

The King in the Dock

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 June 2024

Preacher: Jonathan Middleton

[0 : 0 0] Samuel said to all Israel, I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and grey and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken?

Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right. You have not cheated us or oppressed us, they replied. You have not taken anything from anyone's hand. Samuel said to them, the Lord is witness against you and also his anointed is witness this day that you have not found anything in my hand. He is witness, they said. Then Samuel said to the people, it is the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors up out of Egypt. Now then, stand here because I'm going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your ancestors. After Jacob entered Egypt, they cried to the Lord for help and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron who brought your ancestors out of Egypt and settled them in this place. But they forgot the Lord their God. So he sold them into the hands of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab who fought against them. They cried out to the Lord and said, we have sinned. We have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies and we will serve you. Then the Lord sent Jerob, Baal, Barak,

Jephthah and Samuel and he delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around you so that you lived in safety. But when you saw that Nahash, king of the Ammonites, was moving against you, you said to me, no, we want a king to rule over us, even though the Lord your God was your king. Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for. See, the Lord has set a king over you. If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God, good. But if you do not obey the Lord and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you as it was against your ancestors. Now then, stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest now?

I will call on the Lord to send thunder and rain and you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king. Then Samuel called on the Lord and that same day the Lord sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel.

The people all said to Samuel, pray to the Lord your God for your servants so that we will not die for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.

[3 : 39] Do not be afraid, Samuel replied. You have done all this evil. Yet do not turn away from the Lord but serve the Lord with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do no good nor can they rescue you because they are useless. For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people because the Lord was pleased to make you his own. As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. Consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks Phil for reading. Let me add my welcome to Simon's. If we've not met before, it would be great to meet you afterwards in the coffee break. And as ever, do keep your Bibles open at the chapter 1 Samuel 12. That would be a great help. And let's join together in prayer and ask for God's help as we begin. Heavenly Father, the words we just read is your word, the word of God. The word you have spoken to each of us this morning in each of our different circumstances and backgrounds and baggage. And so we pray Lord that you would send the Holy Spirit to come mightily empowered to illuminate these words to our hearts this morning, to unveil our hearts that are blind to see the truth of the gospel, Lord, and point us to your Son, the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name. Amen.

Well, back yourself. Have you come across that expression before? Perhaps it's familiar to some of you. Back yourself. Just have confidence in your own ability to do the thing that you do. You used to hear it a lot in the business world. Perhaps you still do. You're going into an important meeting of clients. Back yourself, mate. You've got this because self-confidence is half the battle, so they say.

We've got a version of that in Glasgow. If we get the slide up, instead of back yourself, go on yourself. So a bit of a cultural initiation. If you're here visiting Glasgow this morning, or if you're new to the city, go on yourself. It's usually followed by big man or wee man, depending on the stature of the person being addressed. Go on yourself, big man. And nothing screams encouragement or shows moral support like hearing these words, go on yourself. It's often heard on the football terraces.

Perhaps not so much in these past few weeks. But our players on an amazing run down the wing, go on yourself, wee man. You got this. If Jenny from Forrest Gump was Scottish, instead of run, Forrest, run, go on yourself, big man, to express her unwavering support. Or if she's English, back yourself, Forrest.

[7 : 17] Let's get into it. Often we need encouragement like that to achieve our goals. And if I'm in the mountains with our children, they're struggling over a boulder or something like that, they need some encouragement. Back yourself. You can do it. But when it comes to the moral standards of our holy God, as we're going to see in our passage, when it comes to meeting God's holy standards, backing yourself isn't necessarily going to be the smartest move, isn't going to be your best bet.

And it's a great passage this morning if you're here exploring the Christian faith, kind of looking in on the Christian faith from outside in. Because this is one of the things that distinguishes the Christian faith from all other world religions, which are basically about backing yourself, your moral performance, basically. And it's a great reminder too, if you're here and you are a Christian, that we don't need to carry false burdens. We don't need to back yourself.

We've got somebody who's got our back, as it were. And we've been in the book of Samuel these past few weeks now. And the book of Samuel is really about the search for the right kind of leader.

So if you remember back to last week, end of chapter 11, Samuel and the people of Israel have gathered at Gilgal to anoint Saul as their king. So it's a threshold in the history of the nation, the end of an era with Samuel as their leader. He's old and gray. And the beginning of a new leader with King Saul as their king. And so they're all gathered here and Samuel makes this big speech.

