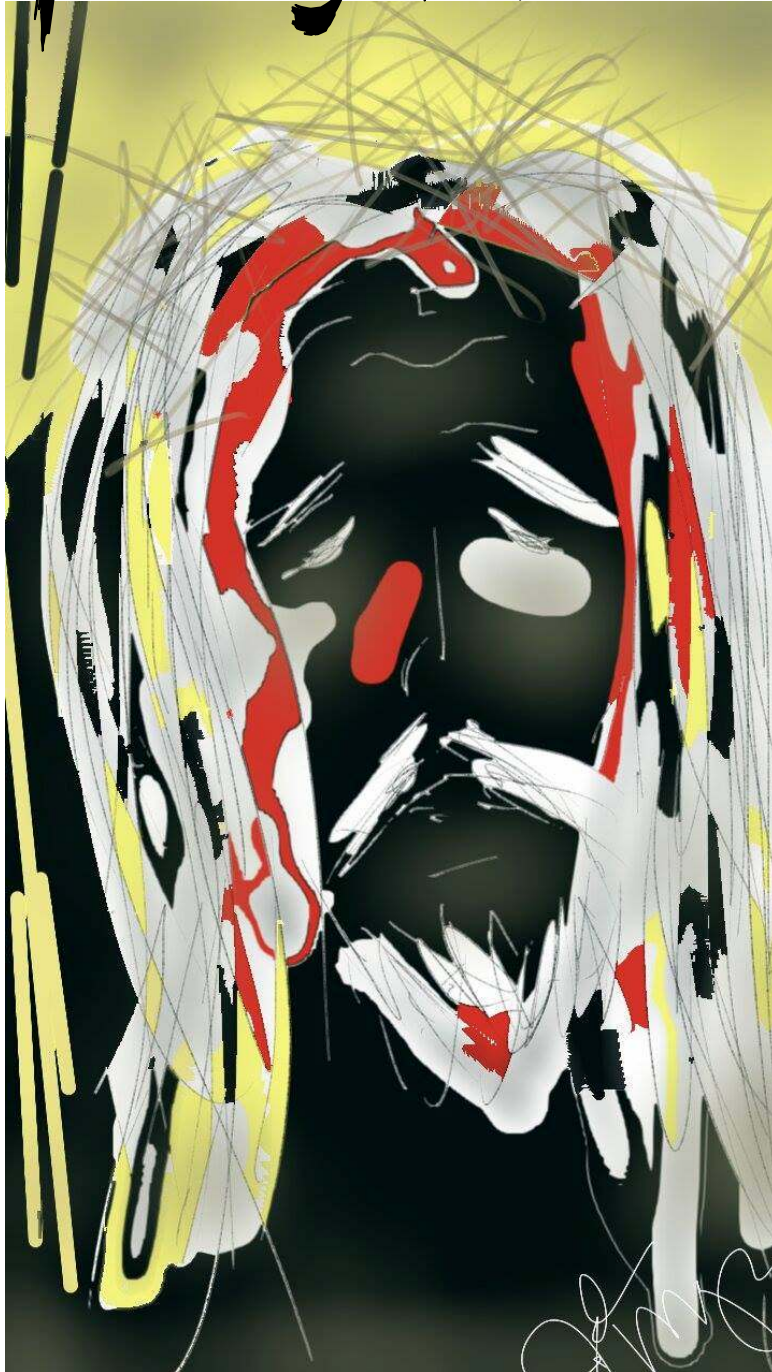


Despising the Lamb



Contempt for Christ in First Samuel
Teague McKamey

Published in 2014 by

The Voice of One

Cover art by Johnny Mays

**Despising the Lamb:
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Introduction

Historically speaking, 1 Samuel is the dark before the dawn of David's reign. God's people were fumbling around without His word to light their path (Psalm 119:105). Their indifference towards the tabernacle, worship of other gods, and infighting was bad enough. But there was something blacker still. First Samuel presents instance after instance of the Lord's people treating Him with contempt. He was repeatedly despised and rejected—not by godless pagans but by His own (Isaiah 53:3; John 1:11).

Spiritually, the pictures of contempt in 1 Samuel are all too relevant. They show that when Jesus comes self-effacing and humble, He is taunted, scorned, overlooked, rejected, attacked, and driven away. This was true when He was crucified, and it is true as He indwells us today. Jesus said, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 14:20). These pictures are recorded in 1 Samuel to break our hearts and to show the sobering cost of following the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4).

I. Hannah and Peninnah

Rival Wives

First Samuel opens with a story about Elkanah and his wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah was unable to have children. Peninnah bore children for Elkanah and smugly needled Hannah about it: “Her rival would taunt her severely just to provoke her, because the LORD had kept her from conceiving” (1 Sam. 1:6). Scripture says nothing else about Peninnah’s treatment of Hannah. But we can imagine the snide comments, the jeers, and the air of superiority Peninnah projected. To be sure, Peninnah believed Elkanah loved her more because she gave him children. And in her weaker moments, Hannah probably entertained such thoughts as well.

Elkanah and his family worshiped the Lord. They journeyed to the tabernacle at Shiloh every year as required in the law (1 Sam. 1:3)¹. There, they offered sacrifices to the Lord. Elkanah gave meat from the sacrificed animals to his wives and children. Hannah got a double-portion of meat. The double-portion was reserved for a man’s heir. By giving Hannah a double-portion, Elkanah honored Hannah above Peninnah. He certainly didn’t love Hannah less. Still, 1 Samuel chapter one finds Hannah at her breaking point. She cannot bear Peninnah’s taunts or her own childlessness and retreats to the tabernacle. As she prays, the dam breaks. Years of grief, soured hope, and pain flood her soul. Eli, the high priest, notices and scolds her for being drunk. Hannah responds, “Don’t think of me as a wicked woman; I’ve been praying from the depth of my anguish and resentment” (1 Sam. 1:16). Eli changes his tone and blesses Hannah.

Fast forward to another of Elkanah’s trips to the tabernacle. Hannah stays home because she is nursing a baby—her son Samuel. During the previous trip, when Hannah prayed in the tabernacle, she made a promise: She would give her child to the Lord if He enabled her to conceive. Eli blessed her, and the Lord answered her prayer.

Life out of Death, Rags to Riches

Hannah weans Samuel then takes him to live at the tabernacle (1 Sam. 1:11, 21-28). After presenting Samuel to the Lord, Hannah prays. With striking imagery, she describes her childless state and transition to bearing a son. Consider a few of these word pictures:

“Those who are starving hunger no more” (1 Sam. 2:5).

“The LORD brings death and gives life” (1 Sam. 2:6).

*“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the garbage pile.
He seats them with noblemen and gives them a throne of honor” (1 Sam. 2:8).*

Hannah’s prayer compares barrenness with hunger, death, poverty, and need. Bringing forth a son is like a full stomach, life out of death, rags to riches. She has gone through a transformation but not just related to pregnancy. Hannah’s prayer reflects ways she has come to know the Lord; it is a window into her divine experience.

¹ Before the temple was built, the Lord dwelled in the tabernacle, the tent built by Moses (Ex. 39:32). People brought sacrifices and worshiped at Shiloh, where the tabernacle stood.

The apostle Paul talked about knowing the Lord in similar ways. The bread and wine at communion remind us that we participate in the death and life of Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:16-18). Communion with Christ satisfies the hungry. Paul described the Christian life as carrying about the death of Jesus within so that the life of Jesus can also be revealed within (2 Cor. 4:10). The Lord brings death and gives life as we know Jesus in His suffering, death, and resurrection (Php. 3:10). Finally, from the dust of death and garbage pile of sin we were raised with Christ to the heavens. Here we sit with the King of kings and share His throne of honor (Eph. 2:5-6; Rev. 3:21).

The Fruitlessness of the Cross

Jesus described the cross as a seed falling into the ground to die; His resurrection would be like a harvest (John 12:24). There is a fruitlessness associated with the cross, a sense of wasted potential. Nothing about the cross seems successful or productive for the kingdom of God. Jesus was mocked for this as He hung in mid-air, bleeding to death: “He saved others, but He cannot save Himself!” (Matt. 27:42). “Ha! The One who would demolish the sanctuary and build it in three days, save Yourself by coming down from the cross!” (Mark 15:30). The people and priests treated Him with contempt because He had produced nothing. He was accused of blasphemy and insurrection. Everyone—including His friends—abandoned His sinking ministry. His failure, along with His body, was sealed by the stone rolled over His tomb. These were His only outward achievements.

