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1 Samuel 8

"We Want a King Like the World"

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Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Samuel 8. We're going to continue on through our favorite book in the Bible.

These historical books are narrative written. I think I've mentioned that to you a lot, but all that means is you get stories from the LORD, and everything that He wants you to know is in it. And so your lessons are drawn from the story. What if I was standing there? What if I was going through this? What if I was faced with these things? How would I respond? What would the LORD want me to do? And so most people enjoy narrative books the most because that's kind of the way you approach them. The book of Acts is written that way. All of the historical books in the Old Testament are written that way as well. The gospels, somewhat, are written that way. The epistles are no way written that way; they're all very doctrinal. So we're going to be in these historical books for quite some time.

These two books - 1 and 2 Samuel - start with Samuel's birth. He was the last judge, maybe 1100 B.C. or so. We're going to go forward 130 years through the reign of King Saul, the life of Samuel before that, and then the reign of David - almost to the end of David's life, about 970 or so.

So tonight we're all the way at chapter 8. Let me go really quickly over what we've looked at so far, as far as timewise.

The first couple of chapters cover Samuel's birth. His mom had no children and cried every year when she went to worship there before the LORD and asked God for a child; and the answers didn't come - every year to Shiloh - three times a year for a week, no answer. And eventually she began to pray differently. "LORD, rather than a child so that I can be fulfilled, I want to give this child to You to serve You." And that really was all that the LORD was looking for. And, after many years of crying, that following year she had a child. She promised she'd bring him to the tabernacle to serve the LORD. She weaned him for three or four years and then delivered Him to the high priest, who happened to be Eli at the time; was a good priest, not a very good father. In fact, his sons created havoc in the place of worship, and it had actually turned the people away from coming to worship the LORD. They were stealing money, they were sleeping with the women, they were

throwing their weight around. It was just about as horrible as it could get. Eli didn't do anything about that, and that would eventually be his downfall.

In chapter 3, Samuel is 13 or so. God comes to speak to him in his heart for the first time. He hears God's voice. He learns to discern God's voice. He's allowed, for the first time, to respond to what the LORD tells him, and God tells him that if Eli doesn't get his act together with his family that it'll be the downfall of his ministry; there won't be anyone following him to the place of high priest, if you will. And he delivers the bad news to a man that he respected and looked up to, and yet he's just a teenager. When you get to the end of chapter 3, into the first part of chapter 4, we get the tone for the next twenty-five years: there's nothing in the narrative except to tell us that during those years God began to faithfully speak to His people again. During the time of the judges that was unusual because so often the people weren't listening. But God brought Samuel, and he laid out for them the will of God. And after twenty-five years of that - Samuel, now in his late thirties - the children of Israel, rather than responding, decided, "Well, the Philistines, who are our enemies, have been defeating us. And the reason they are winning is they have a god they can carry into battle, and we aren't carrying ours. So let's go get the ark. Let's put it on our shoulders. Let's go march out with our God, and then we should win." And instead of win, they were slaughtered; thousands of people died. The ark was stolen. Israel went home in defeat. All the years of ministry of Samuel's seem to have just gone by the wayside. He'd been faithful, but there hadn't been any repentance or any turning to the LORD.

In chapters 4 and 5, we're told of those battles, the stealing of the ark and all, and how that the LORD then in, first of all, teaching His people that He wasn't an idol, He was a living God, He now has to deal with the Philistines who looked at this ark as an idol. And so the LORD began to send sickness through all of the five (especially the five) major cities of the Philistines; and it wasn't but seven months later that the Philistines collectively voted to send this thing back to Israel - which they did - and miraculously so. God made sure that they knew that He was the LORD.

