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Israel Chooses a King

1 Samuel 8:1-5

Prayer: *Father, again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for gathering us together again as we have each week just by your grace and by your blessing. And I pray as we open up your book, Lord, once again the same prayer, that your Holy Spirit would accompany us, that you'd guide us, that you'd open our eyes and ears and give us what you have to give us. I pray that you'd give it not only to us but it would be of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are working our way through 1 Samuel, and when we last left off last week, Israel had settled into a pattern of peaceful existence and it was all due to their national repentance.

They had come to Samuel in deep fear of the Philistines, and he had directed them to a three-fold action of repentance. They were to abandon the false gods that they had embraced, they were to seek God and his ways, and they were to serve God with all of their heart. This Israel did and they did for quite a few years, but

true to the pattern that had been established from Israel's start, she once again went back to this pattern of rebellion that started off with an admission of corruption and an altogether worldly request; and sadly Samuel's sons, well, they were at the heart of it.

We open up with *1 Samuel 8:1* which says: *When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and 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 perverted justice.*

Now there's something awfully familiar about this problem. If you're looking for a pattern, you can find one quite readily here. We know Samuel was an incredibly godly man who did a wonderful job of leading his people for many, many years and yet there was this character flaw that in the end sought to undo him. And it happened to be the exact same character flaw that marked the very man who raised Samuel and that was Eli. Both of them were apparently terrible fathers. Both seem to have treated their sons with a complete lack of discipline.

I mean, Eli was a godly man who led Israel during the latter part of Judges, and in fact it was Eli who raised Samuel from his

infancy. And it's striking how the bad habits that Eli had inculcated in his sons simply repeat themselves in the way Samuel raised his sons. This is what God said about -- in 1 Samuel about Eli's sons. It says: *Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD.*

And so now it's a generation later and Samuel's in the exact same position that Eli was. He's now old, his sons are now considered to be corrupt and as worthless as Eli's sons were. And when it came to judging Israel, Eli apparently was true, he was honest, he was upright, but when it came to judging his own sons, he was woefully inadequate. And that exact same pattern repeats itself in Samuel.

For some reason, neither father could or would address the issues of their sons, and in Eli's case, just as God had predicted, remember both of his sons were killed in battle. Remember they brought the ark of the covenant into war thinking it was going to bring them some kind of magic victory, instead it brought them death.

Samuel's sons just like Eli's sons, they had been appointed by their father to the position of judges in spite of the fact that the scripture says as judges, they were literally for sale. They

were so corrupt that all of Israel knew it and outright rejected them as spiritual leaders.

And again, this creates the perfect opportunity for Israel's rebellion to begin to show itself in their desire for a king. We pick up on verse 4. It says: *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 us like all the nations."*

Now if I were to ask how many of you parents, how many of you have sons or daughters who -- quote -- *"do not walk in your ways"* when it comes to faith, I think I'd get an almost universal response. I know because I'm in that category as well.

So what do you do when your adult sons and daughters reject the faith that they've been raised with? I mean, what do you do when you see them making morally wrong choices and going in morally wrong directions? Do you argue? Do you -- do you debate? Do you try to put your foot down and just demand a response? I think we all know that simply doesn't work.

Again, I'm not talking about children here, I'm talking about adults. Both Eli's and Samuel's sons were adults making

desperately bad choices. I think we also know that in our particular age, it has been marked by a great many sons and daughters walking away from the faith of their families.

And here's where having a Reformed perspective can be a real blessing; it can also be a curse as well. The Reformed view takes the position that it is God alone who can make the gospel make sense to anyone, regardless of whether or not they're sons and daughters.

It's a view that says that when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they cursed the entire future of mankind to an innate hostility to God, a hostility that they're not even aware of. It's the view that says that there is no ability of individuals to reach out to God on their own.

As Romans 7:7 puts it: *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 1 Corinthians 1:18, which says: For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

So how do you present the gospel to someone who may be externally

polite, externally respectful but internally and maybe even unknowingly is clearly hostile to God? How do you present the light of the gospel to someone who God says has already been blinded? *2 Corinthians 4* says: *The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

How do you share the gospel with someone who's decided that for now at least the cross is utter foolishness? Well, I've said it before and I'll say it again, there are only two parties who have access to the inside of your son or daughter's head, one is your son or daughter and the other is God. I mean, that alone should be a powerful incentive for prayer.

I honestly don't understand why our monthly POPS meeting, which is actually via Zoom, why so few parents attend. You know, "POPS" stands for Parents of Prodigals and it's basically simply acknowledging on a monthly basis our children who have strayed, so that we can pray specifically for them.

