

Homiletics Analysis: 1 Samuel 10

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

First Samuel 10 records the private anointing of Saul by Samuel (vv. 1–8), followed by the confirming signs God provides (vv. 9–13), and culminating in the public selection and presentation of Saul at Mizpah by lot (vv. 17–27). The chapter is the hinge between Israel’s demand for a king (chapter 8) and Saul’s first military test (chapter 11). Samuel anoints Saul with oil and kisses him — acts of royal installation — and announces that Saul is the LORD’s anointed over His heritage (v. 1). Three sequential signs are given as divine confirmation: the men at Rachel’s tomb reporting the donkeys found, the men at Bethel offering bread, and Saul joining a prophetic band and prophesying in the Spirit (vv. 2–13). The Spirit of God rushes upon Saul and he is transformed (v. 6, 9). At Mizpah, Samuel reassembles Israel, rebukes them for rejecting God as king (vv. 17–19), and then the lot falls on Saul — who is found hiding among the baggage (vv. 20–22). Saul is presented, towering above the people, and the crowd shouts “Long live the king!” (vv. 23–24). Samuel writes the rights of the kingship in a book, dismisses the assembly, and Saul returns home accompanied by men whose hearts God has touched — while some worthless men despise him (vv. 25–27).

This Text — Intent

God is demonstrating through this chapter that Saul’s kingship is entirely His initiative, His selection, His installation, and His authentication — not Saul’s achievement, not Israel’s discovery, and not Samuel’s invention. The Spirit’s arrival on Saul, the confirming signs, the divine lot at Mizpah, and even the men “whose hearts God touched” accompanying Saul all point to the same reality: this king comes from God, not from below. But the chapter simultaneously embeds the seeds of what will come: Saul hiding in the baggage, the worthless men who despise him from the start, and the sobering Mizpah speech in which Samuel frames the kingship as Israel’s rejection of God. God is pressing the reader to understand that even when the right king arrives by divine appointment, human structures built on human demand are inherently fragile. The intent is to create in the reader both reverence for divine sovereignty in the appointment of leaders and honest reckoning with the instability of what man demands rather than what God originally ordained.

Subject Sentence: God publicly installs His chosen king over Israel while exposing the instability beneath the gift.

Primary Claim: God sovereignly chooses, equips, and presents Saul as king — but the very manner of the installation reveals that a kingship born from Israel’s rejection of God carries within it the conditions of its own unraveling.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Nature of Saul’s Transformation and Prophesying (vv. 6, 9–13)

A significant interpretive issue concerns what happens when the Spirit of God rushes upon Saul and he prophesies with the prophetic band. Pentecostal and Charismatic readings frequently read Saul’s prophesying as a model for Spirit-baptism experiences — ecstatic, immediate, validating. The question arises: is Saul regenerated here? Is this a sign of saving grace? Is his “changed heart” (v. 9) equivalent to new birth?

The text warrants neither a maximalist spiritual reading nor a dismissal of the Spirit’s real action. The Reformed reading, consistent with how the Spirit operates throughout the Old Testament, is that the Spirit of God came upon Saul in a kingly, functional sense — equipping him for the office he had been appointed to, not necessarily regenerating him savingly. The Spirit “rushes upon” Saul in the same pattern as Samson and the judges — a pattern of empowerment for a role rather than transformation toward godliness. The changed heart of verse 9 should be read in this light: God prepared Saul for his appointed role on this day, not that Saul became a new covenant man. The tragic arc of Saul’s life — the Spirit departing in 1 Samuel 16:14 — is the clinching evidence that Saul’s Spirit experience was vocational and covenantal, not salvific.

The Wesleyan tradition’s emphasis on the genuine transforming work of the Spirit is worth acknowledging, but the text does not ultimately support reading this as the Spirit producing lasting sanctification in Saul. What the Spirit produces here is immediate, sign-like, and office-oriented.

