

3/7/2021

Sermon Series: The Big Picture

1 Samuel 8:1-22

When Samuel got to be an old man, he set his sons up as judges in Israel. His firstborn son was named Joel, the name of his second, Abijah. They were assigned duty in Beersheba. But his sons didn't take after him; they were out for what they could get for themselves, taking bribes, corrupting justice.

Fed up, all the elders of Israel got together and confronted Samuel at Ramah. They presented their case: "Look, you're an old man, and your sons aren't following in your footsteps. Here's what we want you to do: Appoint a king to rule us, just like everybody else."

When Samuel heard their demand—"Give us a king to rule us!"—he was crushed. How awful! Samuel prayed to God.

God answered Samuel, *"Go ahead and do what they're asking. They are not rejecting you. They've rejected me as their King. From the day I brought them out of Egypt until this very day they've been behaving like this, leaving me for other gods. And now they're doing it to you. So let them have their own way. But warn them of what they're in for. Tell them the way kings operate, just what they're likely to get from a king."*

So Samuel told them, delivered God's warning to the people who were asking him to give them a king. He said, "This is the way the kind of king you're talking about operates. He'll take your sons and make soldiers of them—chariotry, cavalry, infantry, regimented in battalions and squadrons. He'll put some to forced labor on his farms, plowing and harvesting, and others to making either weapons of war or chariots in which he can ride in luxury. He'll put your daughters to work as beauticians and waitresses and cooks. He'll conscript your best fields, vineyards, and orchards and hand them over to his special friends. He'll tax your harvests and vintage to support his extensive bureaucracy. Your prize workers and best animals he'll take for his own use. He'll lay a tax on your flocks and you'll end up no better than slaves. The day will come when you will cry in desperation because of this king you so much want for yourselves. But don't expect God to answer."

But the people wouldn't listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We will have a king to rule us! Then we'll be just like all the other nations. Our king will rule us and lead us and fight our battles."

Samuel took in what they said and rehearsed it with God. God told Samuel, "Do what they say. Make them a king."

Then Samuel dismissed the men of Israel: "Go home, each of you to your own city."

The Big Picture: Crown

Alright, my friends, I want to give you some encouragement on your Bible reading journey for a moment. I hope that if you chose to set out at the beginning of the year to read through the Bible with the plan in our bulletin or your own reading plan that even here at the beginning of March you're continuing to press on and engage the amazing story of the Bible. Because, right about now, beginning of March is when new years resolutions can start to feel stale. Perhaps you've already given up before now. But I want to encourage you to jump back on the Bible wagon because I know that God is going to use your persistence for so much good in his Kingdom - not only for your own heart and life, but for your family and friends. Because as we've talked about almost every week throughout our "Big Picture" sermon series, we are (like our Israelite friends – bless their hearts) we are, also, like them, blessed to be a blessing. And with each page or chapter of the Bible we allow to enter our hearts and minds, or with each "C" word we learn about, you and I, like the Israelites, are being shaped by God to be the people of God more and more and more! And so, if you're feeling bogged down in the reading of the Bible, hear these words: keep going! You can do it! If you're really struggling, let me know! I can send you some helpful tools to help clarify some things and hopefully get

you get excited to read again. And if you haven't started the reading through the Bible plan but you've been thinking to yourself you wish you would have, just start with whatever day we're on and keep pressing on! It's going to be worth it.

Which reminds me, we are on our second to last week of working through the Old Testament on Sunday's! In two weeks we will finally enter into the New Testament, (woo hoo!) just in case you were wondering how much longer we'd be talking about these crazy Israelites that seem to get themselves into too much trouble...which is exactly what they've seemed to do again in our scripture reading that Kim/Katie read for us a few moments ago.

Last week we visited the part of Israel's story when they finally were able to enter the land that God had promised to their people. And so, while they're living in this land, it's very clear that our good ole' Israelites are supposed to follow **God's ways** – the commandments that help them continue to be different from the rest of the nations and will allow them to continue being “blessed to be a blessing” to the surrounding nations.

But while they were supposed to **take the land** and conquer the Canaanites (remember...Canaanites...dun, dun, dun...), well the Isrealites

failed at kicking all the Canaanites out, too, and long story short...God's people go through **many cycles** of adopting the foreign nations' religious practices, distancing themselves from the one true God, getting to a point of corruption when all they knew to do was cry out to God for help, God would raise up a person (called a judge) who would bring the people back to God's ways, they would experience blessing again, but then the cycle would happen all over and over again throughout generations of the Israelite people. That cycle (again and again and again) is what the whole book of Judges is all about (which is the book right before 1 Samuel where our scripture reading comes from). And even after 12 Judges, Israel still can't seem to continue on the straight and narrow with their God and chapter 8 of 1 Samuel is a *huge* turning point in the history of the Israelite people.

