

We Want a King

1 Samuel 8

Drew McKay

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever seen a toddler about to do something dangerous? Like reaching for a hot pan or running next to a fireplace or jumping from couch to couch. I don't know if that happens at your house. It definitely happens at my house.

And immediately you try to put a stop to it. No, don't touch that. Don't run next to that. Don't do that. You're going to hurt yourself. But you can see it in their eyes. As they hear this warning from you, it's either a look of, I'll be the judge of that, or I'm going to wait until you leave.

Sometimes our warnings don't take root, and only for them to have to learn the hard way. They get to experience pain sometimes. We don't take pleasure in it. We don't like it. But hopefully now they've learned their lesson. Oh, that's hot. I'm not going to touch that.

But we see the same type of behavior from Israel in our passage today. We see that the Israelites rejected God by demanding a king like all the other nations. Good news though, we never act like this. So let's just look at all their mistakes. No, we do the same thing, we'll see. We'll say that we reject God and imitate the world.

Before we jump in too far, we need to give ourselves a little refresher of where we have been thus far in the book of 1 Samuel. Remember, Israel has already tried to do things their own way without God. They went out to battle only to suffer just terrible defeat. They learned their lesson—well, they thought they did. They brought the Ark of the Covenant to the battle instead. And this fires them up. They're excited. And also, it terrifies the Philistines.

Remember what the Philistines said in 1 Samuel 4:7-8: "The Philistines were afraid, for they said, a God has come into the camp. And they said, woe to us, for nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who shook down the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness."

The Philistines understood who God was, didn't they? They knew the power of God was the power of Israel, but Israel forgot their God. They tried to manipulate God's presence instead of actually submitting themselves to their God. This is how God works, and they suffered an even worse loss. And they lost the ark.

Yet God still had a plan, and through a crazy sort of circumstances, God is still working, and the ark is returned back home. Then last week, it appeared that maybe Israel actually learned their lesson. The ark is returned. Foreign gods are put out of their house. And the Philistines came to attack again. They were utterly destroyed. They cried out to the Lord, and God worked a marvelous victory. They found peace, and it says in 1 Samuel 7:13, Success.

But then we moved into chapter 8, and where are we at in the story? Let me read verses 1 through 8 again for us:

1 Samuel 8:1-8 (ESV) When Samuel became old, he made his sons judge over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, the name of his second, Abijah. They were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain. They took bribes, and they perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge like all the nations. But this thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, Obey the voice of the people and all they say to you. For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them, according to all the deeds that they have done from the day I brought them out of Egypt, even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they also are doing to you.

Some years have passed, and Israel has had some peace from the Philistines. But that security that Israel had been feeling, it's starting to get a little more insecure. Three factors are adding to that insecurity we see.

We see that Samuel is getting old. The people could see it. And it appears that Samuel could also see it and he wasn't going to be judge forever. They were going to have to move on, which was a scary thought. And so Samuel named his sons as judge over Israel.

Which, this is weird because the office of judge had never been a hereditary post before in Israel. It wasn't something that was passed down from father to son. God raised up a leader when Israel needed it and when God decided, he wanted to work in that way. We know from the book of Judges, right? It wasn't passed down. God called the leaders for a particular time and a particular purpose.

In fact, the people had asked one of the judges to be king. Judges 8:22-23 says, "Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian. Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you."

It's great. Good response, Gideon. But he named his son Abimelech. Now, Abimelech is a great name. Most of you know that baby number four for the McKays is coming soon. We've been considering Abimelech. And mostly because of what it means in the Hebrew. It means, my father is king. No. We're not considering Abimelech.

So Gideon had a great response to the people, but what did he actually believe? Maybe he didn't really mean it. Abimelech ends up being a terrible man and kills many of his family and his brothers in order to be a leader to the people and to try to snatch a kingship, some king. That didn't go so well, which leads us to the third insecurity.

His sons failed in their post. Samuel's sons failed. There were judges like 50 miles away in Beersheba, and they were taking bribes and perverting justice, verse 3 says.

So the people and the elders, they're insecure, right? We get it. That makes sense. But what do they do with this insecurity? How do you respond to insecurity? What do you start trusting in when things don't look exactly how you want them to look?

