

1 Samuel 8 — Give Us A King!

March 6, 2022

Good morning! My name is Kurt. If you are a guest, it is great to have you. I want to thank Dan Foote. He is one of our elders. I want to thank him for leading us in that time of prayer for Ukraine.

I am thankful for our elders. They are godly men I trust. In the upcoming weeks, I will have other elders up front leading in prayer for Ukraine. That will give you a chance to know them better as we pray for Ukraine.

For those of you who are new, let me take a moment to let you know how CrossWinds is governed. CrossWinds is a multisite church. We are led by an elder board. The men on the elder board come from both campuses. These men meet together, and we work together on the mission of reaching people with Jesus in the Spencer and Spirit Lake communities. While the elders come from both campuses and work together, each campus has a team of deacons that are specific to that campus. While there are only men on the elder board, there are men and women on the deacon teams. While the elders focus on the leadership of the church, deacons focus on caring for people in the church. I will get back to the role of elders and deacons later in the message but I wanted to begin by giving everyone an idea of how we are structured at CrossWinds.

Let's get into the message.

As a country, we love our freedom. America is the land of the free and the home of the brave. The honest truth is that in many parts of the world, people don't want freedom. They want to be told how to live their lives. People will

tolerate and even welcome a totalitarian government if it gets rid of anarchy and lawlessness in society.

A humiliated and defeated Germany from World War I welcomed Adolf Hitler and fascism because he offered to bring order to chaos. Germans were willing to overlook the murder of the Jews and their own enslavement to the Nazi state as long as there was order in society. They didn't want freedom. They wanted someone to tell them what to do.

Today, we see the same thing in our own country as a younger generation speaks of embracing socialism and concentrating all the power in a person or a party to solve our problems. Young people eagerly embrace big government as they try to legislate everything from morality to masks in people's lives in a one-size-fits-all approach.

As a people, why do we have a continual attraction to putting one person in power? Even after seeing tyrants, why do we not fear tyrants? We saw what happened when a tyrant was given all the power in Germany. Hitler unleashed a war where he attempted to take over the world. Even after seeing the terrible danger of tyranny, why do we keep trying to give one person all the power and put one person in control? This morning, as we turn to 1 Samuel 8, we will find the answer.

Last week, in 1 Samuel 7, we saw the power of repentance. Even though Samuel was recognized as a prophet of God who spoke the words of God to the people, for 20 years, the people of Israel ignored him. They went their own way. They did their own thing. They even worshipped the Canaanite gods around

them, such as Baal and Ashtaroath. As a result, God didn't fight for them. He fought against them. Then, after 20 years, the people finally began listening to Samuel's calls to repentance. It started as a trickle of repentance that turned into a raging river of repentance as all of Israel went through nationwide repentance. They put away the foreign gods around them and turned back to the Lord. The question was, did that repentance make a difference? Yes, it did. It made a huge difference. God went from fighting against them to fighting for them. When the Philistines attacked this time, God defeated them. He thundered against them. The Philistines were destroyed, and Israel finally had peace. It was a peace that lasted for decades. When 1 Samuel 7 closed, Samuel was judging the nation. He went on a little preaching tour each year, continually calling God's people to repentance and to stay in a right relationship with God. Repentance makes a difference!

As chapter 8 begins, we have moved many years into the future. When this chapter picks up, Samuel is now old. One scholarly work I referenced believes there is about a 30-year period between the end of 1 Samuel 7 and the beginning of 1 Samuel 8. We are to understand that peace and security in the land of Israel continued for decades after the people repented of sin and turned to God. When they were in a right relationship with God, God was fighting for them. He was protecting them. As 1 Samuel 8 opens, after 30 years of peace and security, a crisis is approaching on the horizon. Let's see what it is.

The Crisis

Samuel was old.

When Samuel became old... 1 Samuel 8:1 (ESV)

Samuel was old. How old was Samuel? We don't know. The problem of an old leader should remind us of another old man who became old and lost his effectiveness. We met him at the beginning of the book. Do you remember his name? Eli. He also was old. Just about every time the text referenced him, it reminds us he was old. It told us he was so old he couldn't see. He was so old he couldn't hear. He should have retired years before, but he refused to step aside. The last reference to him was that he was old and very heavy.

