty and needed reassurance that I came peaceably. This I was able to give them. I then invited them together with Jesse and his sons to attend a sacrifice. There, God promised me that He would instruct me as to what I should do and to anoint as king the son of Jesse that the Lord would indicate.

This is what indeed happened but in a way that I would never have contemplated. The first of his eight sons that Jesse introduced to me was the eldest, Eliab. I thought that he would be the obvious choice. He looked the part and was the first born son of the family. Why should he not be God's choice? Nonetheless, the Lord made it abundantly clear to me that Eliab was not the one chosen to be king and neither were any of the next six brothers who were brought before me. They were all rejected. You can understand how puzzled I was until I ascertained from Jesse that there was an

eighth son, the baby of the family, who was not present as he was looking after his father's flocks. I asked that he be brought to me. This was young David. Jesse thought I would not need to see him but God thought differently as He instructed me to anoint him as the one who was to be the future King of Israel.

After the anointing ceremony, I was left pondering on the words that I had heard from God after being introduced to Eliab. His words were:-

“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart”.

Now there can be no doubt that David was as physically attractive as his brothers if not more so as he was ruddy, had beautiful eyes and was handsome but in God's eyes there was something different about him that was very special and which I could not see. I could not see right inside him and know how attractive he was to God. David's heart set him apart from his brothers and only God knew that.

That was a salutary lesson for me and one which I have never forgotten. David's heart was so much more than the organ acting as a pump to drive blood through his body. It was the life giving force within him; the core of his existence; the source of his amazing courage. What drove him was the spirit dwelling within him; the spirit of friendship and encouragement; the veritable in-dwelling heart of his being. These are the characteristics that I have come to see in him for myself but above all else I have recognised his heart for the Lord.

God perceived what was special about David and, thankfully, He knows and loves what is special about each one of us too. Although He is the God from whom no secrets can be hidden and who knows our innermost thoughts and intentions as well as what we say or do, He is also the God who can recognise, as he did with David, all that is good within us.

I, Samuel, can now feel that my work is complete and that there is a successor in place who can lead the people of Israel as God's chosen servant. David has been anointed with the Spirit of the Lord and will govern with the heart for our nation that God has so clearly recognised in him. Thanks be to God!