Saul Hiding in the Baggage (v. 22)

Some readers interpret Saul’s hiding as commendable humility — the kind of self-effacing modesty appropriate to a man suddenly called to great responsibility. Others, particularly those reading with the full Saul narrative in view, see it as the first visible symptom of the character disorder that will eventually ruin him: a man who cannot stand before public scrutiny, who avoids the moment that God has prepared, whose instinct when summoned is to conceal himself.

The Reformed reading does not read this scene as commendable humility. True humility in Scripture is not the avoidance of God’s calling — it is obedience to it under God’s strength rather than one’s own. Moses’s protest at the burning bush is analogous — and God does not endorse Moses’s resistance; He accommodates it while correcting it. Saul hiding in the baggage at the moment of public divine appointment is a foretaste: a man more responsive

to crowd anxiety than to divine summons. The narrator does not editorialize, but the canonical reading of this moment is sobering rather than flattering.

Samuel's Mizpah Speech and the Kingship's Legitimacy

Some interpreters, particularly those concerned to rehabilitate Saul or soften the tension in the text, minimize Samuel's rebuke in verses 17–19, treating it as pro forma — Samuel's obligatory prophetic disclaimer before endorsing a divine gift. This reading is inadequate. The speech is structurally parallel to Samuel's rebuke in chapter 8 and the covenant lawsuit pattern in Joshua 24 and Judges 2. Samuel is not giving a perfunctory disclaimer; he is embedding a genuine theological diagnosis into the very inauguration of the monarchy: Israel has rejected God as king. This is not qualified away by God's subsequent instruction to give them a king — God can grant a demand while simultaneously recording that the demand was a rejection. Both things are true. The Reformed reading holds the tension: this kingship is divinely sanctioned and simultaneously a symptom of covenant unfaithfulness. That tension is the point.

Key Canonical Support

- **Deuteronomy 17:14–20** — The law of the king: God anticipated monarchy and gave conditions for it; Israel's demand in 1 Samuel 8–10 violated the spirit of the Deuteronomic kingship law by seeking a king “like the nations” rather than a king submitted to Torah.
 - **1 Samuel 8:7** — “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” — the theological verdict that governs everything in chapters 8–12, including the Mizpah installation; Samuel's speech in 10:17–19 directly echoes this divine indictment.
 - **Judges 2:11–19** — The cycle pattern: Israel's rejection of divine kingship in favor of human alternatives produces leaders who are temporarily effective and ultimately insufficient; Saul's kingship follows this structural logic.
 - **Acts 13:20–22** — Paul's synagogue sermon retrospect: God “gave them Saul the son of Kish” and then “raised up David” — the New Testament reads Saul's kingship not as a failure of God's plan but as a chapter within it, giving way to the king after God's own heart; this places 1 Samuel 10 within the canonical arc moving toward David and ultimately toward Christ.
 - **1 Samuel 16:7, 13–14** — The Spirit's departure from Saul and arrival on David functions as the interpretive key for the Spirit's arrival on Saul in chapter 10: the Spirit's presence was vocational and conditional, not constitutive of Saul's identity before God.
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Aim: To demonstrate that even God’s sovereign appointments operate within and through human failure — and that the instability of Saul’s kingship is not an accident but a theological signal pointing forward to the King Israel actually needed.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Samuel anoints Saul with oil, kisses him, and announces his appointment as prince over Israel and his people	“Prince” (nagid) not yet “king” — a deliberate distinction; the LORD is still king; the anointing is private and covenantal
2	Sign 1: At Rachel’s tomb near Zelzah, two men will tell Saul the donkeys are found and his father is anxious for him	Grounds Saul in his immediate, ordinary context before elevating him; the mundane confirms the divine
3–4	Sign 2: At the oak of Tabor, three men going to Bethel will give Saul two loaves of bread	The bread is freely given — a sign of providential provision accompanying the appointed king
5–6	Sign 3: At Gibeah of God (Philistine garrison present), Saul will meet prophets descending with instruments; the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon him and he will prophesy and be turned into another man	The location is significant — Philistine garrison at the place where Israel’s king-to-be receives the Spirit; public, military, and spiritual significance converge
7	Samuel instructs Saul: when these signs come, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you	Open commission; not yet full instruction — tests Saul’s responsiveness
8	Samuel instructs Saul to go ahead to Gilgal and wait seven days for Samuel to come and offer burnt offerings and tell him what to do	This command will become the test Saul fails in chapter 13 — planted here as future narrative load-bearing
9	When Saul turns to leave Samuel, God gives him	“Another heart” — vocational transformation,

