

INTRO: At the tender age of 23, a godly young man felt a strong internal calling to become the next pastor of Holy Trinity Church, near Cambridge in England. There was just one little problem standing between him and his calling. The congregation didn't want him...at all. They had their heart set on a previous assistant pastor name John Hammond. In those days, the congregation didn't have the power to appoint their own minister. That was up to their regional bishop. But the congregation could angle for it. So they set up John Hammond with a lectureship that would pay his bills. And back then in Cambridge, that would have been the only way their minister could pay the bills. With that move, the congregation thought they had Hammond firmly in hand. But their bishop wouldn't budge. In fact, their bishop actually appointed this 23 year old upstart. His name was Charles Simeon. And the congregation was slow to take a liking to him. Really slow. In those days, you rented a pew at church as a way of supporting the ministry, and the ends of the pews had little doors on them. For the first 12 years of Simeon's ministry at Holy Trinity, the congregation put locks on the pew doors so no one could sit down to hear him preach. Simeon had benches brought into the aisles at his own expense, only to see the churchwardens haul them out. Most 23-year old pastors would have taken the hint. But Simeon persevered through the hardship. Long story short, he eventually won their respect and conducted a faithful, fruitful ministry there for 50 years.¹ They rejected him. But he did not reject them. That is what gospel faithfulness looks like, and we're about to see it from both God and Samuel in 1Samuel 12, page 233 in your pew Bible.

1Sam 12:1-5 *“And Samuel said to all Israel, ‘Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. Here I am; testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.’ They said, ‘You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man’s hand.’ And 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 said, ‘He is witness.’”*

This is not so much Samuel's farewell as it is a transfer of judicial power. Samuel has been functioning as both prophet and judge. But now that the nation wants a king, Samuel's function as judge is coming to an end. He will still function as prophet, but Saul will now function as commander in chief and head of state. It's been clear since chapter 8 that Samuel thinks this is a bad idea; even God Himself takes it as rejection of His own divine kingship. So here in 12:1-2, Samuel puts the onus on the people. Samuel is obeying their voice in giving them a king, maybe implying that they are disobeying his voice in cautioning them against a king. Yet it's still the prophet who makes the king. God's word still creates and regulates human authority. Saul doesn't appoint Samuel. Samuel appoints Saul.

Yet Samuel also knows a transition is needed. He's getting too old for this, his sons are not exactly paragons of virtue, and Saul is something to behold. For better or worse, Saul is the future, and as reticent as Samuel is, he's resigned to it. The people are gonna get what they asked for, against Samuel's better judgment. But this transition is not because of any corruption in Samuel's character or conduct. He challenges them to prosecute him for any bribery, fraud, or extortion. He uses the word “taken” three times. What have I taken...taken...taken? In ch 8, that's what he told them their king would do—take and take and take. Samuel has taken nothing from anyone, unlike Eli's sons, unlike Samuel's own sons, and unlike the king they're crowning. So in part there's a feel of “Don't blame me for what's coming down

¹ Derek Prime, *Charles Simeon: An Ordinary Pastor of Extraordinary Influence* (Leominster, UK: DayOne), pp.46, 220.
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the pike.” But something else is going on here. Samuel is about to go from defendant to prosecutor, so he is also establishing his credibility. He himself is not guilty of corruption; the people are guilty of treason.

1Sam 12:6-11 “*And Samuel said to the people, ‘The Lord is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous deeds of the Lord that he performed for you and for your fathers.’*” What Samuel is about to say is a pleading of a lawsuit. He’s going to plead God’s case of perfect faithfulness to Israel, and he’s going to prosecute Israel for treason against God as their king. He’s pleading with Israel, before God, about God’s covenant faithfulness as Lord. God has given them zero reason to seek another king, while they have given God every reason to seek a different people. Samuel is not pleading for them to not have a human king—that ship has already sailed. He’s pleading for them not to forget their ultimate king, their covenant God.

Samuel rehearses the history in v.8 “*When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the Lord and the Lord sent Moses to Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. But they forgot the Lord their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them. And they cried out to the Lord and said, ‘We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.’*” And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and SAMUEL and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety.” Whenever you were in trouble, who did you cry out to? The Lord. And who did the Lord send? First prophets, then judges; never kings. Your fathers never demanded to have a particular kind of human leader; God just provided the right king at the right time, in answer to their cry for help. But when God saved his people, they forgot Him. Today you’re getting a king; don’t forget the God who gave him to you.

