

Christs Power to Save

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[0 : 00] Turn with me then to the chapter that we read already, 1 Samuel chapter 8, and we're going to read from the beginning once again, but we're going to consider together the whole of the chapter.

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second Abijah. They were judges in Beersheba, yet his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain.

They took bribes and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to them, 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, and the Lord said to Samuel, Obey the voice of the people and all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

A few weeks ago, I watched The Iron Lady, the portrayal of the life of Margaret Thatcher.

[1 : 29] And what struck me about that story was not so much what she was in her young days, but the way in which she viewed her life, in which it viewed her life from the perspective of her old age.

People like myself can remember very easily and very vividly the many years in which Margaret Thatcher was in power. And there wasn't a day, I don't think, but that she was on the television and in the newspapers and she was all over the place.

Now, although she is still alive, she is old. And the present generation, I guess, growing up, probably don't even know who she was or who she is.

Much more is known about Margaret Thatcher in her active younger years. And the same is true from Samuel's perspective.

With the best will in the world, although it's discriminatory to judge the faculties of older people, and therefore, of course, there's a whole debate as to when somebody should retire and when somebody shouldn't retire.

[2 : 49] And everyone's different in that respect. Some people keep their faculties for longer. Yet with the best will in the world, as you get older, what you are when you're 80 is not what you were when you were 20.

You may have more wisdom when you're 80, but you don't have the sharpness. You don't have the reactions. You don't have the same ability to think quickly and to do quickly.

And the same was true for Samuel. It's always been true. Much more is known about Samuel in his younger days. And I'm sure that the same is true for the way that we have read Samuel.

He was a miracle baby in many respects. After many years of not being able to have a baby, his mother Hannah, she prayed in God's house that God specifically would give her a son.

And if he did, she would give him back to the Lord and he would serve the Lord from when he was a young man. And that's what happened. God gave her a son and she took him back to the Lord's house, to the tabernacle at that time.

[3 : 57] And he served from a very young age under the supervision of Eli, who was a priest at that time. And so it's the younger days of Samuel that are more familiar to us.

We know that he's one of the finest and most godly men in the Bible, a great example of what it was for God to raise up someone who would lead his people and to deliver them from a very depressing time and to give them hope and encouragement at that time.

But now he is old and he's now become obscure. He's taken a back seat. He's detached from the people and he has made his sons judges in his place.

The first son was called Joel and the second son was called Abijah. But it turns out that however fine Samuel was in his person and in his abilities, his sons did not follow him in his ways.

They were corrupt. They were on the take. They took bribes. They perverted justice. Now, some people will say that this shows that Samuel failed in bringing up his sons.

[5 : 24] It's very easy to say to someone, ah, the Bible says train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. We all know that verse. And that's the aim and that's the objective.

That's the prayer that every Christian man and woman has as soon as their child is conceived or born. We pray for our children and we seek in whatever way we can to bring up our children prayerfully in the nurture and in the instruction of the Lord.

I'm sure you heard about that this morning because there was a baptism here this morning. And every time there's a baptism, we refocus on this great principle and the great prayer that we have. And yet, it doesn't always work out that way.

It could be that Samuel did fail. For one thing, his own experience growing up wasn't actually the most balanced. With the best will in the world, despite, maybe some of you may take issue with me on this, because after all, Hannah did promise Samuel to the Lord, but there must have been a price to pay because that meant that Samuel's exposure to his own home was not what it should have been.

He grew up outside his own home, outside the influence of his own father and his own mother. He was under the supervision of Eli. Is that the best influence?

[6 : 47] Eli himself wasn't the best example of someone who brought up his own sons. And then it could also be suggested that Samuel, the nature of his work as he grew up, was such that it took him away from his own home.

He traveled extensively throughout Israel. Every time he returned to Ramah, we know that. But perhaps his sons, Joel and Abijah, could have seen more of their father.