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	another heart; all the signs come to pass that day	not necessarily regeneration; the signs' simultaneous fulfillment confirms divine control
10–12	Saul prophesies with the prophetic band; those who knew him before are astonished; the proverb arises: "Is Saul also among the prophets?"	The proverb becomes a fixed saying — suggesting this scene became iconic in Israel's memory; the astonishment is about the gap between Saul's origin and his experience
13	Saul comes down from the high place	Brief, transitional — Saul moves from the Spirit's work back to ordinary life
14–16	Saul's uncle asks where he has been; Saul reports the donkeys found but says nothing of the kingship	Saul conceals the kingship from his family; Samuel had not told him to — noteworthy reticence or fear
17–18	Samuel summons Israel to Mizpah; recites the LORD's deliverance of Israel from Egypt and all oppressors	Covenant lawsuit pattern; grounds the rebuke in covenant history
19	"But today you have rejected your God who saves you from all your calamities and distresses, and you have said, 'Set a king over us'"	The sharpest theological verdict in the chapter; the kingship installation is simultaneous with a covenant indictment
20–21a	The lot falls: tribe of Benjamin, clan of Matrites, then Saul son of Kish	The lot is a divine mechanism — not random selection but the LORD's disclosure (Proverbs 16:33)
21b	Saul is sought and cannot be found; the LORD reveals he is hiding among the baggage	The king-elect is hidden in the luggage at the moment of public divine appointment
22–23	Saul is brought out; he stands head and shoulders above the people; the people shout approval	The crowd responds to physical stature — exactly the kind of king-like-the-nations they demanded
24	Samuel presents Saul: "Do you see him whom the LORD	Samuel's presentation is straightforward — God

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	has chosen? There is none like him among all the people”	chose him; but the narrative has already shown the instability beneath the surface
25	Samuel tells the people the rights and duties of the kingship, writes them in a book, and deposits it before the LORD	The Deuteronomic kingship law comes alive; the rights and duties are the standard by which Saul will be evaluated
26	Saul goes home to Gibeah; valiant men whose hearts God has touched go with him	Divine provision again — even Saul’s core companions are God’s gift, not Saul’s gathering
27	Worthless men despise Saul, bring no present; he holds his peace	Immediate opposition from within Israel; Saul’s response (silence) is ambiguous — patience or passivity?

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–8	The Private Anointing: God Installs His King by Covenant
2	9–13	The Confirming Signs: God Authenticates His Appointment
3	14–16	The Concealed Secret: Saul Hides the Kingship
4	17–25	The Public Presentation: God Selects at Mizpah, Israel Shouts
5	26–27	The Divided Response: Hearts God Touched and Hearts That Despised

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: God publicly installs His chosen king over Israel while exposing the instability beneath the gift.

Primary Claim: God sovereignly chooses, equips, and presents Saul as king — but the very manner of the installation reveals that a kingship born from Israel's rejection of God carries within it the conditions of its own unraveling.

Applications

1. (Mind/Belief) — Reframe what divine appointment guarantees and what it does not.

The chapter trains the reader to distinguish between God's sovereignty in appointment and the spiritual health of what is appointed. Saul is genuinely God's chosen instrument in this moment — the signs are real, the Spirit's arrival is real, the lot is real. None of this is theater. And yet the foundation is compromised from the beginning because Israel demanded a king like the nations rather than the King they had. Believing Christians must resist the assumption that because God is behind something, it is therefore free from the consequences of the sinful desires from which it emerged. God can work through flawed structures while those structures remain flawed. Do not confuse divine sovereignty with divine endorsement of every human motive behind an event.

