November 21/22, 2015

When Followers Don't Follow

Courage to Lead Series

1 Samuel 8:1-22

Pastor Bryan Clark

Video excerpt: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

So, that's the big question we want to wrestle with this morning. Is that true? That if you get everything that you want, you'll live happily ever after? That depends! If you have a Bible, turn with me to 1 Samuel 8. If you're visiting with us this morning, we're studying the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel and we find ourselves up to chapter 8 this morning.

In chapter 7 the nation of Israel finally reached a point of brokenness. There was confession of sin. There was repentance, and there was genuine revival, which ended in God giving them a great victory, which then led to peace and prosperity in the land. Literally, it is the first time this generation had ever experienced that in the land.

If you look at the way chapter 7 ends, it's the typical formula for the ending of a judge's cycle. If you go back to the book of Judges, it's the story of many judges. At the end of each judge cycle, that's how it ends. It indicates that, even though Samuel continues to be in the story, the period of the judges officially comes to a close at the end of chapter 7. Starting in chapter 8, we technically start a new season, which is the beginning of the monarchy, which will take us to the story of Saul and into the story of David.

It's a little hard to date some of this stuff. Most scholars date it around the battles; that's a historical thing—easier to pinpoint. Approximately thirty years have passed from the end of chapter 7 until the beginning of chapter 8. It's a good reminder that there are large time gaps in all of these stories, where we know nothing that has transpired. So, thirty years later we pick it up. Chapter 8, verse 1:

> **And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; *they* were judging in Beersheba. His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.**
>
> (*NASB, 1 Samuel 8:1-3)

So, thirty years have passed—thirty years of relative peace and prosperity. But now Samuel is growing old; probably sixty-five to seventy years old is about where Samuel would be. We learn that Samuel has appointed his sons as judges in Beersheba, which is about fifty-seven miles south of Ramah, right down by the southern border. But then we learn that his sons did not walk in his ways. As a matter of fact, the description of them is very similar to Eli's sons. They use their spiritual position for personal gain. They were dishonest; they perverted justice, and they used and abused people.

There are a lot of questions that come out of this—questions about what happened to Samuel's sons, why are his sons so much like Eli, and what's happening with these leaders? There's really no commentary on that; we really don't know. Did Samuel know that his sons lacked character? Were they rebelling? Is that why he sent them out of Ramah? Why did he send both of them to the same location in Beersheba? Was it to hold one another accountable? Did he know they were corrupt

and perverting justice? It seems almost for sure he had to have known that because all the elders knew. It's hard to imagine he didn't know. There are a lot of questions in the Samuel story. So, what's going on here?

One question we might skip by (a detail in the story) is that Samuel appointed (set up) his sons as judges. Now, we might not think much about that. But it's helpful to understand when you go through the book of Judges that every single judge was called by God. No human appointed a judge. The judges were the political, military and spiritual leaders. That was God's call. So it's interesting for the first time we actually have a human (Samuel) putting his sons in a position of being a judge. We find ourselves wondering: *Should he have done that? Did he have the authority to do that? Why did he do that?* What we do know is that, clearly the spiritual condition of Samuel's sons becomes a focal point in the story. There's no question that if his sons were not appointed as judges, if somebody more godly was in a position of leadership to transition into the story, it would have gone differently. So it is a big deal.

Thinking about Samuel appointing his sons to transition into leadership reminds me that as a parent, I am not objective about my kids. It's really helpful as a parent to start there. There is no parent that is completely objective about their kids. We're just not! It's helpful to realize that's true. Now, that's not a bad thing! The rest of the world will be very objective about my kids. I don't necessarily want to be. I want to be wildly optimistic about my kids. I want to celebrate my kids the way God celebrates *me*! That's part of my job as a parent. Nobody else in the life of my children is going to do that like their parents. That's part of the fun, and I think it's part of the calling. So that's a good thing. But it does create a problem when I start putting my own children in positions of spiritual leadership. Whatever was happening, Samuel appointed his sons as judges and they were not spiritually qualified for that role. It created very disastrous consequences for Israel.