He addresses the nation one last time as their leader. And perhaps you noticed when we read it, when Phil read it, all the legal courtroom language. So look with me at verse 3, testify against me. And then verse 5, the Lord is witness. Verse 5 again, his anointed is witness.

[9 : 35] That is king's soul, his witness. Verse 7, I'm going to confront you with the evidence. So it's like a courtroom drama almost. And first up, Samuel takes the stand. And Samuel does back himself, at least when it comes to his own leadership credentials. Verse 2, he says, I have been your leader from my youth until this day. Here I stand. He's in the dock, as it were.

Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe? And it seems at first glance a bit of an odd defense of his leadership, stating, not his achievements, but rather the things that he hasn't done, putting it in the negative.

I haven't stolen your cows, or I haven't pinched anybody's donkey. Seems a little bit odd. If you just flick back to chapter 8, page 278.

The people want a king just to be like everyone around them. And Samuel warns them to be careful what you wish for.

You want a king like that? A king who takes from you? And he goes on through a whole list of things the king will take from verse 11, and it should be up on the screen as well, including their children, their land, and then verse 16 of chapter 8.

[11 : 23] He will take for his own use their servants and the best of their cattle and donkeys. You really want a king like that, Samuel says.

A king who takes. And these aren't idle words. King Saul, the very first king, will go on to take from them. Will take their land from them, grabbing the people's land and giving it to his mates.

And even King David doesn't take anybody's donkey, as far as I can remember, but he certainly does take his neighbor's wife, Bathsheba. You want a king who takes.

Well, look at my track record, says Samuel. I haven't so much as taken a donkey. So Samuel's leadership has been marked by integrity.

That phrase in 12 verse 2, second half of verse 2, I've been your leader. A more literal translation would be, I have walked before you. And that's exactly what he's done there in the background throughout these chapters.

[12 : 33] He's been going up and down the country, getting the word of God out up and down the country. So if you just quickly flick back to chapter 4 verse 1, page 274.

That's exactly what he does. Through Samuel, God's word came throughout all Israel. So there he is, quietly in the background, ministering God's word up and down the country.

In many ways, his has been a model leadership. Unremarkable, unspectacular, largely. It was the Ebenezer Stone, but not at all showy.

No bribery or betting scandals. No charging the taxpayer 11,000 pounds for their iPad roaming charges. No self-enrichment. A model leadership.

In Glasgow, we've got sandstone tenements. Blonde and red sandstone tenements. That's what gives Glasgow its distinctive character. You can tell it's Glasgow and not Edinburgh or London or Bath or Berlin or anywhere like that.

[13 : 49] And the beauty of a tenement is that it just gets on with its job of being a tenement. It is understated, but it does its job. And of course, along comes a building and breaks all the rules, ignores all the rules, a kind of showy, look at me architecture.

But you know, there's something to be said for the quiet, understated business of the tenement. There's something also to be said for the understated nature of Samuel's leadership.

Nothing flash, nothing showy, but just real integrity. So the people agree with Samuel's appraisal of himself. Verse 4 of chapter 12.

You haven't cheated or oppressed us, they replied. Samuel said to them, the Lord is witness against you. He is witness, they said.

So if you were to sum up Samuel's leadership in a nutshell, you could say it like this. It was a model leadership. So next, there's a collection of essays by C.S. Lewis called God in the Dock.

[14 : 57] His title implies that God is on trial. The author suggests that the modern human being, rather than seeing ourselves as standing before God in judgment, we prefer God on trial while acting as his judge.

Here in 1 Samuel 12, God's not here as the defendant, but as the main witness and judge. Verse 7. Now then, stand here.

I wasn't much in trouble at school, but very occasionally it would be, you boys, stand there. Stand in the corner. We had to stand there for the rest of the lesson. So they're getting us speaking to here. Now then, stand here, because I'm going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your ancestors.

And so he reminds them of God's faithfulness. And there's a pattern here, isn't there? So the pattern is this.

A, they're in trouble. B, they cry out to God. And C, God sends someone to deliver them. So verse 8.

