

Samuel - Intercessor and Teacher

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] chapter 12. We're going to read again near the end of the chapter at verse 19. 1 Samuel 12 at verse 19.

And all the people said to Samuel, pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, but we have added to all our sins this evil to ask for ourselves a king.

And Samuel said to the people, do not be afraid. You have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. Moreover, as for me, be it far from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.

Well, last Sunday evening, as you recall, we looked from 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 at Paul's appeal for prayer. He was praying there for himself particularly, as he engaged in gospel ministry and looked to the future, as God would enable him. Remember, we saw that he was praying for his protection, praying also that his word, the word of God, would be very much blessed through him, and so on. And tonight's passage is also about prayer. It's not a deliberate connection with what we saw on the Lord's day, but nevertheless, this is where the Lord has led us. And here we find the people appealing to Samuel to pray for them and not to cease from praying for them. Prayer is our great privilege at all times, to pray for ourselves, to pray for the Lord's blessing, to reach into our lives.

But it's equally a great privilege to pray for others. And indeed, praying for others is itself a mark of God's grace in our hearts. It's not something we do ordinarily. It's not something we do until the Lord places in our hearts that desire to pray and people that he brings before us as those that we pray for. In other words, intercessory prayer, as that's usually called, is part of the privilege of praying to God as we pray for in that way and pray for ourselves as well.

[2 : 3 3] And we owe much to the prayers of others. You know this yourselves. Most, if not all of us here, can in some way or trace the influence in our lives that the prayers of others led to, in terms of God hearing the prayers of those who prayed for us and came with his blessing in answering those prayers to touch our hearts, to bring us to know himself. And it's a wonderfully humbling thing to know that people are praying for you. And it's a wonderfully humbling thing to know that you have come to know the Lord in answer to the prayers of others who remembered you when you weren't praying for yourself and myself. So all of that comes under the privilege of prayer. And prayer, as I think I mentioned on the Lord's Day evening, prayer is something that binds us together as we pray for ourselves and pray for one another. One of the binding ingredients, if you like, of this meeting tonight is that it's a prayer meeting. I know we study the word as we're trying to do just now, and it's a combined meeting for prayer and for the study of God's word. And those two, of course, features are very important side by side along with each other. But as we pray here, as we pray for each other, as we pray for others, the intercessory prayers you heard this evening from both these young men praying for others out with ourselves in many different aspects of the life of our nation, the life of the world. What a great thing it is that we tonight in this place in Stornoway, in this relatively small building compared to the whole world that's out there, we can pray and we have on our hearts to pray for places like Ukraine, for Christians in such places as Pakistan, for places that are experiencing such devastation, as well as praying for our nation and for ourselves. That, friends, is a massive privilege, one that we sadly, I certainly sadly, so often take for granted, or at least don't don't actually take advantage of to the extent that I should. Now, here in Israel, this was a critical time in their history because they were coming to the point where a king, Saul, was actually set over them. This was something that they themselves had asked for, because if you look back to chapter

11 and verse 15 there, you can see how it's referred to there, where you find the people invited to come with Samuel to Gilgal, so they went there and made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal.

And that's where Samuel then gives this address. He began addressing the people and he went back over some of their history. He got them to recall how they had actually come to ask for a king in the first place. And that fits in with chapter 8, of course. Chapter 8 is the chapter where that request for a king, we'll come back to refer to it in a minute, but chapter 8 is the request of the people for a king. And they had come to the point where they thought this was necessary for them. One of the things they mentioned was they wanted to be like the other nations. They wanted to be like the pagan nations around them. They all had their kings. Those kings led them into battle. And here they were, Samuel, an old man. Here were the people of Israel saying, make us a king. Set a king over us.

And this is what it led to, where the Lord, despite Samuel's reluctance, the Lord said, don't just give them what they asked for, because this is something that's part of my plan, my package for them. They were going to suffer for it. Nevertheless, this is what the Lord said about it. And so you come here in verse 19, Samuel called on the name of the Lord. And then the Lord sent thunder and rain that particular day. And the people greatly feared the Lord. And Samuel, they obviously saw, they knew that Samuel was a man of God. They'd seen that many times. They'd heard him praying many times.

And here again, he prayed and the Lord answered his prayer. And the people said to Samuel, pray for your servants to the Lord, your God, that we may not die. But we have added to all our sins, this evil, ask for ourselves a king. Samuel said to the people, as we've read all the way through the verses, and he then says in verse 23, moreover, as for me, be it far from me that I should sin against the Lord. Look at how he puts it, that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you.