Growing old has its advantages. There is retirement and the golf course. You don't have to brush your teeth. You get to take out your teeth. Growing old also has drawbacks. There is decreased energy. The body has constant aches and pains. There is forgetfulness. You can clearly remember 30 years ago but you have no idea what you ate for breakfast. You are glad to tell people what happened years ago, but you tell them the same story a dozen times. That is old age.

While Israel had 30 years of peace and security under Samuel's leadership, Samuel's ability to judge the nation and carry the responsibilities of leading the nation were diminishing with age.

All leaders, no matter how good, will grow old. Even if those leaders grow in wisdom, they will diminish in capacity to lead. They will diminish in flexibility to change. They want to go back in time, not forward in time. Those are some of the challenges Samuel faced with his age.

Samuel had a plan.

...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. 1 Samuel 8:1–2 (ESV)

Samuel had a possible solution to the difficulties that came with age. He delegated some of his responsibility to judge the nation to his sons. The firstborn was Joel. The second was Abijah. They were judges in Beersheba.

An old leader with diminishing capacity trying to share his responsibilities with his two sons is something we have seen before in 1 Samuel. Do you remember this earlier in this book? As Eli aged, he shared the responsibility of the priesthood with his two sons. There is a difference between Eli and Samuel. The priesthood was hereditary in Israel. It passed from father to son, staying inside the descendants of Aaron. The role of the judge in Israel was not hereditary. Judges were always chosen and raised up by God. On one famous occasion in the book of Judges, Gideon was raised up by God to judge the nation. The people liked him so much they asked to make him king and to establish a dynasty of leadership where his sons reigned after him. He refused.

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian.” Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.” Judges 8:22–23 (ESV)

Why did Samuel make his sons judges? I don't think he was trying to establish a dynasty. I think it was simply a matter of practicality. As an older man, he needed to share the burden of the work. Joel and Abijah were judges in Beersheba which was located in the far south of Israel, almost 50 miles away from Samuel's home in Ramah. It appears Samuel was simply trying to better

cover the country because his old bones couldn't travel like they did when he was young.

Samuel's sons were crooked.

Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. 1 Samuel 8:3 (ESV)

Samuel's sons were no better than Eli's sons. Their perversion of justice reminds us of how Hophni and Phinehas stole people's offerings for themselves. Even though it was in a different way, Samuel's sons and Eli's sons did the same same thing. They all exploited their position of authority. They were supposed to serve people but instead used their position of authority to put themselves in front of people. They were using people, not serving people. They were taking from people. They were not giving to people.

Unlike Eli, Samuel did not follow the sinful behavior of his sons. Samuel's character was the standard of conduct against which his sons were measured and which they failed to obtain. His sons did not walk in his ways.

According to the Old Testament law, a basic requirement of anyone in their position is to hate dishonest gain.

Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. Exodus 18:21 (ESV)

The clear parallel between Eli's wicked sons and Samuel's wicked sons is meant to teach us a lesson.

Application: The best of leaders can have the worst of sons. There is no guarantee the godly character of a father will be passed down to a son. That is what we pray happens. That is what we work for with our children. That is why

we teach our children the Word of God. There is no guarantee a child will follow that path of his or her parents. There are scores of examples in both the Old and New Testaments where people walked away from God even though they grew up in a God-fearing family. Samuel and Eli's rebellious sons remind us that if we have children who are not currently walking with Jesus, we are not alone. That is a pain godly Samuel carried, not just you.

An aging Samuel who had sons without integrity brings up a request.

Give us a king!

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "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." 1 Samuel 8:4–5 (ESV)

On an earlier occasion, it was the elders of Israel who came up with a proposal to solve a national crisis. They were worried about defeat by the Philistines. Their proposal was to bring down the ark of the covenant into battle to use it as a military superweapon. That backfired. It was a bad idea. Now the elders were faced with another crisis and had another really bad idea. "Samuel is old. Let's get rid of Samuel and have him give us a king so we can be just like the other nations around us." Bad idea!

Notice this was their idea on how to lead the nation. It was not God's idea on how to lead the nation. They didn't ask God through Samuel what they should do. They just wanted a king so they could be like everyone else. There was no prayer in this request. There was no seeking God's will in this request. If anything, they should have asked Samuel to pray for them to provide a new and younger judge. They didn't want another judge from God. They wanted an entirely new system of government that was just like the world around them.

In 1 Samuel 7, the people were following the foreign gods around them. In 1 Samuel 8, they wanted to follow the style of foreign governments around them. The people wanted a human leader they could see, not faith in a God they had to trust.

