

The Compass

Week 20

OT Readings – 1 Samuel 15:1-28:25

NT Readings – John 8:1-11:54

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- The fall of Saul and rise of David predominate this week's readings. As David wins victories, Saul's hostility increases until he becomes obsessed with taking David's life.
- Chapter 15 helps in understanding Saul's fall; his life spirals downward from this point. In the end, he consults a medium because God has ceased to speak or perhaps Saul can no longer hear.¹
- 1 Sam. 16:1-14. God's anointing moves from Saul to David. Watch the contrast between David & Saul in the Goliath story – who trusts God? Who has God's purposes fore in their heart and life?

New Testament

- Note the increasing polarization which Jesus causes – some will believe (8:30), but others, including the religious leaders, will reject Him and intensify in their resistance (8:48).
- Jesus close relationship with His Father is on display; His claims to deity unmistakable (8:58-59).²
- There is some very personally applicable teaching this week - hearing God's voice (Jn. 10), the power of truth (Jn. 8:31-32), walking in the light (Jn. 8:12), Jesus power over death and promise of eternal life in the resurrection (Jn. 11). Choose a passage each day for meditation and reflection.

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

John 9:1-4. This passage is important in understanding both sickness and God's character. There is not necessarily a direct connection in *all* cases between sin and sickness; though perhaps in some cases (5:14).³ But does 9:3 imply that God somehow was responsible for the blindness or that there was some predetermined purpose for this man's blindness, "so that the works of God might be displayed in Him"? It is possible to read this text differently by an alternative look at the punctuation, consider this:

Jesus answered, "Neither this man sinned, nor his parents. But so that the works of God might be displayed in him we must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work."⁴ (NASU text)

You can see how this changes things – God is not "causing" a blindness to somehow glorify Himself by healing it! Rather, Jesus, God incarnate, comes into the world to deliver, heal and release us from pain and suffering. This is the heart of God and the whole tenor of Jesus' kingdom ministry. God's works are displayed in His mercy and goodness toward us.

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

John 8:31-32 and John 10:1-16, 27. To *know* Him we must *follow* Him. His disciples are those who are disciples in fact not just in profession, they *continue* to live out His words to them. The result is that they are set free (8:32) and they live in the fullness of life God intends (10:10). How does this work?

We must be truth-filled and obey truth. Of course this means that we must know the truth which the Bible provides to us. But there is more. Jesus uses an illustration that everyone in His day would have understood, the relationship of a shepherd and sheep. The shepherd is intensely involved with his flock; he *knows* them, names them and calls them by name, leads them, cares for them, protects them.

They must be able to *hear* the shepherd's voice *IF* they are to follow him. To be a disciple is to live a lifestyle with a heart attuned to God's heart and with an active ear to hear His voice and then respond appropriately. In fact, hearing God's voice for *ourselves* is what it means to be disciples and followers.

What has the Shepherd been talking to you about? Saying to you specifically? What have you done about that?

Remember that freedom comes from knowing and responding to Him; there's no formula or pat answer, just *follow*.

Difficult Question of the Week⁵

1 Sam. 15. (Especially 15:11, 29 and 35.) Q. Does God change His mind?

The Hebrew word "nacham"⁶ is used four times in 1 Sam. 15. It involves God's *sorrow* or *regret* over making Saul king because of Saul's disobedience. Accordingly, God changes His mind about Saul's kingship. (15:11 and 15:35) When Saul is told by Samuel that God has rejected him, Saul grabs Samuel's cloak in a seeming act of defiance.⁷ Samuel's response is clear, "You can be upset, but God's decision is final. In **this matter** of the kingship God will not *change His mind*, he has rejected you." (15:29) How can we to make sense of this?

What is very clear when observing God's actions in the Bible is that He is unchangeable in nature, character and purpose. He never wavers, vacillates, fails, falters or is mistaken. Yet equally true is that He is flexible. He works with things as they are and interacts with our choices. His interaction with us is real, His relationship with us authentic and genuine. He invites us to interact and participate with Him in His purposes.⁸ Terrence Fretheim captures this wonderful aspect of God's character:

"The God of Israel is revealed as one who is open to change. God will move from decisions made, from courses charted, in view of the ongoing interaction with those affected. God may well adjust modes and directions (though not ultimate goals) in view of such human responsiveness...fundamentally in order that God's salvific⁹ will for all might be realized as fully as possible. It is this openness to change that reveals what it is about God that is unchangeable: God's steadfastness has to do with God's love; God's faithfulness has to do with God's promises; God's will is for the salvation of all. God will always act, even make changes, in order to be true to these unchangeable ways and to accomplish these unchangeable goals."¹⁰

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¹ Again it is very important to understand that nothing of Saul's fall and ultimate death was God's intent for him; Saul made his own choices. His downward spiral is an interesting, tragic study in what happens to a life that continually resists and finally rejects God.

² The "I AM" statements of John are insightful. Jn. 8:58 is a powerful example of the implications of these statements, "before Abraham, I am!" In Ex. 3:14 God reveals His name to Moses by saying, "I Am." Jesus quite literally claims for Himself the name of God!

³ It was widely held that suffering was due to sin; Jesus rejects this in this case. (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, 424.)

⁴ This punctuation in no way changes any of the original wording; it only adjusts the emphasis. Leon Morris notes that this has been considered an alternative reading, see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, 425.)

⁵ We had many choices this week! 1 Sam. 16:15 speaks about an "evil spirit" from the Lord terrorizing Saul, perhaps a comment will help here. It is possible that this is about an internal condition within Saul, i.e., he was depressed and tormented in his own mind because of the withdrawal of God's anointing (16:14). The OT does not present a detailed understanding of the demonic realm.

Another choice for "Difficult Question" would have been to consider the appearance of Samuel in 1 Sam. 28. Was it really Samuel or some demonic apparition? Because the text does not tell us, only narrates the story, we should not speculate from this text about the nature of the afterlife. I have chosen 1 Sam. 15 because of the importance it plays in our understanding of who God is and how He relates with the world.

⁶ The words in the NLT "sorry" (15:11 and 15:35) and "change His mind" (15:29, twice) are the same Hebrew word, "nacham." God is said to "nacham" over 30+ times in the OT. Nacham can be translated "change His mind," "regret," "be sorry" and even "repent." Of course, God doesn't sin, so for God "repentance" is closest to the idea of changing one's mind or direction in a matter.

⁷ In the context, Saul has asked for "forgiveness" but seemingly has no understanding of the seriousness of the situation. Saul wants to remain king.

⁸ Gen. 18:16-33.

⁹ "saving" will

¹⁰ Terrence Fretheim, *Exodus*, 286-287.