By the time we get to chapters 6 and 7, we find that the people, after years of wandering, devoted themselves again to the LORD. It was like the message of Samuel, for a little while, got through. And so He met with them. They made a new vow as a nation to the LORD. God began to deliver them from the Philistines, and the place that they had lost thousands of men in battle (years before), they

were able to return to now with God's help and find victory. And, for a time, God kept Israel safe. The Philistines didn't incur themselves into the land, and God's people lived as they should - protected by Him and overseen by His Spirit and by His work. By the time you get to the end of chapter 7 - and by the way, all you're told there is that for the next many years, the only thing that we know about is Samuel continued to do what he'd been doing for several years. He had a circuit that he would preach; he would go to every part of the nation of Israel, holding fast God's Word and holding it out to them. God continued to give them victory. And, for a time, other than that tour, we again see twenty-five years passing without any comment.

And, by the time we get to chapter 8, we find Samuel to be an old guy. So the LORD's given us little bits and pieces so we can kind of put the story together and think about how that applies to us. By the time we get to chapter 8, and you might remember in chapter 6:1 it said that "the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months;" in chapter 7:2 that "it was there twenty years" before anyone really took notice. In chapter 8:1, we will read, "When Samuel was old," and it's the word for "old." He's now in his seventies or greater. And that's where we start tonight. We're just going to look at one chapter tonight - chapter 8. It's a sad chapter, again, as we follow God's people and then God's prophet to tell them what they should and might be doing and what they should have done. And we get to see that there's always this temptation for God's people to look around and want to be more like the world rather than to please the LORD. And you find that to be so here - that there was a greater influence, at least for them, surrounding them than there is from the God that they should have (by now) been convinced of. And I guess that happens to us, too. We know what God wants, but we'd like to be like everyone else. And yet we're not; God's called us out of the world. Right? We belong to Him. So the lesson is pretty straightforward: "We want a king just like the world. We want to be just like the world. We want to function just like the world." When they had every advantage in the world, every battle that they fought that they won, that's recorded, was because the LORD was with them. Every battle that they lost, that's recorded, was because they went without Him. And yet now they want protection from the world rather than, "I think I'll just get a shirt that says 'I belong to the LORD.'" That, they decided not to do.

So let's start verse 1. It says this, "Now it came to pass when Samuel was old" (and, like I said, twenty-five years or so, maybe longer, pass between these two

chapters again; the explanation of what Samuel was doing is back in verse 15 of the last chapter, that he "judged Israel all the days of his life; he went from year to year on a circuit" to share God's Word) "that he made his sons judges over Israel." Verse 2, "The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice." I think the names that Samuel gives to his boys tell you his hope for them. Those are pretty godly names. Joel means "Jehovah is my God." Abijah means "Jehovah is my Father." So, no doubt, Samuel's commitment to the LORD is seen in the names that he gives to his boys. They eventually get a job in the government of Israel, if you will. They are given a work in the southerly border town of Beersheba. We've taken our groups to Beersheba a couple of times. It is in the middle of nowhere today; it's kind of down by the Gaza strip, if you will, about that far down. But, needless to say, it has a big history. Samuel did never, in his regular circuit according to the last chapter, go down that far. So he did have some representation from his boys there. And they took administrative positions in the government as judges. Unfortunately, they got positions that were too much of a temptation for them. They were quickly corrupted by their power. Their decision making was influenced by bribery and dishonest gain and perverted judgments or, if you will, payoffs for judgments. And so Samuel's boys.....this godly man who served all of his life finds that he has a couple sons that fell for the mighty dollar. They were moved by and interested in - and understand, this is the judges time, wasn't very easy to, well, I won't make an excuse for them, but let's just say there wasn't a lot of godliness in the land, as a whole. Jesus had warned, years later, that, "Be careful of covetousness; your life doesn't consist in the abundance of the things that you possess" (Luke 12:15). Solomon, himself, when he was led by the Holy Spirit, spoke to his boy in chapter 1, and he said, "Be careful of the ways of greed for gain because it'll take away the life of its owner." Chapter 1:19 of the book of Proverbs, "Be careful that your life isn't taken away from you because you are driven by greed." And so here're Samuel's boys, and they seem to be caught up. I suspect that Samuel was unaware of their sin. I can't imagine, from what we know of Samuel, that he would have tolerated it for long; he would have taken them out of that position for sure. He expected better from them. Also, as Eli was spoken to by the LORD when his boys were running wild and he didn't do anything about it, you don't hear that same word coming, if you will, from the LORD to His prophet, Samuel. So, it is always tragic when your children don't walk with the LORD. I would like to tell you that doesn't happen very often in Scripture, and I'd be lying to you. Adam had Cain, Noah had Ham, Isaac had Esau, Jacob had Reuben and

