

201227 A King or No King? - 37/49 - December 27, 2020GG

Dear Friends,

Why do you pray for the things that appear in your prayers, especially those things that have a way of appearing repeatedly in your prayers? Are you praying for those things with the conviction that they will glorify the Lord? Or that they will satisfy some personal need or another? Our study passage for this week gives us rich teaching regarding our prayers. In Philippians 4:6, Paul opens the door for us to pray for whatever our "requests" may be. However, the general theme of Scripture also teaches us that the Lord's answer to our prayers are not governed by our wish or preferred ideas, but by His wise knowledge of us, His children, and our true needs, not our imagined "Need." The young child pleading with his parents for a candy bar may well say, "But I need that candy bar." Fact is, that candy bar has a lot of content that tickles the child's "Sweet tooth," but precious little of true nutrition, which the child does "Need."

In recent years, on a number of occasions, friends in our church fellowship who live in other regions, and states, have pointed out the dreadful economics of the state of California, and encouraged me to consider moving to their state. It has more favorable tax laws governing retirement income than California. Real estate cost there is much lower than in California. Regulations for this or that issue that they or I prefer are less restrictive there. Perhaps every point they make is true. California's economic administration appears at times as if it were being directed by a gathering of the old comedy group, the "Keystone cops," hapless ne'er do wells, who make so many silly mistakes as to make you laugh. I could name any number of reasons that living in one of those regions would be appealing. However, all of my friends' reasoning--and reasons--ignore the single most important reason that I've spent the last fifty nine years in California. I came here, believing that the Lord had a work for me here, not because the state offered more appealing economics or fewer regulations that controlled things I like.

I have come to believe that the Lord assigns fields of profitable spiritual benefit to each of His children who are willing to walk by faith, not exclusively to preachers. How often I've seen bright young college graduates who appeared to be well grounded in their faith respond to a lucrative career offer that located them in a region where they must abandon their active church life, a significant function of their Biblical discipleship. (Hebrews 10:24-37) I've seen people come and go in our church here. The Los Angeles area offers many rich economic opportunities that attract people, and these folks often have richly blessed us during their time with us. But I wonder. If these people followed the Lord's leading, how many of them would have stayed in their native location, instead of coming here? And how many might have stayed here, instead of returning to their native location?

A truly serious regard for the Lord and for the role of prayer and the Lord's leadership in our life decisions should send us to such Scriptures as 1 Samuel 8, and so many like it in God's rich, instructive Book. Do we surrender our "Big" life decisions to the Lord, and both seek and follow His guiding hand in our conduct? Or do we decide those big decisions based on our own carnal wishes or appetites or desires, and then pray for the Lord to ignore His will and negotiate with us to bless our wishes? And, in this process, how often do we, like Israel's elders in this study, or like Aaron with the golden calf, mindlessly rationalize our wishes as we strive to make them appear to be the Lord's will, when we know, deep down, that they are not at all from Him?

Israel learned the hard way, as many faithless children of God today in our own choices, however wildly rationalized in our imaginations, that God's way is always better than our own ways--and that our rationalized ways typically prove disastrous in the end. Whatever big decisions you are facing today, or in the coming year--or years--take them to the Lord. Ask for His guidance. Do not ask Him to rubber stamp your personal wishes. He might have an answer for you far, far better than anything you

can imagine. I think about those young folks who, with little thought for their faith or their God, accepted their career in distant regions with no prayer whatever. Had they truly sought the Lord's guidance in their decision, would He have directed them to abandon their faith, and/or their spiritual assignment in their local church? Might He have actually opened doors for them in their backyard that would have been even better for their career, as well as for their faith? That, my friends, is the problem with unbelief. We blind ourselves to those golden, and blessed, opportunities the Lord can open for us, when we choose our way and do not ask for His direction. In the case of Israel, in less than one generation, God would have given Israel that blessed king of promise. I wonder; have we allowed our impatiences to blind us to blessings that would have been ours, had we waited for the Lord to lead the way, instead of trying to drag Him with us in our own choices?

We can't change past decisions. We can learn from Samuel to trust God with our big decisions, and to listen and follow Him, not try to coerce Him to agree with and bless our own faithless choices. One path will lead us to contentment and rich blessings. The other will lead us into darkness and uncertainty. Choose wisely! Choose the way of prayer, faith, and God, not what you want.

Love in Jesus,
Joe Holder

A King or No King?

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. (1 Samuel 8:4-7, KJV 1900)

I believe Scripture teaches that the Lord answers every sincere prayer that one of His children offers. Sometimes His answer may be, "No, what you are praying for will not bless you." Sometimes it may be a simple "No." On occasion, the Lord's answer may be, as with Paul's thorn in the flesh, "No, I will not remove the thorn, but I will give sufficient grace." Or, as in the case of Samuel's prayer in our study passage, the Lord answers, but with a different response than we requested.

Samuel lived a faithful life of service to God and to His people. He was one of those rare godly men who, when the tough answers were needed, was willing to stand up, take the heat, and speak for God. Sadly, his sons did not follow in his footsteps. Samuel taught them and appointed them to responsible positions as judges, but they judged for their personal gain, not for God and righteousness. (1 Samuel 8:1-3) Perhaps this legitimate complaint was indeed part of the reason that the elders of Israel appealed to Samuel for a king. However, they also told him another reason for their interest in having a king.

And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. (1 Samuel 8:5)

After Samuel followed the Lord's directions and reminded the elders what a king would really do to them, they repeated their petition more strongly.

