

1 SAMUEL 8

INTRODUCTION

As you know a few of us from the church spent the last two weeks in Zambia and we had to face many things that were different from what we were use too. These changes were not easy to get use to for change can be both threatening and challenging.

A change of circumstances or environment can be very unsettling, change can bring with it a variety of emotions, we can become so easily frustrated and anxious by change and we can also become depressed stressed or even despairing because of the changes that one has to face.

But although change can bring with it fear; it is also a challenge and it causes us to depend on God and put what we know to be true of him into practise in a new or fresh way and this can lead to God's word making an even greater impact upon our lives. How do we handle change that threatens us and brings fear and anxiety into our lives as well as presenting to us a new challenge and an opportunity to see God at work in fresh ways?

In dealing with change it is good to follow the example of Samuel who faced the threats and challenges of radical change in his society. As we now look at this chapter we see that the winds of change have picked up for the people want a King of their own and their reason for such a request was simply that they wanted to be like all the other nations that surrounded them (v 20).

1. THE HISTORICAL SETTING (vs. 1-3)

Following the defeat of the Philistines by the Israelites, Samuel emerged as the leader of God's people. Throughout the next 25 years the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines (7:13). As long as Samuel was acting as Judge Israel's enemies were unable to prevail but now as we move into chapter 8 a new generation has arisen. They had only heard from their Parents how the Lord delivered them from the hands of the Philistines.

They had been raised in comparative peace and safety and the younger Israelites took for granted the privileges that they enjoyed without really thinking about the reasons why they enjoyed such things (God was their King). With the passing of time, appreciation of the advantages of having God as their King began to give way to a desire for King who could be seen rather than a God who is unseen.

Samuel is now about 65 years old, which in his day was old as the average age at death was about 45 and it seems that the people were getting concerned about his ability to continue leading. As a result they began to question who would succeed Samuel.

Now in a theocracy with God ruling his people through an earthly representative there is no need for people to be anxious about matters of leadership. God was their King and knowledge of this fact gives stability to those who live under his rule. However the Israelites lost sight of this important fact and felt that they must act decisively on their own behalf.

They exaggerated their fears that Samuel's sons might be designated to follow him. It is true that Samuel's sons had been appointed as judges at Beersheba (v 2), which was some 50 miles south of Jerusalem, and it seems their task was mainly administrative (v 3) while Samuel continued to act as Judge in and around Jerusalem. Samuel's sons although receiving a godly upbringing had given into temptation and had become corrupt (v 3).

Now we can learn here from Samuel's experience for although he would have trained his children in the things of God and given them opportunity to serve him they turned out to be a

disappointment when it came to their service. There are many Christian parents who have raised their children well in the things of God but have been disappointed by their response to Christian things.

A good Christian upbringing is no guarantee that our children will turn out to be loyal servants of almighty God. The fact that Samuel appointed his sons for their task at Beersheba tells us that Samuel saw them as men who were morally and spiritually capable of doing the job.

They had benefited from Samuel's example of godliness, they saw that their Father was a man who persevered with great humility and no doubt Samuel's sons showed great promise as future leaders but when given leadership these men floundered. It is worth saying that there are some people who function well under good leadership but when they are given positions of leadership themselves they simply cannot cope with the weight of the task assigned to them.

They are good followers but not good leaders. This could be said of Samuel's sons under Samuel's leadership they flourished left to themselves they sank under the temptations that were presented to them. When the support of leadership was removed Samuel's sons floundered.

Now this teaches us a very important lesson we all want the best for our children but they may not always live up to our own hopes for them, they may well show great promise when living under our roofs but when they have to move out and begin to demonstrate their Christianity in the real world some of them struggle and we must do all we can to prepare our children for the real world and to help them develop their skills in order to help them maintain a strong testimony etc.

2. THE REQUEST OF THE PEOPLE (vs. 4-5)

Now with this historical background in mind the elders of Israel gathered to discuss the future of Israel's leadership and they came to visit Samuel at Ramah. They presented their arguments to him (v 5) they wanted change in the type of leadership that they have experienced so far (v 5).

