

13. Samuel Out – Saul In

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The definition of “Integrity”, according to Dictionary.com, is as the following: “Steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code or the state of being unimpaired; soundness.”

It is hard to find nowadays, especially, in the political realm. We even have many jokes about integrity and politicians. Here is a good one: “Do you know where the liars go?” Answer: “Washington, D.C.!” So many unfulfilled campaign promises of politicians made us be weary with their more promises during their election campaigns. So the concept of politicians’ integrity seems an oxymoron.

However, it is refreshing to find Samuel’s integrity is not the case. As we are going to learn that he was a man of integrity, faith, and prayer. We are going to learn valuable lessons from this old leader.

A. SAMUEL’S CHALLENGE TO ISRAEL TO TESTIFY AGAINST HIM

1 Samuel 12:1-5 Now Samuel said to all Israel: “Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. 2 And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and grayheaded, and look, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. 3 Here I am. Witness against me before the Lord and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you.” 4 And they said, “You have not cheated us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man’s hand.” 5 Then he said to them, “The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they answered, “He is witness.”

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

In this chapter, Samuel was helping Israel to make the transition from his leadership to Saul’s leadership. Samuel would not try to hold onto the position when God was changing it. Although Samuel never officially “stepped down” from leading Israel as a judge, but he would not allow his shadow to eclipse the new king Saul. In this, Samuel shows himself as a truly godly man. He is willing to pass from the scene when God raises up another leader. His heart is the same as John the Baptist’s heart towards Jesus.

John 3:30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

This reminds me of many bloody incidents from my home town, South Korea. Whenever the executive branch administration was replaced by a revolution or election, the former presidents ended up dead or in jail because of their extortion and corruption.

Samuel wanted it clearly known that it was not his idea to appoint a king over Israel. This idea began in the hearts of Israel, but not in the heart of God. But God allowed it.

In 1 Samuel 8:1-5, Samuel was challenged to take his sons out of leadership in Israel, because they were not godly men. Though it must have been difficult, he did it.

Samuel remembered his humble beginnings as a child, dedicated to the Lord and serving Israel at the tabernacle.

As Samuel spoke to the nation about the transition of leadership, he wanted it clear that he has not defrauded or oppressed or corrupted in any way. He was simply challenging Jewish tabloid magazines to dig up his life. There is nothing for him to hide. This is impressive as an example of the godly character of Samuel. What integrity Samuel had!

I think of Dr. Billy Graham. He was such a man of God in this generation, even all that sleazy filthy tabloid magazines treated him with utter respect. Why? Because he didn't take a chance to give anything to anyone to blaspheme his God's name. He wouldn't walk into a hotel lobby with any woman other than his wife. He even would not walk into a hotel elevator alone, in case a strange woman gets into the elevator and might give an opportunity for someone to gossip about him. He used to take a modest salary and lived in the same house that he had been living all that time, even though he had power and influence to achieve a lot more than any other Christian leaders in the world. He was the man of integrity.

Why did Samuel do what seems to be a purely self-justifying and self-glorifying thing? From what we know of the character of Samuel in other passages, we have to believe this is more than him saying, "Look at how good I am." Instead, it seems that Samuel wants the nation to know that he has passed a good legacy of leadership to the new king Saul. He wanted Israel to recognize that he hasn't handed Saul a mess that the new king had to clean up. If Saul should prove to be a poor leader, no one could say it was because of the bad example set by Samuel.

This is a priceless testimony for any leader. How precious to stand before your own people, and to hear them affirm the integrity of your leadership! Samuel could only make the challenge of v3 because he knew the answer ahead of time.

This kind of fulfilling the promises doesn't only apply to the political leadership, but it also applies in our marriages. During wedding ceremonies, all the brides and grooms happily answer with that famous two words, "I do." But more than a half of the marriages in America goes down the drain. Because they don't take this "I do" seriously. When we say, "I do" in the presence of the people who are at the wedding ceremony, they and God become the witnesses against any lousy excuses we might come up with to break our marriages.

B. SAMUEL'S CHALLENGE TO ISRAEL TO SERVE GOD UNDER THEIR NEW KING

1 Samuel 12:6-12 Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the Lord who raised up Moses and Aaron, and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. 7 Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous acts of the Lord which He did to you and your fathers: 8 When Jacob had gone into Egypt, and your fathers cried out to the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. 9 And when they forgot the

Lord their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab; and they fought against them. 10 Then they cried out to the Lord, and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and Ashtoreths; but now deliver us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve You.' 11 And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you dwelt in safety. 12 And when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the Lord your God was your king.

What do you see here?

Samuel, in this remembrance of God's work from the time of the Exodus until his present day, focuses not on the history of Israel, but on the history of the righteous acts of the Lord:

1) The righteous act of the Lord in deliverance – v6-8

Israel should remember their salvation from slavery and the new life God gave them in the Promised Land. This is the one we always like to see happen.