What made having a king like the other nations so appealing? One man with complete control offered strong and stable leadership. There was no more dependence on an unseen God to unite them.

Was there a problem with peace and security in Israel at this point? No. God protected and fought for them for the last 30 years. They didn't need the security of an earthly king. They just wanted to be like their neighbors.

Application: God's people are not to be led like other nations. In the same way, the church is not to run like other organizations. Just as Israel was not to be led like other nations, the church is not to be run like a business. Sometimes you find people trying to take production techniques from the business world and apply them in the church world in an inappropriate way. I have seen this happen. I can think of one church that gave staff KRA (Key Result Areas) on the number of people they led to Jesus. You can present the gospel but you cannot control the results of the gospel. Who repents and turns to Christ is ultimately beyond our control. It is easy to see a successful business and think the church should be run like a business. We just need to crank out more Jesus products. It isn't that simple. The church is a body. It has hands and feet. Some parts of the body are less presentable. They need special care. We care for them. We don't destroy them if they are not productive enough. In the church, we don't get to

choose our employees. The church is a family. It is made up of brothers and sisters. We care for people. We don't just make performance demands of people.

This morning, I began by telling you we have elders and deacons at CrossWinds. We didn't always have them. They came about because a few years ago we changed our by-laws. A few years ago, we didn't have deacons. We had elders, but they had a different job description. As we studied our by-laws and our Bible, we came to the realization that we were following a business model of doing church instead of the biblical model of church. We did what all Christians do every day. We repented. We changed. We redid our by-laws. We created the offices of elders and deacons because those are clearly in the Bible, then we built the job description for those offices straight out of the Bible. We built our governance model around those offices.

Beware of running a church like a business. While the church has elements of a business, it is not a business. When the church is run like a business God's people are echoing the words, "Give us a king so we can be like the nations around us."

But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 1 Samuel 8:6 (ESV)

Samuel did not like what he heard. He did not like it one bit. It says this request displeased Samuel. The Hebrew literally translates as "this thing was evil in the eyes of Samuel." Samuel did not like the idea of transferring the role of judging the nation to a king. I think there was a measure of personal resentment in his answer. He faithfully led the nation for the last 20-30 years. God protected them. Samuel knew he was raised up by God to judge Israel. After he was gone,

God would raise up another judge to take care of Israel. God had consistently done that for the last 250 years. The elder's proposal was a rejection of not just Samuel, but it was a rejection of God's leadership over that nation.

Application: One thing I wrote down about this as I was studying is that I loved Samuel's reaction. Even though he was deeply hurt by this request, he didn't overreact. Samuel did not respond in anger. He bit his tongue and took his frustrations in prayer to God. What a great reminder for each of us on how to handle things when people hurt us.

And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." 1 Samuel 8:7-9 (ESV)

God's answer to Samuel was full of surprises. Samuel was expecting to be told to ignore the voice of the people. He was told to obey the voice of the people.

"Samuel, they have not rejected you. They rejected me." I am sure this was an encouragement for Samuel. The bigger issue is the Israelites were rejecting God as their king. Remember that up to this point God was the king over them. They knew this.

...The LORD their God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them.
Numbers 23:21b (ESV)

This request for a king was a clear rejection of God as their leader. God said to Samuel, this was nothing new. The Israelites continually rejected God as their king for a long time. From the day God brought his people out of the land of

Egypt they went after other gods. They were doing the same thing now by asking for a king.

Notice what happened. God said because they consistently turned away from him, he would answer their request. He would give them what they wanted.

Application: When we continually rebel against God, sometimes God will give us our misplaced desires as a form of discipline. Did you ever think about that? Did you know God may answer your wrong prayers as a way to discipline you and turn you from your sin?

The best example of this comes from Romans 1. In that chapter, it describes people continually pursuing sexual sin. God, in his grace and protection, will stall people in their descent into sexual sin and death. If they continually pursue sexual sin, he will let them have sexual sin and suffer the penalty that comes with that sin. The key phrase in these verses is, “God gave them up.”

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves... Romans 1:24 (ESV)

This is talking about heterosexual sin. If there is no repentance of pursuing sexual sin for a long period of time, God will remove his protecting influence and let people suffer with sexual sin.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; Romans 1:26 (ESV)

In this verse, it moves from heterosexual sin to homosexual sin. If sexual sin is continually pursued, God will remove his restraining influence and people will suffer the consequences of homosexual sin.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. Romans 1:28 (ESV)

What are some other ways this works out in life?

