

1 Samuel 8

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[0 : 0 0] make your way back to 1 Samuel 8. It would help if we're reading from the same script, so to speak, on the same page. And we've just sung a song that affirms that there is no other name under heaven or on earth or anywhere else in all creation other than the name of Christ that says. But this seems to be a hard lesson to learn, and this is what we see in 1 Samuel 8. The people just don't seem to appreciate the lessons that they had learned as worth holding on to. And while much could be said about this levying of tax and makers and takers, I mean, this is the same problem that Jesus faced with those in the temple. When you have a society divided up in makers and takers, those who make and those who take from those who make and then distributed out, you know, as though we can be in charge of distributing what you make. Well, that there is an error for all societies.

It is problematic. And while much could be said on that, especially in light of Jesus addressing the same problem in the temple, where you've got the whole temple tax situation, and you've got those who are making or rather taking money and then making money on the top of that of those who have actually worked in the fields in the north. And so we could address that, but that's really just a consequence of what is actually in the heart of God's people. In other words, God sometimes will give you what you ask for, and so be careful what you ask for. Okay? God will sometimes give you what you ask for, so be careful what you ask for. So as we have seen, in light of 1 Samuel so far, God is not only proven that he is in control of all things, but it's for our best interest that God is in control of all things. And for us, this is really important, especially for people who don't know the future.

Now, I want to point out to you that you do not know the future. And I want you to hold on to that thought so that you can appreciate what it means to make a decision about the future. Because any decision you make about the future, though it may be a hedging decision, sort of like don't put all your eggs in one basket, which is based on uncertainty, is a decision made in uncertainty about a future that you cannot know. But because the Lord knows everything, the Lord lifts up and he brings down.

He lifts up Samuel, which we have seen, and he brings down the house of Mordecai, which we saw. God also brings down his people in battle when they took the Ark of the Covenant into battle, and then he lifts them up last week, as we saw, as they return to the Lord in repentance.

And now it seems that they're on their way back down again. So we should never think in terms of consequences as though these are things that just happen. And so the distinction that I want you to hold on to, which we made a couple of lessons ago, as it were, through the book of Samuel, is that there is disproportionate damage. So if I remember, if I jump, if I jump, or if I fall, rather, one foot, one foot 100 times, I will not damage myself, compared to if I fall 100 foot once.

[3 : 5 9] So we understand in life that there are some things that accumulatively add up to the same, they're both 100 foot, but falling one foot once 100 times doesn't really cause any damage to me.

My knees might be a bit sore, but I'm not going to be damaged by it. But if I fall 100 foot once, well, I may not be alive at the end of it. So God has created a world in which there are consequences, that they are built into his created order. But God hasn't stepped away and left every eventuality down to a consequence like that. God will intervene, and he will lift up, and he will bring down. That this is the Lord's doing. So God does order a world where there is consequences to falling from great heights. And he does intervene in a world where you can fall from a great height, and he puts all the trees in the right places so that it breaks your fall on the way down and you live. Providence. This is the beauty of how God works in the world. And so Christians, as we live the Christian life, we ought to have the same heart and mind as Job did, where whether we are up or we're down, whether we

have been given or we have been, had stuff taken away from us, we should always be able to proclaim, blessed is the name of the Lord. So our response should always be, blessed is the name of the Lord. The Lord is not arbitrarily giving and taking, as though you can, I'll give you some today, as though this kind of intermittent reinforcement. The way intermittent reinforcement works is that children are brilliant at this, especially with parents who are tired, because if you're out in the shops and they say, can I have, can I have, can I have, can I have, and you go, no, no, no, yes, that yes has cost you now for every time you go out into the shops, because now they know that the yes comes after three no's. Right? And if next time it doesn't come until after five no's, all right, yes, no, no, right? Do you see how it happens? So that intermittent reinforcement, where if it's no from the beginning and it continues to be no, and you're not, there's no break in it, now I know it's no. So I'm not going to ask again because I've worn myself out. And so people are built in that way, that if they think they can get it, that it's just the next one, just one more try. This is, you know, it's like the gambler's fallacy. I may have lost, but I can win it all back in my, in my next bet or whatever it may be.

