**SAMUEL’S FAREWELL MESSAGE**

August 17, 2014

1Samuel 12:1-25 / Key Verse 1:23

“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.”

Last week we learned how God established Saul as a king for Israel. God gave Saul powerful leadership to rescue the city of Jabesh in Chapter 11. Saul humbly gave all the glory to God alone. In today’s passage we have the farewell message by Samuel. Samuel had been a faithful leader for Israel during his whole lifetime. Now the people demanded a king and Samuel was old. It was time for Samuel to step down. Samuel gave God’s people and their king good and right direction to make a choice; obey God faithfully with all their heart. To Israel, obeying God is the most serious matter; the matter of life and death in individual and national level. This truth applies to each one of us here as well. May God touch our hearts to take God’s word seriously as a matter of life and death so that we may live according to his words and reflect God’s glory and divine character through our lives!

**I. God’s faithfulness (1-11)**

In verses 1-5, Samuel begins his farewell address to all the nation of Israel. He told them how he set a king over them as they demanded. He had been their leader from his youth until now. As he prepared to step down as their leader, Samuel asked the nation a series of questions: “Whose ox or donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated or oppressed? From whom have I accepted a bribe? If I have done any of these things I will make it right.” Why did Samuel ask Israel these questions? He wanted to be on record that he was faithful to God in serving God’s people. He was not resigning in disgrace or regret. Often times we also need to ask ourselves, “After I have lived my life, how will I be recorded in history especially in God’s history?” I believe that no one wants to be recorded as disgraceful person. But if we want to be recorded as a faithful and authentic man of God, we have to learn from exemplary men like Samuel.

In verses 4-5, they replied, “You have not cheated or oppressed us. You have not taken anything from anyone’s hand.” So 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.” People responded in union that Samuel had been faithful as their leader with clean hand. Samuel did not proclaim his integrity himself but asked the people about it. By people’s confirmation, he had authenticity as a leader and servant of God. Samuel’s integrity was a reflection on God, just as children are a reflection on their parents. As children of God, we all should be like Samuel who lived before God and men with clean godly character. Then people around us and our children will be influenced by us and find God through us.

After the people recognized Samuel’s unblemished record as their leader, Samuel moved on to give them a history lesson. In verses 6-11, Samuel briefly mentions from the birth of the nation of Israel and how they had repeated rebelling against God and when they repented, how God delivered them until now. After their ancestor Jacob entered Egypt, originally they had been enslaved by the superpower nation Egypt for 400 years. They seemed to have no future hope because of their slavery. But God raised Moses and Aaron as leaders to bring them out of slavery to the Canaan land where they were currently living. It was a marblous work of God which no other nations have had in their history. But after Israel enjoyed a time of freedom from their enemies, verse 9 says, they forgot the Lord their God. They turned from obeying God to following the false gods of the Canaanite around them, including the Baals and Ashtoreths-the gods of agriculture, food, fertility and sex. So God sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Moabites who fought and defeated Israel. They thought they were free to do whatever they wanted without God’s restrictions. But without God, they became slaves of their enemies again, just as they were in Egypt. It was God’s discipline for their rebellion. In verse 10, Samuel recounts how they repented and cried out for God’s deliverance, and God sent them leaders we read about in the book of Judes; Jerub-Baal (Gideon), Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel. According to verse 11, God used these leaders to deliver Israel from their enemies on every side so that they lived securely once again. Here, we see a cycle happening in Israel’s history: slavery, crying out to God, God’s deliverance, secure life, rebellion against God. In actuality, this is not only Israel’s case. All human beings are very vulnerable to repeat such cycle. Only those who learn personally from the past history lesson don’t repeat same mistake.

**II. A Servant Shepherd for God’s People (12-25)**

After giving Israel a history lesson, Samuel begins to address their current national situation. In verse 12, Samuel recounts how they responded when they recently saw Nahash king of Ammonites moving against them. They did not cry out to the LORD for protection as they had in the past. Instead, they came to Samuel and demanded a king to fight for them and protect them. This fact reveals that even though God had been their king and protected them from their enemies until now, they did not accept God as their king deeply. They envied other nations which had visible human king. Even though God chose them as their own people, they didn’t have clear identity as God’s chosen people. In practical situation, they envied other nations who had seemingly stronger army. In this way they rejected God as their king. But, God did not punish them this time and told Samuel to anoint Saul as their king. Now they have their king Saul as they wanted. However, there was one thing that they and their king should not forget even though they had human king as they wanted. What is it? Let’s read verses 14-15.

