

God is the king we need

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Preacher: Peter Kenny

- [0 : 0 0] You may be the heavyweight champion of the world, you may be a socialite with a long string of pearls, but you're going to serve somebody.
- ! Yes, indeed, you're going to serve somebody. It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you're going to serve somebody.
- Long before Bob Dylan wrote those wise lyrics, Israel was faced with a choice in 1 Samuel 8. We see it in verse 8. Who are they going to serve?
- God says they were forsaking him and serving other gods. And that's what this chapter is about. Who are we going to serve? We are made as human beings to serve, to give our time, our thought, our effort, our money, our energy.
- We reflect God in that. But the question is, who will we serve? Who have we been serving even in this past week? This morning, we want to be reminded clearly that God is our king, and it is him that we are to serve.
- [1 : 2 5] God is our king, and it is him that we are to serve. We need a king. That's what we see, first of all, in this chapter. We need a king. And I realize, standing in Cork, saying that we need a king is a risky business.
- I don't mean the king of England. And I don't mean a king like the king of England. I mean a king, as we shall see in these verses. Let's have a look at them together.
- We need a king in these days. There was a need that arose in these days. In verse 1, Samuel grew old. He appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second was Abijah.
- And they served at Beersheba. So Samuel, as you'll remember, was this godly man who had been walking with the Lord all of his life. And he had gone around judging the people of Israel, judging in the sense of bringing about justice and fairness around the tribes of Israel.
- But he was getting old, and he can't go on forever. He had two sons, Joel and Abijah. So Joel, his name means Yahweh is God.
- [2 : 4 2] And Abijah, his name means God is my father. And so you can see the aspiration, the hopes of the parents in how they have named these boys.
- But sadly, the hopes of the parents are dashed, because these boys were not living according to their names. In verse 3, his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.
- And so we realize that even though, as Proverbs tells us, that if we train up a child in the way he should go, that even when he is old, he will not depart from it, even though that is generally true, and especially true if the child has a new heart, we also realize that there are many exceptions to that, sadly.
- Samuel, what a godly man. From the moment we are introduced to Samuel, he's walking with the Lord. You know that he wants these boys to walk with the Lord.
- He's named them as such. He's prayed for them. He's trained them up. And yet they depart from the Lord in these ways. And so there is a problem. There is a need.

[3 : 55] And Israel's leaders recognize this need. And in verse 4, they all gather together and come to Samuel at Ramah. And they propose a solution. They say, you are old and your sons do not follow your ways.

Now appoint a king to lead us. Or as you see in the footnote, to judge us. In other words, to bring about justice and fairness and so on. So this is the solution that they're proposing or putting to Samuel.

And if you turn over just for a moment to verse 20, you'll see what they have in mind when they talk about a king. A king to lead us, to go out before us, and to fight our battles.

In other words, a king to judge us, to bring about justice, to right wrongs and so on. A king to go before us, that is to give us direction through life. And a king who will fight our battles or give us protection.

So what they see as a solution to the problem is a king who will bring justice and direction and protection to them. And this is the way forward that they propose to Samuel.

[5 : 02] And it seems to make sense. It seems to make sense because Israel at the time were not totally unified. They were 12 tribes and they were fairly loosely connected at this point.

And so to have a king would be this great unifying feature in the life of Israel. The surrounding nations had kings and it seemed like this just made common sense.

Why don't we do what they do? Well, they make this proposal to Samuel. And we see Samuel in verse 6 is displeased.

When they said, give us a king to lead us, this displeased Samuel. And you wonder, if you just pause there for a moment, is Samuel right to be displeased?

Because up until this point, it seems like this proposal makes sense. There is a need. Here's the solution. Why don't we go for it? Is he right to be displeased or is he just sulking?

[6 : 05] Is he thinking, oh, I've been like so important in the life of the nation until this point. And I was hoping that my sons would follow on for me and they're not.