Up until this point, Israel did not have a human king like the other nations, what made them beautifully different was that God was their King. Despite their failure to keep his commandments and stay loyal to their king, the King of Israel was almighty God, who continued to deliver them because of his covenant promise. And the reason for this is made clear in our scripture passage when Samuel went to the Israelite leaders and gave them a very detailed *warning* about if they do get a human king, like what

they say they want, then because humans are naturally corrupt creatures, this human king will make their lives very terrible – and honestly, since you and I just studied the Israelites' exodus story just 3 weeks ago, did that warning of Samuel in our scripture reading remind you at all of the king of Egypt, Pharaoh, who kept the Israelites enslaved? In 1 Samuel, chapter 8 Samuel was trying to say, "Don't you understand that if you have any other god or any other ruler or any other king besides our faithful God, that you will just be living in another form of slavery?"

But even with all of Samuel's warning, the Israelite leaders were so, so stubbornly bent on having a king that it seems like they were deaf to Samuel's speech. They didn't even understand what they wanted. Bless their hearts.

When Dustin and I lived down in Lexington, Kentucky, he and I, northern folk, learned this phrase that southerners like to say when they think someone is foolish or just plain pities them: "Bless their heart." It's usually an ironic phrase because you know when someone is saying it, the words they're using don't match their meaning. Instead of trying to explain it, I'll let this video from a Youtube channel called, "It's a Southern Thing," just show you how southerners use this phrase.

Play “What Bless Your Heart Really Means”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4nRIw_ATJA

Bless your heart. You never wanted to be the recipient of a “bless your heart,” and I have to admit that I was the recipient of the fated phrase a few times throughout my stay in Kentucky.

When I read this part of the Biblical story with the Israelites wanting a king to be like all the other nations, I get the sense that God’s part in the story was a head shake, eye roll, and a big ole’ “bless their hearts.” His people just couldn’t get it. They continued to take on the religious practices of the Canaanites and other neighboring nations and the cycle of the judges (over and over and over throughout their history) still hadn’t made them realize their dependence on God.

And now, at this point in our story, in 1 Samuel 8, the Israelite leaders come together to ask the prophet Samuel for what their hearts had been desiring all along – a human king to fight their battles. When will they ever learn? Bless their hearts.

There’s a section of verses in chapter 8 that so tragically illustrates God’s frustration and grief toward the Israelites’ request for a human king:

Verses 7-9, God says to the prophet Samuel *“Go ahead and do what they’re asking. They are not rejecting you. They’ve rejected me as their King. From the day I brought them out of Egypt until this very day they’ve been behaving like this, leaving me for other gods. And now they’re doing it to you. So let them have their own way. But warn them of what they’re in for. Tell them the way kings operate, just what they’re likely to get from a king.”*

God lets them have their way but God is still going to allow them to experience the consequences of their desires and actions. And they don’t know what kind of ride they’re in for with these human kings (you’ll have to come back next week to hear about that, though. Believe me, it’s dramatic).

For now, though, I wonder if there are things in our own lives that we so desperately want, thinking that “If only I had...insert desire here” our happiness or our fulfillment or our salvation would come. Do any of these examples hit home for you?

If only I had...

...more money...

...that promotion at work...

...the house my neighbor has...

...the vacation my friend took...

...a different spouse...

...a different life...

...then life would be better.

Have you ever found yourself feeling like this? Like if you just had ...something else... then life would be better? It's so easy and so tempting to feel this way because we have the same human sin problem that our good ole' friends, the Israelites, had. Bless their hearts. Bless our hearts.

And because it is so tempting, so easy to bow down to these other desires, we have the chance every morning to gain new mercies. And even though I risk sounding like a broken record, I want to remind us again this morning that it is during the season of **Lent** that we attempt to change the posture of our hearts. It is during Lent that we see the love of God made clear for us by Jesus on the cross, and as a response to this great love, as we examine our lives and repent of our sins, we continue to recognize that we are sinners *desperately* in need of a savior.

And thanks be to God for **Jesus Christ** who was and is and is to come the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus redefined for the world what it means to be a king, a ruler, a leader...it is to be a suffering servant. And through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus has won the ugliest battle there is – the war of sin and death is swallowed up in victory. You and I have the chance, every day, to claim Jesus as our King and to live a life that is bowed in surrender of Him.

And so today, as we continue to worship and praise our God, our King of Kings, and as we partake in our holy meal of communion together in a few moments, we will be receiving communion a little different than we have been: before our King on our knees.

DIRECTIONS

- Center aisle – please keep spaced out up here at the front – family can cluster together
- Kneel at the prayer rails, if you're unable to kneel, please don't force yourself – whether we're kneeling or not, I invite you to come with a spirit of humility – to have our hearts bowed down
- I'll let you know when to eat and drink
- Hear a blessing and return by side

BLESS COMMUNION ELEMENTS

AFTER COMMUNION/BEFORE FINAL HYMN

John's Revelation includes these details about worship in heaven: He writes, "I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. ³The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. ⁴ Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads...[whenever the heavenly beings praise the Holy One,] ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

¹¹ "You are worthy, O Lord our God,

to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things,

and they exist because you created what you pleased."