

1st Samuel v 12

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back to the Old Testament passage we read, 1 Samuel chapter 12. Verse 24, once again, but we're going to think about the whole of the chapter.

Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.

Coming to church, I guess, for most of us is part of our habit every week. I wonder how many of us, and I'm asking that question to myself as well, how many of us stop to wonder what we're doing, what our objective is, what are we aiming at when we get up on a Sunday morning and when we get dressed and we go to church?

As we come in the door and as we sit together and begin to sing, what is the aim and the objective of a worship service? For some of you, like I say, it's perhaps habit and that that doesn't go any further than that, because you've always done it.

For others, you're coming because you want to find out more about the Bible. For others, you've already found Jesus by faith, and you're coming to sing his praises and to give thanks for all that he's done for you, and to hear something stimulating about him.

[1 : 3 5] And for some others, it's really just a question of hearing something interesting or something that will give them a boost. I'm not saying that there is nothing good in any of these motives, and I certainly don't want to put anyone off whatever your motives are.

This is the place where we would want you to be, because you're listening to what God has to say to us. But I would say that whatever these reasons, if these are the reasons that they're actually not good enough, because the fact is that the real motive that every one of us ought to have in coming to church is to be completely renewed, to be changed from the inside.

Even if we're Christians already, God says that being a Christian means a process of change, where he works within each one of us to make us more like himself.

And there is a sense in which we have failed if we don't go out that door, not only having learned something, but having encountered God. Coming to church, coming to worship, is a living encounter with the living God.

But just in case you start expecting or thinking that you know what that means, we probably don't. Because if you're only prepared to listen to him as you want him to be, then you're not worshipping at all.

[3 : 1 0] Or as long as he makes you feel good. We're living in a world today where everything is supposed to make us feel good. And if we don't get an ultimate good feeling of whatever we do, then it shouldn't be there in the first place.

Well, if that's why you're coming to church, then I'm sorry, but you're not going to be satisfied with that. Because when we read the Bible, and particularly passages like we read this evening, they don't make us feel good.

And not only do they tell us something about the people as they lived in those days, but there's just something about the Bible that hits home to Christians and unbelievers in every age.

We're made to see ourselves as we really are. We're brought down to earth. And that's what coming to church is. That's why the most important person in Stornoway, and the least important person in Stornoway, I don't know who they are.

I don't care who they are. Because the moment they walk in that door, we're all like everyone else. Every single one of them. Preacher, hearer, elder, doesn't matter who we are. We're all sitting, encountering God, listening to him, and what he wants us to hear.

[4 : 24] And what he wants us to hear is something about ourselves. We come to church to encounter God and to face up to ourselves.

What we really are in and of ourselves. Not as other people see us, but as God sees us. Perhaps for the only time in the week, here is where you really find out about yourself.

You really look in the mirror, and you're made to see yourself as you really are. So coming to church is not always a comfortable experience. It can be very unpleasant.

It can be very unsettling. Because especially if you're used to feeling good during the week, you come to church and you hear things that are different, because this is what God wants us to know about himself.

So if you haven't discovered yourself, then you haven't encountered God, because an encounter with God is always a discovery about who we are.

[5 : 23] It's a discovery about who I am as well. You may think that I preach here, and I can be detached from what I'm saying. I'm not. I am very, very often deeply convicted.

Sometimes I feel in this pulpit as if I should be a million miles away, because the word is speaking to me as much as it is speaking to you. And that's the way it should be. It brings us down.

It humbles us. It brings us to our knees. It brings us to see that we really are not the people that we've been made to think that we are by other people or by ourselves. We're not the people that we'd like to be.

We are what God says we are. And that is what makes this passage so important. You might feel, well, what does this passage have to say to us?

All very interesting. Knowing the kind of ways and the customs and the habits of the Israelite people in Samuel's day, it's all very, it's interesting, isn't it, how they would sacrifice peace offerings before the Lord, and what Samuel said to them, and how he gave them this sermon that reminded them of their past, and how they all reacted to it by repenting, and how he prayed on their thunder as a mark of God's displeasure at the people for their request for a king.

[6 : 42] You might say, well, it's all very interesting and all very fascinating, but what's it got to do with us? Well, it has. Because in this passage, we encounter God, and by encountering God, we encounter ourselves.