And I just don't want to let go of the baton and hand it over to anyone else. Is that what he's doing? Well, we're not sure yet. But we are sure of the need.

And it raises this question for us. Do we recognize this need in our life? So we're not going to say the need for a king primarily, but we're going to say the need for somebody who can act in this way in our life.

Somebody who can bring about justice. Somebody to right the wrongs that we have inflicted on others. Somebody to give us direction through life.

Somebody to lead us on this path through life. Somebody to fight our battles for us. To give us protection. That's what they needed and that's what we need. We're told in many different places today that we should be our own king.

[7 : 15] And it may not be phrased like that, but that's essentially what many will tell us. No one can tell you what to do. Freedom is doing whatever you want. But if you choose that as your way through life, you start to realize, well, if it's me who is the king of my own life, then I'm going to be the one who has to fight my own battles.

And I'm going to be the one who has to find justice. And I'm going to be the one who has to find my own way through life. And you know, that might work at times or it might work to a degree.

I had a friend who brought his car for the NCT, the National Car Test of Ireland. And they failed him because they said his brake discs were too thin.

They were too worn down. And now my friend knew his car. In fact, he had replaced the brake discs himself just a few weeks before this.

So he knew they were wrong. He knew they were unjust to fail him. And so he goes to his car. He takes off the brake discs.

[8 : 29] He measures them with a micrometer. He goes back to the NCT and he fights his case. He says it to the tester. He says it to the supervisor.

He fights it all the way to the top. And he wins. And I say fair play to him because I wouldn't have the skill or the knowledge or the guts to do that.

And if that's your temperament, if that's your personality, fair play to you. And you know, sometimes we can fight our own battles. And sometimes we can protect ourselves.

And sometimes we can bring about justice. But we're not designed to do that every day of our lives in every circumstance that we face. It is exhausting to live like that.

And sooner or later, we will be crushed if we live like that. And so while we're told that we should be the king of our own lives, of course, we don't actually operate like that.

[9 : 30] That's why we have a government. That's why we have trade unions. That's why we have courts. That's why we have local TDs. That's why we have advocacy groups. People fighting for justice.

Giving us direction through life. Protecting us. None of these things are perfect. But we do need them. And what we need to recognize is that that's okay.

It's a normal part of being a human being that when we face injustice or when we have been wronged or when we need direction, that we need a king, to use that phrase.

Or if you don't like that phrase, we need somebody to fight for us, to bring about justice, to give us direction and protection. And that's okay. That's part of being human.

So that's the need, the need for a king. What we see, secondly, is that God is the king we need. God is the king we need. So there's a problem in verse 7.

[10 : 37] In verse 7, the Lord says, listen to all that the people are saying to you. And if you stopped at that point, you'd think, Samuel shouldn't have been sulking. Look, God is telling him to listen to the people.

They must be right. Not so. God says it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. Now, of course, at one level, they have rejected Samuel.

And God says that in a couple of verses time. But what God is highlighting is that there's a deeper issue going on here, Samuel, because they're actually rejecting me as their king.

And so what you realize is that it isn't so much. The problem is not so much that they're asking for a king. The problem is that they're asking for a king to replace God.

That's the issue. The problem is not the form of government, whether it's a monarchy or a democracy. The problem is not whether you have a trade union or a TD or an advocacy group.

[11 : 38] The problem is whether those things replace God in our minds, in our hearts, or whether they are under God. I don't know any Latin, but somebody told me before a little Latin phrase that I enjoy.

So the question is, is it Rex Lex or Lex Rex? So Rex is king. Lex is law. So Rex Lex means the king is the law.

He does whatever he wants. He sets the agenda. He makes up the rules. And he's the boss. That's Rex Lex. Lex Rex is that the law is king.

That the king is answerable to God and his law. And if you have a situation where the king is under God and knows that he's under God, or the government recognizes that they are under God, or whatever it is, authority is under God, that's not a problem.

The problem is when the problem is when the king or the government or whatever it is, replace God in our lives. That was the problem in Samuel's day.