Simeon and Levi - not exactly doing well, Aaron had Abihu and Nadab, David had Absalom. You can make a whole list of fathers who did well that wanted to have their kids do well and didn't always do well. Some of them came back around; some of them did not. But let's just say by the time that Samuel is old, and the nation watches, they don't want anything to do with his kids. They loved him, but they didn't really want anything to do with them. I think as Christian parents there's much direction to be found in just raising your kids in the ways of the LORD and then hanging on to Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." I take it more than a platitude; I take it as God's promise. So, be encouraged parents if that's you in that position. I'm sure that Samuel's heart broke for his kids, especially when he heard from the congregation, the nation, that he had been wanting to serve and had been serving all of these years. But, needless to say, his sons were not doing well though, remember, Dad had given them some godly names, had great hopes for them, I'm sure spent lots of time praying for them. They weren't doing very well. But they were kind of out of sight; they were down in the South, kind of away from the centers of life, if you will, in Israel.

We read, in verse 4, "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah," (verse 17 of the last chapter - that's where he lived) "and said to him, 'Look, you are old,' " (that's not nice, but maybe true; yeah, it's not nice) " 'and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.' " A delegation of elders from Israel came to Samuel, towards the end of his life, with some requests that probably had been whispered around the nation for years. Here's their rationale: Samuel was not getting any younger, and they could depend upon him, but he wasn't going to be around for much longer; his boys certainly weren't cutting it. And if you'll jump down to verses 19 and 20 (which will be their response in a few minutes to us; it'll be maybe weeks in the context of the story), one of the things that they wanted more than anything else is they wanted to be "like all of the nations." It says, there in verse 20, "We want a king to be like the nations." They didn't want to be like God's people; they wanted to fit right in, they wanted to compete, if you will. They wanted someone to rule that would lead them into battle, someone that would replace Samuel - who had just been God's voice to them for years, really all they needed. But they didn't see it that way. Though the LORD had moved Samuel in, and for the past probably fifty years he was the voice of God to the people, the majority of the nation, as I think evidenced even by the elders here, had not really been moved very much closer to the LORD. You ever feel like your ministry's not goin' anywhere, just read Samuel's life or

Jeremiah's life or Ezekiel's life - guys that spent fifty, sixty years in ministry and seemed to have very little to show for it though they faithfully represented the LORD. I'm telling that to you because when we see Samuel upset, you can understand why he might be upset. He had literally spent his years of life on the road bringing God's Word to every place that he could get. He did it faithfully, year in and year out. And yet here comes the brain trust of the nation, the political leadership, the spiritual leadership, and they determined that their best hope for their future was not Samuel, who was going out, was not his kids. But they wanted to be updated from their archaic kind of political constitution, their divine government - where they had to hear from God all the time - and they wanted to get with the times. They were still tribal in their relationships - loosely organized, hard to get everyone on board. From a purely political standpoint, probably a good idea; from a spiritual standpoint, horrible idea. Right? This isn't at all what God wanted; He'd chosen a people, and He had proven Himself to be their God. So, "We would really like to have a king. It would put an end to tribal jealousy, it would unite the tribes, it would produce strength for the common good. Let's face it, all of the judges we've had for the last 350 years have only had power for a little while. They came and they went. There was no descendance to judgeships, so it was one person, then they were gone. There were long intervals between them. All of the enemies around us have kings. They are run like that with the exception of the Philistines. They are ruled by five guys, an oligarchy, if you will. They're the guys that make all of the decisions. If they had a king, he could judge the nation, he could provide an army, we'd be on equal footing, we'd be safer in the long run. Hey, Samuel, we'd just like to have a king like everybody else."