A lesson, perhaps, to ourselves. The contact which a child has with his parents is directly proportional to the influence that they are on him.

That only makes sense. Could it be that he, in some respects, didn't pay enough attention to his children, the attention that he should have paid to them?

We don't know. The fact is, it's easy to blame the parent for the conduct of a child. But whilst there may be some responsibility, it's not always the case that a bad person, or someone who does not grow up in the way that they were brought up, it's not always, it doesn't always follow that it's bad parenting.

[8 : 08] Because at the end of the day, your life is your choice. And you, whatever way you've been brought up, and I'm talking to people here, perhaps today, who have been brought up in Christian homes, and yet you have chosen, you may not have signed on the dotted line as such, you may not have declared it in public, I no longer follow the Christian faith, I want the world to know.

You may never have said that. But nevertheless, that's what it amounts to. You have not walked in the way of, that you have been taught.

And I'm going to remind you of that this evening. And you may say, well, you know, you've no idea how I was brought up in such a strict home. It may be, it may have been.

Your parents were not perfect. No parent is perfect. You may be able tonight to point to, to many's a flaw in your parents.

And you're trying to use that as an excuse because of why you are not a Christian. But what you're forgetting is this, that you are accountable yourself personally to the Lord.

[9 : 24] And the Lord will hold it against you if you have rejected Him. You may also say, ah, but we don't take bribes. We're not corrupt like Abijah and Joel.

You're not going to say that we are, I mean, we have been brought up well. We are respectable citizens. And to that extent, we have followed the ways of our parents.

I'm not asking you tonight if you're a respectable citizen. That's not what being a Christian is about. It's about coming to faith in Jesus and asking Him to be your Lord and Savior and obeying Him.

That's what being a Christian is about. It's accepting His death on the cross as your sacrifice for sin. And nothing will compensate for that.

And all of your good works and all of your attempts in doing your best will never compensate for coming to faith in Jesus Christ because that's what the Bible is all about.

[10 : 32] And besides, what is it that motivates a person to take bribes and to be corrupt? Me. That's what motivates it. You might say, I would never think of taking a bribe.

I would never think of being on the table. That's awful. That's what you read about in the newspapers. I'm sure that there was a time when neither Joel nor Abijah would ever have dreamed of living a corrupt life.

Maybe when they were small and when they were taught the Bible when they were small. They would never have dreamed of living in such a way. Nobody does. You ask any child, are you going to be a child who's brought up in a Christian home?

Are you going to live? Are you going to love the Lord when you grow up? Or are you going to disobey him? He'll always say yes. And he'll mean it that he'll love the Lord.

And yet, once self creeps in, and once you start giving in to me first, the me first philosophy that you see in the world around you, and that's endemic in our own hearts, that's what sin is.

[11 : 44] It's me first, doing things and living for myself. That's where corruption begins. We were thinking about that on Wednesday night. The nature of the world is a corrupt world.

Why? Because it puts me in the first place. And it sets me a challenge. Because ultimately, you either live for the Lord in full submission to him and Jesus Christ who he sent into the world, or you live the way you choose to live for yourself.

It may not be an overtly flamboyant, extravagant life, but it's the way you've chosen to live and you've chosen to live away from God in disobedience to him.

And ultimately, there are only the two ways. My own way or God's way. My own choice or God's way. And I put that to you this evening because I want to challenge particularly those of you who have been brought up in a Christian environment.

You know the gospel. You've come to Sunday school. You know your Bible. Or at least you know enough of the Bible to know that God sent Jesus into the world to save you from...

[12 : 59] Do you think that just because you went to Sunday school that Jesus didn't die for you? Do you think that somehow or other that makes you immune from needing to be saved?

It doesn't. But it puts you in a position where you actually know what God is saying to you. And in many ways, that's a worse position than someone who never heard the gospel in the first place. So I'm asking you tonight that if it's a long time since you've really thought long and hard about this to stop tonight and to revisit the gospel.

