



Catalog No. 1633

1 Samuel 9:1-24

Sixteenth Message

Brian Morgan

November 1st, 2009

SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND? YES, BUT WHAT WILL YOU FIND?

SERIES: *THE CROSSING FATES*

Twice each year for over twenty years, Patrick and Barbara Cunningham have hosted a class for newcomers in their home. On the first Sunday, our Irish host goes around the room and has the guests introduce themselves by answering just two questions. The first is, How did you find PBCC? and the second is, How did Christ find you? As we go around the circle, listening to each person's story, drawn from various places around the globe, there is always a sense of delight and awe at how God's invisible hand sovereignly leads people to himself. No two are alike; the divine encounters are unmistakable.

In our last study we left our prophet Samuel dismissing the people after their painful decision to walk away from a life of faith and sell out for a king to rule them "like all the nations have." As the chapter closes, we are left wondering when and where Israel's new king will come from. How will God bring a "king like the all the nations have" front and center on Israel's stage? In a most intriguing and captivating story (9:1-10:16), we discover how the invisible, sovereign hand of God works behind the scenes to bring a *reluctant* prophet and a *disinterested* candidate to the right place at exactly the right time, to give *rebellious* Israel exactly *what* they had asked for. The key words of our story are "seek" and "find," which appear seven times and trace not one or two but three different quests. Saul is seeking his lost donkeys; Samuel is searching for Israel's new king; and God is seeking to bring the two together at exactly the right place at the right time.

Fokkelman keenly observes that the narrator heightens our awareness of God's controlling hand by the appearance of an exceptional number of characters whose speeches point forward or prepare for coming events:¹ "Whilst an average story has two or three main characters, and the plot often takes the form of a conflict which confronts them with one another, this literary unit has...no less than a dozen characters to man a plot working on one great encounter."²

Coupled with the unusually large number of characters in the story are a massive number of references to time and space (Fokkelman identifies 80 in all!), which bring a multitude of characters with divergent agendas together with the precision of a Swiss clock. Even a serious skeptic cannot escape the conviction that these surprising encounters cannot be mere coincidence; only a sovereign God could orchestrate such a wide range of individuals whose hearts all beat to a different drum to converge for his greater purpose. Ultimately this story foreshadows our Savior, who came "to seek and save what was lost," and most importantly, what roles believers can play in this divine drama.

I. A Royal Setting (1 Sam 9:1-2)

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. (1 Sam 9:1-2 ESV)

A. Echoes of Samuel's birth

The narrator introduces Saul with an impressive genealogy, just as he did Samuel. Several details invite comparison and contrast between the

two characters. Both were the sixth sons in the list, and both of their names come from the root "ask." Samuel was "asked" for by a barren mother in her prayer to God, while Saul was "asked" for by the people in the form of a demand to God's prophet. Both came from neighboring regions in the county, but Benjamin carries a painful stigma from the closing scenes of Judges, as does Gibeah, Saul's hometown, where the most heinous crimes in Israel's history occurred.

B. Early signs of potential?

Kish is described as a "man of wealth." A similar description is given for Boaz in the book of Ruth. It can mean either that Kish was a man of financial means, with great wealth or property, or a mighty warrior, which was what the nation was longing for. With such a father we should expect the son to have real potential for leadership. The traits which the narrator highlights to describe Saul make him a prime candidate to be lauded by the people. He is one able bodied ("choice"), handsome ("good") young man. "Good" can describe either an internal trait of one's personality, or one's "handsome" appearance. The narrator explicates the term in the second line, "from his shoulders upward, taller than all of the people." While Biblical narrative is normally sparse on physical descriptions of characters, this line is over the top. When it comes to appearance, Saul is without equal. What more could you ask for from a human standpoint? Saul is so tall and handsome that his appearance alone makes him look regal.

But on the other hand, in this use of two words for height we are reminded of Hannah's poem, "Do not amplify your speech, O tall one, O tall one!" (1 Sam 2:3). As Barbara Green reminds us, "To be tall in the narrative of 1 Samuel is risky, inviting a fall."³

So how does God get the world's man, with little interest in matters of faith, into the "God business"? The answer is that God goes into the donkey business.

II. Seeking Errant Donkeys (1 Sam 9:3-4)

A. Seeking but not finding (vv. 3-4)

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.

The story opens with Kish's livestock, his precious female donkeys, initiating the action. They have wandered off and run away. The verb *'abad* means, "to be lost, to wander about, run away." The root brings together two ideas of being lost and perishing as a result (Deut 26:5; 1 Sam 9:3, 20; Jer 50:6; Ezek 34:4, 16; Psa 2:12; 119:176). The image does not bode well in a text that will introduce us to Israel's first king, as the metaphorical description of a king in the ancient world was that of a "shepherd." The errant donkeys are perhaps symbolic of God's people who are lost because they are looking for a king in the wrong places. But just as God led the Philistines to acknowledge his unrivaled sovereignty

following milch cows (6:10-12), so now by his grace he will use donkeys to lead a worldly son to acknowledge his kingship.