I can get it all back in one that I lost in, in 10. And that type of thinking is sort of built into the human heart and brain as though, you know, I'm on my own, I can do it. But God is the one who gives and who takes away. And this should never, ever be forgotten. However it has been taken away from you, this is the Lord's doing. But the Lord gives and takes away, not just because of the object that you have, but the reason why you want it. And so this is exactly what we see here in 1 Samuel 8. Their desire for a king is not wrong. To want a king is not wrong. The reason that they want a king is entirely wrong. And so what God is addressing in the people of Israel is not their desire for a king, but rather the reason that they want a king. And so while it looked as if Israel in the previous chapter turned their heart completely to the Lord, now it looks a bit more like the parable that Jesus is told about the seed and falling on different types of soil and they're dying out over time.

[8 : 03] Because Israel seemed to be making the same mistake all over again. It looked like they had genuine repentance. It looked like they had really turned to the Lord. And they clearly did because the Lord responded to their repentance and their dependence on him in prayer. And they won the battle. They were delivered from the hand of the Philistines and then they get to enjoy all the peace that they do.

But now in a time of peace, not in a time of trouble, their heart begins to wander. And I think this is very telling that Israel, God's people, just like us today, find it very difficult to know what our needs are in good times, but very easy to know what they are in difficult times. When we're having a hard time, when we're having troubles, our needs are apparent because they're right in front of us. But when we're going through good times and good circumstances, we don't seem to know what our needs are. We don't actually know what we need to be able to cope with good times. And so as someone once said, you can take the Israelite out of Egypt, but you cannot take Egypt out of the Israelite. Their heart seems to be defaulting back to that way of life. And so while the circumstances of life have changed, what we learn here is that the people haven't. And that is a key lesson. You may be rich one moment and poor the next, but you may be no different. You may have plenty of highs followed by a few lows, followed them by a few more highs, followed them by lots of lows, but you may not be any different through all of them. Now that may be good if you are like Job, blessed is the name of the Lord,

God. But it is not good if you, like Israel, then turn your attention to, well, there may be another name out there that I can turn to. No, there is no other name. Well, there might be. No, there is no other name. No, but there might be. No, there is no other name. And it's hard to convince the heart that is convinced based on uncertainty. Well, I don't know, so there might be. No, the reason we know about uncertainty is because God, who is certain, tells us. The only time the Bible speaks about chance is because it's defining the future in terms of what we don't know.

So chance exists in the minds of those who don't know what the future is. It doesn't exist in the mind of God or even in the will of God, because he knows all things from beginning to end. But it looks like chance to us. It looks like, well, it might happen or it might not happen, because we base it on uncertainty. And so what does it look like to follow a God who knows all things, to listen to God who knows the beginning from the end, to actually really pay attention to God who actually knows what is in the future? In other words, no one knows what this church is going to look like a year from now. I can remember praying several years back, looking at the way the church was, thinking, hang on, this isn't looking good. And then before we knew it, we had five families in here, each of which had

five children. We had a Sunday school in 75. The church was absolutely buzzing. And then a few years later, you know, we had the Joyful Noise Choir. Everything for two and a half, three years seemed to go in. And I can remember preaching at that time, be careful not to lose the blessing that you have got, because we've got countless examples in scripture how to lose blessing. And the Lord lifts up and the Lord brings down, and here we are. And I still don't know what is ahead of us. All I know is what God requires of us today. So here's the summary, and here is the lesson within the summary itself. Israel wants a king, and we need to ask the question, why? [12:19] After years of peace, after years have been made secure by God back in the previous chapter, why would you want a king? Why would you want things to change? Well, it seems to be motivated, verses one and three, by the fact that Samuel is getting old.

