

1 Samuel 8 - Settling for Worldly Leadership

We come to a very famous - or infamous - passage in the Bible. It's the passage where Israel wants a king because they want to be like all the other nations around them. Most of us are familiar with this passage because it is through this uprising that Israel gets not only a failure of a king in the person of Saul, but they also later get king David.

And it's easy to shake our heads at Israel. Looking back it seems so obvious that they are being worldly. They want what the world has. They are rejecting God's way. But if we're honest, as Christians, we are guilty of the very same thing more often than we'd like to admit.

The real issue that's going on here is that God's people often tackle legitimate problems with worldly solutions. In fact, if you wanted to summarize this whole section, that would be it. God's people often tackle legitimate problems with worldly solutions.

Specifically in our chapter we see that with leadership. Israel sees that Samuel is old, that he will eventually die, and they will be left with corrupt leaders. And rather than going about the hard business of raising up godly, skilled leaders, Israel looks to the world for cues on how to make the transition after Samuel.

This is often the case with the people of God. They don't plan for leadership succession. So when they are forced into the situation they often make foolish choices.

This might sound a little odd to you, but Andy and I are already creating the process by which we bring on other elders and even pastors. We want to establish a succession plan for when we are no longer here. We are hammering out what questions we would want to ask potential elders about their spiritual lives. We are thinking and praying about the process by which we would bring them on as elders to maximize unity as well as faithfulness at RBC for the next 50, 100, 200 years or however long until the Lord returns.

You say, that seems pretty soon. We haven't even been a church for a year. But realistically now is the time to fine tune that plan. I plan to be here for 35-40 years but that doesn't mean we don't plan for the future. The apostle Paul wasted no time in seeking and training godly men to lead churches. Timothy wasted no time in seeking and training godly men to pastor churches. The Lord Jesus, almost immediately after he was baptized, began training the apostles for the ministry. Think about that: I'm older than Jesus was when he died for our sins. Jesus knew time was short. On the one hand, he preached to the masses, on the other hand he raised up leaders. That was his 2-fold ministry.

By the way this has been done very poorly since the very beginning of the church. Whether people tried to purchase the office of elder, or the Catholic system of voting on a Pope, or people rallying behind a particularly influential leader - this often gets done very poorly.

And today we see that with all kinds of worldly solutions. People think pastors should be business men. The church takes in money, sends out money, so what we need is a business man to lead us. Wrong. The church is never likened to a business. And while it's nice to have pastors who know a little about business and budgeting and those things, that's not his primary role.

Maybe an elder is a marketer of the church. After all, we are presenting Jesus to people. He should know how to communicate to the masses in a way that connects with them and relate to them. Maybe they should be savvy with social media, and funny, and maybe even a tad gimmicky. That's not it either, is it? While an elder's job is to communicate truth, most of the gospel is inherently repulsive to the unregenerate mind. So what a pastor needs to do is be faithful to stick to the message of the gospel no matter the response.

There are other ways churches or even ministries look to the world when it comes to passing the baton of leadership. I'm sure we could all think of a few examples.

We recognize the dangers of all these traps. And we recognize how easy it would be to simply take notes from the world and raise someone up who would be an obvious choice in a worldly estimation. But we dare not do that.

Tim spoke to true qualifications of elders several weeks ago from Titus 1. Those are qualifications that we cannot compromise on just because the world values other traits more. Raising up godly leaders is hard, time consuming, and sadly it's something that most churches put off. Rather, we have to always be proactive to look for and train leaders.

This morning I want to look at several red flags when it comes to passing the baton of leadership. These are things we need to be on guard against.

1) First of all, Israel had put off finding a leader to replace Samuel. **Read 8:1-3**

We don't know how much time has passed from chapter 7 to chapter 8. It could be as many as 35 or 40 years. Samuel has lived long enough to have two sons who are old enough to fill the position of judge. So they would probably be in their mid 30s. But those sons are not like Samuel.

If you remember from earlier in the book, we've seen this pattern before, haven't we? The judge gets older and their sons are a plague on the people. We saw it back in chapter 2 with Eli the priest and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Eli's sons were wicked, he knew it, and yet did nothing about it. In the end Eli and his sons were killed as an act of God to bring justice to their wickedness.

That wasn't the only time that had happened. You remember Gideon? He was the guy who God raised up in the book of Judges to deliver Israel from the Midianites. And he defeated the Midianites with just 300 men because God was with him. Well, he ended up having 71 sons - that doesn't include daughters. And one of his sons, Abimelech, tried to take over all of Israel by slaughtering his other brothers. He did this with popular support of the people. He managed to kill 69 of them in an effort to take over control of Israel. Eventually he was killed when a woman up in a tower dropped a millstone on his head. She put a humiliating end to his bloodthirsty quest for power.