[7 : 14] And so three things I want to just bring out briefly in regard to Samuel as a man of intercessory prayer, who combined with this intercessory prayer, the element of teaching the people the things of God. Samuel, intercessor and teacher for the people of Israel. First of all, intercessory prayer was a feature of Samuel's life from his youngest days. You recall that back at 1 Samuel, the early chapters of 1 Samuel, Hannah's prayer, for example, there in verse 2, is where you find the life really of Samuel beginning in her prayer, her prayer for a child, and sorry, in chapter 1, her prayer for a child.

And then the Lord, of course, answered that in giving her this child that she called Samuel. The word Samuel, the name Samuel itself, is indicative of prayer because it means asked of the Lord. Samuel was an answer to his mother's prayer for a child, and she dedicated him, as you know, to the Lord. The very mother he had was a praying mother. He knew that from his earliest days. And after he was weaned, of course, she brought him to the house of God to serve the Lord there. And that's where he served in the Lord's service all through these years. Of course, you might think that there wasn't much time for him to get to know his mother's prayers if, as we say, as it says there, he was weaned and then taken to the house of the Lord. But remember, weaning in those days was not in an infancy.

It was very much down in maybe three or four years old before the children were fully weaned. So Samuel would have had plenty of time to hear his mother's prayer, to get used to the fact that his mother was a woman of prayer, a mother who loved the Lord, a mother who commended him to the Lord, who prayed for him, who prayed for her people. I'm sure he heard that many times.

And that's where Samuel learned to pray. That's where Samuel learned intercessory prayer. It was there, really, he imbibed it, you might say, with his mother's milk.

And that, of course, follows into an area which could very, very readily explore, well known to yourselves, the importance of bringing up children to know prayer to the Lord, to experience what it is to pray for others in a family setting, to pray intercessory prayer, just like Samuel learned to pray. This is what we pray for our young families as well. It's a wonderful thing to have so many young families and so many dedicated teachers, some of whom are here tonight, to teach them the things of God in our Sunday school and the other activities that take place in tweenies and in the older age group as well of our children. What a marvellous privilege that is to be a congregation that has that privilege, that has that blessing. And we pray that these children, as they're presently growing up, will actually come as they hear in the family setting, as they hear a parent, a mother or father are both praying, actually asking the Lord for his blessing and asking the Lord for that blessing out with

the family itself and even out with the congregation, that they will learn for themselves how important prayer is and what intercessory prayer is all about. And so it became a feature of Samuel's life. If we go to Psalm 99, you'll find a reference there, interestingly, to Samuel alongside of Moses, a psalm that deals with God as the holy God, the king of Israel, the king in his might, is praised there. But then, verse 6,

[10:59] Moses and Aaron were among his priests. Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. Now, it's interesting that Samuel is there, along with Moses and Aaron. Moses particularly, that the two names there exist together and what's said, because Moses was also a man of intercessory prayer. And as you find Samuel united to Moses there, it takes your mind back to the likes of Exodus 32, where you find after the incident of the golden calf, the Lord saying to Moses to let him alone, that he was going to destroy this people. And then the Lord, Moses pleaded with the Lord, Exodus 32 and verse 32, where you find Moses saying, alas, this people have sinned a great sin. See how similar that is to the context in 1 Samuel we're looking at tonight. Alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will, forgive their sin.

But if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written. But the Lord said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you. And there's a prayer that we, as people who intercede for others, who don't, as far as we know, pray for themselves tonight. These are the very words. These are the very thoughts that you bring to God, where you say, alas, this people have sinned a great sin. Alas, our people, alas, our nation, alas, our people have sinned a great sin. They continue to sin a great sin.

They continue to spurn the ways of God, to reject the ways of God. Alas, the church in our land, or some aspects of it, some parts of it, have sinned a great sin, because they've rejected the Bible. They've rejected the Bible's teaching. They don't take the Bible for what it is.

And we plead with God for them. We have the privilege of intercessory prayer to bring all of these things before the Lord, such as he did here. And you notice in verse 23 here of the passage we're looking at tonight, these words of Samuel, where he's saying, moreover, as for me, far be it from me, that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you. Look at the strong revulsion that Samuel speaks of in the very thought of ceasing to pray for these people, to pray for them before the Lord. And that really makes such a challenge for ourselves, because we are tempted so many ways away from praying and pleading with the Lord for others beside ourselves, even for people that we know have sinned against the Lord and continue to sin against the Lord. But here is what Samuel is saying. Forbid that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you.

