

Grace in Transition | The Book of Samuel

Security! (and Politics)

First Samuel CH 8

10.11.20

And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. ² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. ³ His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; ⁵ and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."

⁶ But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. ⁷ The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. ⁸ "Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day-- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods-- so they are doing to you also. ⁹ "Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them."

¹⁰ So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. ¹¹ He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. ¹² "He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³ "He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ "He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants. ¹⁵ "He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. ¹⁶ "He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work. ¹⁷ "He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. ¹⁸ "Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."

¹⁹ Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

²¹ Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD'S hearing.

²² The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and appoint them a king." So Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."

We've been looking at the Book of Samuel. It's the history of the Jewish people about 1000BC. The Israelites have now been settled in the Promised Land for generations but those passing years have NOT seen Israel trusting the God of Abraham, the God of the Exodus. Rather, the Israelites have given in to the ways of their pagan neighbors.

Worshiping the Canaanite idols, the Israelites, became LIKE those idols (Ps 115.8) – spiritually dead. In the time of the Judges they sank into a kind of sub-human, lawless, anarchy in which, “there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes.”

But today that comes to an end... sort of.

We now enter the period of the monarchy. For the next approximately 500 years, the government of the Israelites will be in the hands of kings. God had made provisions for a king in the law (Deut 17.14ff) and specified that he should be a king different from those in the Ancient Near East... Hannah prayed for such a different kind of king (2.10)... But NOW, they force God’s hand (or so they think) and demand a king of THEIR choosing... and God gives them what they want. It will BAD for them in the short term BUT ULTIMATELY even their bad choice will send them looking for that DIFFERENT TYPE OF KING.

Today we consider the search for security, how it can sometimes lead people to extreme measures. To be safe and secure, to allay the fears and anxieties of facing life unprotected, vulnerable, weak and AFRAID – people are often willing to do strange things.

Do you see YOURSELF as an insecure person? What have you been willing to trade in order to be safe? What are the limits of our safety-measures? And how do you know WHEN you're being wise and prudent and when you are acting in unbelief (refusing the safety that comes on God’s terms?)

Let’s look at: 1) The Search for Security

2) A Tale of Three Kings

3) The Practice of Secure Insecurity

The people repented last week... it was a revival of God’s cause and a lovely restoration of trust in the God who rescued this people from slavery in Egypt and took them away into the wilderness and married them and fought for Israel His bride... and combatted their unbelief (showed them wonders...worked trust).

God settled them in the Promised Land (Joshua) and was ridding the land of demonic-worship and child-sacrifice and cruelty... and God was calling His people to set up “The Kingdom of Love and Truth” where all nations would be drawn to this City on a Hill to witness a people who knew God and enjoyed God and HIS SHALOM.

And the revival we saw last week gave us Big Hope that the anarchy was over... and shalom had begun to reign ... and now maybe 30 years have passed and the heat of revival has cooled... And the people ask for a king... They want the security that a stable government can supply but something’s a little “off” with their request... this request for security.

We turn the page to CH 8 and Samuel is old (I've been hearing from old people all my life that this IS the way it goes – suddenly your old!).

Like Eli, Samuel's sons did NOT follow their father in pursuing God and they cannot be trusted to "judge" as Samuel had. And up to now, the elders' request seems well founded: "Samuel, what's the plan? We don't wanna go back to the brutality of the Judges, so give us a king."

But then the phrase is added, "a king to judge us" and Samuel thinks, "Wait! I'm the judge... they're rejecting ME!"

And then another phrase, "a king to judge us LIKE ALL THE NATIONS..."

And deeply troubled, Samuel the prophet, asks God's direction and God says, "LISTEN to the voice of the people..." The Hebrew word "shema" sounds a lot like the name, "SHEM-u-el". "Shema" (hear or listen: five times in this chapter). God first says, "No, they're NOT rejecting YOU, Shem-u-el, shema TO WHAT THEY'RE REALLY SAYING – you're not hearing."

