

A Life of Faithfulness

Text: 1 Samuel 12

Introduction: In September 1796, as his second term as president came to a close, President George Washington made the decision not to seek a third term as president. He then composed his *Farewell Address*. James Madison actually wrote the original draft in 1792 when Washington considered not seeking a second term as president. But this time around, Alexander Hamilton rewrote Madison's version, with Washington himself providing the final edits. Interestingly enough, Washington did not publicly deliver his *Farewell Address*. Rather, it was published in the Philadelphia *Daily American Advertiser* on September 19, 1796. The address was then republished in newspapers around the country.

Washington was very aware of the great responsibility that came with being the nation's first president. Everything he did would set a precedent for future presidents in the years to come. He feared that if he were to die while in office, Americans might begin to view the presidency as a lifetime appointment. So, he decided to step down from the presidency voluntarily, which provided the standard of a two-term limit that was eventually adopted into the Constitution as the Twenty-Second Amendment.

Washington's primary concern in the address was for the future of the young nation. However, he did conclude the address with some brief thoughts concerning his own legacy. He wrote, "Though in reviewing the incidents of my administration I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my country will never cease to view them with indulgence and that, after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions of rest."

Our text this morning contains another farewell address from another tremendous leader to whom we were first introduced all the way back in chapter 1 of 1 Samuel. There in chapter 1 we saw Samuel's birth. In chapter 2, we reflected on his mother's beautiful prayer of worship. The Lord called Samuel to serve Him in chapter 3. Samuel led the repentance of Israel in chapter 7. He anointed Saul as king in chapter 10.

And here in chapter 12, we find Samuel's farewell address. Samuel is not about to die. In fact, he won't die until chapter 25. But with Saul taking the throne as Israel's first king, Samuel is stepping aside as judge and military leader. And as he steps aside, he has some things to say to the nation.

If you haven't already, go ahead and turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 12. These are the words of Samuel. But this is the Word of God. We'll begin reading in verse 1, and we'll read through the end of the chapter.

(Read 1 Samuel 12...Pray)

The main idea of 1 Samuel 12 is faithfulness. Having served the Lord faithfully, Samuel had come to the end of his ministry. In his farewell address, Samuel addresses his own faithfulness, the faithfulness of the Lord, and the faithfulness of God's people.

I trust we all want to come to the end of our lives and be counted faithful. We want to hear the words of our Lord: "Well done, my good and faithful servant." So, what does 1 Samuel 12 teach us about how to live a life of faithfulness to the Lord?

First, we ought to...

I. Imitate the faithfulness of Samuel (1 Samuel 12:1-5).

A. You'll remember that it was back in chapter 8 where the elders of Israel came to Samuel and demanded a king.

1. The text told us then that Samuel was old, and his sons did not walk in the ways of their father. They turned aside after gain, took bribes, and perverted justice.

2. So, Israel wanted a king to rule over them, to judge them like all the other nations.
3. Judging Israel had been Samuel's role, so it's not difficult to understand why Samuel might have taken their request personally.
4. In fact, the Lord even reassured Samuel that Israel's desire for a king was not ultimately a rejection of Samuel. It was a rejection of the Lord.

B. But now, as the leadership of the nation is officially being handed over to Saul, Samuel seeks vindication for his faithfulness as their leader. And in doing so, he makes three main points.

1. First, in obedience to the Lord, he had given the people what they wanted (vs. 1). (Read vs. 1)
 - a. They had asked for a king. Samuel could see very clearly the problems with their request. Chief among the problems was that their request for a king was a rejection of the Lord.
 - b. But when God said for Samuel to "obey the voice of the people," that's what he did.
 - c. He gave them what they wanted. He anointed Saul as their king.
2. Second, they knew everything about him that there was to know (vs. 2).
 - a. There were no secrets about where Samuel had come from or how he had risen to his position of leadership among the people.
 - b. We read about his parents Hannah and Elkanah in chapter 1. After years of barrenness, the Lord blessed them with Samuel.
 - c. Samuel grew up in Shiloh under Eli the priest. And it was there in Shiloh that the Lord called Samuel into His service.

d. Samuel's life had been an open book for anyone to see his manner of life and ministry and judge it for themselves.