This morning, we're going to walk through 1 Samuel 8 and discover three ways we tend to respond when we're insecure—three ways we reject God and try to find security elsewhere. And ultimately, we'll see why we desperately need the true King.

POINT 1:

First, we see that Israel and us, we have the tendency to reject God and imitate the world. After everything we know about the Israelites, this isn't really surprising, is it? We know the pattern of the book of Judges. The people sin by turning away from God. They become oppressed. Then they cry out to God because God raises up a judge and God delivers them. Eventually, the cycle repeats. They again forget God, go back to other gods, so on and so forth.

Brian talked about this last week during a sermon, the Israelites struggle having a God they can't see. And they turn to the gods from the nations around them that promise things they want, like prosperity, good crops, fertility.

But this time, the insecurity shows itself a little differently, because instead of turning to other gods, they look out at the nations to see what gives them confidence. They see the other nations assemble for war against them with this mighty king in the lead, a king that gives them confidence to go into battle, to rally and instruct them, a king that they can see leading them into battle. Yes, this is what we need. We need a king to lead us.

And why would they want a king? One commentator mentions, a king offered a strong, stable, and predictable center of political authority for a nation that otherwise had to depend upon an unseen God to unite them. Also, kingship held out the promise of efficient central organization to a nation that, lacking such structures, tended to jump from one crisis to the next, maybe because they kept forgetting their unseen gods.

After many years of this instability, it's not difficult to see how reasonable the proposal must have seemed to the elders. They wanted to look like all the other nations. They were tired of looking different.

But they hadn't completely forgotten God, so they thought. So they called Samuel and they made their request to him. But obviously there was still a problem because this really upset Samuel. Why is Samuel so upset? What's going on here?

He's upset because the elders forgot something important. When the elders asked for a king like all the nations, they were forgetting that Israel's strength was to be unlike the other nations. The Israelites were God's covenant people, and he was their king.

Honestly, we react the same way to the story that Samuel does, don't we? I've known all these stories that we're going through so far in 1 Samuel, but in the last few weeks, it's been powerful to understand them in their context, the way that they flow from one to the other because we realize how crazy this request really is. What are you talking about, Israel? Haven't you seen how God has been working when you've suffered defeat and when you've received victory? Don't you see the connection?

But this has been their pattern. The idea proposed by the elders was a rejection of God's ways, an attempt to find security elsewhere.

1. We reject God and imitate the world

So this isn't just a request for a king, it's a rejection of God. We see in verse 20 what they thought a king would do for them: "That we also may be like all the nations and that our king may judge us and go up before us and fight our battles."

They believed a king would fight their battles, judge them justly and lead them visibly. They're really just spitting in God's face and saying, I think we can find somebody that can do a better job.

Here's the crazy part, though. Did you know that God actually had already promised Israel a king? The request itself isn't a sinful request. We see this actually in two different spots.

Genesis 49:10 says, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."

Jacob, Israel, had blessed Judah and prophesied that the king would come from his line and that the kingdom would never depart from it. So a king is coming.

Also, in the law, in Deuteronomy 17, God had set up how a king should act and what he would do. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 says:

"When you come to the land that the Lord your God has given 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, you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as a king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother, only he must not acquire many horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, you shall never return that way again. And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excess of silver and gold. And when he sits on the throne in his kingdom, he shall write for himself, in a book, a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it in all the days of his life, that he may fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and by doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel."

You see from this really long section something that stands out. This king is to copy down the law and to study it, to be guided by it, and keep it with him so that he may lead in the fear of the Lord.

So again, it wasn't the idea of the king that was wrong. It was the heart behind it. They asked out of fear instead of trusting God, the God that had always been there, the God that last chapter they had set up in Ebenezer, a memorial, a remembrance, so that something like this wouldn't happen. "Until now the Lord has helped us," Samuel said, implying that he will continue to do so.

They asked out of impatience instead of waiting for God's timing to provide them with a king. That's my king, and I need him now, Israel says.

They also asked for the wrong type of king. They wanted a king like all the other nations, someone that looks like a king, someone to be proud of, tall, strong, handsome, instead of someone that God had in mind.

Deuteronomy said nothing about leading an army. Besides, don't make yourself too strong. Don't acquire many horses. And he emphasized someone that walks with God instead. A man after his own heart.

