

SERMON NOTES

Text: 1 Samuel 8

Title: Gotta Serve Somebody

Outline: I. The Heart of Rejection (1-9)

II. The Consequence of Rejection (10-18)

III. The Rebellion in Rejection (19-22)

Introduction

Human beings were made to be ruled. It is part of our very nature that we need and ultimately want someone to govern us. In any sort of organized society, a leader or leaders always rise to rule the people within that society. It seems that the need to be ruled it is built into our very being.

Even apart from a political or cultural ruler, there are things that you allow to “rule” your own heart, the center of your being from which all of your thoughts and feelings and actions flow. We each have things that rule our lives - that dictate how we think, what we do, and what is important to us.

I. The Heart of Rejection (1-9)

When we come to the beginning of chapter 8, we read that Samuel has grown old, and in apparent preparation for his death, had set up his sons to be judges over Israel. We should probably not “judge” Samuel too harshly for this decision - but nowhere in Scripture is it stated that God told Samuel to institute his sons. Setting up a hereditary succession of judges was without precedent up until this point. So, particularly because of the moral deficiency of Samuel’s sons, we can make the assumption that this was probably not the best decision Samuel could have made, and possibly was rooted more in nepotism than discernment.

This situation creates the perfect excuse for some of the other leaders of Israel - called “elders” - to make a demand that had probably been on their minds for awhile.

It is very important to note what Israel is actually asking for. The main problem is not that Israel wanted a king. Kingship in and of itself was not bad! In fact, back in Deuteronomy 17, God tells the people that he is going to give them a king: **14** “When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ **15** you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.

The issue was that the Israelites did not ask for a king chosen by God - they wanted a king “like the other nations.” Think about the implications of this for a moment. God had specifically called them *out* and set them apart as a nation for himself. He had said over and over that they were not to be like the other nations. He had made that very, very clear. And now, the people are asking for a king just like all the rest of the nations.

Understandably, Samuel is upset by this for a variety of reasons.

God responds to Samuel’s concerns in an interesting way. He basically tells Samuel, don’t take this personally, it isn’t you they’re rejecting, it’s me. What is interesting about this, however, is that the elders *never* said they were rejecting God! All they said was that they wanted a “king like the other nations.” However, God sees their heart and interprets the true meaning of their words - they have rejected him as king as they have since Exodus - they haven’t changed.

Application

What is important here is that God interprets what the Israelites *meant*, not what they *said*. On its face, what they were asking for was logical, even necessary, and again, it was not an inherently bad thing to ask for. However, God saw past their demand to their heart which is why he says by

their demand was a rejection of him. They didn't like that God wasn't operating on their schedule, their timeframe. They really just wanted God to be a little more controllable, a bit more predictable. They were rejecting God as king without saying that they were rejecting God as king.

God knows that the same heart that the Israelite elders can exist in you and in me today. God has revealed to us that his Son, Jesus, is the true and righteous king, a good king. This kind of heart is not content with Jesus' rule in our lives - not content with Jesus as the "king" of our lives.

II. The Consequence of Rejection (10-18)

God does not outright reject their desire for a king, but he does tell Samuel to warn the people what a king will be like. In other words, God is saying you want to be like all the other nations - okay, here is what that is like! It is important to note that up to this point the people of Israel had not really had any experience with a "king" like they were asking for. They didn't know what a king did, so Samuel fills them in. This list of all the things that the king will do and take from the people isn't necessarily intended to be God saying "if you get a king this is how I am going to punish you," but instead just a simple explanation of what that kind of king is and what they do. The king will bleed them dry. You might think that all the other nations have it so good, but here is the reality! It will be even worse than it is now. You won't be as protected and secure as you think you will be. In fact, that king that you want to protect and govern you is actually going to become oppressive to you, and you are going to wish you had never demanded one!

In Samuel's response, particularly in verse 18, Samuel makes it clear what they are doing by demanding a king. Samuel says that there will come a day when they are going to realize their mistake and cry out to God but God is not going to listen to them. They will have to live with their choice and their rejection of God. By saying "you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, the Lord will not answer you in that day," Samuel makes it clear

that they are rejecting God's rule. The Israelites have no excuse when that day comes - they have been warned! Because they are rejecting God as their king, things are going to get worse for them, and what they think is their salvation will actually become their downfall.

Application

We love to make our own decisions until we are faced with the consequences of our own decisions.

Samuel makes a point to tell the people of Israel that when all of these terrible things happen, they must remember that they were warned. And despite the warnings, they have chosen to reject God and choose a king for themselves.

Jesus is a good king because knows that our desires are deceitful and we very rarely know what we really want. Even when we get what we think we want, it has a way of turning sour and not being exactly what we thought it was going to be. For a child of God, wandering away from his kingship is a bad place to be.

III. The Rebellion in Rejection (19-22)

The elders flatly refuse to listen to Samuel. They again demand a king "like all the other nations," and this time they even double down on their demand. Instead of God judging them and fighting for them, they want a king of their choosing to judge them and fight for them!