Hannah’s childlessness was not merely biological. The Lord kept her from conceiving. Hannah’s inability to produce was a divinely ordained season of knowing the Lord in His suffering and death. She carried barrenness within just as Paul said we carry the dying of Jesus within. Not only did this season deepen her relationship with the Lord, it enabled her to foreshadow the crucified One.

It was because of Hannah’s fellowship with the Lord that Peninnah taunted her. Peninnah was productive and fruitful. She had children to boast of. Hannah produced nothing; she was conformed to the barrenness of the Lord’s death. So Peninnah despised her.

If we walk with God, He will lead us into seasons of knowing Christ in His suffering. He will make us barren and keep us from being productive. We may long to bring forth the Son, for Christ to increase that we may decrease (John 3:30). Perhaps we are pained because our lack of Christ negatively affects others. Maybe we hope for newness of life where our soul has been entombed in worldliness. Whatever the case, the Lord births no seed of Christ to deliver us. For a time we must endure the aching absence of Him within.

God may give us a great desire to nurture His body. We may have spiritual food, gifts, or vision from Him for the church; a willingness to serve others, an urge to meet a need, a calling of some sort. Yet God “puts us on the shelf;” we sit, unused, while others start ministries, help those around them, and enjoy more opportunities than they can pursue. Paul understood this. His zeal to spread the gospel outpaced his desire to live (Acts 20:24). Yet he spent years of his life in prison. Meanwhile, people with lesser motives preached without hindrance as Paul looked on (2 Tim. 2:9; Php. 1:14-18).

There are many ways to experience the fruitlessness of the cross. “Peninnah” usually accompanies these seasons, and not always in the form of another person. We are often our own worst enemies. Comparing ourselves with others is as natural as breathing. They are “going places,” we are going nowhere; they are “anointed,” we are a nothing; they impact their

community, we scarcely leave a footprint. Such “Peninnah” thoughts may taunt and provoke us to despair. We saw how much Elkanah loved and honored Hannah. Our Husband also cherishes us as His own body (Eph. 5:28-30). Yet sometimes our prayers are consumed by grief for what we cannot be or produce. Sometimes we suffer a crippling contempt for ourselves, whom our Husband loves.

Other people can and do fill Peninnah’s role when we are spiritually barren. Their attentions aren’t always overt. Sometimes, who *doesn’t* talk to us is as telling as who does. We aren’t heading to the mission field, drawing crowds to Bible study, or leading people to Christ. We lack spiritual sparkle. There is nothing that draws others into conversation with us (Is. 53:2). Peninnah’s taunts require no interaction. Sidelong glances, an air of superiority, and the silent treatment are effective tormentors.

When someone openly antagonizes us, being ignored doesn’t sound so bad. Patronizing comments and derisive laughter; “godly counsel” from someone about why we aren’t successful; things said loud enough to overhear; hearing rumors about ourselves; all these can crumple us like paper. This is something Jesus understands. People laughed at Him, doubted His ministry, and spread rumors (Mark 5:40; Matt. 11:19, 21:23).

When we experience treatment like this, it is an opportunity to know Jesus in a precious way. (Count on it: people aren’t lining up to experience this aspect of Christ. It’s an intimate setting). We desire to share the sorrows of loved ones, to walk especially close in difficult seasons. We can have this sort of closeness with Jesus; we can know His heartaches and secret griefs. His grace will be sufficient in these seasons, His power perfected in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Peter tells us to appreciate these opportunities, painful as they are, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us (1 Peter 4:14).

Take heart: When “Peninnah” provokes us, it is really the Lord being despised. We may be dismissed, slighted, or jeered at; it may seem to be about us and our lack of productivity. But here is the root issue: Jesus is manifesting His suffering in us. Man’s reaction is to elevate himself and treat Jesus with contempt. Though Jesus has become contemptible for our sakes, we treat Him as the one cursed by God (Isaiah 53:4). People reacted this way to the historical cross; they also react this way to the cross working in a person today. If we can remember Whom they reject we will take it less personally and allow Jesus in us to bear their taunts. Only He can do this without despairing or growing bitter. This frees us in Him to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44).

Delivered by the Son

It isn’t God’s intention for us to suffer forever. He works these things together for our good, to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29). It isn’t merely that God improves circumstances. He also works in our hearts. Hannah was delivered of barrenness and dejection by the son born to her. God will also bring forth His Son in us. The newness of Christ’s life will manifest in us. Our circumstances will change as a sign of the spiritual season changing within.

Life comes out of death. Remember Hannah’s prayer? The hungry are filled; the dead live; the poor and needy are raised to sit with princes. If we have known Jesus in barrenness, we will know Him in fruitfulness; if in hunger, then in being full; if in His death, then in His life; if in His poverty, then also in His abundance (Php. 3:10, 4:11-13). The beatitudes in Matthew chapter five hold out this same promise. The poor in spirit, the mournful, the gentle, and the hungry, Jesus calls “happy” or “blessed.” As they have suffered with Him, they will be happy

and blessed in Him. Again, this happiness/blessedness is not merely circumstantial. It is the happiness/blessedness in our hearts as the Holy Spirit exerts resurrection power within (Eph. 1:19-20). Inward life flows over into outward circumstances. Knowing Christ in this way removes the sting of death (1 Cor. 15:55-57). The life of the Son delivers us from barrenness.

The fruitfulness that came out of Hannah's childlessness went beyond her own restoration. Samuel, the son born to her, became prophet and judge to Israel (1 Sam. 3:20). Before Samuel, "the word of the LORD was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread" (1 Sam. 3:1). God's people were crippled by idolatry, immorality, and division. They were called to reflect God's kingdom. At best, they were a broken mirror. God's image in them was splintered and distorted. Samuel was a conduit of spiritual revelation. His ministry set the stage for the rule of David. Before David, Israel was a handful of infighting tribes, scarcely different from the pagans around them. Under David, the Israelites became a kingdom which manifested divine reality. Because of this, David's kingdom was the template of the messianic reign to come. Since death worked in Hannah, life worked in all of Israel (2 Cor. 4:12).

Despite the jeers of "Peninnah," when death works in us, life works in the body of Christ. We experience resurrection life in ourselves; what is birthed in us brings revelation and renewal to others as well. We aren't all prophets or leaders. But we all contribute to the Lord's body (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:28-30, 14:26; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Whatever our particular function newness of life will flow through us. Resurrection may manifest in a new role or change of function. Knowing that seasons of barrenness will benefit the church is needful encouragement when we are fruitless. It is not only those who appear busy and successful that help the body of Christ grow. It is those who know Him in His death that bring life to the church. As Hannah observed, "The woman who is childless gives birth to seven, but the woman with many sons pines away" (1 Sam. 2:5).

II. Hophni and Phineas

Priests of Pleasure

When Hannah gave her only son to the Lord, Hophni and Phineas were priests (1 Sam. 1:3). Their father, Eli, was the high priest that blessed Hannah's prayer for a child. The Bible says Hophni and Phineas were wicked men (1 Sam. 2:12). They slept with the women who served in the tabernacle (1 Sam. 2:22). But that wasn't the worst of it. When someone brought a sacrifice, certain parts of the animal were burned first as an offering to the Lord (Lev. 7:3-5, 29-31). Hophni and Phineas ignored this command. They took whatever part of the animal they wanted; anyone who protested was threatened (1 Sam. 2:15-16). Scripture says this sin was severe (1 Sam. 2:17). The Lord responded by saying, "Why, then, do all of you despise My sacrifices and offerings...by making yourselves fat with the best part of all the offerings of My people Israel?" (1 Sam. 2:29).

John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus with the words, "Look! The Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). This is what John meant: Every single Old Testament sacrifice foreshadowed Jesus's death on the cross. Every time Hophni and Phineas slaughtered an animal Jesus's crucifixion was vividly portrayed (Gal. 3:1). They looked on God's suffering Lamb and despised Him.

Hophni and Phineas's contempt for the Lamb went beyond thinking little of God's offerings. The entire bent of their lives rejected the Spirit of those offerings—Christ crucified. They slept around. They took the best of everything. They pleased and fattened themselves.

Instead of serving God's people they used their religious stature to serve themselves. All of this self-preferring was done in the face of the sacrifices which poured out their lifeblood day after day. In effect, Hophni and Phineas spat on the Son of God; they mocked and dismissed Christ's laid down life, by which we know the God of love (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16).