Go back to it. And to ask yourself, well, what stage am I at in my life? Have I really achieved what I wanted to achieve living contrary to what God is asking me to do?

Have I really achieved it? And the answer to that is no, you haven't. And God is calling you tonight and commanding you.

[13 : 57] Because remember, the gospel is a command. He's commanding you again and again and again to come and to put your trust in him. So there's no hard evidence that Samuel was defective in any way.

And perhaps it simply was this, that both his sons grew up and they came to a stage where they simply turned their back on what they knew was the truth. Now, the people of Israel then were unhappy with the way that Samuel's sons had turned out, particularly when he made them judges and when that meant that they were accountable to them knowing that these judges were corrupt. Of course, that's the most unstable thing, system, regime that you could ever think of. When the very people that you're supposed to trust, when the pillar of justice in society, you know that it bends this way and that way depending on who offers the most money.

I mean, you can well imagine how awful such a system would be and we pray that the Lord will maintain the integrity of the legal system because once that goes then everything else just simply crumbles.

But the people were not simply asking Samuel to appoint someone else instead of his sons as judges over them or as a judge over them.

[15 : 29] The people were asking for a regime change, a completely different form of government altogether. They were asking for not a judge this time but a king.

Now, on the surface, there is nothing wrong with asking for a king. There was nothing wrong with the people of Israel asking for a king. And the reason I know that is because if you go through the Old Testament, the Old Testament has got some marvelous things to say about the king.

Ultimately, the king was to symbolize the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. So there was nothing inherently wrong with there being a king over Israel.

As history went, a king could either be a good thing or a bad thing. We can all point to good kings in the Old Testament, people who kept the word of God and who ruled and reigned in righteousness, and kings who were corrupt and who were anti-God and who were idolatrous.

So a king in himself was neither a good thing. It depended on who the king was and to what extent he was prepared to be obedient to the Lord.

[16:47] So in asking for a king, they are not asking for something which is in itself sinful. The problem was not what they were asking for.

The problem was in what motivated them to ask for the king. The reasons behind, and these reasons are made very clear to us in this chapter.

The reason they wanted a king, they weren't coming to God or Samuel asking, Lord, what will you have me to do? That's the basis of every true prayer.

But that was not the basis of their prayer and their request. They wanted a king because other nations had kings like all the other nations.

Now what I find interesting in this chapter is that it displays to me so much of human psychology and what a crowd, not only a crowd of people can be when they get together and express their wish, but what we can all individually be when we can express our wish.

[17:58] Let me put it this way. I wonder if it's true to say this. We are what we would wish for. I want you to go away and think about that. Is that true to say that we are what we would wish for, what we would long for, what we would love to have more than anything else in this world?

I remember when I was a young boy growing up with a kind of kind of fables that we used to read when you started learning to read about fairy stories of getting three wishes.

Aladdin rubbing the lamp and the genie came out of the lamp and asked him what he would want. He had the power apparently to give him whatever he would want and there's nobody who's read that story who doesn't stop and think at the same time.

I wonder what I would want. If I had my choice of having anything I would want in this whole world, what would it be? Of course that's the basis of these stories, that's the whole psychology behind them.

We are what we would want and what we would wish for it enters into the will and the heart of mankind. What would you desire tonight more than anything else in all the world?

[19:16] Because that's what we're up against in this chapter. What is it tonight that you would want? Because if somebody gave me a wish the first thing we would all want is to have a million other wishes so that we could have our pick then of course we would probably take the next step which would be to have enough money to buy anything that we would want in this world.

Is that not the case? That's the way it goes, isn't it? That's what lies in our heart. And here were these, here were the people of Israel and they were expressing their wish, what they wanted. more than anything else which was to have a king over them. I want us to look then for the rest of this evening at this request that the people of Israel, the leaders of Israel made to Samuel.