[12 : 54] And so you realize he wasn't sulking. He was right. God is the king. God is the king they need. But God is the king they reject in verse 7.

And this is remarkable. It's remarkable that they're rejecting him because he's the one who's rescued them. If you look in verse 8.

I brought them up out of Egypt until this day. What did he do when he brought them up out of Egypt?

They were enslaved to cruel masters, baking bricks in the baking heat. What did God do? He judged in the sense of bringing about justice.

So he defeated the Egyptians, who were these cruel taskmasters. He gave the people direction. So he led them through the sea, through the desert, pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.

[13 : 59] He gave them protection. In other words, he fought their battles for them. You think of Jericho, if you're familiar with that story. He defeated their enemies.

God rescued them. He is the king they need. And you realize that at times it was through people like Samuel that he did this.

But ultimately it is God who is their king. But it is God who they are rejecting as their king. You can see that rejection in how they live because they replace him.

They have replaced him with other gods. And now they are simply replacing him with a king. Or wanting to replace him with a king. Now why is this picture being painted for us?

Well it's being painted for us because it happened. This is historical fact. It happened. But it's also being painted for us because it still happens. It happens in our lives.

[14 : 58] It happens in our hearts. That God is the one who has rescued us. He is the one we should serve. And day in, day out there is this temptation that we end up serving something or someone else other than God.

Calvin said that the human heart is a perpetual idol factory. That we are constantly replacing God with other gods.

With other kings. With other people. With other things. This is why, for example, the author to the Hebrews says, Keep your life free from love of money.

And be content with what you have. For he has said, He has said, I will never leave you. Nor forsake you. So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper.

I will not fear. What's the problem that the authors of the Hebrews is concerned about for these people who have been rescued by God through Jesus? He's concerned that they will love money in a way that it replaces God for them.

[16 : 10] He's not concerned whether they use money or have money. But it's the love of money that he's concerned about. And he's concerned about that because money will leave us or forsake us.

But God will not leave us or forsake us. And so we may be tempted to love money. For money to be our king. For money to be our God.

To think that if I have this money, I have this power. If I have this money, I will have a good life. And so we start to think, How can I get more money? How can I accumulate more?

Or what can I spend it on? And what we end up doing is, If we're not careful, we end up loving money. And it takes God's place in our hearts.

And that is especially true coming into Christmas. Coming into Christmas, the pressure will be on. If you want this to be a good Christmas, You need to spend money.

[17 : 05] That is not true. If you want this to be a good Christmas, Pursue the Lord. Love God. Dwell on his love for you.

And of course you will spend money, But that won't be the defining feature Of whether it is a good Christmas or not. Money will leave you. Money will forsake you.

But God won't. We do it with money. We do it with relationships sometimes. I knew a girl in college who was going out with this guy.

She'd been going out with him for years. And during college they broke up with each other. And I thought, She is going to be devastated. She's going to be heartbroken.

They've been together for years. And within a space of weeks, She was going out with another guy. And I might be totally wrong in this, But what it seemed to me at the time was, That she didn't so much love the guy, Though she may have, As she loved being in a relationship.

[18 : 10] And relationship was her God, Functionally, at that point. If she could have a relationship, That was all that mattered.

It didn't so much matter who the guy was. We can do this with anything. Where money or a relationship ends up being our God. Paul says our belly can be our God.

The things that we eat. The bodily comforts that we enjoy. But what we're shown clearly here is, God is the king we need. He is the one that brings justice.

He is the one that gives direction, And protection to us. He's the one we need. Lastly, we want to think about, How God is the king who gives.

God is the king who gives. So Israel at this point, They want to have a king like the other nations. Which is a sad thing, At the very least.

[19 : 11] Because they were supposed to not be like, The other nations. They were supposed to be distinct, Different, holy. So that the other nations would be attracted, To worship the God that they worshipped.

