

## **Sermon 9: 1 Samuel 8: Demanding a King**

### **OUTLINE**

The desire for a king  
The burden of a king

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many people struggle to read the OT and profit from it, but you can always learn something about God, Christ and yourselves from the OT. In the text that we have before us we are confronted with the stupidity and stubbornness of our sinfulness. Last week we saw Israel on one of her best days, she was repenting and prayerful, full of faith and humility. This is the opposite side of the coin, here we see Israel in her sins as she demands a king. Various characteristics of our sins stand out to us, things that are true of all of us.

#### **The desire for a king**

Verses 1-3 give us the circumstances that lead to Israel revealing her sins, 'When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. 2 The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. 3 Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.' We are at the end of Samuel's rule, he is old and he has had a good run. But one man being good does not guarantee that his sons will follow in his footsteps. Each and every generation has to follow the Lord for themselves. We see that Samuel did what Gideon did, he made his sons rulers and judges after him. There is no biblical precedent to do this and looks more like a monarchy principle. We see that just as with Eli's sons they were corrupt, they were bribable and therefore corrupted justice for gain. This was one of the main functions of a judge and very significant. The taking of bribes is condemned throughout the scriptures, Isaiah 1:23-24, 'Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them. Therefore the Lord declares, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: "Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes.' God hates judges who receive bribes because they are supposed to uphold His good laws that have been given for the benefit of society and portray His impartial justice to the world. The corruption of justice is very serious because the rule of law has been given in common grace to all men for our good. God's provisions and goodness are prevented from reaching the people. we hate injustice not only because we love our neighbour and seek their good but love God and seek His glory through the proper administration of public justice.

So you might think to yourself, well is it such a bad thing that the elders of Israel didn't want Samuel's sons and wanted a king? V4-5, 'Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah 5 and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.'" At first you won't think that this is such a bad request, after all don't the Israelites have a legitimate excuse for wanting a new government, for the old one is corrupt? We could add to the reasonableness of this request by pointing out that the Law of Moses had provision for a king, Deut. 17:14-20, "'When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' 15 you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. 16 Only he must not acquire many horses for

himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' 17 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. "And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.' But the chapter makes very clear that there is sin involved. Not only do we see it in Samuel's disapproval but God's words as well, v6-7, 'But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "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.' V8 is very explicit, 'According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.'

So we have a case of conveniently using a legitimate excuse to camouflage our sin. We do this all the time, we appeal to things like tiredness or sickness which we may very well be but even though we can go on we use it as the excuse for not. The real reason is unwillingness not inability. We like to look at ourselves as victims who have legitimate excuses for our behaviour when in fact we are never forced to sin. There are two sins that we can identify in their various responses. Firstly in v5 we hear these key words, 'like all the nations.' Israel was to be different and deliberately so in order that God's strength would be demonstrated through their weakness. Yet it seems that they did not live by faith but by appearances and wanted all the trappings of success. They had an insecure desire to conform and be just like the nations and not stick out and have all the apparent weaknesses that living by faith in God brings. They wanted all the fleshly props for their faithlessness, they wanted to be safe in being like others who had such props. They took their eyes off of the sufficiency of God, and they forgot the successes that the chapter before had recorded for them and they wanted what other nations relied on. Secondly, we see in v20 they wanted a king to 'go out before us and fight our battles.' There is a profound mix of laziness and fear here. In chapter 12:12, we see that the Ammonites were a growing threat, and they were scared, 'And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the LORD your God was your king.' And instead of coming together as the 12 tribes to fight they wanted a government department to do all the hard work for them. Living by faith in the face of a scary threat and having to put in the hard work to be one of God's instruments was too much for them. So they hid their faithlessness, their addiction to appearances, their fear, their laziness and insecurity behind the need for a better government.

### **The burden of a king**

The scariest verse in this section is v9, 'Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.'" Imagine God giving you whatever you wanted, terrible! This reminds me of the time when Israel was wandering around in the wilderness and complained for Quail, the Lord sent it, and with it a plague to kill those who complained, Numbers 11:31-35. Psalm 106:15 reflecting on this event writes, 'he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them.' Sometimes for the purposes of chastening us God allows us to have the wrong desires we want. His permissive will which uses sin without condoning it employs sin for His good

purposes. He is not the author of the sin, but by allowing through secondary means causes us to learn how to want rightly. I believe it is part of what we are asking for when we pray, 'Lead us not into temptation.' We need to learn to not want those things that are sinful and daily we are to pray that our paths would be led away from not towards what tempts us.

Samuel is told to map out what having a king will involve. He will take those things that are most precious to you, your children whose services would normally benefit your family. V10-13, 'So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. 11 He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. 12 And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.' The king will also take precious family lands, the very best ones and give them to his servants, v14-15, 'He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. 15 He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants.' He will take your work force for his work force, v16, 'He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work.' He will take a tithe of all you earn, a tax, v17a, 'He will take the tenth of your flocks.' Things will become so bad that you will return to a type of slavery and cry out and God will not hear you, v17b-18, 'and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.'" We will see that the kingdom of Israel will be divided into two kingdoms under Rehoboam because of the demand of work and taxes under Solomon which Rehoboam would refuse to lift.

When it comes to reasons not to sin, we should obey God because He is God and He says so, and we should forsake sin because He says so. But God in His goodness not only commands but also explains some of the rationale behind His commands. Here Samuel is mapping out the consequences of their actions appealing not only to their sense of wanting God as King but even appeals to their sense of self-preservation to help them see the better path. God deliberately points out how it will hurt in the most important ways, our families, our work, our production, our very freedom, but no, we will not listen. We are too stubborn.

V19-20, 'But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." Here we see ourselves in all of our self-afflicting madness. We are mentally deranged, we do things that hurt us because they make empty promises of freedom or pleasure. Hard-heartedness, unteachability, stubbornness, stiff-necked, unyielding, recalcitrance, pride, this is what we are seeing here. This is not merely the fault of youth. Youth is merely a window into our own immaturity. Youth is a concentrated form of our sinfulness without the sophistication and clever arguments. Prov. 12:15, 'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.' Think of Isaiah 53, 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned---every one---to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.' Here we see ourselves again, every one of us a fool who refuses to listen to reason, conscience, Scripture, or advice. We are fixated on our own course following our own desires and we stray, we wound ourselves, we lead ourselves into traps, we fall over cliffs and into the lair of our enemies. And it is Christ as the good shepherd who has to rescue, has to search us out and has to pay with His life for our pig headedness. We just simply wont be told. We are those who cannot learn from others example, we are those who learn from our mistakes or those who just don't learn.

This is a sad chapter and sadly true of all of us. Samuel is told to give them the king they want, v21-22, 'And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king." Samuel then said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city.'" This chapter reminds us that there is the king we want and the King we need. There is the saviour who looks strong in the flesh, one that is acceptable to the unbelieving mind, one that does not offend or stand out, one that seems to promise success without having to work too hard. Then there is the King we need, we need God in Christ, we need one who leads us from sin and not into temptation, one who is strong beyond our foolish assessments of strength, one who saves us from ourselves not who gives us what we want, this is Christ.