I want us to just examine what lies behind this wish and to see what was wrong with the motivation behind the wish and so that we can examine our own hearts and to see what lies therein and to make sure that our motives in living and praying and worshipping and our choices are the right ones, the ones that glorify God instead of bringing pleasure to me.

Notice, first of all, did the people of Israel understand what they wanted in terms of did they really know why they wanted a king?

[21:00] The chapter tells us that their idea of a king was something like a, something of a, of a hero because they were somebody in whom they could depend to fight their battles for him.

That's what the chapter goes on to say. They felt perhaps insecure being surrounded by enemies. They were always aware that at any given moment that an enemy could rise up against them and their lives were in danger.

Now the chapter before, God had proved to them as he had done on many other occasions that God was in covenant relationship with his people and as long as they walked in his ways and lived by his commands then he would protect them.

But they were never quite sure of that because that required living by faith. It was one thing to recognize how God had helped them in the past it was another thing to believe that tomorrow God

will do the same for me.

Samuel had set up a stone in chapter 7 and he had called it Mizpah he had called it Ebenezer and the name of that stone Ebenezer was up until now God has helped us and that should have encouraged the people of Israel to look to the future knowing with assurance that God was going to give them the same help as he had given them in the past.

[22 : 25] But they wanted more than that they wanted more than an invisible trust in an invisible God they wanted someone with armor and with a robe and on a horse and with a train of people behind them an entourage of an army behind them so that they could know for sure so they thought that their enemies would be subdued and defeated in other words a king for them was something superstitious very much it was quite interesting actually they made the same mistake with the ark of the covenant way back in chapter 6 remember they were in the heat of the battle the Philistines were overcoming them they were losing the battle and somebody said bring the ark of the covenant into the middle of the battle so they they went and they brought the ark of the covenant the most precious sacred piece of furniture that God had put in the tabernacle and they brought this not because they were turning to the Lord for help but because they saw the ark of the covenant as a kind of a superstitious charm that would help them that would give them the strength that's how they looked at God someone who was there on the sideline and I wonder if that's the way that they're looking at this as well as the reason why they want a king they want someone visible something visible that they can lay hold upon as a symbol of

God's strength and God's presence with them but that's not what faith is faith is accepting God at his word you know I guess many many as a person wants to see something perhaps you're here tonight and you're on the sideline you're looking in and you're hearing everything I'm saying and perhaps you've been listening to the gospel for many a year but the gospel's not enough for you because they're so it's so invisible so intangible it's not something that you can touch or see and you're perhaps saying well if God would show himself in some way do you know that they said the same thing to Jesus exactly the same thing and Jesus said if what I have done is not enough then nothing is going to convince you to believe and the same is true tonight if what God has done in Jesus Christ is not enough for you then nothing is going to persuade you to trust in him nothing the second thing that I find interesting and fascinating about this chapter is that it reminds me of the danger the horrific danger of the two sisters the two sisters are discontentment and covetousness they go together discontentment in believing and somehow thinking that God hasn't given us enough in this world that somehow we need something more other than what God has given us in this world and with that hot on the heels of discontentment comes covetousness because the moment you go down the road of imagining that God hasn't given you enough in this world and hankering after more you begin to look around you at what other people have and once you do that you discover what the psalmist discovered have you ever read psalm 37 or 73 it's quite easy to remember psalms 37 and psalm 73 they're both about the same thing fascinating psalms and very very relevant in a world where there is so much covetousness so much looking over your shoulder or looking around us at what other people have and Christians can fall into it so easily in fact

