

Be Careful What You Ask For

Text: 1 Samuel 8

Introduction: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Most Americans are familiar with those well-known words from our nation’s Declaration of Independence. But most of us are not as familiar with these words:

“The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.”

I won’t read all of the facts listed, but consider some of them:

- “He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.”
- “He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.”
- “He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.”
- “For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:”
- “For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:”
- “For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:”
- “For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences”
- “He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.”

You get the idea. The American colonies had had enough of monarchical rule, specifically that of King George III.

So, they declared, “We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.”

Our forefathers had seen firsthand the dangers of absolute power. It is true, as it has been said, that “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Therefore, our forefathers instituted a system of checks and balances with three co-equal branches of government whereby they could hold one another accountable.

My sermon this morning is not about the advantages of democracy over monarchy. But we do begin to see in 1 Samuel 8 the dangers of monarchy, or really any form of government, when the person at the top is more committed to his own interests than the interests of those he leads.

The people of Israel wanted a king. But the warning of 1 Samuel 8 is very clear: Be careful what you ask for.

Turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 8 if you haven’t already. My goal this morning is not to dissect American history, but rather to preach the Word of God as it is given to us in 1 Samuel 8.

(Read 1 Samuel 8...Pray)

Chapter 7 ended with a summary of the leadership of Samuel in Israel. The text says... (Read 7:15-17)

Now, as we come to chapter 8, we are fast-forwarding in the narrative many years. We know this not because we are told how many years have passed, but because we are told that Samuel is now old. We can assume that Samuel's faithful leadership in Israel continued through these many years, and that the people followed the Lord by following Samuel. Which means that these years stand in stark contrast to the preceding two decades described at the beginning of chapter 7 when Israel had followed and worshiped pagan gods.

But we're going to see that despite Samuel's faithfulness in judging Israel, there was discontentment among God's people regarding their leadership situation. Samuel has gotten old. The text says that he made his sons judges over Israel. And the problem with that is that Samuel's sons were corrupt. They did not walk in the ways of their father. They turned aside after gain. And they took bribes and perverted justice.

Perhaps that reminds you of Eli the priest and his sons. It seems clear that the author of 1 Samuel wants us to think of Eli and his sons. While Eli certainly wasn't innocent, the text indicates that his sons were much worse than he was. They pursued their own gain by stealing the meat from the sacrifices that were brought to Shiloh. Their actions were immoral and unjust. They took, and they too perverted justice. The actions of Eli's sons created a crisis of leadership in Israel that brought on God's judgment for many years.

The situation at the beginning of chapter 8 is a little bit different. God's people have been experiencing God's blessing under Samuel's leadership. But now Samuel is old. His sons are evil. And again, there's a bit of a crisis of leadership. At least in the eyes of the people.

But the elders of Israel have a solution to this crisis. They want a king. Which brings us to the overarching warning of 1 Samuel 8: Be careful what you ask for.

Israel's desire for a king provides us with three warnings to be careful what you ask for. Number 1, be careful what you ask for because...

I. What you ask for may reveal your heart (1 Samuel 8:1-9).

A. That is certainly the case for Israel here in 1 Samuel 8.

- 1. After telling us that Samuel was now old and his sons were evil, the author of 1 Samuel writes in verse 4... (Read vs. 4)**
- 2. And here's what they said... (Read vs. 5)**
 - a. The elders' solution to the leadership crisis in Israel is fascinating when you really think about it. The problem was that Samuel was old and his sons were evil. So, the elders wanted to institute a new form of leadership. But the new form of leadership that they wanted to institute was a monarchy that would be inherited from generation to generation. What would keep them from finding themselves in the exact same situation in the future? Just with a king instead of a judge. The elders apparently didn't see the irony of their proposal.**
 - b. Their proposal was also a rejection of the LORD. They asked Samuel for a king to "judge us." Samuel had been the one set apart by the LORD to judge Israel. But now the elders wanted a king rather than a judge to do this work of leading the people.**
 - c. And not only that, they wanted a king LIKE ALL THE NATIONS. This stands out to us because God's people were not supposed to be like all the other nations. They were to be set apart from all the other nations. They were God's people. They were to be holy as God is holy. God says to His people in Leviticus 20:26, "You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine." But now they are asking for a king because they want to be like all the other nations.**

