

1 Samuel 7 and 8 sermon : Part 2 – “Israel”

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Outline available

III – Some years ago I was stopped in my car at a set of lights. And as I waited, I saw something that I would never forget, even 11 years later. A young school boy, about 13 years old, ran across the road. Against the lights. He didn't see the car, and the driver didn't see him. He hit the bumper bar, then the bonnet, went straight up in the air, and landed in the middle of this busy intersection 12 metres from where he was hit. I remember running from my car, feeling his pulse but thinking he was almost dead. And I thought to myself, “If only someone could have called out to him: **“STOP! Turn back. Don't run. Wait for the lights. Obey the road rules. Look both ways.”** But then I'm guessing that he'd heard people say those things over and over and over as he grew up. He played a dangerous game that nearly cost him his life.

We can play dangerous games with our faith. Like running across a road at peak hour. We take risks with our faith. We ignore the dangers. We can play around with sin and ignore God, completely forgetting that the consequences could be disastrous.

And when I look at 1 Samuel 7 and 8, two very significant chapters in the Old Testament, I see Israel doing what we often do. Playing a dangerous game with God. They were taking risks with their faith that could have huge consequences. They were ignoring God. They were playing around with other gods.

In chapter 7, the ark has been returned to Israel by the Philistines, but for the next 20 years, the Israelites cries out to God for help, because the Philistines continued to attack them. Finally, Israel cries out to God for help, and Samuel says to them in verse 3:

* **“STOP! Turn back to God! Stop being disobedient. Stop worshipping the gods of Baal and Ashtoreth, and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only!”** In other words, stop playing dangerous games! Turn back to God and when you do, he will deliver you from the hands of the Philistines.

So finally, Israel stops worshipping other gods. And they confess their sins and repent. And in verse 10, God thundered down against the Philistines and defeated them. Then Israel ran after them and finished them off. Israel stopped playing games. They turned back to God, and God delivered them. Again. But have they stopped playing games with their faith?

Well, when we turn to chapter 8, Israel are playing games again. Up until this time, God has led them through everything. God has led them out of Egypt, through the desert, into the Promised Land, and he's made them into a huge powerful nation. Every time enemies have come up against them, God has raised up a leader to deliver them. Joseph, Joshua, Moses, Aaron, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Eli, Samuel... to name just a few. God always delivered them. God was their leader. Again and again he led them to victory.

But Israel doesn't want this any more. Instead, verses 4-5:

* *“So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 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.”*

Israel don't want Samuel's wicked sons leading them. Fair enough. Joel and Abijah turned out to be pretty wicked. But Israel still doesn't trust God enough to raise up another faithful leader. Instead, they want a king like every other nation. And that's the tragedy. Israel isn't meant to *be* like every other nation. They're supposed to be *different*. At first, Samuel thinks that Israel had rejected *his* leadership. But God says to Samuel in verse 7:

* *“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.”*

And God tells Samuel to warn them of everything that’s going to happen to them if they get a King like every other nation. Taxes, conscription, taxes, they’ll lose sons and daughters and menservants and maidservants to the king, **and** there will be more taxes. They will become virtual slaves to their king. They get all the warnings, and they still want a king. And then God does something surprising. God *gives* them a human King.

*** III** – These days if I go to the shops with the kids and they see all the toys and lollies with their favourite cartoon characters, they always want one. Just like all the other kids have. Shrek cereal and Shrek chips, Shrek milk, Shrek yoghurt. They want what’s popular. They want what everyone else has because they think it must be good if everyone else has it! And we won’t give it to them. Usually because we know it’s not good for them. And it’s a rip off. And I’m cheap.

Israel say “We want a King like all the other nations! Give us a King!”

And ... God *gives* Israel a King. It’s hard to understand – Israel *rebel* against God’s leadership by asking for a human King, and he actually **allows** them to **have** one! Why?

Because God is not a dictator. Israel made a bad decision. But God allows them to make this choice, and he allows them to face the consequences. Does that mean God’s plans are all mucked up now? let’s think about it...