Remember that passage in Isaiah chapter 6. Most of us know it. That began the ministry of Isaiah. When he was in the temple, and he saw the Lord, and he says he was high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

He saw the Lord in his majesty, and something of his glory. And his first reaction was one of utter horror at himself. He saw himself for the first time, as he'd never seen himself before, because as he encountered God, he faced up to himself.

And as we encounter God, we have to face up to ourselves this evening. And if you're refusing to do that, then you're not worshipping. You may be listening, but you're not worshipping.

The problem is, if we refuse to hear what God, the Lord will say to us, then we're refusing what God has to tell us. If you're not prepared to face up to what you are yourself, then you can never grasp what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 57] It is only as sinners. If you don't think you're a sinner, if you don't think you have any need of Jesus, then the cross will mean nothing to you. You might be one of these people who say, well, I'm glad that Jesus came to show some people how to live, and to show them the way, but these are people who are much less fortunate than I am.

I'm decent. I know how to live. I don't need all this cross. I don't need to be told how bad I am. Yes, you do, because God has come into the world for bad people.

If you're not a bad person, then God has not come into the world for you. I have not come to call the righteous, said Jesus. I have come to call sinners to repentance. And by calling some people righteous, he didn't mean that there were righteous people.

There are no righteous people. You are not righteous. You may think that compared to others, you are. God says you're not. One day you'll discover that for yourself, and I hope it won't be too late.

Remember that passage I read before? We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. All of us must appear before his judgment seat, and then we'll really discover what we really are.

[9 : 11] Well, there's an opportunity right now to do that. While there is mercy, while God brings his mercy to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, there's an opportunity. And this is one of those passages in which by asking how this passage reveals God to us, that's what the whole Bible does.

If you want to find out what God is like, you read the Bible. That's where you find him. That's where you discover what he's like. And here is one of those passages in which we discover God as he really is.

That's what we want, as he really is. And the first thing that I want us to notice in this passage is that God hates sin. God hates sin.

And this is where it becomes uncomfortable, because you and I both know that we have wronged. We have done wrong. We have thought wrong things. We have been in the wrong places. We've said the wrong things.

We fail to be the people that God created us to be. That's what sin is. It's failure. First and foremost, it's failure to be the people that God, and God hates that failure.

[10 : 15] He hates having given us the opportunity and having given us his own image. He hates the fact that we have not lived up to that image. God hates. Oh, I know we want to think of God as love.

We don't want the word God and hate put together, but go through the Bible and look at it honestly, and you will discover that God hates with a perfect hatred. Anything God does, he does perfectly.

So when you and I hate, then we're sinning. It's sinful to hate, especially when it comes to something about someone else.

We can never hate, but when God hates, God always hates something which is sinful. God cannot be any other way.

If he is totally and completely and utterly holy, he absolutely has to hate sin, and his anger has to burn against sin. And so we're not prepared this evening to take from this passage what we want.

[11 : 18] Do you ever read the Bible and take from it what you want? Do you ever read the Bible? And I know we all have favorite verses, and I have favorite verses as well. Sometimes it can be a bit dangerous having favorite verses because you tend to gravitate towards these favorite passages, and they tend to be passages that give us comfort.

But the whole Bible, we must never ever just have our favorite verses at the expense of the rest of the Bible, especially when what we're really doing is we're cutting and pasting.

I grew up in a world before cutting and pasting, in a world before word processors, where if you wanted to type something, it was a nightmare because you made one mistake in the typewriter to pull the paper out, put it in the bin, and start again.

Nowadays, you type something, and if you make a mistake, it doesn't matter. You just delete it, and you start again, and if you type a paragraph, I do this all the time in letters or sermons or whatever, you type a paragraph, and you don't like it, you go back over it again, and you change what you want, and you decide that one paragraph's in the wrong place, so you cut it, and then you put it into another place, so the document looks completely different from what it started off as.

It's a great world, isn't it? It's a wonderful facility to have. But we live in a cut-and-paste world, don't we, where you not only write something with cut and paste, but you also read things, and you cut what you don't like, or what doesn't give you a good feeling, and you paste in your own creation.

[13 : 02] Do you ever read the Bible like that? Missing out large screeds of the Bible, or verses here and there that don't give you a good feeling, and particularly about God.