2) The righteous act of the Lord in chastisement – v9-11

Israel also should remember how God allowed a disobedient Israel to be under the domination of their enemies, as a chastisement intending to bring them to repentance.

This is not the one we are anxious to see happen in our lives.

However, we realize that we need both of them – deliverance from evil and chastisement from the Lord to reprove us and correct our wrong doings.

But why the history lesson? Because as Israel makes the transition from the theocracy that is governed by God into a monarchy, they need to remember the righteous acts of the Lord. Because the history of Israel had nothing but the miserable cycle of **"Rebellion – Retribution – Repentance – Restoration."**

But let's not look down on these Israelites. Because in a way our lives had the same marks of "Rebellion – Retribution – Repentance – Restoration." When the things go well in our lives, we turn away from God and thinking that we can handle everything by ourselves, "Thank You, God. But I will take it from here." Then by the results of our fleshly mistakes, we get whipped by satan. We start to cry out to God, "O God, help me. I need You." In His abounding grace and limitless mercy, He restores us into His arms. I wish that we've learned from it, but somehow we tend to repeat it again and again. As we grow older and more mature in the Lord, we hopefully learn not to repeat it.

By the way, just for your Bible trivia, who is this Jerubbaal? It is another name of Gideon according to Judges 6:32.

Humans' methods are many, but godly principles are few; humans' methods always change, but godly principles never do.

C. SERVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH YOUR NEW KING

1 Samuel 12:13-18 Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired. And take note, the Lord has set a king over

you. 14 If you fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the Lord your God. 15 However, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers. 16 "Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes: 17 Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the Lord, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking a king for yourselves." 18 So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.

What is your interpretation of this?

Samuel presented Israel with an important choice. They had been disobedient in their desire for a king, yet God had given them a king. Even so, if they would fear the Lord and serve Him, God could still bless them.

One wrong turn had not put any of us out of God's plan forever. If we fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and God will bring good even out of yesterday's wrong turn. That is why Jesus died for our sins, so that we may be cleansed by His precious blood.

Every individual of every generation is tempted to think of oneself as a special exception. They know of the righteous acts of the Lord in previous generations, yet somehow they feel that they are an exception from God's correction or judgment. Samuel was reminding Israel that they were not any different from their fathers, and God would not deal with them any differently than He did with their fathers. And we are no exception either.

According to 1 Corinthians 10:11, the OT is there to show us the examples and teach us what not to do and what to do:

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

However, the following verse gives us a stern warning.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Why would Samuel and the Lord wait until now for such a dramatic sign with thunder and rain? Why not do it when Israel first asked for a king, so they would have known their sin right then, and taken back their request for a king? Because God had a purpose in allowing the people's king, Saul, to come first.

Thunder and rain were unusual during the wheat harvest in Israel. This was a truly remarkable sign from God. The thunder and rain displayed not only God's power, but His judgment also. Heavy rain during the harvest could destroy all their crops. The sign was a warning.

D. THE HEART OF A TRUE LEADER

1 Samuel 12:19-25 And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all

our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves.” 20 Then Samuel said to the people, “Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. 21 And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing. 22 For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name’s sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people. 23 Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. 24 Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. 25 But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

It is sad that it took the thunder and rain for Israel to be impressed with God’s power and majesty. What will it take for us to fear the Lord and treat Him as a God of power and majesty? Did you notice that they said, “your God,” not “our God”? They didn’t get it, because they didn’t have the same kind of intimate relationship with the Lord like Samuel.

We can’t do anything about yesterday. Satan would love for us to live in the past or in the future and to do anything but serve the Lord with all we have right now!

Samuel said, “far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.” What is the middle letter of sin? “I” If we don’t pray for our brothers and sisters, it means that we are self-centered and not caring for others. It goes directly against our Lord Jesus’ commandment, “Love your neighbors as yourself.”

Intercessory prayer is required from all of us as a part of our love for one another. Abraham did, Elijah did, Esther did, and the most of all our Lord Jesus did. Billy Graham’s crusades were interceded by an old lady, Pearl Goode who lifted up Billy Graham to the throne of God every time when he was at the crusade.

Samuel gave them one final warning in v24 and 25.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Serving God with integrity will bring pleasure to His sight.

When everyone around us compromises the truth for their own benefit, let’s stand up for the truth for our God’s name’s sake.

2) God’s grace and mercy are beyond our comprehension.

Even though we don’t deserve His grace and mercy, He lavishes His love through grace and mercy on us. Let’s not cheapen His grace and mercy by repeating the miserable cycle of “**Rebellion – Retribution – Repentance – Restoration.**”

3) Let’s intercede for one another.

Without intercessory prayers for the communities of Sahuarita and Green Valley, there will be many people dying without Jesus in their hearts and they will be eternally damned. Does it mean that their eternal damnation is our responsibility? No, it would be our privilege to pray and intercede for their eternal well-being and one another in the body of Christ.