Samuel is old, and Samuel's sons do not walk in his ways. And now we are beginning to see the transition from the magistrate to the monarchy, from the judges to the kings. And we know this because Hannah's prayer was about that. Hannah knew that this day would come. Hannah knew that we are moving from judges to kings. We are simply catching up with Hannah's prayer. And so Israel are allowed to have a king, Deuteronomy 17, verse 14 through to 20. But the law is already set forth. You're allowed a king, but God has to choose him. So you can have a king, and a king, like a judge, is supposed to reflect God and do what God says in order to lead God's people. So you can have a king, but God is the one who has to choose him. You're not allowed to choose your own king. So from the very beginning, it all looks good. Samuel is old. His sons don't walk in his ways. They're men after the greedy gain, so they're no good. So let's have a king. Well, that all looks good until you begin to understand the reason they want a king. Verse 5 and verse 20 is because they want to be like everyone else.

They want to be like the nations around them. So their desire now to want a king over them is not so that they can come under God with a representative on earth, but it's rather so that they can be like everybody else. And there's the problem. So Samuel, as you can understand, is displeased with this, but he takes this request to the Lord, and God has to take Samuel aside in exactly the same way he took Moses aside and says, look, they're not rejecting you, they're rejecting me. So God knows, and we get to see what God sees, that from the very beginning of their request, God receives this request as a rejection of him. They're not rejecting you, Samuel. They are rejecting me. Now, it cannot be because they are asking for a king, because God has already told them, Deuteronomy 17, you can have a king. So in what way are they rejecting the Lord? Well, they're rejecting the Lord because they want to be like everyone else. They desire to be like everybody else, and there's the part of their rejection of God. And so what you have seen in that in a people who were afraid and asked Samuel to pray to God and trusted and put their dependence in God through prayer and was then delivered from the hand of the Philistines, they are now making the same mistake all over again as they did in chapters 5 and 6. When Israel took the ark of the Lord into battle, thinking that the

Lord was with them, they were putting their trust in the ark of the Lord rather than in the Lord. And in their desire to have a king to judge over them and to go out into battles for them, to go before them, they're doing exactly the same thing with a king, or they want to do exactly the same thing with a king as they did with the ark of the Lord. We're going to put our trust in him.

And this is how the Lord considers it an act of rejection of him. Because instead of them understanding there is only one name under which we will bow our knee, their heart has been directed to trusting in things. And there is a particular error within the Christian church where belief falls into the category where you are trusting in trusting.

[16:29] So some people trust in Jesus, and some people make the error of falling into the sort of row, as it were, the rut of trusting and trusting in Jesus.

So they're not actually trusting in Jesus, they're trusting in the fact that they are trusting Jesus. They are assured by the fact that they are trusting, not the fact of who Jesus is. And so it's the very process of trusting. Well, I know that I'm assured of my fact because I know I'm trusting Jesus. And so all the emphasis is placed on their trusting rather than who they are trusting. That's the same error that Israel made with the ark.

And Christians fall into that category, well, I know I'm okay because as long as I believe, as long as I keep believing, I'm going to be okay. Well, that's the same type of error that Israel are making.

There has to be a direct object to love. If I said, I'm in love, you're going to be looking for the direct object because the sentence doesn't make any sense. I have to give you a direct object. I love God.

Now it makes sense. I'm in love with my wife, but now it makes sense. You need that direct object. It makes no sense to say, I'm trusting. It makes no sense to say, I'm trusting in the fact that I'm trusting. Or I know I believe because I'm believing every day. It may make sense in some people's heads for odd reasons. But unless you're trusting in a direct object, the object of your faith being God himself, that the trusting can actually save you.

God saves, not you trusting in God saves. Okay? But this is the very error that Israel are making. They are making the same error all over again as they made with trusting in the ark of the Lord. They're putting their trust in kings. They've not got there yet, but that's why they are rejecting God. Because it looks like they're trusting God when in fact they are not. So God tells Samuel to go and tell the people that they effectively can have what they want, but give them the warning.