1Sam 12:12-18 “*And when you saw that Nahash the 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.*” Apparently Nahash was a looming threat before chapter 11, maybe even before chapter 8. He’s one reason they wanted a king. But a king would be different. Prophets sent you God’s saving word. Judges executed God’s saving will. But a king...a king is redundant. You already have a king. God is your king. God never needed a human king to save you before. But the dye is cast. V.13 “*And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked [this wasn’t my idea, this is all on you]; behold, the Lord has set a king over you. [this is not my doing. If it were up to me I wouldn’t do it. But God is allowing this. God is the one setting Saul over you today, which means the Lord is still governing this arrangement as your ultimate King.] If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well. But if you will 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 and your king.*”

God is still your king. The Ten Commandments are still His composite command for you. The first commandment is still in effect—no other gods before me, even though you’re doing today what your fathers have been doing for centuries—forsaking me and serving other gods (8:8). And you are still his special people, different from all the other nations, even though you want a king to make you like all the other nations (8:20; contra Ex 19:5-6). Your bread is still buttered on the same side, even though you’re asking for a human king. God is still your king; you’re still dealing with him...and He is still dealing with

you. You might walk away from Sinai (Ex 19:5-6), but the God of Sinai is not walking away from you. **You are not out from under God's rule, just because you decide to serve a different king.**

V.16-18 “*Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the Lord, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking for yourselves a king.’ So Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people **greatly feared** the Lord and Samuel.” God sees, and he is not pleased. Wheat harvest was in the dry season, late May-early June. Rain during that season in the Middle East would be like a July blizzard in Key West. And rain would damage your wheat. Rain, on the day of wheat harvest, in response to the prayer of a prophet, is an unmistakable sign that you’re being judged for what you’re doing today. Your king is going to cost you. Yet look at the sign. Israel’s True King—the God they already have—controls the atmosphere as part of his arsenal! How much more powerful a king could they want? And **the rain makes the truth dawn on them**—what we’re doing is evil. And now they fear God and Samuel both.*

V.19 “*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 this evil, to ask for ourselves a king.’ They finally get it, and they fear for their lives. What have we done? And if God flooded our fields, then he could bury us for this, literally. But Samuel doesn’t stick it to them. He comforts them. First, he comforts them in their relation to God, and then in relation to Samuel himself. *And Samuel said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the lord with all your heart (DT!). And do not turn aside after **empty things** that cannot profit or deliver, for they are **empty**. For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.’*”*

Yes, what you did is as sinful as you fear. But God is also more faithful than you think. He has given you your king. You can’t take back what you’ve done; but you can keep worshiping and serving and trusting the Lord. Keep the Ten Commandments, not just outwardly but inwardly, “*with all your heart.*” Keep trusting in God, not in empty things like kings and armies and alliances that can’t benefit or save you. Those things are big nothings. God is still your everything, your great Benefactor and Savior. And be assured, though you are inclined to forsake God, he is not inclined to forsake you, because His faithfulness is not dependent on yours. He’s not faithful to you because you are faithful to Him. No, God’s faithfulness is rooted in something deeper and more independent—his commitment to His own glory. God has voluntarily staked His own name and glory on His faithfulness to you. And then Samuel appeals again to Ex 19:5-6, “*because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.*” What is the root and reason for God’s relationship to them? His pleasure, not their performance. This is a freely chosen faithfulness, totally sovereign, totally independent of our merit or demerit. God remains faithful to Ex 19:5-6 even when Israel would rather walk away.

But the people had not just feared God, they also feared Samuel. It was his prayer that brought the rain. So now, after comforting them in their relationship with God, Samuel comforts them in relation to himself. **1S 12:23-25** “*Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. **Only fear the Lord** and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.” Samuel is just as accountable to God as they are. So if he quits praying for God’s people, if he quits teaching them God’s ways, then he’s*

sinning against God right along with them. After all this, God is not quitting his people, and neither is Samuel. But they have a responsibility. Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully. Why? First and foremost, because of the great things he has already done for you in the past, and because of his patience with you in the present. But also, because of the bad things he could do to you in the future.

