

1 SAMUEL 12

INTRODUCTION

Having experienced a great victory over the Ammonites through Saul and by the power of the Spirit Samuel seizes the opportunity to reaffirm the Kingship of Saul at Gilgal. However what was more important was that the people would take the opportunity to reaffirm the Kingship of the Lord who is the true King of his people.

It is the Lord who works through the earthly King by the power of his Spirit therefore it is important that the people do not put their hopes on their earthly King and neglect their true King. Perhaps Samuel detected a spirit of presumption creeping into the people, a dependence on their earthly King that if this spirit was left unchecked it would ultimately lead to a rejection of the Lord as their true King.

In fact it was because of their rejection of the Lord that they found themselves with an earthly King like all the other nations. Samuel, in this chapter, gives his farewell speech and uses it as an opportunity to help the people to see their sin and repent of their failure to trust in their true King and to help them confirm their allegiance to the Lord as their true King.

1. SAMUEL'S EXAMPLE OF LOYALTY (vs. 1-5)

Before Samuel deals with the issue of loyalty to the Lord as King he first of all asks the people if he has lived out what he is asking of them. Has Samuel been loyal to his God and to his people? Samuel will call upon the people to be loyal and committed to God but his call would fall on deaf ears if he has not shown those qualities in his life so before he makes his call for commitment he wants the people to realise that what he is calling them to do he has demonstrated in his own life.

Samuel's years of service had been hard and yet he had served the Lord and the nation with unswerving faithfulness. His example was one that the people and indeed Saul as King and those of succeeding generations could follow. Now although pastor's and preachers are not prophets like Samuel we do exercise a prophetic ministry that calls upon people to follow the Lord.

It is important for any pastor or preacher not just to preach God's word faithfully but also to live out that word. How can a preacher call upon the people to be faithful to God or to be committed to God's people if he himself does not demonstrate such qualities in his life? A congregation soon sees through a man who calls upon the congregation to do something when they know that the preacher himself needs to heed his own message.

A Pastor or preacher can only expect the congregation to be loyal and committed if he himself is loyal and committed. Those who listen soon find out a pastor or preacher who calls upon people to be faithful in prayer but never demonstrates that faithfulness himself. This is why it is important to have leaders in God's church who not only preach God's word but who live out that word consistently in their lives.

Now Samuel's method of demonstrating his commitment and loyalty was to call upon the people to testify against him before the Lord and the king (v 3). The response of the people is unanimous (v 4). They agreed that throughout Samuel's years of service he had neither wronged nor defrauded anyone. His administration had been one of impeccable justice. His life had been marked by unquestionable honesty.

Even when it came to his sons he had shown no partiality for they had been removed from office. The reason why Samuel or anyone can preserve his integrity through the various changes and stages of life is because they are inwardly secure. Samuel's parents Elkanah and Hannah had no

doubt laid a solid foundation by giving Samuel a strong inner sense of his uniqueness as a person in the sight of God and in his mission in life.

Later when he grew up he became increasingly aware of his relationship with the Lord and the Lord's purpose for his life. It is this sense of belonging to God and having a task to fulfil for God that enabled Samuel to remain completely faithful and honest in his task.

Likewise it is only our own inward convictions that we belong to God through Christ and that He has given us a mission to complete that will enable us to remain completely faithful and honest throughout all the changing scenes of life. There are many things that will affect our circumstances in life many things outside our own control.

However unless we have an inner conviction that we are God's people and we have a task to fulfil in this world then we will let the circumstances dictate our responses rather than our convictions about the Lord and his word. There are far too many Christians who live pragmatic lives rather than lives that are based on the solid foundation of our relationship with the Lord and upon his word. Often the attitude if it feels right directs our actions rather than asking if it is right in accordance with God's word.

Such deep convictions will help us remain loyal to God and faithful in our actions as we cope with the many demands and changes that this world brings upon us. But in confirming Samuel's integrity the people were in fact unwittingly condemning themselves for they had no reason to be dissatisfied with Samuel leadership and therefore they had no reason to look for an earthly King. This further highlights what Samuel is about to say the real problem with the people is that they have rejected the Lord and in doing so were looking for an earthly king like all the other nations.

They had become tired of what they saw as the restraints that was placed upon them they wanted more freedom but the reality is they wanted freedom to do as they wanted rather than living in humble obedience to the Lord who was their King. The only reason why believers depend on other things and other people rather than the Lord is that they are tired of God's demands. They want freedom to do as they please rather than true freedom to do what God desires.

When such attitudes are displayed in our lives then the alarm bells should start ringing for you are only a very short step away from deserting the Lord for another inferior king a step that sadly Israel as nation took far too often.

2. SAMUEL'S REBUKE OF THE PEOPLE (vs. 6-25)

Now in order for Samuel to rebuke the people of Israel for their failure to stay true and loyal to the Lord their King he does two things:

a) He Reminds The People Of The Past (vs. 6-15). - Samuel recounts God's dealings with his people in the past, he underlines to the people how involved the Lord their God had been in the past. He reminds the people that when they had forsaken the Lord they had been brought into trouble and whenever they had repented and cried out to their God he sent deliverers to rescue them and bring them out of their difficulties, people like Moses and Aaron (v 6 & 8).

