

# 1 Samuel 8-12

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[ 0 : 00 ] We do turn to 1 Samuel 8. We're looking at four! We've seen programs, doesn't there, documentaries on Blair and Brown and on the Cameron years.

Quite fascinating. And it is amazing to watch those times back of when Tony Blair swept to power in 1997. And then David Cameron and the kind of new conservatives, they kind of came to power. And then do you remember Jeremy Corbyn? He's an elderly man in charge of the Labour Party. He was very, very popular, wasn't he? I remember being at Ealing Broadway. There were queues right the way down Ealing Broadway, absolutely packed.

And in all those three instances, people got so excited, didn't they? So excited about Tony Blair. So excited about David Cameron. So excited about Jeremy Corbyn.

Now, regardless of the way you line up politically, we know how it will end in those stories, don't we? One way or another, politicians, it always ends in disappointment.

[ 1 : 26 ] And buried in that initial excitement is some need, isn't it? Some intrinsic need amongst human beings, in every human being, to have someone to lead.

Someone to look to, someone to trust. Somebody who will take care of us. Someone who in some physical form can lead us into an age of blessing. And yet, whoever you think that is, there are zero chances of that really happening.

Not one of us would want to make them king, would we? We know, don't we, that even good leaders don't necessarily mean good sons.

But that is what Israel wanted, that Dawson read. They wanted a king. A king who would provide them with safety. And the reason is because at this point in Israel's history, it's at a point when Samuel has been the judge and the leader of Israel.

And he's now coming to the end of his ministry, the end of his life. There's lots of gray hairs. His best days are behind him. And Samuel has installed his two sons, and they have proved themselves to be an absolute disaster.

[ 2 : 42 ] Added to that, the Ammonites are encircling them. And devour them. So the future feels very, very uncertain. Now, you may be feeling that tonight. Will I ever get married?

Will I ever have children? Will my career take off? Will my health tests come back positive? And the temptation for you and I is to forget that God is king, and that he can be entrusted in whatever journey lies ahead.

You'd already proven that. Remember this morning, 1 Samuel 5-7? And wherever God's ark went, death and destruction followed amongst the Philistine cities. And there wasn't even an Israelite in sight, was there?

God did it all by himself. He proved that he was king, and he will secure his own glory for himself.

Thank you very much. But from chapter 7 to chapter 8, you turn the page, well, it's on the same page, but it's 20 to 25 years have passed by.

And we are now into the next generation. And they've started to forget. Sin always begins with forgetting what God has done.

[ 3 : 53 ] And they have forgotten what God has displayed. He's displayed that he was king. And so in their insecurity and in their vulnerability and their fear, it turns into sin.

And so they ask for a king because they did not trust God as king. Now let's pick it up in chapter 8 in verse 4. Then all the elders and Israel gather together.

And there's a united front. They're unanimous. From all the 12 tribes. And they come to Samuel at Ramah. And they say to him, verse 5, Behold, you are old.

And your sons do not walk in your ways. Now, appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.

At one level, it shouldn't surprise us. In Deuteronomy chapter 17, and even earlier, there was an expectation that kings of Israel would arrive. And it wasn't Samuel they are rejecting.

[ 5 : 01 ] In the end, we discover it was God because God was their king. And to want a king, that key phrase, like all the nations, they want a king who will lead them into battle and victory.

And it sticks in the core of God. A God who had already displayed that he was king, and he didn't need one Israelite to defeat his battles for him. That's chapter 5 to 7. And it was not only wicked and evil and profoundly mistrusting of who God is, but it was also stupid.

Because if you want a king, you're going to get stuck with his sons. And do you remember the sons of Eli? And do you remember the sons of Samuel the priest? Both sides of sons were idiots.

So you want a king, you're not just getting him, but you're getting everyone that follows him. And in verse 6 to 8, God interprets their request, and he lets them know exactly how he feels about it. But when they said this, give us a king to lead us, verse 6, the thing displeased Samuel.

And Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, Obey the voice of the people, in all that they say to you.

