

“Being Like The Nations”

1 Samuel 7-8 | St Georges Anglican Church, Andy Maskell

Lord and God, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

There are plenty of things in life that you and I give ourselves to aren't there.

Lots, that we give our time, energy, money, thoughts to that are pretty none-consequential simply necessary and just everyday “life”, yeah. AND THEN, there are other things we give ourselves to that are more existential, central to who we are, the core drivers of what gives me and you our true sense of significance and happiness.

Our species perpetually looks *to* something or someone to provide us with our fundamental significance and happiness, don't we!

- This is often what absorbs your heart and captures your imagination ABOVE ALL.
- Is normally what we absolutely can't do without,
- deeply scares us not to have, and
- sees us setting our life up around obtaining and preserving - whatever it is.

We look to this thing or person to ultimately lead us to that good place of significance and happiness that we seek.

TODAY: It is seeing and holding God as the one we look to as enough to provide this, which is what we are going to see is the wrestle of Israel in the next part of 1 Samuel.

1. God is the Great King! 7:3-17

The lost Ark has been returned to Israel and it has been 20 years since that awful day of defeat – the battle at Ebenezer. Since then, the Philistines have come to live deep within Israel's ancient borders and continue to creep further in. They remain an ever-looming threat. The Philistines are well on their way to establishing themselves in Israel's patch for good. BUT, a moment for Israel arrives, building over time through Samuel's ministry a change among God's people is a foot. **A return** of Israel to the Lord:

- **A Return (of the people to the Lord) 7:3-6**

*And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, “If you are returning to the LORD with **ALL** your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him **only**, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” 4 So the Israelites put **away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.***

Samuel calls the Israelites to show the genuineness of their heart and seriousness of their “**all**” by ‘*putting away*’ the god's they've put 1st in their lives and putting God back as number 1.¹

¹ It was after all, having God as their all in all that was what made Israel, Israel.

²They'd given themselves to these gods to provide their security, build their identity and create a sense of national dignity. These good things: these significant and happy things, are what they'd been longing for and struggling to obtain since entering the land.

But the LORD had promised to provide Israel with all these good things (and more really). **These would be enjoyed as they trusted the LORD and him only, and expressed that trust in obedience: lived a life of worship, really!**³

You see, Israel had moved away from *fully* trusting in God by *bringing in* deities from outside Israel, that they could see, that they could touch, that they hoped in to deliver this. Yet, this adding had only *taken away... away* from:

- **SOLEY** living a life of faith in God,
- being the special people they were to be: those out off and unlike the rest of the world – ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ Those who - *Love the LORD their God with **all** their heart and with **all** their soul and with **all** their strength. And to have his commands upon their hearts.*⁴
- Where they received his good

But now, Israel realising this, if they are returning to the Lord... As Samuel says, they are to: - 1) Get rid of the idols. – 2) Commit to the Lord. 3) Serve him only. **How Israel behaves: their obedience, will ultimately show if God is enough. Is #1. That will validate their repentance... and show their faith as genuine.**⁵

So, Israel gather to give corporate expression to their sin and failure⁶. It is a wonderful moment of *ACTUALLY* returning to the Lord with *all* their heart, isn't it! And... a great opportunity for the Philistines to end Israel in one fowl swoop - for good!

- This just got serious. This is testing...

Israel are looking down upon the pointy end of *their* extinction event. What will they do? They've put all their eggs in one basket with the LORD – they are all-in and they are wildly vulnerable because of it. They're trusting EVERYTHING to God. What's gonna happen? Will he come good on his promise to them?

- It's the first time, isn't it, in a long time that Israel are not hedging their bets when it comes to life and spirituality.

The people cry out in trust, Samuel intercedes and sacrifices for them and... the Lord answers.

- **A Rescue (by God) 7:7-12**

We see a rescue – the Lord is there to help his people.

² In order to return to the LORD Israel needed to:

- shun the places and the people, give up the ways and means, and abandoning the practices and posturing of what they had come to hold to and look to.

³ The Lord is the leader to be followed to take them where they need to go.

⁴ As then and also today, when it comes to

- becoming, being and continuing a Christian it is an all-in all of life with God.

It's not part of, one of many, an addition, what you pick up and put down on the days of the weeks and seasons of life that suit you. You become just like Israel when your life is one of hedging spiritual bets.

⁵ When it comes to returning to the Lord here, we see, it's not enough for Israel to simply make the noise of repentance, or share the good intent - verse 2, just before, look

- *"It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD."*

Tears with "sorry'es" and "please forgives me's", is a good start, but true repentance? Well, that will show itself in action, in change, it won't stop at honest articulation and the inner emotional of regret and remorse, yeah...