POINT: We should fear God because He is both good and stern. God delivers and disciplines. He saves, and he sweeps away. Our sins against Him have left us in no position to dictate our terms to him, or to tell him how we think he should save us. So we should not presume on His goodness or test his sternness.

Should We Fear God? Samuel says in v.14 *If you will fear the Lord...it will be well.* But in v.20 *“Do not be afraid.”* And then again in v.24 he says *“only fear the Lord.”* To fear or not to fear—which is it? In v.20 they’re afraid God is going to strike them with the same lightning that struck their wheat. Samuel is saying they don’t need to fear that. God’s not going to strike them down today, even though they deserve it. But that doesn’t mean that have no reason to fear anything at all. In vv.14 and 24, the fear is not fear of immediate demise, but a healthy fear of God’s authority and power in light of both his goodness and sternness with His people. We fear God because we *“consider what great things he has done FOR you,”* not against you! We fear him because of the favor he has shown us contrary to all merit. Our relationship with God, and our blessing from God, is a stewardship. God’s generosity engenders accountability. At the same time, we fear him because *if you still do wickedly, you and your king will be swept away.* We fear him because of his goodness, and we fear him because of his severity to those who remain unrepentant. **Matt 10:28** Jesus tells his own disciples *“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* **Hebrews 12:28-29** *“Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.* Be grateful for the kingdom—that’s God’s goodness—and thus offer God reverence, for our God is a consuming fire—sternness. Same God, same goodness, same sternness. The same God uses both past blessing and future warning as motives for us to take him seriously.

One of the lessons we learn here for ourselves as a church is that **we trust in our heavenly king over against all human means.** That’s what Samuel is pleading for in 12:7—trust in God’s faithfulness, not your own plans and schemes. It wasn’t that having a human king was categorically wrong. It’s what they wanted that king do do—fight their battles and make them like any other nation. It was trusting in the king rather than in their God. That’s what’s wrong. That was the empty thing they were not to turn and trust. The churches are tempted to trust in empty things still today (12:21). We’re tempted by the latest ministry and music fads, programs, pragmatism. We’re tempted to make the church look like the world so that the world will like us. We are tempted to let the culture press us into its mold so that we can look successful and feel accepted. But God doesn’t want the church to be like the world. God wants the church to be a counter-culture. That’s what he wanted Israel to be in Canaan. But they wanted to blend in, precisely so that they would not stick out. And that is the church’s temptation today—to blend into the cultural landscape so we don’t stick out. But Jesus still wants us to be a city on a hill whose light can’t be missed on a dark horizon. The way we do that is by trusting and obeying God and his word in the way we go about being a local church. We hold the line on biblical truth and holiness, and we trust God to bless. As soon as we quit doing those things, we lose our authority as ambassadors of Jesus.

Authority among God’s people is never inherent. It’s always derived from God’s word. Saul as king did not appoint Samuel as prophet. God, by His word through Samuel, appointed Saul. Saul had no authority apart from his own obedience to God’s word. And as we’ll see, as soon as he rebelled against

God's word in the way he led, he lost his authority to lead. This is true among the churches and their elders. Elders only have authority insofar as they lead the church by following God's word themselves and feeding others on it. Congregations should generally follow godly leaders who preach and obey God's word. It's normally good for a congregation to submit to its elders, and normally bad for them to resist. That's what we see here. Samuel warned Israel not to demand a king, but they did it anyway, and it wasn't good. Rejecting godly counsel will prove regrettable in the end, even though you thought you knew what you were doing when you rejected it. But as soon as I start preaching myself, and not God's word, get rid of me. Fire me. As soon as the elders begin leading by personality and popularity rather than God's word, it's time to find new elders. The reason is that authority among God's people is never inherent in the leader; authority always comes from obeying, teaching, and applying God's word rightly.

God loves his people simply because it pleases Him to do so (12:22). *“The Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, for it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.”* Why did it please him? That is what God leaves to himself. All we know is that it wasn't because of us. **Dt 7:7** *“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, [then why was it that God set his love on you?] but it is because the lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.”* God doesn't love you because you are who you are. He loves you simply because He decided to love you, because He is who He is. It pleased him to love you because he decided to be pleased by loving you. That's it. And that is why he won't forsake his people—because His love for them is not based on them. It's based on His own sovereign, free decision to love. And that is why...

