



TOUCH POINT

The King's Gambit – Touchpoint for June 5, 2024

1 Samuel 8:4-11 (12-15) 16-20 (11:14-15) (NRSVUE) **Israel Demands a King**

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah ⁵ and said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” ⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the LORD, ⁷ and the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. ⁸ Just as they have done to me from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. ⁹ Now then, listen to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

¹⁰ So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots, ¹² and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵ He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves and the best of your cattle and donkeys and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ And on that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you on that day.”

Israel's Request for a King Granted

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! We are determined to have a king over us, ²⁰ so that we also may be like other nations and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

¹⁴ Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.” ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the LORD, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

Mark 3:28-35 (NRSVUE) **The True Kindred of Jesus**

²⁸ “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin”— ³⁰ for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

I called Jim Hanson to talk me off the roof. I was wrestling with my emerging Touchpoint. Instead, he pushed me closer to the edge. I could see I chose an unavoidable collision with our political times. I know there are many people who just don't want to hear their mentors bring up politics. He reminded me, however, that it cannot be avoided, that almost all prophets emerged after kings began operating. It was a counter-move to the tragic outcomes of choosing kings over the King of all kings. Just as it occurred in the hearts of the Israelites, so too, it is happening in the hearts of our congregations. A desire for authoritarian Christianity has seeped into the fabric of our politics. It breaks my heart, and I must turn my attention to the King of Kings, and not my impulse for emotional reactions and verbosity. I am trying very hard to yield to the words of this passage in Samuel alone for this message... not only socially, but also individually, as we look at our own bouts with blasphemous tendencies and desires for elected kings of our own daily circumstances. It is a gambit when we trade in the God of uncertainty for a god of certitude, when we give over to our own fearful will and choice. But the alternative is what we are being warned about; I don't mean political in this instance, but personal... our trust in the King who reigns, who cannot be manipulated or coerced, rather than the king of our own devices. Please treat this as Henry's Touchpoint. Your own touchpoint will matter more as the words of God to Samuel are heard above the demands of the masses.

The title *king* is used in two different ways: *Malak* when referring to the king they have chosen, and *Melek* in reference to the King who reigns over all chosen kings.

Like the Israelites, do you unwittingly or wittingly choose a person, a place or a thing that appears more tangible, more directive and more powerful than the God who is with us, in silent inner wisdom, the one that guards our hearts with compassion and justice?

Considering the gospel text, have we given enough thought to our blasphemous ways for fear we may have committed "the unforgivable sin"?

For me, I would have to say 'Yes!' on both counts. I have committed blasphemy and chosen many different kings, given the circumstances being presented. It's an anxiety move. I want a king who will call balls and strikes in my favor, not guard my heart, a King who will consider me part of the small, favored circle of blood advantage.

In the gospel, Jesus is in a crowded room when they inform him that his mother is outside. As a Latino man I am very uncomfortable with Jesus' response concerning the one who brought him into this world. The matriarch of matriarchs. In effect he said, 'I am with my mothers.' If I were him, I would be glad she was outside and hope she didn't hear it. Yikes! Here comes the dish towel and an '*Aye, Dios mio!*'

To blaspheme is to say God is in something God is not, or to say God is not in something that God is indeed in.

My answer is yes, I do this. I choose kings and I blaspheme, depending on the feeling of being out of control and fearfully indecisive.

I wouldn't think I do that, because it just doesn't sound like a good idea. So, I try not to think about blasphemy and rejecting God as King, because I know my heart. So maybe the question is more, 'Do we want an authority to tell us what to do?' I don't think anyone wants to choose an authoritarian to tell us what to do. But many of

us pray every day to be told by God what to do, don't we? We want a chosen king with flesh and bones and a Morgan Freeman voice.