⁶ in verse 6: fasting, publicly admitting wrong and picturing their sorrow in ritual by pouring out water

With battle line drawn up the Lord leads the charge on Israel's behalf. He engages the enemy and single handedly puts them to flight! He Thunders from Heaven.

- Shadows fall, clouds churn thick, sky goes dark and, boom after boom rings out at a deafening volume... ringing the ears and thumping the chest with echoes rumbling around the hills. Line after line of the enemy ranks shudder and cower at such an attack. Pandemonium breaks out across the army and the Philistines scatter. Yahweh - The LORD, the God of Israel Thunders.

And we hear some of Hannah's song (in chapter 1) rise through the claps of thunder "*He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.*" He brings about a comprehensive victory, it is astonishing!

- All Israel does is conduct 'operation mop up' *after* the battle is won!

AND SEE how the LORD totally exerts his authority over the so called "storm god" Baal and his consort Ashroth using thunder! I love the veiled humour and irony of the situation.

God uses the very means of rescue of what this god is suppose to be about, to show his supremacy over false gods of the surrounding nations.

- So renders any allegiance to those beliefs futile. Shows impossible to fulfil the promise of those deities to provide the life and legacy of abundance they are striving for. - You know that says something to what ultimately other spiritual belief and practices outside of Christianity have to really offer for our significance and happiness.

Be sure to note this: The Lord is the one who defeats Israel's enemies, re-establish lost borders, gives Israel peace, protection, a distinctiveness compared to other peoples of great worth. He is all they need and the one to look to give them what they need.

This event here shows you and I, and all Israel, The LORD is the undisputed sovereign. He is the Great King. The King of Israel and supreme over the nations and even their deities.

It reminds Israel once again WHO the LORD is and of the relationship they are to have with him.

The simple and amazing truth:

- Write this down: **The LORD's rescue and all the benefits that come with that is experienced when his people trust him and live that faith out in obedience.**

So, as they return, are rescued, a restoration takes place.

- **A Restoration (a reversal of fortunes) 7:12-15**

To mark the moment Samuel builds, what is like a war memorial.

But instead of it serving to remember the names of the fallen, its purpose is to provide a memorial to the memory of God's mercy and salvation. It shows the astonishing victory enjoyed when his people are all-in heart and soul with the LORD their king.

- That was what was lacking at the battle ground of Ebenezer those 20 years before, wasn't it. The name of the stone 'Ebenezer' put up here at Mizpah states the decisive reversal of that great failure and all they lost.

But this stone 'of help' also and importantly, calls to memory the many many points in their history of the LORD's help – Abraham, Egypt, the wilderness, Joshua, Judges for starters! ... And at the same time this stone states the Lord's help into the future. **As has always been the case, and will be, Israel are to live lives of trust displayed in obedience; worship, really in light of the great king's merciful rescue as they enjoy being his special people! Lest they forget that.**

And St Georges - *lest we forget that*. It's a cause of remembrance for you and I. The same truth in a later time. There *is* an Ebenezer, we must recall, keep close to our hearts to live, now as people of this Great King.

A day up on a hill where one faithful Israelite, surrounded by those who had made themselves his enemy, he was giving expressing of his trust in the LORD. As, he cried out, '*Father forgive them for they know, not what they do.*' it was on their behalf, offering forgiveness and a return to the Lord for a wayward people, a humanity that had forgotten. At HIS intercession and at the moment of *his* sacrifice as he hung there, the sky went dark, the sun disappeared, the earth shook, the rocks split, the people shuddered – he thundered... and once again the rescue of God was seen. This time the final and greatest of victories.

We see, Jesus the Christ – God's king leads the battle against our greatest enemy. He devastatingly routed humanity's enemies that held sway and taken over – pursuing them all the way to the grave. Driving sin away, defeating death and disarming the devil. And so, the one able to restore to us all the good we'd lost. And so, for one who has turned in faith and obedience to Jesus the Christ: **the cross becomes our Ebenezer**. That's worth writing down!

At the cross, we see God's generous help to sinners. We raise up the cross and say: "Thus far the Lord has helped us". And if he has helped us by giving his own Son, then surely he will bring us safely home to glory: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

"The hymn Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing by Robert Robinson (1735-1790) contains the lines:

Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Here by thy great help I've come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.

You return first to the Lord by 1) Getting rid of what is stopping you turning to Jesus with all your heart. 2) Commit to the Lord. 3) Serve him only. That is - you repent and have faith. And yes, it's a vulnerable position, being all in heart and soul. But that is how you experience the Lord's rescue and all the blessings that come with that. And that doesn't change.

