

TITLE: "Why Did This Happen to Me?"

TEXT I Samuel 9:1-10:1 (OT pp 251-252)

There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. <sup>2</sup>He had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.

<sup>3</sup>Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, had strayed. So Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the boys with you; go and look for the donkeys." <sup>4</sup>He passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then he passed through the land of Benjamin, but they did not find them. <sup>5</sup>When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to the boy who was with him, "Let us turn back, or my father will stop worrying about the donkeys and worry about us."

<sup>6</sup>But he said to him, "There is a man of God in this town; he is a man held in honor. Whatever he says always comes true. Let us go there now; perhaps he will tell us about the journey on which we have set out." <sup>7</sup>Then Saul replied to the boy, "But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What have we?" <sup>8</sup>The boy answered Saul again, "Here, I have with me a quarter shekel of silver; I will give it to the man of God, to tell us our way." <sup>9</sup>(Formerly in Israel, anyone who went to inquire of God would say, "Come, let us go to the seer"; for the one who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.) <sup>10</sup>Saul said to the boy, "Good; come, let us go." So they went to the town where the man of God was.

<sup>11</sup>As they went up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and said to them, "Is the seer here?" <sup>12</sup>They answered, "Yes, there he is just ahead of you. Hurry; he has come just now to the town, because the people have a sacrifice today at the shrine. <sup>13</sup>As soon as you enter the town, you will find him, before he goes up to the shrine to eat. For the people will not eat until he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those eat who are invited. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately." <sup>14</sup>So they went up to the town. As they were entering the town, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the shrine.

<sup>15</sup>Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed to Samuel: <sup>16</sup>"Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be ruler over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen the suffering of my people, because their outcry has come to me."

<sup>17</sup>When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord told him, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you. He it is who shall rule over my people."

<sup>18</sup>Then Saul approached Samuel inside the gate, and said, "Tell me, please, where is the house of the seer?" <sup>19</sup>Samuel answered Saul, "I am the seer; go up before me to the shrine, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. <sup>20</sup>As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, give no further thought to them, for they have been found. And on whom is all Israel's desire fixed, if not on you and on all your ancestral house?"

<sup>21</sup>Saul answered, "I am only a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why then have you spoken to me in this way?" <sup>22</sup>Then Samuel took Saul and his servant-boy and brought them into the hall, and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, of whom there were about thirty. <sup>23</sup>And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion I gave you, the one I asked you to put aside." <sup>24</sup>The cook took up the thigh and what went with it and set them before Saul. Samuel said, "See, what was kept is set before you. Eat; for it is set before you at the appointed time, so that you might eat with the guests." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

<sup>25</sup>When they came down from the shrine into the town, a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down to sleep. <sup>26</sup>Then at the break of dawn Samuel called to Saul upon the roof, "Get up, so that I may send you on your way." Saul got up, and both he and Samuel went out into the street. <sup>27</sup>As they were going down to the outskirts of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the boy to go on before us, and when he has passed on, stop here yourself for a while, that I may make known to you the word of God."

<sup>1</sup>Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him; he said, "The Lord has anointed you ruler over his people Israel. You shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around.

### Introduction – Why did this happen to me?

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, almost 100 Presbyterians arrived from churches all over south-central New York to conduct a presbytery meeting here in our church. Our facility was clean and beautiful, the technical assistance provided was excellent and the meal served is STILL being talked about. As our Presbytery Executive said about us afterward, "You are a class act."

A little after 10:00 p.m. that evening, I checked to be sure all the lights were out and the doors locked. Then I walked to my car which was parked over at Rite Aid and drove home. I thought I remembered putting my planning calendar in the inside pocket of my sport jacket as I left my office, but when I arrived home, it was not there and it was not any other pocket in the jacket either. "Oh well," I thought, it must be in the car.

Next morning, it was NOT in the car, nor was it my office, the church, or the path I had taken between the church and my car the previous evening. Every one of my meetings, appointments and events for the next year-and-a-half was in that book.

Why did this happen to me? ...Perhaps something has happened to you and you wonder the same thing:

“Why did my spouse leave me?”

“Why did the test come back positive?”

“Why did I lose my job?”

“Why doesn’t my depression go away?”

“Why does my child have such difficult problems?”

...Even though Saul lived about 3,000 years ago, what he went through will help you to understand WHY something happened to you.

#### 1. Don’t put all your eggs in one basket

Saul was a big, strong, handsome young man. God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel because, as the prophet Samuel said to Saul” “...you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around.” As we can see in later chapters, Saul did become a successful warrior king and he DID defeat Israel’s enemies many times.

However, Saul had a blind spot in his personality. Saul applied the principles of what he was good at, which was warfare, to the OTHER parts of his life. The main principle he used in warfare was, if you’re an enemy, I will kill you.” As I said, this worked well in his battles with Israel’s enemies the Philistines, but when God chose David as a successor to Saul, Saul viewed him as an enemy and tried to kill him even though David was steadfastly loyal to Saul.

We have to be careful of this tendency ourselves. ...I read about a man who was an efficiency engineer in a manufacturing firm. He was especially good at reducing the number of steps and actions of workers on an assembly line. One morning he was telling an engineering colleague how successfully he had implemented some of his theories at home.

He was saying, “Each morning my wife makes us oatmeal while I get ready for work. A couple weeks ago, I got ready early and watched. She took 28 minutes, 35 seconds to make the oatmeal. While we were eating, I carefully explained how she could save a lot of time by combining several tasks and using time saving steps like turning the stove on so it could be getting hot while she measures the water and oatmeal.

