

Thine is the Kingdom
Week 1: Thy Kingdom Come
1 Samuel 8

Good morning. A lot has happened since we gathered here for worship last week. I know all of us were fixed on the polls Tuesday night, wondering what the results would be. I, for one, was pleasantly surprised by the outcome. It was so great to see (show picture 1) IU Football ranked 8th in the nation and in the College Football Playoffs!

There are still some notable schools (show picture 2) above of us...but, look at who we're ahead of...(show picture 3).

Those polls came out Tuesday night, but I guess there was another pretty big poll on Tuesday that some of us were maybe paying a little more attention to. This was the first presidential election that our girls have been old enough to know what's going on. And not just know about it, but care about it. We had some fascinating conversations with them leading up to the election and we sat on the couch as a family Tuesday night and watched as the results came in.

And, it was really interesting processing it all with them. Hearing their questions. Explaining what democracy is and what it all means. Talking through the different issues on the table. And, there were times in those conversations when we felt confident and helpful, and there were times we felt a little more like this...(show Progressive video)

Anyone else sometimes feel that way when talking about these things? But, I knew we were at least doing *something* right when last Sunday evening, Norah said, "Why do we even need a president? Why can't we just trust God to lead us instead of all of these crazy people?!"

It's a good question, right? Why *can't* we just trust God instead of all these crazy people? We could spend hours unpacking the reasons why humanity struggles with this, but I think that Norah's question tapped into something that's true about us. There's this universal desire inside of all of us for a leader who will rescue us from our troubles, save us from our circumstances, and protect us from our enemies. We want a leader that we can look to who will give us these things.

I think it's why, when Jesus teaches us how to pray in Matthew 6, he starts it like this...(READ Matthew 6:9b-10)

Jesus knows that we have a tendency to put our trust in people and to look to them for what we can only receive from God. That we will look horizontally for what we can only find vertically. So Jesus wants us to lift our gaze from the little-k kingdoms around us and focus on the eternal, BIG-K Kingdom of God. To put all of our hope and trust in Him to provide a sense of security and peace in our lives.

And some late Greek manuscripts, and maybe a version of the Bible you grew up on, say that Jesus ended his prayer like this...**“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”** Jesus is saying that the Kingdom...all rule and reign, all power and authority and glory...it all belongs to God. It's His.

But as humans, we want to take it from Him and give it to someone else. And this desire is magnified when the world around us feels as chaotic as it does right now. We see all of these things playing out in front of us and we feel like WE have to do something, or appoint someone, to fix it

That's the story of the people in our text today; 1 Samuel 8. We often think that Scripture is ancient and unrelatable, but I have a feeling that if we were plucked from 2024 and taken back about 3,000 years to when this was happening, it would all feel pretty familiar to us.

Israel is a nation in chaos and inner conflict. There's a fragmented sense of identity, which leads to tribalism. They were polarized by their opinions on justice and ethics. There were countless voices competing for influence and it all led to confusion rather than clarity. In many ways, Israel was a nation divided. They were at odds with one another. The end of the book of Judges puts it like this... **“In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 21:25).**

To add to this chaos, the closest thing that Israel had to a leader is a judge and prophet named Samuel. Samuel was getting up there in age and started making decisions that left people scratching their heads. He appointed his kids to leadership positions they had no business being in. 1 Samuel 8:3 says this about his sons, **“They were out for what they could get for themselves, taking bribes, corrupting justice” (1 Samuel 8:3, MSG).**

It all paints a pretty bleak...and familiar...picture, right?

And this state of confusion and instability stirs something in the Israelites that it stirs inside of us. They started longing for security and direction and unity. And the leaders of the tribes of Israel go to Samuel and we read this in 1 Samuel 8:5...**(READ vs. 5-7)**

You remember what Jesus prayed? **“For THINE is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.”** All rule and reign, all power and authority, it belongs to the Lord. It's His. But, the Israelites are looking around at the state of their nation saying, **“We don't think we can trust Him with the job anymore.”** It's why God tells Samuel, **“No, they're not rejecting you, they're rejecting me as their King.”**

The Israelites see all the chaos and uncertainty around them and it makes them lose their faith in the sovereignty of God. Their desire for their nation and lives didn't line up with their reality. And when there's a gap between what we expect and what we experience, we typically go looking for someone to blame. We saw some of that this week. And instead of

pointing the finger to themselves and their own sinful hearts, they pointed a collective finger at God.

