**God’s Own People**

The boy that was prayed for and later dedicated to the LORD since his birth is now old and gray. He has reached a stage of his life at which most would look back and see what reputation they are leaving behind. He has served the Lord and the people his whole life. Now here in chapter 12 he addresses the people in what is titled a farewell speech. However, it is not so much a farewell speech, because of his closing remarks. In the first 5 verses, Samuel begins with a personal testimony to his integrity before the people. How many leaders can you name whose services to the people can be affirmed with such confidence in personal integrity?

*Samuel said to all Israel, “I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you.* *Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day.* *Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes?*

We will notice that under his government, no man was oppressed, no man was cheated or defrauded; no man was robbed of his property. Samuel is making a point that as one chosen by God to be the judge over the people, he was in fact fair and served with integrity. The quality of his leadership was on the basis of his loyalty and obedience to God. As a result of that, he did not use his authority to take advantage of the people. And so he says to them, *“if I have done any of these things, I will make it right.”*

*“You have not cheated or oppressed us,” they replied. “You have not taken anything from anyone’s hand.”* There is a lesson we can learn here. Obedience is the best way to show God we love Him. In a world that is corrupt, we should choose God first and honour Him in everything. Unlike his sons, who took bribes and were dishonest rulers, Samuel was a man of integrity. Perhaps the only thing these people could condemn him for, would be for not raising up his sons to follow in his example. However, as far as they were concerned, Samuel was an alright guy. He obeyed the Lord and he was a fair and honest leader. Look at verse 5. You can almost imagine Samuel here stretching up his hands and saying to the people, *alright now, let’s get this clear*… *“The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.”* With the following words they affirm his integrity. *“He is witness,” they said.*

**Remembering God**

And from there we move on to verses 6-11. After Samuel presents himself before the People, he goes on to set the people before God and presents to them the righteous acts God performed for them and their ancestors. It is the sort of thing that the pastor of the church does on a routine basis - remind the church all of God’s goodness and His righteousness. Think of Pastor Baik in all his endeavours every sunday, preaching the word of God, in hopes that in hearing we may be edified as well as encouraged, by remembering and seeing God’s faithfulness in our own lives. Do you ever sit down and just reflect on all that God has done in your life - from calling you out of the darkness of sin and through Christ bringing you into His wonderful light? Do you ever look back to all the times He has spared you from hardship, and everytime He has comforted you in times of hardship? Even more so, do you ever look back to the many times God has brought about deliverance in your life? I think we should. I know I need to. And we should really appreciate and pray for our Pastors, who genuinely remind us of the works of God, because as a people we have a forgetting problem. If there is something that will cause you and I to lose faith in God and look elsewhere, it is in forgetting His faithfulness and His promises as they are given to us in His Word.

So Samuel begins in verses 6-8 *“It is the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors up out of Egypt.* *Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your ancestors.* He begins with reminding them of God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt . Then he proceeds to present them the evidence of God’s work and presence in the People of Israel, which we see when we read through the history of Israel. The people struggled with remembering the Lord their God, and in many ways disobeyed Him and turned to idols. In the book of Judges for example, we see this pattern develop: The people would turn away from God and consequently God would let them fall into oppression. Then they would cry out to God for deliverance, and God in turn would bring deliverance through a person using various Judges, Samuel being one of them. Samuel includes himself in the list of people he mentions in verse 11. He is on the list because in chapter 7 God uses Samuel to bring about a great deliverance among the people. See, history matters. In history we can see how God has worked providentially through His people. Look at what God did for your ancestors. Look at what He did for you just not so long ago. He is showing them that God has been their only faithful King.

Now the people had forgotten the Lord again, and instead of turning to Him as they usually did, they rejected Him. Look at verse 12: *But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, ‘No, we want a king to rule over us’—even though the Lord your God was your king.* In Exodus 19 God had made a covenant with His people. I’ll read briefly from verse 4: *“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.* *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,* *you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. ’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.”* So it was established. And as God’s own people, they had many privileges such as intimacy with God, providing they kept the covenant. Israel was to uphold the covenant in faith, by loving God and obeying His commands. By trusting and loving God they were to refuse to let anything take the place of God in their hearts.

**Forgetting God**

But here we see that they rejected the covenant keeping God by asking for a king. This was not the first time either, remember 1 Samuel 8:5: They said to Samuel*, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”* They had their excuses but ultimately they were rejecting God by wanting to be like other nations. Samuel is old, his sons are useless, God’s way of doing things is not working, so… yah let’s switch it up and do what everybody around us is doing. I caught myself wondering “man, after all that God has done for these people, how can they reject Him and seek to be like everybody else outside of God’s people?” Then I realised that I am not so different. How many times do I turn away from God and desire the things of this world more than Him? How many times have I said “I want what he has there - I wanna be like them, they get to party every weekend. Not me, I have bible study Saturday - church sunday. I mean I get to go on retreats every now and then - I mean that’s cool, but look what they have there. I want that. You see, I am not so different from these people, and I do not suspect you are either. Maybe you are not, maybe you are perfect and not once do you fall to the temptation of doing your own thing. I don’t know. But I imagine that’s how some of these people may have thought: “Look at all these nations around us, they get to do whatever they want and what do we have? An unseen God, a bunch of commandments and this old chap with his useless sons. So they said, *no… we want a king to rule over us - even though the Lord God was their King.*

Well, a king they asked for and a king they got. Despite their disobedience, God granted them a king but only king of His choosing. God is sovereign over all things. The further along we read the bible the more we discover that His will always prevails. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We should never deceive ourselves into thinking that God is foreign to our needs and that we know best what is best for us. In verses 14-15 Samuel proceeds to give them two conditions which they would have to fulfil to keep God’s blessings. He also warns them against disobeying God and assures them God’s mercy and protection, if both them and the king choose to obey God. You see, God is sovereign above all things. His sovereignty does not depend on man’s decision.