3. Third, there was no one who could make any charge against his character and faithful service as judge and prophet in Israel (vs. 3-5).
 - a. To demonstrate his faithfulness, Samuel invited anyone who had a charge against him to come and state it clearly and publicly (vs. 3). (Read vs. 3)
 - b. This was a pretty brave invitation for Samuel to make. The truth is that there will always be someone who is unhappy with a leader's leadership.
 - c. But concerning Samuel, the people responded, "You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand" (vs. 4).
 - d. The fact that no one came forward with any charges against Samuel demonstrates his faithfulness to the Lord and to the Lord's people. He was a man of integrity.
 - e. Samuel then said, "The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand" (vs. 5a).
 - f. And the people responded, "He is witness" (vs. 5b).
4. Samuel was vindicated as Israel's leader. As he came to the end of his service, he was judged faithful.

C. I don't know about you, but the thing I desire most in life is to be judged faithful when I come to the end of my life.

1. Sadly, it almost seems rare for church leaders today to come to the end of their ministry having remained faithful to the end. I can more easily name those well-known pastors who have fallen than I can those who faithfully endured to the end.

2. But when I think about faithfulness in ministry, I think about my mom's first cousin R.G. Rowland. R.G. is the pastor of Greenfield Baptist Church in Gretna, VA. If you've never been to Gretna, VA, you haven't missed much. They have a sign as you drive into town that says, "Ain't no big thing, but it's growing." I don't know how much it's actually growing, but it's true that it ain't no big thing. But today, after 37 years of faithful ministry at Greenfield Baptist, R.G. is retiring as pastor. R.G. is a brilliant writer and orator. There's no doubt in my mind that he could have pastored a First Baptist Church in a much larger place. But he chose to spend the past 37 years of his life shepherding one flock in a small town in the middle of nowhere. I recently reached out to him to let him know that I want to spend the day with him sometime soon now that he's retired. I want to know his secret to what Eugene Peterson called "a long obedience in the same direction."
3. But faithfulness in life isn't just for those who serve the Lord vocationally. It's for all of us as followers of Jesus. We should all desire to get to the end of our lives and be able to review our lives and service to Jesus without having to feel afraid or ashamed. We should all desire to be able to say to the Lord as Jesus said in John 17, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (Jn. 17:4).
4. I think about my responsibility to my children as their dad. My kids will certainly be able to testify that their dad was not a perfect man. But I want them to be able to say that I was faithful to love them, provide for them, and raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I want them to say that my faith was real. It wasn't just a show that I put on when I stepped into the pulpit on Sunday mornings.
5. What about you? What areas of your life do you need to grow in faithfulness. Let's commit ourselves to imitating the faithfulness of Samuel.

But let's also...

II. Trust the faithfulness of the Lord (1 Samuel 12:6-11).

- A. After vindicating himself by pointing to his own faithfulness, Samuel sought to vindicate the Lord by pointing to the Lord's faithfulness.
 1. We see beginning in verse 6 that Samuel first directs the people's attention to the Exodus from Egypt.
 - a. Samuel says, "The Lord is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt" (vs. 6).
 - b. The Exodus is cited throughout the Bible as evidence of the Lord's faithfulness to His people.
 - 1) *In giving the Ten Commandments, God said, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:2).*
 - 2) *The psalmist records the words of the Lord in Psalm 81:10 where he writes, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Ps. 81:10).*
 - 3) *The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'I myself made a covenant with your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery'" (Jer. 34:13).*
 - 4) *There are countless other times throughout the Bible when the Exodus from Egypt is referred to as evidence of the faithfulness of God.*
 - c. And Samuel's farewell address here in 1 Samuel 12 is no different.
 - d. Samuel wants the people of Israel to see that whenever they turn to the Lord and cry out to Him, the Lord is faithful to hear their cry and act on behalf of His people.
 - e. He says in verse 8... (Read vs. 8)

2. While the Lord had always been faithful to Israel, they had not always been faithful to Him.

- a. Samuel says... (Read vs. 9)
- b. The Lord's people "forgot the Lord." They went their own way. They did their own thing.
- c. And when God's people go their own way and do their own thing, God brings His hand of discipline against them. Why? Because the Lord disciplines those He loves.
- d. In fact, Samuel reminds Israel that the Lord had disciplined them at the hand of Sisera of Hazor, the Philistines, and the king of Moab.