[16 : 14] They're oppressed in Egypt. They cried to the Lord for help, and the Lord sent deliverers, Moses and Aaron, who brought them out of Egypt into the promised land.

But then they do what God's people so often do, don't we? They forget the Lord God. And it's so easy for us to fall into that trap, to forget the living God.

We come up against the first trial, the first obstacle, the first hint at opposition, and we forget all about God's faithfulness. We seek elsewhere.

We seek gratification in other things. Well, God's people here are embattled and facing trials against all those around them, against Sisera, against the Philistines and Moabites.

Eventually, they come to their senses, verse 10, and they turn back to God and pray. They cried out to the Lord for help and said, We have sinned. We have forsaken the Lord and served false gods and idols.

[17 : 19] Now deliver us from the hands of our enemies. And we will serve you. And so then the Lord sent these deliverers. So if you want it in a nutshell, you could say God is faithful even when his people are not faithful.

So that's a pattern. They're in trouble. They cry out to God for help. And God sends a deliverer. But in verse 12, notice, there's a shift, a break in the pattern.

And now it's very much the people themselves that are in the dock. So verse 12, But when you saw that the Ammonite king was moving against you, you said, No, we want a king to rule over us, even though the Lord was your king.

Do you see the difference? It's a big difference between our crying out from the bottom of our hearts to the Lord to lift us up out of the pit from a posture of humility and repentance.

Lord, I've made a complete mess of things. Completely stuffed up. I've made a mess of this relationship that I'm in. I've made a mess of my finances. I'm in all kinds of debt.

[18 : 41] And I'm just in a mess, whatever it is. It's a difference between that and what the people do here. Basically telling the Lord what to do.

Here's our problem. Here's our solution. Now you fix it, Lord. You give us the thing that everyone else has. You give us a king.

So do you see the difference? It's the difference between us doing the things God's way and trying to make God do things our way.

And we think we know what's best for us, don't we? We want to be commanders of our own destiny. And sometimes we just don't trust God in certain areas of our lives.

Don't trust that God's got our best interests at heart. Whatever it may be. It's a bit like those kiddie rides in shopping malls.

[19 : 41] And by the way, I hate shopping malls. I hate everything about them. They're cynically designed to make you spend as much money as possible. And if you're designing a shopping mall, you get given a design manual with strict guidelines about how to design the shops.

And it's all based on cynical research by retail psychologists. So you get floors that you have to design that are gently sloping away from the entrance to the back of the shop so that you're spending as much time and money in there as possible.

That kind of thing. But it's those amusement cars that used to really do my head in when the children were younger. Daddy, can I go on that ride? No.

But please, Daddy, no. But Daddy, I really want to go on that ride. No. You're going to have to trust me. They're a complete waste of money. And they're not even any fun anyway.

Why are you so mean to me, Daddy? Well, eventually they get their own way, don't they? Usually when they're with their grandparents or something like that. Then they realize for themselves that the kiddie ride in a shopping mall isn't the same as that time they got to go on a quad bike at the farm.

[20 : 57] Someone once said, sometimes the worst thing God can do is give you whatever you want. And that's exactly what God does here. He gives them exactly what they asked for.

Verse 13. Here's the king you have chosen. Here he is. The one you asked for. And then in verse 14 there's this very big if.

A very big if. If you fear the Lord. If you serve and obey him. If you do not rebel against his commands. And if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God.

If you do all these things then all good. Except it's not good is it? Because if not you're all stuffed basically.

That's what he says. God's hand of judgment against you. And so do you see the problem here? The big problem. The elephant in the room. The problem is it's all about their performance.

[22 : 04] Not just their performance. Their performance and the performance of the king that they asked for. So are you going to back yourself when it's stacked against you like that?

Are you going to back yourself when there's all that at stake? Well as the people think about that and ponder that for dramatic effect Samuel calls on the Lord to do verse 16 what no human king can do.

Now then stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do and you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you rebelled against him and asked for a king.

And so even though it's harvest time and there's barely a cloud in the sky the Lord sent thunder and rain verse 18 and the people stood in awe at the sight of this and stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel.

So the heavens erupt into this kind of cinematic thunderstorm people know they've blown it verse 19 they said pray to the Lord your God for us so that we will not die for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.