“Well,” asked his colleague, “DID it save time?”

“O yes!” said the engineer. “...Now I make the oatmeal in 17 minutes 53 seconds!”

Teachers cannot always be teachers to their spouses and children. Counselors can't always be counselors. Accountants can't always solve problems at home like they solve them at work and pastors cannot always be pastors at home either.

WE must learn what Saul never DID learn, which was this: in our personal relationships, we must be willing to step out of our comfortable patterns of behavior in order to lovingly relate to those who are close to us.

## 2. Asking for directions

Another problem Saul had was a lack of discernment. Saul tended to get confused easily and when he did, he asked ANYone for directions. In later years, Saul tended to listen to those who told him what we WANTED to hear and he tried to KILL those who told him what he DIDN'T want to hear. Therefore, he would up surrounded by a group of yes men.”

In this morning's text, Saul was about to make a wrong decision and go back home but fortunately, the young servant boy he had brought along suggested that they visit the prophet Samuel. Then Saul listened to a group of girls who, fortunately, also directed him to Samuel. Samuel was the right guy to go to because Samuel listened to God.

We need to be VERY careful about who we listen to. I had a friend named Mike who was part of a young professionals group in a church we attended. Mike was a brilliant premed student when several of his friends got him to try a hallucinogenic drug called acid. One day he got a tab from a bad batch and it destroyed part of his brain function. When I knew him, he still longed to be a surgeon, but he simply could not retain the information necessary for the grueling medical courses.

A young woman I had never met stopped by the church one day. She grew up in a Christian home, but started hanging around with a bunch of kids at college who loved to party. Eventually, she was binge drinking with them on weekends. Eventually, she discovered that she had AIDS. “They were such nice kids, too,” she said. She stopped because she needed help to buy her prescription drugs until her Medicaid card came.

Our quality of life depends upon the decisions we make. Therefore, the more important the decision, the more important it is to ask God what you should do.

PRAY about things before you do them.

READ the Bible. God will not condone things that are condemned in the Bible.

TALK to Christian friends. Ask them to pray and help you to discern God's will. God WANTS you to have a life FILLED with love, joy and peace ...but you have to be willing to LISTEN to God. And you will NOT listen to God if you surround yourself with ungodly people who tell you just what you want to hear.

### 3. The big picture

God KNOWS the future. That does NOT mean that our future is predetermined. We ALWAYS have free choice. The text reads:

Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed to Samuel: "Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be ruler over my people Israel. ...When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord told him, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you. He shall rule over my people." As you get to know God, and as you practice discerning God's will for you, you will have times when God will give you crystal clear directions, just as God gave to Samuel.

Other times you will just wander around in the wilderness looking for donkeys and not finding them. In others words, you will just be living your life and have no idea what part this all plays in the larger scheme of things. That's OK. It happened to Saul, and God made him king of Israel. Who KNOWS what God can do with you! But the key thing to remember when you ARE wandering around in the wilderness of life is not to do anything that you know is wrong. Just keep going, keep searching, keep trying to hear God and wait, wait, wait, till God shows you what to do.

God knows the BIG picture. God knew that for Saul to meet Samuel on that particular day, at that particular time, he HAD to wander around for a while and he HAD to come to this out of the way place where Samuel as staying.

The key is whether or not you are going to trust that God knows what will bring you love, joy and peace better than you do. And one of the reasons that things happen, good and bad, is because God wants us to trust His love every moment of the day and night.

...Remember I told you that I lost my planning calendar. You know how it is when you lose a purse or a wallet, you look and look. I looked and looked, but it wasn't to be found. Finally, I asked the Lord why this had happened. Jesus said, "Trust me. I'll get you where you need to get when you need to get there."

I felt like saying, “It would be easier TO trust you if I had that calendar.” But that’s not how you develop trust. Developing trust is like developing muscles. You begin to exercise a new muscle group and it hurts. It’s only when you keep at it that the muscle grows the pain diminishes. Losing that calendar was painful, but it did enable me to trust Jesus more.

And when you start to trust the Lord, Jesus will go to EXTRAORDINARY lengths to show you that you CAN trust Him.

...Carol and I attended the wedding of Tim and Lisa Parsons on June 18<sup>th</sup>. It was held in the church that Lisa’s parents attend in Moravia. We had the address, but had never been to the church, so when we turned onto the street and saw a church with nicely dressed people walking in on a Saturday afternoon, we assumed that was the church. As I was parking, a guy in a very loud shirt, cut in front of our car, looked in my window, and said, “Your inspection sticker is expired,” and took off.

Getting the car inspected was one of the appointments in my calendar that I had forgotten. ...It turned out that that wasn’t even the right church. But God had us park there so this guy, whoever he was, could tell us about the sticker.

#### Conclusion – “Trust and Obey”

Three weeks ago yesterday, Carol and I were packing to drive to PA for her niece’s wedding. For the wedding rehearsal that night, I went downstairs to get my blue blazer. It was the first time I had used it since the Presbytery meeting here in our church. In one of the sleeves, held there by a pen that had slipped sideways, was my calendar.

I told Carol and we both laughed. Then I checked it. I had not missed one single appointment, event or meeting, including the car inspection.

...John H. Sammis wrote the words to the hymn “Trust and Obey.” The first stanza goes:

When we walk with the Lord, in the light of His Word,  
 What a glory He sheds on our way!  
 While we do His good will  
 He abides with us still  
 And with all who will trust and obey.

Let us sing this now; it’s hymn #349...