Now, like I said, practically and reasonably, and without spiritual insight, it seems like a great deal of political wisdom. But obviously it's not. They might have even argued that this wasn't a new idea. In fact, you will find that God had a plan for a king all along. You might remember back in Judges chapter 8, when Gideon was a guy that the LORD was using to deliver the people, that it was the people that came to Gideon in chapter 8:22-23, and they said, "We'd like you to be our king," and Gideon said, "Yeah, I don't want to rule over you nor do my sons want to rule over you. But I'll tell you what, the LORD wants to rule over you." But they hadn't really listened to that then, and they haven't been listening to it now. When the LORD chose Abraham, when Israel began as a nation (back in Genesis 17), one of the things that the LORD said to Abraham was, "I'm going to make you extremely fruitful, and I'm going to make nations come forth from you, and kings will come

forth from you as well" (verse 6). So God had an intention to give the spiritual people of God an organization that would include politically, if you will, a king and a ruler and oversight and all. Ten verses later to Abraham, as He's continuing to speak to Abraham, He said, "I'm going to bless you and your wife, and you're going to have a son; and I'm going to bless her, and she's going to be the mother of many nations; and kings of people shall be coming from her" (verse 16). So it's not new that they would ask for that. But understand these people are not walking with God, and they want to be just like the nations around them. "I want to be like they are. I don't want to be God's people. I just want to be like they were." When Jacob came to that place of rulership, and the LORD made Himself known (in Genesis 35), the LORD said to Jacob (verse 11), "I am God Almighty. You go forth and be fruitful and multiply as a nation, and a company of nations will proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body."

So God had a plan. And the nation might have argued, "Well, the LORD had a plan." But I'll guarantee you none of these folks are readin' their Bibles because they're just so far away from God's heart. If you go to the Law - Deuteronomy 17, especially - there are whole provisions in the Law for when you get a king from the LORD. "These are the spiritual qualifications you should look for in his life: things like no multiplication of horses to try to be strong without God's help, don't go back to Egypt from where you came from to get those horses, don't get married to a bunch of women, don't look to multiply gold and silver for yourself, and on and on it goes; write a copy of the law down in your own hand, read it every day, seek to live it out so that you can be God's representative to the people." I mean, they're very specific.

God had a plan. God had a choice of a king. But the people weren't being driven by that. In fact, if they were, Saul would have never qualified by those standards. They just wanted a helper, an overseer. In fact, the people, in their request (in these verses), almost verbatim quote Deuteronomy 17:14 where the LORD talks about, "When you come into the land which the LORD will give you and possess it and dwell in it, and they begin to say, 'We would like a king to rule over us like the nations all around us,' then if you're going to get a king, do these things." And they stopped at the request. So, can you see the people gathering with Samuel? He's old, he's been servin'. They're not doing much better, for the most part. His boys, he hears, aren't doing very well either. Hard to get old sometimes. "Samuel, better you make these changes now before it's too late. We don't want to deal

with your sons. They're different than you are before the LORD. What do you say, huh? Good idea, huh? What do you think?"

And we read, in verse 6, "But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' So Samuel prayed to the LORD." The word "displeased" is a very strong Hebrew word that means "to be grieved" or "to be brought to tears." To Samuel, this was not a people saying, "We want to line up with the Bible, and will God give us the king He tells us He's going to send us?" It was just the people wanting to be like the world around them. And so Samuel was angry. He did the right thing. He went, verse 6 says, and "prayed to the LORD" rather than screamed at the people. He was slow to speak and quick to hear, I guess. It would appear, from the LORD's words to Samuel, that he took all of this very personally; like he'd been out there just servin' and lovin' and presenting the LORD to the people, and they had not grabbed ahold. He felt like he hadn't done a very good job. Over fifty years, sharing the wisdom and the care of the LORD, and now it wasn't good enough to turn to God. "We want to replace the LORD with a king like the heathen nations roundabout."