And I suspect the reason why people don't avail themselves as much as they could is because there's one ingredient that's an absolute requirement for POPS, it's an ingredient that's in very short supply in our culture and it's in particular short supply in this

area because we all desperately want to see results. That ingredient is patience. It's the ability to be persistent for months, for years, perhaps even for decades of extended prayer, because our sons and daughters just might be unwilling to listen for months, for years, and for decades.

And I'm very sympathetic towards those who give up because I understand it's constant pressure, but I'm also encouraged by how Jesus expressed how he wants us to view praying for our prodigals. This is a story he told in *Luke 18*. It says: *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*

I mean, you think about what Jesus is after in this story, you realize he's acknowledging that oftentimes it is an excruciatingly long process, a process in which people lose heart. You say, okay, well, why is that? Why doesn't God just simply answer our prayers in a shorter time frame? And the answer is found in the scripture. I'm sure by now most of us have almost memorized. It's *Romans 8:28*. *"All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*

But understand, that includes our own personal story and how it fits into a far bigger story; and, yes, that might include praying for ten, twenty, thirty, maybe forty years before God sees a proper time to bring someone into the fold.

I mean, consider the way Jesus described the situation in this parable, I mean, he's talking about a widow who's gotten a raw deal, and she's absolutely committed to making a pest of herself before the judge. And God says the judge, he doesn't care at all, he doesn't care about justice, he doesn't care about God, he doesn't care about anything but he hates the fact that he's being pestered. Well, Jesus says picture a motive as bad as that judge's response to persistence. And then he says now picture a motive that is filled with nothing but love for you along with a desire to have all things work together for good, not necessarily your notion

or my notion of what's good but God's notion of what is good, and that is everything is designed to conform and shape us into a living image of God's son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that may require a very long time frame for it to work itself out, and that's exactly what God is saying. He says: *"Will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?"*

And so we say long, long according to whom? Well, you know, one of the members of our POPS group has been faithful in prayer for over 25 years. That's how long we've been around doing this. And in that period of time she has prayed faithfully every single month. And during those years, during those years what she received back was zip, zero, nada. I would go even farther than that. Sometimes things got even worse. She would respond that things were not going good, they were going badly, but she heeded what Jesus said and persisted in doing exactly what God said to do. She persisted in praying. And you know what? After 25 years of prayer one of her children and her whole family is now attending on a weekly basis a very solid church. That's what God is talking about.

You know, say, okay, why did this family start going to church? Well, I can tell you exactly why. God heard a persistent prayer from one of his children. And again, this is what God is trying to

impress upon us.

He told another story of Luke 11, and again in this story he's trying to get us to be willing to see the importance of patience and long suffering and stick-to-it-iveness when it comes to this long, long task of praying for our prodigals.

This is Luke 11. Jesus says: *"Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs."*

Understand here, once again, Jesus is acknowledging that from our perspective, this is going to require persistence. He's saying you're going to get the impression that you're imposing, you're going to get the impression that nobody's listening, you're going to have this impression that your presence is nothing but a source of annoyance and that you're literally being impudent in your request. I mean, we know all of those thoughts are incredibly

discouraging and it's what causes the parents of prodigals to simply give up. But understand, God is acknowledging that very thing when he says push through, press through, stick to it because if the unjust judge will give and relent because he can't stand your persistence and if a much friendlier neighbor will acknowledge even though it's midnight that I better answer my crazy neighbor because he's going to give me no peace, well, in both of these situations Jesus is creating a scenario in which praying for a prodigal means pushing back against the persistence that says give up.

And he says in the very next verse: *"And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."*

Well, persistence and prayer was not something that was obvious in the lives of both Eli and Samuel, even though Samuel had been exposed to it through Hannah's prayer that she would be able to conceive a son, I mean, Samuel was the very son that she prayed for. I mean, he had to have known that his mother Hannah had prayed for years and years for a son, only to be denied year after year after year, until, until the appropriate time when God gave her the very Samuel that we're talking about here. And for some

reason both Eli and Samuel had glaring holes in their otherwise wise understanding of God in his kingdom as they led Israel, and their weak spots were their sons.

Hophni and Phinehas were Eli's wicked sons and Joel and Abijah were Samuel's. And not only did they fail Israel as corrupt judges, they gave the nation an excuse to demand that God give them a king over Israel. We pick up at verse 5. It says: *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 us like all the nations."*

You know, all the other nations have earthly kings to lead, guide and protect them, we're stuck with God himself as the head of our nation, I mean, that's literally what they were saying to Samuel. We want somebody we can see, we can touch, we can hear. We want somebody rooted in flesh just like we are.

Verse 6 goes on to say: *But the 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 in all that 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 up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are*

also doing to you."

