“SAMUEL’S FINAL ADDRESS TO THE NATION”

In last week’s lesson, 1 Samuel Chapter 8, the elders of Israel approached Samuel and they said, “Hey, Samuel, we have a problem. You’re getting old and your sons who presumably will follow you are not doing what’s right… “Therefore, appoint a king to rule over us just like all the other nations have.” The problem with the people’s request for a king is that it was not God-directed! God never wanted His covenant people to be like all the other nations. He wanted them to be distinct, to be a holy nation. The people of Israel’s cry for a king came from their own human wisdom and it was based on what they saw around them. This was typical of the Period of the Judges where “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” The people felt that they needed a king, that their problem was their government and that a change in the governmental system from a judgeship to a monarchy would be the solution. But their problem was not the government. Israel was supposed to be a theocracy, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Exodus 19), ruled by God Himself. No, their problem at its core was a spiritual one. What the people really needed was to repent of their sins and turn to God.

Well, Samuel was upset by the people’s request and he prayed. He sought God’s guidance in the matter. God told Samuel, “They have not rejected you; they have rejected Me as their King. Go ahead and give them what they ask for!” Samuel went back to the people and he laid out for them very clearly what having a king would mean for the nation and the people. He told them the truth and he didn’t exactly paint a cheerful picture of an Israelite monarchy. Despite Samuel’s clear warning the people insisted on having a king. They told Samuel in essence, “We don’t care what God wants! We want a king!”

Chapter 8 closes with Samuel seeking and following God’s guidance and sets about choosing a king for the nation of Israel. In Chapters 9-10 Samuel identifies and eventually anoints Saul as Israel’s first king. Saul is a handsome young man and stands taller than everyone else. Though Saul is inexperienced as a leader, he does exhibit some good qualities – he is responsible, humble, brave and at times the Spirit of the Lord is upon him. In Chapter 11 Saul has perhaps his finest moment when he wins an impressive military victory over Nahash and the Ammonites. He saves the city of Jabesh-gilead from certain destruction, which they never forgot. Saul recognizes that it is God who won the battle and declares, “the Lord has worked salvation in Israel.” So Saul starts out well and the people rally around him as their new king.

It’s a bittersweet time for Samuel. Having been Israel’s leader for some 40 years, he now hands over the reins of leadership to Saul. The people have made their choice and now they have the king they wanted. There is a transition from the Period of the Judges (which ends with Samuel) to the Monarchy (which begins with Saul). Samuel fades out of the public eye and into the background. Though he is no longer a judge, no longer a political leader, Samuel remains an important spiritual leader in his role as a prophet of God. He will continue to be God’s spokesman for many years to come.

Before Samuel officially steps back and lets Saul assume leadership, he makes one last public statement. In Chapter 12 Samuel delivers his final address to the nation of Israel. After this whenever we hear from Samuel he will only be speaking one-on-one to the Israelite leadership in the role of God’s messenger, as their spiritual advisor. So these are Samuel’s last words to the people as a whole.

READ 1 Samuel 12:1-5

This is an important statement. Remember the people had requested to have a king. They wanted a change in the government because in their minds they had a problem. But what Samuel points out here is that they never really ever had a problem… at least not while they were under Samuel’s leadership. Their perception was that things would get bad when Samuel died but that reflected a lack of trust in God. They weren’t willing to wait for God to appoint a leader as He had always done. God had always raised up sound leadership for His covenant people – Moses, Joshua, Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon on thru to Samson and Samuel. Oh sure God’s leaders weren’t perfect and some of them had real issues. But for a period of 400 years (from the time they came out of Egypt until now) the nation had survived and even thrived as long as they followed God’s commandments.

The bottom line is that the people had no grounds for complaint against Samuel’s judgeship. He had led with integrity, he had pure motives and his conduct was proper. He had an exemplary career. His life withstood the scrutiny of public inspection. He was above reproach. God gave the people what they wanted (a king) but they could never say it was because Samuel wasn’t doing a good job as their leader. And the people acknowledged this.

READ 1 Samuel 12:6-8

Samuel begins to recall part of the history of God’s blessing upon the nation. He begins with God’s deliverance of His people out of Egypt and then bringing them to live in the Promised Land.

What happened when they got to the Promised Land?

READ 1 Samuel 12:9

Samuel recalls the cycle of the Period of the Judges – the people forget the Lord, God raises up enemies to oppress them. Of course the purpose for God doing this was to get His people to return to Him.