One of the trends I see that's been happening for several years (and I'm concerned it will continue to happen), is that you have a lot of baby boomers (I'm on the tail-end of the baby boomer thing) who are in large churches. They have a lot of influence. They've achieved some level of celebrity status, and they control these churches. They reach a point where it's time for them to transition out, but they are so determined to control the church that they install their own sons as their successors. It's happening all over the country and, in more cases than not, it becomes disastrous. It's a helpful reminder that the church of Jesus Christ is not a family business. The church belongs to Jesus. It's up to the godly leadership of the church to prayerfully, carefully, consider whom God has called to lead His church. I think that's a dangerous model when we start putting our own kids in positions of spiritual leadership because we're not objective about our kids. So that creates the problem that the elders now have to respond to. Verse 4:

> **Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."** (Vs. 4-5)

So, there's no question. The problem that brings up this conversation is that Samuel is old, which is going to happen. But, his sons have now been put into positions of leadership to be the heir apparent to the leadership roles. They do not walk in Samuel's ways. They do not follow after God. They are abusing and using and corrupting the people. In Israel, there was no such thing as a young elder. Elders were always elderly. So, there's absolutely no question that these elders had lived through the disaster with Eli and his sons. They had experienced the heartache; they had experienced the grief, and they had experienced the thousands of lives lost. So, they had every right

to be concerned. As a matter of fact, they *should* be concerned. The problem is they reacted; maybe we would say *overreacted*. They should have come to Samuel and said, "This is my concern. What do we do? Let's ask God," and moved on from there. But rather, what they determined is, "We want a king like the Gentiles." When the text says *like the other nations*, literally, the Hebrew is "like the Gentiles."

Now, understand, there's really not a problem with a king. As a matter of fact, early in the story of Abraham we're told that there will come a king. We're told in the laws. Deuteronomy 17 actually has the qualifications for a king, for how to do this, and for how to establish a king. That really wasn't the problem. The problem was deeper than that. The problem was in their motive. They wanted an earthly king like the Gentiles. The model that God had established for the Hebrew people is: "*You are to be a called out people. You are to be holy* (to be "other than" the rest), *that you would have one God. I will be your God. You will be My people. You will walk in obedience to Me. I will pour out My blessing on you. And by that, all the other nations would know that the God of the Hebrews is the one true God".* So, the whole model was established around a theocracy with God as king, and they would be "other than" the rest of the nations.

The elders are rejecting that model. They're tired of being different. They're tired of being "other than". What they're asking for is, "We want to be like the Gentiles." (There are enemies on all of their borders. We find out later in the chapter that they're fearful about that.) "We want an earthly king. We want a human army. We don't want to live by faith; we want to live by sight. We want to be like them."

This is very helpful in thinking about our Christian lives. There've been very few cultures in the history of Christianity where people have had the luxury of being able to live out their Christian lives with one foot in the kingdom of God and one foot in the world. We happen to live in such a culture. As Christians, it is the most frustrating way to live. God has called us to be a "set apart" people. He's called us to be holy. The word "holy" basically means "other than the rest of the world," that we would be different, that we would be out of step, that we would represent God, that we would represent God's ways and God's value system, that we would travel the narrow path, even though the majority would travel the wide path. That's our calling as Christians.

If you've travelled that path, you well know it is a difficult assignment. Over time people grow weary of being different—weary of being "other than" the rest of the world—different beliefs, different values, a different purpose to life. We begin to think, "Maybe I can pull this off with one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom of God!" James said, "*If you make yourself a friend of the world, you have declared yourself to be an enemy of God."* John says, "*You can't have two lovers. If you love the world, then you don't love the Father."* Jesus said, "*You can't have it both ways."*

So there is this reminder that we must choose. Which is it going to be? Perhaps the most miserable of all is to try to live with one foot in both worlds. The elders of Israel are saying, "We don't want this anymore. We're taking what God wanted (God's model) and we want something different." There's no question that's what they're asking for because that's what God identifies. Verse 6:

> **But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel** [the Hebrew word for "displeasing" is literally the word "evil." It was *evil* in the sight of Samuel] **when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they**

have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them." (Vs. 6-9)