Paul's Resolve

"Hophni and Phineas" can show up in our lives as well. Consider Paul's experience. When he first came to Corinth, he encountered resistance and feared bodily harm because of his ministry (Acts 18:6, 9-10). The church of Corinth was planted because of his long-suffering (Acts 18:11; 1 Cor. 4:15, 9:2). Not surprisingly, the church flourished. The Corinthians were prolific in supernatural gifts such as tongues, prophesy, and healing (1 Cor. 12, 14). Indications are that the church was financially prosperous and attracted its share of prominent teachers as a result (1 Cor. 9:11-12; 2 Cor. 9:5, 11:5-8). Undoubtedly, Corinth's growth was due in part to what Paul sacrificed for them. Every harvest comes from seed that has fallen into the ground to die (John 12:24). Even after leaving Paul pastored, instructed, and carried them spiritually, as he did all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28-29).

Ironically, the more prominent the church in Corinth became, the less regard they had for Paul. While they prospered, he continued to live on a shoestring (1 Cor. 4:8, 11). They became distinguished for wisdom and strength of faith; Paul endured poor treatment and disadvantage as he sacrificed to spread the gospel (1 Cor. 4:10-13). Corinth received much from Paul's ministry. But the more they benefited the more condescending they became. They viewed their success as proof of God's favor while seeing Paul as second class. Contrary to Jesus's words, the Corinthians believed they were above their teacher (Matt. 10:24). Here, Hophni and Phineas cast their shadow on Corinth. Paul resolved to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Because of his likeness to the Lamb the Corinthians looked down on him.

House of the Lamb

When it comes to Hophni and Phineas, pointing fingers is easy. Famous ministers fall publicly because they sleep around or get greedy. Not-so-famous ministers also commit adultery, fleece the tithes, or use their positions to benefit themselves. But it isn't only ministers that need to be concerned about the sin of Hophni and Phineas. How often do **we** view Jesus mainly as a means to a better life? We take the best parts of Him for ourselves—forgiveness, financial blessing, healing, etc. But we want no part of His self-sacrificing nature. The cross is mainly something Jesus "did for us." It has little bearing on our motivations or decisions. Our life is essentially directed by what makes us feel happy, comfortable, and successful. Jesus is more life-coach than Lord. He supports and inspires us as we pursue our own dreams.

Jesus **died** for us. He wasted Himself to the last drop. His Spirit constantly pours out to calm our emotions, give us understanding, and meet our needs. Can we look on Him and be unaffected? Can we remain indifferent as He gives Himself so freely? Paul said, "And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:15). To live for ourselves in the face of the One who died for all is to despise God's Lamb and only Son.

The Lord said His sacrifices and offerings were required or commanded for His dwelling (1 Sam. 2:29). Under the old covenant God dwelled in the tabernacle or temple. Now He dwells

in His people, the church (Eph. 2:21-22). Christ crucified is the sacrifice God requires for us, His dwelling. We are the house of His Lamb. Don't we violate Him when we enshrine personal interest? Don't we fall from purpose when we house self?

Christ Our Portion

Scripture says Hophni and Phineas "had no regard for the LORD or for the priests' share of the sacrifices from the people" (1 Sam. 2:12-13). Old covenant priests received a portion of nearly everything offered to the Lord (Lev. 2:10, 5:13, 6:26, 7:6, 7:15). This was their food, livelihood, and inheritance (Josh. 13:14). By grasping after the Lord's portion of the offerings, Hophni and Phineas lost theirs. They were also put to death for this (1 Sam. 2:34).

God's True Offering said, "The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me" (John 6:56-57). We said that Christ's crucifixion was portrayed every time Hophni and Phineas sacrificed an animal. His life was also pictured in their share of the offerings. In that they had no regard for their share of the sacrifices, they had no regard for the life of Jesus.

We are new covenant priests (1 Peter 2:9). The life of Jesus is our portion. How do we "feed" on Him? We believe we are dead to ourselves and alive to God in Christ (Rom. 6:11). As we believe, the Holy Spirit causes us to experience the death of Christ within. The power of sin lessens because Christ died to sin once for all (Rom. 6:10). The power of self also lessens. Jesus died to Himself. Self wasn't the source or beneficiary of His actions (Matt. 26:39). The Holy Spirit makes these realities active in us. Our lives become less sinful and self-seeking over time.

There is no resurrection without death. This was true for Jesus, and it is true for us. As we know Jesus in His death, the Holy Spirit will bring new life to every place in us touched by the cross. Here is our portion and what spiritually feeds us. Old covenant priests were fed by every sacrifice they offered. We are fed by the life of Jesus as His sacrifice works in us.

III. The Rejected King

The King of Long-Suffering

Hannah's son, Samuel, led Israel until he was old. He appointed his sons to succeed him but they were dishonest and greedy (1 Sam. 8:1-3). The elders of Israel approached Samuel and said, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not follow your example. Therefore, appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have" (1 Sam. 8:4-5). Samuel had a red flag about this request and prayed. The Lord said, "Listen to the people and everything they say to you. They have not rejected you; they have rejected Me as their king" (1 Sam. 8:7). This was nothing new. The Lord reminded Samuel that Israel had been rejecting Him since the exodus, generations earlier (1 Sam. 8:8).

Think of that: Through the death of the Passover lamb and the firstborn, God broke Egypt's power and freed His people from slavery (Ex. 12:6-7, 29-32). He walked every step of the way with them through the desert. The Lord provided a steady supply of food, water, and necessities (Deut. 8:1-4, 15). As promised, He led them into the fertile, well-watered land of Canaan and gave it to them (Deut. 8:7-10). Despite every gift given, every promise kept, and

every protection provided, the people rejected Him over and over and over (Psalm 95:7-11). God's relationship with Israel was nothing if not long-suffering.

Give and Take

Even as Israel rejected the Lord as King, His thoughts were for them. He asked Samuel to warn the people about the king for which they were asking:

He will **take** your sons and put them to his use...as commanders of thousands or commanders of fifties, to plow his ground or reap his harvest, or to make his weapons of war or the equipment for his chariots. He can **take** your daughters to become perfumers, cooks, and bakers. [...] He can **take** a tenth of your grain and your vineyards and give them to his officials and servants. He can **take** your male servants, your female servants, your best young men, and your donkeys and use them for his work. He can **take** a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves can become his servants. When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you've chosen for yourselves" (1 Sam. 8:11-18).

Notice how often the word "take" occurs in this warning. As their King, the Lord gave and gave—of Himself, His loving care, and the world's resources. The human king would take and take for himself. Everything—including the people themselves—would be used by the king for his own benefit. After escaping the slavery of Egypt, Israel was asking to be enslaved again. After escaping the nations they were asking to be like them.

As Jesus hung in mid-air, suffocating and bleeding to death, one could just make out the sign above his head: "Jesus the Nazarene. The king of the Jews" (John 19:19). "Rejection" is an altogether weak word for what happened to the King of the Jews. His body was so badly bruised, torn, whipped, punctured, and beaten that He barely resembled a person (Isaiah 52:14). He was likely bleeding internally as well as externally. He was hungry and dehydrated. A wreath of thorns was pounded onto His head, possibly causing a concussion. Streams of blood ran into his eyes. As He struggled to stand, Pilate asked the people if he should crucify their King. They screamed their verdict: "WE HAVE NO KING BUT CAESAR!!" (John 19:15).

This scene fully illuminates Israel's rejection of the Lord as King in 1 Samuel. It allows us to see their choice with uncompromising contrast. Jesus, God and King, poured out His blood and let His body be broken to save His people. But the people chose Caesar. His military dominated them. His taxes crippled them. The shadow of his fist loomed over them. But they chose him as their king and rejected the Lord. Israel's decision was no different in the time of Samuel than in the time of Christ. They chose the self-serving government of humanity and refused the self-giving government of the Lamb.

Conformed or Transformed

Romans 12 begins with an appeal. Paul asks us to consider God's mercy. Christ's sacrifice of Himself defines that mercy. Then Paul urges us to live as sacrifices and says, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:1-2). This goes right to the heart of what governs us. Will we be like the nations? Will we conform to the government of this age which seeks its own interests at the expense of others? Or will our

minds be renewed by a Spirit-given understanding of the cross? Will we be transformed into the image of the Lamb King and live as sacrifices? (Rev. 5:6).

The choice of government seems easy during devotions or worship services. But it's another matter when circumstances put devotional theories to the test. How do we respond when there's a disagreement about money? Are we consumed with getting our cut or do we look out for others? What happens when both parents are exhausted at the end of the day? Is there complaining and suspicion that the other isn't doing their part? Or does each think of how they can lighten the other's load? In traffic, are we competing with other drivers? Do we tailgate, gesture, and gripe if someone slows us down or gets in our way? Or does wisdom from above make us willing to yield? (James 3:17). These may be small examples. But they can be telling of where our treasure and heart are (Matt. 6:21).

