



THE STORY



Date: November 11-12, 2017
Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: The Story – Chapter 10

We have all heard those feel good stories, the rags to riches, David versus Goliath kind of stories. You know the plotline. The underdog overcomes adversity and rises to the top and goes on to live happy ever after. We love those stories don't we? We have seen it in movies with Rocky I, II, III. Remember the Titans. Braveheart, even Star Wars is about underdogs.

In real life we have seen it in Rosa Parks and Malala Yousafzai. We read about the them in books. Harry Potter and the Lord of the Rings are stories about underdogs. And of course, we watch them unfold almost every week on the sports field or in the hockey arena. The underdogs snatching victory from certain defeat from a much superior opponent. What do we learn from those stories? Never give up. If you just work hard, give it your best. Stay humble. You can come out on top. Achieve success. Those stories motivate us. We come away from them believing and determined to finish well.

You know what we don't hear so much of? The riches to rags stories. The stories about those that started so well and then it all falls apart. All the potential, all the hopes and dreams shattered. It is hard to find those stories, in movies or books. They don't seem to sell as well. They are not as motivating. Do a google search for riches to rags stories and it keeps wanting to spin it around. But unfortunately, real life is littered with these kind of stories as well. Sometimes, a person's downfall is beyond their control but other times, many other times, it is a character flaw that sends them on a downward spiral.

In 1992, Lance Armstrong began his career as a professional cyclist and achieved some success with a handful of victories in Europe. But in 1996, he was diagnosed with a potentially fatal form of cancer. After his recovery, he founded the Lance

Armstrong Foundation, you may know it as the [Livestrong Foundation](#), to assist other cancer survivors. He defeated cancer and returned to cycling in 1998, and the next year, he won the first of what would be an unprecedented seven consecutive Tour De France Titles. The most prestigious race in cycling. He retired for good in 2011. At the time, Lance Armstrong was one of the most successful and famous athletes in the world.

The charity that he had established, the Livestrong Foundation was a global brand with their trademark yellow wristband generating almost a ½ billion dollars to be distributed to cancer related causes. Now, that is a feel good story. I should stop right there.

I think some of you know, unfortunately, the story doesn't end there. Armstrong did not ride off into the sunset. Allegations of his use of performance enhancing drugs had dogged Armstrong throughout his cycling career. He had always vehemently denied them. He had taken and passed over 200 drug tests throughout the years.

But the rumors got so loud that the US Anti-doping Association, launched an investigation and gave him no choice but to come clean and tell the truth. It was discovered that through the years Armstrong went to great lengths to obtain and administer drugs and then hide the fact he took them. And he threatened, bullied, and attacked anyone who accused him of doping. He lied, cheated, and sued people and organizations to keep his illegal activities secret.

But eventually, it all caught up with him. His reputation was now in tatters. He was given a life time ban from cycling and all his victories that made him a legend were wiped away. The sponsors that gave him enormous wealth dropped him and he was forced to pay back millions of dollars in

restitution. But, perhaps the biggest blow of all was being asked to step down as CEO of Livestrong, the charitable foundation he has established.

It is the epic downfall of cycling's greatest star. Once idolized by millions around the globe. His name synonymous with excellence, perseverance and philanthropy now brings to mind one word, cheater. His life fell with a great crash and those who knew him best state that it was his pride, that led to his destruction.

Riches to Rags stories, what do we learn from them?

But you need to know that we, as an entire church, every ministry area, every age group are taking a journey through the whole bible this season. We started in September with Genesis and creation and we will go until next June when we finish up in the last book of the bible, Revelation.

And we are using as our resource, a study tool called *The Story*. It is a version of the bible, that is simply organized according to a chronological timeline. It is all scripture but it is just a little easier for us to see when and how things happened.

Today marks our tenth week and we find ourselves in the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel or chapter 10 of your books.

It follows a rather turbulent time in the history of God's people, the Israelites between the years, 1400-1000 BC. It was known as the time of Judges. You see at this time, Israel would not have been considered a formal country or even a Kingdom, it was more a loose confederacy of made up of 12 tribes. And they were ruled by Judges.