They want to have a king like the other nations, And that's what they're going to get. Samuel gives them this warning. In verse 10, Samuel told all the words of the Lord, To the people who are asking him for a king.

What does he say? He says, The king will take. The king will take. Verse 11, He will take your sons.

Verse 13, He will take your daughters. Verse 14, He will take the best of your fields. He will take the best of your vineyards. He will take the best of your olive groves.

Verse 15, He will take a tenth of your grain. He will take a tenth of your vintage. Verse 17, He will, Sorry, Verse 16, He will take for his own use.

[20 : 14] Your male and female servants. The best of your cattle. The best of your donkeys. Verse 17, He will take a tenth of your flocks. This king that you so badly want, Is going to take everything from you.

And he will take them from their rightful place. Where should their sons and daughters be? They should be with them. At home. But the king will take them from their rightful place.

Where should their crops and their food be? They should be on their table. But this king will take them from their rightful place. And he will take them for himself. Verse 11, He will take your sons and daughters and make them serve with his chariots.

They will run in front of his chariots. Verse 12, It will be his ground. His harvest. Verse 15, His officials.

His attendants. Verse 17, You will become his slaves. They will end up essentially back in Egypt as slaves.

[21 : 28] Because of this king that they so badly want. Back where they started. He will take, He will take, He will take from their rightful place for himself.

It reminds me a little bit of this book I've been reading. It's the Wing Feather Saga. It's a kid's book. That's about the level that I'm operating at. And in the kid's book, there's these children and this dog.

They're living in a cottage by the cliffs on the dark sea of darkness. And in the night, what happens is this black carriage comes and takes people from their homes.

And it says this, It's no wonder that Janer had a hard time sleeping once he heard the faint thud of hooves and the jangle of chains. He could see in his mind the forms of the crows circling the carriage and perched atop it, hearing the croaking beaks and the flapping of black wings.

He told himself that the sounds were only his imagination. But he knew that somewhere in the countryside that very night, the black carriage would stop at some poor soul's house and the children there would be taken away, never to be seen again.

[22 : 45] And that's what Samuel says this king is going to do. He will take and take and take and the people do not listen.

Verse 19, The people refused to listen to Samuel. No, they said, We want a king over us. We want to be like the nations. And so God grants them what they want.

It reminds us of this phrase that one author says, There's only two kinds of people in the end, those who say to God, Thy will be done. And those to whom God says, in the end, Thy will be done.

This is what they so badly want. This is what God gives them. And you wonder, is Samuel exaggerating? Is he being dramatic? Well, you think about it. If you know the kings in the Old Testament, let's take the two best, two of the best kings.

You think about David and you think about Solomon. Now, they did great things and they were good kings in many ways. But you think about David. What did David do? He took, didn't he, for himself?

[23 : 50] He took the wife of another man. He took her from her rightful place for himself. Then he took that man's life to cover his tracks.

He was one of the best kings. You think about Solomon who starts out so well and God says to him, What do you want? And Solomon says, I don't want to take anything.

I don't want riches. I don't want power. I don't want fame. Give me wisdom, God. I need your wisdom. And God commends him for that. But what happens by the end of Solomon's life? 1 Kings 11, King Solomon loved many foreign women.

Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives who were princesses and 300 concubines. Did he even know their names?

For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods. And his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God.

[24 : 53] And the men come to Solomon's son when Solomon's son is going to reign over them and they say, Your father's yoke was heavy on us. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us and we will serve you.

And Solomon's son says to them, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.

And we need to hear this because the reality is that whoever we serve, if they are not serving God, they will take and take and take. Their yoke will be either heavy, heavier or heaviest.

And our service will be hard harder or hardest. I was in the doctor's waiting room during the week with one of the lads, nothing serious at all, but the telly was on, which was a bit of a blast from the past.

The TV was on and the TV, the ads break came on and what the TV was advertising was more TV. So it was telling me that if I came back at nine o'clock that evening, there'd be more telly on for me to watch.

