

TEXT: 1 Samuel 8:1-22

TITLE: *I WANNA BE LIKE MIKE! THE SUPERSTAR SYNDROME IN SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE A TRAGIC HISTORY OF REJECTING GOD'S LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR A PRAGMATIC, WORLDLY MODEL OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING

INTRODUCTION:

Everybody loves a superstar. Nothing wrong with Michael Jordan ... greatest basketball player of all time. Spawned a whole series of TV commercials – Nike, Gatorade ... you name it ... a whole generation of kids growing up with the mentality: “I wanna be like Mike!” The problem comes when we take a Superstar paradigm and apply it to the realm of spiritual leadership with no regard for God’s revealed model.

- We are going to look at the will of the people back in the days of Samuel when Israel rejected God’s design for theocratic rule and demanded a king like all the other nations around them.

- Then we are going to make application to God’s people today in the context of the local church where God’s clearly revealed pattern of plurality of elder government has been replaced by the Superstar Syndrome of a Senior Pastor model with helper elders.

My thesis will be that these 2 situations (which in both instances became the norm rather than the exception for God’s people) are remarkably parallel. For some reason, God’s people are incredibly blind to the warnings and the exhortations which God provides in this crucial area.

However, God is gracious to continue to work and bless in a program that at best can be called “Second Best.” Deviation in this one area is not a fatal flaw for either the nation of Israel or the local church. There are many other criteria for God’s favor and blessing. However, that doesn’t excuse us from seeking God’s best in this area as well and expecting that despite our natural pragmatic thinking to the contrary, God’s way will actually turn out to be most fruitful when judged from God’s perspective.

I. (:1-3) GOD'S LEADERSHIP MODEL CANNOT BE ESTABLISHED ON THE BASIS OF NATURAL SUCCESSION

A. (:1-2) Samuel’s Transition Plan for Leadership Continuity: Appoint His Sons as Judges

1. (:1) Insufficient Preparation

Samuel waited too long to do the necessary discipling work with his sons
“And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel.”

2. (:2) Mechanical Attempt at Implementation
No appointment by God; no divine calling

Same problem that Eli experienced – his sons lacked the character for the job

B. (:3) Failure of That Plan: Corrupt Leadership

1. Summary: Did not emulate the godly example of their father Samuel
“His sons, however, did not walk in his ways”
2. Root Problem: Rebellion / Disobedience
“but turned aside”
3. Motivation: Selfish gain
“dishonest gain”
“took bribes”
4. Result: No righteousness in the land
“perverted justice”

II. (:4-9) GOD’S LEADERSHIP MODEL CANNOT BE ESTABLISHED ON THE BASIS OF THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

A. (:4-5) The Voice of the People Present a Plan that Sounds Reasonable and Pragmatic

1. (:4) Proper Approach to Appeal to Authority
“Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah”

But inherent danger of democratic type of representative government:

The will of the majority can be at great odds with the will of God!

We need safeguards in a structure where the voice of the people can become More powerful than the voice of God.

What happens when you have the inmates running the insane asylum?

Deffinbaugh: “At first glance, it seems as though only the elders of Israel are demanding a king. As the chapter unfolds, it is very clear that all of the people of Israel are behind this movement to have a king. This indicates to me that Israel is functioning here somewhat as a democracy. Their elders are not leading, as much as they are representing the people.”

2. (:5a) Accurate Assessment of the Situation
“Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways”
3. (:5b) Logical Conclusion Based on Worldly, Pragmatic Model
“Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.”

- A sense that under theocratic rule they were missing out on something;
- A preference for the visible and the impressive over the invisible and the spiritual
- A lack of discernment over the dangers of monarchy
- A denial of their mission to be a holy people ruled directly by God

B. (:6) The Discerning Ear of the Prophet of God Immediately Recognizes Deviation from God's Program

1. (:6a) Immediate Reaction on the Part of Samuel

"But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel ..."

2. (:6b) Mature Reaction on the Part of Samuel

Did not react defensively, but sought counsel from God

"And Samuel prayed to the Lord"

Victor Yap: 'Samuel was feeling deeply hurt, backed into a corner, and disrespected in the worst way. No one came to his defense, all elders had the same thinking, and options were not on the table. He did not threaten to quit or call it quits, announce or take an early retirement, or leave without a word or trace. He didn't think it was necessary, time, or wise, but Samuel did what his mother did, what he saw his mother do, and what he had learned to do all his life -- when he led the revival early in his ministry (1 Sam 7:5), when he underwent this crisis midway in his ministry (1 Sam 8:6), and when he bid them farewell in his twilight years (1 Sam 12:19, 23)-; he prayed. Samuel was attested by prophet Jeremiah as a great man of prayer (Jer 15:1)."