Judges not so much in the legal sense that we know them today, although they would have ruled over disputes and squabbles. But these judges were more administrators and civic leaders of the people who were not really equipped to lead them in battle. And that was becoming a persistent problem for the Israelites. They were surrounded by hostile enemy nations.

The Moabites, the Amalekites but most notably, the Philistines who were turning their anger towards the Israelites. The issue most probably was land. Over taking land.

During this time, the Israelites face three major obstacles in their conflict with neighbouring nations, particularly the Philistines.

1. **They were out manned.** They just didn't have the same number of soldiers.
2. **They were deficient in weaponry.** At this time in history, the Philistines had the monopoly on iron. Which made for more and better weapons to fight battles.
But maybe most significantly,
3. **They didn't have a King.** All the other nations had a king, a leader who could organize the people and implement a battle strategy and lead the troops into war.

And to the Israelite people at this time, this was their greatest shortfall. They felt they needed a King to help consolidate the 12 tribes into one nation and one army.

And that is where we pick up the story in 1 Samuel 8 in your bibles or page 135 in your books and it is here that we meet Samuel. God called Samuel to fill many different roles for his people. He was a judge, priest, prophet, counsellor and he was God's appointment man to lead the people through this pivotal turning point in their history.

1 Samuel 8:4-5, or page 135

⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah.⁵ They said to him, "You are old,

Can I just stop there? Young people in here, let me just give you a bit of advice. This is from a 54 year-old. That may not be the best way to begin a dialogue when your intention is to ask for something. *You are old.* That almost never works for my children. Hey old man, can I have the car? They usually end up walking.

And I am not so sure their next comment is any better. *You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways;* now they are ridiculing Samuel's parenting skills. But then comes the heart of the matter. *now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."*

The Elders of the Israelite people go to God's prophet, Samuel and declare, *we want a king, just like everybody else.* Seems like a rather harmless request doesn't it? They are consistently losing on

the battle field and they have done a self-audit and realized they are missing the one thing all the other nations around them have, a King. *We want what they've got, a King.* And the text says, their request displeased Samuel. Why is that?

1 Samuel 8:7-8, Samuel prays to God, And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.

There are two reasons why the Israelites request is so displeasing to Samuel. The first reason was:

1. They are rejecting God as their King.

Do you remember back in the book of Exodus when God rescues his people from slavery to Pharaoh and the Egyptians? He parts the Red Sea, leads them toward the Promised Land and gives them His law, and he established himself as their king. In fact, the Israelites acknowledge this in a hymn of praise in,

Exodus 15:18 when they sing,

"The LORD reigns for ever and ever."

In Exodus, when he saved them, the Lord was their King. But as we have seen all throughout The Story to this point, the people had a bad habit of forgetting God, rejecting God and wanting someone or something else. They replace God with something else. Do you remember what that is called? Idolatry. And that is the second reason why Samuel is so displeased with their request for a king. Not only are they rejecting God as their King. They want what the other nations have.

2. They want a King like everyone else.

This is the spirit of Idolatry. Unfortunately, this is what we have discovered throughout the history of God's people. In times of testing and adversity, instead of turning to God, they followed the ways of the world. I want what they have.

I wonder, is that our mindset today? In those times when it seems like life is just throwing us nothing but bad news, nothing but disappointment and heartache. What is our response, is it to turn in, to our King, Jesus or is it to exclaim, I want what they

have? A new car, a new house, a new spouse, a new job, a new life?

As we have stated before, that attitude is idolatry. We are trying to replace a void in our lives that only God can fill. And the root of the problem; it's pride. We think we know best how to live our lives. Better than the creator of life. So, we step away from his kingship and submit to the reign and rule or someone or something else of our own choosing. Is that what you are doing?

Think back on the decisions and actions of your week. Who or what was your king this week? Something to ponder. And if you don't know ask someone close to you. They will tell you who or what you submit to or worship.

Back to the text, the Lord instructs Samuel to warn the people of the negative consequences of having a king and he lists them off. But still the people refuse to budge from their request. We want a King. Look what they say in,

1 Samuel 8:20

"Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

Can you imagine God thinking, *What have I been doing all these years...* But, he relents and says to Samuel,

1 Samuel 8:22

.....give them a king." The Lord said.

And with those words, a new and even more unsettling future awaits the Israelite people.