God’s plan to save the world is through Jesus. No choice the Israelites make can stop that plan of God’s. In fact, God even sends Jesus from the line of the King of Israel. He uses their bad choice in his plans! And no choice we make can stop God’s plans in Jesus. And no plan of Satan’s can stop God’s plans in Jesus. In other words, the choices we make cannot change God’s salvation plans, **BUT** they *can* impact OUR salvation and the faith of others.

For example – A Christian commits adultery. That won’t stop God’s plans in Jesus! But it will affect his church – and it will affect the people around him.

A minister abuses a child. That won’t stop God’s plans in Jesus! But it will affect the faith of the minister’s congregations and many others.

A church decides not to take the gospel out to their community. That won’t stop God’s plans in Jesus! But it will affect faith opportunities of that community. How can they be saved if they never hear!

We cannot affect God’s plan of salvation through Jesus – we cannot stop the saving work of Christ. It’s been done. But our choices **DO** impact, in a negative or positive way, **our** faith and the faith of people around us.

* Hebrews 4:13 says: *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*

We are able to freely make choices, but those choices *impact* the lives around us. And God sees all the choices we make. And that makes us accountable. So do you want to be accountable for having a negative impact on someone else’s faith? or would you rather be accountable for having a positive impact? Let’s assume we want to have a positive impact! How do we do that?

*** III** – There was a big fad several years ago for people to wear these **wrist bands** that said **“W.W.J.D.”** The letters stood for **“What Would Jesus Do?”** And the idea was that the wristband would remind you to ask yourself “What Would Jesus Do in this situation?” Eventually the fad ended and not many people wear them anymore. But these wristbands did have an impact. Why? Because they reminded people to **STOP**. Instead of going on playing dangerous games with their faith, these wristbands reminded Christians to stop and think and ask: Who is my King? Who do I follow? It caused people to stop and ask themselves when they made decisions, “Am I **different** because of my faith, or am I the **same** as the rest of the world?”

Do we want to be different? Do we want to stand out as followers of Jesus? Or do we want to be *like all the other nations*?

Israel finally stopped playing dangerous games with their faith. They stopped following the false gods of the other nations. They recognised God as their King. But then life goes on and they want to be like everyone else again. They want a king like everyone else. It took Israel 20 years to stop and see the danger they were in. And only a few more years to fall into the same dangers again. When was the last time WE stopped? When was the last time we seriously asked ourselves “Am I listening to God?” Am I standing out as different? Am I having a positive impact on people’s faith? Am I a follower of Jesus or a follower of his world?

*** III** – Every year I was at high school, I used to volunteer to do **stock-take** in the library. Why? Because it got me out of 3 days of school lessons. At stock-take you had to go through every shelf in the library and check for every book. Some were missing, others were put back in the wrong spot. Some had been taken. Some were damaged. The stock-take was the time to get everything back to where it should be. What was missing? What was in the wrong place? What was damaged?

Do you make time to take stock of your *faith*?

We make time to take stock of everything else in our lives: We take time to do the shopping. We take time to check our finances, pay the bills, do our taxes. We take time to get our car serviced and our lawns mowed, our hair cut, our washing done. We take time to see the doctor when we’re sick. I want to suggest today that we need the time to take stock of our faith. Is anything missing? Is anything lacking? Is anything in the wrong place? Am I, in any way, in any part of my life, ignoring **God**?

And as I finish, I want us all to have the opportunity to do that now. To take stock.

So let me lead us in prayer.

Father, everything in creation is laid bare before you. And you know where we lack faith, when we lack courage, when we fail to have conviction in our beliefs. You know when we are weak, and when we weaken others.

We see ourselves in Israel – a people who follow you, yet often lose sight of you.

We hear Samuel’s words to Israel for ourselves: “*Commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only.*” And we know we fail.

Yet you are merciful and kind. You love us and you love to see our hearts changed.

Father, give us an undivided heart that seeks you alone. Help us in our lives to stop, and take stock of our faith. To see our weaknesses and to turn to you for strength.

Help us to make choices in our lives which make us stand out as followers of Jesus. Help us not to be like every other nation, but set apart for you and your purposes.

Father, give us humility in the presence of pride, courage in the face of fear, strength in the shadow of weakness, and faith greater than all our doubt.

Help us to serve you only. In Jesus’ name. Amen.