Well, Samuel hears the people's complaints and he does the right thing, he cries out to God. God tells him, it's not you, it's not you that they are rejecting; rather, it's me. Remember, God sees the hundreds of years of his care for Israel, from his leading them out of Egypt through all of the other judges in the book of Judges to this point where they've been at peace for enough years to forget about the God that had just brought them there.

See, many, many years before in *Deuteronomy 8* God warned Israel what would happen. He said this: *"Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in*

your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'"

You know, a few messages back I spoke about R.C. Sproul and his famous assessment of human nature known as grace accepted always leads to grace expected. This is exactly what God is cataloging. Israel, do you remember Egypt and slavery and the manna and water and the desert and the protection that you got from your enemies? Do you remember anything that brought you to this place that you're in right now? Well, the fact is they were way past remembering. It's all grace that's been accepted so repeatedly that now it's completely expected. And it's all swept away by their desire for a king, somebody who will change our status quo.

Now we in the 21st century, we have a subset of that. We call our view of that "What have you done for me lately". And it's the idea that the only thing that matters is what you can do for me here and now and today, the past is past, God, I mean, even though you've demonstrated your loyalty, your strength, your power, your omnipotence, and all of your other attributes, that's all in the past and we're ready to move on. Amazingly God looks on that kind of attitude and he sees it for exactly what it's for and he acknowledges it.

This is what he tells Samuel in verse 9. He says: *"Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."*

And again, this raises a question, I mean, why is it that God is suddenly willing to accommodate such a rejection? You know, after hundreds of years God at this point in time seems to endorse seeking out a king, and so we ask, why is that? Well again, I mentioned before something we refer to over and over here at Grace and that's again *Romans 8:28*. Once again: *God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, and are called according to his purpose*. And that means, among many other things, that God has a timetable. He's got a time and a place for every single detail that fits into our lives.

And the reason why Jesus told two very different parables about the importance of patience and persistence and praying for prodigals is because he's able to fit all things into a context, our personal context that includes time and place and circumstance.

In other words, God's providence is far more complex than we even imagine. He is sovereign and his word is final and it is possible that his answer to a prayer for a prodigal may just be "no," but it's also quite possible that he may wait ten years before

answering a prayer on a particular prodigal because he has plans for that prodigal that are timed into a ten-year time frame. You have no idea that he might intend you to have a casual conversation in a check-out line with somebody that's going to impact their future eternity. We have no idea. And what I'm saying here is that God is far greater than the tiny little god we imagine oftentimes when we pray.

Could God actually be fitting all of the details of my life into a timeline that includes all the other subsets of all the other timelines of all the other people that I've ever interacted with for all of my days? And can he do that simultaneously with literally billions of people on a second-by-second basis? Well, the answer to that is absolutely.

I mean, we're often guilty of thinking tiny thoughts of who God actually is. And we think of God almost exclusively in the present, and God sees the present, the past, and the future simultaneously. And he tells us time and again to at least view the past along with the present when we're thinking about the future so that we can get a bigger picture of who he really is.

It's 167 times in scripture that God tells us to remember. In *1 Chronicles 16*, he says: *Remember the wondrous works that he has*

done, his miracles and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of Israel his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones!

Well Israel did what we all do. They chose to forget. I mean, she longed to be just like the other nations with a king, someone who had the same flesh and blood as all the other kings. God knew exactly what Israel was getting into because, like I said, his vision includes the past, the present, and the future.

Listen to what God said in the past about this king that Israel is now calling for. This is *Deuteronomy 17*. He says: "*When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving 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 king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.*"

What's fascinating about this statement that God makes is this was written 400 years before the fact. You see, God knew precisely what, when, and where the request for a new king would be coming from. And like I said, the past, the present, and the future, they're all the same to him.

The book of Deuteronomy was addressed to the Israelites through Moses some 400 years before they were actually given a king. And all of this is because God had a plan that every single good thing was going to fit into. He can tell Moses and tell his people they're eventually going to demand a flesh and blood king because they're going to grow tired of God himself leading them. And he goes on to say when you do grow tired of me as king, here's what you can expect from the earthly king you're going to get.

This is 1 Samuel 8:10. It says: *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."

God tells Israel you're going to get what you want all right. You're going to get it because it's going to fit into a pattern, a pattern that's much bigger than any individual or nation, a pattern that's going to demonstrate, just like I said, that all things do work together for good to those who love God. And as that pattern unfolds, you will see eventually you will be selecting David as king and his time will be yet many years in the future; but even after more years than that, from his line will come the real King, King Jesus.