Have you ever really wanted something and then realized, man. That was a mistake. I know we are into Movember, many guys growing mustaches for a good cause. I did it for a few years but hairs tickling against my nose, drove me nuts. But if I could pull off a beard and mustache I would. Because I despise shaving. I remember as a young boy, I used to watch my dad shave. At that time, guys would squeeze a strip of shaving cream into their hand, lather it up with a brush and then apply it to their face. Then shave it off in nice, neat rows. I wanted to do that. My dad would say, be careful what you wish for, because it is such a nuisance to have to do every day. When I was 13-14 years-old, I had some peach fuzz above my lip and I would take some of my sister's mascara and lightly colour it, so it looked like a mustache, I was ready. But

throughout the day, it would smear all over. I was a 13-14 year old boy! No wonder I had so much trouble getting a girlfriend. But finally, some whiskers appeared and my dreams came true, I could shave! And I have been regretting it ever since.

Have you ever really wanted something and then realized, phew, that was a mistake.

This is where Saul enters the story and what a grand entrance he makes.

1 Samuel 9:1-2 or page 136

There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, ... Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.

Saul was a looker, A babe. A hotty. That man was fine. And tall. Tall and handsome. He had the kind of appearance that when he walked in the room, heads would turn, women would gasp, *oh my!* He had a kingly appearance. And he enters the scene gallantly riding on horseback, right? No, we get introduced to Saul as he is looking for donkeys which kind of shatters his mystique, but his dad was wealthy and owned many donkeys and Saul's job was to round them up.

But in the text, Saul and his servant lose their way and they wander into town looking for the prophet, Samuel who they are told can point them in the right direction. But when they meet up, Samuel remembers something that God had spoken to him the day before.

1 Samuel 9:16 or page 137

The day before, the Lord said to Samuel, About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me."

This is the man. The tall one! It's Saul. God choice to be the first human King over his people.

So Samuel anoints Saul, King. At first he resists, look a little further down at,

1 Samuel 9:21

Saul answered, "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?" Who I am to be King? I the least of the least.

Where have we heard that before? Remember Gideon from a few weeks ago.

Although his outward appearance is Kingly, inwardly, Saul is insecure, timid and resistant. He didn't want to face the responsibility that is being bestowed on him. He is a reluctant King at first. In fact, when Samuel calls the tribes of Israel together to formally introduce to them their new King, Saul, it says in,

1 Samuel 10:21-22 or page 138

Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was taken. Finally Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. ²² So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?" And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies."

The time has finally arrived for the grand introduction of Israel's first King. The King that they pleaded for. Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to introduce for the first time, King Saul. And he is nowhere to be found. And you picture Samuel saying, God, where did he go? He was here a minute ago. And the Lord responding. He's in the closet. Go check the closet. How would that be for instilling a bit of hope in the nation? Your leader is hiding in the storage closet afraid to come out.

Have you ever really wanted something and then realized, phew, that was a mistake. The Israelites wanted a military man who could lead them into battle and instead they have a hunk hiding in the hall closet. But, as we have seen time after time, God can change a heart. God can change the heart of a leader. That is important for us to understand even today, isn't it? That God can change the heart of a leader. And God did change Saul's heart. Now one important element of the coronation of this new king that I forgot to mention was that there was to be a time of community prayer and the sacrificing of offerings to God. To praise him for the provision of a king. These aspects of worship had to be led by

a priest, not the King. That is why Samuel says to Saul in,

1 Samuel 10:8

“Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.”

This is an important instruction. As you will see in a few minutes. Saul, the reluctant King, is getting over his shell shock, and prepares to make his way to Gilgal for his coronation but before he can get there, an Israelite city was attacked by enemy forces, the Ammonites. This was not uncommon in this day. The Israelites in this city say that they will surrender and submit, if the Ammonites spare their lives. But listen to what the General of the enemy troops says in response.

1 Samuel 11:2 or page 139

“I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.”

Yeah, I will make peace but first let me poke out your eye! The Israelites respond, ah, can you give us some time to think about that? Now, we have to remember, this was the Bronze Age. A very barbaric time in history and as I mentioned a few weeks ago, this was the level of evil and depravity that was rampant in this world at this time.