God is more faithful to His people than we are to him (12:22). *“The Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake...”* He has publicly staked his own glory on his faithfulness to His people. He cannot forsake his own people anymore than he can forsake his own splendor and reputation. Christian, take comfort in God's faithfulness to the church, and to you. His love for you is not rooted in his response to your love for Him. It's rooted in his own unchangeable purpose to magnify his own splendor in the world by loving His people despite their sins. But that security should not excuse our sin; it should motivate our loyalty to God and our obedience to His word.

When God's people admitted their sin and evil and fear of punishment, Samuel said in v.20 *“Do not be afraid, you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.”* Now, **if God is this gracious with his old covenant people, then how much more grace is there in Christ for us, His new covenant people?** (D.R. Davis). We have all done very evil things—ungrateful things, dirty things, mean things, dishonest and unfaithful things, secret things, things we can't take back or do over. Those are sins, instances of our own rebellion against God's rule over our lives. But our sins are not the last word. We have done all these sins. Yet...yet if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Why? Because “we have an Advocate with God the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.” And he invites us, come let us reason together. Though your sins are as scarlet, I will make them white as snow.

Come everyone by sin oppressed there's mercy with the Lord. And he will surely give you rest by trusting in his word. For Jesus shed his precious blood rich blessings to bestow; plunge now into the crimson flood that washes white as snow. Only trust him, only trust him, only trust him now; he will save you, he will save you, he will save you now.

As it's often been said before, there is more grace in Christ than sin in you. His blood can cover your worst sin, your oldest sin, your most recent sin. Yes, Sinner, you have done all this evil. Yet..., do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. Your sin is not a reason to leave the Lord. Your sin is a reason to return to Him for mercy, and cleansing, for grace and peace. The Christian is not a person that never sins. The Christian is the person who keeps on taking God's side against their own sin, and keeps turning back to the Lord by confessing their sin, to serve Jesus afresh in humility and contrition and love. Christian, did you become a Christian by faith, only to stay a Christian by works? No. You stay a Christian in the same way you started—by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. That's what Paul says in Galatians 3. You foolish Galatians [Illinoians]! Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" He says the same thing in Col 2:6 As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Continue as you began, Christian—not based on your own performance, but based on God's promise to you in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, this is why pray during the Lord's Supper as we do. "We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for our wrongs; remembering them now grieves us; the burden of them is intolerable to us. Have mercy up on us, most merciful Father, for Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Forgive us all that is past. And grant, most merciful Father, for His sake that we may hereafter serve and please you in newness of life, by living a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of Your holy name." It's a new beginning. And that's why we normally recite our church covenant after we've taken communion, as a re-commitment to our covenant promises to each other. Why can we do that? It's not because our good stuff outweighs our bad stuff. It's because Jesus' good stuff outweighs our bad stuff. It's because God is merciful and gracious to us in Christ, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness to those who fear him, to those who take refuge in Him, to those who call on Jesus' name as the savior He is.

Jesus is our praying and teaching High Priest (D.R. Davis). Just as Samuel would never stop praying for Israel and teaching them, so Jesus will never stop praying for us and teaching us. Jesus is not only our King; He is our patient prophet and priest. This is why he came down from heaven and took our human flesh on his own divine person. He knew we had sinned and offended God. He knew the penalty for that sin was eternal conscious torment in Hell. And so he came to live a sinless human life in our place, to please God for us; and then He died as the sinless substitute penalty for our sin, to appease God's righteous anger and endure His judgment for us. Then he rose from the dead to vindicate His sinlessness, and he ascended to God's right hand to show that God accepts his sacrifice and his ministry of intercession for us. He even sent his Word and Spirit to teach us. So if we turn from our own sins and false-gods to trust in Jesus, then Jesus will never stop praying for us and teaching us. It was his earthly life and sinless death that got us into God's good graces, and it is now his never-ending ministry of praying and teaching that keeps us in God's good graces.

Yes Jesus is the truth the way that leads you into rest; believe in him without delay, and you are fully blessed. Come then and join this holy band, and on to glory go, to dwell in that celestial land where joys immortal flow. Only trust him, only trust him, only trust him now. He will save you, he will save you, he will save you now.