And God, the Analyst, says, "If you look deeper, you'll realize that they have rejected ME from being their king, just as they have been doing ever since I rescued them from Egypt. They're forsaking ME to go after other gods and now you feel it too!"

And God tells Samuel to elucidate/clarify what a typical Ancient Near Eastern king will mean for them. "He will cost you a lot."

But they insist! And as Samuel NOW listens more carefully, he hears an even deeper motive to their request, "No, but there SHALL be a king over us THAT WE MAY BE like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

All the nations have these divine or semi-divine kings who impress and scare their enemies because the kings look majestic and grand and larger-than-life and they intimidate the enemies... "Pagan kings are like the Ark of the Covenant is for us (except, we couldn't make it work) BUT WE CAN MAKE A KING WORK... we've seen how the nations do it! Grandeur!"

One commentator wrote, "They were tired of being Israel..." "We want to be a real nation – important and powerful and impressive – THAT'S HOW YOU WIN IN TODAY'S WORLD, Samuel, but I guess you're too old to see that."

Truth is: they're NOT like other nations. Their welfare does NOT depend on their ability to work it and control and terrify their enemies – their security is NOT theirs to control... It's a gift (grace) from the one true and living God...which they receive by FAITH.

But they're finding it difficult to live by grace through faith... Faith deals with unseen things (e.g. promises) and they want to see it and to work it and manage (not TRUST...anything but trust.)

There's an old story about a man who fell off a 200-foot-high cliff but on his way down he grabbed a tree-root. He began to yell, "Is anyone up there? I need help...can any hear me ...is anyone up there?"

And a voice came out of heaven saying, "I'm here to save you... let go of the tree and I will catch you."

And after thinking about it, he said, "Is anyone ELSE up there?"

See this stubborn insistence on having a king they could see and control rather than depend on or trust the God they couldn't see and control...the Only True God who made the universe and who totally committed Himself to THEM – Israel was God's Bride and NO OTHER NATION HAD THAT FAVORED STATUS. And the reason this is so serious (it cost them a 40-year long detour Acts 13.21!) – it's a capitulation. It's a radical rejection of their identity, their mission, their history; it's a denial of God and His grace.

"We don't want to BE Israel anymore – we just want to be ordinary... even if it costs us our daughters and sons, our lands, our money, our freedom – we don't want to be the favored nation – don't want to trust You...rather do it ourselves."

There are three kings in this story. The first king is I. (You know "The King and I" – well, this is "The King IS I!") We all want to be in control. We want safety and security on our own terms. We don't want to trust – we want to depend on ourselves.

The second king I see here is this fantasy king: "IF WE CAN JUST GET HIM... put this ideal king on the throne, then HE'LL GIVE US WHAT WE WANT – he'll fight those terrible Philistines and just like we used the Ark, so NOW we'll use him... An enormous status symbol – dripping with gold, showering us with rubies... INTIMIDATING all our enemies and DOING ALL WE TELL HIM TO DO!"

Yeah, but he'll be a tyrant! He'll "take" – see that word, repeated in the big paragraph eight times, "He will take...take...take" "Well, at least we'll be safe and secure! AND THAT'S THE MAIN THING! To be safe!

But you won't be safe and secure... not in this world, not East of Eden, not outside the Garden. The world is fallen and the kind of security you want is not available in a world marred by sin. The egg is shattered and you can't put it back in the shell.

The president can't keep you secure. The government and police and institutions can't keep you safe. Your home security system and the Securities and Exchange Commission can't keep you secure. 215 thousand deaths in our nation and climbing... from a microorganism. Psalm 146.3: "Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation."

The world is under the heavy burden of a curse; we ALL live East of Eden... BUT there is a King who was so confident in His own identity and didn't need to impress anyone. AND HE was willing and able to carry the curse so that we could know the Truest Security there is. He's a King who actually fought our battle for us.