C. (:7-9) Sometimes God Has Had Enough of Rebellion and Stubbornness

1. (:7) Sad Reality of Rejection

"they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them" (Luke 10:16)

2. (:8) Sad Pattern of History of Rebellion

"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."

3. (:9) Acquiescence of the Lord / Yet Graciousness of Warning

a. Acquiescence of the Lord

"Now then, listen to their voice"

b. Graciousness of Warning

"however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them."

III. (:10-18) GOD'S WARNINGS ABOUT LEADERSHIP ABUSE FALL ON DEAF EARS – THE HIGH COST OF KINGSHIP

Deffinbaugh: “The ‘principle of proportion’ is always an important clue to the meaning and interpretation of a text. In our chapter, we know that Israel’s demand for a king is idolatry, idolatry of the same kind Israel has practiced since the exodus (8:7-9). We know that when Samuel speaks to the people, he tells them ‘all the words of the LORD’ (verse 10), but what is written and preserved for us is the content of verses 10-18, which is a detailed description of the costs of a kingship. The cost of kingship is the emphasis of Samuel’s words in this chapter.”

A. (:10) The Complete Disclosure by God’s Prophet

“So Samuel spoke all the words of the Lord to the people who had asked of him a king.”

B. (:11-17) The High Cost of Leadership Abuse

1. (:11a) Government characterized by Dominion Rather than Servanthood

“This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you”

Jesus had to warn the disciples that His pattern for spiritual leadership was completely opposed to the pattern of the Gentile world
Matt. 20:25-28; cf. 3 John

2. (:11b-13) Drafting people into positions of service to benefit the king (including military service)

3. (:14-17a) Taxation to support the administration of the leader

Appropriation of Personal Property (land, animals, etc.)

4. (:17b) Summary: Servitude rather than Empowerment and Personal Liberty

“and you yourselves will become his servants”

Interesting that the Messiah would come to present Himself as the rightful King of the Jews but would be rejected by His own people. He would have none of these negative qualities of monarchy and yet would not be recognized as legitimate.

C. (:18) The Deaf Ear of God When You Realize Your Plight

(the pain of being stuck with your bad decision)

you will have to sleep in the bed which you have made

Don’t put yourself in the position of God saying “I told you so”

1. Cry for Deliverance

“Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves”

Hindsight is always 20/20; Monday morning quarterbacking won’t win any games

2. Deaf Ear of God

“but the Lord will not answer you in that day”

The time to listen and respond is when God is speaking

IV. (:19-22) SOMETIMES GOD GIVES IN TO OUR STUBBORNNESS AND ALLOWS US TO CHOOSE SECOND BEST

A. (:19a) Stubborn Refusal to Follow God’s Plan

“Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel”

B. (:19b) Insistent Demand that the People Know Best

“No, but there shall be a king over us”

C. (:20) Pragmatic Motivation to Trust in the Visible Superstar

“that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

When someone asks? “Who’s the pastor at your church?” We like to say: “Pastor X -- who is very impressive in XYZ” rather than try to explain: “In reality the Lord Jesus Christ is our Shepherd. He is working through a number of undershepherds (pastors, bishops, overseers, elders) who operate under His designated authority and who use their manifold spiritual gifts to provide the leadership and direction we need.”

Cf. modern day statements of justification for Senior Pastor model:

- Any organization needs 1 person at the top of the command hierarchy or nothing will get done
- You cannot have doctrinal unity unless you have one main leader pointing the way
- How can so many churches be wrong? They all have this same setup ... I don’t know of any functioning plurality where anything is really happening ...

D. (:21-22) Closing of the Window of Opportunity

Samuel went back to the Lord to make sure of his marching orders.

The Lord told him to give in to the demands of the people and allow them to settle for second best (which really is a misnomer).

Guzik: “God told Samuel to fulfill the people’s request. This was not because their request was good or right, but because God was going to teach Israel through this. Sometimes, when we insist of having something bad, God will allow us to have it, and then learn the consequences.”

Very sad watershed in the history of Israel. Theocratic rule was never again even an option until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Sometimes do we pray with perseverance and persistence for the wrong things? Has God ever given you what you asked for and then you were distressed with the consequences? Are we careful to pray: “Thy will be done?” Do our children sometimes nag us and try to break down our resistance so that we will just give in? Why did God relent here and let the people have their own stubborn way?
- 2) How does God in His sovereignty bring good even out of our bad decisions and our stubbornness and rebellion?
- 3) What type of tyranny have you been experiencing in your life? Tyranny of leadership of some type... tyranny of your own sinfulness ... tyranny of some form of addiction ... How does God offer deliverance from such tyranny?
- 4) Do you see the same parallel application that I do to church government issues?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Baxter: “So then, the people claimed and exercised what in these days is called ‘the right of self-determination.’ The change-over from theocracy to monarchy was of themselves. God gave them a king and constituted a kingship. The fact would seem to be that Israel had wearied of a theocratic form of government which made their well-being dependent on their right conduct. Perhaps they vaguely supposed that a government under a human king would relieve them somewhat of this responsibility, inasmuch as their well-being would rest more with the character of the government and the qualities of the king himself.”