B. Samuel immediately sees the problems with the elders' request.

- 1. The text says... (Read vs. 6)**

2. We can imagine that Samuel may have been displeased because the elders' rejection of the current model of leadership in Israel was essentially a rejection of him because he was Israel's judge. It would be hard to be in Samuel's position and not take the request of the elders personally.
 3. But more than that, the request displeased Samuel because he knew it was a rejection of the Lord. John Woodhouse states in his commentary that the Hebrew here is stronger than that it merely DISPLEASED Samuel. Rather, the request of the elders was EVIL in the eyes of Samuel. Samuel had been raised up by the LORD to judge Israel. The proposal of a king instead was a rejection not just of Samuel, but a rejection of God and His ways and an attempt to find security for the nation somewhere other than the LORD.
 4. So, what does Samuel do? He does exactly what he should have done. He takes it to the LORD in prayer. We don't know the nature of Samuel's prayer. We might assume that he was praying for direction from the LORD as to what he should do. That's certainly possible. But the text doesn't say anything about the content of his prayer. He could have been asking the Lord for mercy toward His people despite their rejection of Him.
- C. Whatever the content of Samuel's prayer, the Lord's response is kind of shocking. Both to Samuel then and to us as we read it now.
1. We read the LORD's response in verses 7-9. (Read vs. 7-9)
 2. The first word recorded is the most shocking word spoken by the LORD to Samuel. The LORD tells Samuel to OBEY. "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you" (vs. 7a).
 - a. Do you see why this would have been so shocking for Samuel?
- b. Samuel considered the request of the elders to be evil. And the truth is that he was right. Their request was evil. Yet the LORD told him to obey the voice of the people. They want a king? Give them what they want.
3. Then the Lord told Samuel that the people were not rejecting him; they were ultimately rejecting the Lord from being king over them (vs. 7b).
 - a. This is serious business. It's one thing for the people to reject Samuel. It's another thing altogether for them to reject the LORD.
 - b. But that's exactly how the LORD views His people's request for a king. They are rejecting the LORD's leadership of His people.
 - c. It's clear then, isn't it? That their request for a king was not only evil in the eyes of Samuel. It was evil in the eyes of the LORD.
 - d. So, it's strange, isn't it? That the Lord says, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you" (vs. 7a).
 4. The LORD goes on in the next verse to make clear that this isn't the first time His people have rejected Him.
 - a. Look at verse 8. (Read vs. 8)
 - b. They rejected the LORD when Moses was their leader. They rejected the LORD when Joshua was their leader. They rejected the LORD with a string of judges as their leaders. They rejected the LORD when Eli the priest was their leader. And now, with Samuel as their leader, they are again rejecting the LORD. It's the way of sinful, fallen hearts. Forsaking the LORD and serving other gods.
 - c. There's nothing about this situation that makes Samuel unique or a failure as a leader. If anything, Samuel stood out among the judges for his faithfulness. But now the people were again doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

5. Still the LORD tells Samuel, “Obey their voice” (vs. 9a).
6. But the Lord does give one caveat in verse 9. He says, “Only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them”(vs. 9b).

D. What does all of this reveal about the hearts of God’s people?

1. Ultimately, they did not trust the Lord as they should have.
2. One commentator writes, “They want a king they can see and touch and control because they do not fully trust God” (Greear, 87).
3. The truth is that they could trust God. God had proven His trustworthiness to them time and time again. Most recently in the narrative of 1 Samuel, God gave His people victory over the Philistines in chapter 7. The years that had passed since then had been years of peace. Samuel, who had been raised up by God, had been a wonderful leader for Israel. There was really no reason for God’s people to lack trust in Him.
4. But still they did. They did not trust God. That was the condition of their hearts. And it’s revealed in their asking for a king to judge them like all the nations.
5. Not only that, but they also wanted to be like the other nations. They weren’t interested in being set apart or different as God had called them to be. All the other nations had a king. They wanted one too.
6. One commentator describes the elders’ demand as “sinful in its motives, since their request represented a rebellion against God’s rule; selfish in its timing, since they demanded God’s provision at the time of their own choosing; and cowardly in its spirit, since they sought a system that would remove the need for their faith in the Lord” (Arnold, 153-154).
7. The bottom line is that their demand for a king reveals the condition of their sinful hearts.

E. What about you? Do you realize that your prayers also reveal your heart?

1. First, if you don’t pray, or don’t pray as often as you know you should, surely that reveals something about your heart. Perhaps it reveals that you, like the people of Israel, don’t trust the LORD like you should. Maybe it reveals that you believe that you are self-sufficient and don’t need the LORD. You can handle things just fine on your own.
2. Or what if you do pray, and all your prayers are focused on number one, you? What does that say about the condition of your heart? Perhaps it reveals a selfish heart. Perhaps it reveals a heart that cares more about yourself than the LORD.
3. This text is not meant for us to read it and think, “Oh, look at those poor Israelites. Once again going their own way and doing their own thing.” No, it’s intended for us to examine our own hearts and see if we too might be inclined to the very same errors. You’re probably not asking for a king, but perhaps the kinds of heart motives that caused Israel to ask for a king are present in your heart too.