Feeling the potential of great economic loss, Kish fires a rapid burst of imperatives at his son (“take... get up...go...seek”), thrusting him out the door with his servant in tow to search for the lost livestock. In obedience to the father, the two make extensive efforts to find the donkeys, crisscrossing the borderlands between Benjamin and Ephraim (the verb *avar* ‘crossed over’ is used 4x), but they are nowhere to be found. The only thing that resonates in this geographical tour is that the insignificant villages of Shalishah and Shaalim contain an echo of Saul’s name.

B. Seeking divine aid (vv. 5-12)

When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, “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.” (vv. 5-6)

After a strenuous and frustrating three-day search, they arrive in Zuph. Saul is ready to call it quits and turn their expedition home empty-handed. His first words are revealing. Bodner observes, “Saul’s first utterance reveals him as a young man uncertain about pursuing his way, and quite concerned about his father.”⁴ Saul’s fears are truer than he realizes; Kish is about to lose his son to another realm and, failing in that realm, he will lose him to a premature death.

The servant serves as a foil to Saul and outstrips him in faith, perseverance and creativity. Typical of the narratives of Scripture, it is the little people who are in the know spiritually, not the proud or powerful, and often they serve as guides to their “blind” leaders. What Saul believes to be the end of the road the servant sees as a doorway of opportunity, for their journey has taken them right to the doorstep of a “man of God,” who is highly esteemed because his words never fail. The servant then prods his weary master on with his own tantalizing words: “Perhaps he will tell (*yagid* – a wordplay with *nadig* v. 16 “leader, king-designate”) us [about] our way which we have set out.” Perhaps with divine aid we will “find” that there is more to “our way” than we are “seeking.”

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 (lit. “found”) with me a quarter of a shekel of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way.” (vv. 7-8)

With no heavenly horizon, Saul can’t see beyond earthly obstacles that prevent him from embracing new possibilities outside of his world view. He believes spiritual favors must be bought. And with their saddlebags empty of food and money, they are destitute, with nothing to pay the prophet. Not to be deterred, the servant has “found” that he has his American Express Card in his possession. One swipe at the ATM machine and instantly their “search” is put right back on track. Now that they have come to their end and are seeking divine aid in their search, mysteriously they start “finding” things.

Saul’s words (*mah nabi*) “what shall we bring?” are more than he knows, as the Hebrew can also be read as “what is a prophet?” Before we hear Saul’s response, the narrator breaks in to add a clarification for his readers about the term *nabi* (“prophet”), which “formerly in Israel” was called a *ro’eh* (“seer”).

(Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, “Come, let us go to the seer,” for today’s “prophet” was formerly called a seer.) And Saul said to his servant, “Well said; come, let us go.” So they went to the city where the man of God was. (vv. 9-10)

This double use of the term “formerly” suggests that we are entering a new era not just for Saul, but also for all Israel. With the advent of monarchy, a new office is needed. The seer will now be a *nabi* (a prophet), one who is uniquely tied to the king. The prophets were kingmakers and served as the moral conscience to the king representing God’s court upon the earth. As spectators to this unfolding drama, the narrator is preparing us to anticipate so much more on this journey than Kish’s unsuspecting and uncomprehending son.

In response to the servant’s initiative, faith, creativity and perseverance, Saul is finally out of excuses. Like a beaten down skeptic, he gets out of the car and steps into in the back seat and lets his servant drive him to church. To appreciate what might be going on Saul’s mind as they are driving to church, we need to know a little of his family history. Saul’s mother came from Jabesh Gilead (Judg 20-21), the only town that did not participate in the rash and vile civil war that ravaged all but 600 men in Benjamin. Because the tribes of Israel had taken an oath not to give any of their wives to Benjamin, Israel now feared one of their tribes would become extinct. To solve the problem, the leaders of Israel decided that Jabesh Gilead deserved the same fate as the cities of Benjamin, because they did not participate in war. One holy war deserves another!

So the congregation sent 12,000 of their bravest men there and commanded them, “Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones. This is what you shall do: every male and every woman that has lain with a male you shall devote to destruction.” And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan. (Judg 21:10-12)

You can imagine how no woman, having been the victim of such gruesome violence in the name of religion, would want to raise her son in the faith of the fathers. This explains how Saul could grow up within buy a few miles of Ramah and have no clue that Israel’s nationally acclaimed prophet lived just down the road.

Getting back to our journey...