But the reason they were in this position to begin with is because they had been rejecting the very God they were now blaming! Everyone was doing as they saw fit. That's why they were such a mess. They had rejected God and were doing things their own way. And instead of turning back to the Lord, they just turn their backs on Him, and they went looking for a person who could solve all their problems.

But, you know this from your life as much as I know it from mine...when we try to do things our own way, we typically take a bad situation and make it worse.

I read a story this week about a lady named Lexi Hensler. She's a beauty product influencer who got herself into a little bit of trouble trying to take matters into her own hands. She dyed her hair red, which made her dark eyebrows really stand out, so she decided to lighten them up a little bit by using bleach??? The results didn't quite turn out the way she wanted them to...(show image 4 and leave up). This is why you should never trust an "influencer."

To make it worse, instead of going to the store looking like this to get something to fix it, she took the red dye she used on her hair and ended up with this...(show image 5)

Now, I've never overcorrected the color of my eyebrows, but I have made a bad situation worse by taking it into my own hands. And I'm guessing you have to. It's what happens when we try to do things our own way, *especially when the other way is the Lord's way.*

The Israelites took God's rule and reign from Him and tried to give it to someone else. And when you read through the rest of the Old Testament, you see that it didn't work out very well for them. With a few exceptions, everything went from bad to worse. And I think we see our story in their story.

When we're faced with a crisis, or a sense of instability, we instinctively look for someone who will save us. There's something inside of us that wants a powerful figure to put things right, to solve our problems and fix the things that feel broken in our lives and in our world.

The problem is, when we look to people who are flawed, just like we are, to rescue us, we will *always* find ourselves worse off than when we began. Because here's the thing...nobody can fully satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts. They will only demand more from us and ultimately let us down.

And hear me, I believe that our desire for someone who will put things right and fix the broken pieces of our lives and in our world is **good**. It's a good desire, it's just been a little misguided. And in the chaos and confusion of our lives, we've questioned whether or not God can be trusted. We've taken his rule and reign, His power and authority, out of His hands and we've tried to give it to someone else we think will fix the things that feel broken.

We've given it to kings and presidents over the years, but we've also given it to other people and things. We all tend to look horizontally for what we can only find vertically. And so:

- We attach our identity to the respect of another person. If they think well of us then we matter. We give them that kind of rule and reign over us when it belongs to the Lord.
- We draw a sense of self-worth from our physical appearance and allow it to control us.
- We attach our meaning and purpose to our achievements. Our identity to our education.
- We ask our spouses to make us happy and whole.
- We look to food or drinks or substances or sex to satisfy us.
- We ask our loved ones to heal our wounds.

When we turn God's rule and reign in our lives over to these things, we place a weight on them that will crush them and disappoint us. We take a bad situation and make it worse.

I think this desire in us for someone who will put things right and fix the broken pieces of our lives is meant to point us to Jesus. It's meant to point us to a GREATER King and Kingdom, whose reign is eternal and who will never let us down. A Kingdom that is not bound by borders or politics or election cycles, but is eternal and based on God's justice, and mercy, and love.

This is the Kingdom that Jesus came to proclaim. This is the Kingdom that He tells us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come." This is the Kingdom that we are citizens of when we put our faith in Jesus. And as citizens of this Kingdom, we can find all of our identity and purpose and meaning and value and satisfaction and love...we find everything our hearts truly desire in our One, true King, Jesus.

And, as citizens of God's Kingdom, we are called to live differently. We don't get consumed by the cares and concerns of this world, but we also don't just sit on the sidelines. We become instruments of God's love and care in our world. We come alongside of others who are feeling the chaos and uncertainty of this world and we shine the light of God's love and grace into their lives.

And that's exactly what our Season of Care (let video loop until I share the website) is all about. This time of year provides us with so many opportunities to live out the values of God's Kingdom that we see in the life of Jesus. Things like compassion, love, generosity. We get to demonstrate these values by serving those in need.

Whether it's through Operation Christmas Child, ringing a bell for Salvation Army, adopting an Angel Tree family, or simply showing kindness to our neighbors, this is how we can be

the answer to Jesus' prayer, "Thy Kingdom come." We get to bring God's Kingdom just a little closer to earth through the way we love others.