Be careful what you ask for because what you ask for may reveal your heart. Number two, be careful what you ask for because...

II. What you ask for may involve more than you know (1 Samuel 8:10-18).

- A. That was certainly the case with Israel’s request for a king.
1. We saw in verse 9 that God told Samuel to warn the people and show them the ways of the king who would rule over them.
 2. And in verse 10 we read that Samuel “told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him” (vs. 10). Isn’t that exactly what God’s prophet is supposed to do? Tell the people what God said. Samuel was faithful to do exactly as the LORD instructed him.
 3. And in verses 11-18, we read the warning that Samuel gave to the people. (Read vs. 11-18)

- a. I can't help but notice that this list of warnings from Samuel concerning a king reads a lot like the list of grievances concerning the King of Great Britain in the Declaration of Independence.
 - b. We can notice a few things from this warning that Samuel gives to the people. The first thing that stands out is the word "take." It shows up 6 times in these 8 verses. He will take their sons (vs. 11), their daughters (vs. 13), the best of their fields, vineyards, and olive trees (vs. 14), a tenth of their produce (vs. 15), and their servants, young men, and donkeys (vs. 16). This is interesting because this was one of the sins of Eli's sons, wasn't it? They took from the people to fatten themselves. It's also the sin of Samuel's sons. Rather than leading the people in faithfulness as their father had done, they turned aside after gain. They took bribes. John Woodhouse writes, "The implication seems to be that with the king they had asked for, the problems of self-serving power that they had experienced at the hands of these young men would only be intensified" (Woodhouse, 148-149). Because now the one doing the taking would be king with no check on his power and authority.
 - c. Look at the warning Samuel gives the people at the end of verse 17. He says, "And you shall be his slaves" (vs. 17b). God had delivered His people out of slavery in Egypt. But now, here they are asking to return to slavery again.
 - d. The only difference is that this time their cries would not be heard. Look at verse 18. (Read vs. 18)
 - e. When they were in slavery in Egypt, the people cried out for help, and God heard their cries, remembered His covenant with them, and delivered them from slavery (Ex. 2:23-25). But this time Samuel says, "The LORD will not answer you in that day" (vs. 18).
4. Slavery is not what God's people wanted when they were asking for a king. They wanted strong leadership. They wanted protection. They wanted security.
 5. Which is sad and ironic because no king could provide stronger leadership than God. No king could protect them like God. No king could give them more security than God. They already had everything they needed. They had the God of the universe as their king. What more could they ask for?
 6. They asked for a king. And Samuel warned them that getting what they wanted would involve more than they knew.
- B. I wonder if you realize that sometimes getting what you ask for involves more than you know.
 1. Parents, I'm sure you've warned your children before that if they eat too many sweets, they will make themselves sick. I know that I had to learn that one the hard way. My grandmother used to make these cherry cookies every year at Christmas time. I remember one year as a child eating so many of them that I made myself sick. I don't remember how many I ate. I know it was a lot. I do remember that I was sick all night as a result. They were so good while I was eating them. And if an adult had realized how many I was eating, I'm sure they would have stopped me. Anyone with a little perspective could have seen that things were not going to turn out well for me. But I couldn't see it in the moment. I was a child. My perspective was limited. I just knew that the cookies tasted good, so I kept on eating them. I got what I wanted, but it involved far more than I knew.
 2. Have you ever wondered why God doesn't give you everything you want? A better job. More money. A bigger house. A better, faster car. Whatever it is. You name it. Could it be that God knows something you don't? Could it be that God can see the bigger picture, but you are too focused on what's right in front of you to see anything else? Could it be that God knows better than you do? Could it be that God is protecting you by not giving you what you want?

3. **I don't know why God isn't giving you what you want. God is often doing a thousand things in our lives and the lives of those around us to which we are oblivious. We cannot claim to fully know and understand the ways of God. But we can be certain that He is good. We can be certain that He is in complete control. We can be certain that He always does exactly what is right even when it doesn't feel that way. We can be certain that He is worthy of our trust.**

Be careful what you ask for because what you ask for may involve more than you know. Finally, be careful what you ask for because...