[ 6 : 26 ] For they have not rejected you, but they've rejected me from being king over them.

According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them out of Egypt, even to this day, they've forsaken me, and serving other gods, and so they are also doing to you.

Samuel takes it personally, doesn't he? But God says to him, the issue, Samuel, is not that they were rejecting you, even though you're wounded, even though those words sting, the issue is they're rejecting me as their god, as king.

Now there are three main characters in one Samuel. Samuel, there's Samuel the prophet, and then it's Saul, and then it's David. But the main character on every page of the Bible, and in one Samuel, is God.

And he is king. And he is the one that they are distrusting. And sometimes we take things too personally. Sometimes in Christian ministry, we take things too personally.

And very often the reason that we don't share Jesus more often is because we feel the rejection rather than seeing that Jesus is rejected. I think the problem is that we make ourselves the main character in our lives.

[ 7 : 52 ] Don't know me as I studied it this week. We make ourselves the main characters in our lives. We ought to be like John the Baptist. John the Baptist said, Jesus must increase, and I must decrease.

And so, you are not the main character in your life. Jesus says, you exist for his glory. And if we had that more clear in our minds, then we might be a little bit more bold, won't we?

Because we'd be less concerned about our rejection, and more jealous about his glory. Well, be that as it may, they ask for a king like all the other nations, and it's a flat-out request for idolatry. It's an unusual account of idolatry in many ways. To be fair, normally in the Old Testament, it's worshipping Baal or one of the other gods that was on offer.

But this was a classic case, isn't it? At the core of idolatry, it's when you place something other than God as the object of your worship. When you invest your trust and your hope in a human instead of God.

[ 8 : 56 ] And it's instinctive to all of us, a fallen instinct. An idol is something that you trust in more than God. Or rather, someone or something you trust to save you from danger or harm, and ultimately hell itself, rather than God.

It's a question of who you trust. It's a question of who you love. It's something or someone you love more than God. And it's a question of service. Who is it that you serve or are enslaved to instead of God?

So sometimes our idols in and of themselves are not wrong. Sometimes they are wrong. When you worship a God other than the Lord Jesus Christ, that flat-out idolatry, and it's evil, and there's nothing commendable about it.

But it can be right the way through to taking illegal drugs. There's nothing in and of itself commendable in that. But your idols, I expect, are far more sophisticated than that.

It's when you turn a good thing given to you from God, and you treat it like it was the ultimate thing. Wanting a king in and of itself was not wrong.

[ 10 : 07 ] God had made it part of his purposes within his plan. Ultimately, it would anticipate the king of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. But wanting a king and investing your hope and salvation in

that king is what made, in and of itself, something not evil, evil.

Wanting it and not God to save you. And then wanting a king like all the other nations. And so if you know anything about the Bible, anything about that covenant between God and Israel, who chose this people from among all the nations to be his people.

So that they could be a light to the nations rather than a mirror. And they were supposed to be different. He was a holy God set apart from other gods.

And they were to reflect that by being a nation set apart from other nations. The more they looked like the world, the less God would stand out. And they would get in the way of God being glorified. The New Testament puts it in this way. It says, you cannot love the world and love the Father. You will love one and hate the other. But you can't love both.

[ 11 : 29 ] And so God's people, as part of our DNA, are to be countercultural. We are always, always swimming upstream with our culture.

It's one of the reasons why we say no to the pleasures of sin. Hebrews 11 and 25. Moses said, no to palace life. Do you remember? In Egypt. Easy life with Pharaoh.

He resisted the fleeting pleasures of sin. It's a really interesting way of putting it. It recognizes, of course, that there are, there is a degree of pleasure in sin, but it's fleeting.

It's here today and it's gone tomorrow. And what is pleasure today? Flips and turns into enslavement tomorrow. Just ask any of the people here who have been addicted to pornography. Pleasure flips into enslavement so quickly. And the other reason we say no to the fleeting pleasure of sin is not that God is a killjoy, but it's that his pleasure runs deeper.

