

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (15)
THE SPECIFIC WILL OF GOD
SEEKING HIS UNREVEALED WILL-PART THREE
“GOD’S OVERWHELMING GRACE”
Sermon 9/23/18

Over the past few weeks we have been looking at how we can discover God’s unrevealed will for our lives and how he uses different methods or ways to reveal His will. The first is through the use of His word and I shared how the Lord used His word to reveal His will to me regarding my mother’s health. Then last week I spoke of how the Lord gives people dreams that dealt with events in their future. I used Abraham and Joseph as examples. I also shared how God had given me three dreams that dealt with my being laid off from Bank of America.

I ended my story by saying that through the years following my dismissal I continued to walk in faith believing that God would provide for my family’s financial needs. But I also asked the question, “Did God provide, and if so, did He provide before my severance pay ran out?” Because the answer to that question comes from my experience with God’s overwhelming grace I want to save that answer for next week. This week I want to establish what God’s overwhelming grace is, so that next week you will understand more fully what happened to me.

God’s grace can be an overwhelming thing. The primary example of this is the provision God made for the forgiveness of sin. While we were deep in the midst of our sin Christ died so that through Him we could receive forgiveness and be saved. God didn’t wait until we had worked our way out of sin or had performed the right amount or the right type of “good deeds” before He decided to die for us. He died for us while we were in the midst of our sin with no desire to stop sinning.

The price for sin had to be paid but we were incapable of paying it. So God paid it for us. This is overwhelming grace. Everyone who has come to a realization of this truth understands this. What we could not do, God did for us. What we could not become, God made it possible for us to become. What we could not accomplish God empowered us to accomplish.

God’s overwhelming grace though is not limited to salvation. God also overwhelms us with His grace when He calls us to do something beyond what we think we’re capable of doing or becoming. As with salvation, our reaction or response to God’s overwhelming grace can determine the course of the rest of our life. Today I want to look at a few examples of how three different people responded to God’s overwhelming grace and the impact it had on them and on those around them.

MOSES, THE DELIVERER OF ISRAEL

Moses was born into a Hebrew family during the time when Pharaoh had instructed all midwives to kill any male child born to a Hebrew woman. Moses’ mother, along with the help of the mid-wives, hid Moses for three months before putting him in a basket and placing him among the reeds of the Nile River. Pharaoh’s sister was bathing nearby, spotted the basket and had pity on the child. She drew the child out of the water and named him Moses. (It’s interesting to note that

we are not told the name his birth mother and father might have given to him at birth. We only know the name given to him by Pharaoh's daughter.) The name Moses comes from the Hebrew verb meaning "to pull out or draw out (of water)" which indicates that Pharaoh's daughter was fully aware that this child was one of the Hebrew's children. This may have been why she allowed Moses' sister Miriam to take him back to his mother to be weaned. In spite of his family of origin and the prevailing attitude toward the Hebrews at the time, Pharaoh's daughter adopted and raised this Hebrew infant as her own. Moses may have been born a Hebrew, but he grew up in the palace of Pharaoh.

After Moses became a man he went to the land of the Hebrews and came across an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. Thinking no one was looking Moses killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. But Moses had been seen. Afraid for his life Moses fled Egypt and lived in the desert for 40 years. It was there that God's overwhelming grace called to Moses out of the burning bush telling him to go back to his people in Egypt and demand Pharaoh let them go.

God's call to Moses was surprising and unexpected. How could someone with his past be used by God to accomplish such a great deed? Unsure of his abilities Moses initially responded by asking several questions of God. He began with, "*Who am I*" that I should do this thing you are asking of me? Moses was a simple shepherd, a fugitive from Egypt who no longer had any standing or influence in Pharaoh's court. Who was he that God should call him? All he had to offer was a shepherd's staff, yet God was calling him to do greater things with that shepherd's staff than even he could imagine (Exodus 3:11).

Moses then asked, "*What shall I say when they ask who sent me?*" Moses needed to know the power and authority behind the One who was calling Him to do this mighty task. God responded by saying "I AM WHO I AM". He then instructed Moses to tell His people that the covenant which God had established with their forefathers was about to be fulfilled (Exodus 3:13-17).

Moses - with all his inadequacies standing at attention – then said (and I paraphrase), "What if they don't believe me or listen to what I have to say? You know what a poor public speaker I am. I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. So please, Lord, I think it would be to Your advantage if You sent this message by someone more qualified than I". Moses had been gone from Egypt for 40 years and the court manners he had learned as a child had faded into history. His speech was limited to a few commands to his sheep and some intimate conversations at home. He no longer had the ability to speak as he once did as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Moses recognized the inherent weakness within himself. He looked at his abilities and found them lacking. God responded by assuring Him that He would be with Him throughout the whole ordeal and that it was God Himself who would be on display, not Moses. Moses simply had to put aside his own inadequacies and allow God to move and work through him (Exodus 4:1, 10, 13). Though initially resisting, Moses opened his heart and received the overwhelming grace which God was extending to him. Confident in God's power to sustain him, Moses picked up his staff, walked back to Egypt and took on the role of Israel's deliverer.

SAUL, THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL

Saul was the first king Israel ever had. Prior to that they had been a theocracy, a form of government in which God is the source of all authority but where prophets and priests rule in His name. The people, however, demanded to be ruled over by a king like the nations that surrounded them. As God's representative Samuel was very displeased but he prayed to the Lord and the Lord answered, saying, *"Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them"* (Samuel 8:7).

Samuel then told people that God would soon provide a king to rule over them and that Saul, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, was anointed as king. Saul was described as *"a choice and handsome man...there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people"* (2 Samuel 9:2).

You would think that with such an appealing outward appearance he would be confident in himself. But the exact opposite was true. When Samuel held a public meeting to anoint him as king, Saul could not be found. After initiating a search party he was found hiding by the baggage. So they ran and took him from there. Notice Saul did not voluntarily leave his place of hiding. He had to be physically removed from that area and brought up front; a man who was thirty years old, more handsome and taller than all others in Israel had to be dragged out of hiding in order to be anointed king. This sense of timidity and insecurity was a foreshadowing of what was to come.

There is much to be said about Saul as king but that is for another time. My point in bringing up Saul today is to look at how he handled God's call to be king. God had granted grace and mercy and favor as well as power to Saul by choosing him to be the first king of Israel. But from the very beginning Saul was more concerned with what the people thought of him than he did what either Samuel or God thought. His insecurity was in full display when he was being anointed and continued to be his downfall as he ruled.

You may remember the verse which says, "To obey is better than sacrifice". This comes from Samuel's response to Saul as king when he disobeyed God's direct order. Saul was told to destroy everything of the Amalekites including their livestock. But Saul disobeyed (1 Samuel 15:9).

When Samuel confronted him Saul initially lied and said that he had indeed carried out the command of the Lord. But Samuel refuted him by saying, *"What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"* Saul then blamed the people but justified their actions by saying they were to be used as a sacrifice to God. Here is Samuel's response.

1 SAMUEL 15:17-24

"Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord?' ...

"The Saul said to Samuel, 'I did obey the voice of the Lord, and went on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things

devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal.’ ...

“Samuel said, ‘Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is an iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.’ ...

“The Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice.”

Here lies the crux of the matter for Saul. He was more concerned over not upsetting the people than he was upsetting the Lord. His insecurities ruled him. He was a man who sought the people’s approval so that they would remain loyal to him. As Samuel said, he was little in his own eyes when he was made king. But he remained little in his own eyes after becoming king and so could not confront those who disobeyed him.

God had provided an opportunity for Saul to become more than what he was but Saul could never fully embrace the gift that God has bestowed on him. He never got over being small in his own eyes. Because he could not accept God’s belief in his potential Saul remained firmly entrenched in his own belief regarding his limited abilities. Seeking self-confidence as king he consistently sought affirmation from the people rather than resting in the affirmation God had already provided. In the end God rejected Saul – not Saul the man, but Saul the king – because he did not live up to the grace that God had extended to him.

DAVID, THE SECOND KING OF ISRAEL

Let’s look now to David. Like Saul, he too was anointed king by the prophet Samuel. After God had rejected Saul as King, He told Samuel to go the home of Jesse to anoint one of his sons to be the next king. Under the pretext of offering a sacrifice Samuel invited all the sons of Jesse to attend. As the first of the sons of Jesse approached Samuel thought, *“Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him.”* But the Lord said to Samuel, *“Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”* (1 Samuel 16:7).

As each of the seven remaining sons of Jesse passed before Samuel he said, *“The Lord has not chosen this one either.”* So Samuel asked Jesse if he had any more sons. Jesse said yes, he had one other son who was currently tending sheep. Samuel then told Jesse to send for him because they would not sit down until he arrived. When David, the last son of Jesse arrived, the Scripture says he was *“ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance.”* When Samuel laid eyes on him the Lord said, *“‘Arise, anoint him, for this is he.’ Samuel then took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Scriptures say, “The spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.”*

As with Saul there is much to say about David but I will refrain from doing so again in order to make my point. There were now two men who were anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel – one currently ruling and one waiting to rule. Saul was known for his desire to please the people in order to stay in their good graces. David was known for his desire to please the Lord.

These two opposing desires would eventually clash.

Saul felt threatened and became very jealous of David, nearly killing him several times. Rather than retaliating or instigating a coup, David fled from the presence of Saul and waited for God to move on his behalf. Even while being chased by Saul in the wilderness David did not give in to the pressure of his followers to kill Saul. David considered Saul to be God's anointed so David left Saul's fate to God alone. David accepted Samuel's anointing of him to be the future king of Israel, but he would not take matters into his own hands in order to become what God had already promised. He would wait for God to raise him up at the proper time.

As a result of his continued faithfulness and trust in a future promise, David was known as a man after God's own heart. David sought the Lord continually and kept Him before his face in everything he did. He was a mighty man of war and well beloved by many but he was also a very humble man. He accepted the position of king but never pressed the issue or used his authority for personal gain. This does not mean that David was a flawless man. He was not. He fell into sin like the rest of us; but when confronted by the prophet Nathan over his transgressions with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, David confessed and did not blame anyone but himself. He acknowledged that he did not live up to God's standard by saying, "*I have sinned against the Lord*" (2 Samuel 12:13).

David did not try to deny his guilt, make excuses, or present his reasons for disobedience in an attempt to appear righteous as Saul had done. Instead he acknowledged his sin and accepted the consequences. Unlike Saul, David retained God's favor. His response to confrontation about sin did not result in God's rejection. Instead He was told through the prophet Nathan that from his family line a descendant would come who would rule over an eternal kingdom. This promise was and will be fulfilled through Jesus.

The reaction of these two men who were both given God's overwhelming grace to be king of Israel could not have been more different. Saul tried to self-justify his disobedience rather than rely on God's mercy for forgiveness so God rejected him as king and sought another whose heart was committed to His God. That man was David who, when confronted with sin, confessed his guilt without offering any excuse. As a result he was able to retain his position as king of Israel.

How was he able to do this? By receiving the overwhelming grace God had offered. David knew he was not capable of being king in his own power and strength. He knew that God's call for him rested on God's ability to provide what David needed to rule over Israel. David began his prolonged journey to be king by believing that God's grace would be sufficient for him to be the man God desired him to be. And he continued walking in that grace.

When Saul felt weak and in need of strength he dipped his ladle into the well of insecurity and came up empty. David, however, dipped his ladle into the well of God's grace and found in it a never-ending supply of strength and power. Because David drew from the well of God's grace God was determined to bless David's future descendants. And what was his response to such a promise?

2 SAMUEL 7:18-22

“Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord God, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future...

“For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness to let Your servant know. For this reason You are great, O Lord God; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”

David continued to receive the grace of God with humility. He did not reject God’s favor or his future blessing out of false sense of inferiority. He accepted God’s opinion and worked to live up to God’s expectations. Saul, however, retained his low self-image even after receiving the overwhelming grace of God establishing him as the first king of Israel.

The difference between Saul and David is that Saul did not allow God’s grace to penetrate his heart and mind. He continued to think very little of himself and as a result sought affirmation not from God but from people. Unfortunately by forsaking the Lord he ended up losing his position, the respect of his people, and ultimately his life.

David, on the other hand, accepted and embraced God’s overwhelming grace of becoming the second king of Israel even while Saul remained on the throne. David did not immediately press the issue of being king or attempt to take his rightful place. God’s grace had penetrated the heart of David, allowing him to be gracious to Saul; He was willing to wait until God removed him and would not permit others to make him king through violence.