III. You may actually get what you ask for (1 Sam. 8:19-22).

A. After hearing Samuel's warning, how did the people respond?

1. **They decided that having a king may not be so great after all and took back their request, right?**
2. **No. Look at verses 19-20. (Read vs. 19-20)**
3. **The people were determined in their rebellion against God. They wanted what they wanted, and they were determined to get it. And Samuel, with His godly wisdom, wasn't going to stand in their way.**
4. **In verse 5, you could say that they requested a king. Now in verse 19, they demand a king.**
5. **Not only would their king judge them, but he would "go out before [them] and fight [their] battles" (vs. 20b). Woodhouse says, "He would do, in other words, what the Lord had previously done for Israel" (Woodhouse, 149).**

B. After warning the people and hearing their demand, Samuel returned to the Lord.

1. **Look at verse 21. (Read vs. 21).**
 - a. **We can imagine that Samuel's heart was heavy. He knew that God's people were making a terrible mistake. But there was nothing he could do to stop it. He had warned them. He had done all that he could do.**

- b. **So, he returned to the Lord and repeated the words of the people to the Lord.**

2. And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king" (vs. 22a).

- a. **This is ironic, isn't it? The people wouldn't obey Samuel's voice, so the Lord tells Samuel to obey the voice of the people.**
- b. **They want a king? They're that determined in their rebellion? Give them what they want.**

3. We'll have to wait until next week to begin to see what happens next because the chapter ends with Samuel simply saying to the people, "Go every man to his city."

4. **We do know that the people are going to get the king that they asked for. We also know, if you've read the rest of the Old Testament, that all of Samuel's warnings concerning a king are going to come to fruition, and then some. It's going to be much worse at times than even Samuel could have imagined.**
5. **But the warning rings true: Be careful what you ask for because you may actually get what you ask for.**

C. I want to be very careful here, but I don't think I can preach this text without attempting to make some application to our current political moment.

1. **You know that I don't do politics from this pulpit. I do speak about moral issues. I don't shy away from addressing sin. We do pray for our elections. We pray for our leaders. But I try really hard not to do politics from this pulpit. We have people in our church who typically vote Democrat. We have people in our church who typically vote Republican. And we have people in our church who have a hard time stomaching either party.**
2. **The beautiful thing about America is that we get exactly the leaders that we deserve. We asked for them. We voted for them.**

3. **And it's easy for us to look at our leaders and lament the sad state of affairs in which we find ourselves. It usually seems like godliness and righteousness are nowhere to be found.**
4. **But the truth is that our leaders are a reflection of the people they lead. They say the things they say, do the things they do, and enact the policies they enact because that's what they believe the people want. For many, their number one guiding principle. Their north star. Is getting elected or re-elected. So, if they believe that standing for righteousness will help them get elected, they'll stand for righteousness. If they believe that standing for debauchery will help them get elected, they'll stand for debauchery.**
5. **And sadly, right now in America, debauchery is the way to go on both the left and the right and most places in between.**
6. **Verse 18 of 1 Samuel 8 says, "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."**
7. **I believe that's where we are in America right now. Whether we're talking about the president or the congress or whoever else. We are where we are because the people of this country chose and are choosing this path. A path that I believe leads to destruction. I don't mean temporal destruction. The end of our democracy. Though that's certainly possible. I mean eternal destruction.**
8. **Like the people of Israel, we are forsaking the LORD and serving other gods. Not graven images like Astarte and Baal and Dagon. But false gods like money, and power, and sensuality.**
9. **I think I've been vague enough in what I've said so far for everyone, no matter what "side" you're on, to think I must be talking about the other side. But I'm not talking primarily about the other side, whatever side that may be. I'm talking about you. I'm talking about me.**
10. **The direction of our nation is mostly out of your hands as an individual. Yes, you should vote. Yes, I believe that Christians should seek to do good by being involved in the government of our nation. But you're just one person. I'm just one person.**
11. **But I'm not going to answer to God for what everyone else did and how everyone else conducted themselves. I'm going to answer to God for what I do and how I conduct myself.**
12. **Goshen family, no matter what everyone else does, you seek the Lord. You pursue righteousness. You stand against sin and debauchery whether it comes from the left or the right or anywhere in between. What's right is right and what's wrong is wrong regardless of what side it's coming from. And as God's people, we should be the ones willing to stand for the truth of God's Word no matter the cost.**

Conclusion: Again, verse 18 says, "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

That's a pretty bleak picture, isn't it? I could leave us there this morning. With the weight of this text. Without any hope. But to do so would be to fail you as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because this is where the story of God's people was at this particular point in history. But it's not where the story of God's people is today.

We have a king. But He's not a king like all the other nations.

In John 18, the Lord Jesus stood before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. And Pilate asked Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus responded, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did other say it to you?"

Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"

And Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” He essentially said, “I am not a king like all the other nations.”

He went on, “If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world.”

Goshen family, this sermon is not about who you should vote for. But it is about who you should trust. The truth is that even the best, mostly godly leaders of this world will fail you. But the Lord Jesus will never fail you. Trust in Him. Cling to Him in faith. For He alone is worthy of your hope and faith.