Life with God continues to be one of trust. When we are tempted to bring in other things to deliver what we feel we lack, we need and isn't being provided by God – when that happens, look to the cross. When we are scared, feel hopeless and like a failure – look to the cross. Put all your eggs in that basket.

This day of rescue is what reminds us, call you back to be all-in and provides for us the way of return, rescue and restoration. Our Ebenezer is where we can stand in view of God's mercy and so offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—as this is your spiritual act of worship. And were we know help to not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but become transformed by the renewing of our minds. Able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

God is the Great King!

2. But... we need another king!

As the curtains close on chapter 7 all is well. Its idyllic really. Now as the curtains open on chapter 8 we things have changed... It is time for Samuel's hand over and transition to new leadership. So, *who* is going to take the people forward? Well Samuel's got a good plan...

1Sam. 8:1 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. 2 The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. 3 But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

- Hang on! Two wayward sons of Israel's Priest. Oh no... It is history re:repeating itself from chapter 2 isn't it! It's a face palm moment.

Seeing this Israel gets together and brings **their request**.

The Request (of the people) 8:1-9

4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

Underline that phrase – it is important. Let's read on...

6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. 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. 8 As 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. 9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do."

A king. That is new. Israel has never had a king. It's an historical moment. You can feel the difference. Faced with Samuel's choice of leadership and wanting, I suppose, to not risk going back to the mess of Eli's sons, it seems eminently sensible to request a king – after all God's allowed it!

- in Deuteronomy 17, God made provisions for Israel to have a king when they are in the land. He'd spelt out the characteristics of the type of King they were to have when they wanted one⁷... So it can't be that... so, what is it?

It's demanding a king such as all the other nations have. A king, that they go on to say, they want "to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

- They're asking for the wrong kind of king aren't they, and that shows they are asking for the wrong reasons! They demand out of fear not faith!

It's like the idolatry of chapter 7 they'd *turned from*, but with a different twist!

- Not a deity of their choosing but a monarch of their choosing.

When faced, AGAIN with the uncertain prospect of their security, their identity and sense of nation, this is their solution! This time there is no calling to God and asking for his help. They want to *bring* a king in to provide any help they need.⁸

⁷ Deut. 17:14 When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," 15 be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite. 16 The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." 17 He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

Deut. 17:18 When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. 19 It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees 20 and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

⁸ And if a human king was to fit into that he was to lead them in faith and obedience under God. I guess the logic goes – "other nations have the kind of kings that assure this, so we want a king like them to be this for us so we'll be safe and happy"

To their minds this is the way to get it. But this is the problem. God is their Great king! We just saw clearly 'Who is King', RIGHT?! See the irony, God literally went before them and fought their battles in the previous chapter?

The Rejection (of God) 8:7-9

As one preacher says, *"they were not to trust in the size of their army for security, or be constantly and feverishly trying to accomplish in order to establish their identity and give them a sense of meaning. Their relationship with God was supposed to be the source of those things."*⁹

REMEMBER: This is what made them totally different from all the other nations. What set Israel apart.

- Makes them salt and light and like a city on a hill.

Having the LORD as their Great king living a life of faith in him expressed in obedience was what fundamentally defined them compared to other people: *"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

That is what transformed. Conforming to the ways of the world wouldn't add to that one bit. It would only *take away*.

And that is what still defines God's people today doesn't it? Us, St George's. Peter says to us, *'you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1Q Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.'*¹⁰

Yet, in Israel's past and at this request, they are not walking out on God altogether, are they? This isn't really, quite the case. It's just they seem to want more... They seem to need someone, or something to make them feel safe, significant – happen even. Their request shows something really important; **God as their king doesn't seem enough.**

Once again by looking to the world and what it offers - they're dividing their heart. God considered this a rejection of him. Another moment in their history where they have failed to trust him.

8am / 10am I wanna ask you: where have you done this? Where have you said, *"God you are not enough."*

- "Sure, God is great! Jesus is my king - Of course, of course, but I need something more to ensure my significance and happiness?"

What have you given yourself to as the value add to your relationship with God?

Maybe you've said, *"God is great, Jesus you are my king, but give me some concrete things to do, to give me a sense of achievement and respect as I am seen doing them.*

Make sure there is the right religious elements in the Sunday service for me (communion / short sermons), give me that position on Parish council, keep me involvement in important church goings on."

So, you're asking to be useful and contribute and that's not wrong! What's wrong is that you're demanding this from fear, not faith. Fear that without your concrete input of what you do, the quality and stability of your faith and your standing in the community will fade and become lost. Or *"God, I*

⁹ J.D Gere, 1 samuel 8 sermon.