READ 1 Samuel 12:10-11

So the people cried out to God, they confessed their sins and turned to God. Whenever the people repented, God would raise up someone to deliver them from their oppressors. Verse 11 lists some of the judges that God used. Jerubbaal was a second name given to Gideon because he destroyed the altar of Baal (Judges 6:32). Of course Samuel includes himself on the “Mount Rushmore” of judges.

Samuel is reminding the people that during the Period of the Judges it wasn’t the system of government that was the problem. The problem was sin and disobedience. The people wanted to blame the system, but that was never the issue. The real issue was they did not trust God!

READ 1 Samuel 12:12-13

Samuel wraps up his review of how God blessed the nation in the most recent events. Apparently the people had been motivated by their fear of Nahash who was the king of the Ammorites. And now here they are. They have the king they wanted. Notice what Samuel says: “Behold the king whom YOU have chosen…”

It must be pointed out that, yes, the Lord chose and used Saul as Israel’s king, but God could have just as easily raised up an effective leader to lead the nation after Samuel. God is sovereign and can use anyone He chooses to accomplish His purposes. God can fully operate in His divine sovereignty no matter what system of government is in place and no matter who the leader is. That being said, God’s perfect plan was that He Himself be Israel’s king and that He would raise up human leaders as necessary to accomplish His will and purpose.

Despite the fact that the people have not made the right choice, God’s choice, the situation is not hopeless. The way forward after sins is always thru repentance of sins, either as individuals or as a nation, and turning to God…

READ 1 Samuel 12:14-15

God makes a conditional promise to His people… the same one He made back in Deuteronomy 28. Despite the change in Israel’s government, God’s laws have not changed. They will continue to apply even under the new monarchy.

READ 1 Samuel 12:16-19

It’s harvest time in Israel so it is the dry season. Rain would be highly unusual this time of the year. And immediately after Samuel calls upon the Lord here comes the rain and the thunder! This is obviously a God thing! It is a sign. What is the purpose in the Bible for signs and wonders? To authenticate the inspired, infallible spokesman of God. Here Samuel is authenticated as a prophet, a spokesman of the one true God. [Others in the Bible did signs to show they were indeed from God – Moses, Elijah and Elisha, the Apostles; of course Jesus performed signs to show that He was indeed not just a spokesman for God, but in fact God Himself]. So Samuel shows that He is from God and fear grips the people. They repent of their sin in asking for a king.

READ 1 Samuel 12:20-21

From this day forward just follow the Lord and don’t go after other gods. “Empty things” – Samuel is specifically warning the people against the sin of idolatry here.

READ 1 Samuel 12:22a

“for His great name’s sake” – God’s great name speaks to His great character. Part of God’s perfect and holy character is that He will keep His covenant promise to His people.

READ 1 Samuel 12:22b

Deuteronomy 7:7 “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all the peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you” [that He brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand]

Deuteronomy 9:5 “Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of the nations that the Lord is driving them out before you…”

Hey people it’s called grace… God’s amazing grace! You and I are not blessed because we somehow deserve it. The truth is that we don’t. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

We don’t do anything to deserve God’s grace. The same is true with Israel. Samuel is reminding the people that the blessings they enjoy as a covenant nation are “because it pleased the Lord to make you a people for Himself.” Sure, you have an obligation to obey God, but you are in a relationship with Him because He chose you to be.

I like to think of it this way: I may have chosen Him, but He chose me first!

READ 1 Samuel 12:23

Samuel promises that he will continue to pray for the people. He actually considers that it would be a sin if he did NOT to pray for them. Prayerlessness is a sin.

READ 1 Samuel 12:24

Obedience is required. But here the admonition is to do what is right because of what He has done for you. Have an attitude of thankfulness for what God has done in your life. “Consider what great things He has done for you.”

READ 1 Samuel 12:25

They should have circled and underlined this in their scrolls and memorized it. Because what Samuel warns about in this last verse is exactly what would happen to the nation. They WERE eventually swept away. The northern kingdom of Israel was swept away by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (329 years after Samuel’s warning here). The southern kingdom of Judah lasted a little longer because they were moderately faithful to God. But eventually the Babylonians swept them away and took them into captivity in three separate sieges: 609 B.C., 597 B.C. and 586 B.C. (some 450 years after Samuel’s warning)

Application: What we need is not a different form of government or a new president. What we need is to be a people who turn to God and fear Him. If our nation is going to turn around it has to begin with God’s people. It has to start with the church.