[ 12 : 40 ] And his pleasure is longer lasting and more satisfying. But there'll be no joy in the pleasures of God when you have one foot in the world and one foot in his kingdom.

That's the problem. when you live in a kind of state of permanent compromise, you have the worst of two worlds. And so try wanting to live for Jesus and feed yourself with a diet of Netflix.

I'm telling you, you can't do it. You will not know the joys of God's pleasure because you've turned up the volume of the world and you've turned down the volume of God's word.

J.K. Smith, James Smith, has done some really helpful work on how we are being disciplined 24-7 by our world. Are your children, if you've got them, are being disciplined by our world 24-7?

24-7. I get 30-35 minutes from you in the morning and maybe 30-35 minutes in the evening. Maybe you get to house group.

[ 13 : 56 ] Possibly you're reading your Bible. But make no mistake, you are being preached at 24-7 by the best preachers in the world. People who sit down in offices in London and New York and they work out how to sell you stuff you don't need.

How to make you feel that you need these things. to make you feel that you're missing out. And Israel feels like she's missing out.

So they come up with this bright idea. Israel says, Samuel, you're old. It's not gentle, is it? There's a new generation on the scene. Times have changed and we have a cool new idea called kingship.

3,000 years on, we can't believe it, can we? They think it's going to work. A request for a king is such a slap in the face of God. A God who had demonstrated that he was in charge.

So what does God do? God hands them over to their foolish desires. That's what he does. Out of love. So you reap what you sow.

[ 15 : 01 ] You reap what you sow and then finally you wake up and repent. And God in his kindness doesn't just give them it, he warns them. So look at chapter 8 in verse 10. So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from them and he said, these will be the ways of the king who will reign over you.

You'll take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. He doesn't hold anything back. He's a very faithful prophet. He told them rather than leading them into victory, the king will lead them into sin and rather than protecting their sons, the king will enslave them.

And rather than liberating them, the king will exploit them and rather than the king being a blessing that you think he will be, he will be a curse and you will regret this idolatry. And rather being a king who will give, give, give, give, give, he will take, take, and take, and take, and take, and take.

And he'll bleed you dry. Chapter 8, verse 15. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and he'll give it to his officers and servants. And the most lovable warning is in verse 18.

And in that day you will cry out because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves. The Lord will not answer you in that day. We think of Jesus leaning over to Judas saying, the one who hands the son of man over, it will be better if that person had ever been born.

[16:36] Don't do this, Israel. Don't do this. You will regret it. But of course they do it. And after the warning, and then we all received warnings from somebody who's got the guts to say something when we just thought we were smarter than everything else.

Here's a picture. Verse 19. But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. Samuel. Do you see yourself in this?

This will end in ruin. No. We want a king to rule over us. And this is how they picture this world, this future world. They want to be like all the other nations.

Verse 20. We want a king who will lead us and will go before us and fight our battles. Didn't they read chapter 7 of 1 Samuel?

And so they reject the word of God from the prophet of God who would only be consistent and faithful in speaking it to them. It's the classic definition of a biblical idiot.

[17:48] A fool. And I see myself in this. Because somehow I think that I am wiser than God. Somehow thinking that my way is better than God's way.

That my plan is better than God's plan. That somehow my common sense and the common sense of the world that's the best way of moving forward in this situation. Preferring to follow people on the broad road that leads to destruction rather than staying with the narrow road that leads to life.

Now I understand I particularly want to speak to our young people I understand that you might feel that you will be missing out if you put Jesus first. And I felt that growing up in church.

That I would miss out if I really put Jesus first. But I want to say to you tonight let the film play itself out. Let the movie run to the end of the film.

Because what you miss out on is a quota of pain in this world a part of pain in this world but a greater pain in the world to come.

[19:05] You might miss out a little bit in this life. But you will not miss out in full. As if you feel like you're missing out now that's exactly what Israel felt like in 1 Samuel chapter 8.

We want a king like everybody else. How come we don't have one? Well God gives them a king that they ask for. The very name Saul means asking.