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have 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)

Would a king single-handedly fight their battles for them? The elders' reasoning followed a pattern that typically appears whenever a professing believer knowingly chooses to abandon God's way and pursue their own, nonsensical rationalization. Remember Aaron telling Moses how he threw jewelry into the

fire and the golden calf just came out mysteriously on its own.

*And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but **they have rejected me**, that I should not reign over them. (1 Samuel 8:7)*

Over the years of pastoring, I have more than a few times had to remind myself; the Lord charges a preacher/pastor to be faithful, to preach the message that He wants His people to hear. If the man preaches that message in the right spirit, the Lord does not hold him responsible for results. The people were fully informed. If they knowingly choose to ignore or disobey, the Lord shall hold them, not the pastor, responsible. However, any pastor worth his salt will fret and worry when he preaches his heart's conviction, which he believes to be the Lord's message, and the people, people whom he has come to love as his own family over the years, turn a deaf ear. He will question; "Could I have preached that message differently and gotten their attention?" And he also knows, either by his own experience or by his pastoral observations over the years, that the Lord's chastening, though always righteous and loving, can also be severe. A child is always better off when he obeys and avoids chastening than when he sins against his knowledge and conscience and suffers the Lord's chastening.

The Lord reminded Samuel on this occasion that the people were rejecting Him, not Samuel, though Samuel no doubt felt as if the people were rejecting him.

And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city. (1 Samuel 8:22)

The Lord and Samuel got along quite well through this episode, but neither of them did well with the people. In this case, despite all the warning, the Lord gave the people what they insisted on having, though it proved the burdensome curse to them that He warned it would.

We may fail to connect this major problem with God's promise centuries before that, when the people settled in the land of promise, the Lord would appoint a king over them, but a king *of His choosing*, and a king who would be subject to the same laws as the people.

Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. (Deuteronomy 17:15)

In fact, this faithless demand for a king to imitate surrounding nations was one brief generation too early. In consequence of this crisis of leadership, a crisis only because the elders refused to acknowledge the Lord as their true "King" and counselor, Samuel would eventually appoint Saul as Israel's king. Saul would be more a curse than a blessing to Israel. I suspect Saul was the king in question when the Lord spoke these words to rebellious Israel.

I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath. (Hosea 13:11)

Whom did the Lord appoint as king over Israel to follow Saul? David was a man of God's choosing, not the people's choice. And he blessed Israel during his reign.

We can only imagine the outcome, had Israel's elders wisely listened to Samuel and to the Lord on this occasion. It would have been far better; that we can know with good reason. At His appointed time and for His reasons, the Lord would have appointed David as Israel's king. Instead of spending much of his life avoiding Saul's jealous sword, David would have ascended Israel's throne peacefully, and he would have richly blessed Israel on their journey to honor the Lord.

I wonder. Have we ever prayed for something with impatience? It was not a bad thing, but the time wasn't right. Had we waited with patience, the Lord would have given us our petition and blessed us,

instead of chastening us for taking His lordship of our lives into our own hands and trying to supplant Him as our personal King.

During the last nine months, have you felt the sting of impatience and taken matters into your own hands instead of leaving those matters wisely in the Lord's hand? Might your present situation be better had you trusted the Lord and left the matter with Him?

Years ago, I heard a preacher make what I thought at the time was a rather odd comment. Since then, I've come to appreciate his wisdom in the comment. "God is liberal with His grace, but He is stingy with His glory."

I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. (Isaiah 42:8)

Are we willing, in faith, to trust God with the big decisions of our lives and our churches, and to follow Him in a manner that ensures His glory? Have we prayed for grace to pursue such a course? Are we willing to give up our own ideas and ways for His glory?

Should we regard this lesson as an example of answered prayer? Obviously, I believe we should. First, the Lord repeatedly interacts with Samuel through this episode, so Samuel would be quite convinced that his prayers were answered. Although the Lord did grant Israel a king, the verses cited above indicate that Israel's reasons for wanting a king were not correct, I'd stop short of regarding the granting of a king as an answer to prayer. There are times in most believers' lives when the unwise—sinful—things we desire become their own punishment, and I'd classify Saul as such a grief to Israel.

Based on 1 Samuel 9:2, Saul had all the physical assets to give him appeal in the eyes of the people, including that he was roughly *a foot or more taller than any other man in Israel*. He stood "*head and shoulders*" taller than anyone else. A thought; if Saul was the tallest man in Israel, why didn't he volunteer to fight Goliath, the Philistine giant? And why would he stand by and allow a young shepherd boy to fight that battle?

I love the example this lesson gives us of the Lord interacting with Samuel regarding the current problem in Israel. Samuel's sons' forsaking their father's training and using their position as judges for their own gain was a legitimate problem, but not a problem that required the appointment of a king. While their perverting judgment may have sent the elders to Samuel, they soon revealed their thinking, a desire to be like other people.

How much of our prayers and our promoting ideas in church grow out of true spiritual wisdom and needs, and how much begins with our own desire to "Be like them"? This question applies as much to existing practices or traditions that fail to stand on a solid Bible example as well as the occasional church or pastor that simply want to fit into the current mold of accepted, or acceptable Christianity. When I was a young man, I recall our church's oldest deacon grieving over a particular practice that, at the time, had become common practice. He actually remembered the time when no church in the fellowship in the region engaged in this practice. Someone visited some churches in another region, observed this practice, had a personal liking to it, so he came home, told the people about it, and started nudging them to start the practice. Whatever we do in church should not be based on what we like, but on what Scripture teaches us. Let's follow Jesus and not the elders of Israel.

Elder Joe Holder