And just in case they were not convinced of how greatly displeased God was with their request, Samuel called unto God to send thunder and rain as a sign. From verses 16-19 he calls their attention to what God was about to do. Samuel says: *Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call on the Lord to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king.”* This was a very unusual thing to happen during this season. It was about as unusual as having snow in Zambia in the middle of october. *“The people all said to Samuel, “Pray to the Lord your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.”* I thought it interesting how earlier in chapter 7 they said to Samuel “*Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us.”* Now here they say “pray to the Lord your God for us.” We can see how their sin had distanced them from God. And that is exactly what sin does - it creates distance. It separates. Even in our Christian walk, we know this - how sin robs us of the joy of salvation. Sin hinders our intimacy with God and that is why the bible constantly instructs us to walk in obedience and put God first is everything we do. There is nothing necessarily wrong with having a king, but there is everything sinful about placing man in the place of God. They came to recognise their sin and they were afraid. It is true that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, isn’t it? These people came to their senses and understood how they had rejected their covenant-keeping, Holy God . So they repented and asked Samuel to intercede on their behalf.

And he says to them “Do not be afraid.” To a people afraid of the prospect of judgement and wrath at the Hand of God, I cannot imagine any words more encouraging than these: “Do not be afraid.” But how can they not be afraid? After all, in the second part of the verse in encouraging them to serve the Lord, he does not hesitate to remind them of their sin. Look at what he says: *“You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart*. And he goes to add this warning in verse 21: *Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless.* Indeed, in rejecting God they chased after idols which are useless. The hebrew word that is used here for idols is *“hattohu,”* which is the same expression found in Genesis 1:2: The earth was tohu - empty and formless. It’s a lesson for us too. The things we make idols of in this world are exactly that. Tohu. Empty. Money, fame, appearance, people and the list goes on. When we place these things in the place of God, we soon realise that they are empty and unable to satisfy. And the lesson to these people who are rejecting God by asking for a king, is that unlike God, this king they are asking for, cannot satisfy. It is the lesson that echos is psalm 118:8: *It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.*

**A Faithful God**

Well, the question still stands: How can they not be afraid? On what basis can they not be afraid and under what motivation can they turn away from worthless idols and serve the Lord? I think the answer is in verse 22: *For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own. Because of His own name God will not reject His people.* God is greatly concerned about His glory. God says to Isaiah in chapter 48:9 *“For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And for My praise I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off.”* Even if they were faithless God was committed to accomplishing what He began in making them a people for Himself. He is not a God of unfinished business. God is not human, that He should lie, not a human being, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? No. What God says He will do, He does. He was pleased to make them His people, He is faithful to keeping them as His people. It is on the foundation of God’s faithful that they should not be afraid. God is a promise keeper and He is faithful to His Word.

This ought to encourage us all - especially when we remember the entire project of the Old Testament points to the Messiah to come. All of God’s promises made to Abraham, Isaac and all of Israel ultimately find their fulfilment in Jesus. The same blessings that exclusively belonged to Israel are now given to all who place their faith in Jesus Christ. When Peter wrote to the early church he says: *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1peter 2:9-10.* It was on the account of God’s grace and mercy that Israel became God’s people. It is on the account of God’s grace and mercy that we become His people.

The same titles that applied to Israel in exodus 19 are applied to us too who belong to God, as His own special people through faith in Jesus. When we are tempted to be defined by our past sins, remember that in dying for our sins, Jesus makes verse 22 of first Samuel 12 so true of us, too. When we are faced with the reality that although sin no longer reigns in our lives, it remains and causes us to stumble, may we remember verse 22. When everything around seems to be falling apart in national unrest or in the midst of a deadly virus, may we remember verse 22. For His own glory, God will not forsake you. He is pleased to make us His people. Despite whatever circumstances may cause you to doubt, remember that God is not a God of unfinished business. Paul confidently made this statement in Philippians 1:6: *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

I would say we end there but Samuel has a few more words and we will just look at them briefly. In verses 23-25, even though he was stepping down as their leader he promises that he will continue his role as prophet and intercessor - teaching them the way that is good and right. In addition to that he exhorts them to fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully with all their heart. And he warns them of what will happen if they persist in doing evil. Both you and your king will be swept away, he says. It makes you wonder: *How could the people of Israel possibly fear God and serve Him faithfully with all their hearts?* I think the answer begins with considering the great things He has done for them?

How about us? What does this have to do with us? Well, we should be encouraged in knowing that God is faithful despite our failures and disobedience. He shows us grace. We need to remember that the bible is ultimately about God’s purposes which are ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is the greater prophet who speaks the very words of God. He is the highest priest who intercedes for us, even today. Jesus is the great King before whom we bow. God is most pleased and glorified when we abide in Jesus Christ. He is the one through whom all of His purposes are fulfilled.

**Conclusion**

I pray and hope that we may begin to see how precious a thing it is to be a people of God. And from that reality, may we live lives that are motivated by God’s love and faithfulness to make us His own people.