

Be Careful What You Wish For

1 Samuel 8

"Obey the voice of the people...for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them..."

Introduction: In a world that clamors for transparency and honesty, we typically have a hard time letting people see our *real* selves. Take the process of traditional dating, for instance. Dating is the process of getting to know someone enough to come a conclusion in deciding on marriage, yet the whole venture is set up to put ones BEST self forward, not the real. We dress nicely, are on our best behavior, and don't overeat at dinner. We try to avoid any topic of conversation or activity that would shine light on the worst (or at least perceived worst parts) parts of ourselves, hoping that when those things DO get revealed, it's too late and we are already committed to a lifelong covenant! The problem with this is the fact that knowing who someone really is, in the best and worst moments, makes up the totality of a relationship, and we make a free decision to love the whole of a person, good and bad, admirable and less than admirable. Love covers a multitude of sin, and embraces the worst but changing parts.

We can often have the same mindset and mentality when it comes to our relationships in the church and even in our walk with Christ. We want to put on the best of smiles, have people see a happy marriage, and a life that is all together. We can even convince most people all of the time, and in so doing, convince ourselves that perhaps the perception truly is the reality. But God is not fooled, and some others are not as well. When our hearts, motives, and the things we like to keep locked away get **revealed**, it is an opportunity to truly experience the grace, love, and patience of the Lord. He desires to transform us from the inside out, rather than trying to shine the outside of the cup. The gospel deals with what we think is the best we can offer and the worst we try to keep hidden. On our best or worst day, we are equally in desperate need of His grace. When we get exposed, it is an opportunity to exercise trust in Christ alone, not our actions or perceptions, with our standing before God and others. This is the crux of our text this morning in **1 Samuel 8**.

It's been a couple of months since we have looked at 1 Samuel, so it's important to get back up to speed on the flow of the narrative and historical context. 1 Samuel started with the nation of Israel in both a state of **transition** and **moral dilapidation**. The nation was in the Promised Land, but throughout the period of the Judges the drumbeat was *"everyone did what was right in their own eyes, and there was no king."* Without strong leadership, the people would follow the course of their sinful heart and the culture around them, which would not only lead them **away** from worship but would elicit judgment from God in the form of warring nations against them. Then God would raise up a redeemer to save them, only to go back down the same path as before, repeating the same **cycle over and over**. Whenever we allow idols to rule, we cannot worship God alone, and whenever we try to live in our own strength, the cycle of seen in Judges will continue in our own life.

When 1 Samuel starts, Israel was led by a weak priest with wicked priest sons who took advantage of the people and abused the women. This wickedness was exposed when Israel took the Ark of the Covenant into battle against the Philistines, thinking they could leverage God for their advantage which lead to the capture of the Ark, the defeat of Israel's army, the death of Eli and his sons, and the declaration of **Ichabod**, *"the glory has departed"*, over Israel itself. *But God is longsuffering with His*

people and will glorify Himself. So God raised up Samuel to lead the people, and he did it well. He led the people to **repent of their sin, to return to the LORD with their whole heart, to put away idols and foreign gods, and serve God only** (7:3). This caused the people to publically confess their sin, to commit themselves to the LORD, and God responded by **thundering a mighty victory over the Philistines** (7:10 – and really important to remember this verse). Samuel raised stone of remembrance and called it **Ebenezer**, to acknowledge forever that God was their help. For all the years of Samuel’s leadership, Israel flourished, with worship being restored and their enemies held at bay. We remember the importance of Biblical, spiritual leadership in the home and the church, for as this goes, so goes the rest. But we also are reminded that just because one generation walks faithfully does NOT insure the next, and every one of us is prone to forgetfulness, and that comes quickly. This is where we pick up chapter 8.

