“BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR”

Have you ever asked for something – maybe even prayed for something – and later when you got you wished you hadn’t? Be careful what you ask for! You just might get it.

Our text for this morning is found in 1 Samuel Chapter 8. Last week we covered Chapters 5 thru 7 and observed that the prophet Samuel, the man appointed by God to judge Israel, leading his nation in a much needed spiritual revival. The people confessed and repented of their sins. They put away their false gods “and they served the Lord only.” Not long after this the powerful Philistine army moved in to attack Israel. READ 1 Samuel 7:7-14.

God demonstrated that if His people will trust and obey Him, He will provide all their needs. He will fight their battles for them. He will defeat their enemies.

Well, between Chapters 7 and 8 a long period of time goes by. Some 40 years has passed since the Israelite victory (God’s victory) over the Philistines in Chapter 7. A whole new generation has grown up. Samuel is probably in his 70s as Chapter 8 opens…

READ 1 Samuel 8:1-3.

Similar to what happened previously with Eli’s sons, Samuel’s two sons grow up and do not follow their father’s example. Samuel had shown them a godly example of leadership. Yet, his sons chose to go the way of wickedness. They rebelled and did what they wanted. We’re told here that they are taking bribes and perverting justice. This is a clear violation of Deut 16:19: “You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous.” So not only had they have rejected Samuel’s example, but they have rejected God’s instruction.

READ 1 Samuel 8:4-5.

“Hey, Samuel, we have a problem. A, you’re getting old (your days are numbered, you’re not going to live forever); B, your sons who will follow in your footsteps have deeply flawed character.”

OK so the elders of Israel recognize that they face a very real problem as far as the leadership of their nation is concerned. But their conclusion (the solution that they have arrived at) is questionable… “Therefore, appoint a king to rule over us just like all the other nations have.”

So, is there anything wrong with their request? Is there anything particularly wrong with having a king? After all, look around! All the other nations have kings, so why not Israel? DISCUSS

The problem is that what they ask Samuel for is not God-directed! It comes from their own human wisdom and understanding. Their desire for a king is based on what they see around them. Remember we are still in the Period of the Judges here and there is a phrase repeated over and over again in the Book of Judges that summarizes their spiritual condition: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” The bottom line is, that’s what is happening here. They want what seems right in their own eyes rather than wanting what God wants for them.

God had commanded that Israel be a holy nation and be distinct (be different) from the other nations. That’s what He said in Exodus 19:5-6 right after they came out of Egypt: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...” God later reiterated this in Leviticus 20 and Deuteronomy 26. Their allegiance was to be to God alone. God was to be their King. Israel was to be a theocracy. That was God’s desire for His covenant people.

Note: People may argue that based on Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (God gives Moses laws concerning Israel’s future kings) that it WAS God’s will for Israel to have a king. God had even told Abraham back in Genesis 17:6 that kings would come from the nation God would establish. But just because God knows that His covenant people will one day ask for a king and addresses this by giving Moses specific instructions concerning qualifications for their future king, does not necessarily mean that this is His ultimate will, His design for the nation. I personally believe that in God’s grace, knowing the rebellious hearts that His people would have, He gave them those laws to follow in order to make it work. I think having a king falls under the umbrella of God’s permissive will and not His perfect will. THOUGHTS?

Well, notice Samuel’s response to the request of the elders to have a king…

READ 1 Samuel 8:6-9.

Samuel is upset by the people’s request. He considers it to be sinful and he prays to God. He seeks God’s guidance. And what does God tell Samuel? “They have not rejected you; they have rejected Me as their King. Go ahead and give them what they ask for!” In verse 8 God reminds Samuel that this rejection is nothing new. This is what the people have been doing from the time they left Egypt until now. So give them what they want but warn them about what the result will be – and it won’t be all that great!

So Samuel goes back to the people and he lays out for them very clearly what having a king will mean for the nation and the people. In contrast to God who has been a constant giver to His people, this king they so badly want will be a constant taker…

READ 1 Samuel 8:10-18.

Notice that last phrase in verse 18: “you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves…” This is not God’s choice for you. It is your own choice. And you will be forced to live with the consequences.

Samuel doesn’t exactly paint a cheerful picture of an Israelite monarchy does he? And whenever you study the history of the kings of Israel and Judah there is the constant crying out of the people because of their kings – most of them were bad. Sure, things were OK under Saul, better under David and Solomon. But after that, starting with the split of the kingdom under Rehoboam and Jeroboam, times were definitely not so great! In David Jeremiah’s commentary on this passage he points out that “Israel had 43 kings over a period of 450 years, and only 8 followed the Lord. A human leader only created more problems for the nation.”

So here God warns the people through Samuel. “Hey, be careful what you ask for! You might want to reconsider your request.”

Well, what was the people’s response to the warning God gave them? Did they listen? Of course not! Listen to their rather emphatic reply…

READ 1 Samuel 8:19-20. Basically they were saying, “We don’t care what God wants! We want a king!” Back in Chapter 7 we saw a revival. Now, 40 years later, the people have slipped right back to where they were before spiritually. And they show their true colors. “We’ll be like all the other nations! We don’t want to be different! We want to be just like them!” And the elders of Israel had conveniently forgotten how God had fought their battles for them in the past, how He had defeated the Philistines and brought peace for 40 years! The truth is, they trusted more in a human leader than they did in the one true living God. Despite all God had done for them. What a sad, sad commentary this passage gives us on the spiritual condition of God’s people.

Many centuries later when the people of Israel returned to the Promised Land from exile in Babylon and Persia, Ezra and Nehemiah recalled the price that Israel had paid for wanting to be like the other nations. It cost them deeply spiritually. There was a call for national repentance, to put away their foreign wives and their abominable practices and return to God. This decision right here would adversely impact the nation for centuries to come. It put them on a path moving away from God that, frankly, they have never recovered from.

The O.T. is a sad commentary on what happens when God’s people compromise with the world and reject His Lordship. And yes us N.T. saints, the church, can learn a lot from their mistakes. Over and over again you read about how the people rejected God, and, as a result, they fell under His judgment. Even when they eventually turned back to Him it was never quite the same.

READ 1 Samuel 8:21-22.

Chapter 8 closes with Samuel seeking and following God’s guidance in the matter of choosing a king for the nation of Israel. The process of finding the right man is going to take a while so Samuel dismisses the people to go back home while he begins his search for a king. Chapters 9-10 describe how Samuel identifies and eventually anoints Saul as Israel’s first king. He is a physically impressive man though he is not much of a leader. He certainly has his flaws as do all leaders, but at least at first Saul follows God’s guidance and he wins some impressive military victories. But the honeymoon doesn’t last very long and we will find out more about that in Chapter 12 next week.

Application: Be careful what you ask for! We need to follow Jesus’ example when we go to God in prayer: “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.” There is nothing wrong with petitioning God but it should always be tempered with an attitude that says, “This is what I want. But, Lord, I want what You want even more.”