This in particular is an explicit rejection of God and his rule and protection over them. In Exodus 14:14, when Pharaoh is pursuing the people of Israel from Egypt, Moses tells the people that they do not have to be afraid because "the Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." This is not just a situational promise - it is God's heart for his people! He is their protector, the one who fights for them, and the elders are rejecting the safety and security that comes from being under God's authority.

This is not God being reactive and just “giving in.” He has a plan here, and is allowing Israel to choose a king for themselves in order to illustrate to them how deficient any king will be in comparison to him. He has told them, but they won’t believe, so now he is going to show them. God is going to use the Israelite kings to illustrate for the people how important it is for them to have a good king, one chosen by God who will seek God and lead the nation in the fear of the Lord. King David is a king like this.

And ultimately, God is looking into the future of his people, when a king will come who is greater than any earthly king. Called the King of kings and the Lord of lords, this king is Jesus Christ. Every failure of an earthly king points more dramatically to humanity’s need for a good king, and Jesus is that king which causes every other king to pale in comparison. But, Jesus is also a king that will be rejected by so many.

In John 19, Jesus has been arrested just a few days after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In this triumphal entry, the people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as a king, singing and waving palm branches in celebration of their king finally coming. But within a week, all of that had changed.

John 19:12 From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.” 13 So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” 15 They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” 16 So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

Some of these people crying out “crucify him” are some of the same people who just a few days earlier were singing praises for Jesus as a king! Now, because Jesus did not turn out to be the kind of king they wanted, come to kick out the Romans and give them their political power back, they had turned on him. In the words of the chief priests “we have no king but Caesar” we hear echoes of the elders in 1 Samuel 8 demanding “a king like all the nations.”

Application

These last four verses in this passage drive home the point that the Israelites are not simply rejecting God as king, they are in full-fledged rebellion against him. For both the Israelites and for us today, we can try to hide behind excuses to not admit that we are toying with rebellion against God. Of course we wouldn't come right out and say that we are in rebellion against God, but we have already seen how our thoughts and actions can betray that our heart is far from God even if we would lie to ourselves and say that isn't the case.

Jesus isn't a king who is satisfied with just some of your heart, he wants it all. This may sound authoritarian or like Jesus is just on a power trip. But that is not the case! The fact that Jesus wants it all reveals more about why he is such a good and wise king.

He knows that anything else that we might allow to rule our life will ultimately leave us broken, alone, and without hope for eternity. He knows that when we cling to different parts of our life in a desperate attempt to maintain some control and “rule” over our lives, what actually happens is our lives begin to be marked by rebellion against God.

And the thing about rebellion is, you would rather be miserable in rebellion and separated from God than submit to God and thus give up control - rule - over your own life. Think about it. How many things are you trying to hold onto right now? Things that you are allowing to rule your life? How much does it hurt when those things don't go the way you'd like them to? The job isn't quite what you thought it would be, the relationship doesn't work out, does it devastate

you? Leave you desperate, broken, hopeless? If so, it is a good indication that you have the same heart that the Israelite elders did - you are looking for a king in all the wrong places.

But here is the good news - it does not have to be this way! Your life does not have to be marked by rebellion against God. As enticing as it might seem to do your own thing, go your own way, be your own king, there is true joy and hope in submitting to the only good king - Jesus.

Conclusion

You gotta serve somebody. No matter how “independent,” or “free” you think that you are, you cannot escape the fact that there is always something or someone who is the king of your heart. In discussing this passage, J.D. Greear says that, “Every life has a king. A king in your life is whatever you must have in order to be happy and secure. And kings make all their subjects into servants.”

You gotta serve somebody.

The Israelite people rejected God as their king because they did not trust him to rule them and protect them. Maybe you look around at your life and there are things that are too important to you to let anyone or anything interfere with. You have tricked yourself into thinking that you are king of your life when in fact you are being ruled by all the things that you think you are controlling.

We are not that different from the Israelites. We all want something or someone to rule us that will help us, protect us, and care for us. We want security, we want hope, we want purpose and direction! These pursuits, strangely, often lead us away from the one good king - Jesus.

We have seen how Jesus is the good and perfect king, the one we are created to serve. He knows us fully, loves us completely, walks with us through trials and does not abandon us, and gives us

hope for now and for eternity. Jesus epitomizes the type of king that the Israelites wanted and the type of king that we need today.

Perhaps today you need a reminder that you, or anything else in your life, makes a terrible king in comparison to King Jesus. Maybe you need to realize that those things you've been trying to control are actually controlling you. The thing about surrendering to King Jesus is that is so easy to try to pretend that you are still on the throne.

Or maybe you would not say that you have ever had a relationship with Jesus. Even if you haven't, you can relate to this feeling. Wanting some direction, purpose outside of yourself. Someone you can put your faith and trust in, someone who will walk with you through trials and and will give you hope for eternity. Today, you can repent of your sinful way and trust in Jesus, the one true king, as the Lord of your life.

You gotta serve somebody. Make sure it's King Jesus.