Well, as you can imagine, the news of this attack and the details of the peace treaty reach the ears of the new King, Saul as he is preparing to go to Gilgal and look how the once timid and frightened Saul responds.

1 Samuel 11:6-7 or page 139

When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger. ⁷ He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, “This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.” Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out together as one.

1 Samuel 11:11

The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

God can change the heart of a leader. Saul led the people to victory over the Ammonites and with that he became an answer to their prayers. This was the high point of the kingship of Saul. Like Lance Armstrong, winning his seven Tour De France races and establishing his Livestrong Foundation. This was Saul’s peak and he was beginning to feel the love and adoration of his people. He is worshipping and giving credit to God for the victory. Saul has humility. This is as good as it gets. Rags to riches. We should just stop right there, shouldn’t we?

Unfortunately, just like they did for Lance Armstrong, things are about to get bad for Saul. Because we get the sense that he begins to read his own press. That his head begins to swell under that crown a little bit. He starts to become a little cocky. The man that was once hiding in the closet is now walking with a bit of a swagger. Self-confidence is turning to over-confidence.

We pick the story back up with Saul leading the Israelite army into another battle, this time against the Philistines which was a familiar foe in this day.

As they are positioning for battle in Gilgal, remember Gilgal. This is the place where Samuel was to lead the worship to God for their new king. But it is now war torn.

1 Samuel 13:5 or page 141

The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

Can you imagine seeing that? 3000 chariots made of iron. Thousands of soldiers, cresting the hill and coming towards you. It would be like the army of Orcs approaching in one of the battle scenes in Lord of the Rings. Pretty imposing. What would you do?

Do you want to know what the Israelite soldiers did? They hid.

1 Samuel 13:6 or page 142

When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns.

They hid. Ran for cover. Can you blame them? And their King Saul is left standing there in Gilgal. Remember what Samuel had told Saul back in,

1 Samuel 10:8

“Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.”

Don't take matters into your own hands, Saul! Wait for me, Samuel says. But Saul's situation here is dire, he is in the midst of battle, many of his soldiers deserted him and the ones with him are shaking with fear and now he has to wait for Samuel to arrive?

1 Samuel 13:8

He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter.

What would you do? I remember when my kids were in high school. They were involved in a lot of extra-curricular activities. Several times a week, I would get the text, Dad, can you pick me up at 5:00pm. I would find myself waiting in my car outside the school at 5:00, then 5:10, 5:15. I would text, where are you?! Their response, I will be out in a minute and a minute would pass, and I would be tempted to take off. I spent a lot of time waiting for my kids. Perhaps you know that feeling.

So maybe you would do what Saul did.

1 Samuel 13:9

So he said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” And Saul offered up the burnt offering.

He couldn't wait for Samuel. He took matters into his own hands. Look what happens next.

1 Samuel 13:10-11

Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. ¹¹ “What have you done?” asked Samuel.

What have you done?

Well, you said you would come in seven days and you weren't here and the men were scattering and the enemy was advancing, and I knew I needed to offer a sacrifice and something had to be done and, where have you been!!! Saul offers Excuses, excuses. Justifying his disobedience. Just like Lance Armstrong. Excuses, lies and deception.

Samuel just looks at him and says in,

1 Samuel 13:13

“You have done a foolish thing,”

Why is it so foolish? In this day, a sacrifice was to only be offered to God by a priest. Not a King. A King had human blood on his hands. This was against God's laws and against the specific instructions of Samuel.

True character is revealed under pressure, don't you find that to be true? When Saul felt time was running out, he became impatient with Samuel, impatient with God and took matters into his own hands. He put the ritual of the sacrifice, oh it was a good thing to do, but he put it above his faith in God. The faith that he will provide in his time.