III. Finding Women at the Well (1 Sam 9:11-14)

As they went up the hill to the city, they met (lit. “found”) young women coming out to draw water and said to them, “Is the seer here?” (v. 11)

As they head up the hill to Samuel’s hometown, they encounter several young maidens coming out of the city to draw water just before sundown. Being strangers to Ramah, they ask the young maidens if the seer happens to be in town. Normally in Scripture, when a man travels to a foreign land and comes upon a well with young maidens drawing water, a betrothal scene is ignited, followed by a wedding. Such was the case with Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah. But in this case Saul seems blind to the beauty before him and remains focused on his quest for the donkeys. The anticipated “betrothal scene” is aborted. Or is it?

Their question about the seer sets off a cacophony of female voices charged with energy and excitement over a man as tall and handsome as Saul. Bodner notes that “unpredictable changes in the pronouns of the Hebrew text” make it appear that the young maidens are all speaking at once:

They answered them, and said, “Yes, he’s right in front of you! Hurry! Now! Indeed, today he has arrived at the city, for today there’s a sacrifice for the people at the high place. Just as you enter the city, you’ll find him before he goes up to the high place to eat, for the people won’t eat until he comes for he will bless the sacrifice after thus the invited ones will eat. So now, go up, indeed, him today

you'll find him!" And so they went up to the city. (vv. 12-14a Keith Bodner translation)⁵

With fifteen time and space indicators in just two verses, this animated chorus of feminine voices presses home the fact that they have arrived at precisely the right place at exactly the right time; therefore they must hurry and not delay. Only the dullest of minds could fail to see that Saul is being drawn into something much more significant than "donkeys." "The young girls unwittingly become Samuel's animated welcoming committee"⁶ to a banquet that will celebrate Israel's new marriage to kingship.

At this juncture in the text, the point of view changes from Saul's quest to find his lost donkeys to Samuel's quest to find God's chosen king. The two now come together by divine appointment.

IV. The One Seeking is Found (1 Sam 9:14b-21)

A. The voice behind the search (vv. 14b-17)

As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place. 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." When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD told him, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people." (vv. 14b-17)

For the first time in the story we hear the sovereign voice that is orchestrating all the "seeking." God had revealed to Samuel the previous day that the man he was to anoint as Israel's crown prince (*nagid*) was on his way to Ramah and would arrive the next day right on schedule. Though God is giving his people a king in accordance with their request, he is not relinquishing the reins of his authority over them. Saul may be given a position of authority over the people, but God four times emphatically underscores the fact they are still "my people."

When Samuel observed Saul the following day, the Lord made his selection unequivocally clear: "He it is who shall restrain my people." It's a lot easier playing the "seek and find" game when you're sitting in the coach's booth. The prophet doesn't have to wander about into unknown territories seeking that which is lost. With his divine "headset" on he just waits until the one God is seeking is brought to his doorstep.

B. The search is re-defined (vv. 18-21)

Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, "Tell me where is the house of the seer?" Samuel answered Saul, "I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. 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?" (vv. 18-20)

Finally, the anticipated moment has arrived: the prophet and Saul meet face to face. Saul is intent on the donkeys, while Samuel is focused on kingship. Saul has no clue as to Samuel's identity; he approaches him as just another passerby to get more information for his agenda. In his naïve ignorance he puts his foot in his mouth, asking Samuel "to tell" him (the same verbal root as *nagid*, "ruler") where the "house of the seer" is. The word for "house" also means "dynasty," and in Samuel's case there is going to be no dynasty precisely because of the institution of monarchy. As Bodner points out, this is "not the ideal opening line in this conversation... given Samuel's hostility to the monarchy in general and sense of personal rejection in particular."⁷

But the prophet moves past his personal emotions and quickly gets to the matters at hand by redefining the search. Saul doesn't receive directions to Samuel's house; instead he finds himself standing in front of the seer himself and is told that he is going to be his guest at the sacrificial banquet: "This is the reason that you have come. You thought you came in search of your donkeys, but the donkeys have only served God's greater purpose by leading you to me. And having accomplished that purpose, they have been found. As for you, you are about to take center stage that will be a defining moment in Israel's history."

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?" (v. 21)

Saul at first appears to demur in humility, but his final question reveals a touch of reproach, and that he is anything but interested. His reluctance is later confirmed at his public coronation. When the people first look for Saul, he like his donkeys cannot be found.

