

Introduction

The book of 1 Samuel is full of stories and characters that will be familiar to those who have been immersed in the story of Scripture. Hannah, Samuel, Saul, David, and Jonathan leap off the page and give us truly memorable moments. But 1 Samuel isn't just a book detailing the stories of larger-than-life heroes and antiheroes, it's a book about God. Baked into the story of the birth of the Kingdom of Israel is a story about the beginnings of the Kingdom of Heaven.

God is the ultimate storyteller, and no one puts it better than him. His stories are not just anecdotes for us to live up to, neither are they simply revealing a set of principles or truths to believe: his narrative is calling us, as Eugene Peterson puts it, to "live into" his story, "being led not to see God in our stories but our stories in God's."¹ In other words, spending weeks and weeks in the narrative of Scripture forces us to wrestle with child-like faith. The stories of 1 Samuel are not very dense. They leave a lot of room for imagination by not telling us too much. This sparse quality actually leaves room for faith: it allows us to sit in the realities of life and trust God when answers are not as clear as we would like. 1 Samuel won't be subjected to the same dissection of a Pauline epistle or to the same philosophical introspection of the wisdom literature. It calls us to simply open up, like a child, and be awed that our God is a God of history and a God of people and a God of story.

Getting swept up in God's story is an incredible thing, because it always pulls us towards Jesus Christ, the center of God's story and the power of God. 1 Samuel is no different. Again and again, we will see how each and every piece of this narrative is magnetically tied to the person and work of Jesus. That's power and pull in action.

Outline

FROM GRACE CHURCH, WACO TX

1:1-2:11 *Catalytic Fortitude*

The story of Hannah is a journey from barrenness to blessedness. Like Hannah, as we journey in God's kingdom, he calls us to exhibit a kind of fortitude that is catalytic: it paves the way for Christ the true king.

2:12-36 *Understanding The Stakes*

How does God respond when he is dishonored? He leaves no sin unnoticed, he quietly honors those who honor him, and he intervenes with merciful judgment.

3:1-21 *After Darkness, Light*

Into the darkness, God speaks with the light of his word. His word is patient and persistent, worth bearing even when it's weighty, and brings blessing to those who listen.

4:11-22 *The Barrenness of Empty Religion*

The consequences of empty religious actions is death and despair, and bargaining with God with more empty action is not enough to bring God back to our side. Only Jesus can pay the penalty dead religion deserves and ensure his presence with us now and forever.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 3.

5:1-7:2 *God Doesn't Need Your Help*

God doesn't need your help. He is more than powerful enough to accomplish his purposes on his own, which is ultimately very good news for needy people like us.

7:3-17 *Returning to the Lord*

When we whole-heartedly return to the Lord in repentance, he will always respond in deliverance. In Christ we have a great Ebenezer, a Rock of help, who points us to the freedom of repentance.

8:1-22 *God Works His Way Through Ours*

In our stubbornness, we always want our own way and sometimes God grants it. But our text shows us that God always gets his own way, ultimately using even our failure towards his glory in Christ.

9:1-27 *Divine Appointments*

God's providence guides our steps even when we are unaware, leading us to divine appointments with his grace in Christ.

10:1-27 *God's Providential Choice*

How does God work providentially to set up his authority in our lives? And more importantly, why does he use imperfect kings to bring about his perfect ways?

11:1-15 *Salvation Comes From the Lord*

Even when we see success and salvation from our own hands or in surprising places, all salvation ultimately comes from the Lord and points us to Jesus.

12:1-25 *Covenant Renewal*

Samuel's address at Gilgal teaches us the importance of covenant renewal. We haven't upheld our end of the deal, but the gospel teaches us that in Christ, God has upheld his end, and ours too.

13:1-23 *What Have You Done?*

When we seek to use God rather than be used, the result is eternal separation from God. In Jesus, when we repent of our failure to submit rather than defend it, there is salvation forevermore.

