

**Sermon Title:** “Whose Kingdom Am I Seeking?”

**Series:** Seeking God’s Kingdom, Part 29

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 31

**Main Takeaway:** No matter what comes our way, the question remains the same: Whose kingdom are we seeking? The answer reveals the direction of our hearts.

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## Part 29 Sermon Manuscript

We started this series back in August of 2025.

Since then, we’ve all been through a lot...  
But God hasn’t been silent.

And so this morning...  
I want us to reflect on what God has been showing us...  
I want us to ask ourselves...

**[SLIDE 1] How has God been forming us through His Word throughout our time in 1 Samuel?**

As I thought about that this week...  
The first thing that comes to mind is that...

**[SLIDE 2] God has been teaching us to trust His nearness**

Over the past year,  
we’ve experienced loss...  
Major life changes...  
Uncertainty...

But God has proven that even when all is stripped away...  
He’s near.

His *presence* and *peace* are near.  
His *wisdom* and *strength* are near.

And He’s ready to speak.

In fact, that's another thing...

**[SLIDE 3] God has been teaching us to listen for His voice.**

We listen for His voice through His Word...

Through prayer...

Through His Spirit moving in us...

And through the voices of wisdom He's placed around us.

It's like when someone said to Amanda and I...

***"The doctors are great, but they're not the Almighty."***

God used that person to speak into our lives 9 months ago.

Those words still resonate...

They remind us that even when we're walking the darkest valleys...

Our Almighty God and King, Jesus...

Is still in control.

And so, in that way...

**[SLIDE 4] God has been teaching us to surrender our fears.**

Hannah feared she'd never have a child.

Yet she prayed through her tears.

At one point, Samuel feared Saul would kill him...

But he trusted the LORD more than he feared Saul.

And sometimes even David feared.

When perseverance wore thin... he ran.

But when it seemed like everything was taken from him...

He turned to the LORD and found strength.

So why did Hannah, Samuel and David surrender their fears?

**It's because they knew the LORD's heart.**

And now, God's revealing His heart to us through their stories...

**[SLIDE 5] God has been showing us His heart.**

This is the deepest formational truth we've been learning together.

It's what Seeking God's Kingdom is all about.

When we seek Him...

He reveals more of Himself to us.

In fact, there's a foundational truth about **the character of God...**  
found at the center of 1 Samuel...

**[SLIDE 6] 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."**

And so, 1 Samuel kept us asking...

How do the hearts of God's people reflect His character?

We've seen that...

**Hannah** had a prayerful heart.

**Samuel** had a willing heart.

**Eli and his sons** had deceptive hearts.

**Saul** had a heart that grew in fear.

**Jonathan** had a trusting heart.

**Abigail** had a heart of wisdom.

**David** was a man after God's own heart.

And so in that way...

1 Samuel is more than a history book...

**It's a book about real people who went through real struggles.**

And the same God who looked at their hearts...

Looks at ours.

And I wonder...  
Of all the people I just listed...  
Who do you resonate with the most?

The answer probably changes depending on the day.

Some days we resonate with Hannah's desperation...  
Or Samuel's frustration...  
Some days we trust like Jonathan...  
Other days we turn back to the LORD like David.

And if we're really being honest...  
We all have moments when we resonate with Saul's fear.

And so...  
It's worth reflecting on the trajectory of our own story.

**What kind of people are we becoming?**

**Are we moving toward God...  
Or are we drifting away?**

**And one of these days...**

**[SLIDE 6.1] When our story comes to a close, how will our hearts be remembered?**

Today we're going to talk about the end of Saul's story.

You know...  
His story began with so much potential.

God *chose* Saul...  
He *empowered* Saul...  
And He even *used* Saul to accomplish His will.

But over time...

**Fear distorted Saul's reality...  
It magnified the threat...  
And it slowly eroded his trust in the LORD.**

And now, we come to the final moments of his life.

### **Let's look at chapter 31...**

In the very first verse,  
we see that the Israelites and the Philistines are at war...

#### **[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 31:1 - Now the Philistines fought against Israel...**

Imagine the scale of this battle...  
Thousands of soldiers colliding in the Jezreel valley.

You know...

The last time we watched Israel face the Philistines...  
A young shepherd boy walked into the valley and trusted the LORD.  
This time, an aging king walks into the valley without Him.

And the battle wasn't going well...

#### **[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 31:1a-2 - the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua.**

The Israelites were now outnumbered and terrified.