And there's a pattern here isn't there? Can you see the pattern? The first Messiah will be Saul. And the pattern is he is chosen by God and he is anointed by the prophet Samuel and he is empowered by the Holy Spirit and he has victories in battle as a result of that.

And he is recognized by the congregation of Israel to be their king. And that pattern will be replicated by David and all who follow him. And a thousand years later that pattern will be replicated with Jesus for Jesus himself was chosen by his father.

He was, as it were, anointed by John the Baptist, the greatest of all the prophets. He was filled by the Holy Spirit and empowered by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. He was thrust into battle with Satan, the ultimate enemy and he defeated him.

[20:19] He was marked by signs and wonders and then he was recognized by the crowds in large numbers. And so when Jesus comes you read the gospels and you think, wow, there's a lot of things that remind me of Saul and David and maybe he is the one.

So give us a king like all the other nations. Well, Saul was that man. And he was exactly what they wanted and he gave them, God gave them a class, a type A worldly king.

He was literally outwardly impressive. He was a foot taller than everyone else. He physically stood out. And so the people were impressed by the outward but not the inward.

And I mean, right through 1 Samuel you'll see that God is interested in the heart. But they are interested in appearances. They're superficial to a T.

And so outwardly here is this very impressive man but inwardly he's a scared little boy isn't he? And there's this moment where Samuel calls him out to give Israel the king they've asked for.

[21:27] And in chapter 10 in verse 22 there's a lovely little scene. So they inquired again of the Lord. Is there a man still to come?

And the Lord said, behold, he's hidden himself among the baggage. It's funny, isn't it? Here's the man that they've decided to put their faith in.

Here is their champion. Here is their great saviour. Here is the one who is a foot taller than everyone else hiding in the bags fearing that someone might ask him to be king.

There's your idol for you deaf, dumb, and scared. The one who is their king hiding in the baggage. And the only time Saul is useful is when God's Holy Spirit comes upon him and empowers him reminding us that he had nothing to offer.

The only thing of value in Saul was the spirit of God in him. That led him to battle with the Amorites and give victory. And eventually Israel comes to a brief moment of clarity on this.

[ 22 : 32 ] And you get to chapter 12 and there's this final farewell speech by Samuel. And it reaffirms God's covenants, God's promises, God's commitment to his people. And he says in chapter 12 and verse 20, And Samuel said to the people, Do not be afraid.

You have done all this evil. That's how God views their acts. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.

And do not turn aside from empty things, worthless things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. Do you notice the emphasis there? Empty things.

Empty things. God who gives and gives and gives and gives and they want a king who takes and takes and takes and takes.

1 Samuel is your classic example of idolatry. You can go anywhere in the Bible, but I want to say this is the classic expression of where people have invested in something other than God and they've turned it into an idol.

[ 23 : 40 ] And the hard thing for us tonight who follow the Lord Jesus as our king is we don't quite see idols in the same way because it's not an object that you worship and pray to.

You are a bit more sophisticated than that. But here is another form of idolatry that I think we do connect with. And that is putting your trust in something other than God.

I wonder what is your idol of choice? What is your idol of choice? So here it is. It could be as simple as the car parked outside.

I doubt it is that you live for and you love that car. I doubt it. It could be the person sitting next to you. But you can't really slide anything into that box and everything I'm about to list here in and of itself are good things.

But here are potential idols for you. Your hobbies, your sport, your friends, your comfort, your lifestyle, your job, your bank account, your house, your savings, your lifestyle, your looks, your approval, your health, your strength, your skill, your shape, your respect, your business, your intellect, your cool, your culture, your lover, your kids, your church, your ministry, your reputation.

[ 25 : 14 ] Every single one of those things that I've just mentioned is a good gift. It's a God-given gift. But what idolatry is, is it is taking a good thing and making it the ultimate thing.

So how do we know? Let's go in the last couple of minutes sniffing around for clues that I've turned a good thing into an idol. Here are five clues. clue number one is this.