[18:55] Give them the warning. And the warning is that when you choose this king for yourselves, which you have done, you must understand that when it doesn't work out, you must remember you chose him.

So you can have him, and this is the Lord giving a lesson to his people. But when it doesn't work out, you can't then turn around and say, I didn't know. No, you chose him. And so God does give his people what they ask for. But it's the last thing that they actually need. They don't need a king. God has already proven to be their king in the previous chapter. He's already proven that he's able to deliver them. He's already proven that he's able to give them peace and take care of them. So they don't need a king. They want a king. And they want a king because they want to be like everyone else.

And so God gives them what they want, but what they want is not what they need. In fact, it is the last thing that they need, which is another way of saying it is not what they need at all. So what is a temporary lesson here, or at least a permanent lesson, but in short? Well, it would be this, that don't ever consider a divine no to your prayers as God rejecting you, when in fact it is actually a blessing. Because you don't actually know what the future holds. And you don't actually know the complete state of your heart before God. You remember how David desired to build the temple of the Lord, and he was met with a divine no. And it's not quite sure why David was told no. We know that he was a man who had blood on his hands. It could be because he was a man of war. David went out and fought the battles, and Solomon was the builder. And God raises up different type of men like that. Some fight, some build. And that's just the way God does it. But David was met with a divine no.

So don't ever consider these divine no's as a rejection, when in fact they could be one of the greatest blessings that you have ever received, keeping you from the dangers that you just don't see.

[21:09] But because the people seem to be persistent, especially given the fact that they don't listen to the warning, God gives them what they want, but it is the last thing they need.

And so God gives them what they want, not because they're not allowed a king, but he gives them what they want because the way that they're asking for a king, and the reason they want a king, they have to learn the lesson that they just don't know what they are asking for. So I've really only got one point, and it's this, asking the Lord if you can have it your own way. Can you imagine that? How many of us have actually prayed prayers that fit into that category? I know what's best for me, Lord, and so this is what I'm asking for. I know what I need, I know what I want, and so this is what I'm asking for. Now, in some cases that may be true, like in the previous chapter, they knew that they needed deliverance from the hand of the Philistines, but they knew that in times of trouble. The question is, is it possible for God's people to understand their needs clearly when everything is okay? And I'm not so sure we do. I'm not so sure we are as clear-sighted in the good times as we are in the times of trouble. So when you have a nation, like this nation, where the circumstances have changed, the question we ask is, have the people? And what we begin to see is that the people haven't changed, but their circumstances have. They want a king, and the reason they want a king is to be like everyone else. And so what looked like a genuine turning to the Lord in the previous chapter is now followed by what seems to be a very equally genuine turning away from the Lord now. After many years of peace, they are now rejecting the Lord. And their motivation is because they want to be like everyone else. We know what we want. And perhaps this is the reason why they are no longer see their need for God or their dependence on God, because there's no trouble. There's just peace.

And so what do you do as a Christian, living the Christian life, when your circumstances have reached a plateau and everything seems to be going well, and you think, well, I'm old now, there can't be any more troubles coming my way. But we all know that the older you get, that's just not true.

[23 : 50] Troubles are never behind us. There are troubles behind us, but they're never only, ever only behind us. There could be many in front of us. But the issue of crying out to God in prayer when we're having difficult times is easy. But what about when times are good? What about when everything is fine, circumstances are good? Do you know your needs then? It seems to be the case that we don't.