14:1-52 *Redemption From Dead Religion*

In our text week we see two examples: the foolishness of Saul, and the confidence of Jonathan. In the gospel, Jesus Christ frees us from the foolishness of dead religion to live lives of confident faith for the Kingdom.

15:1-34 *Justice, Obedience, and Impassability*

When our presumptions of God's actions and God's character don't fit our selfish motives, how will we respond? Christ, the obedient one, offers a bloody paradigm-shattering salvation: will we come his way?

16:1-23 *Seeing Through God's Eyes*

The narrative of 1 Samuel contrasts the way we see the world with the way God does. We are shortsighted by fearing the unknown, failing to see spiritual realities, and dismissing the grace of God when it is right in front of us. Through his anointed king, God rearranges our sight to look directly at Christ.

17:1-58 *The Way God Fights His Battles*

The story of David and Goliath isn't primarily about how we should be like David. It's about how God provides a representative champion to fight for his people when they are cowering in fear from sin, death, and Satan.

18:1-30 *Kiss The Son*

When God shows his favor and grace to us and others, we are called to respond not with entitlement, pride, or comparison, but by giving honor to the Son.

19:1-24 *God Protects His Purpose*

God has and will protect you for his purpose. Even when the spears of life and sin seem to come from every side, God in Christ is still working for his purpose in your life, and he will protect through others, through his people themselves, and through inexplicable divine deliverance.

20:1-42 *The Blessings of Covenant Love*

In Christ, we receive the same blessings of covenant love that David and Jonathan received from one another: trust in the midst of doubt, boldness in the midst of temptation, and peace in the midst of uncertainty.

21:1-22:5 *The King Of The Wilderness*

In the wilderness of earth, the needy are given provision, the desperate are given deliverance, and Jesus Christ, the lowly in heart, draws the needy and desperate to him for protection and purpose.

22:6-23 *The Futility of Antichrist*

In the evil genocide of King Saul we see an anti-type of our enemy Satan. But we also see the futility of evil—we understand Satan's ploys, we know his end, and we know his enemy Jesus Christ.

23:1-29 *The Upholder of Our Life*

In the wilderness of earth, God sustains the life of his people with confidence, community, and worship.

24:1-22 *Waiting and Trusting in Providence*

The wilderness is a perfect place to learn to wait and trust in God. In our perseverance, we are being transformed into the image of Christ and learn to lean into the good news of divine providence.

25:1-44 *The Preventative Grace of God*

At every moment, God's sovereign grace is holding back the tide of sin and evil, and it is his providence that chooses the time and place to release the tide and bring it back in. But if we are safe in Jesus Christ, the great mercy of God, he will never let the tide sweep us away.

26:1-27:12 *Justice and Mercy*

God's justice enables our mercy, because by seeing and trusting the justice of God in the gospel we receive confidence, salvation, and wisdom.

28:1-25 *The Tragedy of Listening and the Comedy of the Gospel*

Saul's tragic story shows us that God does not answer those who will not listen. The good news is that in the gospel, God in Christ unplugs our ears.

29:1-30:31 *The Gospel Brook*

God's story in bringing his anointed king out of the wilderness comes to a close, and we see three gospel lenses: The Understated Gospel (For The Stuck), The Relentless Gospel (For the Overwhelmed), and The Extravagant Gospel (For The Weary).

31:1-13 *The Clarity of Tragic End*

We can summarize the tragedy of Saul with these two observations: 1) self-autonomy brings self-destruction and 2) self-preservation brings idolatry. It's not too late to see the tragedy and bow the knee to the true king.