¹⁰ 1Pet. 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

do trust you, but I gotta see some career advancement: decent uni grades, successful ministry, promotions like other people.”

It's ok to ask for those things! But if you simply can't be happy without good work prospects before you, professional progression and higher pay, that shows you are being motivated by fear. I can never be happy, feel secure or reach my potential until I am at this qualification, this level of income, this position of significance.” OR maybe you've said, *“God, you must give me healthy, good, intelligent kids, a loving spouse, house in a nice suburb and a cute dog as well, give me the family lifestyle that looks like this.”*

There's nothing wrong with wanting to enjoy a stable, wholesome and whole family... But, when that's driven by this fear, then I will never be satisfied and feel adequate enough without it until I match up with all the other families that have arrived there...”¹¹

You see 8 / 10 am, whatever that thing is that you demand in addition to God is *your King*. This is how you become like the Israelites here in this chapter. I want you to pause and hear this as its important for us a church:

Rejection of God is not usually walking away from God, it's usually demanding something in addition to God.

What then might be the consequences of this choice? This king? Well, God tells Samuel to tell Israel what to expect from any king you demand in addition to God. And double checks this is really what they want for themselves.

8:10 Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said,

*“This is what the king who will reign over you will do: **He will take** your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses... 13 **He will take** your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 **He will take** the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves... 15 **He will take** a tenth of your grain and of your vintage... 16 Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys **he will take** for his own use. 17 **He will take** a tenth of your flocks, and **you yourselves will become his slaves**. 18 When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day.”*

He will take, take, take and take and in the end, it's going to lead to your enslavement. Your demand will end up demanding a great cost that one day you wish you never paid. *Are you sure?* God asks you.

This is a warning for us that the kings of this world that we demand, perhaps actual rulers of society or figuratively such as good health, real success, true love, decent money, respect and acceptability, the examples before, yeah, won't simply fail to deliver on their promises **but ACTUALLY wind up enslaving us**.

Any king other than God you give yourself to, will keep exacting from you, because without that king there's no way to get the good you are after.

¹¹ This question comes individually, sure, but what about collectively? When have we said, Jesus is our king here, but God needs to make us to be more accepting of people, just let them alone to do and be who they want, don't mention anything they are getting wrong in the Bible or doing in their faith. There's no issue with embracing, accepting and giving the benefit of the doubt to people, however, that's driven by a fear not faith that people won't like us, like me, that ?

- So, you work more hours, volunteer more time, spent more money, get more stuff, commit to more projects, give more of a say, give more attention and bend what is around you, to move you ever closer to obtaining this goal – reaching this place... doubling down on any loses along the way and excusing or justifying the cracks that form in friendships, family, health and character.

And realise, you're not giving the bottom of the barrel away, you are having the best of you taken and you won't be able to get yourself out of it.

The warning here St Georges is **every king but God enslaves. Whatever king you give your life too will take, take and take**. Write that down and now emphatically circle it. Are you sure, you want to give yourself to a king that operates like the world? Remember who you are, remember who he is. Return!

- **The Resolve 8:19-21¹²**

They ask they get, and we're left hanging ready to hear in the next act just how much this King will take from them. But Israel needed a king different from the nations didn't they, they needed a king like God! And all of us need a king that we can safely give *our all* too that doesn't operate like this, don't we... It would be a while for Israel and the world, but it would be Jesus, who would show his self to be Israel's king like this.

Jesus was the one UTTERLY unlike those of all the nations. Who was the one who had said of himself *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). The true King *"did not come to be served, but ... to give"* and give and give so those following his lead would experience freedom, not slavery. He could deliver the good the people feared they wouldn't get. When Pilate asked whether he is the king of the Jews (John 18:33). Jesus replies: *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (v 36). That is what was needed.

Yet God still wasn't enough, was he. The demand in this passage is closed by another demand that signals the climatic rejection of God:

- *"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. **15** But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. **"We have no king but Caesar,"** the chief priests answered.*

They still want a king like all the other nations. And that preference is shared by many, maybe still you still now. Yet, it was this rejection that led to Jesus giving his life under their treason, bearing their sin and shame - mine to, so the good we so long for can be enjoyed. - So we'd know freedom from striving to obtain, have forgiveness and help given when we fail and be truly safe. No other king can delivered that.

It is God we finally see in his King Jesus that comes to **rescue and all the benefits that come with that is experienced when his people trust him and live that faith out in obedience**.

Is that enough for you?

¹² *But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. 20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." 21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. 22 The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Everyone go back to his town."*