Church communities also need to consider government. The question isn't whether we have episcopal, congregational, or presbyterian structure. The question is the same we've been considering: self's empire or Jesus's kingdom? Do church policies reflect self-preservation or crucifixion? Does the church operate as yet another vendor of personal fulfillment? Or is it a community of the new commandment?—"Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12-13). If we don't love one another, no one will know we are Jesus's disciples (John 13:35). No one will see God (1 John 4:12). What they will see is one more façade in the mall of the world. The picture-window promises something different but inside it's the same old stuff for sale.

Rejected with the Lamb

If the Lamb King governs us we will be rejected whenever He is. Because we walk with Jesus we bring a foreign kingdom and mindset. We breathe another atmosphere and have a different culture. This can be challenging even if we aren't openly rejected. We don't quite fit. What is natural to everyone else isn't to us. We live with an underlying sense of alienation.

When it comes to being rejected our minds naturally think of human society or the world. This is certainly valid. Jesus said, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world...the world hates you" (John 15:19). But in 1 Samuel it isn't pagan nations rejecting the Lord as King. It is God's people, Israel. As we saw, those calling for Jesus's crucifixion were also His people, the Jews. They couldn't have crucified Jesus without the complicity of Pilate and Rome's political machine. But Rome wouldn't have bothered to swat a fly like Jesus. God's people were the driving force behind Jesus's betrayal and murder. This confronts us with a sobering thought: If we embrace the Lamb's government it may be Christians that reject us.

Christians have a long history of turning on each other. The church officially broke in half when the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch excommunicated each other in 1054 AD². This event, known as "The Great Schism," birthed the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. The Dark Ages were sometimes lit by the fires of Christians burning other Christians at the stake over differing beliefs. In the 1500's the Catholic Church lowered its horns against Martin Luther when he questioned its practices. Luther had to take up papal bull-fighting³. Unfortunately, reformers like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli also went at each other from time to

² The Pope is the head of the Catholic Church, and the Ecumenical Patriarch leads the Eastern Orthodox Church.

³ A papal bull is a document which communicates something decreed by the Pope. In Luther's case, papal bulls informed him of his heresy and excommunication.

time. The church has often been stronger on truth than grace. But Jesus brought grace and truth (John 1:17). Since we bear His name we also may want to bear His nature when dealing with one another.

Paul got after the Corinthians for taking each other to court and having disputes settled by unbelievers (1 Cor. 6:1-6). He asked, “Why not rather put up with injustice? Why not rather be cheated?” (1 Cor. 6:7). Paul’s question is one of government. One option is to be like society and fight for what we “deserve.” The other is to be governed by Jesus’s words: “As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well” (Matt. 5:40). Those who agree with Paul and Jesus may be viewed as naïve and irresponsible by other believers. Ecclesiastes says there is a time and place for everything (Eccl. 3:1). There are occasions when going to court is valid and necessary. But it is such a normal way to handle differences we hardly question it; we rarely allow scripture to question our motives when it comes to legal action. We are more often driven by what we want and feel is our right.

When the Lamb King’s influence affects those outside the church, outcomes vary. Many are willing to “live and let live” as long as the Christian God’s purposes don’t conflict with their own. But time and again, the church confronts the world’s self-serving rule. Society says a woman’s body belongs to her so she can kill an unborn baby if she chooses. Jesus says a woman’s body is for Him and the baby it is sustaining. Sometimes corporations adopt practices that profit upper management by preying on the public. The government of God works differently: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Whatever the issue, selfishness won’t be backed into a corner. It comes out swinging every time.

Here’s the bottom line: Humanity will never accept a government that asks it to give up self-determination; people will never accept a King that says, “Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Neither will they accept the herald of such a government and King. Our choice to self-govern has led to rape, alcoholism, self-righteousness, pollution, and everything else that destroys what God originally called good (Gen. 1:31). Still, we prefer things this way. Though we want a better world there is something we want even more—government of us, by us, and for us. Anything else is an offense.

IV. The Rejected Message

Be Careful What You Wish For...

After Israel rejected the Lord’s Kingship, He gave them the king they wanted. His choice was Saul. Saul was everything you’d expect a king to be. He came from an influential family, and scripture says, “There was no one more impressive among the Israelites than he. He stood a head taller than anyone else” (1 Sam. 9:2). Samuel anointed Saul. His anointing was followed by signs and a move of God’s Spirit. Saul himself prophesied. “Is Saul also among the prophets?” became a household phrase (1 Sam. 10:1-12). Saul’s coronation was overwhelmingly celebrated (1 Sam. 10:24). In every way, Saul’s kingship began auspiciously. It was blessed by God and man.

Saul’s early days seemed full of promise as well. He was able to unite Israel and lead them against the Lord’s enemies (1 Sam. 11:11). We know that Samuel warned Israel about asking for a king. By all appearances Samuel was wrong. Saul’s reign seemed nothing but beneficial.

But God is true, even if everyone else lies (Rom. 3:4). Over time, the reason for the Lord's warning became clear. As Israel's prophet, Samuel brought the word of the Lord to Saul. But Saul lived by his own evaluation of things. This made the people happy but not the Lord. Saul never disobeyed the Lord's word through Samuel. That wasn't his problem. His problem was that he obeyed his interpretation of the Lord's word. And Saul usually interpreted the Lord's word in a way that benefited himself.

For instance: Samuel once told Saul to meet him at Gilgal in seven days. There, Samuel would sacrifice to the Lord and seek His leading. Seven days later, Samuel hadn't shown up. Saul and his soldiers were surrounded by the Philistines. Pressure mounted, and the troops began deserting. Saul didn't dare go into battle without the blessing of the Lord. He felt he had to do something. So he made the sacrifice himself (1 Sam. 13:5-10). Just as Saul finished the sacrifice, Samuel showed up and asked, "What have you done?" (1 Sam. 13:11). Saul explained his reasoning—he was surrounded, his army was abandoning him, he needed the favor of God so he had to make the offering himself (1 Sam. 13:11-12). But Samuel wasn't having it: "You have been foolish. You have not kept the command which the LORD your God gave you" (1 Sam. 13:13).

Doesn't Saul's thinking make sense? Yes—to the mind that weighs everything by self-preservation and self-interest. This is the mind through which Saul filtered God's word. It is the human mind, as convoluted spiritually as it is physically. Our self-referential obsession is almost symbolized by the structure of the brain; it twists, turns, and continually bends back on itself. It is a maze of caverns. Each turn leads to a place more lost and dark than the last.

The incident with Samuel wasn't the end of the road for Saul. But it was a sign of the end. The end came on another occasion when Saul disregarded God's word. What message did Saul ignore? God asked Saul to lead his armies against the Amalekites. Generations before, the Amalekites attacked the Israelites after they left Egypt (Ex. 17:8-16). Because of this, the Lord said, "Now go and attack the Amalekites and completely destroy everything they have. Do not spare them. Kill men and women, children and infants, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys" (1 Sam. 15:3). The Lord couldn't have been more clear. But Saul spared Agag, the Amalekite king, along with the best sheep and cattle (1 Sam. 15:9). When Samuel confronted him, Saul argued:

But I did obey the LORD! [...] I brought back Agag, king of Amalek, and I completely destroyed the Amalekites. The troops took sheep and cattle from the plunder—the best of what was set apart for destruction—to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal (1 Sam. 15:20-21).

Saul's logic is certainly persuasive. Why just destroy everything? Saul's plan allowed the soldiers to take plunder. Then they wouldn't feel cheated and resent him. And why shouldn't he triumphantly parade the Amalekite king past the people of Israel? It would boost morale and show the Lord's greatness. From Saul's perspective, it was win-win. One could say he improved on the Lord's command. He would still destroy everything; he would just do it as an act of worship, by sacrificing them to the Lord. There was only one problem: this wasn't what the Lord commanded. Once again, Samuel lowered the boom: "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you as king" (1 Sam. 15:23).

The Message of the Cross

God's message to Saul is, in a figure, God's message to us: the Lord has utterly destroyed everything through the judgment of the cross. Adam and the sinful nature we inherited from him have been destroyed (Rom. 6:6, 7; Gal. 5:24). The world has been crucified, as well as our relationship to it (Gal. 6:14). So complete was the judgment of the cross that we await an entirely new heavens and earth (2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:5). This is why the Amalekites should have been completely destroyed. Their destruction was meant to picture the cross.