What kept happening in Israel was a leadership vacuum. Ever since Moses and Joshua there was really no **one** outstanding leader that unified the country. There were judges who would occasionally come along and help deliver the people out of trouble, but there was no one leader that gave the people a sense of togetherness and led them to the Lord. In fact, you read in the book of Judges 4 times that it says "In those days there was no king in Israel (**Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1, 21:25**)." It's almost as though there was a glaring lack of leadership. And in 2 of those verses the very next thing that it says is that everyone did what? What was right in their own eyes. There is a connection between a lack of leadership and national sinfulness.

And furthermore whenever there was someone who rose to a position of any kind of leadership, there was never any succession for leadership.

Now, God had originally designed Israel to be able operate without a king or even a strong leader. He would raise up prophets, he would raise up priests to fill those leadership positions. But for the most part, God had designed the Israel to be governed by the local heads of each tribe. The elders of the tribe of Asher could govern Asher. The elders of the tribe of Gad could govern Gad. Local government would be enough so long as people were holy and followed the Lord, he would provide national protection from enemies and bless his people. Well, you know how that turned out.

The people were continually wicked and so God continually sent in outside nations to judge them. They'd cry out to God, he'd raise up a judge, they'd be good for a little while, and they'd fall into sinfulness again. This was a real problem in Israel.

Here, we're a little bit torn. We like Samuel. He's a good guy, he's is a prophet of God, and he has served Israel well. In chapter 7 he called the entire nation to repentance and it seems as though they listened to him and did repent. He is viewed in high regard by all of Israel. But many years have passed, and now his sons have gone the way of Eli's sons. And the people are once again concerned about the quality of leadership that will be left when he is gone.

The people assume that unless something happens, Samuel's sons will be left in charge. And they don't want that. There is no legitimate succession plan happening. They had put this off. I mean, Samuel wasn't going to be around forever. But putting off leadership is always a recipe for disaster.

The 2nd issue here was that the people tried to fix the looming crisis of leadership with a worldly solution.

Read 4-5

So the sons of Samuel are wicked, the people know this. But their proposed solution is all wrong. Their solution isn't to go back to their clan leaders and submit to them. Their solution isn't to pursue holiness and let the Lord fight for them as had done time after time throughout their history.

No, their solution is that they want Israel to look like all the other nations around them. They want a king like all the other the pagan nations. Right diagnosis, wrong solution. If someone's lawnmower breaks down the solution is not to stop watering the grass. That doesn't actually solve the underlying problem.

Israel's problem was always a holiness problem. It was that they didn't do what the Lord called them to do in the Law. And because they didn't do that, the Lord brought in enemies to destroy them.

I want to show you 2 places in the Law that address this very situation. **Turn to Deut. 17:14-20.** I just want to show you that this very situation didn't catch God by surprise. **Read**

This was written hundreds of years before the situation in Samuel. God knew that this would be the course of his people all along. But he made several stipulations. First, the king had to be a native Israelite, not a foreigner. Second, the king couldn't just hoard things, whether it be gold or horses or wives. As a professor in college said: gold, gals, and giddy-up. By the way, what did Solomon do? All 3. Third, the king made his own personal copy of the Bible - hand written - so that he would personally know all that was written in the Law so that he would be careful to do it. We actually don't have any record in the Bible that that ever happened. Actually we know that for many years, the kings didn't even know there was a book of the Law.

Fast forward to **Deut. 28.** This is a very important passage in the Law because it basically outlines what God will do if Israel obeys him and what he'll do if they disobey. There are blessings for obedience. And there are curses for disobedience. This is a pretty simple equation. Obey God and he blesses you. Disobey God and he disciplines you. **Read 1-8**

Sounds pretty good. There's no need for a national defense system, no need for a king. Why? Because is king and God will take care of the people. What if they don't obey? Well, then there's 54 verses of curses that God will reign down on them. Look at just a few. **Read 15-19, 25-29, 36-44, 52**

That's pretty sobering isn't it? Did you notice in **Vs. 36** God mentions a king? There was no king when Moses wrote this down. Moses was not a king. But as we saw, God made provision for kings in the Law. So the fact that Israel wanted a king - all on its own - was not necessarily a wrong thing. The thing that was wrong was the motivation for wanting a king. They didn't want a king because it was a legitimate governmental option that would please the Lord and for which he had made laws. They wanted it because they wanted to be like the nations around them. They wanted to look like Egypt and Assyria and Canaan. They wanted to look like the enemies of God.

But we see very clearly here that if the people were wicked, there was nothing a king could do to stop foreign invaders from coming in because those foreign invaders were sent in by who? By God.

What was it about a king that attracted people? This might be helpful for us to think about. We live in a democratic republic where we elect our officials who represent us. Our system of government was created in direct response to the wickedness of a monarchy, of a king. Which sort of begs the question: why would anyone want a king? What is it about a monarchy that attracts people? Monarchy means rule by one. Mon: one, arche: means rule.

There are a few things that attract people to this option. First, monarchies are incredibly efficient. They get things done speedily. There's very little deliberation, very little red tape. What the king says happens immediately. And if you have a good king, a kind ruler, most of what he accomplishes is good. The downfall is the old saying that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Not a lot of good kings.