There's no question that Samuel takes this personally. They have rejected Samuel. So God comes along and says to Samuel, "*Samuel, they haven't rejected You. They have rejected Me as king."* He goes on to say, "*This has been the pattern of My people since the time they left Egypt.* The pattern, the default mode, has not been to be faithful. God is saying that the consistent pattern of the people of God has not been primarily faithfulness with a little bit of rebellion. He's saying that the pattern has been primarily rebellion with seasons of faithfulness. It seems like each generation has to learn this the hard way! What He's saying to Samuel is, "*Listen to them! The only way they're going to learn is if they get what they want. And they're going to find out this is disastrous, which perhaps, then, will turn their hearts back to Me."* That's what God is saying. It's very interesting that Samuel, obviously, takes this personally, and God has to talk to him about that. Then God comes back and says: *But, because they've rejected Me as king, that does mean, secondarily, that they have rejected you!* And, Samuel is feeling that.

I think this is very helpful for all of us who take seriously our call as leaders. Remember, in our Samuel study we're defining spiritual leadership in very general terms. If you're serious about being a Christ-follower and you desire to influence others for Christ, you are a spiritual leader. There would be a desire to think that if we are a spiritual leader, we just want to help people travel down the path of life and that everyone should love us. The reality is: that is not going to be the case! As a matter of fact, God just said the default pattern is rebellion. There's a wide path and a narrow path. Even among the people of God, the default position is more likely to be rebellion than submission to the way of Christ.

The language here is the idea of God as king. This is the exact same language as Genesis 3—of determining to practically function as your own god. If it's true that you're seeking to influence people for Christ, the likelihood is high that they're not going to want that. They're going to want to set themselves up as their own king. They're going to want to practically function as their own god. In rejecting Christ as King, secondarily they're rejecting you and your influence. I think as leaders, we feel that deeply. If you're going to take seriously your call to influence others for Christ, one of the things you have to accept is that people are going to break your heart again and again and again. You find yourself again and again wanting more for people than they want for themselves. Sometimes that's very hurtful. As a matter of fact, we tend to take it personally that *we've* been rejected. I have to tell you, if you take it personally, you will not survive. You just won't. You have to understand: it's really not about *you*. It's deeper. It's more profound. They want to be their own god. They don't want Christ as King. They're rejecting Christ and, secondarily, you feel that. It's about so much more than *you*. It helps, if you're going to make it and survive, to realize that it isn't personal. It's deeper and it's more than that.

When I signed up to be a pastor, I think there were a lot of things about spiritual leadership I understood. Like, "I think I understand what I am signing up for." But there are a lot of other things I didn't understand; I didn't realize, "This is what I'm signing up for?" One of those things is that I did not realize how many people would reject me simply because I'm a spiritual leader!

Several years ago we were going through something and I remember saying to Patty, "When I signed up to be a pastor, one thing I didn't calculate is how many people would end up hating me!" I mean, when you think about it, I just want to help people. That's my calling. I want to be a good

pastor. What I hadn't anticipated is how many people would end up rejecting me and hating me—who would falsely accuse me...who, if I had a big moral failure, there would be dancing in the streets in certain circles. I didn't know there'd be entire blogs written to destroy me. I didn't know that there would be a website that has existed for years for the purpose of taking me down. I didn't anticipate any of that—but I should have! Jesus couldn't have been clearer! "*They hated ME; they will hate YOU. They rejected Me; they will reject You!"* He was very clear about that. So I think for all of us together, to understand: if you're going to be serious about your call as a spiritual leader, you have to know there will be those who will break your heart, those who will reject Christ's rule in their lives. As a result, they will reject your influence in their lives. It's not personal. You have to see it that way or you're probably not going to survive.

In verse 9, He says, "*Listen to them."* In other words, "I'm going to give them what they want. But you better warn them; there's going to be the cost … ." When the text says: *And tell them of the procedure...t*hat Hebrew word translated **procedure** is the Hebrew word *mishpat*. We've seen this word in the Proverbs, the Psalms, and Amos. It is typically translated "justice". It's a little tongue-in-cheek in this text. *This will be the king's version of justice.* That's what he's saying. Verse 10:

> **So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. He said, "This will be the procedure** [the justice] **of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place *them* for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and *some* to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give *them* to his servants. He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use *them* for his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."** (Vs. 10-18)