His very name means RESCUE – Yeshua, Jesus means “salvation.”

He doesn't HAVE to “TAKE-TAKE-TAKE” because He needs nothing. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and He's able to say to us, “if I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you.” (Ps 50.10-12)

Idols have to be propped up... the human “saviors” whether kings or congressmen or anyone or anything we look to to give us the security we ALL long for in this often scary world – no one and no thing can keep us safe... and yet He showed in His life death and resurrection that He can give true and everlasting security to the Real Me!

He is the One and Only true, unfailing source of security... but He'll only give that security on His terms: He only gives it as a GIFT and the only way that gift can be received is TRUST.

The other kings...in fact anything we turn to for security ...they always enslave us because they require more than they deliver...and they can't keep the real me safe from the ultimate and final enemy which is death... they require a lot and they deliver only a temporary fix.

But Jesus Christ defeated death... and what He wants is MY WHOLE SELF...NOT as a payment or a punishment but for liberation. He wants access to every room in the house that I am... I take down the “no-access” sign and invite Him in to free me from fear and sin and all that ruins and distorts life. He wants to abide/dwell in me and I in Him... for freedom.

Now, you may be wondering: what about health insurance? What about wearing a seatbelt or a mask – is doing that an act of unbelief? Is a “social security” check relying on a false source of safety?

Well, the security into which Jesus Christ calls us and invites us is a kind of insecure security... In many ways the world is enjoying God's gifts like seatbelts and airbags and medications and even insurance policies and retirement accounts are all gifts from God and should be received with thanksgiving and enjoyed to God's glory.

And the security Jesus Christ gives is received in the uncomfortable exercise of faith – that means we have to trust even when we don't see the results. Believers in Jesus still get flat-tires and still lose their cell-phones and still get cancer – “He causes it to rain on the just and the unjust.” (Mt 5.45)

BUT as we believe, we can truly know that the real evil is taken out of our pains, our accidents, our failings and the failings of others that seem to disrupt OUR temporal well-being.

He promises that “no weapon formed against me will succeed” (Isa 54.17) that’s NOT to say that I’ll never have a bad hair-day or lose my job or have a child who goes astray (Samuel did!) but that ultimately these troubles will somehow shape me to become like Jesus... He’s using even pain and trouble to set me free.

So how do I know if I’m trusting in Jesus Christ and His good gifts as my source of security or I’m over-relying on the means/instruments He provides?

Here’s a few helps: First, worry is an indicator. Listen to your words and question your emotions. Often the problem is at a deeper level. Samuel was told to listen to what the people were really saying and we’re called to do that with ourselves and when we’re asked to counsel other believers too. Am I really believing that HE always has my true best interests in mind even when I MAY be losing my job... or I get a bad diagnosis?

He wants to free us from worry and bring us to a place of rest.

Second, am I manipulating people or situations, self-justifying, insisting on MY WAY etc.? It could be lying or cheating or clearly disobeying one of God’s good commands? That’s a way to know that I’m trading His true security (which is by faith) for my fake security, which is based on my control.

Third, prayer-less-ness is a sign that I am trusting in what I DO TO SECURE MYSELF instead of Jesus Christ’s promises and providence.

Fourth, Bonhoeffer said the multiplication of goods is also a multiplication of CARES. We gather stuff to make us more care-free and secure...then we have to CARE for the stuff. So, travel light. (quote in the bulletin – wonderful and freeing!)

Lastly, a lack of joy may indicate that I’m taking on responsibility/credit for MY safety that really belongs to Him. Paul asked the Galatians, “Where is your sense of blessing?” (4.15) If our generosity is begrudging or forced (not joyful) then I’m an unbelieving believer.

It’s a wild world out there, East of Eden, and yet we have a Source of security in Jesus Christ and the Good News... may we have JOY/REST IN HIM IN THIS COMING WEEK!