Key Motifs

The Tragedy of Sin

1 Samuel is a highly literary work, and it's genre closely resembles that of a classical tragedy. Think Macbeth or King Lear: 1 Samuel is at its core the tragedy of King Saul. Every protagonist in a tragedy has what is called a "tragic flaw", some sort of error, shortcoming, or even sin that brings about their downfall. In 1 Samuel we see the quick rise of king Saul. Blessed by Samuel the prophet, all the people look up to him and revere him and his military prowess. But Saul has no zeal for God's commands, no fear of God, and no desire to turn to God in his distress—that turns out to be his undoing. The book begins with the miraculous birth of Samuel, but ends with the self-inflicted carnal death of Saul.

The characters in 1 Samuel are complex and nuanced, because all are haunted by sin. Even the most upright protagonists, like David, Samuel, Jonathan, Abigail, and Hannah, feel the consequences and effects of their personal sin or the sins of those close to them. The overall tone of 1 Samuel leaves us with a picture of a nation and a people who are slowly coming out of a time where "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). There are no light and jovial storylines in this book. Instead, we find sorrow, pain, rejection, suffering, disobedience, greed, violence, genocide, suicide, and power-grabbing.

But the real power of tragedy is that it leaves room for hope: it shows us where not to look, and gives us an opportunity to learn before it's too late for us. To journey through 1 Samuel is to open up the church to warnings and convictions, types and antitypes, that pull listeners away from foolishness and towards faithfulness. As we are shocked and dismayed by the reality of tragedy, our hearts will warm to the promise of deliverance. When David appears on the scene, we begin to see a picture of a story of a king that ends much differently than Lear or Macbeth or Saul. On the outside, it seems a tragedy that David's death ends with his family in turmoil, just as it is a tragedy that Saul's death ends with abrupt self-destruction. But beneath the surface, God is doing something in David's family that will end in marriage, not in death. So the tragedy of Saul points us to the comedy of Christ, whose end at the cross appears outwardly tragic but with secret power in his resurrection really ends in hopeful triumph and feasting. The tragedy of Saul paves the way for the comedy of David to play out in 2 Samuel and ultimately, in redemptive history.

The Miraculous Providence of God

God is the author of 1 Samuel, and it's no wonder then that he weaves the needle of his own mysterious providence throughout this piece of literary art. 1 Samuel isn't just interested in telling us the cold, hard, facts, it is interested in taking us on a journey to the place where we wake up every morning and say: "God is working today in the world." John Piper calls providence God's "purposeful sovereignty." Every detail of 1 Samuel reveals to us miraculous purpose.

Why would Hannah have to suffer in barrenness? Why would Hophni and Phineas be allowed to desecrate the temple? Why would Eli turn a blind eye? What point is there in Samuel hearing God's audible voice? For what purpose would God allow his own ark to be captured? Why give Israel a king when it would only lead to their enslavement? Why anoint a king who would rather hide in the baggage? Why require something of Saul, only to have him fail? Why require David to be hunted like an animal? Why take the life of Jonathan too soon? All of it has purpose when we learn to see through the lens of providence. The myriad of players and actions in 1 Samuel never distract from the central point: God is delivering his people.

In 1 Samuel the reader is forced to wrestle with God's actions that may seem unjust, disjointed, or even cruel to modern logical sensibilities. But the hits keep coming. On more than one occasion God intentionally writes in a "deus ex machina" moment into his divine tragedy—swooping in at the last moment to change the story and show he is the one ultimately in control. But neither in 1 Samuel do we fall prey to determinism. At times, the characters' decisions are described in vivid detail, revealing their hearts and their motives and showing that while God is the author of all things, we are responsible for our own actions.

You cannot leave 1 Samuel, all 31 chapters, without a sense of scope. The microscopic look at the life of Israel's leaders provides a sort of anti-microscope into the life of God—by zooming in on his working in the world, we zoom out ever so slightly to get a better picture of his majestic artistry in weaving all things together for his glory and the good enjoyment of his people.