PRESENT PROBLEM (1-3)

“Success without a successor is failure”, a truism that was coined or popularized by management guru Peter Drucker. The Bible contains positive transitions of leadership, from Moses to Joshua and Elijah to Elisha, and Jesus to His disciples. But there are also disappointing and sad stories where the drop-off of leadership is palpable. Things went from bad to worse with Eli and his sons, but there was real hope with Samuel. He had two sons, and he had high hopes for them, naming the firstborn **Joel**, which means “YHWH is God”, and the second **Abijah**, which means “YHWH is our father”. In other words, it seems like he had the best intentions that his sons would grow up with the knowledge of God and follow in his footsteps, since he also placed them in leadership as **judges over Israel**. But best intentions are not enough, and that was abundantly evident as his sons departed from the righteous path set out for them.

As with Eli’s sons, Samuel’s sons abused their authority and positions of leadership by *“taking bribes and perverting justice”*, seeking earthly gain rather than leading by service and caring for God’s people. God does not fill in the blanks as to this failure, but it is clear that Samuel did not discipline his sons well, either early on or when they began to go astray. There are two quick principles we glean from this situation Israel and Samuel faced: 1) **Disciplining our children is a must**, and a parent who fails to discipline consistently loves themselves more than their kids. *“For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”* (Heb. 12:7b-8). This involves telling our kids “no”, giving out consequences for actions, and remembering we are the parent who make decisions, not our kids. Child-centeredness leads to disobedient, bratty, miserable young people. 2) **Nepotism demands wisdom** – When it comes down to it, I will prefer my kids over others and have a hard time seeing the reality clearly at times. So we need others in our lives who can give unbiased observations of our parenting and wisdom in particular situations. A parent that knows they struggle with seeing their kids clearly is wise, and one who thinks they are not child centered at all needs wisdom.

REVEALING REQUEST (4-6)

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). One of the best ways to know someone is to hear them speak, and our words always reveal what is going on in our hearts. In fact, what people ask for and pray for will reveal what they truly believe about themselves, God, and what life is all about. Here, we have the **elders of Israel**, the group of men who would have led around Samuel, asking Samuel for future leadership, but in actuality, their request revealed who they trusted and what they were ultimately pursuing. They began by building a **logical case** based on present circumstances: **1) Samuel, you are old** (tough to refute), **2) your sons do not walk in your ways**

(acknowledged), **3) there is no clear replacement** (unfortunate). These were true and real reasons, but it culminated in the **revealing request**: *Give us a king to judge us LIKE ALL THE NATIONS*. Now, at face value, this was NOT a bad request and there is even a sanitized Biblical case to be made for it.

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 stated that when Israel came into the land, the Lord would “*set a king over you, like all the nations that are around you*” (17:14) So the request was *seemingly* in line with a Biblical command. However, it is abundantly clear that this request was made out of different motivations, a divided desire rather than for pure obedience. Deut. 17 also lays out specific requirements for that king, and he would be one of God’s choosing and one who was after God’s heart.

So what did this request reveal? The people wanted something tangible that they could look to, a king who looked the part, and one that they could follow NOT by faith, but by sight. This request revealed that they had trust in an institution of government rather than the One who instituted government. It was not the monarchy but the trust in the monarchy that was the villain. (Dale Ralph Davis) Psalm **118:8-9** says, “*It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.*” And Psalm **146:3** “*Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.*” Even **Ronald Reagan** knew that trusting in government was not a solution: “*In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem, government IS the problem. For time to time we’ve been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people.*” In a direct way, the elders believed that a change of government, or the change of the type of government would be the solution to their plight. People today, even believers, can subtly think the same thing, hoping that a changeover in the party in power or changing the Constitution itself would somehow change people’s hearts. Not only is this not true, but believing this actually moves us away from our trust in the One who rules over all things.

But how do we know that this was such a bad request or one that revealed an idolatrous heart? The answer comes straight from God Himself, who knew that the request was NOT one that upheld Biblical truth but that pressed a divided heart.