When you're prepared to sacrifice your God-given priorities for that thing or that person. When you're prepared to sacrifice your God-given priorities for that thing or that person.

So you see it when you put work for family, Facebook for prayer, sport for church. none of those things are wrong.

But to deal with it, you either need to get rid of it or put it back in its place. And stop treating it as an idol. The second clue is when you are a slave to something other than God, you become enslaved to it.

[ 26 : 34 ] So you know the thing that gets your best time? The thing that gets your best money? the thing that gets your juices running?

We tithe our hobbies and pleasures and lifestyle, but we give loose chains to the kingdom of God. The third clue is when that idol captures your imagination.

You know, the thing that you spend most of your time thinking about, what you think of as your default thing, the chances are what you think of, that is your idol or certainly a potential idol.

The fourth clue is this, you will resent anything or anyone standing between you and your choice of idol. choice of You will resent anything or anyone standing between you and your choice, your idol of choice.

And that could be Jesus or it could be another Christian. Another Christian who names and exposes your idol. I find they often come in the name of a spouse.

[ 27 : 53 ] And so my wife makes the odd reference to me looking at my iPhone. And I have to say it is right, it's an idol. It takes up too much of my time.

My relaxation time, the distraction is unhelpful. And of course when she says that phone is an idol, I don't respond by saying of course darling, yes, thank you for pointing that out.

I really appreciate that. The fifth clue that you love something more than God is this, that when it gets threatened, you are devastated.

So we all know it in the little child, don't we? The little child was a scratch on their toy, absolutely broken hearted, a mark on the outfit, you go ballistic, pimple spot on your face, you get depressed. A sickness in the family, can I say it, even a death in the family, a rejection in a relationship, and you're not just hurt and grieved and wounded, you are shattered.

[ 29 : 11 ] Maybe it was a comment or a missed out on promotion, a sacking or a session, and you're shot to pieces, can't cope with it. Maybe somebody says something of you, or thinks something of you, or even which you've reacted in a way that's damaged your reputation, and you just can't cope with it.

I saw a beautiful counter-example of this a couple of months ago. Jan is not here, I don't think he's watching, he's in South Africa. But Jan was dropped from the first team in the rugby.

And I met with him the following morning, I'd met with another one of the players who'd been dropped, who was absolutely furious, and spent 20 minutes telling me how terrible the coach was and evil, all the management were. But Jan didn't do that.

He refused to badmouth the coach, he was as friendly as he normally is, and he said for me this, he said, Paul, it's what I do, not who I am.

It's what I do, not who I am. And what it showed me is that his job was not his idol, it was just a job. So encouraging to me.

[ 30 : 30 ] Because one of the big challenges of my heart as a minister is not turning ministry into an idol. Somebody said in a conference I was at this week, if you can't walk away from it, there's something unhealthy.

Start to divine yourself by the role, and in doing ministry you can feel safe and secure and comfortable. You see, it is allowing a good thing to become the ultimate thing is when it turns into an idol.

And a substitute for trusting God. I think this kind of sermon actually needs lots of talking through and lots of thinking through. There may be questions you've got for me, but I do want to encourage you to talk to others about it.

And to think about it. Because John Calvin rightly says that the heart is a factory of idols. And all these good things have either the potential for rearing up and becoming something that they shouldn't be.

And so there will be some cases tonight where you need to get rid of them out of your life. Or in other places you need to get them back in place. Like a well-trained dog. Sit there.

[ 31 : 45 ] Sit there. Sit and don't become my idol. Well, if Jesus is your king, we are going to celebrate now a God who gives and gives and gives and gives.

And who doesn't take and take and take. And as we come to the Lord's table, this meal is for you. But if Jesus Christ is not your king, this meal is not for you.

If Jesus Christ is not Lord of your life, if you are not part of his church, we want to ask you not to take the bread and not to take the wine, but to pass it along to the person next to you.

Don't be embarrassed about that. We respect you for doing that. But if you take the bread and the wine, you are saying that Jesus Christ is my king.

He is my Lord. And I will follow him.