The Subversive Glory of True Kingliness

If the flaw of Saul is his failure to obey, the flaw of the people of Israel is their failure to submit. The story of 1 Samuel is a story of the birth of a kingdom. Instead of being content with God ruling over them, the people of God desired an earthly king just like the rest of the nations. Since the discipline and instruction of the Lord often comes in unique ways, God gives the people what they want. He anoints a king to rule over them, but it doesn't go exactly like they planned. In His Fatherly wisdom, God is teaching a lesson about who really rules. Any king who fails to place God's throne above his own is doomed for failure.

Our world longs for leadership in a similar way to the Israelites. We want a just and good king to make things right (or a president, or a CEO, etc.). 1 Samuel is a masterclass lesson in learning to submit with humility to the one who really reigns over all things. God is our true king, and

trusting in him leads us to victory over Philistines and pornography, over enemies outside and enemies inside alike. Time in 1 Samuel will pave the way to long for Jesus to reign and rule in our hearts and in our world.

This theme of true kingliness is presented in 1 Samuel primarily through subversion. By that I mean that it comes to the reader *underneath* the surface. We see it in Hannah's humble dependence: she echoes the catalytic power of the true king, changing the course of the nation by committing her son to God's service. We see it in Samuel, who listens to God and is bold enough to call the nation to repentance and obedient enough to anoint two kings and condemn one. Neither appear outwardly impressive, but beneath the surface it is their faithfulness that is moving the people of God from barrenness to blessedness.

True kingliness is also displayed in Jonathan. But instead of taking up the mantle of king he deserved as birthright and proved in battle, he lays down his armor and his title for another—again surprising us. Abigail too has a surprising regality to her, uncommon in her time for a woman to show. She comes to David as a mediator with the respect of her household, and riding on a donkey, the animal of kings. Finally, David's rise in 1 Samuel is a perfect picture of God readying his subversive king to ascend to the throne. David is the smallest and the least likely king. He becomes champion not through force of hand but through cunning and dependent faith on God as he slays Goliath. He is forced to wander in the wilderness, to beg for food, to seek asylum from his enemies. But God is doing something underneath the surface: leading him and preparing him for his ascension to kingly glory.

Problem Passages

God Orders the Ban on the Amalekites (15:1-2)

God's command to Saul to "devote to destruction" the Amalekites included specific instructions to leave nothing alive, "man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" were not to be spared. This kind of devotion to destruction is known as "the Ban". Such a divine order is often considered by skeptics to be evidence of God's vengeful nature, his lack of moral goodness, or even his non-existence. Others use evidence like 1 Samuel 15 to argue that God's nature in the Old Testament is inherently different than the new, or at least misrepresented by the Old Testament authors. We do not need to deny the immutability of God (that he is without change) or the authority of the Bible in order to understand God's command rightly.

Typically any push back we have against the revealed character of God has to do with our autonomy. At the core of our lack of trust in God is a desire for self-deification. We want to be our own god, our own authority, and we want to define our own reality. And what is the sin of self-deification? It is nothing less than idolatry. When we begin to root around too deep and bring our finite presumptions onto an infinite God, we begin to fashion a god who is not the true God, but a false one. Through the process of self-deification, we create a god who we can understand, who we can control, who we can domesticate. If God is really God, at the logical

end of all our attempts to justify his actions lies idolatry. We want a house pet to wag its tail and make us smile, not a creator, savior, or Lord. There are several reasons to believe, with humility before God, that he is not unjust in ordering the destruction of the Amalekites.

First, the justice of God means rebellion against God is a capital offense.

Amalek is an ancient enemy of Israel. They are a nomadic people group, so they travel around in tents and have no specific fortified location. But the significance of the Amalekites is the way they treated God's people during the time of Exodus. Instead of showing them kindness, they persecuted them when they were the most vulnerable. When Moses recounts the attack from the Amalekites in Deuteronomy, he notes how they attacked without honor, from the rear and without any warning or motive, raiding a nomadic people for nothing more than their own personal gain. After hundreds of years, God has not forgotten this, and neither have the Amalekites shown any sign of repentance. We can look at the innocence of Amalek, but that is not how sin works. Sin pervades our breath, our beating heart, our nature, from the moment of our birth. The wages of such sin is death—we have rejected the only one who sustains our life, and our rejection of him leads to destruction. Every single moment you breathe is an act of God's merciful grace. For him to remove that grace, even for a moment, means your end. The realities of God's commands against the Amalekites remind us how serious it is to sin against God, and how serious it is for a people group to sin specifically against God's people.