Saul didn't see God's purpose so he reinterpreted His message. God judged that Amalek should be annihilated. Saul's selfish interests led him to conclude that some of Amalek, just the most valuable things, should be spared. Saul's good intentions caused him to reject the message of the cross; his own valuation blinded him to God's valuation.

We said that Saul's mind is the human mind. This is the mind we are born with and the mind we still have after being born again. Our minds are being renewed to spiritual things but not all at once (Col. 3:10). We still deal with the old mindset. Because of this, we evaluate ourselves and the world independently of God. We are enamored with ourselves, at least with our good qualities. We feel bad when we do wrong. We confess what is weak and unattractive in us. It benefits us if these things are judged so we embrace the cross just as Saul destroyed "all the worthless and unwanted things" (1 Sam. 15:9). But we prize our gifts and talents. We pat our backs with the good things we do. Surely, the destruction of the cross doesn't extend to what is best in us. Surely these "good" things should be spared so we can use them to worship God.

We go to the cross but we reason, *God created me with this talent or gave me this gift. He can't possibly want it given up. I will keep it and use it for His glory.* Didn't God give Isaac to Abraham? Didn't God also command Abraham to lay Isaac on the altar and plunge a knife into him? Like Abraham, we may receive back what we offer. But we must first take every sin and every good gift to the cross, accepting its destruction.

The cross decimated us completely (2 Cor. 5:14). God makes no attempt to tease apart the good, bad, or ugly in us. That is a purely human exercise (in futility). The cross was an execution. Imagine prison officials administering a *mostly* lethal injection. Imagine a firing squad shooting someone *almost* full of holes. Imagine a guillotine stopping part-way. Absurd.

Unless submitted to the cross, what is best in us will constitute our deepest rebellion; what is good will lead us to reject the word of the Lord: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27).

Jesus isn't saying we are to live an ascetic lifestyle. He is saying we aren't to live at all. He will live in us (Gal. 2:19-20).

Can we accept the end of ourselves? Can we accept Christ raised in our place? Like a seed pushing up new life through the dirt, His desires and goals supplant ours. This is the message of the cross. Paul says this message is foolishness to philosophers, scholars, and debaters. It is a stumbling block to the person who trusts in morality, tradition, or miraculous signs. But God is pleased to save those who accept this nonsensical message; He is pleased to be in relationship with those who value His wisdom over their own (1 Cor. 1:18-23).

Renewed Minds

“You took off your former way of life, the old man that is corrupted by deceitful desires; you are being renewed in the spirit of your minds; you put on the new man⁴, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth” (Eph. 4:22-24).

In these verses, Paul speaks about the message of the cross in our experience. We can see the message of the cross when he talks about taking off the old way of life and the old man corrupted by deceitful desires. The “old man” is Adam. We are born with Adam’s nature, which is controlled by sinful and selfish desires. This man was crucified with Christ and destroyed (Rom. 6:6). We also see the message of the cross when Paul says we put on the new man, created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity. The new man is Christ.

Here’s what happens when we’re born again: The Holy Spirit brings us into the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6:3). His death to sin and the destruction of the old man becomes a reality for us. His resurrection as new man and life lived to God is also our reality (Rom. 6:10). Being born again is nothing less than the resurrection of the new man within (1 Peter 1:3).

It is through the message of the cross that we are ushered into Christ and participate in His death and resurrection. The message can create faith in those that hear (Rom. 10:17); it is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). Everything that is true in Christ is true for us, right now.

But our minds—our inner “Sauls”—are blind to Him (2 Cor. 3:15-16, 4:3-4). This is why Paul says we are being renewed in the spirit of our minds. The Holy Spirit is making known what we’ve been freely given in Christ (1 Cor. 2:12). As the Spirit makes Him known, we take off the old man’s passions and desires (Gal. 5:24). We see we are no longer what he is. Instead, we see that what Christ is, we are.

Unless our minds are renewed to Christ we function by the old mindset. Like Saul, we view everything through our own satisfaction and security. This includes God and His message. But what seems right to us leads to death (Prov. 14:12). God cannot be known through the old mindset. Neither can His message. We will refashion both according to our own viewpoint. But if we are refashioned by God and His message we find life.

Rejected Messengers

“But the soulish person does not welcome what comes from God’s Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone” (1 Cor. 2:14-15).⁵

⁴ The HCSB uses the terms “old self” and “new self” in these verses. But the Greek says “old man” and “new man” so the translation has been modified. Paul isn’t talking about taking off or putting on individual identities (as “self” implies). He is talking about two different humanities—one represented by the old man, Adam; the other represented by the new man, Christ.

⁵ The HCSB translates “soulish person” as “unbeliever.” The translation has been modified here because it better reflects the Greek and the context of the letter. Paul is not contrasting believers and unbelievers. He is contrasting soulish and spiritual people. Chapter 3 begins with Paul telling the Corinthians he could not address them as spiritual. The contrast at the end of chapter 2 was for their instruction, not to talk about people outside the church.

These verses contrast two types of people: soulish and spiritual. The soulish person operates by the old mindset. Saul typifies this type of person. The spiritual person operates by a mind renewed to Christ. What happens when you get these two together? The soulish person considers the spiritual person foolish. He can't accept the message taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13). The soulish person cannot evaluate the spiritual person either. That is, the soulish person will misunderstand the spiritual person much of the time. Because of this, the soulish person rejects the spiritual message as well as the messenger who brings it.

We got a taste of this when Samuel confronted Saul. Samuel brought the spiritual message: "Now go and attack the Amalekites and completely destroy everything they have" (1 Sam. 15:3). Saul, the soulish man, couldn't accept this message. It seemed foolish to him. So he rejected it and Samuel with it. It wasn't necessarily Saul's intent to reject Samuel. But their relationship ended afterward (1 Sam. 15:35).

Paul met with an interesting mix of soulish people in Athens. Many Jews, though believers in God, resisted Paul's message (Acts 17:17). They could not accept Jesus or that their scriptures and traditions testified of Him (John 5:39). Some of the intellectuals and philosophers in Athens called Paul a babbler (Acts 17:18). Others listened to Paul simply because they enjoyed the novelty of new ideas (Acts 17:21). They didn't argue or belittle Paul's message. But they didn't accept it either. The Christ message was just the flavor of the day.

It is instructive to see the varied reactions of the soulish man. The spiritual messenger can meet everything from persecution to non-committal interest. Soulish people can be religious or atheistic. Whatever the soulish person's presentation, the result is the same—he rejects the message and the messenger.

Here's the point: If we are taught by the Spirit, if our mind is being renewed, we should be prepared for soulish reactions. Sometimes, we will be misunderstood, made fun of, discredited, or personally attacked. Or, someone may be politely indifferent to us and our message. The Word who became flesh, who was Message and Messenger, wasn't received by His own people (John 1:11). The Holy Spirit is merging our experience with Christ's. There will be times when we and the message we bring are not received.

V. David

The Forgotten Son

When Saul rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord rejected Him as king (1 Sam. 15:23). Samuel mourned for Saul. He had trouble moving on (1 Sam. 15:35). But the Lord told him to fill a horn with oil and go to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem. Among Jesse's sons was the new king. The Lord would show Samuel the son He had chosen, and Samuel would anoint him king over Israel (1 Sam. 16:1-3).

Samuel didn't breeze into town announcing a new king. Saul, after all, was still ruling. Directed by the Lord or not, anointing a new king was treasonous. Samuel informed Bethlehem's elders he had come to sacrifice to the Lord. He invited Jesse and his sons to worship with him and feast on the meat of the offering (1 Sam. 16:4-5).

Jesse's oldest son, Eliab, must have been impressive. When Samuel saw Eliab, he thought, "Certainly the LORD's anointed one is here before Him" (1 Sam. 16:6). Perhaps Eliab reminded Samuel of Saul somehow. Eliab may have reminded the Lord of Saul as well because He rejected him outright: "Do not look at his appearance or his stature, because I have rejected

him. Man does not see what the LORD sees, for man sees what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). The Lord rejected the next six of Jesse’s sons in the same way. Perplexed, Samuel asked if Jesse had any other sons. There was one more, the youngest, who was out tending sheep (1 Sam. 16:8-11). This son’s name was David.

