

The king worth trusting \* 1 Samuel 8, 12

October 6, 2019 \* Langford community church \* Graham Gladstone

The question at the heart of that passage is really quite straight forward – who’s your king? Now I know that we don’t have political kings in this day and age, so let me put it to you like this:

Who is ultimately in charge in your life? Who leads you into battle? Who decides right and wrong and the values you live by? Who receives your ultimate allegiance? Who wears the crown in your life?

Those are questions that the people of Israel were wrestling with at the beginning of 1 Samuel 8. They knew that Samuel was getting older and they wanted something in place for when he was gone. Samuel had after all been the de facto leader of Israel for the last generation – he travelled through the land and gave judicial and spiritual leadership to all the people. And all the people, who belonged to all different tribes, were all beginning to gravitate towards this one man, Samuel (1 Samuel 7:15-17 NIV).

But as the years past, Samuel got older, and Israel began to think that they’d better have a succession plan in place. And that’s where we begin in chapter 8. Look at it with me – 1 Samuel 8, verse 1.

1 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel.

Hmmm. That’s odd. Judges don’t usually appoint their sons as successor judges. The pattern is usually this - God raises up people to be judges, they deliver their people, and then the people are restored to relationship with God. That’s the way it had always worked and it worked every time! God had every time reliably delivered His people through judges and there was no reason to think that He wouldn’t do it again. No need then to pass the mantle of ‘judge’ on. But.... That’s what Samuel did – he appointed his sons as judges for Israel.

2 The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served (a long ways away from their dad) at Beersheba.

3 But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

They did not take after their father. Samuel was their dad – he was the pinnacle of devotion and faith and here his sons have turned out just like Eli’s – hungry for dishonest gain. They have positions of authority to lead in Israel and they are using it for their own benefit. That’s too bad.

Now, should we take this to mean that Samuel was a bad parent? That he failed to raise his children in a godly way? I don’t think so and the narrator here doesn’t think so either. I think that this is just an illustration of sad reality that sometimes happens. Faithful parents raise up their children in the way that they should go, and when they are old, they choose to walk away from God. Sometimes that just happens. And if it happens, it’s not your fault. They are making their own decisions. And sometimes they make bad decisions. That doesn’t mean we stop praying for them and encouraging them back towards God, but if it can happen to Samuel, it can happen to us.

It’s often said that God has no grandchildren. Being a child of a believer doesn’t make you a child of God; you need to receive the grace of God for yourself and become His child.

Now, all that to say, that Samuel was nearing the end of his life and his sons were in no shape to replace him. So, verse 4 -

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

What a way to open the conversation eh? Blunt, straight to the point – this is probably going to be an awkward conversation as it is – and they say – ‘Look, you’re old.’ Young people eh? (eye roll ;)

and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

The elders of Israel here are asking for something big. Something monumental. Ever since they came out of Egypt, there was a tacit understanding that God was king. Yes, He raised up leaders like Moses and Joshua and Deborah and Samuel and they exercised real power – but their authority came from God their king.

Now though, Israel was asking for a human king, who would unite the people and lead them. They wanted a mon-arch – That word actually had Greek roots – ‘mono’ – one; ‘arche’ authority – they want one authority – they wanted one king – that they could see - to lead them.

At any rate, verse 6:

6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.

Now, I have to give it to Samuel. The people have essentially said – ‘well old boy – time to retire – you need to hire your successor – and give him a pay raise while you’re at it!’ – and his instinct is to pray. That’s pretty amazing. He doesn’t rail against them; he doesn’t bawl them out – ‘you stiff necked unfaithful people!’ – he prays.

But I do think that we need to ask ourselves why exactly Samuel was displeased by this request. There ARE two possibilities – one theological and one personal. Theologically speaking, I think Samuel really IS upset because he knows that in asking for a king, the people are rejecting God. And Samuel truly treasures the Lord and that’s one reason why he’s upset.

But I think that there’s a personal reason too and it’s this - he’s been acting with the power of a king for the last generation. He’s been leading the nation for decades. He’s even set up his sons as successors to rule in his place when he’s gone – the king in all but name is dead, long live the king in all but name. Admittedly, the kind of leadership that Samuel has given Israel is the kind that a good king should – helping them to walk with God. But it sure looks like there’s some personal self-interest woven into Samuel’s displeasure here. And I think that’s really helpful for us as we realize that there are NO perfect people in the Bible, only people with mixed motivations who need the grace of Jesus, just like we do.