Some people think this way about marriage. Sometimes people are desperate for a spouse. They had a list of qualifications for Mr. or Mrs. Right but as they get older and can't find the right person, the list gets shorter. Soon they are happy to marry anyone with a heartbeat. They refuse to be content and trust God to provide the right person. They will date and marry anyone who is interested in them. When that happens, sometimes God will answer their prayer by sidestepping his best for them and allowing them to choose not the person of their dreams but the person of their nightmares because they were worshipping marriage instead of God.

Application: Sometimes God's greatest mercies come to us in the form of unanswered prayers. This should change the way we think about unanswered prayers. Sometimes we get really mad at God for not answering our prayers. Many times God doesn't answer our prayers because what we are asking for is not good for us or the right timing for us.

This past week Cindy and I watched the Kurt Warner movie called "American Underdog." It was a good movie. At one point in the movie, Kurt Warner had a chance to achieve his dream. He was able to try out for the Green Bay Packers. To his surprise, he was almost immediately cut from the team. That led to deep questions about why God wasn't answering his prayer. That was followed by hard times in his life and a time in the Arena Football League. Later, he had a chance to try out again for the NFL with the St. Louis Rams. You know

the rest of the story. That led to him becoming one of the most successful quarterbacks in the NFL.

In the movie he said, "It was a good thing I was cut from the Packers. Now I know I wasn't ready for the NFL. God was still preparing me. It was only the second time I tried out that I was finally ready. Thank goodness for God not answering my prayers."

If the people really wanted a king, Samuel was to warn them about the ways of a king.

The Ways Of A King

So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." 1 Samuel 8:10–18 (ESV)

Before God answered their prayer, he gave them one final warning about what would happen to them if God answered their prayer and he gave them a king, a man in sole authority, someone who could become a tyrant.

By the way, this description is the ordinary result when any human being has complete authority. This is ordinary kingship, not the most depraved form of kingship. There is one key verb repeated again and again. It is the word "take." A

king will take from you and you will serve him. This is an accurate picture of what we have seen happen with tyrants in history. They take over a country and make the people of the nation serve them. The Israelites wanted a king so they could have prosperity and security but having a king would take away their prosperity and security.

When you have any king in your life other than God, that king will not save you, he will tyrannize you.

The word “take” occurs six times. Your sons will be taken to serve in his armies and die in his battles. That reminds me of the text messages that were found on the phone of a Russian soldier after he was killed in Ukraine this week. His mother was asking him how the training exercises were going in Crimea. He told his mother, they were no longer in Crimea. They were in Ukraine. He said they were told the people would welcome them, but they were not welcoming them. They were falling under the wheels of their armored vehicles trying to stop them from coming. The soldiers were told to drive over the civilians that were trying to stop them with their bodies. Moments later, the young man was killed. These are the ways of a king. He will make your sons die in his wars.

When the young men are not fighting for the king, your sons will be taken to serve the king, plowing his ground, reaping his harvest, and working in his factories.

The king will also take your daughters. The daughters will not be able to stay home and tend to their children. They will be taken to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. The best of their cooking will be for him to eat, not you to eat.

The king will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive orchards from you so he can give them as a reward to his favorite friends. He will take your land. There will be an extra tithe of all products so his high-ranking officials can live in proper luxury. The king will take your servants so they no longer work in your house but in his house. In short, Samuel said the people would end up living as slaves of their king. God's people were freed from slavery in the land of Egypt, but if they had a king they would return to slavery in their own land.

Samuel's message is still true today. Those who want a king and big national government to provide for all their needs must be ready to give away their rights as free people. If the government is to solve all our problems, then most of what we have must be given to the government and the government must be obeyed in all things at all times. In short, Samuel tells us whatever good a king or monarch accomplishes for a nation, he will take more than he gives to that nation. He will take and you will serve is what happens when anyone is put in an exclusive position of power and given lots of authority over those people.

This scenario plays out only three generations into Israel's kings. The first king was Saul. The second was David. The third was Solomon. Under Solomon, Israel experienced the oppression Samuel warned about. King Solomon engaged in two massive building projects. He spent seven years building the Lord's house. Then he spent another 13 years building his own house! To accomplish that feat, Solomon put much of Israel into forced labor.