Second, the justice of God means that God will always protect and avenge his people.

The Amalekites were not just in general rebellion against God, they specifically came after the flock of God. As the great shepherd-king, God rules over Israel for their good. In Deuteronomy 25 we read:

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.

God literally baked a promise of vengeance into the Mosaic law. He charges Israel to not forget. God takes the protection of his people seriously. This is certainly good news for those of us who recognize our real enemies of sin and Satan are not forgotten by God. He will avenge us, his justice knows no decay to time.

Thirdly, the justice of God means that he holds all people in his hands.

If God is the giver of life, he is also the taker of life. No one escapes from his mercy and justice. Whether he takes life in a child or in a man who has lived a long life, whether death comes suddenly or it is expected, God is not surprised. And neither is he out of control. The Lord gives,

the Lord takes away, blessed by the name of the Lord. If we cannot trust God with life and death, he is not worth trusting with anything else. And so when we see death in the Scripture and in our world, we mourn. Things are not as they should be. But we also trust: God knows what he is doing. To fail to ascribe to him sovereignty over human life would mean that some other power or person is really in charge of who lives and dies. And that kind of power is too burdensome for anyone who is not eternally just.

Fourthly, the justice of God means he uses specific means and people to carry his justice.

We balk at 1 Samuel 15 because even if we are okay with God holding the keys to life and death, we are bothered by the fact that he has human beings carry out his justice. We must remember that the nation of Israel is unique. The role God has given them in the world at this time is not only spiritual but political. God gives the authority at times to his chosen servants to hold the realities of life and death. That is a terrifying authority, but one that God decides, particularly in this moment of history in 1 Samuel 15, to use. We may pray and ask him: why this way? But we also trust: just as he uses our own civil government to temper and control evil in the world, so he has used other means to carry out his justice. The church today is not the arbiter of God's civil justice like Israel was in her day. But the fact that the New Testament church is not a political entity does not make the fact that Israel was a political entity wrong. God is doing something specific through Israel wielding his sword—showing us too in this passage, I believe, how Israel is an imperfect tool of God's justice, and preparing our hearts for a more perfect justice to come.

God “Regrets” and “Changes” His Mind (15:35)

Another difficult text comes from later on in the same chapter, where God is described as “regretting” his decision to make Saul king. This passage seems to imply a refutation of the classic doctrine of impassability, that God is not overcome by passions such as greed, rage, or lust. Thomas Weinandy says that for God to be impassable it means that “he does not undergo successive and fluctuating emotional states; nor can the created order alter him in such a way so as to cause him to suffer any modification or loss.”² For God to “regret” an action he has made seems to show that he has suffered some sort of emotional loss.

Interestingly, the language of God's regret also seems to counteract what is said by Samuel in 15:29, “...the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” Here, Samuel is more clear than the narrator in verse 35. His aim is to remind Saul that God is *unlike* mankind. His emotions are not like ours—they do not control him. If they did, he would not be God, emotions would be! In fact, the entire thrust of the chapter is intended to teach Saul and the reader that God cannot be mocked, tricked, manipulated, or convinced. 1 Samuel 15 is set up as a dichotomy and comparison between the “manhood” of Saul and the “Godness” of God.

² Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 111.