The Lord had consistently shown the people that He was their king by disciplining them when they forgot the Lord their God. Spiritual backsliding had been punished with physical oppression like the one at the hand of the Moabites (v 9). However true repentance always brought deliverance (vs. 10-11) but the nation had not learned the lessons of history. For when Nahash the Ammonite came against them they capitulated because of their fear.

They feared man more than they feared God and the result of their fear was that they chose to rely on human wisdom and human power and demanded a king to save them (v 12). They had lost sight of all that God had taught them throughout their history they totally disregarded thousands of years of history because of their fear of man. They seemed to have forgotten God's past deliverances through Moses and the Judges.

They blamed their current troubles on their form of government; they mistakenly thought that with a king to lead them all their problems would vanish. However the reality was that Israel's restlessness and discontent showed their distrust in the providential care of the Lord. They ignored the fact that no external form of government could secure for them the blessings that they sought.

Therefore refusing to consult with Samuel or the priests of the day, they demanded a king so that they could be like all the other nations. In spite of their presumption and pride God graciously gave them victory over Nahash. He worked through Saul in the same way that He had previously worked through Moses and the Judges and in doing so, the Lord was saying I am still the same God who worked for you Israel in the past and would do so again if only you would trust me.

Now surely we must learn this lesson as well. We have recorded for us in the bible God's dealings with his people. As we read our bibles we see that God acts on behalf of his people that when they call out to him He answers. We know that He is faithful and can be trusted yet how often are we guilty of being unfaithful to him and how often have we sought after other man made gods instead of trusting our God.

How often have we wanted to depend on the power of man instead of the unlimited power of God? How often have we trusted in what is seen rather than trusting in the unseen God. It is not that we only have God faithfulness in the bible to teach us these lessons although that would be sufficient for us; but God very graciously shows us in our own lives the sort of God He is.

How many times have we called out to him and He has graciously come to our aide? How often have we been amazed at God's power in working out the various situations of life? Yet we so often fail to trust him and be committed to him, we still run after the gods of this world instead of staying true and faithful to our God who demonstrates his commitment to us.

We like the people of Israel in Samuel's day are being rebuked, we are being called upon to repent and stay true to God.

b) He Demonstrates God's Power In the Present (vs. 16-25) – Samuel believed that the lessons of the past and their most recent lesson in their victory over Nahash needed to be reinforced. It was now the time of harvest (middle of May to the end of June) when rain was almost unknown for it was their dry season.

Therefore in order to convince the people of their sin in setting aside the Lord for an earthly king and in order to show them that his judgments are always ready to fall on disobedient people Samuel calls on the Lord for rain (vs. 16-18). That same day the Lord sent thunder and rain and the result was that the people were filled with fear and awe for God (v 18). A lesson about fearing God instead of man is clearly being reinforced. They learnt the lesson for they suddenly realised that they were wrong in asking for a king and so they asked Samuel to intercede for the people so that God's judgement will not fall upon them (v 19).

Samuel's response is to encourage the people not to let their fear drive them from God but to come to him and to serve him (v 20). The danger was that they would be so fearful that they would run from God but that is never the right response to our sin we must run to him and receive his grace of forgiveness.

Samuel promises that he would also pray for the people as they requested (v 23) and Samuel urges them to continue to serve the Lord with all their hearts, they must not turn away to useless gods they must remember what the Lord has done for them (v 24). However Samuel warns them that should they insist in turning from the Lord then God's judgement will come upon them (v 25).

When we feel guilty for our sin of failing to trust in God then we must respond as the people of Israel are being called upon to respond. Sometimes because of the Lord's powerful dealings with us we can be afraid of God. We realise that we are sinners and that He is powerful and could destroy us. The danger is to try and hide from him and instead of seeking his forgiveness and grace we continue to run from him. But this section encourages us to come to this powerful and fearful God because the Lord will not reject us (v 22).

He has committed himself to us, we are his people and although we fail, God would be unfaithful to his covenant promises if He failed to accept us and have us back. Therefore I encourage us all to turn to this God in true repentance and seek his grace to forgive us for our backsliding and our failure to stay true to him and we can be assured that He will forgive us.

The people of Israel realised that they needed Samuel to pray for them if God was going to accept them, Samuel as priest represented the people before God, which is why he promises not to fail in his task of praying for the people (v 23). The good news is that our priest is Jesus Christ who came from heaven to earth so that He may represent us before his Father in heaven.

He prays for us in all our sins and failings and his prayers are always heard and accepted therefore we can come to our God in the knowledge that we have a High Priest who represents us and prays for us and therefore if we confess our sins we know that our great and powerful God will forgive us.

However I must end with the warning that Samuel gives (v 25). If even as professing believers we fail to repent and turn to the Lord, if we fail to remember what great things He has done for us (v 24) and if we continue to place other man made gods above the true God, then we are in danger of bringing upon ourselves the wrath of a holy and jealous God.

Therefore I urge us all to repent of our backsliding and turn to our God and receive his gift of forgiveness that comes to us through his Son Jesus Christ.

Amen