**Israel Rejects God as Their King**

1 Samuel 8:1-22 Key verse 7

***And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.”***

In chapter 7, the people of Israel returned to the Lord with repentance. When the Philistines attacked them, they asked Samuel to cry out to the Lord who answered their prayer, fighting for them before their very eyes. Samuel made a monument, Ebenezer, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.” Let’s remember how God has listened to our repentance and answered our prayer, saving us from our sin and troubles, and commemorate the God of Ebenezer!

Today’s passage is discouraging because the people of Israel rejected God as their king. God warned them how terrible it is to have a human king, but they refused to listen to God. Yet, God told Samuel to listen to them. Why? Let’s meditate on it together.

Look at verses 1-2. **“When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel’s leaders. 2The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba.”**Samuel was the judge and prophet of God, who lived in the way of God. God spoke to him and he gave the people of Israel God’s word. Moreover, he traveled to take care the people of Israel as their judge before God and people respected him as God’s servant. I cannot but imagine how he diligently taught his sons the word of God whenever he had a chance, day and night, on doorframes and gates as in Deuteronomy 11:18-20. He thought that they were ready to serve God. When Samuel grew old, he appointed his two sons, Joel and Abijah, as Israel’s judges after him. But it was not as Samuel expected his sons to be.

Look at verse 3. **“But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.”** Samuel’s sons did not follow the good example of father, living a holy and godly life. But they were not righteous before God but living in a sinful way, getting bribes and perverting justice. We can imagine how Samuel raised his children in the way of God, teaching them the word of God diligently and prayerfully, but they did not turn out to be godly. We do not know the reason why, but it also happened to children of many great men of God. The saying is true, “We can bring a horse to water, but the horse has to drink.” Each of us has a choice to make, and will bear the consequences of our choice.

Look at verses 4-5. “**So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5They said to him, ‘You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.’”** The elders went to Samuel to ask him to appoint a king to lead them as the other nations. They gave three reasons, because 1) he was old, 2) his sons did not follow the way of God as Samuel did, and 3) they want a king just as all the other nations. It seems reasonable for them to request. Since Samuel was old, when he died, they would be stuck with two unrighteous judges. They wanted someone who can rule them just like the Philistines and Amorites had their powerful kings who attacked them many times.

What was the response of Samuel? Look at verse 6. “**But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord.”**

Samuel was displeased by their request, although according to Deut. 17:14-20, God allowed the Israelites to have a king with God’s rules and regulations. The only condition they had was that the king should not be a foreigner but one chosen from among themselves. What did Samuel do when he had an issue with people? He prayed to the Lord. What do you do when you have an issue? When Samuel prayed, God answered. What was God’s answer?

Look at verses 7-8. “**And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 8As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.”**  There are four answers God gave. **Firstly, the people of Israel rejected God as their king.** God should be their king. When they had God as their king, God fought for them all by himself, as we saw in the previous chapter, and they had a great victory. God rescued them from powerful enemies, provided what they needed and protected them in the wilderness. When they tried to solve their problem of having ungodly judges, they did not solve it in the way of God but in their own way, following the other nations. They should have asked Samuel to find God’s chosen judge just as God raised Samuel himself. Or they should have asked for a king according to God’s word, not be like other nations. In fact, God called them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Therefore, they must be different from all other nations as they have God as their King. As a priestly nation, they should share the knowledge of God with all other nations. But they were like people who have one foot in God and another in the world. They say that they love God but the fact is that they love the world as they are following the pattern of this world. Yesterday, I asked one young man when we do such a thing, rejecting God as our king. “All the time,” he answered, “whenever I reject Jesus and his word but do according to our feelings or situations, I am making myself king over my life.” Yet, the humble king, Jesus, is riding on a donkey, waiting for us to receive him. May God help us to receive Jesus and obey his word so that he can rule our church and each one of our lives with grace and truth. Amen!