AUTHORITATIVE ANSWER (6-18)

Samuel was rightly irked by the request since it was an affront to his leadership and shined light on his failures. But the true offense was NOT against Samuel but God Himself. God’s response was swift and clear:

Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, BUT THEY HAVE REJECTED ME FROM BEING KING OVER THEM. According to all the deeds that they have done from the day I brought them out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them. (7-9)

REAL ISSUE: It was clear that it was the actual request but the *motive* behind the request. This is what we mean when we say God cares about our hearts and the reason behind our actions and words. God laid out His expectations clearly, saying that He would be their EXCLUSIVE God and He demanded exclusivity in return. He would guide, love, care for, forgive, and lead them into righteousness and goodness if they followed Him. He does not compete for our affections but demands them. He will not share His glory with another. This request was an example of **idolatry, which is anything that is a**

substitution of God Himself and His promises. Idolatry is the plight of EVERY person and is a struggle for EVERY Christian, since the substitute is rarely something evil in itself but instead something acceptable in and of itself that gets elevated to the place only God claims.

Here is what the request of the elders revealed:

- **They assessed their problems mechanically rather than spiritually** – Their focus on the plight was not focused on any inward change but instead an outward fix, looking to switch a technique or system rather than examining what needed to change. They were after **new gimmicks rather than new hearts**. Now we may say there was no sin stated on the elder's part leading to this request, but **IF** they had been focused on God's glory and fidelity to Him alone, they would have **FIRST** prayed for pure hearts and confessing of any hidden sin and motive and then sought the LORD. Their own history betrayed them, as God reviewed how His own people, over and over, went after **OTHER** fixes rather than simply yielding to God. When we believe the problems, issues and frustrations in our life are **ALL OUTSIDE** of us instead of opportunities to assess our hearts before the LORD, our prayer will be focused on **FIXING**, rather than **SEEING** the truth of our own need to change.
- **They were NOT looking to God alone for help but *prescribing* to Him what form that help should take** – Jesus taught us to pray according to God's will (Matt. 6:10) and James says we do not receive because we pray with selfish motives (James 4:3). Often we do not see or experience the answer to our prayers because **WE** are dictating **TO** God how He should answer our plight, instead of seeking Him as the greatest pleasure and joy of our heart, and asking Him to accomplish **HIS** will in our lives. When He acts, He gets the glory and praise, and we benefit from that. Remember, God wants us to worship, depend, and trust Him with **ALL OF OUR HEART**, even when the outcome is **NOT** what we wanted or anticipated. That is why the Psalms are full of the wrestling's of writers trying to make sense of the world when it seems upside down, with the solution **NOT** found in a change of circumstance but of truth and perspective. Praying that God would accomplish His will alone keeps us out of the irony of the next principle in the text.

REAL IRONY: "I will give them what they want, desire, and ask for ----- but for their correction, not immediate benefit"

When we studied the Lord's prayer, we saw that praying God's will means we do not want Him to give us something we are asking for that will bring us away from Himself ---- like when we pray for material provision, we get it, and forget about Him or trust in the material instead. Here, we see that when God answers our selfish prayers positively, it's actually bad for us. He was going to give the people a king that would do more damage than good. This is consistent with believers and unbelievers:

- **Romans 1:18-32** – A punishment to exchanging the worship of God with the creation is God **giving mankind over to their desires** – which we see on display today in our world, where sin does not satisfy so more egregious and creative sin must be engaged in
- **Psalms 81:11-13** – *"But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. Oh that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways."*

- **Psalm 106:13-15** – *“But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel. But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert; **He gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them.**”*

God is a good dad. He wants what is best for us, and the absolute best for us is to yield to Him completely, to confess and repent of our sin, to worship Him with our whole heart, and to obey Him in all areas of our life. He will chastise, discipline, and correct those He loves, even inflicting temporal pain and discomfort to teach and train us. I remember a family growing up that found their children (from 8-14 years old) who found cigarettes and smoked them in secret at their house. Instead of taking them away, the parents instead gave the kids what they wanted and had them smoke ALL the cigarettes they could until they threw up, giving them a distaste for tobacco from that time forward. God will give us what we want to our detriment, so **what and why we ask for is imperative.**

REAL WARNING: God is always gracious, so He gave Israel an opportunity to be warned about their request, as Samuel laid out exactly what the affirmation of their request for the wrong king would mean:

- **He would take, not give** – Bigger and more powerful governments do not give, but take away from the people they govern. **Six times** Samuel laid out what this king would take: their sons (11) and daughters (13) for service, their best fields, vineyards, and orchards (14), a tenth of their grain (TAXES!) (15), you male and female servants for himself (16), and a tenth of their flocks (TAXES!) (17).
- **He would use his authority for his own gain and expansion** – Absolute power corrupts absolutely, and giving up authority to another means he will ultimately take advantage. Some of this would be for defense, but a vast majority was for personal gain
- **He would put you in servitude rather than expand your freedom** – The fear of the elders concerned the enemy and warring nations. They would give up a semblance of peace for their own rights ----- when God said HE WAS THE ONE WHO COULD ACTUALLY GIVE THIS PEACE ---- but we as humans think only temporally and willingly give up future sureties for artificial security in the present.
- **HE WILL BE EXACTLY LIKE ALL THE OTHER NATIONS KINGS!!!!** – Here is the real irony: they wanted a king like ALL THE OTHER NATIONS ----- you got it. And this will lead to you *“in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom YOU HAVE CHOSEN FOR YOURSELVES, but the LORD will not answer in that day.”* (8:18).

STUBBORNESS SECURED (19-22)

In consistent fashion, Israel heard the warning like a prideful teen, with ears and hearts closed, thinking they knew better than God and Samuel. In light of the warning, they doubled down on their request for a king and desire to be like everyone else. This leaves us three realities that we consider in our own hearts this morning:

- **Forgetfulness of God’s promises and work is a pathway to idolatry** – The people wanted a king that would *“go before us and fight our battles.”* But God had already DEMONSTRATED that when Israel yielded to Him, He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines (7:3), He would THUNDER against their enemies (7:10) and have His hand against the Philistines (7:13). How quickly we forget that God says He is the One who satisfies, that if we say we love Him we actually obey Him alone (1 John 5:2) since His commands are not burdensome, and that THIS life

is temporal but something better is coming! Selfish living and self-driven requests of God reveals we do not know, care about, or have forgotten the God we say we love.

- **Stubbornly demonstrated a gross misunderstanding of holiness** – Wanting to be like the nations around us plagued Israel and the church today alike. We see churches and individuals who want to act and function like everyone else, adopting methods and philosophies that EVERYONE around does. However, Israel was called to be holy, to be set apart from the nations to be a beacon of light to the nations around. We, as the church, are called be the same. The church is a group of **called out ones** (*“ekklessia”*) and holiness demands being “set apart”. We as believers that make up the church are called to be *“children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...”* (Phil. 2:15b). When we act like the world, or desire to be LIKE the world, we veil the light and lose the opportunity to accomplish our mission of making disciples, not to mention ending up in misery like Israel did when they got what they wanted
- **Stubbornness displays God’s patience, grace, and long-suffering toward His own** - Here is what we’ll see in the chapters ahead: God indeed gives Israel a king *like the other nations*, and each of his warnings came true ----- **YET** ----- He still used this request to ultimately accomplish His will of bringing an everlasting monarchy from which the **Messiah Jesus would come to pay for the sin of those who asked for the wrong thing selfishly!!!** That is grace, folks! God may give us over to our request to refine us, but it always for our ultimate good. He wants us to come to Him and commit ourselves to Him completely, which leads to our greatest joy. He wants us to be distinctly different than the world around us, since the world around us has been **blinded by their sin and our enemy and is trying to find happiness through selfishness, which is impossible.**

So what is God revealing in your heart and mind? Are your requests only selfish and temporal? Do you not request at all, thinking you don’t need God? We are reminded to return to God with all our heart, to put away idols, and direct our heart to serve and obey Him. He is patient and gracious, but calls us clearly to turn from our stubbornness and pursue Him alone. We do this in reality, truthfulness, and honesty, not faking a response or putting on a good face, but letting the work of Christ and the freshness of forgiveness bring us back to Him, our Lord, Savior, and King.