Because God lacks nothing, he is impassable. But this does not mean that he is stoic or lifeless. He does not have emotions in the way that we would describe them: as forces that take over us. What this means is not that he lacks love or compassion or grief, but rather that he has them in perfect measure. He can experience the full measure of love and compassion and even grief, because he is not overcome by them. This guarantees that his love and compassion never change or never fluctuate. In context, these verses are not in opposition to one another. Only God can be perfectly free from passions and yet still feel sorrow over sin. Only God can be perfectly steadfast in his sovereign will and yet still feel grief that his king has rejected him. I love the way Eugene Peterson puts it:

The picture we get is one of Saul coldly and deviously trimming his overinze to terms that serve his own interests, and of God (and Samuel) experiencing the effects of his sin and regret and grief and sorrow. While Saul calculates, God cares.³

Just as the impassibility of God makes him more emotive, not less, the passability of Saul makes him more stoic and cold, not less. Saul is so overcome with the emotions of pride and greed and power and fear that he loses himself in lies and self-deception. Our text is showing us good news: that kind of fall could never happen to God. He is not a calculating piece of heavenly machinery: he is the God of life in and of himself.

Saul's Suicide (31:4)

Saul's unseemly death at his own hands comes right after his request for assisted suicide and is followed by the suicide of his armor-bearer and the mutilation of his and his sons bodies. It's a difficult passage because not only is it gruesome, it's sensitive for those who have been affected by suicide. Besides that, after a lengthy sermon series in 1 Samuel, Saul's death feels a little cathartic. How are we to process suicide, especially when it is someone whom we feel in some way deserves punishment and death?

Suicide is an incredibly dark act. But there is mercy at the throne of grace for those who take their own life: it is not an unpardonable offense. We recognize that often the darkness of depression and the trauma of the world we live in pushes men and women to actions they themselves deem as unconscionable. We weep and mourn that it exists in our world, and pray for it to end. But suicide is a serious spit in the face of God, because it says to God: "I am the master of my fate, I hold the keys to life and death." Suicide, like murder, is taking what belongs to God and trying to wrestle it away from him.

God permitted Satan to take everything from Job, including the lives of his own children. And Job still said: "the lord gives and takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." How is he able to say this? Because he knows the truth professed later in Job 12:10: "In [God's] hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind." God is the author of life, and the taker of life.

³ Eugene Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 86.

He decides when it begins and when it ends. The taking away of life is not an unjust action of God—we are his creation, to do with as he pleases. We are not our own.

Did you know that ten states in the U.S. have laws that permit medical suicide or assisted suicide? Oregon's calls their law the Death with Dignity Act. This is a misnomer: because every death is a dignified one. Every man and woman has dignity from God: it cannot be stripped from them by the sin of our world. And suicide is so incredibly tragic because it is a cry for help, a soul saying: "I cannot believe that God holds my destiny!", it's a fatal act of self-autonomy.

And for Saul, it is sadly not a surprise. His whole life he has lived as if he were God, and so it is no surprise that he would attempt to die on his own terms. But notice the effect of Saul's actions. His armor bearer too takes his life, and verse 6-7, all his men and his sons die, and more from Israel who witness this destruction abandon their cities, giving them over to the Philistines. Remember that Saul was anointed primarily to address the Philistine threat. Now Israel is in a worse state than they were before Saul. Typically in a battle like this, when the people heard of their fallen king, they would rally to him to protect his body before retreating, hoping perhaps to save him. But no, the men of Israel flee. No one comes to Saul's aid. I can't imagine a more potent tragedy than this scene.

So as tragic as suicide is, it is an opportunity to understand the stakes of eternity. When we try to play God, our end is self-destruction. We cannot hold the line of our own destiny, we cannot tip-toe so close to the edge and not fall in. Without God, without his hands on us, tragedy is our end. God doesn't have to commit us to destruction against our will—we will do the willing ourselves.

Jesus Christ subverted our understanding of self-autonomy. He was with God and is God from the beginning, but took on human flesh to do the will of his Father. He came to earth to feel what we feel, the beauty of submitting to God's authority. And he did it perfectly, to the point of death on a cross, so that by faith in him you don't have to be your own master any longer. You don't have to control your narrative, and you don't have to hold the power of your own life or death.