What's happened is that they have pushed God as their king and that model to the sideline, and they've asked for a human king, like the Gentiles. So he goes through this warning of, "*Okay, if that's really what you want, you need to know this is what you're going to get."*

The way this text reads is very dramatic in the original language. In the original language, what's going to be lost is always at the front of the sentence (we would say "the emphatic", the emphasized part of the sentence) followed by the line, **He will take.** So, it basically reads like this: *Your sons...he will take. Your daughters...he will take. Your servants...he will take. The best of your land...he will take. Your crops...he will take. Everything you have...he will take. You, yourself...he will take.* It's very dramatic to the people where they will finally reach a point where they will cry out to God for mercy because life under their king has become unbearable. And God says, "*In that moment I will remind you—this is what you said you wanted, and this is what you got."*

This is very interesting to think about. This isn't just because Saul would be their king. This is talking about what happens when God is King, when God and His ways and His values are moved to the sideline and the ways of the world come in and rule the day. This isn't just about something that happened three thousand years ago. This is what's happened to every nation of the world throughout history when God—God's values, God's morality, God's influence—gets pushed aside

and we set ourselves up as our own gods, whether that's a king, whether that's a dictator, whether that's a democracy. People without God are not, by nature, generous and benevolent. People without God are, by nature, selfish. And the more power people get, the more they use that power for themselves.

This has *always been* true. It *always will* be true. This is not political. This is not about Republicans. This is not about Democrats. This is not about a president. It's not *political*; it is *theological*. Theology affects everything, *including* politics. Think of it this way: the more we, as a nation, push God—God's ways, God's morality, God's values—to the sideline, then we, ourselves, choose to practically function as our own gods, and the more our culture is going to come unraveled. You can feel it now! It's coming unraveled in almost every pocket of our culture. You have this feeling of desperation. Something's wrong. Those in power will do what is necessary to try to control what is wrong. They will take...and they will take...and they will take...and they will take...and they will take! No country, no culture that exchanges what God wants for what man wants thrives. God is benevolent. God is generous. We are never more free, we're never more happy, we're never more safe, we're never more protected, we're never more prosperous than when we choose to travel God's path. The farther we push God to the sideline, and the more we choose to do it ourselves, there will be less freedom...less prosperity...less joy...less meaning...less purpose...less happiness.

Now, if that's true, then it's also a reminder that the solution is not political...*the solution is not political*! It never has been. It never will be. The solution is *revival*. Revival is not the responsibility of government. It *is* the responsibility of the church of Jesus Christ. *We must take our responsibility seriously*—down in the trenches, at the grass roots, one by one, people choosing to submit to Christ as King. Little by little that changes a culture. The only way a church is going to experience revival is if individual people experience revival. What is true of a nation is just as true of an individual. When you choose to submit to Christ as King, by faith, you will never be more free...you will never be more prosperous...you will never more happy...you'll never be more joyful. You'll never experience more than when Christ is rightly positioned as King. When you push Christ to the sideline and choose practically to function as your own god, as your own king, because you want to be more like the world around you, it will be less of everything—less freedom...less joy...less peace...less prosperity...less of everything. Revival starts one person at a time, surrendering to Christ as King.

The text story ends with a warning, that this is what people are going to get if God gives them what they want. We'd love for this story to end with the people saying, "Whoa! We changed our minds. We want God to be our King!" Thirty years ago God defeated the Philistines without a single soldier and brought peace and prosperity to the land. But thirty years later there's an entire generation that is determined to learn the lesson all over again for themselves. So, verse 19:

> **Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to 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, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD's hearing. The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and appoint them a king." So Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."** (Vs. 19-22)

We'll pick up the story next week as we begin our search for the first king of Israel.

Essentially, what God just said to Samuel is, "*I am going to give them what they want, because it's the only way they will learn and, hopefully, experience the disaster of their choices in order to turn back to God*."

There are a couple of things to think about as we wrap this up:

One, it's very clear from this text that the role of a spiritual leader is to tell the truth. It is to lovingly, caringly warn people of the consequences of their choices. The role of a spiritual leader is not just to silently love someone down the path of destruction. You don't have to badger them; you don't have to condemn them; you don't have to work them over. But at some point you have to have courage enough to genuinely care and say, "I see you're traveling down this path, and I just have to tell you that if you continue down this path, God says it will lead to disaster." It takes courage to be a spiritual leader because sometimes you have to have the hard conversations and tell the truth.