3. But even in the midst of His discipline, the Lord still remained faithful to His covenant.

- a. We see their cry in verse 10. (Read vs. 10)
- b. This cry was not just on one occasion. In fact, in the book of Judges, we see a cycle of the people forgetting the Lord, experiencing the Lord's discipline, returning to the Lord, experiencing the Lord's deliverance and salvation, and then eventually forgetting the Lord again.
- c. To deliver His people, the Lord sent a series of judges, some of whom are named in verse 11: Jerubbaal, Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel. These men were used by God to lead His people and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies.

4. Samuel doesn't recount the whole history of Israel in these verses. But he does summarize it very briefly. And in doing so, he shows that the Lord had always been faithful to His covenant people.

B. Just as Samuel's words served as a reminder to the people of Israel in that day of the faithfulness of the Lord, they continue as a reminder to us today.

1. For we know that we are, as followers of Jesus, the Lord's people. We have been adopted into His family. Grafted into His covenant people. We are His.
2. We are His people, and He is our God.
3. 1 Peter 2 says to the believer in Jesus today, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,...Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people" (1 Pet. 2:9-10).
4. It's important for me to state very clearly this morning that this faithfulness of the Lord to His people only extends to those who have turned from their sin and placed their trust in Jesus. If you are here this morning and you are not yet a follower of Jesus—you've never turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus—then you are not numbered among God's people. You are not a recipient of His covenant faithfulness. The good news is that you CAN be numbered among His people. You CAN BECOME a recipient of His covenant faithfulness. How? By turning from your sin and placing your trust in Jesus. That's all you have to do. There's nothing you can really DO to earn a relationship with God. You only trust Jesus. He has already done everything for you. He lived the sinless life you could not live. And He died on Calvary's cross to pay for your sin.
5. If you are already a follower of Jesus, then you are right now a recipient of God's covenant faithfulness. Trust Him. Just as He was faithful to Israel up through Samuel's day, He is faithful to you today. He's worthy of your trust and confidence.

Imitate the faithfulness of Samuel. Trust the faithfulness of the Lord. And finally...

III. Heed the call to faithfulness to the Lord (1 Sam 12:12-25).

- A. Samuel now turns his attention from his own faithfulness and the Lord's faithfulness to the faithfulness of God's people (vs. 12-15).

1. Of course, one of the ways that the people had demonstrated their lack of faithfulness to the Lord was through their demand for a king (vs. 12).
 - a. They wanted a king who would protect them from their enemies.
 - b. But God had always protected His people from their enemies. They didn't need a king to experience the protection of God.
 - c. But apparently, God's protection wasn't good enough to them because they demanded a king to reign over them when God was their king.
2. But despite the evil hearts behind their demand, God gave them a king (vs. 13).
 - a. See, the problem wasn't so much just with Israel having a king. That was actually God's plan. The problem was really the heart behind their demand for a king. They had not sought a king who would serve under the authority of God and lead them in the ways of the Lord. They had sought a king like all the other nations.
 - b. So, when God gave them a king, he was not to be a king like all the other nations.
 - c. Because it was the Lord who set the king over them. The Lord was still on His throne. The Lord had not relinquished His rule and reign over them.
3. In fact, Samuel calls the people and their new king to walk in faithfulness before the Lord. And he promises that if they will be faithful to the Lord, it will be well with them (vs. 14). (Read vs. 14)
4. But if they are unfaithful to the Lord, they will experience the Lord's discipline (vs. 15). (Read vs. 15)
5. This is not unlike what God said to His people in the book of Deuteronomy when they were preparing to go into the land of promise and transitioning from the leadership of Moses to the leadership of Joshua. God said, "See, I have set before you today life and good,

death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish" (Deut. 30:15-18a).

6. As the leadership of the nation is transitioning from judges to kings here in 1 Samuel, God reaffirms His covenant with His people. God had always required faithfulness to the covenant. Faithfulness would result in blessing. Unfaithfulness would result in discipline.
7. Is this not how the Lord still operates today? He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He has not changed. I'm not saying that bad things won't happen to you if you are following the Lord in faithfulness. Bad things happen. We live in a fallen world. Things are not as they should be. But if we faithfully follow the Lord and His commands, we will experience His blessings. If we refuse to follow the Lord and His commands, we should expect to experience His hand of discipline. The Bible does teach that there is a direct relationship between obedience to the Lord and His commands and the blessings of the Lord.