My point is this. There are times when God takes ordinary, sinful people and bestows on them a sense of overwhelming grace by raising them up to a position which they did not seek nor felt themselves worthy of. God sees a potential which we do not. How we initially respond to these opportunities, these moments of overwhelming grace, will determine the course of our life.

Moses initially questioned God’s wisdom in choosing him to free his people from the land of Pharaoh. But He soon came to a place of trust in God which caused him to willingly embrace God’s desire for him to be someone he did not think himself to be. His acceptance of God’s overwhelming grace resulted in him becoming the leader of Israel and the one who delivered his people from the bondage of Egypt.

Though Saul outwardly accepted the position of king, inwardly he could not reconcile the person he believed himself to be with the one whom God was calling him to be. He became king not by embracing God’s grace but rather by being reluctant to disappoint Samuel and his people. His rejection of God’s overwhelming grace brought trouble to Israel and to his family. Saul never did become the king that God knew he could be because he never embraced the grace that could have strengthened his weakness and overcome his fears.

By contrast, David did not question God’s calling. From the moment of his anointing and throughout the rest of his life David embraced the overwhelming grace given to him through God’s call to be king. He believed that whomever God called He would equip. It did not matter what

David thought of himself or what he thought he was capable of. David relied on God's determination of his character and was willing to walk steadfastly on that path.

God's overwhelming grace has been bestowed on all who have come to faith in Christ but not all have lived up to their potential. Like Saul, some have retained their insecurities and seek affirmation from others to gain self-worth rather than seeking after God. Others question God's wisdom in choosing them and still struggle to be what God calls them to be, as Moses initially did.

Then there are others, like David, who embrace God's overwhelming grace and move past their position of servitude into a position of authority over sin and self. Embracing God's grace has led them to live more productive and fruitful lives. For them it does not matter whether they hold the position of shepherd or king, they are determined to live their life pleasing God and living in the light of God's grace. They strive to please God and not men and, as a result, if God should ever call them to be something greater than whom they believe they are, they are willing to receive it.

Grace has often been referred to as God's Unmerited Favor. Overwhelming grace is simply overwhelming favor. It is receiving something which we do not deserve simply because God desires to offer it to us. God's overwhelming grace appears in those moments when we understand that God sees a potential in us that we cannot see and offers to us a power we do not have so that we can become something we do not think possible. It's overwhelming because it is meant to overcome our doubts, overcome our insecurities, and overcome our past. It's overwhelming so that we no longer doubt what we can become through the power of Christ, no longer give our insecurities permission to stop us from achieving the impossible, and no longer allow the past to dictate our present and our future. We are overwhelmed by the power and love of God expressed through His unmerited favor towards us. And when we accept this unmerited favor and believe in His promises we truly live like children of God.

Yes, God's grace can be overwhelming but it wouldn't be grace if it didn't. And God's overwhelming grace is not limited to the young. Abraham was 90 years old and Sarah 80 when God told them they would have a son. God can pour out his grace on anyone at any time. How we respond will determine the future course of our lives. Will we respond like Moses and David and embrace His grace? Or will we respond like Saul and reject it?

My desire for each of us is to recognize God's grace when it comes, to embrace it fully and not reject it. Not just at the moment of salvation but at each point in our life when God calls us to do something beyond our current abilities. We may not understand them now but when they come God will reveal them to us. As the Scripture says,

1 CORINTHIANS 2:9

'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.'

This is what happened to me as I sought the Lord's will for my life after BofA. Next week I will detail what happened and describe my own moment of overwhelming grace. But as I close today let me say this: As believers in God's power to do the impossible, including making something more of us than we can imagine, we should remain open to God calling us to do and be

something more than we currently imagine we can be. We may not be able to see it now, we may not be able to hear of it or imagine it now, but God has something prepared for each of us which is beyond our sight and beyond our ears and beyond our imagination. All He asks is that we remain open to whatever He has prepared. When we do, God's Spirit, as He did with Moses, Saul and David, will overwhelm us with His grace and reveal the plan He has for each us to become something more than we currently believe we can be.

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