In ancient Israel, it was a big deal when a prophet came to town. If a visiting prophet invited your family to sacrifice and feast with him, it was a particular honor. When David’s family was graced by such an invitation from Samuel, they didn’t include David. They went to worship, feast, and enjoy themselves with a celebrity minister. But they thought so little of David they didn’t bother telling him about the invitation. He was an afterthought, only summoned because the Lord asked for Him.

Biblical names often reflect God’s view of a person. David means, “beloved.” God saw David as the guest of honor. Perhaps Samuel began to sense this because he told Jesse and his sons they wouldn’t eat until David arrived (1 Sam. 16:11). When David walked in, the Lord announced to Samuel, “Anoint him, for he is the one” (1 Sam. 16:12). After David’s anointing, the Holy Spirit began to act powerfully on him (1 Sam. 16:13). The Lord chose David to be king. Yet he was the youngest of his family, the one forgotten and left to do chores while the rest went to an important feast.

The Beloved Son

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a little town in the region of Galilee. His dad was a carpenter. Here’s what was said about Galilee: “Surely the Messiah doesn’t come from Galilee, does he?” “Investigate and you will see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 7:41, 52; 1:46). Galilee was nowhere’s-ville. It was populated by half-breeds and pagans. Conscientious Jews regarded it with scorn. Romans could care less about it. Galilee was the last place on earth you’d expect to find a king.

The Jews were looking for a king. Messianic expectation was high because of the Roman occupation. People were looking for a strong ruler, someone impressive who was a head taller than everyone else. Someone like Saul or Eliab. They wanted a king to take on Caesar and put the heathen kingdom under their godly feet. No one would look for such a person in Galilee. No one would consider a carpenter’s son monarch material, even if both sides of his family descended from David. Jesus was a nobody from nowhere. Like David, the Son of David was dismissed and overlooked.

No one knew Jesus was God’s King, not even His family. Jesus and John the Baptist were relatives. John must’ve heard how God was working in their family; he must’ve known some of the prophecies spoken about Jesus (Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:30-33). John was expressly called to reveal the Messiah to Israel through his baptismal ministry (John 1:31). But he didn’t know Jesus was the Messiah before Jesus came to be baptized:

I watched the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He rested on Him. I didn’t know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God! (John 1:32-34).

The anointings of David and Jesus mirror each other. David’s anointing was accompanied by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit Himself descended on Jesus as His anointing (Acts 10:38). Samuel and David’s family realized David was king when he was anointed. Similarly, the

anointing of God's Spirit revealed that Jesus was the Messiah to John and to Israel. To most people, Jesus was unknown, little thought of. But to God, He was David's namesake—beloved. So God announced His baptism and anointing with the words, "This is my beloved Son. I take delight in Him!" (Matt. 3:17).

A Boy Throwing Rocks

One might think things changed for David after he was anointed king. They didn't. Fast-forwarding, we find Israel in a stand-off with the Philistine army. Goliath, the Philistine champion, spouts blasphemies all day and mocks God's people. The Hebrew soldiers quake in their boots. Saul also quakes but more impressively, a head taller than everyone else.

Jesse's older boys are in the military. Jesse sends David to the battle lines with a care package of bread and cheese (1 Sam. 17:17-18). When David shows up, Eliab says, "Why did you come down here? Who did you leave those few sheep with in the wilderness? I know your arrogance and your evil heart—you came down to see the battle!" (1 Sam. 17:28). Eliab was there when Samuel anointed David. Yet in one breath he accuses David of irresponsibility, arrogance, and rubber-necking. He dismisses David as a nobody. David isn't the king who has come to his army. He's just a kid who should be tending sheep. He has no business at an important place like a battle.

But David is exactly where he should be. He is God's king and beloved. David isn't at the battle because he's irresponsible or arrogant. His earthly father AND his heavenly Father sent him. As David listens to Goliath malign his people and his God, he boils over. Zeal for the Lord's house consumes him and bursts out—"Just who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26).

Saul hears about David's bold remarks and sends for him. Such words must come from a champion. But David is the definition of anticlimax. He's not a champion. He's a boy. Saul doesn't realize he is meeting his replacement. The man who rejected God's word is meeting the man after God's heart (Acts 13:22). Saul can't see what God sees: David is willing to face off with Israel's enemy or die trying; he is willing to do what Saul should have done as king. David looks like a kid but acts like a king. Saul is called king but doesn't act like it.

Saul treats David dismissively, just like Eliab: "You can't go fight this Philistine. You're just a youth, and he's been a warrior since he was young" (1 Sam. 17:33). When David won't back down, Saul offers to let David use his armor. Perhaps this was a helpful gesture. Or maybe Saul just wanted to drive home David's inadequacy: *See, you're not big enough for this armor. You can't fill a soldier's shoes. You're nothing but a boy. Go home before you get yourself killed.* David tries the armor but replies, "I'm not used to it," and takes it off (1 Sam. 17:39). He was more used to the armor of God (Psalm 3:3, 18:2). Without age, adequacy, or armor, David goes toe to toe with the Philistine hulk. All he has is a sling and five stones. Four of the stones remain unused. David only needs one to take Goliath down (1 Sam. 17:40, 49).

A Nobody Throwing Stones

Like David, Jesus came to His own but they didn't know Him (John 1:11). The Spirit descended on Jesus and anointed Him. A voice from heaven announced God's approval of His beloved Son. And Jesus still had credibility problems. When He taught in his hometown of Nazareth, people said, "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55). In other words, "Who does

this guy think he is?” Jesus went from familiar face to village idiot in seconds flat. And it’s hard to blame them. Imagine some guy you’ve grown up with standing up in church and announcing he is the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2. You’d have some doubts. Like the people in Nazareth, you’d say, “I know this guy. I know his family. Where does he get off acting like a prophet?” The people were offended because Jesus couldn’t be anything more than what they thought he was. And they didn’t think much of Him.

Jesus didn’t have any status among religious leaders either. Whether He taught, performed miracles, or forgave, the Pharisees challenged Him. In Jesus’s day (as now) religion was quite the money-maker. Jesus drove profiteers out of the temple (Matt. 21:12-13). His Father’s house was a place of loving sacrifice, not selfish gain. The Pharisees asked what authority He had to do this (Matt. 21:23). Jesus wasn’t prophet or Messiah. He was just an upstart from the armpit of Israel; a nobody who had no right to throw stones.

The Anointing Within

Christ lives in anyone born of God (1 John 3:9). Jesus shares the Father’s heart and is Shepherd of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). We often fail to recognize Him as such. We have much more esteem for our life experience, our own judgment, and conventional wisdom. We look to our strengths to lead us. Jesus isn’t always considered. The impulses of His Spirit are uninvited, ignored, dismissed.

What we need is the anointing: We need the Spirit of God to descend and remain on Christ within. This anointing is what revealed David among his brothers and Jesus at His baptism. Before the Spirit settled on Jesus, John’s testimony was, “I didn’t know Him” (John 1:33). Jesus was right there but John didn’t know Him. It is the same with us. Jesus is *in us* but we don’t know Him. When the Spirit of God lights on Him, we see Him, we know Him. Our souls recognize His Kingship and come under it. This isn’t a one time event. It’s a lifetime process. The cycle repeats: We don’t know Him, the Spirit reveals Him, we know and are ruled by Him.

Undervalued by Men, Valued by God

The anointing of Christ in us comes with an irony. It is the same irony David and Jesus experienced: the anointing doesn’t mean others will esteem or recognize us. David was shrugged off by his own family and God’s people. So was the Lord. If Jesus is anointed and revealed in us, we may be dismissed with Him; we may be lightly esteemed because He is. Christ’s very nature means people will wave Him off: “He didn’t have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at Him, no appearance that we should desire Him.... He was like someone people turned away from; He was despised, and we didn’t value Him” (Isaiah 53:2-3). Being transformed into Christ’s image means appearing less impressive and desirable; it means being undervalued.

Others in whom Christ has been revealed by the Spirit’s anointing may recognize and value Jesus in us. But there is no guarantee of this. Samuel didn’t know David until the Lord pointed him out. John didn’t know Jesus until the Spirit settled on Him. Both Samuel and John were prophets but failed to recognize the Anointed One before them.

Knowing Christ in these humble ways isn’t easy. We want to feel valued and important. When people treat us like we don’t matter, it’s painful, alienating. Sometimes this is because

self is pouting in the corner. It wants recognition. It wants to be fanned and fed grapes. But that's not the whole picture. Jesus had no struggle with self. Still, He felt hurt when people turned their noses up at Him. Disappointment and grief are normal. This is especially true as we walk with the Man of suffering, who was familiar with pain (Isaiah 53:3).