Isn't that a challenge that we should think of not praying for other people or not praying for ourselves and not praying for the church as a sin against God, as a failure on our part for which we are culpable. That is what Samuel is really saying to us. Let's try and get that thought into our minds and keep it there, that far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for one another or even for those out with our own congregation.

[14:32] Edison intercessory prayer, it was a part of Samuel's upbringing and how much that reminds us to that last point of the Lord's own teaching to the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5 and verse 44. Because as we said, there's so much that seeks to tempt us away from praying for others, especially when something's happened to ourselves that others have done. Remember how Jesus said, you've heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same. And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the

Gentiles do the same. You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. We pray even for our enemies, not just for those who don't follow the ways of the Lord, but those who are very much opposed and engaged against him and against his cause. Here is Jesus saying something that fits in with what Samuel is saying himself, be it far from me that I should sin against the Lord by not or by ceasing to pray for you.

So as intercessory prayer is very much a part of the Christian life, let us seek the grace from God that would take advantage and make the most of that because this world needs prayers and needs

your prayers.

It needs intercessory prayer. Our nation needs prayer. And we were reminded by both our brothers tonight of the need to pray for our new prime minister, for her cabinet, for the officers that she has appointed, to pray for those in opposition, to pray for the whole parliament, to pray for those who rule over us, to pray in such critical times as we face. This is intercessory prayer. This is our privilege. This is what God has laid upon our hearts to do. Secondly, Samuel was not deflected from intercessory prayer. And when you go back to chapter eight again, as I mentioned, we'd just refer to it later on. The beginning of chapter eight, when Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel.

The name of his firstborn son was Joel, name of his second Abijah. They were judges in Israel, yet his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.

[17 : 18] Then all the elders gathered together and said to Samuel, Atrama, behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed to the Lord. See, he prayed again to the Lord immediately. And the Lord said to Samuel, Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. And he reflects on how they have been so stubborn, even since he took them out of Egypt.

And so, you see, going back to that, you find that there is really, although it's primarily a rejection of the Lord, Samuel was quite right, of course, in including in that a rejection of himself.

And it really was treating him despitefully and treating him in a way that was really pretty nasty, pretty bad. They just said, you're too old for us, effectively. You've reached the stage of life.

Anyway, we want to be like the nations around us. You can't go before us into battle. You're not a proper king. We want a king. We want a king like the nations around us to go into battle around, to go into battle ahead of us. Samuel prayed, as we saw, to the Lord right there and then in that context. But you see, the rejection of Samuel by the people in seeking to have a king set over him did not deflect him from prayer and for praying for them. It actually, if anything, just made him even more determined to pray for them. He prayed to the Lord about this. He was annoyed. And he wasn't annoyed just because they had sought a king instead of him. They were annoyed because he knew full well that the Lord was their king. And what they were actually asking for was really a rejection of the Lord as their king and wanting a human king like all the nations. Well, of course, that's not confined to the days of Samuel. Is it that kind of thinking? Because sadly, you'll find elements of the visible church in our world that really are pretty much the same in their attitude towards what's going on around them.

And that's where you find this very damaging idea, this damaging philosophy, this damaging thought process that really says, well, certain aspects of the gospel are just too outmoded. Just like they said to Samuel, now you're old, so we want changes. They're really saying of the Bible, well, this Bible is old. It's not relevant in all that it says for our present generation. We want to be like the other people out there. We want some of that culture out there brought into the church. Let's modernize.

[20 : 08] Let's do things in a way that will really change things drastically from within. Let's be like what the world itself sees in terms of human relationships. Is that not progress? Of course, it's not progress.

Wherever you find the word of God left behind or even adjusted to suit the culture of the age, that's not progression. That's regression. As John said in one of his letters, those that actually went ahead and left God behind, that wasn't progress. They went ahead into all kinds of new teachings, but they were leaving God behind. You see, that's the devastating thing that we see happening in our generation. People who think that new ideas about the gospel itself and what the gospel is or the gospel should be. They may be very appealing. They may be very appealing to the world. They may be very appealing to the culture around us, but they've left God behind. Whenever you leave God behind, well, you know you're in trouble because whatever you do, you're not going to have blessing.

You're not going to have the blessing of God. That's really a tangent there. I don't want to go into that too much, but it's part of what you find connected with what the people said to Samuel here, that you've reached the end of your stage of ministry. We want something different. We want to be

like the nations around us, so make us a king. Now, that didn't deflect Samuel from praying for them.

