

Sunday, September 18 sermon: "The People & Their King Judged -- Put Not Your Trust in Princes (Pt 2)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS, by John Pittman Hey

1 Samuel 12; Luke 4:16-30

Samuel warned Israel that demanding a king to rule over them was a bad idea, but they wouldn't heed his warning.

God controls the actions of all rulers, whether for good or bad. Kings have no authority or power over God, nor can they resist His will.

After Saul was anointed Israel's first king, and had some early success at defending Israel from its enemies, Samuel further warned Israel of its rebellion and disobedience against God.

Samuel began by rehearsing several times that God had judged Israel for its idolatry and wickedness, but sent deliverers when the people cried out to Him.

In fact, it was the threat of the Ammonite king against Israel that prompted them to ask for a king.

Sadly, Israel didn't seem to remember that it was always God who rescued the nation in the past.

Their demanding a king was simply the latest installment of their rebellion against God, Who was already their King.

But having their own human king would not save them from God's judgment if they continued in their sin. King or no king, Israel would continue to be judged for its sin.

To underscore Israel's latest sin in rejecting God as King and installing a man instead, God sent thunder and rain that day, even though it was harvest season. Samuel told Israel this was to demonstrate their great wickedness in demanding a king to rule over them.

Samuel exhorts Israel to follow after the Lord, and serve Him. Any other pursuit would be after vain things.

Seeking after a king was one such vain thing. It could not profit Israel, it could not save Israel from God's judgment for their sin.

Israel's attempt to escape judgment with a king would fail, Samuel promised them.

Don't follow your king, or trust in him, but rather follow God, and trust in Him, or you will be lost and judged.

But then, Samuel gave this ominous warning: If ye will still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed,

both ye and your king.

Note very closely: the wickedness of the people ends up destroying their king.

With this simple promise, God overthrows all of man's attempts to institutionalize righteousness and peace and happiness.

Israel wanted a king, because the enemies were at the gates.

But the REASON they were in danger is because of their sin! They disobeyed God's commandments, and evil had been brought to their doorstep by God in judgment against them.

They thought they could ensure their safety by creating a new institution, a kingdom with a king, to fight for them and protect them.

But all they were doing was following after vain things, instead of following the Lord.

Rather than repent and turn back to the Lord, they thought a king could save them, and then they wouldn't have to face the root causes of their discontent: their own guiltiness and sin.

That's why God said, when they demanded a king, that the people had rejected Him, that He should rule over them. They didn't want to obey God as their King.

They thought that surely a king could solve their problem of disobedience, by delivering them from the CONSEQUENCES of their sin.

This is the way with all people -- we think we can solve our problems by creating new institutions and authorities and governments.

We think that if only we had reliable earthly entities to reign over us, surely all these dysfunctions, these problems, could be solved for us!

What we need is a Constitution, that will fix the evil we fear!

What we need are more laws to put a stop to wrongdoing!

What we need are courts with full power to declare what is right and wrong to save us!

We need Presidents with power to save us!

We need democracy, so that the people can declare what is right and wrong. Surely the people won't go wrong!

We need bicameral legislatures to keep things right, and Montesquieu's separation of powers to ensure good government!

We need international treaties, which will surely save us, since they will have the weight of world opinion in support of them!

We need a United Nations to settle the problems of all our squabbling nations!

In religious matters, what we need are denominations to organize and regulate our religion!

We need Popes to declare ex cathedra what the Bible teaches and what we must believe!

And then, after we have created a host of ways to "institutionalize" power and right and happiness, we spend the rest of our days trying to REFORM those institutions, and set them back on the road we intended them to travel.

But these all fail because they cannot address the underlying sin in our hearts, individually and societally.

We disobey God, and trouble comes, and we propose, not to obey God, but to institutionalize our own vain solutions.

At best, these institutions ultimately collapse in failure; at worst, they turn against us and destroy us.

We think that we need these institutions to regulate us, and remove wrongdoing from our midst. While they may appear to work for a time, ultimately they fail to achieve that which, in reality, would require us to obey God's commandments.

And then we puzzle over why our institutions aren't working anymore.

Because of our sin, God judges both us and our kings, just like Samuel warned so long ago.

Walt Kelly's little cartoon character, the possum Pogo, put it well when he opined, "we have met the enemy, and he is us."

"If ye shall do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

The right attitude is always to trust only in the Lord!

The Psalmist warned us in Psalm 146, to put not our trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

The reason given is that all men die and are buried, and their thoughts perish with them.

But not so with our God, Who made all things, and keeps truth, and does justice for the oppressed, and heals the blind, and loves the righteous, and destroys the wicked.

And the Psalmist concludes: “The Lord shall reign forever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord.”

But there is one Man Who has and will forever institutionalize safety and righteousness and justice for His people – the God Man, Our Lord Jesus Christ!

If we must institutionalize a king, then let it be Jesus! It must be Jesus! It can ONLY BE Jesus!

Jesus taught us that the work that God would have us do is to BELIEVE upon Himself, the Savior.

Yet, when Jesus came and proclaimed the fulfilment of the promises of Psalm 146 in Nazareth early in His ministry, His kinsmen rejected Him, and tried to destroy Him. Indeed, He was despised and rejected of men, and we would not have this Man to rule over us.

Just as they rejected the rule of God in Samuel’s day, even to this day, most of the world rejects the rule of King Jesus, the only One Who can attain the virtues we claim to desire.

We will have our own institutions, and rulers, and kings, before we will bow the knee to the Lord Jesus.

But wedded to Christ’s power to rule us in righteousness, is His mighty power to cleanse His people of their disobedience and sin against God.

The reason that the human institutions never work, is because the people cannot obey God’s commandments, and the kings we appoint cannot make us do so. Therefore, we are consumed, along with our king.

Not so with the Lord Jesus. He has obeyed all the commandments in our place, and His obedience is accounted to us for righteousness when we trust in Him.

Not only so, He takes all our sins away from us on the cross, by dying in our place and being punished for our crimes, so that all who trust in Jesus are set free from judgment and death.

Christ is not only the institutionalization of the rule of right and power and justice and peace, He is also the only cure for what got us into this mess in the first place -- our disobedience, our inability to obey God.

If only the people in Samuel’s day, rather than demanding a king, had cried out to God for new hearts and a willingness to obey Him!

That’s the promise of the New Covenant: that by the blood of Jesus shed for His people’s sin, God remembers our sins against us no more, and His law is written in our hearts, and we all come to know the Lord and to obey Him.

In the end, all of our human institutions will be consumed because of our sin.

Not so our Great King Jesus! His rule and His kingdom are forever! He is the consummation of all the hopes of His people! He shall reign until He puts all things under His feet.

Our great King grants us forgiveness and repentance! He paid the price with His blood.

That is why He is the King of Glory!