That we just don't seem to be as clear about our needs in good times as we are about our needs in difficult times. Because we don't see our level of dependence on God in the same way. Now, God, in 1 John, calls us his little children. And I think that's striking for a number of reasons, especially as we read here in 1 Samuel 8. Because children, as always, often want to make decisions that are way above their age limit, so to speak, as though they are mature adults. But let's try and put this in terms of a puzzle. Imagine you had nine pieces or ten pieces, okay, out of a hundred piece jigsaw puzzle. It would be foolish to claim that you know what the big picture is. It would be foolish to claim that you know what the big picture is. That you have enough to see the rest. And you don't have enough to see the rest. And so when God's people are asking for a king, it's like, well, I have ten pieces. I know what's in store for the future. And God says, no, you don't. Anytime you make a decision about the future, about what you want, you're assuming a certain image of the future. You're assuming and picturing the image of the future in a particular way. This is how the future is going to turn. This is what it's going to look like. And what you're doing is you're preparing for that future. And then the future comes, and it's not like what you thought it was going to be. And that's just God shaking things up again on purpose, raising up, bringing down, so that you would understand what is ahead of you. And so the Lord gives his people this warning, and it says, it's very clear, when you cry out to God because your king has, because of how your king is treating the people, how he has taken your daughters, how he has taken your best fields, how he has taken a tenth of your grain. When you cry out to God because the king has done all of these things, cry out remembering that you asked for it. You asked for it. You actually got what you asked for. And if you then turn around and say, well, I wouldn't have made the choice if I knew how it was going to turn out, the answer is, you never know how it's going to turn out.

So if we never know how it's going to turn out, we should think differently about the type of decisions we make in the first place. Right? Because it's a favorable excuse, right?

You know, it works in reverse as well. You have children, and you say to your children, we're going to go to this place today, and they just don't want to go. They're in the garden, they're messing around, they're quite happy playing with mud in the garden and cutting grass and making flowers and this type of thing. We've got a mud kitchen or whatever it is, and let's play.

[27 : 44] And you say, no, but I want to take you to the beach. I want to take you to this bouncy camp. And they don't want to go. They don't want to go because they can't imagine what it's going to be like.

They've got no idea what it's going to be like. Then you take them, but you're two hours into the day already, or you're three hours into the day already. And then when they're there, what's the one question they ask? Can I stay longer?

So if you came earlier, you would have been able to say, yeah, but I didn't know it was going to be this good. And that's the point. That nails us as Christians down to a T. When we get the good things, we then are sick with ourselves at the fact that we didn't listen earlier.

We're sick to the stomach at the fact that we didn't listen. We could have had all of this earlier, but we didn't because we weren't listening. And we weren't listening because we assumed we knew what the future was going to be like.

We have this image of the future, and we base all of our present decisions off our image of the future. And we don't know the future. And so when God's people turn around, and if they were to turn around and say, yeah, but I didn't know it was going to be like this, God can actually say, no, you did, because I told you it was going to be like this.

[29 : 02] Yeah, but I didn't think you were serious. And this is where the wisdom kicks in. Why is it that so many Christians think that they are an exception to the wisdom of God's word, to the rule of God's word?

Why is it that so many think, well, the rules don't apply for me. It's just not the case. And so we go back to the previous lesson, that wherever there is an absence of the fear of the Lord, there is an absence of knowledge.

Because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. And so if you don't have the fear of the Lord, you don't have the knowledge. You don't have that wisdom to make the decisions you need to make.

And every decision you make is not one that you are certain about. It's one that you make in uncertainty as you trust the Lord. And that's the security.

Every decision I make about the future is made in uncertainty. But it's made in the knowledge that I am trusting the Lord who knows the future. And that's the assurance.

[30 : 10] That's the blessing. That's where we remain secure. And so if we pray and we are convicted and it's a no, listen to the no. And if the door opens, then we walk through it.

This is how the Lord works. So here's the exhortation as we close. The reason we make commitments is so that we don't change when our circumstances change.

Money is often the best one to determine this. You promise to give, right? And then you claim, well, I can't give this anymore because my circumstances have changed.

Well, that's always going to be the case for everyone. The Ananias and Sapphira. Hang on. This has turned out quite good for us. Their sin was not the fact that they lied.

But it was the fact that they gave the impression that they gave everything when they didn't. They gave the impression that they had given when they hadn't actually given. That was the sin there.