[26 : 04] And then after that first ad, what it did was it advertised Disney Plus to me, which in my mind, I thought, well, this is just more TV. Now, Disney Plus, it will take your money on a monthly basis.

If you want the standard definition, if you want higher definition, it'll take a little bit more from you. If you want ultra high 4HKD or whatever it is, sorry, it'll take more money from you.

So the TV will take your time if you give it. Disney Plus will take your time. The next ad that came on, Sky. So Sky was being advertised and I just thought, this is bizarre.

I'm watching TV already. What more does it want from me? And it's trying to sell me Sky and Disney Plus and come back later and we will take all of your time and all of your money.

And it's the same with kings. It's the same with technology. It's the same with anything in our lives. They will take from you the things that should be in a different place for themselves.

[27 : 07] And it crushes us. It leaves us weary. It leaves us heavy laden. You get to the end of the box set and you're thinking, I don't feel better having watched all that. And so it means that if we are feeling crushed this morning or weary or heavy laden, it may be because we are serving something other than God.

It may be that we're serving our boss instead of the Lord or serving our belly instead of the Lord or serving our spouse instead of the Lord. That we've replaced God with those things.

That we are giving ourselves to something in a way that God has never intended. And those things, like these kings, will take and take and take. And then we hear Jesus.

Does Jesus say to us, My Father made your yoke heavy and I will add to it. He disciplined you with whips but I disciplined you with scorpions. No, Jesus doesn't say that.

Jesus says, Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I'm not going to run you into the ground. Take my yoke upon you for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[28 : 30] And you realize, here is a king who doesn't take things from their rightful place for himself, but he gives and gives and gives and as you read through the gospels you realize Jesus gives his time, he gives his ear, he gives his energy, he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

That Jesus is the king who brings about justice. He brings about justice by righting the wrongs that we have done through his blood on the cross. He brings about justice by righting the wrongs that others have done to us so that we can cry out to him and leave it with him even as we work for justice in other ways that he has provided.

He brings about direction in our life, he leads us like a king through his word showing us what is good and what is bad, what is right and wrong, what is wise and unwise.

He gives us protection like a real king should. He fights our battles for us so that if we're going back to the NCT and we're saying this is wrong, we pray to Jesus and say, Jesus, this is your fight and I leave it in your hands.

He protects us so much that not even death can separate us from the love of God and he does this, he is our king so that everything in our life would find its rightful place.

[30 : 05] He doesn't take things from their rightful place. He puts them in their rightful place. Some things have no rightful place in our lives and everything else finds its rightful place before him and so we realize that a king as these Israelites wanted is a gift to us if that is where we live.

It's not a god. A government is a gift to us. It's not our god. That's why Paul says there's no authority except that which God has established.

The authorities that exist have been established by God. We realize before King Jesus that food is a gift to us. It's not our god so that we can eat and drink to the glory of God.

We realize that work is a gift to us. It's not our god so that we don't have to work our fingers to the bone but we can rest in Christ we realize our spouse if we're married is a gift not a god so that as one author says when I've learned to love God better than my earthly dearest I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now.

And so this is the question we need to be considering throughout the week is this thing that I'm enjoying am I considering it as a gift which is what it is from God or am I replacing God with it?

[31 : 36] You may be a construction worker working on a home might be living in a mansion you might live in a dome you may own guns you may own even tanks you may be somebody's landlord you may even own banks but you're gonna have to serve somebody yes you are gonna have to serve somebody it may be the devil it might be the Lord but you're gonna have to serve somebody we wanna serve the Lord he is the king we need he is the king who has given and given and given so that we would gladly serve him let's pray and ask his help to do that father we pray that you'd strengthen our resolve lord we want to serve you help us to see more clearly that you are the king that we need that Jesus is the one father who has given his life for us and may we joyfully serve him this week may everything else in our lives find their rightful place those things are not our gods they are gifts from you help us to enjoy them as such amen