"And the LORD said," in verse 7, "to Samuel, 'Heed' " (or listen) " 'the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day - with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods - so they are doing to you also." God's answer to Samuel is pretty revealing. "Don't take it personally. This is not about you. This is about Me." Not only that, but the LORD said to Samuel, "This is par for the course." In other words, "This is consistent with their history. From the day that I brought them out of Egypt, until this day, their life has always been about pursuing false gods, having false hopes, entertaining false confidences, trusting in things other than the LORD. Samuel, you're the latest casualty is all. But it is a people that we've had to deal with." And Samuel was, I think, sharing in God's grief. The LORD said the same thing. He couldn't have been happy about it. "This is always the way that they are." The desire for a king would have been good if they had viewed him as one submitted to the ultimate King of kings, LORD on high. So, instead they wanted a king to be "like," verse 20, "the other nations." But, look, they weren't like the other nations. There's a verse in Leviticus 20:26, where the LORD, through Moses, is speaking to the people, and He said, "You are holy to Me, and I've separated you from all of the people. You're Mine." That's far different than being like the world. And the LORD would say

that to us tonight - we're His people. Right? We're in His kingdom. We don't see Him yet. He's not here to rule yet. But you don't want the world. You want the King of kings to rule over your life.

These people - the nation of Israel that God chose - God's intention was to make them the light of the world, a witness for Him, a testimony to His love to let the world see the power of God who loved all men. And yet they just wanted to be "like other nations." Verse 20 will say, "We want a king that will judge us and govern us and settle our disputes and go to war with us. We just like a guy. We don't want to live by faith." They had switched from religious idolatry - which was carrying the ark into battle, thinking that somehow that was their God - to, now, political hopes. Right? Before it was religious idolatry; now it's political hope that somehow the type of government they had would make all of the difference. But here's the problem: it's not the type of government you have that makes all the difference; it's the God that you serve and the God that you trust in. So you get to Psalm 20:7, and it says, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." In other words, our confidences are different. That's what broke Samuel's heart. And the LORD said that had broken His for many years. Isaiah would say in prophecy (Isaiah 31:1), "Woe to those who go to Egypt looking for help, woe to those who rely upon their horses or chariots because they're many, or the horsemen because they're strong, but they won't look to the Holy One of Israel, and they won't seek the LORD! Woe to them." There's a lesson in there for us. We have to learn to live by faith, but it's so easy to trust in other things: in people, in promises, in the world and in success. Foolish but tempting. And I suspect the LORD's heart feels the same way about that when we are willing to do that. So, even though we've skipped twenty-five or thirty years twice in two or three chapters, Israel hasn't made much progress. They still have the same spiritual problem. Every time they called upon the LORD, He delivered them. Every time their hearts were humble, He helped them. Every time they repented of their wickedness, God spoke. I mean, just thirty years earlier - in chapter 7 - you remember they put that stone out (you were with us), the Ebenezer stone. And the word "Ebenezer" means "God has brought us this far." That was just one generation earlier. "God's brought us this far. We're gonna make it because God's with us." And now they want a king just like everyone else. How we quickly seem to prefer the visible to the invisible. Right? Rather have one in the hand than two by faith, the ones that we don't see. And faith will leave you in the minority. It's not like all the nations roundabout. Everybody wants to see and count. And contrary to all that Samuel had taught them and the example he

had set for them - living his whole life in faith - they weren't willing to do that. But we should be willing to do that. Moses was 40 years old when he came to his senses one time, and he looked around and he saw where he was living and all the advantages, and it says that "he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; because he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). Moses had an eye on more spiritual things. That's for us, isn't it? Because you look around, and you go, "Oh, man, the world seems to be fallin' apart." It's not. God's in charge. And it won't be long before He'll come for us. How much more than wealth and status and being Pharaoh's son did Moses want? And the answer was he wanted eternal riches with God's people, but it took a faith that God earmarked to get him to see it. We do the same thing today. Rather than walking with the LORD, we want to blame the system, we want to blame our boss or our spouse; anything but what it is - our less-than-devoted spiritual life.