V. The Goal of the Search: Coronation (1 Sam 9:22-24)

Then Samuel took Saul and his young man and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, who were about thirty persons. And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion I gave you, of which I said to you, 'Put it aside.'" 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." So Saul ate with Samuel that day. (vv. 22-24)

Samuel doesn't respond to Saul's question, but rather escorts him and his servant into the worship center for the sacrificial banquet. In front of thirty guests, Saul is seated in Samuel's place at the head of the table and given choicest portions of the sacrificial animal. Normally, the leg, the priestly portion of the sacrifice, was taken home to share with his family. Twice Samuel emphasizes that which has been "kept" or "set aside" is now for Saul to eat and enjoy because the appointed time has come. By giving the choicest portions to Saul, Samuel is adopting him as his son and successor. As a generous host, he is treating Saul as a king even before he has anointed him.

This concludes the first half of Saul's search for his lost donkeys that mysteriously led him front and center on Israel's stage to be anointed by Samuel as Israel's first king.

VI. Your Role in Seeking the Lost

Jesus further developed this theme of "seeking" and "finding" to demonstrate the purpose of his incarnation: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). Just as we are prone to methodically and passionately search for items of value that we lose and then share our consummate joy with others over their recovery, in similar fashion God shares his consummate joy with the angels of heaven when a human life, which has infinite value, repents and is restored to life:

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:8-10)

Now that Christ has paid for our sins on the cross and paved the way for all mankind to have eternal life, there is a divine search going on around the world to bring the good news of salvation to all nations,

for we serve a God “who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:1). But just as in the case of the agnostic and reluctant Saul, God needs many servants to play their parts in this drama of “finding” the lost. My encouragement to you is, get in the game!

Perhaps God is asking you to play the role of Saul’s anonymous servant. You may be one of “little people” whose work goes unnoticed behind the scenes. You may be attached to a person of influence—a boss, a co-worker, or even a spouse—who goes about life with no heavenly vision or faith. They call the shots and you have to follow, sometimes down dead-end roads or dark valleys. But there comes a time in their wandering when they come to the end of their resources and are ready to call it quits. It is then that a no-name servant is needed, one who is full of faith, initiative and perseverance, a servant who is bold enough to redirect a friend’s search to seek divine aid. Will you be that servant? Will you be willing to launch the “lost seekers” in a new direction that they may be found?

Then there are the young maidens whose feminine beauty and excited voices act like a heavenly chorus to awaken Saul out of his worldly sleep to see that he is on the threshold of a divine encounter, an event that transcends his search for donkeys. United, they urge him to hurry and not delay. The fact that they come into Saul’s view as they are on the way to draw water suggests that a wedding is about to begin. But unlike earlier betrothal type-scenes, the bride is not to be found among the maidens, for this wedding has larger ramifications. Our unsuspecting groom will marry the nation.

The young girls serve their task unwittingly, which makes the impact all the more effective. In similar manner, as we go about our ordinary tasks of the day we can have a profound impact on others just by the way we respond to a stranger’s simple request for directions: “Do you know where you are going?” The look in our eyes, the joy in our hearts, or the enthusiasm we exude in their presence can be God’s way of breaking into their world to invite them to the “wedding” he has prepared for them.

The servant and the young maidens play key roles in the drama. Then there is Samuel, who becomes the generous host to our unsuspecting guest. Meals are significant times in Scripture, for so much life happens around them. Samuel spares no expense for this meal and transforms a weary traveler into the honored guest who is adopted into this new family. Are you willing to do this for those whom God is seeking? The early Christians viewed hospitality (the Greek term is “lover of strangers”) as an effective tool for spreading the good news. But in our fast-paced, modern culture, few homes are able to preserve sacred boundaries around meals for their children, let alone adding a “lost” stranger into the mix. But despite the current trends, we must stand against the tide and recover the lost art of meals that promote all that is sacred.

It was no easy task for Samuel to grant such honor to one such as Saul. Yet he did it out of obedience to God’s command. Will you? Will you take in the one whom God is seeking and transform an ordinary meal into his or her wedding feast? Travelling through Europe at 19, it was the hospitality of Christians who took me into their homes and treated me like a son of the “King” that did much to enlarge my faith and deepen my love for Christ.

Finally, there are some among us who are like Saul. You have no interest in spiritual matters; you may not even know why you are here this morning. Perhaps, like him, you carry wounds that cut deeply in the name of “religion.” But in recent days you have suffered significant losses and have grown weary in your search for recovery.

**Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food. (Isa 55:2)**

Perhaps for the first time in your life you are at the end of your resources and are open to divine aid. If that is the case, Jesus invites you to be his guest at a banquet in his honor. This feast is for you. It is the day of your wedding, the day you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is your King. Come and eat!

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:19-20)

1 J. P. Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Corcum, 1993), 356.

2 Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 361.

3 Barbara Green, *How are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel JSOT Sup*, 365 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 203, quoted by Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel, A Narrative Commentary* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 79.

4 Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 81.

5 Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 83-84.

6 Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology, an Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 634.

7 Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 88.

Copyright 2009 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino