

God is a Good and Giving King

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1 Samuel 8:1-22 (Luke 22:24-30)

Let us Pray: O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. Amen.

What was just prayed was today's Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, and I think it is particularly relevant for today's passage under study from *1 Samuel 8*. Actually, clergy briefly studied this passage at our recent synod. Since then, I have reflected on how this passage may help us, as Christians, understand our we should perceive and relate to leadership; both in the Church and in our government; especially in light of the recent discussions about Romans 13 cited by Attorney General Jeff Sessions. I have come up with more questions than answers. So, let me ask you, "How do you imagine leadership or being a leader yourself? How does God envision leadership, and how may that be different from the 'world's' view of leadership? What type of leader or ruler would you trust in at a crucial time of stressful transition? Why?"

As we look at today's passage, we see Israel at a key transition from the rule of the judges/"leaders" (NIV) to the monarchy (the establishment of a king to rule over God's People). How the people of Israel respond to this time of anxiety and transition can instruct us today as we face stressful transition in the Church and in our country. Samuel was a pivotal figure who faithfully served Israel as a priest, prophet and judge, yet he is aging, and the elders of Israel are very concerned about their future as a nation. Why such concern? Because...

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1. Samuel's Sons are Selfish Successors (Verses 1-5)

- a. Samuel's sons are self-serving leaders like Eli's sons in *1 Samuel 2:12-17*

2. Israel's 'Demand' is a Rejection of God's Reign (Verses 6-9)

- a. This is the key problem, and it is symptomatic of our foolish inclination to turn to human leader for worldly solutions rather than prayerfully turning to God and trusting in His Word. The problem is not necessarily Israel's desire for a King. After all, God Himself allowed for a king; however, it would be a king that God would choose for them; not one that Samuel would appoint through the demands of the elders (*Deuteronomy 17:14-15*; and stated at the beginning of 1 Samuel which points to the central event of the books of Samuel; the institution of the monarchy in *1 Samuel 2:10*). Israel's king would be chosen and anointed by God, but the elders wanted Samuel to appoint for them a king. Samuel, perhaps initially perceiving the elders' request as a rejection of his leadership, prayerfully does what Israel's elders, should have done, he prayed to God (*verse 6*).

- b. Verses 7-8 This is characteristic of Israel's rebelliousness.

- i. Israel, and all her leaders, should have done what Samuel did. They should have turned to God in prayer. Trusted in His Word and waited for Him to give them a king of His divine choosing; a king according to His own heart. Instead, they demanded that Samuel appoint a king for them; a king of human choosing; a king according to their foolish, untrusting rebellious hearts.

1. And what do they get? They get King Saul, whose name means "ask for". God will hand them over to the foolish and sinful devices and desires of their own hearts by giving them a foolish king who will not listen to God's Word either.

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3. Israel's Refusal to Listen will Result in a 'Demanding' King (Verses 10-22)

a. Israel refuses to listen to God, but God listens to them and gives them what they demand. We see, since Israel refused to listen to God's Word of warning through the prophet Samuel and demanded a king of human choosing rather than God's choosing, God will give them the demanding king they themselves demanded. The punishment is just and it fits the crime of God handing people over to their rebellious requests.

b. Verses 10-18 "Take, take, take"

i. Ironically, the Israelites are agreeing to have done to them by a comparatively common ("like all the other nations") human ruler what Samuel's sons (Joel and Abijah) were *already* doing. It kind of humorous.

ii. What we often fail to foolishly realize is that human leaders, political, religious or otherwise, are not God and will, eventually, fail the people they serve in some way. Even human leaders, even Christian Church leaders, will struggle with trusting in God or trusting in worldly strength and wisdom.

1. This is the warning in the rest of *Deuteronomy 17:16-17*. Even the greatest kings in world history, David and Solomon, failed to heed this warning, and the Kingdom of Israel suffered as a result. Should we really expect any more from our own contemporary human leaders? But...

c. Verses 19-20

i. Demanding Samuel to Appoint A King was a:

1. Rejection of Israel's Holy Status as Yahweh's Nation/People, and...

2. Failure to Recognize that Yahweh had already successfully led Israel through the wilderness, that the LORD had already fought for them in their

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Conquest of Canaan under Joshua, and that He had recently defeated the Philistines in *1 Samuel 7:10-11*.

Samuel's sons sought their own gain as religious and political leaders, so the people of Israel, when looking at a future without Samuel, failed to turn to God as their King. They failed to trust in God's Word. They forgot all that God had already accomplished for them as their holy and incomparable Leader. They forgot it was the Lord God Himself who gave them Samuel. Israel characteristically rejected God as their King by demanding a king according to their human hearts who would, in turn, make burdensome demands of them. The lesson for us is a helpful and comforting reminder that amid the trials of transition, we can look to what God has already accomplished for us and trust in Him Who gives rather than human leaders who take. **God is a Good and Giving King.** God gave His only Son to die for our rebellion and our demanding oppression of others. King Jesus gave His own life as a ransom for our cosmic treason against Him. *Jesus is a Giving King We Can Turn to and Trust.* Christians believe this; because, we can look back and see what He accomplished for us on the Cross. In the words of today's opening and gathering prayer, Jesus is the protector of all who trust in Him. Without Him, nothing is strong, nothing is holy. Christ is God's promised anointed King who is fully God and fully man; reigning on earth as in heaven. He is our ruler and guide, Who gives us His Word and Spirit so that we may pass through the temporal trials and transitions of this world with confidence in His sovereign reign and with the assurance that we will not lose our eternal inheritance in Him as children of God.

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Who, or what, do we turn to and trust in times of trial and transition? Do we place unrealistic burdens or have an unhealthy reliance upon church leaders? Government leaders? Political parties? For example, human leadership, when properly viewed and prayerfully sought after, can be a good thing in service of God. However, when we have more hopeful dependence on human leaders for protection and guidance amid trials and transitions than on Christ's Sovereign Goodness, then they are idols that replace our Good King Jesus Who gave His life in love for us.

Do you believe Jesus is a good and giving King, or do you turn to the world's 'wisdom' and idols for false security when things are uncertain? Do you place unrealistic expectations upon human leaders that only King Jesus can satisfy? As leaders in various situations and settings, are we, as Christians, servants of King Jesus set apart for the Gospel serving others with our God-given gifts out of sincere self-denying and sacrificial love? Christian leaders, within government or in the Church, are called to be very different from the "the kings of the Gentiles who lord it over" the people, and "who exercise authority over them calling themselves Benefactors". Christian leaders "will be like the youngest and the one who serves"; because, we trust that King Jesus has graciously "conferred on us a kingdom, just as His Father conferred one on Him, so that we may eat and drink at His Table in His Kingdom and sit on thrones, judging even the Twelve Tribes of Israel" (*Luke 22:24-30*).

AMEN