Not to spoil anything later, but I think you can pick up where the book of Samuel is about to take us. Something tells me that Israel's problems, far from being overcome, is only about to begin.

But so far, we've only really been making fun of the Israelites. But remember the point? We reject God and imitate the world. Because we do this too, don't we?

We look to worldly solutions for security. Israel wanted a king to fight their battles, to protect them and ultimately guarantee their success. And tell me we aren't the same. We need money to feel safe. We need relationships to feel valued. We need a certain status to feel significant.

Again, none of these things are wrong in and of themselves, but none of them can be our ultimate security. Worldly things will never be enough. You can't have enough money, locks, insurance, friends. These things are great, but they make terrible gods.

We need to pause and do a little internal assessment because God cannot be plan B. God is not a safety net in case something fails and then I'll cry out to God. God is supposed to be king.

Ask yourself, where do I run to when I'm afraid?

Not only that, but we try to fit in instead of stand out. Israel said they wanted to be like the nations, and we want to be like the world. At least, we don't want to look too different from the world. We don't want to look weird in the world. We try to blend in with the world. We care more about being liked than being holy and faithful. We soften our uncultural values because we don't want to hurt anyone's feelings.

Ask yourself, where am I more concerned with approval than obedience?

And third, we choose visible kings over an invisible God. Israel wanted a king they could see, and so do we. If only I had a better job or a higher salary, then I'd be set. God would be enough for me if I just had a spouse or if I could just get into this school. We'll be safe as long as this person wins the election.

We literally do the exact same thing as Israel. We have God as our king and still trust in a president like he can save us and protect us. Or instead of asking for a king, we ourselves want to be king. That's the American way. If I set my mind to it, I can do it. I'll just tighten up my bootstraps and I'll make it happen.

Ask yourself, what king am I asking God to bless instead of letting God be king?

POINT 2:

So after Israel makes their request to Samuel, Samuel takes their request to God. Let's read verses 9 through 18 again:

1 Samuel 8:9-18 (ESV) Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them. So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 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.

2. We reject God and ignore his warnings

God tells them two things. They haven't rejected you, they've rejected me, which we've already talked about. But then he says something else. Not just warn them, he says, solemnly warn them. Spooky. Strikes an ominous note, doesn't it?

The people were about to be given the king they had asked for. But before this happened, Samuel was to warn them of the ways of this king. It's becoming clear that the Lord's willingness to give them a king is not a blessing—it's a judgment.

The warning that God gave the Israelites is made of three warnings in particular. As we walk through these warnings, what I notice about them is that it isn't just the king that will do this to Israel, but it's just what sin does to us in general.

First, sin takes from us.

For the Israelites, they want a king that's going to make them strong and look good. But a king is going to take everything from them. And he's going to take their sons, be drafted into his army and to serve and to lead in it. And to serve at other places in the kingdom.

Remember, in this culture, the family means everything. Family success is based on passing everything down through the sons. But now, instead of the family, the king is going to use their sons for his own glory and power.

He's going to take their daughters and put them to work in other parts of the kingdom, in the palace. Families are going to be broken up so the king can be cared for and the palace can run smoothly.

He's going to take their fields and their vineyards and their orchards. They'll be used to provide for the king. He's going to take the best of what's theirs, which is a big deal because there are no grocery stores. They produce for themselves what they need. But the king is taking their best for himself. This is going to cause some difficulties. They don't get their best land to produce for themselves any longer.

And on top of that, of giving their best land to the king, they're going to also be giving some of what they produce minus the best land that they've already had. Now they're going to take a tenth and give it to the king so that he can provide for all the people that he's already taken from them as his leaders. The king is going to take their wealth and their livelihood. This is going to cause, again, difficulties for families.

He's going to take their servants and their livestock. Nothing that belongs to the people is off limits for the king. The people will be the way the king gains power and wealth. In other words, he's going to take something from everything. There isn't any part of their life that is not going to be affected by this.

They're going from a king in God who gives them all they have, and they're going to trade him in for a king that's going to take everything from them. There's going to be a decision that will drastically change their life.

But sin does this to us as well. Sin takes everything. It steals our peace instead of giving us peace. Guilt replaces joy. Anxiety replaces rest. Sin steals our relationships. Sin is isolating and it's compromising. It causes you to look inward instead of looking outward to the needs of others. Sin can't give you what you think it will because we can't find our fulfillment in sin. Because fulfillment, satisfaction, security, all come from God alone.