Two things are vital when fellowshiping with Jesus in this way. One: God values us highly. We are in the Beloved, and He is in us. God esteems us as He does Christ. The more that Christ is our importance and value, the less we rely on human approval. Two: It is Christ, not us, being dismissed and wrongly appraised. Because the circumstances are happening to us it is easy to conclude we aren't worth much; it's easy to think people blow us off because of some inherent deficiency. But it isn't. The Lord told Samuel people see what is visible (1 Sam. 16:7). The Lord sees something more: He sees His beloved Son. He sees new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). "From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way" (2 Cor. 5:16).

We are blinded by what we can see. Dismissing Christ in someone is a matter of spiritual blindness, not inferiority. We can join Jesus in forgiving those that don't know what they're doing (Luke 23:34). By the Spirit, we can cultivate an awareness that Christ honors us when people don't. It is a precious thing to be undervalued with Him. Appreciating this is hard; it goes against everything in us. But such a perspective keeps us from despair. It also keeps us from doing the very thing we have suffered—undervaluing Christ within.

VI. Outsider

Run out of Town

Lack of human approval didn't change the fact that God anointed David. His family was dismissive of him as was Saul. But David rose quickly through the ranks of Saul's army. "Exaltation does not come from the east, the west, or the desert, for God is the Judge: He brings down one and exalts another" (Psalm 75:6-7). David became Saul's number one asset. Saul's army won battle after battle under David's command (1 Sam. 18:5). David made Saul look good. The kingdom succeeded because David succeeded. This only made sense: David was the Lord's anointed, the true king of Israel.

But the people began to sing a new song, and it was catchy: "Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). Jealousy and fear bit down and shook Saul like a rag doll. He was convinced he would lose the kingdom to David (1 Sam. 18:8). He was right. Saul's reaction was to hold more tightly to the kingdom. He started a tug-of-war with God that he was sure to lose. Holding tighter just meant the rope burns would be worse when the kingdom was wrenched from his hands.

Saul's behavior became increasingly erratic. David knew his way around a stringed instrument. His playing soothed Saul and kept evil spirits from tormenting him (1 Sam. 16:14, 23). Saul often asked David to play for him. But as Saul's jealousy and fear increased, his self-possession decreased. Music couldn't tame the savage beast or the evil spirits. His mind filled with images of driving a spear through David. One day, a murderous scream slashed through David's song. The wall next to David groaned and cracked as a spear bit and wouldn't let go. David barely made it out alive (1 Sam. 18:10-11).

Most of us in David's position would've got the heck out of Dodge. But David stuck around. Saul tried to skewer him a couple more times before David decided to skip town. Why

the wait? There were a hundred reasons. Israel was the promised land, home to God's covenant people. To faithful Jews like David, there was nowhere else to go. Israel was a light surrounded by the darkness of nations who were the Lord's enemies. Another thing: Going AWOL probably meant a death sentence. If you were the king's most successful commander, you might be killed twice over. David figured he was dead if he stayed and dead if he left. Plus, Saul was giving off mixed signals. Twice—in between attempts to shish kabob him—Saul asked David to marry one of his daughters. Such a sign of favor was deeply flattering. David was too humble to be flattered. He refused both times Saul offered. But the second time, Saul wouldn't take no for an answer. He made David an offer he couldn't refuse: his daughter Michal for 100 Philistine foreskins. David brought Saul 200 and they called it a deal. With Saul being so on again/off again it's no wonder David was confused about what to do.

Eventually, common sense prevailed and David hit the road. He had to sneak out his window. Michal put an idol in their bed to make it look like David was napping when Saul came looking for him. The ruse lasted a few minutes, tops. When Saul asked why Michal helped David, she said David threatened to kill her (1 Sam. 19:12-17). David fled for his life looking like a guy who'd kill his own wife. Saul had attempted to murder his own son-in-law several times. Yet he looked like the concerned father, the king betrayed by his rogue commander. It wasn't a stretch to image David was gunning for the throne. He led the king's armies. He had the king's daughter; why not the king's throne? Add to this that when Saul came to Ramah in pursuit of David, the Spirit moved on him. He spent a couple days prophesying. The saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" became popular again (1 Sam. 19:23-24). On top of everything else, Saul looked godly and spiritual; David seemed to be the worst of sinners.

After fleeing, David lived in the deserts outside Jerusalem. He spent years playing cat and mouse with Saul. Saul hunted David relentlessly. David eluded Saul by moving around and hiding out in caves. Once, he even hid among the Philistines he loathed. He only survived among them by pretending to be insane (1 Sam. 21:12-13). David's list of rumored crimes grew. He could now add fugitive, Philistine, and nut case. As a boy, David was misappraised and discounted. As a man, he suffered because of those who couldn't see past appearances.

Suffering Outside the Gate

Jesus knew what it was to be slandered and run out of town. Public opinion was sharply divided throughout His ministry. Many said Jesus was possessed and in league with the devil (John 7:20; Matt. 12:24). He was accused of deceiving people (John 7:12). Religious leaders said Jesus wasn't from God; they denounced Him as a sinner and a drunk (John 9:16, 24; Matt. 11:19). Most of Jesus's disciples found His bread of life teaching heretical. Offended, they abandoned Him (John 6:66). Jesus's own family thought He was a nut case at one point (Mark 3:20-21). Public pressure mounted. The religious leaders hatched a plot to murder Jesus. Because of this, Jesus couldn't move about publicly. The Son of David skipped town to live in the wilderness just like His ancestor, David (John 11:54).

Jesus could run but He couldn't hide. For awhile, He managed to elude the authorities. But on the eve of Passover, Judas betrayed His location. The Pharisees took Jesus into custody with the help of a Roman garrison. The religious leaders held a clandestine trial at night. Using fabricated evidence, they convicted Jesus of blasphemy and sentenced Him to death. There was only one problem: the Jewish council had no legal teeth. To kill Jesus, they needed to go through Roman channels. They brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea (Luke 3:1).

Pilate wasn't keen on executing Jesus. He could smell a religious rat. But the Pharisees mounted a full court press: Jesus claimed to be king. He was gunning for Caesar's throne. Releasing Him was an act of treason. Pilate couldn't take this kind of heat. He caved and signed off on executing the King of the Jews.

After guards lapped His blood with whips, Jesus was led outside of Jerusalem. He was about to be exiled further than that. Hebrews compares the cross to the sin offering under the law. For the sin offering, the animal's blood was sprinkled before the Lord but its body was burned outside the camp (Lev. 4:5-12; Heb. 13:11). "Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the gate, so that He might sanctify the people by His own blood" (Heb. 13:12). Taking the animal's body outside the camp prefigured the crucifixion of Christ outside Jerusalem. The people needed a sin offering. The cross was the proof of humanity's God-hating nature. The Pharisees preened themselves for their piety as they murdered an innocent man. Yet Jesus hung there like a criminal, like someone cursed by God. The One who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). He breathed His last—exiled from God, humanity, and life itself. The cross made Him the ultimate Outsider.

Bearing His Disgrace

After comparing the cross to the old covenant sin offering, Hebrews says, "Let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing His disgrace" (Heb. 13:13). Hebrews was written to Jews who had converted to Christianity. Being outside the camp was very real to them. They found themselves outside the tradition of their countrymen; outside temple worship; outside the Jewish understanding of scripture and doctrine; outside their religious and cultural identity. In many cases, this meant being ostracized by family and friends who saw them as deceived. The writer of Hebrews was encouraging them. They were outside the Jewish camp but so was Jesus. They could even reframe it this way: They were in Christ but the whole Jewish system was outside Him. This is why the same passage says, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle do not have a right to eat" (Heb. 13:10).

Anyone who follows Jesus will find themselves outside the camp at some point. Remember, the camp we're talking about isn't the secular world. David and Jesus were ejected from the camp of God's people. We can find ourselves outside the camp of Christians. History is full of examples. Take Athanasius, a bishop who lived in the third and fourth centuries. He was fired from his bishopric and banished over five times. Why? For defending the deity of Christ! Sometimes heretical factions in the church gained favor with whomever was Emperor at the time. When they did, they used political power against enemies like Athanasius. It's hard to imagine someone being kicked out of church for believing in Christ's deity but it happened. Though distant from our times, Athanasius challenges us now: Would we prefer Christ with disgrace to Christianity with praise?