And those that were still standing started running for their lives...

Samuel's prophecy was coming true.

In chapter 28, Samuel said that Saul's sons would fall.

And now...

Jonathan's gone.

Abinadab... gone.

Malki-Shua... gone.

#### **[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 31:3a - The fighting grew fierce around Saul...**

The Philistines are continuing to press in around him...

I imagine he's *distressed*...

At this point he had to realize he was fighting a losing battle.

**But as Saul kept fighting...**

The Philistine archers took aim...

**[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 31:3b - and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.**

Maybe Samuel's words from the night before were running through Saul's mind...

Samuel said:

*"Tomorrow... you and your sons will be with me...*

*The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines."*<sup>1</sup>

And so...

Realizing this is it...

Saul said to his armor-bearer...

**[SLIDE 11] 1 Samuel 31:4 - "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me."**

Saul's like...

*Who knows what these guys will do to me?*

*Just end it... here and now... on my terms.*

But the armor-bearer was terrified.

He wouldn't do it.

So Saul took his own sword...

And fell on it.

When the armor-bearer realized Saul was dead...

He also fell on his sword.

**[SLIDE 12] 1 Samuel 31:6 - So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.**

Saul's reign is **finished**.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 28:19

[...]

I'm curious...

How does this make you feel?

Do you sense the tragedy?

Because there's a real emptiness here.

There's no hope left for Saul.

It's over.

This isn't something God was celebrating.

**And that's what makes this tragic!**

Scripture says in Lamentations...

**[SLIDE 13] Lamentations 3:32-33 - Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.**

Saul's death was brought on by his own sin.

He chose to reject Yahweh.

Over and over, the LORD gave Saul opportunities to turn to Him...  
To trust Him...

But Saul's heart is ultimately what led to his own judgment.

It's because of Saul's choices that the LORD lifted His hand of protection...  
And now the nation of Israel is in shambles.

They're falling apart at the seams...  
And **they're terrified of what might happen next...**

So they ran...

**[SLIDE 14] 1 Samuel 31:7 - When the Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his**

**sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. And the Philistines came and occupied them.**

Rather than going back to their camp...

The Philistines took over nearby Israelite towns and stayed the night.

Imagine abandoning your home because you know the enemy's coming.

They're entering your home...

They're going through your stuff...

Watching your TV...

Playing your video games...

Eating at your table...

And sleeping in your bed...

*—Obviously they didn't have Disney+ or a Nintendo Switch...*

I'm just making the point that Saul's choices affected more than just himself.

Verse 8 says that the next day,  
the Philistines went back out to the battlefield.

There, they found Saul and his three sons...  
Dead on Mount Gilboa.

They cut off Saul's head...  
Stripped his armor...  
And began spreading the news of their victory.

**Verse 10 says...**

**[SLIDE 15] 1 Samuel 31:10 - They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.**

This is the Philistine Temple of the Ashtoreths.  
It was near the Temple of Dagon...

You might remember Dagon's Temple...  
It's where they tried to place the Ark of the LORD...  
And Dagon's statue kept falling...

Eventually his head broke off...  
Which is interesting, because this is where they put Saul's head.

And just down the road...  
They put Saul's armor in the Ashtoreth Temple.

Saul's head and armor were their trophies of war.  
The Philistines think they've won.  
They 100% believe their gods overpowered Israel's God.

### **But we know better.**

And the irony is that what they think represents Yahweh God...  
Actually couldn't be farther from the truth.

### **That's why Saul's armor is an interesting little detail.**

The last time 1 Samuel mentioned Saul's armor,  
was when he offered it to David before facing Goliath.

Saul insisted that David wear it...  
He felt David didn't stand a chance without it.

But David refused to wear Saul's armor...  
Because David trusted the LORD.

And that's been the pattern throughout 1 Samuel...

### **As Saul's trust in the LORD eroded with fear... David continued to learn what it meant to trust the LORD.**

That couldn't be more clear with the final two chapters.

Because while Israel was falling apart under Saul...  
David was already building them up.

### **[SLIDE 16] The Final Chapters Chart**

Look at how the final two chapters of 1 Samuel end.

David strengthened himself in the LORD.  
Saul fell on his sword.

David inquired of the LORD and got direction.  
Saul inquired of the LORD and got silence.

David lost everything...  
But through the LORD's strength, he got it all back.  
Saul had everything...  
But through his own strength, he lost everything.