“If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his command, 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 father.” Samuel gave the nation and the king a serious charge. It was very much the same as the covenant God gave with Israel through Moses when they came out of Egypt. Israel and their king had a choice: Would they be faithful to follow God – obey his command? Or would they rebel against God’s commands and follow their own ways or the ways of the godless nations around them? It would be good for them to keep God’s ways. They would have right relationship with God and have God’s protection and blessing. But if they did not, God would withdraw his hand of protection and be against them. He would use enemy nations to punish them for their rebellion as he had done to their forefathers. Samuel was not forcing them to behave a certain way. But he was making clear consequences of their choice. God loves us and wants to be with us and protect us. But he doesn’t force us to do so. It comes down to our own choice.

In verse 16-19, Samuel helps the people to see the glory of the LORD; our true king. He said, “I will call upon 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.” It was the harvest time, a time when it did not rain in their land. Maybe there was barely a cloud in the sky. But verse 18 says, “Samuel called upon 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.” In great fear, the people cried out to Samuel to pray to the LORD so that they would not die due to their sin of asking for a king. They asked a king and trusted in him. But could the king call for a thunderstorm like Samuel? Could their king control nature like Creator God? When they realized their foolishness, they were convicted of their sins and they can only cry out to God for his mercy.

When people were full of fear of the LORD, how did Samuel help them? Let’s read verses 20-22. “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 you 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.’” The reason that Samuel called upon the LORD to send the thunder and rain was not to condemn the people but to help them to make a right choice to obey God alone by realizing who the true King is and who the true God is. A loving parent disciplines to show child what is the right way, so he or she may be blessed and not harmed. Likewise, God disciplines his people. What is more amazing is that though they were evil, for the sake of his great name, God would not reject them and he was pleased to make them his own. What a great comfort this was to the people! The reason that the people of Israel was chosen to be his own people was not because they were righteous or better than others but only for the sake of his great name. We call this grace. Our God is gracious, forgiving God as well as holy and righteous God.

Let’s read verse 23. “As for me, far be it from 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.” Samuel had been talking about the people’s responsibility before God. But now he shares his part-his responsibility before God and his people. Samuel was stepping down from his leadership position after a lifetime of serving. We may think that he would have a retirement mentality, “Yes, I am finally free from all stubborn people! I am going to somewhere for my vacation finally!” But Samuel had a never- changing shepherd heart for God’s people. He promised to do two things for the people continually; to pray for them and to teach them what is good and right. Samuel’s commitment to God and his people really reflects the heart of God and his faithfulness toward his people. This is best example for godly men and women to follow throughout their lifetime. Like Samuel, let all who accepted Jesus as our LORD make a serious decision to do two things in our lifetime; To pray for God’s people; both lost and found and teach them the word of God no matter what.

Let’s read verses 24-25. “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 be swept away.” As Samuel concludes his farewell address, he summarizes what the people should do from now on. First, “fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart”. He said this earlier in verse 20. Here ‘fear’ means our ‘awesome reverence’. God is worthy to receive our awesome reverence because he is the Only Sovereign Ruler over this universe and history and every single person and he is the one who gave life to us and saved us from the enemy’s hands. The Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (wisdom) but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” And in fear of the LORD, we must serve God faithfully through persistent prayer and Bible study and teaching like Samuel.

In North American Christianity, it is considered normal to go to a church on Sunday and listen to a message and that’s it. And they feel their obligation to God is fulfilled. Then they spend most of time in serving themselves and some empty pursuit of pleasure-seeking. But this is not serving God with all their heart. Whether we are in school, home, or workplace, we should work to serve God’s will and purpose giving our hearts to God wholeheartedly not half-heartedly in divided heart. Second, “Consider what great things God had done for you”. Human beings are very forgettable. So we definitely need repeated reminders to constantly remember what God has done for us. When we remember what God has done for us, we can have courage and confidence to continue to move on in spite of many challenges and hardship in our lives. Lastly, “They should always remember that if they forsake God in doing evil, both they and their king will be swept away.” This is God’s warning to us as well.

Today we learned Samuel’s farewell address that is full of God’s shepherd heart. For the sake of his great name, God is faithful in loving his people giving the way that is good and right. What was good and right that Samuel taught the people of Israel was to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all their heart remembering what God had done for them. Praying constantly for God’s people and teaching the Bible like Samuel is the best way to serve God. May God help us to devote our heart to God faithfully to the end so that we may be recorded in God’s history as faithful men and women who reflect the image of God! Amen!