And indeed, you'll find the same when Saul was rejected by God. In chapter 15, verses 10 to 11, there you'll find a similar thing mentioned. Chapter 15, verse 10, the word of the Lord came to Samuel.

I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned his back from following me and has not performed my commandments. And Samuel was angry and he cried to the Lord all night. See what he's saying?

[22 : 12] He cried to the Lord all night. And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. As soon as the Lord had spoken to Samuel about his rejection, the Lord's rejection of Saul as king because of his disobedience, the way he had not followed the ways of the Lord, the first thing Samuel did was throw himself down and pray and he prayed all night. When did I last pray all night? I can't remember.

When did I last pray overhearing such news as sometimes you hear in the world or in the church? Something that you know fills you with a sense of apprehension or dread?

Here is Samuel. You see, all of these events, the way in which he was rejected and a king being asked for in his place, the way in which Saul is rejected from being king by the Lord because of what he had done.

In each case, what does Samuel do? He prays. He turns to prayer. And that's a lesson, isn't it, for us to, for prayer to be prominent and the primary thing whenever we have such things as you find in these events in Samuel's life. And you can find the same when they face their enemies.

Look at chapter 7. We're rattling through a few passages here, but you'll find the same thing in chapter 7 there in verses 5 and then verse 8 to 9. Samuel said, gather all Israel at Mizpah.

[23 : 51] This is the context in which they needed to be delivered from the hand of the Philistines who had at that stage such a hold over them. Samuel said, gather all Israel at Mizpah and I will pray to the Lord for you. So he didn't just go into his own home and close the door and pray. That would have been absolutely fine. The Lord commands us to do that at times.

But he wanted the people to hear him praying, to pray for them. Gather all Israel at Mizpah. I will pray to the Lord for you. So they gathered at Mizpah and threw water, poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said, we have sinned against the Lord.

And go to verse 8. The people of Israel said to Samuel, do not cease to cry out to the Lord of God for us that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines. So Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it to the Lord.

And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel and the Lord answered him. See the context again, doesn't matter really with the conditions this man is in or facing.

It doesn't matter how things change from one situation to the next. But you will always find that this man turns to prayer, that this man brings it before the Lord and pleads for the people before the Lord. He turns to intercessory prayer for the people.

[25 : 21] And while Samuel in chapter 7, of course, is engaged in prayer, as a result of that, you'll find a great victory given to Israel in response to the prayer of Samuel.

So you could say really in a sense, you ask, what was Israel's greatest weapon against her enemies, against its enemies? Well, the greatest weapon that they had at the time was Samuel's intercessory prayer.

That was their greatest weapon. And that's a great weapon that we still have from the Lord to use, to wield against the Lord's enemies, not for their destruction, but for their conversion, for their turning to the Lord, for their being brought to see their need of Christ for themselves.

Intercessory prayer was a feature of Samuel's life. And Samuel was not deflected from intercessory prayer. But then thirdly, Samuel linked intercession and instruction.

Again, the passage in chapter 12, you see he's saying there that he will not, in fact, cease to pray for them. But he also says, far be it from me that I should cease to pray sin against the Lord, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.

[26 : 40] And in fact, all the way through this short passage, you'll find instruction given by Samuel with regard to the people's instruction. Verses 20 to 22 there, you'll find Samuel said, do not be afraid.

What is his instruction? Well, you can follow it through a few brief points, a few brief steps. He instructs them, first of all, by reassuring them. They have made this great confession of their sin. But then Samuel said, don't be afraid.

You have done this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve him with all your heart. In other words, what you have done, Samuel is saying, is not the end of the matter. Things can be mended.

Things can be put right. And at that stage, he is then going on to charge them to be obedient to the Lord. Don't turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.

And then thirdly, he instructs them about the foolishness of idolatry. Don't turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty.

[27 : 46] He means by that especially the idolatry that they had imported, that belonged to the pagans around them. The interesting thing is this word empty. Recall right back at the beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, the account of the creation.

The earth was without form and void or empty, formless. That emptiness. The same word that's used here for the foolishness of idolatry.

Don't turn aside after empty things. And of course, when you put beside that, the emptiness of idolatry. Idolatry just has no substance, nothing of any real substance to it.

It's all just something that a puff of wind takes away when the Lord comes to blow upon it.

Something like that. But when you contrast that with where the Bible presents God.