David then gave gifts to the towns of Judah.  
But Saul's stuff became trophies in pagan temples.

David's families were *restored*.  
Saul's family was *destroyed*.

David's kingdom was *expanding*.  
Saul's kingdom was *collapsing*."

### **And here's the key thing to notice...**

Both men faced hardship...  
Both experienced fear...  
Both made mistakes...

But **the difference between them...**  
**Was the direction they were facing.**

**[SLIDE 17] David kept turning back toward the LORD, while Saul kept drifting away.**

And one of the saddest parts of Saul's story...  
Is that when he eventually realized what God was doing...  
He wasn't on board with God's will.

**Saul spent years of his life,  
fighting against what God had already decided.**

And that's what makes this story so tragic.

It's not that Saul was merely the villain of 1 Samuel...  
It's that every time he had an opportunity to trust the LORD...  
He kept choosing a different path.

Rather than trusting the LORD...  
**He'd take matters into his own hands.**

As Israel's king...  
 His job was to seek the LORD and follow His ways.  
 But Saul only followed what benefited him.

*He chose* to reject the LORD.  
*He chose* to throw his spear.  
*He chose* to pursue David.  
*He chose* to run to the witch of Endor.

And ultimately...  
*He chose* to fall on his own sword.

And yet...  
**The Scripture says it was God's choice to end Saul's life.**

1 Chronicles says...

**[SLIDE 18] 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 - Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.**

1 & 2 Chronicles help us understand Israel's history.

And when the writer of Chronicles looks back at Saul's life...  
 His conclusion is sobering...

**God was the One who brought Saul's story to an end.**

Saul made his own choices.  
 His sin created the mess.

But it was God's choice to bring judgment on Saul...  
 And give the Kingdom to David.

And so...

The question that's followed us throughout this entire series is this:

## **[SLIDE 19] Whose kingdom are we seeking?**

Saul spent most of his life trying to hold on to his own kingdom.

David learned to seek God's Kingdom.

And in the end...

That choice made all the difference.

### **So whose kingdom are we seeking?**

Our own...

Or God's?

This question carries a lot of weight.

Because it's so much more than a devotional cliché.

It's not just another interesting sermon point.

If we forget this question...

It's almost like...

*What are we even doing?*

This is a question that we need to be constantly asking ourselves.

**Because there are so many "kingdoms" out there...**

**That are all competing for our allegiance.**

Politics...

Money...

Materialism...

Status...

**All of these things compete for our allegiance.**

Let me pick on politics for a moment...

Because this might be one of the bigger competing forces...

I've actually had people ask me why I rarely talk about politics.

I like to tell them...

*Actually, I talk about political stuff all the time.*

But my job isn't to side with any party...

My calling as a pastor is to show a biblical perspective.

But I will say...

There have been times in my life where political messages began to impact me in a way I didn't want.

I used to watch the news every day.

But after a while...

I started feeling fear and anxiety creep in...

I even started feeling angry toward people who disagreed with me...

Just being honest!

When it comes to political agendas...

I've noticed that pattern of fear in me...

I've felt the threat being magnified...

**And the last thing I want is for fear to erode my trust in the LORD.**

**That's not the trajectory I want my life to be on.**

Whether the world goes down the toilet...

Or we prosper like never before...

Either way...

I don't want political agendas to matter more than the LORD.

I just want to follow Jesus in the midst of the mess.

I don't want to be so distracted by political messaging...

That I totally miss the mission of Jesus.

Followers of Jesus are called to a higher Kingdom and purpose.

But the reality is that the enemy uses anything they can to keep us from seeing clearly, and from truly seeking God's Kingdom.

We've now spent several months watching that happen to Saul. And if we're not awake... That same pattern of fear can find its way in our lives.

Now, to be fair...

Politics...

Money...

Success...

Stuff...

They're not the enemy.

But the danger is when anything becomes more important to us than seeking God's Kingdom.

Again...

It all comes down to one question:  
*Whose kingdom are we seeking?*

Think of that question as a heart-diagnostic question...

It applies to everything:

- When I'm scrolling social media...  
*Whose kingdom am I seeking?*
- When I'm spending money...  
*Whose kingdom am I seeking?*
- When I'm angry...  
*Whose kingdom am I seeking?*
- When I'm afraid...  
*Whose kingdom am I seeking?*

No matter what happens in our lives...  
We should always be asking:  
Whose kingdom am I seeking?

Because the answer to that question...  
Reveals the direction of our heart...

**Let's Pray**