Back in chapter 4 of this book, verse 3, the elders felt that they were defeated in battle simply because they didn't have a God with them in battle. Such a blind spot for their lives. Unfortunately we, like them, can make decisions without seeking God or His ways and then decide we're right - because we're smart - and God can't understand totally what we're goin' through. So we opt for the visible rather than the invisible. We trust in our bank account, the promise of a friend, logic would tell us rather than, "You know what the Bible says?" and I stand upon that, and I rest upon that. We can think we use the best the world has to offer for the glory of God, and we can resort to worldly ways so we can pick it and protest and demand and threaten in Jesus' name. We're gonna look a lot like the world. Or we can just really trust God to get us through this life. Look, Israel - this nation - knew God, they knew who He was, they knew what He had said, they knew what He had done, and then they got together and went, "Yeah, we've got a better plan." Bad idea. Bad idea. So, God is patient. And I love the chapter, not only because it's a lesson for me to try to trust the LORD through everything, but also a lesson in God's patience. Don't you think if you're God, at this time, you might go (Pastor Jack makes a slapping sound), "That's 400 years, I'm tired," and just kind of squash 'em like a bug? But I'm amazed at watching the LORD. People say, "Well, look how bad things have gotten. I wonder why the LORD's not back yet." And I want the LORD to come back. But He's always been patient. He lets people deny His existence and criticize His ways and question His love and reject His Word, and He doesn't strike them dead on the spot. And you would probably do differently. There's that verse in Matthew 12:36 that says, "One day the judgment of God is

coming. Every idle word that men speak will one day be brought into judgment." But not yet.

So the LORD says to Samuel, "It's not about you. It's about Me. And this is their way of life. You're just the latest casualty." So here's His advice - the LORD's - to Samuel. In verse 9, He said, " 'Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.' " So, "Go tell them that they can have what they want, but before you give them what they want, show them what it will cost them." So the following verses, beginning in verse 10 down through verse 18 or so, Samuel lays out the consequences of their choices. Right? This is the problem. And if anything else, verses 10-18 paint a pretty interesting picture, and I want you to think about this: these verses would say democracy is not the best way to go. It's the best thing we know; it's the best man has apart from God. But there's a better political system than democracy, and it's a monarchy - it's a theocracy. When the Lord comes to rule, everything'll be just fine. It'll be the only workable system of all. Our democracy, as good as it is, I mean if you ever watch the news, you know not everything works so well. I know that the church cheers Trump on continually. We like what he does, and yet we're embarrassed by his words and even more embarrassed by his actions and wouldn't want anything to do with his public behavior. But, "Hey, right on, bro." And either way - it doesn't matter, I don't care about politics - if we walk with God, we're better off. If we walk with Him. Right? Our biblical outlook should see God's oversight. He will never embarrass you. Ever. Or fail you. So, "Tell them what they're getting themselves into."

Verse 10, "So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who asked him for a king. And he said, 'This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not

hear you in that day.' " That's pretty heavy. "Come on, LORD. Lie to me if You have to." No, He tells you the truth. "There will be draft established for government. There will be conscription when it comes to agriculture. And to an army, the army will not be voluntary; it'll be at the king's discretion. You'll lose your kids and your daughters. They'll be forced to make food and support services. The king will take land from you if he wants them. He'll take your family, he'll take your servants, he'll take whatever he wants because he's going to be the king. He's not going to be interested in you. Oh, you think you're going to get served by him. Trust Me. He's going to use you for himself." That sounds political, doesn't it? Sounds political to me. "Taxing on your crops, taxing on your gains, 10% administrative cost of the king will be laid upon you, forced labor, slavery with limited freedom, 10% tax on your livestock. Pretty soon you won't be feeling like you've been cared for at all. Is that what you want? That's what you're gonna get. So give 'em what they want, but warn them what was coming their way." And He said, in verse 18, "When you've lived to regret the decision you've made to be like the other nations, and you will sooner or later, it'll be too late. I won't respond. This is what you want. I'm going to give you what you want, but it's coming with consequence." I think fairly rarely in the Bible are the consequences of a decision laid out so clearly. Oh, they're there, but not this directly. Like if you're voting, and the LORD sends you this letter, you might go, "Well, maybe I don't know." Right?