2. (Mind/Belief) — Recognize Samuel's Mizpah speech as theological framework, not background noise. The tendency in reading this chapter is to treat Samuel's rebuke in verses 17–19 as a formality before the real event — the selection of Saul. But the speech is the interpretive key to the entire ceremony. God is installing a king while simultaneously indicting the request. These two things are not in tension; they are both true at once. The reader who hears the shout "Long live the king!" without also hearing "you have rejected your God" has missed the chapter's weight. The same pattern applies in the reader's life: God can grant what we demand while the very granting of it carries a judgment. Learn to read your circumstances with this double-lens — what God is giving, and what the giving reveals about what you have been seeking.

3. (Affections/Worship) — Grieve the instinct to hide when God calls rather than trusting His sufficiency to stand. Saul hiding in the baggage is not comedic — it is tragic. Here is the man God has chosen, Spirit-equipped, sign-confirmed, lot-selected, and he is crouching among the luggage while the nation waits. The crowd's excitement cannot overcome what Saul's hiding reveals: a man more afraid of exposure than confident in God's summons. This is a recognizable condition. Many believers hide in analogous baggage — avoiding the calling God has placed on their life because the crowd seems too large, the stakes too high, the scrutiny too unbearable. The appropriate response to divine appointment is not self-promotion, but it is also not hiding. God calls us out of the baggage. Let the grief of Saul's posture produce in you a willingness to stand where God has placed you.

4. (Affections/Worship) — Take honest inventory of what kind of king — what kind of savior — you are actually looking for. Israel’s demand for a king “like the nations” was not merely a political preference; it was a revelation of what they wanted their salvation to look like. They wanted it to be visible, military, impressive, someone head-and-shoulders above the rest. They got exactly that. And they got the instability that comes with it. The reader of 1 Samuel 10 should feel the convicting weight of this: what form of rescue am I actually hoping for? A king who looks like the kings around me, who competes on the world’s terms, who impresses on the world’s scale? Or the rejected, unlikely, hidden-in-plain-sight King that the entire arc of this narrative is moving toward? Let the crowd’s shout — “Long live the king!” over a man hiding in the baggage — stir you toward genuine worship of the King who did not hide from His appointed suffering.

5. (Will/Behavior) — Take seriously the embedded commands and warnings God places in your calling before the crisis arrives. Verse 8 is the most structurally significant verse in this chapter for Saul’s future: go to Gilgal, wait seven days, do not act until Samuel comes. This instruction is planted here. It will become the test Saul catastrophically fails in 1 Samuel 13. God does not give Saul the test at Gilgal without first giving him the instruction. The reader should ask: where in my current calling has God given me clear instruction that I have not yet been tested on — and am I taking it as seriously as the future crisis will require? The time to internalize the command is before the pressure arrives, not during it. Rehearse obedience now so that it does not collapse under the weight of urgency later.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: First Samuel 10 displays the LORD’s sovereign control over the installation of human authority in the most thoroughgoing way — the anointing is His initiative, the signs are His confirmation, the Spirit is His gift, and the lot is His voice. No human maneuvering produces Saul; God selects, equips, and presents him. Yet the chapter simultaneously reveals that divine sovereignty does not sanitize the conditions from which an event emerges. Israel demanded a king from a posture of covenant rebellion, and God’s granting of the demand does not transform the rebellion into faithfulness. The Mizpah speech (vv. 17–19) ensures that the reader receives the installation of Saul with full theological awareness: this is a gift given in the context of judgment, a mercy delivered within a warning. The LORD is utterly sovereign — and He does not shield His people from the consequences of what they demand.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: This chapter is a sustained display of God’s sovereign governance of history, including its dark and compromised chapters. The Reformed tradition’s insistence on divine sovereignty over human events — including