There's also a sense of national unity with a king. To some extent the king is the chief citizen. He is someone to rally around, the figure head for the country.

Think of sports teams. A couple of years ago when the Seahawks were in the playoffs I was at Costco and watching some of the game on one of their jumbo TVs. Me and about 20 other guys. And I didn't know these guys from anyone but we were all rallied and united around this team moving a ball 300 feet down a grassy field. When we put it that way it sounds silly. But we like being united around a common cause or person or team. A king provided that. They were the figurehead for the country, the leader whom the people united around.

Here's the other thing a king provided and I think this is key: a monarchy - a king - meant that Israel would have lasting leadership. Who becomes king when the king dies? His oldest son. And who becomes king when he dies? His oldest son. And so forth and so on.

What was Israel's problem throughout the time of the judges and even by the time Samuel is old? They never had a plan for how to pass the baton of leadership. They keep lacking a someone who was qualified to judge them. So they have to keep going through this cycle time and time again.

Getting a king was hitting the easy button. They wouldn't have to think about who would protect them. They wouldn't have to keep their leadership accountable - they couldn't. They wouldn't have to worry about being holy to secure God's provision.

They would just always have a king to watch out for them. And this was ultimately their downfall. Think about the irony here. They don't want Samuel's sons to rule over them because Samuel's sons are not righteous like Samuel. So they want a king. What happens when the king's sons aren't righteous? You know what happens when the king's sons are not righteous? Just read the rest of the history of Israel. Corrupt king after corrupt king.

And that should seem pretty obvious. There is nothing about genetics - our family lineage - that makes a person more or less qualified to lead. There's nothing about a family name that lends someone to righteousness. But the people don't see their own bad logic. Instead they press all the more.

Look back at 1 Sam. 8 and see the Lord's evaluation. **Read 6-9**

So maybe at first glance it seems like an odd connection that Israel asking for a king is a rejection of God. But both Samuel and God make the connection instantly. It displeases Samuel. Why? For all the reasons we just saw. Israel is forsaking their responsibility to be holy. If they desired to be holy they wouldn't need a king. They would have a king - the Lord God - who would take care of them.

Instead they become essentially a secular society, relying on one family to sustain them and protect them.

3) There's a third red flag we see here as Israel wants this to move forward. That's that they don't listen to the warnings. **Read 10-20**

What the people wanted in a king was safety. What they didn't realize was the cost. He would take their **family** - their sons and daughters. He would take their **land** - their orchards and vineyards. He would take their **servants** - their male and female servants and even the beasts of burden by which the land was cultivated. And he would take their **freedom**. Ultimately having a king wasn't safety from foreign kings. It was enslavement to a local king.

If you've read through 1 and 2 Kings lately you know that the history of Israel's monarchy was tragic. Saul was king. That ended in tragedy. David was king. He was a good king for the most part, but he was disobedient. Solomon was blessed by God but because he added to himself gold, and wives and horses, God judged him.

And although we look on Solomon as being the height of Israel's monarchy the people were oppressed. All these warnings that Samuel gave the people were happening under Solomon's rule. And when Solomon died the kingdom of Israel was divided into 2 - you remember that? 10 tribes went to the north, 1 tribe - Judah - stayed in the south. But there were 2 kingdoms. Do you remember why the kingdom was divided? Taxes. It was this very warning that Samuel gave. The king would take and take and take until the people couldn't handle it anymore. And finally they broke.

When people who are not qualified to lead become leaders, the people always suffer. It's not the wolves that suffer under bad leadership. It's who? The sheep. It's the sheep that get slaughtered when the shepherds are bad.

And when people turn a deaf ear to warnings, tragedy almost always follows.

4) Finally, the Lord often gives people over to their sinful requests. **Read 21-22**

The people were supposed to listen to the voice of the Lord. Instead, the Lord tells Samuel to listen to the voice of the people.

Many times when leadership is bad, God's decision isn't to rescue them from their bad mistakes. It's to make them deal with the consequences of what they've chosen.

One author: This is the kind of dilemma in which Christians all too often find themselves. The ideal is not an option, because it [is not popular]...so another way has to be chosen which involves a compromise.

But the author goes on to say this: The Lord, like a master chess-player, achieves his objective despite human plans and policies that temporarily impede what he wants to do. (Baldwin, J. *G.1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 8, p. 93).

God wasn't hindered by Israel's bad leadership choice. His hands weren't tied. Because, ultimately, who came from the royal line of Judah? Jesus. Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah - it was from David's family that the Messiah came.

Our sovereign, reigning Lord has the genetic right to reign because God's people sinfully demanded a king. That doesn't excuse their sin. What it reminds us is that God is merciful and gracious to us despite our bad decisions. Despite our worldliness.

This is no excuse to compromise and settle and look to the world for guidance. But it is a reminder that when we get caught up in that God is still God. He is still on the throne. And he weaves even our worldly mistakes for his glory.

Pray