Secondly, history repeats. Since God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, they rejected God, serving other gods. For example, in Exodus 32-35, the people of Israel made and worshiped a golden calf. God almost destroyed the whole nation until Moses persuaded God through his intercessory prayer for them twice. Even in chapter 5, they wanted to use the ark of God as an idol. In the previous chapter showed that they secretly worshiped the Baals and the Ashtoreth, as they were called to repent. But they did not learn from their history and their own mistakes. In the light of this passage, they replaced their idols with a king. Not only history repeats, but also personal habit repeats. You are who you are according to what you have done, and you will be according to what you are doing today repeatedly.

Here is the encouragement in this discouraging passage: Romans 12:2,**“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”** As a Christian, it is our fundamental privilege to worship God as our King in Jesus, but we must live our lives holy and pleasing to God. How? 1) We must not follow the pattern of this world as the people of Israel did in this passage. 2) we must be transformed by renewing our minds. How? Through meditating on the word of God, we are being transformed as our minds are renewed, living a new way of life, not following the way of the world and knowing God’s good and perfect will. Let’s ask ourselves a question: Do you consider yourself a disciple of Jesus? How many times did you deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus?

**Thirdly, warn them.** Look at verses 11-17. Basically, there are two main contents in this warning: possessions and people. The king will take whatever they have, especially the best things for himself and for his attendants. In addition, he will take their children to serve him and make them slaves. If I ask you today, would you still ask for a king? No, I would not do that! Why do I want to be a slave and give everything to someone? When they do not want God to be their king, that is what they are choosing. They are choosing to be slaves. We are slaves to whom we obey. When we obey our sinful nature, we are slaves of our sins. In Romans 6:20-22, Apostle Paul said, **“When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”**

**Fourthly, I will not answer.** Look at verse 18, “**When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”** How miserable life would be when they became slaves! The people of Israel cried out to the Lord when they lived as slaves. God answered their cry and rescued them with his mighty hand. But this time God will not answer, when they cry out for relief from the king they chose. When we reject God as our king, we think we are wise but we are fooling ourselves because someone or something else will be our king, who will treat us like a slave and make us miserable. Moreover, God will not answer our prayer even if we cry out to him. This reminds me of Romans 1:21-22 and 24, **“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools…. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.”**

What was the response of the people who received the warning?Look at verses 19-21.In spite of God’s clear warning, they would not listen to God but insisted to have a king, repeating the same reason. They wanted to be like all the other nations. They wish that their king fights for them; but in fact, they, foot soldiers, have to fight and die for their king. Samuel heard them and told God what they said. How hard it was for Samuel to tell God? They will experience life without God. Maybe their hearts are hardened too much to come to God for help.

What was God’s final answer? Look at verse 22. “**The Lord answered, ‘Listen to them and give them a king.’ Then Samuel said to the Israelites, “Everyone go back to your own town.’”** Finally, God gave in to their sinful request;give them a king. It was not easy for me to understand this verse as it repeated 3 times, “listen to them”. Why should Samuel had to listen to them though they were rejecting God as their king? Shouldn’t he rebuke them until they repent and come back to their senses just as he punished the Israelites as they complained to God at Marah? Why not? There are two reasons. 1) God has not been making anyone worship him as their king. Beginning from Adam, God did not stop Adam and Eve from disobeying God’s command, though he warned them not to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. 2) God seeks those who worship in spirit and truth. God does not force anyone to worship him. God wants us to choose to worship him as he wants us to choose God as our king.

The story of the prodigal son depicts the heart of God very well. The father did not stop this second son from taking his share and wasting it all. When he came back to his senses, he came back to the father with repentance, asking forgiveness. The father not only forgave him but also welcomed his lost son back to his position. This is the mercy and grace of God the Father. In response to God’s divine work, what should be our response? Romans 12:1 says, **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”** Let us choose to worship our Lord, Savior and king, Jesus Christ and offer our whole body, living sacrificial and holy lives, not following the pattern of this world but being transformed by meditating on the word of God everyday. This is our true and proper worship for our King!