Instead the people say, in verse 19 (and maybe the word is), "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, 'No, but we will have a king over us, 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.'" Like a shark that closes his eyes while charging in with his mouth, the people close their eyes, shut their ears to God's warning. Sure they were right and He was wrong. Isn't that something?! "God, You don't know what You're talkin' about. It's all doom and gloom with Your prophet here. That's not all going to happen to us." But you see, that's how sin works. It lies to you. Knowing the consequences of their decision was not enough to stop them. If it was, things could have been different. And I would say the same thing to us: if you know the consequences of your action, and you believe it nobody's smokin' today. You might have smoked fifty years ago when nobody knew better, but you pretty well know better now. No one's doin' cocaine. You shouldn't. Yet, in a spiritual sense, only God can deliver you from the blindness of sin's deception. We read this, and we think, "Not a big surprise, the folks who just bought into this so quickly." But what is that lesson for us, then? Because it's the

narrative, we've got to put ourselves in their shoes. What should we be learning? How should we be responding? What should we do with the information? They say, in verse 20, "Well, we're going to take our chances." God's Word falls on deaf ears, and Samuel is grieved again. Why? Because he sees where they're headed, and he cares about them.

So he goes back to tell the LORD what has happened. Verse 21, "And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. So the LORD said to Samuel, 'Heed their voice, and make them a king.' And Samuel said to the men of Israel, 'Every man go to his city.' " Go home. "God, they won't listen to me. God, they don't seem to care. I laid it all out like You told me, but nothing seems to matter to them but what they want." And the LORD said, "Fine. Then give them what they want." The desire to be like the world never pleases the LORD when it's found in His people. Ever. You'll never please God by wanting to be like the world. God brought you out of the world. Right? He delivered you from it. Though He may give you what you want, you should know that it isn't always life to get what you want. You should want what He wants for you. Big difference. In fact, a completely different story.

Here's what is written in the Psalms about this time. It says (Psalm 106:10-15), "He saved them from the hand of those who hated them, and He redeemed them from the hands of the enemy." And about the parting of the Red Sea, "The waters covered their enemies; not one of them was left. They believed His words; they sang His praises. But they soon forgot His works; they didn't wait for His counsel, they lusted exceedingly in the desert, and tested God in the wilderness. He gave them their request, sent leanness into their soul." You don't always want to get what you want. I want to really be careful and pray, "Lord, give me what You want." Because I have a lot of stuff I'd like to have or would like to do, but I think the angel sits at the desk with a check marker. No, no, no. But that's good for me. It's good for me. When Jeremiah was speaking to the LORD about the same thing - the people didn't really want to do what God said - the LORD said to Jeremiah, "You know, Jeremiah, the people have committed two great evils - they've forsaken Me, and I'm the fountain of living waters; and instead, they have hewn out for themselves cisterns that are broken, and they can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). In other words, "They made the wrong choice. I have life to give them. They chose to go after some broken bottle that isn't going to be able to hold any life at all." Same thing here. Right? And same thing can happen to us, that God would help us. Look, nobody is forced by God to take His yoke. If you'd rather have a

heavier one, be much obliged. "My yoke is easy, My burden is light," He said (Matthew 11:30). But these folks are about to strap on something they can't carry.