And so, we invite you to be a part of one of these ways of giving back and living like Jesus. You can go to socc.org/seasonofcare for more information on how to get involved.

And, one of the most tangible ways we live out the values of God's Kingdom is through our generosity. So, in this season of care, we also want to focus on giving, not out of obligation, but out of gratitude. And so part of our Season of Care also includes our Gratitude Offering, which is a chance for us to express our thankfulness for everything that God has done in our church and beyond.

And He is doing A LOT! This is one of the most exciting seasons of ministry I've ever been a part of. This Fall:

- We've seen 37 people surrender their life to Jesus through baptism. And what I love is that 75% of them were baptized by the friend or family member who led them to Jesus and will continue to walk with them.
- We've had over 80 first-time guests who have reached out to connect with us. Many of them have attended our Discover Sherwood Oaks class and taken their next step.
- 784 people who are actively serving in a ministry.
- We have over 800 people connected in a group that meets through the week.

We have seen a drastic increase in ministry from this time last year. But, to pull back the curtain just a little bit, we're also experiencing a drastic decrease in our offering. We are currently about \$320,000 behind in our giving versus our budget. So, about 20% behind.

And I get it. These are uncertain times. There was a study done a while back that tracked charitable giving to churches and non-profits going all the way back to before World War 1. What they found over the course of 100+ years of data is that when times were good, people gave generously. When times were bad, but predicably bad (like, you could point to a reason for why they were bad), people still gave generously. But, when times were uncertain, people held back and charitable donations, across the board, dropped.

We're definitely in uncertain times. Our family feels it just like yours and so does our Church family. And, our staff has responded to make sure that our spending doesn't outpace our giving, but like all of us, bills come due and expenses pop up and we want to make sure that ministry continues.

So, our Gratitude Offering this year is going to go towards catching us up. And we're going to tithe the first 10% off of it to go towards one of our local or global partners, but 90% of it is going to help shore us up financially as we move into 2025.

And I know that MY tendency, talking about me here, my tendency is to take God's rule and reign out of His hands and give it over to our finances. I am tempted to look to them for security and confidence and hope...things I can only truly find in the Lord.

And so, to fight that, during this uncertain time when the temptation is to hold back, Amber and I have committed to increasing our giving to the church between now and the end of the year. We don't want our finances to rule and reign in our life and the only thing that has the power to break that is generosity. Generosity takes the power away from money and gives it back to God. It puts Him in His rightful place in our hearts.

And we're not the only ones doing this. Our executive staff and elders have all committed to increasing their giving between now and the end of the year, and we invite you to consider joining us. Or, if you don't currently give to Sherwood Oaks, but are finding a church home here, to consider starting to give for the first time.

Your giving, whether it's through the Gratitude Offering or weekly offering moment, it helps us not just meet a budget and keep the lights on; it allows us to continue the work of ministry in our community and around the world. We want you to experience freedom from the power and control of money and find the joy of partnering with God in generosity to bring His Kingdom to earth.

So, as you consider how you will give during this Season of Care, with your time, your talent, your treasure, or all of the above, our hope is that it won't be out of obligation, but from a desire to evaluate your heart and ask the Lord to reveal any ways you are looking horizontally for what you can only find vertically. If there's anyone or anything that has rule and reign over you.

And as we pray, "Thy Kingdom come," we will lift our gaze to the Lord and allow Him to take His rightful place in our life. For THINE is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

As I reflected on our One, true King this week, I was reminded that Jesus did not come to rule over us. He came to serve and give His life for us. While earthly authority often takes, King Jesus gave everything, even His own life, to rescue us and invite us into His eternal Kingdom.

As we come to our response time...

Communion: Let this be a moment to recommit ourselves to our King. To confess anything or anyone we have handed His rule and reign over to and give it back to the only one who lived, died, and lives again to set us free.

Invitation: If you're here today longing for something more, for a leader who can truly save and transform your life, Jesus is inviting you to follow Him. He's inviting you to leave behind the kingdoms of this world and to enter into His Kingdom. He's inviting you into a relationship with Him that will never end.

Maybe your next step today is baptism, this beautiful picture of saying, "I belong to Jesus and He is my King." If you're ready to take that step, we're ready to come alongside you.