The God of substance. The God whose substance is holy and righteous and true and powerful and loving and faithful.

[28 : 56] Things of substance. Things that have weight morally and spiritually. When the Lord is saying to us, don't turn aside to other things apart from me.

He's saying everything out with me lacks the substance that you need. I am the one who has the substance. I am the Lord. That is my name. And my name carries the substance.

It's one of the interesting things. The word for glory in Hebrew of the Old Testament. It's a word that literally means to have weight. To have weight.

The Lord who is glorious. The glory of the Lord. It means something of substance. Something of weight. Idolatry doesn't have that.

Nothing outside of God has that weightiness of glory and of substance spiritually, morally. This is our God. And this is the God we pray to as we pray intercessory prayers on behalf of others.

[29 : 59] And he goes on from that. These are all very interesting steps. One that lead on to the other. He's saying, don't turn aside from following the Lord. Don't turn aside after empty things for they are empty.

For he says, the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake. Because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.

What an amazing amount of assurance and reassurance for them was in these words. The Lord will not forsake his people.

See, this is what their concern is. We've done this great sin. Pray to the Lord for us. Plead with the Lord for us. Pray that he will not cast us off.

That he will not reject us. We've rejected him to a great extent. But pray for us. This is Samuel's answer. The Lord will not forsake his people.

[31 : 01] Because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. And really that reinforces the point. And it's such a hugely important point for ourselves tonight.

Samuel is more or less saying, you know, if the Lord had it in his mind to reject you and forsake you, he'd never have made you a people for himself in the first place.

But having made you a people for himself, that itself shows you and guarantees for you, he will never forsake his people. Those that he has made his people for his name's sake.

His own reputation is tied to it. And again, you go back to the days of Moses. One of the arguments Moses pleaded in his intercessory prayer with God is, why should the Egyptians say that for evil you have taken your people out into the desert to destroy them?

See, there is the momentous consideration that Moses had in mind as he was praying for the people. Just as Samuel has here, Lord, your reputation is attached to your people.

[32 : 08] And here is Samuel saying, you know, the Lord's reputation is such that he would never take his people, you to be a people for himself and then reject you.

That would be contradictory to his name, to his very nature. But at the same time, he's saying, only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for consider what great things he has done for you.

Well, there it is. Isn't it the same for ourselves? If we consider what great things he has done for you. And our brothers in prayer tonight also brought that out in their prayer to God.

The sheer goodness of God to us. The amazing goodness of God to us. How many people go to the COPE or to Tesco and think that these things have just been man-produced?

The things that we need for our bodily sustenance. A Christian goes in there or should go in there and say, Lord, I thank you for this abundance. I thank you for being so good and providing this.

[33 : 26] When I know that so much of the world is starving. But you have placed this in our possession. You have placed us in this privileged position of having access to this in your goodness.

And that's just one thing, the food that you eat. Look at all the other things we have that are really attributable to God's goodness. Only, he said, fear the Lord and consider what great things he has done for you.

And when we consider what great things the Lord has done for us. Not only will we pray for ourselves with thankfulness. But we will be also busy with intercessory prayer.

Praying for others. That they too will know the Lord's blessing. Let's pray. Almighty and gracious God.

We know that all things are in your hand. And we pray, O Lord, that as we consider the goodness of the Lord to us. And as we consider this passage of your word that fills us with so many challenges and yet gives us such great reassurance.

[34 : 36] We thank you, Lord, that you hear our prayers. We thank you that you give us this facility of intercessory prayer. Hear our prayers, Lord, tonight, spoken and also silent.

They are all known to you. We pray that you would hear us. And that you would answer us for your name's sake. As we pray for others as we have done. We ask, Lord, that you would continue to remind us daily of how much we owe to you.

And how much you have dealt with us, not according to our sins or iniquity. But in your pity and mercy, you have come with your blessing after blessing. Bless us, we pray, as a congregation.

As we continue to seek your own guidance and your blessing in the gospel. And graciously bless those of our number who have not yet come to know you. Have not yet come to profess that they know you.

We ask that you would bless them, Lord, to bring them onwards in their own spiritual lives and development. And we ask now that you would be with us in the rest of this week.

[35 : 44] And enable us as we look forward again by your grace to your day. That we may rejoice at the prospect of being together in the house of the Lord. And as the house of the Lord.

That we may know your presence with us. Hear us, we pray. For your glory's sake. Amen. Let's now conclude our service singing.