B. As a guarantee of His sovereignty over everything and a warning of His power to bring discipline and judgment, the Lord gave His people a sign through Samuel (vs. 16-19). (Read vs. 16-18a)

1. The people had been foolish to reject the Lord and demand a king.
2. The Lord was and is sovereign over everything. Including the rain and the thunder.
3. Going forward, God's people should remember His sovereign control over all things and walk in faithfulness to Him.

4. In fact, we see the people's response to the sign at the end of verse 18 and into verse 19.
 - a. Verse 18 says that "all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel" (vs. 18b).
 - b. In verse 19, all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king" (vs. 19).
- C. Samuel then responds by again calling the people to walk in faithfulness to the Lord (vs. 20-25).
1. Look at verses 20-21. (Read vs. 20-21)
 - a. The people had sinned against the Lord. Not just in their demand for a king but in other ways as well. Repentance was appropriate.
 - b. But they should not despair. Samuel says, "Do not be afraid." Rather, they were to commit themselves to walking in faithfulness to the Lord.
 - c. Sometimes people think that because their sin was so great, there's no use in them seeking to follow the Lord. They think that they are too far gone. The Lord could never bless them. Maybe that's you this morning. You like at your life and you think, "What's the point?" You say, "Preacher, if you only knew what I've done. If you only knew how far I've wandered from the Lord. If you only knew how deep my rejection of God and his ways has been." I want to tell you this morning that you are not too far gone.
 - d. The people of Israel had rejected the Lord. They had done evil in the sight of the Lord. Yet Samuel says to them, "Do not be afraid." And he calls them to walk in faithfulness to the Lord.
 2. Look at the promises God gave His people through Samuel in verse 22. (Read vs. 22)
 - a. That's why point number two was to trust the faithfulness of the Lord.
 - b. People ask, "What comes first? The chicken or the egg?" I don't know. But in this case, we don't have to wonder what comes first. The Lord's faithfulness or our faithfulness? It's the Lord's faithfulness! He is always faithful. He has always been faithful. And He will always be faithful.
 - c. He won't forsake you. He is still making a people for Himself. Not a perfect people who have never sinned. But a people who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. While Samuel is stepping down from his service as judge in Israel, he commits himself in verse 23 to continued ministry among the people (vs. 23). He will continue to pray for them. He will continue to teach them to follow the Lord.
 4. Now look at the closing words of his speech in verses 24-25. (Read vs. 24-25)
 - a. This is the heart of the speech, isn't it? A call to faithfulness to the Lord.
 - b. Faithfulness will result in blessing for God's people. Unfaithfulness will result in discipline and judgment.
 - c. We'll see both as the narrative continues.
 - e. The people of Israel in that day didn't have the benefit of the full revelation of God's Word like we have today. Jesus had not yet come. But now He has come! And it is through Him that we can have forgiveness of our sin and be brought into a right relationship with God. You're not too far gone. Turn from your sin. Place your trust in Jesus. And walk in faithfulness to the Lord.

Conclusion: But what about you?

The call for each of us this morning is to walk in faithfulness to the Lord.

Some of you may need to begin that walk of faithfulness. You've never turned from your sin. You've never placed your trust in Jesus. You can begin your walk of faithfulness today by turning from your sin and placing your trust in Jesus. He will receive you just as you are. But He won't leave you there. He'll be at work in you to produce faithfulness to Him in your life.

Some of you may need to renew your commitment to faithfulness to the Lord. You're a Christian. You've turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus. But you've wandered from the Lord. Repent of your sin. Turn back to the Lord in faith. Ask Him to help you as you pursue faithfulness to Him.

Maybe there's something specific in your life that you know the Lord is calling you to right now. Some kind of ministry in the church. Some kind of service for King Jesus. To this point you've been hesitant. You've made a thousand excuses as to why you won't follow the Lord and be obedient to what you know He is calling you to do. Now is the time to commit to following Him in faithfulness.

Samuel was a man of faithfulness. He trusted in the Lord's faithfulness. And he called God's people to faithfulness to the Lord.

One day I want to come to the end of my life and have the people who gather for my funeral say, "He was a man who walked in faithfulness to the Lord." And even more than that, "I want to hear the words of my Lord, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." I trust that's your desire for yourself as well.