I would say that these two sisters are the most subtle temptation that we can face they go along together in which you look around you just like the psalmist did in 73 and what he said was this he said that when I looked around me and I expected an unbelieving world to be suffering because of their unbelief I expected them to be unhappy because they refused to listen to God I expected them to fall under some judgment or punishment because of their refusal but instead they're prospering they're on top of the world everything's going well for them and he says my feet then almost slipped I almost fell and I believe that that was what was happening to Israel at that time they were looking around as time had gone on and you remember of course you remember that the Old Testament it condenses the story of Israel which takes place over hundreds of years it condenses it into a few chapters you have to remember that long periods of time had taken there had been between one chapter and another between one event and another so this was late into Samuel's judging Israel and as time had gone on people people had become discontent with what God had the way that God was ruling over them and they saw they began to imagine by looking at other nations the cities round about them and seeing how happy and how peaceful things were and how civilized and how organized other cities were the same way I guess as we might make the same mistake today in losing sight of the big picture irrespective of how happy and organized and

easy this world is and successful the time is coming when everything will be destroyed
[28 : 56] God says that the world will come to an end and a day will come when those who knew success without God in this world will be destroyed and those who had nothing and yet knew the Lord Jesus Christ in this world will be elevated and glorified and raised to be part of the new heaven and the new earth besides it's always difficult isn't it to stand out from the crowd if the people of Israel were to carry on were to continue with the Lord as their king then they would be different from the other cities round about them now by that time they had begun to mingle and mix they had begun to trade with with others with other cities they knew the language and the culture of other cities so they knew that they were different and it's the same with ourselves tonight God if you are a follower of

Jesus Christ the Lord expects you to be different he expects your choices to be different he expects your behavior to be different he expects you to think differently about your life he expects you to live with different motives and for different reasons and that is bound to affect every aspect of your life and the temptation of course is the easy thing to do is to blend in with the world around us so that our uniqueness as people of God gets lost it becomes it becomes overshadowed and we lose our witness don't ever think that by being like everyone else you're going to be a witness you're not I'm not saying of course to live in a monastery somewhere I'm not saying that at all and I'm not saying that we're not to engage with people to work with them and to have everyone as friends of course we are

Jesus himself did that and yet the challenge is to live in the world but not be of the world you have to work out what that means in practice you have to take your Bible and you have to ask how to what extent does my life reflect the light of the world that's what Christ requires us to be the third thing I see in this in this passage is Samuel's reaction to the people's request they said give us a king so that we can be like all the other nations and Samuel we're told was displeased now we're specifically told that he was displeased and the sense appears to be that Samuel somehow he felt that the people had rejected him because the Lord said that to him they have not rejected you they have rejected now here's God coming to

Samuel he's saying I know how you feel you probably feel that you've spent all these years tirelessly serving me ministering amongst the people of Israel judging the people of Israel at great cost to yourself and now here they are and they're that you think that they're rejecting everything that you've done their ministry amongst them that's not the case he said and there's God was God was encouraging Samuel and there are times when we need encouragement times when we when we misunderstand things and when we're inclined to take things too personally I'm really interested in how personally Samuel took the request that they made for a king he believed that what they're saying is look you've been you've been a rubbish judge over us no that's not what they were saying they weren't saying that at all but it's so easy to come to the wrong conclusions isn't it especially when we're some people are more prone than others to take things personally and when that happens you can become despondent and you can think that your life is of no value well for one thing it's not people that give value to our lives it's the

Lord and God is saying to Samuel I'm telling you I'm telling you that you have been obedient to me there it's not you that they have rejected it is me now just one or two things as we draw some conclusions from this chapter and I want to specifically talk about what we pray for because at the end of the day this was a kind of prayer wasn't it the people came to Samuel but in doing so they were coming to the Lord Samuel represented the word of the Lord just like every other prophet did in the Old Testament so in coming to Samuel they were coming to pray to the Lord and there are some very interesting very challenging lessons I think we can draw from this particularly in terms of what we pray for first one is this look at how the

