

Our Old Testament reading begins like this. It says, "The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul?'" But that makes us realize that we're actually starting somewhere in the middle of the story. Because why is Samuel grieving? What has Saul done that has made him so upset? To answer those questions, we have to go back a little bit to when Saul first became king in the book of 1 Samuel. Because the people of Israel at that time were worried. They were worried about a military threat that had come upon their country. And they said to the Lord at that time, "Give us a king! We want to be safe. We want to be saved from this threat. Give us a king like the kings of the nations." And God did just that for them. He gave them Saul to be the first king of Israel. And to Saul's credit, when he first was king, he was a good king. He not only defeated that threat that they were so worried about. He actually waged war against the Philistines too and was victorious, so that it seemed like the future of Israel was bright. It seemed like everything was going uphill.

But then in the chapter right before this one, in 1 Samuel chapter 15, things are going downhill. Things are not going the way that they should have. Because Saul is no longer listening to the voice of the Lord. God tells him in 1 Samuel chapter 15, "Go and wage war against Amalek." The Amalekites have now deserved their judgment, which has been long in coming. Because the Amalekites were a wicked people. But the worst of their sins, God told Saul, was that they had fought against Israel all those years ago when Israel was coming up out of Egypt. And so now the time of judgment had come. God told Saul, "Wage war against Amalek, and destroy them utterly. Leave no one alive." Because the time of judgment had come, and God's ways are true and right and just. And Saul did wage war against Amalek, but he didn't do everything that he was supposed to. Because instead of destroying everything like God told him to do, he kept some of the best of the cattle and the sheep for himself, keeping them for his own flocks, because it would be such a waste to destroy them, right? And he even left alive the king of Amalek, King Agag, not killing him like he was supposed to. So Saul had disobeyed the voice of the Lord. But worse than that still, unfortunately, was that when Samuel came to him and rebuked him for doing these things, Saul said, "But I didn't do anything wrong! It was the people. The people were the ones who sinned. The people were the ones who kept all of these animals for themselves. I have been obedient to the voice of the Lord." So not only did he disobey the Lord, he also lied, piling sin upon sin.

And so God proclaimed a judgment against Saul. He said to him, "You will no longer be the king of Israel. I am rejecting you and tearing the kingdom from you. And I will give the kingdom to someone better than you, someone who is a man after my own heart." And after Samuel left from pronouncing that judgment against Saul, he's grieved. He's sad about everything that has happened, because it's such a mess that has come upon the people of Israel. What was going to happen in the days ahead? Now, Samuel might've been grieving because maybe he felt responsible. After all, it was his hand that had made Saul king. Maybe he thought, "I'm the one who brought all of these terrible things upon Israel." But what's more likely is that he thought, "What's going to happen to us? What is the future going to hold for us? Because if the king who was supposed to be the very best of Israel, who is anointed by God himself, if the king has sinned so grievously, what's gonna happen to the rest of us? What is the future of our people? It sure seems like we don't have a future at all."

And the reason why he thought that way, Christians, was because he was focused on what his eyes could see. He was focused on the things which were external, focused on the things of this world. Because if he had focused his eyes where he should have, on the Lord, he wouldn't have grieved the way that he did. But because he only focused on what he could see right in front of him, he started to wonder, "What's the future going to be like? It seems like we don't have a future at all. It seems so bleak ahead of us." And Christians, that's such an easy temptation to fall into, isn't it? To be so focused on what our eyes can see in the world that we forget about what God is doing as God. We become so focused on only what's right in front of us that the future starts to look so bleak. It starts to look like we don't have any hope at all. Maybe you're dealing with troubles in your life, something that has caused you a lot of grief or something you just can't seem to get through. And you become so focused on what's right in front of you that you start to say, "Is there ever going to be a way out of this? Is there ever going to be a solution? I just can't see it. It seems like it's going to go on forever." Because we forget that the Lord is in control. Or maybe you're having troubles in your family, some tragedy or some tension that's going on that you can't seem to find any resolution for, and you start to wonder, "Is this going to go on forever? Is there ever going to be an end to this? Are we ever going to get along again? Why does it seem like the future is so dark?" Because we get so focused on what's right in front of us that we forget the Lord is in control. Or maybe even you're worried about what's going on in our nation, in our society, and the way it seems to be constantly going downhill. And we start to become so focused on what's right in front of us that we say, "It seems like this is never going to be better. That it's only going to get worse and worse and worse and worse, and we'll never find a way out again. Because why do people hate us without ever having met us, just for being Christians or just for being who we are as people? It seems like things have gotten worse." And when we become so focused on what's right in front of us, we forget that the Lord is in control.

But Christians, God does not leave us without hope. He does not leave us wandering in darkness, wondering how we're ever going to get out again. He shows us that he is in fact in control. Because listen to what he says to Samuel: "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Notice what he says here: "I have rejected Saul from being king over Israel." He does not say, "I am rejecting him." He does not say, "I will reject him." He says, "I have rejected him." It's a done deal. This has already been accomplished. The Lord has worked his judgment already. He's not sitting up in heaven, twiddling his thumbs saying, "What am I going to do? What am I going to do?" The Lord has already done something for us, so there's no reason to be afraid. And also he says, "I will send you to Jesse, because I have provided for myself a king among his sons." He doesn't say, "I will provide." He doesn't say, "I am providing." He says, "I have provided." Even though Samuel couldn't see how, he couldn't see the way out of his predicament, God had already done something about it. And God had given them the king which they needed. He had given them a future, even when the future seemed so far away. So Christians, don't be afraid of what our futures might hold. God remains in control. He is the one who's going to take care of you no matter what. He is the one who will lead you, because God watches over all of our steps. God reigns as King forever. And for that reason, we don't have to be afraid.