You can, and I'm sure that this is one of those chapters, especially when God decides to reveal Himself as a God of anger against the sin of His people.

Maybe you'll go to this chapter, and you'll say, well, verse 22, verse 22 is my favorite verse in this chapter, for the Lord will not forsake His people.

That's the important one. That's what stands up, and as long as I grab that verse, and pull it out of the passage, and lay hold upon it, then that's my, but that we're not right in doing so.

We're not right in doing so. When I was in Sunday school, we used to sit in for, sometimes for the service, in Bible class, and there was about three or four of us in a row, and we used to whisper to each other, and we used to guess which verse.

[14 : 09] We'd read the Bible, read the Bible with a minister, and we would guess, I bet you it's 22, or I bet you it's 15, and this would be the verse that the minister would, and it was always a verse that would stand out, and I guess for us, it's verse 22, for the Lord will not forsake His people.

Well, we'll come to that, but that's not the important, that's not the only important verse in that passage. In fact, it's meaningless, unless you grasp the fact that His people do not deserve His love.

They deserve His anger and His punishment. You and I do not deserve the love of God. You and I deserve His anger and His punishment.

The fact that the statement, God is love, is meaningless, unless, unless you understand what God has done in sending His Son for us, dying for us, taking our sin upon Himself, that puts the love of God in a completely different perspective, and once I come to see myself as I really am, a hopeless sinner who deserves nothing but God's anger and His wrath, then when I discover that God has loved and God has sent His Son for me to take my sin upon Himself, then I want that, because I know it's the only way of forgiveness and of mercy.

So you see, you can't have one without the other. It's got to be the whole thing. So please don't cut and paste the whole, cut and paste this chapter.

[15 : 55] Besides, there's another reason why it's so important for me to know that God hates sin. It's important for me to know that God hates sin because I sin.

I sin regularly. You might find that surprising. I'm confessing that to you, but you know that as well as I do. It doesn't matter that I'm a minister. It doesn't matter. That makes no difference.

I'm still a sinner. And I still fail. I still go wrong. But, you know, the fact that God, it's a fearful thought that I as a Christian, having been redeemed by God in His love in Jesus Christ, and having a new heart and a new direction, and Him having completely forgiven my sin, how can I tolerate something in my life that God hates?

That's a fearful thought, isn't it? It's a fearful thought. So next time you are tempted to sin, and trust me, that won't be long.

Next time you are tempted to sin, stop and think about the extent to which God utterly hates what you're going to do.

[17 : 25] I say, well, God loves me. I know. If you're in Christ, God loves you. That is absolutely true. That makes it even worse. Because when I remember how much God loves me in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He's done for you, then that's an even greater incentive for me not to choose to do something which is sinful.

So, next time you are tempted to do something that you know is sinful, remember how much God loves you because that in itself should be a deterrent.

and remember how much God hates what you're about to do. Surely these two, these two tremendous realities should prevent us from taking that step that we know is wrong in the eyes of God.

So the truth tonight that God hates sin, and it was the sin of the people of Israel that God hated so much. Them turning away from Him after all that He had done for them.

That's what Samuel said. Look over your history. The last 400 years, God took you out. Moses led you out of Egypt. Who was that but the power of God? Who was it that protected you all the way through the wilderness?

[18 : 56] Who was it that led you across the River Jordan into the Promised Land? Who was it that protected you as long as you obeyed Him and as long as you worshipped Him? God promised you His own protection and yet you willingly and deliberately forsook Him.

And yet even then when you cried out to God, God raised up a judge and He defeated the enemy and so on and so forth and the cycle began and ended and began and ended time and time again over 400 years.

And you thought all the time, ah yeah but, if we had a king none of that would have happened. Who is kidding who? We will think up any excuse to justify our own behaviour.

For the Israelites it was that they didn't have a king. And the Israelites believed that now that they had a king everything would be fine for them.

And Samuel is saying to them, you are wrong. You have forsaken the Lord. You've turned your back on Him. You've not trusted Him. You haven't prayed to Him. You've turned away from Him.

[20 : 05] And God hates your unbelief. And it was massively important for them to hear that because the next bit would have been utterly meaningless if it hadn't been for the knowledge that God hated their sin.

and it was only when they saw that as it were in reality. Because it's one thing to tell, it's one thing to say, to talk about God.