We see God early at work here but with the work is far greater than simply giving into the consistent whining of his people about an earthly king. God has far bigger fish to fry than simply giving in to Israel's desire for a king, and here's where Israel's politics impacts our politics.

You see, 400 years before Samuel had this confrontation with the elders in Israel where they tell him they no longer wanted God as king but instead they want a real flesh and blood king, 400 years before that day God announced that it was coming. That's how much

God knew about Israel's politics.

Two weeks from now we're going to have a highly consequential election. And I know lots of people are nervous and frightened about what's going to happen. You know what? God knows. God knew what November the 6th, 2024 was going to be before 1776, before this country even got established. Here's where I think we begin to identify more with Israel than with God.

You know, I've mention before how Romans 8:28 undergirds so much of what God is doing because in his economy and by his power, all things do work together for good and that we are very short-sighted creatures and that God is not. Every single thing he does takes into account a far wider world than the world that we occupy. It's a world that includes our mental, spiritual, and physical existence, but more importantly, it includes God's highest priority. And believe it or not, that priority is not civil authority, it's not election integrity, it's not even about the peaceful transfer of power.

You see, God's highest priority, the thing that all things work together for good for is Christ and his bride, the church. And when God says that "all things work together for good," he is specifically meaning that all things have an intended goal and all

things are going to work in the direction of that goal, and that goal is the culmination of all things at the return of Christ.

How Donald Trump and Kamala Harris fit into that goal, I guarantee you, there's not a soul on this earth who actually knows. What we do know is -- what we know is that God's intent is to shape and to mold every single event, political and otherwise, toward the end goal of bringing glory to his Son and preparing for his eventual return.

The apostle Paul recognized that 2,000 years ago. In *Ephesians 3:8* he's speaking about the grace of God, the grace that God gave particularly to him. And this is what he said, he said: *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.*

Now Paul is asking his disciples not to lose heart over his suffering because they were pressed in on every side. They saw things only from the viewpoint of this incredibly difficult present set of circumstances. And Paul's calling on them to have the same kind of vision that God has, that sees from the past, to the present, to the future and all things and shapes and molds the evidence of this world accordingly. I mean, in Paul's days that included the suffering that he was undergoing; in our day includes just losing heart over the pit that we see our culture falling into. But don't miss the point that Paul is making here. He is telling the church the role that they have, a role that's going to be witnessed not just by friends and neighbors but by rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

And what he's telling us is that it is the task given to us by God to recognize -- quote -- *"The eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him."*

I've said it before, I'll say it again. Someone once said the gospel is literally a freight train moving from the past through the present to the future, and you have two choices: You can either get on board or in one way or another it will flatten you because nothing is ever going to stop it. Ultimately it doesn't

matter who wins this election because God is still sovereign. Now we can be disappointed or elated but the freight train is still going to move forward regardless.

The people of Israel in Samuel's day, they saw only the present in front of them and they chose accordingly. This is what they said in verse 19: *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 be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."* And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, *"Obey their voice and make them a king."* Samuel then said to the men of Israel, *"Go every man to his city."*

You know, we often speak about the humiliation that Christ endured on the cross, that God himself took on flesh so that he could live this perfect life that ended with him being stripped naked and nailed to a cross by a Roman government that thought they were all powerful. They didn't realize that actually they were doing God's bidding as he offered himself up as a sacrifice to pay the price of your sin and my sin, so that by faith in him we could stand before God with our sins fully paid for. I mean, understand, Jesus and humiliation, they go hand-in-hand. *Philippians 2:8* says: *And*

being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

We understand that of Jesus but seldom do we acknowledge the humiliation that God the Father willingly endured from his own people. I mean, after hundreds of years of miraculous strength and protection, they tell God himself, you are no longer wanted. God's reaction is simple and it's to the point -- quote -- "*Obey their voice and make them a king.*" Everybody said, why? Because his eternal purpose was that he was to realize it in Christ Jesus his son and it included making him a king from the line of David, something no one in Israel had the faintest idea of, but God knew, just as he knows exactly how everything is going to turn out in this election. It, too, was going to work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.

You see, we have the benefit of some of the story having been already told in scripture. Much of the future story has yet to be told, but just like God says, we have the task of remembering the past, acknowledging the present, and trusting in the future from a God who has earned that trust. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for the lessons that you give us. I thank you for the history that you give us. I thank you for the nation of

Israel that we can look at and see patterns that are not ancient, they're patterns that still repeat themselves in us today. I pray you would give us the ability to trust implicitly in you, trust in your ways, trust in your goal which is the glorification of your Son and the role that the church has in that process. And I pray you would give each of us the insight, the wisdom, and the courage to act out that role in any way you choose to see fit. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.