Being outside the camp isn't always something so dramatic. Christians can be clique-ish and show favoritism—though James warns us not to (James 2:1, 8-9). A person might be excluded for any number of reasons. Some are fleshly—their age, looks, intelligence, or political views. Some are more "spiritual"—views on eschatology, worship styles, charismatic gifts, or a ministry that bucks prevailing trends. Whatever the reason, if we find ourselves outside the camp, Jesus is there. He doesn't drive us away (John 6:37). He welcomes us to the camp of outsiders and invites us to call it home.

Adullam

We mentioned that David hid out in Philistia for awhile. Eventually, he left. A person can only act crazy for so long. David set up camp in the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1). In many ways, Adullam is where David's kingdom began. People started gathering to him there. David's family came to believe in his anointing. They were the first to join him. Others followed: "In addition, every man who was desperate, in debt, or discontented rallied around him, and he became their leader" (1 Sam. 22:1-2). Those that came to David had soured on Saul's rule. They found themselves on the wrong side of society. Their personal lives were wrecked. With David, they hoped for something different, a fresh start.

Adullam means "refuge" or "rest." David didn't run off any of the ne'er-do-wells that came to him. He had been run off himself. David found refuge and rest in the cave of Adullam. When people came to him, David invited them into his refuge and rest.

David's crew was pretty motley. They weren't "the beautiful people" by any means. The upperly mobile, fashionistas, intelligentsia, and pillars of society were conspicuously absent. But under David, a transformation took place. These rough customers became a force for God's rule. With this band of misfits David raided the Lord's enemies. The Philistines, Amalekites, and others fell before God's anointed and his ranks (1 Sam. 23:5; 27:8; 30:16-17). David and his soldiers advanced God's kingdom even while officially black-listed from it.

The kingdom of Jesus, the Son of David, also had its origins in a cave. David was driven to Adullam, dogged by rumors of treason and disgrace. Jesus was buried in a cave "outside the camp"—without religious approval or social standing (Luke 23:53). People gathered to David at Adullam. When we believe, the Holy Spirit gathers us into the burial cave of Christ: "we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in a new way of life (Rom. 6:4). Who we were is put away. Christ becomes our resurrection and life (John 11:25).

Like those who came to David, we come to Jesus burdened by stress, debt, or disillusionment; we are disenfranchised; we lack status or privilege; we are not the world's best or brightest; we may be looked down on or treated dismissively. But we come, and we find a place with Jesus. He doesn't throw us out or consider us second class. He accepts us and gives us refuge from whatever past we left. We no longer need to be burdened by our bad rep, our most embarrassing moment, our poor business sense, or the crushing failures that have made us give up on the world. Jesus loves us. He says, "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves" (Matt. 11:28-29). Jesus is one of us. He is the original reject. He is not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:11). He becomes our leader. A leader and his soldiers are a unit. They have a common identity. We have a common identity with Jesus, one He doesn't shrink from. He embraces it without secret misgivings. We are one with Him.

Paul said this to the Corinthians:

Brothers, consider your calling: Not many are wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

Think of that. Christians are not the power-elite. We are the rag-tag outfit with the Son of David. But God has chosen us to bring this current order to nothing. How? Recall that Saul wouldn't completely destroy the Amalekites. He refused the message of the cross in type. His regime operated by the human mindset. Compare this with David's mindset: "Whenever David attacked the land, he did not leave a single person alive" (1 Sam. 27:9). David and his ilk may have been a lot of things. But they embraced the message of the cross in type. They lived it out as a group. Its wisdom dictated their actions.

We too have embraced the message of the cross—and not just in type. We have accepted the complete destruction of everything we were. We have left old things behind to join the Son of David, to be ruled by His life. "Saul" is no longer our master. We are learning a new government, one other than the human mindset. As John says, "This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith" (1 John 5:4). We conquer simply by believing in Jesus. Why? Because He has already conquered. As we believe, His victory manifests in our experience. We are the underdogs that win because of the come back (from the dead) King.

VII. Epilogue: David and Michal

The Queen of Sass

It's an understatement to say that David's rise to the throne was long. It's even an understatement to say it's an understatement. Saul was hell-bent on killing David. For years David couldn't stay in one place; he couldn't let down his guard for a second. Foxes had dens, birds of the sky had nests, but David had no place to lay His head (Luke 9:58). Adullam gave David some breathing room and an address. This enabled the Lord to start building David's kingdom using the scraps and leftovers from Saul's. Still, the true king of Israel lived in a cave while a poseur lounged in the royal palace.

The years in the desert only bought David more years at Adullam. Then Judah sent men to anoint David. He became king over one tribe (2 Sam. 2:4, 7). David didn't spike the football and do a victory dance. Saul killed himself during a battle with the Philistines (1 Sam. 31:4). The ruling king was dead. But Saul's family didn't give up the right to rule. A protracted civil war began between the families of David and Saul (2 Sam. 3:1). Eventually, the war went in David's favor. All of Israel came to David at Hebron and anointed him king (2 Sam. 5:1-3).

What a moment it must've been when David was crowned. Yet something else surpassed even that—bringing the ark into Jerusalem. Priests carried the ark into the city of David. Wearing a linen ephod (priestly boxers), David danced and leapt around worshiping with abandon. He was like a man released from a cage—a cage of suffering he'd been locked in for over a decade. But it was more than that. He danced like someone back from the dead. The people blew the top off the city with shouts, praises, and trumpet blasts. It was a raucous, exuberant tumult. Everyone was acting crazy for the Lord (2 Sam. 6:14-15).

Well, almost everyone: "Saul's daughter, Michal, looked down from the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, and she despised him in her heart" (2 Sam. 6:16). Michal looked down on David in every sense, not just from the window. She didn't compromise her dignity to worship the Lord like David and the commoners. When David got home, she said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today! He exposed himself today in the sight of the slave girls of his subjects like a vulgar person would expose himself" (2 Sam. 6:20).

Wow. Acid dripped from Michal's words and sizzled on the palace rug. If Proverbs 21:9⁶ went through David's mind he didn't quote it. In the desert he faced much worse than a sassy wife, and he was done living in the dog house. David replied, "I was dancing before the LORD.... I will celebrate before the LORD, and I will humble myself even more and humiliate myself" (2 Sam. 6:21-22). Michal died without having any children (2 Sam. 6:23). Did the Lord curse her womb? Or did David have no further union with her? Scripture doesn't say. But it was a direct result of despising her husband and king.

The Bride, the Wife of the Lamb

There is a moral to this story for the church. Here we have a bride who sees her lord lower and humiliate himself for God, and she refuses to join him. She stands aloof then mocks him for his sacrifice of praise. The result? She can't have children; she can't produce life. The church is the bride of Christ. Our Husband and King humiliated Himself on the cross. Do we stand aloof from His sufferings? When the Lord wants us to lower ourselves in a situation do we ditch Him to keep our dignity? The church that refuses to know His cross will birth nothing of her Husband. The bride that despises His humiliation will bring forth nothing of her King.

In Revelation, John's closing vision is of the New Jerusalem. An angel presents her as "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9). The Lamb is her lamp. The river of life flows from within, where God and the Lamb are enthroned (Rev. 21:23, 22:1). The tree of life—the cross of Christ—continually bears fruit in her (Rev. 22:2; 1 Peter 2:24). This isn't a vision of the afterlife. It's a vision of eternal life. There's a difference. One is a happy future existence. The other is a marriage, a relationship of mutual self-giving. The Bible calls this love. The church exists for this relationship, this marriage to the Lamb. She exists to live in union with Him who laid down His life, to join His undignified selflessness (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16).

Genesis 1:27 tells us God created mankind in His image, and created us male and female. God's first command was given to His image: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). This verse is pregnant with divine purpose (excuse the pun). It is not just about populating the globe. It tells us what God's vision was from the beginning: that His image fill and subdue all things. Christ is the image of God (Col. 1:15). As the female in this relationship, it is through us that Jesus multiplies, fills creation, and brings it under His rule. We cannot fulfill that purpose while His wounded hands and side offend us. We cannot birth something of our Husband if we despise Him who is the slaughtered Lamb (Rev. 5:6).

Paul said he hoped that "Christ will be highly honored in my body, whether by life or by death" (Php. 1:20). This is how the wife of the Lamb speaks. She does not love herself so much that she shrinks from death (Rev. 12:11). She is more attached to her Husband than to her own life. Just as Christ left His Father and joined to her, she left everything to join to Him (Gen. 2:23-24; Eph. 5:30-32). This union is blessed by God. He has chosen it to produce fruit that lasts and brings Him glory (John 15:8, 16).

⁶ "Better to live on the corner of a roof than to share a house with a nagging wife."

Published by:

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