And in verse 7, God offers Him grace –

7 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.

8 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.

God knows what Samuel's been thinking. He knows the royal aspirations that Samuel had. And He says – 'look, they're not saying they don't want YOU as king. They're saying that don't want ME as their king. And that's nothing new. That's been going on since Day 1 out of Egypt.'

And if you turn over the chapter 12, you actually see Samuel trace that history out for the people. Chapter 12, starting in verse 8, Samuel zooms through Israelite history and says essentially – look how faithful God your King has been and how unfaithful you've been to Him.

#### Chapter 12, verse 8 -

8 "After Jacob entered Egypt (that's the Joseph story), they cried to the LORD for help, and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your forefathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place. (That's the Exodus).

9 "But they forgot the LORD their God; so he sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them.

10 They cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned; we have forsaken the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.'

11 Then the LORD sent Jerub-Baal, Barak (and Deborah), Jephthah and Samuel, and he delivered you from the hands of your enemies on every side, so that you lived securely.

12 "But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'--even though the LORD your God was your king.'

That's the key to the whole thing right there. From the very beginning, they have had a king. YHWH has been their king. And He was proven Himself eminently capable of taking care of His people. He rescued them out of Egypt, from the hands of Canaanites and the Philistines and the Moabites – time and again He delivered them and gave them all they needed and yet they have turned from Him to trust in other gods. This request for a king is just the latest in a long line of rejections, the people of God turning their backs on their faithful King.

And yet look at what God does – Verse 9 -

9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do."

Now that's fascinating. God gives them a king. By asking for a king, they are essentially committing treason against their king YHWH – and yet what does He do? Throw em in jail? Off with their heads? No. He gives them the king that they've asked for. Three times He says to Samuel – 'Listen to them' and verse 22 – '~~Listen to them and give them a king.~~' (1 Samuel 8:22). God graciously gives them the king that they asked for, even though they sinned in the asking.

Now that being said, He gives them a warning too, and through Samuel we hear all the ways that a human king will act. Verse 11 –

10 Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king.

11 He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots.

12 Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.

14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants.

15 He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants.

16 Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use.

17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves.

18 When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day."

'This is what' Samuel says 'a human king will do. He will take take take. He will rule for his own benefit. He will take from you who have little in order to have a little more than the excess he already has.' A human king, Samuel says, will do nothing but take and God will nothing to help you when you regret this decision.

19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us.

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."

They want someone to fight their battles. They want a fearless leader; a stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf. They want to be just like the other nations.

But press into it a little more and you'll see this – they want someone they can see. They want some visible human leader to save them, instead of trusting that God will come through for them, the way He always had. And I can identify with that. When the chips are down, it can be hard to trust in the invisible God and easy to trust in some human solution, but in the end, God always comes through and His way is best. Nonetheless, God promised them their king and they all went home and we'll talk about the king they get in a couple of weeks.

But for now, let's ask, what does this all mean? Let me give you a summary statement and then unpack it – Israel was wrong to ask for a king but God was gracious and gave them one.

Israel was wrong to ask for a king. They HAD a king. They had a GOOD king. From the moment that He miraculously rescued them out of Egypt, YHWH proved that He was a powerful, compassionate, providential King who gave them everything they really needed. If only they had been faithful to their king instead of flirting with other powers, they would have experienced the fullness of prosperity and blessing that their God and King had to offer. But their loyalties were divided. And so they failed to receive everything that God had for them. But instead of asking 'wait, have we really been faithful here?' they decided they'd do better with a new king. Israel did evil in the eyes of the LORD by asking for a human king. (And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king." (1Sa 12:17 NIV).

And yet, God was gracious and gave them a king. Why?

Because God had always planned to rule through a king.

There's nothing inherently wrong with having a human king; when the king walks with God and helps his people to walk with God, they will all prosper. I mean, that was the underlying thesis of the book of Judges – if only we had a king to lead us, then we would all do right in God's eyes rather than in our own.