King Solomon drafted forced labor out of all Israel, and the draft numbered 30,000 men... Solomon also had 70,000 burden-bearers and 80,000 stonecutters in the hill country... 1 Kings 5:13–15 (ESV)

That is a lot of forced labor, and most of it was used to build his house! When Solomon died, the elders appealed to his son Rehoboam for leniency from all the hard work. Rehoboam responded by refusing to lighten the forced labor on the people. That led to civil war in the kingdom of Israel as the nation split into the northern and southern kingdoms because the Israelites rebelled against the constant slave labor they lived under.

All a king would do or big government would do is become despots. They would tyrannize and take from people, not serve and help other people.

God warned them about this. If they went this way, he would no longer answer their cries for help.

God's warning fell on deaf ears.

But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." 1 Samuel 8:19–20 (ESV)

In spite of this warning, the people would not listen. Their request of Samuel now turned into a demand, even in spite of this warning. "No! Give us a king! We want to be like the other nations!"

There is an interesting observation we should notice.

Application: Elders are to lead people, not to follow people. When we began the chapter, it was the elders who brought the request for a king to the people. A few verses before this and in this verse, we see the source of this request was the people. Instead of the elders leading the people, they were following the people. They were pacifying the people. They were playing politics. The job of elders then, and elders today, is not to pacify the people. It is to lead

people. The church is not a democracy. The elders of the church are the most spiritually mature men in the church. They are the men who know God's Word well enough that they are qualified to teach it. This is why God placed the leadership of his church into a plurality of the elders of the church. The loudest voices of the people are not necessarily the biblically right voices. They also are not what is best for the people. If God wanted the church to be a democracy, he would have set it up that way where the most spiritually immature person and the most spiritually mature person have one vote. That is not the way God set up his church. It is a plurality of the most spiritually mature men that lead the church.

Just as the majority opinion in Israel at this time was dead wrong, there are many times in the church where the majority opinion is dead wrong. What is popular is not necessarily biblically right. The majority in a church may want female pastors and elders. That may be what the majority wants but it is clearly not biblically right. We have discussed that and taught on that issue in the past. We have numerous messages in our sermon archives where you can learn what the Bible says on this matter.

That doesn't mean that elders don't listen to the people. Yes, elders listen to the people but their job is not to follow the people. They have to lead according to the Scripture and the truth. That is a courageous and hard job. Listening to the loudest voices of the people and following them is what got the Israelite elders in trouble.

And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king." Samuel then said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city." 1 Samuel 8:21-22 (ESV)

So Samuel agreed to give the people the king they wanted. It would be a king that would be a judgment on them. No human being can be a better king than our God. No matter how much good they do, they will always take more than they give.

Applications

1. Israel tried to find security for the future in a king instead of God. Today, in a similar way, people look to politicians to save them and give them hope for their future instead of God. Listen to politicians running for office --- if you elect them, they promise to solve all your problems. Once they get in office, they forget about everything they said and let you down. Our God is the only one who will not let us down.
2. Whenever a church or denomination strays from a plurality of qualified elders governing the body and concentrates power on one man, it will lead to disaster (See 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-16). A few months ago, I told you about a podcast I was listening to called, "The Rise And Fall Of Mars Hill." It is the inside story of too much power being concentrated on Pastor Mark Driscoll in Seattle and his getting rid of his elders. It is the story of a church being run like a business. It is a story of massive leadership failure and the tyranny that takes place when someone has the power of a king.
3. The majority rule does not always produce the right results. The majority of Israel wanted a king, but the majority was wrong. While elders are to listen to the people, they are called to lead and not follow the people.
4. Jesus is the only king who won't fail us. He is the only king we can always trust. While all earthly kings will fail us, there is one king who will not fail us.

His name is Jesus. Jesus is the only king with perfect integrity. He never takes bribes or perverts justice. Jesus is the only king who doesn't take from people. Jesus gave his life to save his people. Rather than running up debt building projects of luxury for himself, he paid our debt on the cross. In contrast to the enslavement of an earthly king, Jesus says, " My yoke is easy, my burden is light." Jesus doesn't call us to fight his battles. He fought our battles for us.

All of us have to choose a king in our lives. All human kings and leaders will let us down. Jesus is a different kind of king. Even when we are not faithful to him, he is faithful to us. That is the king I am following, how about you?



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