But Samuel doesn't quite get it yet, does he? He's still really only focused on what his eyes can see right in front of him. Because he hears what God says, and I'm sure he believed it. But then

he says in verse 2: "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me. If Saul hears what you want me to do, Lord, he will see it as treason, and for good reason. And when he does that, he's going to put me to death. If I do what you want me to do right now, the way seems so dark. The way seems so scary. How can I follow after you when I know that it's going to seemingly make things worse?" It's as if Samuel had said, "Yeah, I know you're in control, Lord, but it seems too dark. It seems too dangerous. It seems too far away."

But how often have we said something similar, Christians? Yes, I know the Lord's in control but I've tried and I've tried and I've tried, and it never seems to get any better. Yes, I know the Lord's in control, but it just seems to make things worse. Why can't I seem to find a way out of this at all? Yes, I know the Lord's in control, but I'm going to end up suffering for this. It's going to make things harder before it makes things better. We become so focused on what our eyes can see and what we think is gonna happen to us that we lose sight of the fact that the Lord is guiding all of our steps.

Because what does the Lord say to Samuel? He says, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you." It's as if God was saying to Samuel, "Trust me. Go and do what I have told you to do, and I will protect you every step of the way. I'm not going to let Saul get his hands on you. I'm not going to let you fall into trouble. I will watch over you, and you will return from doing what I have told you to do. Trust me, because I am the one who watches over all of your ways." Christians, God says the same to you as well. Don't be so focused on what we see, what we think we see in front of our eyes, because God will watch over you. And he will protect you in all of your ways. No matter how dark the way may seem, no matter how difficult it may seem, no matter how much it seems like were going to suffer, God will lead us through. Because God is our good Shepherd, the one who will take care of us always. So trust him, Christians, and follow where he leads, because he is your loving Lord.

But Samuel still doesn't quite get it. It's like he's saying, "Yes, Lord, I know you're going to take care of me. Yes, Lord, I know you're gonna lead me. So that must mean that you're going to give us a solution to this problem." And that's right. That's what we should think. God is going to help us. But Samuel wants that solution to be the way that he wants it. Samuel wants a solution according to his own understanding, according to the way he thinks things should go. This is why he says in verse 6, when Eliab, the oldest son of Jesse comes before him, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." Surely this must be the man God has chosen to be king! Surely this is the way God has chosen to deliver his people! But it's not an accident here, Christians, that Eliab looks exactly like Saul. Because you'll notice in verse 7, God says to him, "Don't look at his appearance or on the height of his stature." Eliab is a tall, handsome, young man. And if you go back to 1 Samuel chapter 9, we hear this about Saul: that he was a handsome young man, "and 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." In other words, Saul was a handsome, young man, and tall as well. Just like Eliab. So, in other words, what Samuel is seeing is a man just like Saul. And he thinks that this man who is just like Saul is going to solve the problem of Saul. Do you hear the problem in that? It's going to end up being more of the same. Because Samuel is not looking where he's supposed to look. Samuel is looking [at] what he can see. And Eliab is

certainly a very strong, mighty man, the kind of man who looks like a king. But he would've been the same thing all over again.

But God rebukes Samuel, and he says to him, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." God sees what we can't. God sees what is hidden from us. And God will give us something far greater than anything we might have imagined. Because God rejects the mighty sons of Jesse in favor of the weakest. God rejects the eldest sons of Jesse in favor of the youngest. God rejects what seems like the right solution for the one that is the true solution, a man after his own heart in David. Because it is this unimpressive young boy who will be the future king of Israel, and he will be the future of his people. God was going to provide for himself a king, a true king, one who would follow after him and lead Israel out of her misery. That's exactly what he did Christians. David was the king which Israel needed.

And God is going to do the same for you too, Christians. God will lead you out of these present troubles. Not in the way you think it should be done, according to our own understanding. But according to his own true ways, the ways which are far greater. Because no matter what we must suffer or go through, the Lord is going to take care of us and give us the things which we need. God's ways are always best. And even if we must suffer for the sake of the kingdom, God will give us a future. He will lead us out of our present troubles.

And he has done that especially, Christians, in his Son Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is a king raised up from among the sons of Jesse. The promised Son of David has come into the world to be your future, to be your hope in the midst of every trouble. He is the one who is going to take care of you. And just as he has suffered and was raised up again to the right hand of the Father, even if we suffer with him, following after God, God will take care of us in his Son, and he will be with us always. Because Jesus is the king who will be with his people forever.

So trust him, Christians. Follow after God. God will take care of you. God will watch after you. God is in control. And he proves that through Jesus, who has come to you this day as the promised Son of David who will reign as king forever. Trust him, because he watches over all of your steps.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you watch over all of our ways. We pray that you would lead us to always trust in you, knowing that you will take care of us through your Son in whom we have a future. In his name we pray. Amen.