What I'm hearing in the Old Testament passage is that we have a real problem. It seems to me the only true authority is ultimate reality, of which we do not have complete knowledge of, and never will. So, we seek an authority of tatted flesh and flowing blood that has the power to fight battles on our behalf. Dispense with our discomfort. Smite our perceived enemies with a vengeful back of the hand, so-called, justice. In our personal lives we turn love into enabling, and make ourselves queen or king. We wittingly or unwittingly pray, "Lavish us with more than we need. Protect us from others. Manufacture positive outcomes. Prevent us from suffering. Make others behave properly." Maybe what we really want is an Uber God, a delivery service full of authority, like when we have something delivered, like food, simply for convenience, and we are willing to pay a service charge and a tip. It appears that in our culture, we are willing to pay both of those fees to get an authoritarian, to have a king... a king even at the expense of my mothers and my brothers.

A king speaks with words and is not silent. A king does not believe we can use our brains and follow our hearts. A chosen king doesn't even necessarily know me; it just puts me in a category that can be polled. When a king is chosen, it is being given full authority from people, but not necessarily *all* the people. In a democracy, a king is chosen by a majority. In a plutocracy, it is chosen by financial investment, reassuring the poor that their lanes will be open to the same wealth, or at least to the same lack of suffering, only to find we've cushioned the king's throne.

Was it God's desire that King Saul rule Israel? Is this even an important question? I think it is! I think it is because there is a deeply popular theology that fashions every event in history to be God's will, even if the event is horrific, as long as it ensures that Jesus is of the lineage of King David... to bring salvation from the sins that were supposedly "God's will" ... to hurry up the apocalypse and the return of Jesus.

A well-known pastor stated it this way: "So we see Israel's sinful will and God's righteous will dovetailing to ultimately bring about the greatest good in redemptive history, the justification and vindication of God's righteousness and the salvation of God's people through the sacrifice of the God-man King Jesus. Why does God sovereignly foreordain events in such a way that sinful secondary causes ultimately serve to carry along his primary plans and purposes? In my humble opinion, God accomplishes his purposes through sin, rather than in spite of it, shows his infinite wisdom and ingenuity."

This, my friends, claims permission to choose sin and blasphemy, and permission to choose a Saul as king. I encourage you to go back and read what God told Samuel. The fallout, not the punishment, should be they choose Saul, a person who desired to be King for his own populist, power-mongering end.

This idea would seem to support the cliché, "everything happens for a reason." It would be like saying God, in his infinite wisdom, caused a bus full of school children to go over a cliff to teach us a lesson or bring about a future event. It is shocking and disgusting, and it's no wonder the U.S. has more atheists than anywhere else in the world.

worldpopulationreview.com sites China and South Korea as having more atheists; however, I'm defining atheist as a rejection of the concept of a western God. This site, as so many pollers sites, defines an atheist as not attending church, therefore having no religion. To my understanding, Buddhism is not a religion, so Buddhists are being counted as godless. It appears everything spiritual is judged through the prism of Western Christianity and anything

denominationally mainline. A belief in the divine and personal belief is not considered. Just church-going "believers."

I would submit that everything does not happen for a reason. Instead, perhaps God causes reason out of what happens, post-event. We live our life and choose our Kings to rule over us.

When God tells Samuel, "They did not reject you, Samuel, they're rejecting me," God is reassuring Samuel that he did the right thing by not placing himself or anyone else above God. Even if he stands alone. He is not a failure as a king. He's just not the kind of king they want. The Israelites want a king to do their bidding, not a King of Kings who is for them to live and move and have their being. There is only one King of all the Kings we've chosen. This King says, "Go ahead – choose who will lead, but understand the fallout, and know I was not chosen, I AM.

Amen.

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

You, Lord, Are in This Place

(Keith Duke)

You, Lord, are in 1)...this place. 2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.
Your presence fills it. Your presence is peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear.

Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear.

For the burden you carry will fade within God's care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

Refrain

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains.

God and God alone will be your soul's true rest. Fall in the arms of God. *Refrain*

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care.

God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God. *Refrain*

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

Sevenfold Amen

(The Emmanuel Quartet)