[31 : 15] And so the reason we make commitments is so that we don't change when our circumstances change. Because even when we make commitments, we make them in a world where we don't know what the future is.

They're made in complete uncertainty. But we make them trusting the Lord. That's the definition of commitment. We don't know what the future holds.

And if we know that is the truth, then that should affect the commitments we make. That doesn't mean that we would never make a commitment. Because that could be everyone's excuse.

I can't make a commitment because I don't know what the future holds. My circumstances might change. Yeah, they might. They might. But that shouldn't make any difference to the type of commitment you make here and now.

So the reason we make commitments is because we don't, is so that we don't change in a world that changes. So that we don't change with the world that changes.

[32 : 17] That's why we make the commitments that we do and why we should stick to them. Why our hearts should be directed to the Lord and then not turn away from him afterwards.

But when it is, as it is with the people of God here, what they're actually wanting is a reject, they just want to reject the Lord.

They're not just wanting a replacement for Samuel. Samuel's old and now they need a new judge. They don't want a replacement for Samuel. They want a replacement for God. And that's what God is considering their desire to be.

When you're trusting in a human king, you are replacing me for that human king. When you took the ark of the Lord out into battle without me, you are replacing me with the ark of the Lord.

That was the sin behind what they did with the ark. And that is the same sin that they commit here. To put it in the words of Jeremiah, he says this. For my people have committed two evils.

[33 : 18] They have forsaken me, the fountains of living water, and who'd out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. In other words, you've exchanged the glory of God for worthless things.

You've exchanged me who can deliver you for something which cannot deliver you. You've exchanged me, the provider, for something which cannot provide. You have exchanged me, someone who can give, for someone who will take.

And yet they still want it. And they still want it because in that action, they are rejecting that God. They are rejecting the delivering God. They are rejecting the giving God.

They are rejecting the loving God. Why? Because they think they know better. They think their image of the future is certain. When it is very much uncertain.

And so in a world like we live in now where many Christians are simply doing their own thing, they may be completely unaware of the unwise decisions that they are making.

[34 : 23] Completely unaware of the unwise decisions that they are making. Many of these decisions and the outcome of the circumstances could have been avoided, but they're not.

And God warns his people what will happen. That is, what will happen in the future. A future that they do not know. But they are making their decision in the context of, well, it hasn't happened yet. It hasn't happened yet. This is like the man who falls from a skyscraper and halfway down says, all right, so far. Right? Things take time.

Things take, when you hit the bottom, you hit the bottom. But halfway down, you're still okay. It seems as if you're still okay. When the prodigal son asked for his share of the inheritance and left home, okay, he didn't come back after the first day.

Why? Because he still had money in his pocket. He didn't come after, because he still had money in his pocket. But when it ran out, what does he say? He's eating food with the pigs, or pig food.

[35 : 29] And there's a sign of desperation, especially for a Jew. He says, even my father's servants eat better than this. Right? Because previous to that, he was only halfway down.

But when he's eating pig food, now he's all the way out. Now he's hit the actual bottom. Now he's at the shock to wake him up and to actually see the condition that he is in.

And so when people make those type of decisions, even after all the warnings that they have been given, what they are doing, what they are doing is simply doing what is right in their own eyes. And the one question that we have been asking over and over and over again as we've gone through 1 Samuel is that have people really learned their lesson?

Have they really turned to the Lord? Or are they still continuing to do what is right in their own eyes? Therefore, I'll finish with this. As always, time and truth go hand in hand.

But given enough time, the truth always comes out. The truth always comes out. And when God gives you a warning and says, don't do this or that or the other.

[36 : 42] Don't think that you can buck the curve. The warning applies to you. So listen. So listen. And when it says, little children, keep yourself from idols like it does in 1 John, listen.

You're being told because it is an error that you can so easily fall into. And also remember this. That when you pray for what you want, and it's quite clear that you are met with a divine no.

Don't consider that as the Lord rejecting you. Consider that as a divine blessing. Because you don't know what the future holds. Amen.