

De-throned But Still Royalty
based on 1Samuel 16:1-13, David Jahnke, 5/8/16

The other day I saw a picture of a bed which had ornate stairs that you had to climb to get up to it. And it had what looked like a throne or pulpit in front of it between the stairs. And my friend who put it up wrote, "Here's a bed for those who think they are royalty" to which I responded, "We are a royal priesthood after all!" which is a quote from 1 Peter.

So both my friend's original intent of humbling anyone who would own such a bed and my reply are true. We need both persistent humbling and persistent reminders that we are royalty in God's eyes, despite our fallen state.

If King Saul had known he was still loved, he would have ceded power to David and saved a lot of trouble for Israel. If the powerful in the world today would only be willing to cede power when God so called! Related to this, why in the world do we not have term limits for our congressmen and women? It is time!

God has allowed and/or ordained all leaders to their positions, including us. We have been crowned with power and authority and wisdom and knowledge and goodness. The question then becomes what we and all leaders do with all of this. We either obey the calling of God to empower others to Love or we reject God's vision in favor of our own.

Saul rejected the fullness of God's plan and set up a monument to himself in its place. This is the foundational human sin that goes back to Adam and Eve who chose the tree of knowledge over obedience to God. They wanted to go their own way and be like gods rather than trust in God. This basic sin has become more and more of a temptation as the self has replaced God over the last five centuries as the source of meaning, power and truth. This is an issue for everyone but it is particularly problematic for those blessed with power like Saul: the intellectually powerful, the financially and politically powerful, even the morally powerful who run into the danger of self-righteousness and a lack of mercy.

Saul had succeeded in many ways. He had defeated the Amalekites and saved some livestock for offerings and did not kill everyone. He thought he was doing well. He was strong and moral. But he was de-throned.

I was de-throned at 27. I had succeeded in teaching English and getting sober and living abroad. Things were going quite well and according to design. But then something central was taken from me. Over time I learned that what I was really losing was being King of my own life and destiny. Through what was previously a silly thing to me-- prayer-- I was shown concretely that there was a power higher than me and all my life circumstances.

That power filled me and wants to fill you with peace and love for all. But this means giving up control—giving ourselves over to that higher power. And because we resist this, God humbles us again and again and reminds that a new King has been chosen; a King whose vision and standards are very different from ours.

This happens through the Spirit convicting us of something in our own conscience; or through others in our homes, churches or workplaces. And this hurts. It feels like we are being robbed of power and that we are not good enough or strong enough. But it also can open up tremendous possibilities if we remember who the new King is and the kind of King he is.

I had one of those humbling-loss-of-power times this week. And the day that this happened, I tried to carry on but my heart was just not in anything. So I went to the Y but I could not find the strength to lift. So I ran outside for about a block and was like, "It's too cold outside to run." I went to the treadmill inside. And after about 3 minutes of running, I was ready to throw in the towel. But then I suddenly remembered who was in charge of this situation. Was he presenting new possibilities? I recalled that he was with me and for me and he did not want me down in the dumps. And I turned the speed up on the treadmill and ran harder and forced a smile to my lips and within seconds, everything was new.

That evening, we had a wonderful small group. I felt very good about my teaching and the meeting was filled with insights and hopes and lots of laughter. New life in Christ was with us.

Now people are very sensitive to news that they are not sovereign over their work or their homes; that they, in fact, are not even sovereign over their own lives. And with all of our emphases on individual rights, any good American can understand this sensitivity...which is why we need to be careful about bearing this news.

Samuel was very nervous about letting Saul and the elders know that God was choosing a new king. So the Lord told Samuel to tell the elders that he was coming for the sake of the Lord and sacrifice.

This frames our approach to the modern world. We bear news of a new King but this is expressed with an d through sacrificial love. We make clear that we have no interest in having power over anyone or taking their power from anyone by loving and serving from below. This show them the kind of higher power who is above them. That power has no interest in condemning or shaming them and actually wants to empower them to know and follow the Love and Mercy and Goodness and Truth that is yes, above them, but also deep within them.

I posted a song the other day for Mother's Day and I think it exemplifies our approach to others. It might help to imagine Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris and Dolly Parton singing this:

One day a mother went to a prison
To see an erring but precious son
She told the warden how much she loved him
It did not matter what he had done

She did not bring him parole or pardon
She brought no silver, no pomp or style
It was a halo bright sent down from heaven's light
The sweetest gift, a mother's smile. [The Sweetest Gift, James B. Coates]

We are all children who err and our errors imprison us. If we know the unconditional smile and love of our mother and father in heaven, we must go out to the world, bearing unconditionally that smile and that love. But we also make clear God's vision.

Samuel was told to pass by the big and the strong until he got to a child who would be anointed by God as King. And God has chosen every child out there—the weak, the lowly, the broken, the poor and He has big plans for all of them. So because everyone is meant to be a priest like Samuel— everyone's work is not primarily for themselves or for their company. It is for the sake of lifting up the weak and the lowly and empowering them for the good-- bringing to their gifts to life in the world.

That is what your work is for. So find ways to express this to the powerful in your workplaces and to the lowly around you. Express this with words and through what you produce and what you earn. Do it joyfully and fearlessly as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, remembering that God is with you. Do this and others will see signs of the most important truth that love, peace and mercy reign over them and over all. And God's people say...