Second, sin over-promises and under-delivers.

The Israelites wanted a king to lead them, to judge them and fight for them. But in verse 18 he says, you will cry out because of your king. They think they're going to someone that can do all these things for them, but an earthly king could never do this. He is human and limited. He's selfish and self-absorbed.

You've probably heard it said of sin that it will always take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.

Sin isn't a pet that we can keep shut up and safe and hidden and have no repercussions because sin isn't a pet. Sin soon becomes the master. Sin promises happiness but leaves you feeling guilt and shame. And then like a dog to vomit, we turn around and do it over again because maybe this time it will be different.

I found kind of this list of what sin promises and what it delivers. Let it be a warning to us today:

- Sin promises adventure, and it gives addiction
- Sin promises comfort, but it leaves us craving
- Sin promises confidence, but it only leads us feeling insecure
- Sin promises pleasure, but it only leaves us feeling pain
- Sin promises freedom, and it can only lead to slavery
- Sin promises control that winds up in chaos
- Sin promises identity but it only causes confusion
- And ultimately, sin promises life, but sin only leads to death

And third, sin is slavery, not freedom.

The Israelites thought they were getting security and freedom by having a king, like all the other nations. Finally, they would have someone present with them to take care of them. But in verse 17, the warning is clear. You will be his slaves.

They thought they were going to gain so much from having a king. But look how much it's costing them. It's going to cost them everything, including themselves. Sin is so, so costly.

We know this, right? This isn't a new concept for us. The Bible tells us this over and over again. John 8:34 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."

Or one more, Romans 6:16: "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

Sin leaves you lacking because it can never fill you up. It can never satisfy you. But we do it to ourselves. We chain ourselves to it.

Through Jesus, we have been set free, yet sometimes we still choose to turn to sin. Sin is kind of like a Chinese finger trap. You guys as kids, like, ever brought home, like, a Chinese finger trap, and you, you know, however they got it at school or whatever, and you think, oh, these are kind of fun, right? And so you watch this. You stick your fingers in, and bam, you're stuck. You pull on it again. Uh-oh. Stuck tighter. Stuck tighter. My fingers aren't coming apart.

You kind of have this momentary moment of panic, right? You're like, what do I do? Once you're finally over that, you know, you're an adult, you pause for a second, you take a deep breath, or you push your fingers back together and you get your fingers out. You toss that thing in the garbage can because how dare it make you look silly.

But we do this with our sin, but sin isn't a child's toy. It kind of looks fun and enticing, and before you know it, it has you. Sin isn't safe. That's why the Bible doesn't tell us to push it off to the side, keep it on the back burner,

save it for a rainy day, maybe put it in your pocket. No, what does the Bible tell us to do with sin? It tells us to flee sin.

1 Corinthians 6:18, flee from your sexual immorality. 2 Timothy 2:22, so flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 2 Corinthians 10:14, therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Have you guys ever seen Monty Python? It's kind of this British comedy group. And one of my favorite ones, the Holy Grail. And so the premise of this is they're knights in an old kingdom. And they go around and they're fighting battles. And normally when we think of like a war movie, even when they're like getting beat, there's this like kind of manly call of retreat, fall back, regain order so we can push again. What are they doing in Monty Python? Run away! Run away!

That is what the Bible calls us to do with sin. It doesn't say fall back so that you can fight it again. It says run away from sin.

Again, the idea for a king for Israel, it's not a bad idea. It was something that God had planned for them because he has something to teach us through kingship. But Israel's idea for a king was all wrong because they already had a king.

The irony here is tremendous. The Israelites looked to a king to guarantee prosperity and security. Yet what they received instead of a king who would take those things from them, they wanted a king whom they could control. Instead, the king ends up controlling them. What a scary warning.

POINT 3:

How could anyone possibly think this is a good idea to go ahead with this plan for a king? You'd think they'd hear this like, nope, we're good. We'll continue trusting you, Samuel. When typical Israel fashion, they don't heed God's warning.

1 Samuel 8:19-20 (ESV) But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, No, but there shall be a king over us that we also may look like all the nations and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.

I don't think they heard a word that Samuel said. But sin does this to us. It blinds us from wisdom.