We're also reminded from this text that the pattern will be for people to want to be their own king, to be their own god. When they reject Christ as King, you will feel that. It will feel like you, yourself, are being rejected. What you have to remember is that this isn't personal. There's a deeper thing going on. *Because they've rejected Christ, I'm going to feel that*. You have to remember it's not personal, or you're not going to survive.

Lastly, this idea that the majority—that the pattern through history—has not been that the people of God are primarily faithful and occasionally rebel. It's that the default pattern is that the people of God are often more likely to rebel, and it's more the exception of those who surrender to Christ as King.

If that's true, that would mean that there are probably those here this morning where that has been your choice. You've decided, "*I really want to run my own life. I want to be my own king. I want to be my own god. I want to call my own shots."* We do that because we're convinced that life will be better. That's what you wanted—now, you've gotten what you wanted! So, my question would be, "How is that working for you? Are you happy? Are you fulfilled? Are you satisfied? Are you joyful? Are you prosperous? Do you go to bed at night with a smile on your face and get up in the morning with a sense of meaning and purpose to life? *This is everything that I dreamed life would be*!

Maybe you *did* get what you wanted. But if it hasn't turned out to be what you thought it would be, maybe it's time to rethink that. Maybe life surrendered to Christ as King is where you're going to find the life that your soul longs for.

Is it true that if you get everything you want, you will live happily ever after? It *is* true, as long as you learn to want the right things.

> *Our Father, we celebrate Your goodness, Your patience, and Your faithfulness. Again and again and again You have demonstrated that You are such a patient, loving, forgiving God. Lord, I'm sure there are those here this morning who thought what they wanted was a life with themselves in charge. But, Lord, it hasn't turned out to be such a good thing. Lord, my prayer would be that today, he or she might rethink that decision and perhaps everything that their soul longs for can be found when they surrender to Christ as King. In His name we pray. Amen.*

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When Followers Don't Follow

Courage to Lead Series

I Samuel 8:1-22

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Have you ever been rejected as a leader? What happened? How did it feel?

2. Do people who get everything in life they wanted live happily ever after? Why or why not? Do you have a personal example?

3. Jesus said we must count the cost to follow Him. We must die to ourselves to find our life in Him. To be holy means to be set apart, other than, the world. What does that mean in very practical terms and why is it so hard to do? Do you sometimes grow weary of being "different" in this world?

Bible Study

1. Read I Samuel 8:1-3. How is Samuel's situation similar than Eli's situation and how is it different? Why do you think Samuel appointed his sons as judges and why do you think he failed to deal with their sin?

2. If you look at Eli's sons and Samuel's sons what do you think is the risk of functioning as a spiritual leader? What makes spiritual leaders especially vulnerable to abusing their role for personal gain?

3. Read I Samuel 8:4-9. What are the people asking for and why? Why does Samuel consider the request evil? What does it seem like they have forgotten from chapters 4-7 now 30 years later?

4. According to God, have the people rejected Samuel personally or have they rejected Samuel because they've ultimately rejected God? How does this help us as spiritual leaders to process those who seem to reject our leadership? How do you discern if the issue is that people are rejecting God or if our leadership has been ineffective?

5. Read I Samuel 8:10-18. God is going to give the people what they ask for but there will be consequences to their choice. What will come with an earthly King? What is bound to happen when God is rejected and human leaders fill the void? Will human leaders and governments be generous by nature or will they ultimately take for themselves by nature? What are the ramifications of this with a nation, church and in our individual lives?

6. Read I Samuel 8:19-22. Does God sometimes give us what we long for in order to discipline or correct us? Has this happened to you? Explain.

Application

1. To follow Christ requires that we walk by faith. Sometimes the road ahead seems dangerous or unfulfilling so we're tempted to react by taking back control of our lives. What have you learned from this text to help you navigate these moments in life?

2. How do you avoid making the mistake of the Israelites in insisting on something that ultimately makes you miserable? What can we do to respond well to difficult circumstances but not react into a bad decision?

3. What does it mean to trust God with all your circumstances right now in your life? What would be a good response and what might be a bad reaction?

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