So God was angry with His people, as Samuel was as well, but He was going to do whatever it took to help them to understand that this wasn't going to work. There's a Scripture in Hosea 13:11 that says, "I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath." So God was going to give them what they wanted, but He was angry, and He was going to be sure that they learned this wasn't going to work out. It's kind of like when they complained in the desert, there in Numbers 11, about they hadn't had meat to eat, and the LORD brought all the quail in, and they dove on it like they hadn't eaten in years. And it said (verse 33), "While the meat was still between their teeth, before they'd even chewed it, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and a great plague came." A lot of people died shovin' their food in their mouths. "Oh, finally got meat!" Yeah, and you died. God'll give you what you want sometimes....only to find out you didn't want that at all. Pretty good evidence of that in this chapter. Laid out so clearly for literally half the chapter, "This is what you're gonna get. This is what you want. This is what you're looking forward to." It kind of reminds me of the prodigal son who was just sure his way of life would work. "Give me my inheritance." And the father said, "You know, this is not going to work out." "Oh, you don't know what you're talkin' about, old guy," and off he went partying it up. Spring break every day for a year. Didn't listen to the pleadings of his father or the warnings of his father, who gave those warnings to him in love. So he learned the hard way. He came home when he decided eating slop with the pigs was really not his idea of a good time. Didn't think his dad would love him as a son again, hoped he could get a job as a servant, found out God has greater love than that. But that was the same driving force behind it.

And I think that's one of our big problems, too. We think we know better. Don't we? We think we know better than God. But we don't. We don't. God will permit foolish demands because headstrong people need to learn by experience. And, by the way, one of the best teachers in the book - experience. "Hey, you shouldn't hit yourself in the head with a hammer." "I know. I did that." (Laughing) "Don't stick your hand in the" "Well, I did that." Idiots. Wouldn't you rather just read it than experience it? I don't know. The tuition for learning by experience is very high. Sometimes you can't afford the tuition. But one of the best ways to discuss men with their own folly is to have them experience it. In fact, I would say that the primary lesson of the book of Ecclesiastes is that - if you don't believe God,

then go find out that He's right. Live it out. And then you go, "Oh, this stinks!" You're right. It does.

So, it's the same principle, by the way, that God uses for church discipline. There're a lot of Bible verses that talk about people in the church that aren't walking good and walking with the Lord. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he said (in Ephesus, Timothy went there to pastor), "Those two guys, Hymenaeus and Alexander, just so you know, I delivered them to Satan so that they might learn not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20). What he meant was, "I put them back out in the world, kept them out of the church so that they could learn out there that this is no place to live." And it's the same concept. You go taste and see, and when you just are tired of it, then you come back. Same thing in 1 Corinthians 5.

So, I think it's better to go God's way rather than the hard way. That's all I'm thinkin'. Hard way; God's way. Isn't it? So you get two choices tonight - God's way; hard way. Pray, forgive, mercy, love; hard way. Fruit of the Spirit; hard way. God's way. Amen. Look, God intended to give them a king all along. He didn't want them to stand out. He wanted them to be a witness. The sinful request from them did not change God's plans. He wanted for them all along the things that they were wanting in their flesh. Saul was the people's choice: he looked good, he was tall. You ever hear from people that go, "Hey, who'd you vote for? I just voted for the good lookin' guy." Nah. That's pretty much what they were doin'. They didn't know any of the issues. David would be the LORD's choice, but he was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). So, God will let you be stubborn, will not thwart your plans, will sit back and watch you blow up, if necessary. Because sometimes the hard way is the only way you can learn. Which is the reason the door's always open. His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). When you're ready to be right, He'll be ready. Just wait. He's waiting. But I think if you have to write I'm real big on learning chapters, lessons, rather than verses. I'm bad at remembering verses, but I'm good with chapters. And here's a chapter: we want a king like the world. And the lesson should be very clear: you can go the LORD's way or the hard way. LORD's way, the hard way. Which one are you going to pick? (Congregation responds, "LORD's way.") Yep, let's do that, shall we?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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