It's another thing to actually encounter God. And that's exactly what the people of Israel did then when Samuel called upon the Lord. Verse 18. He said to them, your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the Lord in asking for a king.

See, it's harvest today. It's the harvest today. The beginning of the wheat harvest. Now that was May and June. It was precisely the time in Israel where it just doesn't rain.

So whatever they expected, my understanding, my sources tell me that the one thing you can expect during May and June is for it not to rain in that part of the world.

[21 : 14] And the moment that Samuel lifted up his eyes to heaven and called upon God and asked God to send rain into the world, then all of a sudden the rain fell.

The clouds gathered, the rain fell. They knew that this was a reality. I'm going to ask you tonight, do you know that God is a reality?

Or is it just words to you? Because it's one thing for us to listen to the message. Most of you have done that already. It's another thing for you to be struck by the reality of what you're hearing and only God himself can bring that message home to you by the power of his spirit.

And tonight, let's pray that God will do that before it's too late because one day you will face up to the reality but then it might be too late like I said before.

Please don't leave it till then. Do not leave it. That's the greatest mistake you'll ever make in your life is to leave listening to the Lord and coming to him in faith until that time.

[22 : 24] Well, that was the reality and when they were struck by the fearfulness of what happened, they knew then. They knew then that all of a sudden they depended on God for every breath they took, for every bite of food.

Their harvest could have been easily destroyed. There could have been a famine in a moment of time and they would have been starving. And it was at that moment that they realized that the only course of action was to repent, to turn away from their sins.

You often hear that word repentance, don't you? Repent tells us it's in the New Testament. That's what Peter said when the people, when he preached to them on the day of Pentecost, all these 3,000 people and just like the people here, they were struck all of a sudden by the reality of being confronted by God.

And they asked, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, repent. And what that means is that we take a look at our lives as never before.

And we see our lives as never before. That we see ourselves as God sees us and that we run away from it. And we run to him and to the mercy that he offers to each one of us.

[23 : 49] in Jesus Christ. That's what repentance means. But it's something that it doesn't just happen once. It happens all the way through. A Christian, like, you're making a huge mistake if you think that repentance is only when you're converted.

It's not. That's the beginning. That's when you turn to Jesus for the first time. But then on, you're repenting all the time. There's no point in saying, well, I've been a Christian for 10 years.

I remember 10 years ago I repented. I don't need to repent anymore. You're wrong. You must certainly do. And so do I. So did the Israelites. They had to learn how important it was to turn away continually from their wrongdoing and from their sinfulness.

and to continually take a fresh look at yourself. And that's why I started off with a question. What are we aiming for when we come into a place like this?

And one of the aims is to see ourselves as God sees us, but not to do nothing about it, but to turn to him and ask him, Lord, have mercy upon me.

[24 : 58] A sinner, forgive me as you've never forgiven me before. Lord, I turn to you afresh. That's why Samuel said, we saw it last week, come let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.

There's a sense in which every time we hear God's word, we're asking, Lord, create within me a clean heart. Lord, renew a right spirit within me.

Is that what you're praying tonight? I hope it is. Do you mean it? Do you really mean it? Because if you come to the Lord in prayer, he will answer. Just like he answered the people then, if God wasn't merciful, there would be no need for them to gather.

The fact that they're hearing God's word was testimony to his goodness and his kindness. It was testimony to his nature and to his love for his people.

But real love is not blind love that disregards the problems. Love confronts the problems and does something about them.

[26 : 01] That's what God did in Jesus. He confronted the problem in all its ugliness and its shame and its horror. God so loved the world. He confronted the world.

He came into the world in person to give himself so that the problem could be removed from you and I and so that we could be made to see that we are part of the problem and so that our sin could be forgiven and we could be set free from sin.

Have you been set free? That's what he promises you. But there's only one way of taking that promise and accepting it and that is to believe and to trust in Jesus Christ and to see ourselves as we really are.

And so it was a service of repentance as every service ought to be. I find it interesting that part of their process of repentance was what Samuel said at the very beginning.

He is not pointing the finger at anyone else. He is starting off with himself. Do you notice that? As we began the reading this evening, he starts off with himself and he's saying, here I am, testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed.