How does *Romeo and Juliet* end? After the tragic suicide of the young couple, the play ends with hope that perhaps tragedy can be the tool that awakens virtue. The two feuding families make a tenuous peace. And that's what we have here. This is no doubt a tragedy, but it reminds us that it's not too late to learn from example. This is the story of 1 Samuel, punctuated by the suicide of Saul. It's a literary tragedy, the forerunner for *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, shouting out to the audience: it's not too late to turn away from tragedy and towards right fear of God.

Helpful Resources

Derek Cooper, Martin J. Lohrmann, Editors, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament V, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking On The Heart* (Fear, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2000).

Ian Duguid, James Hamilton Jr., Jay Sklar, Editors, *ESV Expository Commentary: 1 Samuel - 2 Chronicles*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

Eugene Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

Peter Leithart, *A Son To Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003).

How to Preach Christ From 1 Samuel

How do you *not* preach Christ from 1 Samuel? It's a story of kings—it all points to the king of kings. Here are some helps:

Notice the typology. This may seem obvious, but 1 Samuel is dripping with helpful typological themes. There are, of course, obvious connections to David and Christ. But not only that, we see connections backwards as well, i.e. David as the true Jacob, rejected by his Father but chosen by God. There is likewise typology showing Christ not just as king but as prophet (Hannah, Samuel), priest (Samuel, David, Abigail, Jonathan) and true son (Jonathan, David). It is not exegetical cheap-work to notice and hold out the rich typology of 1 Samuel to your people in order to show them Christ. If God is the author of this incredible piece of history, literature, and devotion, then he will leave clues of his character scattered throughout.

Notice the anti-typology. Saul plays a very interesting role typologically, starting out as the unsuspecting and meek king but turning quickly into the ant-christ destroyer of the people of God and the anointed one of God. Other negative types about in spades, as antagonists like Hophni/Phineas, Nahash, Agag, Goliath, Doeg, and Nabal all appear as larger than life. This is God's doing: in making it clear the enemies of his people and his anointed king, he is helping us notice and stand in awe of how he defeats them. Highlighting the clarity of the anti-types in 1 Samuel will give you people a stronger sense of the victory of Christ, the conquering king.

Major on the character and action of God the Trinity. I cannot help but see 1 Samuel as a Trinitarian book. The Father chooses and anoints his servants that will bring his people from barrenness back to blessing. The Son typifies them, working in history to pave the way for our expectancy of his incarnation. And the Spirit illuminates and indwells God's purposes—filling up and animating specific players and characters in order to advance God's mission. Show your people the gospel of Christ in 1 Samuel by showing how every text points to God's trinitarian mission and his undivisible nature. There will be plenty of lessons for faithful Christian living: don't focus on those, but let them come out naturally. Spend most of your exhortative energy on showcasing the character and action of God.

Why Preach 1 Samuel?

In 1 Samuel 12, Samuel the prophet tells the people of Israel to “behold their king”. The people got what they asked for in King Saul, but not what they needed. When Jesus was presented by Pilate to the people of Israel to be crucified, Pilate said “behold your king.” This time, the people got what they wanted, and what they needed: even while they crucified the King, he solidified the security of his kingdom. In Jesus, we have a king who submitted to the unjust will of the people in order to save them by submitting to the will of God. If Christ is our king, we get what we want and what we need. He is the true king: the storyteller and the story, the servant and the master, the obedient son and the conquering warrior. His kingliness is shown to us in a subversive manner: he comes unknown out of the wilderness, mocked and rejected, with no place to lay his head and with enemies seeking his life. But in his learned obedience he is shown to be the true champion of God’s people and the one bear to hold the crown.

Preach 1 Samuel to behold Jesus Christ, the true king.