By stating that Samuel was now old they were implying that he was no longer up to the task, his sons were not walking in his steps and therefore they have come to the conclusion that they need a King like all the other nations around them. What lay behind the elders request which was really a demand was a dissatisfaction with God as their King, their history of God's dealings with this nation was just that to them, history. They might have argued that times have changed and now Israel needs a King like all the other nations.

Of course this change did not catch God of guard for He had already foreseen and planned for a monarchical form of theocracy for he told Abraham that Kings would be among his descendants (Genesis 35:11) but in the plan of God such a king would be chosen by God and must reign according to the ways of God (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

So in many ways there was nothing wrong with their request for a King but it was their motive and reasoning that was wrong. They simply wanted a human King to replace their divine king. They had become tired of God's leadership over the nation as He exercised it through the judges. The sad thing is that often we too can become tired of God's leadership as He exercises it in the church through Christ the head.

In practise this means that we look to men instead of God; we rely upon some dynamic strong leader with a forceful personality and think that he will be able to lead the church. Although God appoints Elders as under shepherds and works through them for the benefit of the church, every church must look to Christ as their leader and King and listen to him through his word rather than placing all our hopes on a particular leader or Pastor.

There are far too many churches that are dependent upon the Pastor instead of being totally dependent upon Christ who is the head of the church. Sometimes people jokingly call me the boss, but I am not the boss of this church I am only a servant of Christ and of the church the real boss is Christ and it is to him that we must look to it is him that we must trust and depend upon for the well being of the church.

That does not mean that we do not need human leadership within the church for we do because it is Christ who appointed Elders but no Elder no matter how good he may be as a leader can replace the true leadership of Christ through the work of His Spirit. It is the Elders task to follow Christ just like every other member of the church. Elders simply proclaim God's word and help the church to understand it so that we may all together humble ourselves and follow Christ lead as He reveals his truth and way to us through his preached word.

3. THE RESPONSE OF SAMUEL (vs. 6-18)

Verse 6 starts with an emphatic "but", Samuel was displeased with the people's request so he did what all true men of God do in similar situations he prays to God (v 6). No doubt he feels he is being rejected by the people and so is the Lord and so he pours out his heart to the Lord.

He had served the Lord faithfully for decades he was judge for about 45 years and no one had ever complained about him before (1 Samuel 12:2-5) and now the treatment he is receiving shows how unthankful the people were for Samuel's leadership. But it is how one answers rejection that is important and there are some things here that we can learn from Samuel's handling of the situation.

People often respond to rejection with aggression or resentment or other negative attitudes. The pain of rejection is very personal and it can also be persistent and therefore rejection must be handled well otherwise it may have far reaching effects upon our lives. You see rejection comes from a denial of approval, affection or recognition and if we are unable to cope with our feelings of rejection adequately then they can undermine our sense of worth and corrode our confidence and give rise to insecurity and helplessness. By nature we like to be approved of by others, we want people to think well of us and when we are rejected that failure to be approved can be devastating unless handled well.

Every child loves the approval of his parents, which is why a reprimand can have a very real corrective effect upon children because they love approval and find the disapproval of a reprimand hard to cope with and the result is a change in behaviour in order to be approved again by the parents.

We can be denied this approval in so many ways in our world, it may come from our family, or from our place of work or even from our own spouses but it is how we handle it that matters. This longing for approval comes from a longing for affection we all love to be loved and when we do not receive it or even feel that we are receiving it then sadly relationships and marriages break down.

Poor Samuel like everyone else must have felt all these emotions as the people are rejecting him, he wanted to be approved and loved but sadly he is being rejected. Such rejection is hard to cope with and the inner fear is acute and unless we respond to rejection in the right way then the problems can multiply. How does Samuel handle rejection? He immediately took the matter to the Lord in prayer (v 6). Although the request of the people displeased him he did not argue with them or seek to persuade them otherwise and then pray he simply consulted the Lord first of all.

Before he decided to do anything he laid the whole matter before the Lord, his rejection made him depend totally upon the Lord, it gave him an opportunity to assess the situation before the Lord and to reassure himself of his position before the God of heaven. Here is the secret to overcoming

the crippling effects of being rejected. We need to use the means of prayer for by it we are able to openly and frankly discuss the matter with the Lord.

