

## Chosen to Serve

1 Samuel 8:4-11, 16-20  
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First Presbyterian Church  
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It is said that Napoleon Bonaparte, reflecting back on his life, made this ... statement on his career in government: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself founded empires; but on what foundation did we rest the creatures of our genius? Upon force. But Jesus Christ founded an empire upon love,” said Napoleon, “and at this hour, millions of persons would die for Him.”<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Israel in the time of the Prophet Samuel, most nations these days are governed by elected official and not kings and queens. In Samuel’s day, the nation of Israel was initially governed by judges who were chosen by God. While Samuel was the first of the prophets of Israel, he was also the last of the judges.

This came about as we just heard when the elders of Israel said to Samuel, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” When they asked this, scripture tells us that Samuel was displeased.

So he prayed to God and God said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.” “Listen to the voice of the people ..., for ... they have rejected me .....,” rejected God. That’s scary. These are God’s chosen people – the nation of Israel that was chosen by God as blessed among all nations – and now we hear them outright rejecting God.

Well, listening to the people of our nation – the people of the United States of America – what’s your conclusion concerning their relationship with God. Are we embracing God in all that we say and do? Or are we also rejecting God?

I don’t know about you, but when I see and hear what’s happening in government and politics these days, I’m pretty certain that by-and-large we are rejecting God. I don’t care whether you are a Democrat or Republic or Independent; a liberal, conservative or progressive; rich or poor or middle class, I’m pretty sure most people on all sides of the aisle and on every step of the economic ladder are concerned. Most people are genuinely concerned that the values and ethics shaping the future of this country are out of whack, that they don’t reflect the values and ethics of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message* (W Publishing Group, 2002), 149.

That's a problem. That's scary. Because if we don't find a way to reclaim the halls of power in this country on behalf of basic human decency, civility among differences, service above self-interest then we don't have to guess about the future. It will be more of the same and worse.

Seeing this, how can we help to instill God's values and ethics into the heart of who we are as a country? Well, on Tuesday, Nov. 8, we will have a say in who our elected officials will be in the midterm elections. That gives you 30 days from today to decide who will be a positive influence on the future of our cities, state, and country and who will not, if that's something you care about. Maybe some people don't care. That also could be a problem.

Consider a certain elderly woman who was being given a cognitive test by her doctor. He asks her the standard question, "Who is the president of the United States?" trying to determine her mental ability. The woman looked at him strangely and said, "Honey, at 101 years old, I don't give a hoot who's President." Needless to say, she passed that cognitive test.

So, yes, maybe if you're 101 years old you get a pass when it comes to worrying about the future. But the rest of us don't. And the upcoming midterms and the presidential-election cycle that follows are important ways for us to at least try to make a difference.

So, how do we do that? How can we be sure we're making a positive difference through the candidates we choose to run this country? After all, this is the same concern that God had with the Israelites, when they were deciding who would rule their nation. Seeing this, God sent them a warning, saying to Samuel, "... You shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

So Samuel told them about their future king, saying, "... He will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day." "The Lord will not answer you in that day." That's a pretty grim warning; the worst. To feel abandoned by God. But that's how many people feel. It's how it looks in many ways in this country – that God has abandoned us.

And yet, as it was with the Israelites, so it is with us. God has not abandoned us; it is we who have rejected God. We fail to hold ourselves and our leaders to a higher standard in keeping with God's will, God's sense of justice, God's divine truth, God's way of being, who God is, and who God is forming us to be.

To faithfully discern which candidates will truly govern this nation in the spirit of godly service, we just have to measure them against what we see in today's scripture lesson. Notice the warning that Samuel gives voice to concerning the future ruler of Israel. "He will take you sons ..., take your ... slaves, (take) you cattle and donkeys ..., take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slave."

Take, take, take, take. Those are the people to watch out for. Those are the people concerned more with their own power and glory than they are with truly serving this nation, being faithful to the interests of others and the interests of all the world. It's not hard to tell the difference between the takers in this world and those with hearts set on selfless service. If we listen to what they say and watch what they do and measure it against who we know God to be, it becomes clear who is ready to serve in a goodly manner.

God is a giver. God blesses the lives of others. God offers grace and mercy. God brings peace and justice. God provides for all who have need. God guides us in the spirit of wisdom and discernment. God shares with us power and responsibility. God trusts us to work for the good of all people, all creation.

Given such freedom of choice and the responsibility to serve, let us not be like the misguided Israelites of Samuel's day, who responded saying, "No, but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations," other people.

We are not like other people. Because of our love of Jesus and devotion to the Lord, we are blessed to be God's people. And as God's people, we are called to listen to God's word, letting it guide us and rule over us, in all our decisions, both great and small. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, you are deserving of the very best we have to offer – the devotion of our hearts, the place of honor in our priorities, and the first fruits of our labors.

We welcome your Spirit, knowing that in so doing, we abandon control and open ourselves in faith and trust to your purposes and plan, rather than our own.

We are humbled by your gracious presence among us. Who are we in light of your sovereign majesty? You who formed us, you open to us the riches of your kingdom.

Your love and mercy, forgiveness and peace, comfort and protection are not withheld from us, but are poured out in abundance. Thank you.

Thank you for loving us with an everlasting love. Renew us and heal us by that love that we might live as your beloved children.

We pray your spirit of comfort and healing upon those struggling with illness, disease and loss.

We lift up prayers of thanksgiving for those celebrating the greatest moments of life.

And for us, O God, grant us the grace to listen with love, to think with compassion, to pause and consider, so that we might be a person others turn to because of our love of Christ and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**