[27 : 22] Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.

Now, Samuel's doing something really important that doesn't just apply to him but it applies, doesn't just apply to me or the elders or the members but anyone who professes to be a Christian.

He's, as he comes in to worship the Lord, the last thing that he wants to be is a hypocrite. And the last thing he wants is for anything to spoil the effect of what God is going to say to the people and if there's one thing that will spoil, it is when we live a double life or when we allow things to creep in and affect the relationship between one Christian and another.

Samuel is sorting it out right away before he goes any further, before he's going to start talking to the people. He's saying, if any of you have, it could be, it could be that I've done something that, in which I've wronged you and if I have, if you hold anything against me, then you're not going to be listening to me and what I have to say to you is so important that I absolutely have to have clean hands so if any of you thinks of anything that I have done, if I've cheated anyone, if I've taken something, inadvertently, even if I don't even remember it, tell me and I'll put it right.

Do you know what? that's an essential part of every and any worship because worship is not about a whole bunch of random people coming together to do the same things.

[29 : 15] It's about the family of God. If you have wronged anyone, sort it out.

Even if you think you've wronged somebody, sort it out and quickly because you have no idea how something like that can destroy the work of God.

You have no idea how you as one single person, you have it in you to do a huge amount of damage. So even if you think, even if there's any fear, sort it out.

Sort it out graciously, prayerfully, humbly. Go to the person that you have wronged and you ask them if we can sit down and sort this out as brothers or sisters in the Lord.

and if you have been wronged, then you make sure that you make every effort to resolve the issue graciously, humbly, with a spirit of, I know how difficult that can be.

[30 : 42] Trust me, I know. and it may not happen overnight and you can't just snap your fingers and resolve every problem. You can with some of them but not with others.

You have to work at it. Are you working at it or have you washed your hands of it? Have you said, I'm never going to speak to that person again? Well, if that's what you're saying, you have a problem as well as he has.

You have to sort it out. That's what Jesus had in mind. I'm not saying anything new. Jesus said, if you go to the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, then you leave your gift at the altar and you go to him and you resolve the issue with your brother and then come back and make your gift at the altar.

What did he say in the Lord's Prayer? He said, if you do not forgive people when they trespass against you, then your heavenly Father will not forgive you. It's part and parcel of the gospel.

You see, that's one of these verses we tend to kind of not pay a lot of attention to. We'd rather the Lord's Prayer. But Jesus insists on it that we sort out our problems.

[31 : 57] After all, what's the Christian life all about? What's the new life all about? If we just act the same way as everyone else does, with resentment and bitterness.

Samuel is such an example. He's such a legend. You know, Samuel is one of the most unsung heroes in the Bible. He's just such a great, great Christian.

And that's what makes him great, his humility. He's like Moses. He was just some of the most humble men that walked the face of the earth because as far as he's concerned, his own reputation, it doesn't mean anything.

What means something to him, what means the world to him is God's reputation. He lives for God. He lives for the glory of God. And so should you and I. Who are we in this world? We live for God.

Man's chief end. Your great purpose and my great purpose is not to please ourselves or to live an easy life. It is not to gain what we can out of this world. It is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[33 : 02] And so, this chapter has a huge amount to tell us and to show us of the nature and the character of God.

And yet, even with all his wrath and his anger and the demonstration of his wrath, he still loves his people. And the chapter ends with such an encouragement to his people.

An encouragement which leads you sort of to wonder, how can the same God who is so angry with the deeds of his people be so loving towards his people as well?

Well, the same can be asked of me. How can God who is so angry with sin yet declare his perfect love for me and for you if you're a believer this evening?

And that is because you know the answer. God doesn't just ignore sin, doesn't just pretend it's not there, doesn't just say, let's draw a line and move on as if nothing is.

[34 : 14] No, no. God loves us in Jesus Christ. and his love has meant that God has already judged our sin.

He's already punished my sin. All of my guilt has already been punished. It's not that God has said, well, you're different. I was as guilty and I am as guilty as anyone else in this world, but the difference is God has said that Christ has taken my guilt.

And that's why today I can stand here as you can if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ as a new creation in him, a new person.

It's only by grasping the whole of God and it's only by confronting what we really are that we truly discover the gospel and how to find Christ.

Let's pray. Let's pray.