

Being Just Like the World: The Tragedy of God Giving Us What We Want 1 Samuel 8:10-22

*“NO! But there shall be a king over us, **that we also may be like all the nations...!**”*

Introduction: On a morning that we recognize the importance of our teachers and the education of our children, it is appropriate to think about how the thinking of our world has changed around us concerning the subject. There has been a vast shift in what defines success in literature published in the US since 1776:

*“Almost all the literature in the first 150 years or so focused on what could be called the **Character ethic** as the foundation for success --- things like integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty, and the Golden Rule.... But shortly after WWI, the basic view of success shifted from the **Character ethic** to what we might call the **Personality Ethic**. Success became more a function of personality, of public image, of attitudes and behaviors, skills and techniques, that lubricate the processes of human interaction...The basic thrust was quick-fix influence techniques, power strategies, communication skills, and positive attitudes.”¹*

Up until the end of the nineteenth century, the most important class in an American student's college/university career was **moral philosophy**, or what is called **ethics**, which means people recognized there were absolutes in terms of right and wrong. Most university presidents would teach this last class themselves, knowing the importance of sending out adults who had a clear understanding of a robust morality. **James Monroe**, our 5th President, said about these classes, *“The question to be asked at the end of an educational step is NOT, ‘What has the student learned?’, but ‘What has the student BECOME?’* Writing on this change, Gary Gilley cited *“Today, things are different. We live in a society that increasingly drifts toward the form rather than the substance, which embraces the superficial, lives to play, will pay almost any amount of money to be amused, and prizes fun as the highest pursuit of life. Conviction has been replaced by the thrill and few seem to notice.”²*

Why is it important to see this shift in education? Because it explains the shifts of thought in our culture and also illustrates how **churches** have tried, with often good intentions, to continue to reach the world around them. The problem comes when the church merely mirrors the culture instead of standing distinctly apart from it. It often goes like this: *the culture around wants to be entertained, have more fun, does not like being told they are sinful/or feel condemned, have shifting ethics in terms of sexual immorality, and expectations of what is in it for them, so we need to meet them where they are and offer a church that feels comfortable, non-threatening, and familiar.* I think there is good **intentions** here, and we would ALL say we want to reach the lost, but **how** we go about this matters greatly. The church, meaning individual families who make up a local assembly of called out believers of Jesus Christ, is the Household of God, the pillar and buttress of truth (1 Tim. 3:15), where sons and daughters are equipped and trained to be workers in the harvest (Luke 10:2; Eph. 4:11), calling sinners to repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47). The church is a place of **full commitment**, since believers now understand that Jesus is LORD of all through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). It is a people set apart to

¹ Steven Covey, “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”, p. 18-19. (This is NOT an endorsement of the book as a whole, but this was an interesting observation!

² Gary Gilley, “This Little Church Went to the Market”, p. 31.

worship God completely and to walk in holiness. This is not unclear, but it gets muddled in the waters of cultural trends.

What does this have to do with Israel in 1 Samuel 8? Israel continually struggled with their desires and commitments, wavering in their whole-hearted **devotion TO God** and their **desire to BE like all other nations around**. These are both issues we struggle with today, as individuals, families, and even churches. The goal is to see this struggle from Israel and learn from it, avoiding the destructive consequences and living to the glory of God.

PRESENT PROBLEM (1-3)

Following the positive, healthy, God honoring leadership of Samuel, there was no clear successor and it left the people of Israel without a clear future leader.

REVEALING REQUEST (4-6)

The *elders* seemingly asked for a Biblically informed request, but their motives were idolatrous. They wanted a king, not a priest (like Eli and Samuel) or a Judge (like the time of Judges). But the reason they wanted a king was so they could walk by sight, to have a king who looked good in armor, who could fight their battles, and lead them, ***so that they could BE LIKE EVERY OTHER NATION around them.***

Why do we drift toward being like the world around us? What is it about our sinful condition that longs to be like those around us?

- **At a cursory, external, observable level, it seems like the way of self-indulgence is more pleasurable than following the Lord** – When Asaph looked around at the wicked around him thriving, he said *“in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.”* (Psalm 73:13). He was like a young person looking at social media and comparing themselves to others, or a young mom looking at other moms smiling, free, and in a perfect marriage and wondering what happened to her? But Psalm 73 reminds us that it *only LOOKS that way*, since coming into worship gained perspective and discernment about reality and their end result (Psalm 73:17).
- **We misunderstand our sojourn on this earth** – Jesus never promised comfort and ease on this earth, but did promise to prepare a place for us IN THE FUTURE (John 14:2). When we try to gain now what is only promised in the future, we will long to be like the world around us.
- **We walk by sight, not by faith** – *Faith is hard*. It requires daily pursuit, consistent yielding, and constant vigilance to not be swayed by the world. Those who neglect the Word, prayer, fellowship, and teaching are prone to desire the world more than Christ.
- **When we walk in the flesh, not in the Spirit** – When we walk in the flesh, we desire and do the deeds of the flesh. Worldly living comes out of worldly thinking, which come out of worldly desire. We must fight worldly action at the level of our heart and our mind.

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
- They were NOT looking to God alone for help but *prescribing* to Him what form that help should take

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
- **Psalm 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** – Israel was called by God to be holy and set apart, not only to **worship Him alone, but to be a light to the nations around.** They were to be different, categorically unlike the nations around them in their *thinking, behavior, goals, and methods.* The LORD is a consuming fire, a jealous God (Deut. 4:24), who demands that we be different, set apart, holy, because He Himself is holy (Lev. 19:2). Not only was that an act of worship, but this separation from the nations allowed Israel to **be a light TO the nations around:**

*"I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, **a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.**" (Isa. 42:6)*

*"I will make you as a **light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**"*
(Isa. 49:6; Ps. 98:3; Acts 13:47)

Israel was to be set apart to shine brightly to the nations around to show the salvation of God to all. And **of course**, there was conflict. Of course the nations around hated them, just like people today. Jesus said that if the world hates us, it's because they hated Him first (John 15:18-19). In fact, we should be cautious if the world around ONLY speaks well of us (Luke 6:26). We are called to be a **light to world, a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden** (Matt. 5:14), to live blameless and innocent lives without complaint so that we can shine brightly in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation (Phil. 2:15). We do this by not being **conformed to it** (Rom. 12:1-2), not **loving it** (1 John 2:15-17), and not **being friends with it** (James 4:4). **WHY?** Because Jesus came into the world to save sinners like us (1 Tim. 1:15), to reconcile the world to Himself through us (2 Cor. 5:19), because of His great love for the people in the world (John 3:16). So we are called to be **distinct, different, and holy**, so that God will be glorified and that we can reach the nations around.

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. The church is a group of **called out ones** ("*ekklesia*") and holiness demands being "set apart". 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.

Neil Postman, a non-Christian writer who predicted much of what we see today in our culture, wrote in his book *“Amusing Ourselves to Death”* in 1985, *“Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether...there is no doubt, in other words, that religions can be made entertaining. The question is, by doing so, we destroy it.”*

We are called to be distinct, to be different, so that we can shine brightly and offer the good news of salvation to others, not a more fun, entertaining, me-focused life. This requires us to be serious, dependent, and hopeful, yielding ourselves continually to God’s will, and seeking His glory, and not our own. Life is not about us, but about God, others, and the gospel. May God give us what He wants and what He wills, not what we want in our selfish desires.