human sin and human demands — is not an abstraction here; it is visible in every element of Saul's installation. God did not merely permit Israel's demand and scramble to redeem it; He incorporated it into His purposes, which will ultimately carry through Saul's failure to David and from David to David's greater Son. The Spirit's work on Saul (vocational, not salvific) illustrates the Reformed distinction between common and saving grace — God can use and equip instruments who are not ultimately His in a saving sense. The embedded instruction in verse 8 that Saul will later disobey foreshadows the Reformed conviction that obedience to the covenant word, not spiritual experience alone, is the mark of genuine responsiveness to God. Every dimension of Saul's installation points forward to the one anointed by the Spirit without measure (Isaiah 11:2; John 3:34) who did not hide when summoned, did not disobey when tested, and whose kingship was not born from human demand but from eternal divine love.

Main Takeaway

God is not surprised by the messiness of Saul's installation, and He is not undone by it. He chose Saul, equipped Saul, and presented Saul — all while Samuel's speech made clear that the whole enterprise was rooted in Israel's rejection of God as king. The takeaway is this: God's sovereignty runs straight through human failure, not around it. He does not need clean conditions to accomplish His purposes. But He also does not lie to you about the conditions. The hiding king, the divided crowd, and the rebuke embedded in the coronation ceremony are all honest. He is moving the story forward — toward a better king, a better anointing, a better coronation. Read this chapter with your eyes open to what Israel's demand revealed about them — and what your own demands reveal about you.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the chapter as a straightforward success story.** The most common mishandling of 1 Samuel 10 is preaching it as unqualified good news: God chose Saul, the Spirit came, the signs confirmed it, the lot selected him — end of story. This reading is deaf to the theological weight of Samuel's Mizpah speech and blind to the narrative seeds of disaster embedded throughout (Saul hiding, verse 8's planted command, the worthless men). Preach the chapter's honest complexity — divine sovereignty operating through and despite human failure — not a triumph narrative with decorative concerns attached.
- **Psychologizing Saul's hiding as admirable humility.** Teachers sometimes soften the hiding-in-the-baggage scene to encourage people who feel inadequate to step into their calling. While the impulse is pastoral, it misreads the text. The narrator is not commending Saul here; the canonical reading of Saul's character makes this scene ominous, not endearing. Preach the scene for what it is — a man evading divine appointment — rather than recruiting it as a lesson about imposter syndrome.

- **Separating Saul's prophesying from its canonical context and using it as a Spirit-empowerment model.** Pentecostal and charismatic exposition frequently isolates verses 6, 9–12 and builds a Spirit-baptism theology from them. The Reformed exposition must reintegrate these verses into the full Saul narrative: the Spirit's departure in 1 Samuel 16:14 is the indispensable interpretive frame for the Spirit's arrival in chapter 10. Saul's Spirit experience was real, vocational, and temporary — not a model for normative Christian Spirit-reception.
- **Treating Samuel's Mizpah speech as a perfunctory disclaimer.** If the preacher rushes through verses 17–19 to get to the dramatic selection scene, the sermon loses its theological spine. The speech is not background noise; it is the covenant-lawsuit framing that makes sense of everything that follows in Saul's reign and in Israel's history. Give it its full weight. The installation and the indictment are simultaneous and both are real.
- **Failing to preach the canonical trajectory toward David and Christ.** This chapter exists within a narrative arc. Expounding it as a self-contained episode without connecting it to the movement toward "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14) and ultimately toward the anointed Son of David leaves the congregation with a troubling story and no gospel horizon. The pitfall is not adding Christ artificially — it is failing to trace the genuine canonical logic: Saul's failed kingship is the foil that God uses to prepare the way for the king He always intended, who is the shadow of the King the New Testament discloses.
- **Missing verse 8 as the load-bearing command planted for the future.** The instruction to wait seven days at Gilgal sounds like one detail among many in a chapter full of details. A preacher who does not flag this verse and its catastrophic future relevance (1 Samuel 13:8–14) has left a live wire unexplained. Even if the preacher does not develop it fully, the congregation should understand that this quiet instruction carries enormous weight — that God's tests are often preceded by God's advance instruction, and the question is always whether we will hold the word when the pressure comes.