

Can This Be Said Of You? Samuel's Vindication

(1 Samuel 12:1-5)

Context: The Scene at Gilgal (11:12-15)

- The LORD has brought victory to Israel (11:6-11). They have renewed their commitment to the LORD (11:14-15). The nation is unified for the first time since Joshua's campaign, as they entered the Promised Land.
- The worship scene at Gilgal included the people's presentation of Saul as their king and their re-commitment to the LORD through the sacrifice of peace offerings. All of this was done "before the LORD." In this way, the kingdom was "renewed."
- Saul's primary obligation, as a vassal-king, is a total, undivided, and exclusive fidelity to the LORD, who is his benefactor (10:25; 11:14-15).

1. Samuel's Superior Leadership (v.1-4)

- Once the peace-offerings and successive fellowship meal is completed, Samuel addresses the nation.
- The tune for chapter 12 is changing from celebration to concern. The picture is a court room scene: Samuel functions as the defendant. There are three witnesses to his testimony: the people, the LORD, and the LORD's anointed (Saul). Important cases could not be decided on the testimony of one witness (Numb. 35:30; Deut. 19:16; Ex. 20:16).

In his character (v.2)

- Samuel invites the witnesses to testify about/against his integrity. "I have walked..." Samuel's "walking" is in reference to the direction of his life.
- While there is an intrinsic value within truth itself, the force behind that truth in affecting others can be enhanced or hindered by whether or not the one making the claim heeds his/her own warning or exhortation.
- This force and its effect in large amounts can be measured by what the people think of the person by whom the advice is given.
- Samuel has "obeyed you." Samuel was discouraged by the people's request for a king (8:4-6) and thought that it was a reflection on himself. He was not ill-disposed to them.
- The nation was unaware of the private conversation Samuel had with the LORD after he prayed (8:6-9). Samuel technically obeyed the LORD. Three times, the LORD told Samuel to "obey their voice" (v.7, 9, 22). While the request for a human king was a great wickedness, an evil and sinful act (12:17, 19), the LORD commanded Samuel to obey their request.

From his youth (v.2): From the time he was weaned from his mother Hannah and brought under the mentorship of Eli (1:24; 2:18), he ministered to the LORD (2:11; 3:1) and grew in favor with God and man (2:26).

- The perseverance of Samuel serving the LORD all his life (v.2) would have carried tremendous weight.

To the demand of a human king (v.3):

- Samuel asks five rhetorical questions which are intended to contrast the future endowed rights of the king and his own testimony before them. He contrasts the future "taking" by the king, and what he has not taken from them. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Who have I defrauded? Who have I oppressed? Whose hand I have I taken a bribe from?
- *Rights of the king* (8:11-18):
 - The "taking" by the king is not an abuse of power. In their demand, they endow him with rights that would otherwise belong to them.
 - He will take your sons (v.11-12): your sons will be taken from you and will fight for him in his military. They will work on his fields in order to feed his army. Additionally, they will make weapons of war.
 - He will take your daughters (v.13): your daughters will serve as perfumers (concubines), cooks, and bakers, to feed his military.
 - He will take your property (v.14-16): the king will take your best fields. Private property will be confiscated in order to provide food for the king's military. He will also take your servants from you.
 - He will tax you (v.17): He will tax you 10% with whatever else you own once he is done taking from you.

The result: once everything is taking from you, you will be his slaves. In that day, you will cry out, and the LORD will not deliver (v.18)

2. Shallowness and Stupidity of the People in their Wickedness (v.5)

- Despite Samuel's momentum in his polemic argument, the people remain cold, indifferent, and unmoved.
- The people declare Samuel "innocent" from any charges of theft, fraud, oppression and bribery. If Samuel was to be guilty of any of these indictments, he will pay them back (Lev. 6:1-7; Numb. 16:15; Deut. 16:19).
- In expunging Samuel from any of these qualities that the king will exercise, they condemn themselves. The LORD is a witness no longer against Samuel, but the people.
- Why are the people requesting a king?
 - At surface level, it is because they want to be like the other nations and have a physical man lead them in battles (8:5, 20).
 - Their request is grounded in great wickedness (12:17)