We are able to tell him exactly how we feel and why we feel the way we do. As we do so and as we open God's word prayerfully so often God gives us a new perspective that will keep us from harbouring resentment or blaming others for the situation.

It was as Samuel prayed that the Lord encouraged him by his word (v 7) this new perspective took the sting out of the situation for the Lord reminds Samuel that the history of Israel as a nation is one of rejection of God's authority, they have continually rebelled against the Lord and his leadership and their rejection of Samuel is a result of their rejection of the Lord (v 8). Samuel is told to do two things in response to the people's rejection; he is to listen to them something which is never easy when one has been rejected by the ones you are to listen too.

Secondly he is to warn the people of the consequences of their rejection (v 9). A king must be paid for and unless you have a good king who lives by God's principles as laid down in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 then kingship can be a burden. What Samuel does next is truly remarkable for rising from prayer and having received instructions from the Lord he faithfully discharges his duty of relating to the people what God had said.

He continued to proclaim the word of the Lord (vs. 10-18). Samuel tells the people that some of the Kings that will rule over them will make life difficult for them they will take from them by taxing them heavily (the word "take" is mentioned six times). This teaches us that present decisions have future consequences sometimes huge consequences. A church may decide to introduce something within the church that is against biblical principles.

They may introduce it for pragmatic reasons but their actions may have consequences that last for generations within the church. That is why every generation of believers must seek to follow the Lord wholeheartedly and every decision made in church meetings must be examined in the light of Scripture otherwise the consequences of some rash decision may be lived with for many generations.

Our decisions as a church will not only affect us but will affect those who follow us. Even though Samuel told the people what would happen if they persisted in their request for a king and he warns them that when they are experiencing hard times under some future King and cry out to God the Lord will refuse to answer them (v 18).

Nevertheless Samuel warning did not put the people off they refused to listen to Samuel and repeated their demand for a king (v 19). They were stubborn, they had made their minds up they had set their hearts on having a king and wanted to be like the other nations who had a king to lead them into battle (v 20). But they had forgotten their status; Israel was not to be like other nations, they were to be different from them for God was their King and ruler.

The people foolishly believed that by being like the other nations they would benefit but the truth is that being like the other nations would be disastrous for them. No doubt the people feared the other nations (12:12) and felt their best chance of defeating any future attacks was to have a king who was trained in warfare and could lead the nation into battle.

But the people have forgotten their past and how the Lord had granted them victory over the Philistines (chapter 7) without having a King to lead them. The greatest mistake the church makes today is to want to be like the world. Often it is argued we must be like them to win them; but to be like the world is disastrous for the church and for the cause of Christ.

The church is not to be like the people of the world we are to be different from them we are to be holy like Christ. The more like Christ we are and less like the world we will be and we will be more effective in this world. Sadly when we reject Christ as our King and true leader of the church then we become more like the world. When we reject Christ as head of the church then the church becomes like every other organisation within this world.

We must resist the temptation to be like everyone else and desire to be increasingly like Jesus Christ.

Samuel once again turns to the Lord in prayer and he is instructed to grant the people their wish, he has warned them but if they will not heed the warning then the Lord says let them have their own way. You see sometimes God grants us our way even when our way is wrong. Do you remember Jonah, he disobeyed God and God gave him his own way in order to teach him a painful and costly lesson.

Sometimes God grants us our wishes and desires even when they are not according to his purposes in order to teach us some important lessons. When we are stubborn and rebellious and will not listen to God through his word; then God may leave us to our own devices and let us face the consequences of our foolish decisions.

That is what happened to Israel and at least some of their future kings made life difficult for the people and no doubt there were many regrets. Let us be people who obey the Lord wholeheartedly and submit to his will so that we may not have to face the consequences of disobedience. However if we are disobedient and go in the wrong direction then learn the lessons even though they may be hard ones and repent and turn back to God's path and God's way.

Jonah eventually came to understand God's ways and purposes and brought his will into line with the Lord's although we have to understand that he had to face incredibly difficult times before he learnt his lesson. Let us not be like that but humbly submit to God's ways as He reveals them to us in his word.

May God enable us to do so for his glory?

Amen