3. God sometimes gives us what we want

So sometimes God gives us what we want. He told Samuel to listen to them and to give them a king. And just like that, the era of the judges ended with the people's refusal to listen to the voice of Samuel. Kind of fitting. Now they've moved from a simple request to a demand. Give us a king. So God gives it to them.

This request is so bad, though. Why does God give it to them? Why not simply say no? He can be good at that sometimes. This is why:

God will sometimes answer your prayers to let you learn the hard way that what or why you were asking was wrong. God did this for Israel, and he does this for us now. Sometimes the only way for us to learn is by making mistakes and suffering the consequences.

God wants us to find all of our joy and satisfaction in him alone. And sometimes he has to teach that to us by giving us what we want. So we see that that thing isn't the answer.

This is kind of the pattern we see in the book of Romans. Romans 1:24, 1:26, and 1:28 all say, God gave them up.

Or even scarier, 1 Corinthians 5 says, "You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh."

Now in Romans, this is the context of church discipline. But it's allowing people to run after something they're chasing so they can catch it and realize that it wasn't what they thought it would be.

Famous American philosopher Jim Carrey says, "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer."

Sometimes God teaches us by showing us his grace beyond measure. We say, wow, that was a God thing. Other times he lets us learn through making mistakes, much like we do with our kids sometimes.

But notice that's the point of 1 Samuel. That's also the point of this verse, 1 Corinthians 5:5. Because here's the other half of that verse: "so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

This is done to teach, to correct, and ultimately used to bring about salvation. This might seem harsh or unloving. But the greatest blessing God could ever give is the ability to be happy in him alone.

And here's the grace that God gave through granting to them this command. He showed that we really do need a king. We see this in the short term here in 1 Samuel, what a king should look like when David replaces Saul, right? But even David, the man after God's own heart, falls short.

No, we need a God-man. We need Jesus.

POINT 4:

Jesus is the king that Israel needs and the king that we need. Remember from Deuteronomy, the king was supposed to write down their own copy of the law? Well, now our king is the word of God. John 1:1, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God."

4. We need a king

Jesus is a king that doesn't just rule under God's authority, but is himself God.

Compare Jesus with the warnings that Samuel gave to the people about a king like all the nations. The king would take everything from them. Well, what about Jesus? Matthew 20:28: "The Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The nation's kings, they take and they take and they take. But Jesus, he gives and he serves. He doesn't just give. Jesus gives us his very life so that we might live. That's a real king. Not one that sends his people into battle to die for him, but one that goes into battle for you and dies so that you might live.

Just like sin over promises and under delivers, Jesus will never let you down. He never comes up short. He's always enough. His mercy is always greater than your sin. The nation's kings could never satisfy, but Jesus, Jesus is the bread of life. If we follow after him, our souls will never be hungry again.

Israel wanted freedom, and they got slavery. But Galatians 5:1 says, "For freedom Christ has set us free." We're no longer slaves to sin, but now we're slaves to righteousness. But this slavery, it's not burdensome. It's the opposite. Only through service to Jesus can we really find freedom.

Matthew 11:30, "for my yoke is easy and my burden is light," Jesus says. Now with the power of Christ, we have the ability to fight sin and to break its bondage.

Israel wanted to find their identity in their king that looked the part. But Jesus actually changes our identity. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come."

The story of Israel wanting a king, like all the nations, makes me think of one other story. There was a man standing in front of Pontius Pilate. And Pilate asked him a question. Are you the king of the Jews? Yes. This king answered him, "My kingdom is not of this world. 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."

Translation, I'm not a king like all the other nations.

CONCLUSION

So turn to Jesus, the true king today. Put aside your false securities. Stop thinking of God as your security net and fully surrender your life to him. Because only when you find true freedom, true satisfaction, and true security is in him.

Let me pray for us.

Our Father in heaven, God, please forgive us for the ways that we are like the Israelites. Forgive us for rejecting you and chasing after the world. Father, forgive us for not listening to your warnings, disobeying, ignoring your word. God, we ask that you would help us to trust in you.

Father, help us to not use you as a security blanket. But God, may you be our security. May you be our trust. Please help us in this because we're just like the Israelites. We have no power in and of ourselves to do this on our own. And so we need you. Please help us.

And it's in the precious name of our King, Jesus, we pray. Amen.