But, it is hard to wait isn't it? Whether it is for a child in front of a school or a health diagnosis, or a job to come through for you, or a spouse, or a pregnancy to take or even for the end of a college teacher's strike. It is hard to wait. But, all throughout scripture, we see that God does some of his best work, in those times of waiting. When his people turn into him, not away. Maybe you have seen God in your wait? But, unfortunately, all too often, we are more like Saul. We take matters into our own hands, we manipulate the circumstances ourselves because we think we know what is best. And do you know what that is called? It is pride. Which leads to idolatry, replacing God as our King and provider with someone or something else. All too often, in times of testing and adversity, instead of turning and waiting on God, we follow the ways of the world. This kind of behavior had dire repercussions for King Saul. Listen as Samuel continues in,

1 Samuel 13:13-14 or page 142

“You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. ¹⁴ But now your

kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

Samuel tells Saul, all you had to do was follow God, be obedient to God but because you haven't, your kingship will not last. In fact, God has already found your replacement. Does anyone know who it is? David. And we will pick up his story next week. Oh, Saul continues in the role of King for several more years but God's spirit is removed and it just goes from bad to worse. He continues to disobey God's commands and pushes his own agenda. Instead of unifying the people, they become more and more fractured. Saul's life and rule are riddled with anger, jealousy, bitterness, insecurity, and paranoia. He lies to, threatens, bullies and attacks anyone who goes against him. He even ostracizes his son, Jonathon.

A kingship that started with much fanfare and promise; Tall, handsome, timid, humble has dissolved into an ugly, tragic pride filled mess. Saul descends into madness and finishes poorly. He ends his life by falling on his own sword. For a King to fall on his own sword was shameful in this day. Riches to rags.

What do we learn from these Riches to rags stories? These types of stories in the bible are not the feel good, hopeful and motivational tales like David and Goliath or Gideon or Ruth.

These stories riches to rags, serve as a warning.

The Life of King Saul may be summed up best with a modern cliché, *it is not how you begin but how you finish, that matters.*

I don't know if you watched the interview Lance Armstrong did with Oprah Winfrey shortly after his world fell apart. It was one of the first times publicly when he let go a bit of his pride, his bravado and demonstrated some real signs of humility. He almost came to tears when he admitted his wrongdoing and realized how much heartache and pain he caused so many people, including his own children. Lance Armstrong's life fell with a great crash. His pride led to his destruction. But God is merciful. Scripture tells us that God gives grace to the humble; with humility comes wisdom. Who knows maybe it is not too late for Lance Armstrong to finish well. It was too late for Saul.

Saul's life is a cautionary story that reminds us that it is crucial to reflect on our own lives, our own character. Where and how is pride seeping into our lives because it is a biggie. Those areas where we are trying to live life on our own apart from our King, Jesus. That kind of living can harm us and those around us. But with God's help we can humble ourselves so that Saul's story doesn't become ours.

So, how are you living these days and how are you finishing? Maybe this is specifically a question for those of you who are like me, who may be in the second half of life. Do you still have that same commitment to our King, Jesus? Do you remember the passion you had when you first became a Christian? When Jesus saved you? Full out devotion, fully reliant. Jesus was so alive in your life, prayers were answer. You were on fire. You trusted him for everything.

Do you still have the same passion? Same faith? Or have you drifted away, started taking things into your own hands, relying more on yourself these days and become a little more proud and a little less humble.

That kind of living takes us further and further away from Christ and into, idolatry. We replace Jesus with something else in our lives.

As a community, let's use these stories in the bible like that of Saul, to encourage each other to keep the faith. Tap into the power we have through the Holy Spirit and stay true to the calling God has for our lives no matter what our ages no more what stage of life. That is my own prayer these days and my prayer for this community. May we cast out pride, turn to Jesus and all finish as well as we started.

Amen? Amen.

Let's pray.

Points to Ponder

THE STORY

Standing Tall, Falling Hard

Chapter 10

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Discuss Rags to Riches stories that have impacted your life. What was it that was so motivating? What about riches to rags stories? Do you know any examples of people who have just not finished well? Share what you learned from those lives?
2. Why was Samuel so displeased that the Israelites asked for a King?
3. In what areas of your life have you replace Jesus, our King, with some other “king”? What have been the “kings” that you have followed? Describe how things worked out for you as you put your allegiances behind those “kings”.
4. Discuss this topic of Pride in your group. Where do you see examples of excessive pride in the world today? In the news? How does pride reveal itself in your life? Where do you see pride interfering in your relationship with Jesus? Think back on some of the characters we have studied in *The Story* to this point. Where did pride get the best of them and what were the repercussions?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray for an attitude of humility in your life and against pride seeping in and interfering in your relationship with Jesus. Pray also that God would allow you to “finish well” in any task that you undertake or even throughout your life journey.