[23 : 30] Maybe that's you this morning. Maybe you're here and maybe even getting to church this morning was a struggle because you think you've blown it feel like you've messed up again but through Samuel the Lord says do not be afraid do not be afraid you have done all this evil and yet do not despair why not?

Because of all these things he's about to tell them one thing about the Lord two things about Samuel three ways we are to respond so don't despair first and foremost because the Lord hasn't given up on you verse 22 for the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people because the Lord was pleased to make you his own God isn't surprised by sin God isn't surprised by your sin he isn't surprised by your struggles they do not catch him off guard so one thing about God briefly he will not reject his people you're not a lost cause two things about Samuel they're not to despair first because he's going to keep on praying for them interceding to God on their behalf as their mediator verse 23 far be it from me that I should sin against the

Lord by failing to pray for you it's a wonderful thing to have a mediator and I've got a great relationship with my in-laws my wife Alice and the kids are over there just now so there's just a slim chance that they're joining in on the feed if so ciao joinita I suppose I should be a little bit careful what I say but in other ways it doesn't really matter because they don't speak much English and I don't speak much Latvian part of the reason why we have such a good relationship such a brilliant relationship not the only reason but part of the reason is because in Alice we have such a great mediator moderating our conversations translating what she thinks is necessary filtering what I have to say sometimes sometimes I'm surprised that I think I've said a paragraph and there's only three words that are translated it's okay don't worry about that well Samuel's going to be continuing as their mediator continuing that significant prayer ministry for them second he's going to keep on teaching them verse 23

I will teach you the way he says so even though the focus is going to shift to king soul Samuel's still going to be exercising a very significant ministry of word and prayer throughout the land so how to respond three things number one don't turn away from God verse 20 you've done all this evil yeah don't turn away from the Lord don't turn after useless idols they're useless but when we've had a spiritual shocker we feel like retreating from God we don't want to open our Bibles they often it's a struggle just to pray well you might have stuffed up big time yet do not turn away from the Lord he's your only hope number two end of verse 20 serve the

Lord with all your heart when we mess up we're not to turn away from the Lord but we are to have a healthy fear of the Lord verse 24 and serve him faithfully with all your heart because there's that big warning in verse 25 if you persist in doing evil both you and your king will perish so here's that problem again here's that big problem it seems like it's down to our performance but if it's back yourself then we're back to square one so how is this resolved well the third way we're to respond verse 24 end of the verse there consider what great things he has done for you consider what great things that the Lord has done for you you see the people's problem was that they forgot what God had done for them they demand a king eventually the Lord will provide a king will provide a king for his people the kind of king we really need for God so loved the world that he sent a king greater than

[29 : 09] Samuel king Jesus a king who doesn't take from his people but who gave himself up for us a king who took our place in the dock and laid down his life for us a king who perished so we don't have to and king Jesus who died was raised to life and we're told that he is at the right hand of God always interceding for his people a king from whose lips we are to seek instruction he's the one to whom God wants us his people to listen so it's not about our performance after all it's about Jesus' performance so don't back yourself turn back to Jesus what does this look like well for some of us here this morning perhaps you've been having a good week and when things are going well there's a temptation that creeps and we begin to think that we can back ourselves well you need to keep on preaching the gospel to yourself keep on seeking instruction from

Jesus' lips by opening your Bible and listening to what King Jesus has to teach us day by day through his words for others of us here this morning it means not despairing at your sin but turning back to God embracing the grace and the new start that's on offer to you not running away from God but repenting of your sins and so perhaps for some of you this morning you need to stop backing yourself stop trying to carry that unbearable burden and admit to yourself perhaps even for the very first time this morning that you need King Jesus as Lord and Saviour of your life don't back yourself turn back to Jesus don't go on yourself but keep going on with him let's have a moment of quiet reflection before we carry it all to the Lord in prayer so heavenly father faithful

God as we consider all the great things you've done for us through your son the Lord Jesus Christ we want to thank you for the king who perished on our behalf though he lived a perfect life took our place in the dock we thank you that in the in king Jesus we have one who is constantly interceding on our behalf thank you that you are not surprised by our failings and sin but that you have offered the gift of grace forgiveness full and free to those who no longer back ourselves but entrust ourselves wholeheartedly to the perfect performance of your son great is your faithfulness great is the gospel glory be to Christ amen to the might not even but no