[34 : 25] Israelites they prayed on the basis that they were right in what they were praying for give us a king some people they believe that that is faith they believe that if you pray in faith then you're always going to be absolutely certain as to what exactly you're praying for and if you're not absolutely certain about what you are praying for you're not praying in faith you ever heard people saying that I used to hear people saying that all the time in fact I believed it was a time in my life I actually believed that it's amazing how you grow in your knowledge and in your I hope wisdom and in your maturity as a Christian but I believe that it's very easy to believe that isn't it it's nice and clear cut isn't it you go to the Lord and you make up your mind what you want from him and you pray and the more certain you are if you're a hundred percent certain about exactly what after all Jesus

himself said if you pray that this mountain will be taken and removed and brought and placed in the sea then if you're praying in faith it will be done for you but what if what you are praying for is not what

God wants that's what you got to think of and sometimes when you take the view that I have to be certain you know what you're doing is you're asking God to bless what you're doing instead of asking him for guidance to make sure that what you are doing is the right thing if you've decided to take a course of action for example and you think it's right and you're saying to the Lord Lord bless this bless this decision I've made that's not the right prayer at all that's not the first prayer we should be making the first prayer that we should be praying is Lord please make sure that I'm not making a mistake here and if I am then put me right make it very clear to me and make me willing to about turn so asking for specific things in prayer is fine as long as we know that the specific things we're asking for are the right things but also for the right motive because it's possible to pray for things the right things good things with the wrong motive that's what the people here were doing they were praying for a king there was nothing wrong with that we've already seen that but their motives were all wrong besides they didn't understand the consequences of what they were asking for and that's why

Samuel had to spell it out for them literally blow by blow this is what the king make sure you know what you are asking for he said these will be the ways of the king who will reign over he will take your sons he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties to plow his ground and reap his harvest he will take your daughters he will take the best of your field he will take he will take he will take this is going to cost you and surely that teaches us that we have to know we have to use our brains and to reason out the logic of what we are asking for even as Christians and what we are doing besides it's very interesting isn't it that and again I'll leave this with you that they were asking for a king in order to rectify the corruption that there was in the sons of

Samuel they were taking bribes and they were perverting justice but as time went on if you read the history of the kings of Israel you will find that the kings of Israel were far worse far more corrupt far more selfish and godless and idolatrous than the two sons in actual fact the very thing they were trying to fix was the very thing that they were letting themselves into what I'm saying is this that we must be open to the lord at all times ready to accept that we may not be right in what we want or why we are wanting it and we must be always asking the lord nevertheless not my will but yours be done that's what these people failed to do they failed to take account of the possibility that what they were asking for was not right and yet here's the amazing thing here's the really here's the really incredible part of this story god gave them a king because it was always actually ultimately his intention to have a king over israel and the king became the symbol of what god was going to do in Jesus Christ and I think there's tremendous encouragement for the person who looks back maybe you look back over your life at a point in time when you feel you made the wrong decision god is able to take that wrong decision and to work out his own purpose and plan that doesn't give us an excuse to go on making wrong decisions we will suffer the consequences for the decisions that we make and yet god in his wisdom and in his providence is able to take our even our wrong decisions at the time and to work out everything for good to those who love him and those who are called according to all things he says work together for good to them who love god and who are called according to his purpose tonight when we're talking about choices when we're talking about crossroads when we're talking about what you really want more than anything else do you really want to live by yourself for yourself without god or have you listened to the voice of god in the gospel who has provided for you a way of forgiveness and a new life a new beginning and are you prepared to take him to be your own because it is only as we take him to be our own that we will be assured that he will guide us into the right kind of choices the right kind of prayer and the greatest of all rewards let's pray father in heaven we ask now that you will bless our time together we pray that you will speak to each one of us from your word we thank you lord that your word is so relevant to us tonight we pray that in all our choices and in all our heart and what motivates us and what we wish for

we ask lord that we will wish more than anything else that your name will be glorified in our lives and that your kingdom will be extended and added to and that you that we will do all that we can to glorify your name we pray we pray that Jesus will increase and that we will decrease in everything that we do and are in Jesus name amen