And God had always planned to work through this kind of king -

Genesis 17:6, when God made the promise to bless Abraham, He said - 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you (Genesis 17:6).

Genesis 49:10 – when Jacob blessed his sons, he predicted that kings would come from Judah – ‘the scepter will not depart from him...’ *10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. (Gen 49:10 NIV).*

Samuel's own mother, back in chapter 2, anticipated that God Himself would rule through a king – 1 Samuel 2:10. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed" (1 Samuel 2:10).

And in Deuteronomy 17, God had explicitly laid out instructions for this kind of God-oriented king. Deuteronomy 17:14 says:

14 When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,"  
15 be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses.

Not if, but when. When you ask for a king, appoint the king that YHWH chooses. And here's the criteria – 1. He must be from among your brothers – no foreigners or outsiders 2. He must not accumulate horses or wives or riches – because they will all in excess draw him away from God and 3. He must walk in the ways of the Lord, never straying to the right or to the left.

*He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite.*

*16 The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again."*

*17 He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.*

*18 When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites.*

*19 It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees*

*20 and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.*

This is the kind of king that God intended to rule in Israel. One who would walk with God, rely on God and draw all of his power and authority from Him – the true King.

That's not the kind of king though that Israel wanted, is it? They wanted a warrior they could see, a human being they could trust in. Trusting God was too abstract – they wanted flesh and bone to believe in.

And so God gave it to them – and I think actually this might go a long way to answering the whole why Saul, then David thing? I think in Saul, they got the king they asked for; in David, I think they got the kind of king they needed. Saul's reign shows a king who trusts in himself, while David's reign shows a king who trusts in God. Under Saul, the kingdom started well but then devolved into civil war and paranoia. Under David, Israel was united and there was peace in the land. God's kind of king is infinitely superior. And I suspect that Saul was given to teach that lesson.

But even so, David was not entirely God's kind of king, was he? He had his fair share of sins. And Solomon started well, but 1 Kings 10 and 11 tell us that Solomon ultimately accumulated horses and wives and riches – all the things kings aren't supposed to collect – and he fell too. And don't even get me started on King Ahab and Amon and Manasseh. A king who points his people to God is king, but no human king ever really succeeds in that.

And it's here that 1 Samuel 8 really shines a light on us. Because, sure, we don't have kings in the political sense any more, but we certainly have things that we look to for power and security and morality. We like to trust in our bank accounts and our elected officials; we like to trust in things we can see, rather than trusting in the God who sees all things.

And to be frank, more often than not, we are our own kings. We wear the crown in our lives. We sit on the throne of our hearts. We determine right and wrong; we make the decisions and pursue the things we want to pursue. We trust in our own ability and in our own reputations as we live as kings of our own little kingdoms.

But you know what, even for a kingdom of one, I'm not a great king. My power is limited, my vision is short-sighted and my motives are mixed. My reign will not last forever. *I may* win the battles I enter or... I might just face plant.

And when I trust myself as king, I am rejecting God who IS my king. He has always been my king. He makes the sun to rise every morning; He gives us health and strength and the ability to work and we are just as wrong as the Israelite to pretend that God's not our king.

But just as He was gracious with Israel, God has been gracious to us. Rather than being a king who takes, God is a king who gives. God gave His son Jesus to pay for our rebellion – to pay for all the times that we've told God – 'hey, I'm more trustworthy than You.' He gave us His Son; He gives us life with Him. He gives us forgiveness and the grace to believe and receive it.

And He gave us a King who will never fail – the risen Jesus – whose power is unlimited, wisdom far-sighted and motives pure. He is a far better king than I could ever be. Jesus is the kind of king that God wants and the King worth trusting in. Are you trusting Him as king of your life?

The Israelites struggled I think because they couldn't see God – they just had to trust that He was at work.

But in Jesus, God is made visible. He is the image of the invisible God.

In Jesus, we see what God is like; and in the Cross, we see how committed our King is to us.

He gave His life for us, to prove once and for all how trustworthy He is and to bridge the gap between us and God that we had created.

He invites us now to trust in Him, to rely on Him in all things and to live lives that reflect His Kingdom in this world.

There is no reason to be like all the nations, when we have a king who is unlike any other.

#### BENEDICTION

5. 1 Cor. 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.