Davis: “The people persisted in their demands, desiring political compatibility and jurisprudence which would be similar to that of their neighbors. They also wanted a warrior who would lead them against the encroachments of the Ammonites to the east (v. 20; cf. 12:12). Samuel was commanded to listen to the voice of the people and to give them a king (v. 22).”

David Guzik: “Samuel was one of the most godly men in the entire Bible. He is never specifically said to sin. Yet, this may be a sin on his part. We never have the pattern of judges being appointed by men, or of the office of judge being passed from father to son. Samuel was not right in appointing his sons judges over Israel. . .

What was the difference between a king and a judge? A judge was a leader raised up by God, usually to meet a specific need in a time of crisis. When the crisis was over, usually the judge just went back to doing what he was doing before. A king not only

held his office as king as long as he lived; he also passed his throne down to his descendants.

In addition, a judge would not have a 'government.' He was there to meet a specific need in a time of crisis. A king would establish a standing government, with a bureaucracy, which is both a blessing and a curse to any people.

In Judges 8, Gideon was offered the throne over Israel. He refused it, saying 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.' (Judges 8:23) This was the heart of all the judges, and why Israel went some 400 years in the Promised Land without a king."

Deffinbaugh: "Israel is demanding a very expensive kind of government. Samuel seeks to spell out the cost of kingship, and it is amazingly expensive. In order for us to appreciate the high cost of having a king, we must first refresh our memories on how things worked under the rule of judges. In the Book of Judges we see that there is no king, no palace, no standing army. When Israel is attacked, a volunteer army is assembled. In part, this army is supplied by the families of those who fight (see 1 Samuel 17:17-22). There is no 'administration' of counselors, advisors, servants and staff, who support and facilitate the king's reign. In short, the system is informal, ad hoc, and very inexpensive. With God as their King, it works, as we can see in the Book of Judges and in 1 Samuel 7, for example.

In contrast to a 'low budget' system as a means of ruling a nation, what the Israelites are demanding is very costly. To have a king who will go before them and lead them to war is to have a standing army. Once Israel is ruled by a king, life on the farm will never be the same. The king will draft their sons into military service, driving his chariots or serving as a horseman, or as one of the infantry. Some will be drafted as officers. A standing army must also have supplies. Israelite sons will be used to plant and harvest crops and build and maintain military equipment (not to mention all of the non-military supplies required). It is not just the young men whom the king will draft into his service. The Israelites' daughters, who once sat or served at their fathers' table, will now serve the king's table. They will be perfumers, cooks, and bakers."

Victor Yap:

A joke on the management of cows has been circulating for many years under the subject "World Economics," "World Politics," or "World Ideologies?"

Communism: You have two cows. The government takes both, milks them, keeps the milk, and gives you a pint.

Socialism: The government takes one of your cows and gives it to a neighbor.

Fascism: The government takes both your cows and shoots one of them.

Nazism: The government takes both cows and shoots you.

Capitalism: You milk both cows, sell one of the cows, and buy a bull.

Bureaucracy: The government takes both cows, milks them, and pours the milk down the drain.

Frank Gallagher: Christian “Celebrities” - Christians sometimes have a tendency to treat certain believers as “celebrities.” These men might be evangelists, pastors, Bible teachers, writers, and musicians. They sometimes are the leaders of Christian organizations. We can respect such men for the job they are doing, but shouldn’t view them or treat them better than we might treat other believers.

Gordon Runyon: Webster’s dictionary defines “tyranny” as arbitrary or unrestrained exercise of power. We don’t use the word “tyranny” a lot in our own day. We don’t routinely hear people in positions over us referred to as tyrants. (They may in fact be tyrants, but we don’t use the word.)

But the word “tyranny” was pretty common in the political discourse of the day when our nation was founded. In fact, one of the flags that was flown by colonial patriots in the American Revolution said this, “Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.” Or, maybe you’ve heard that quote by Thomas Paine, a professional fomenter of revolution, “The tree of liberty must from time to time be refreshed with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” The Mel Gibson movie, *The Patriot*, set in that era, had his character, a reluctant warrior, say something like, “It remains to be seen whether it is better to be ruled by one tyrant a thousand miles away, or by a thousand tyrants one mile away.” . . .

What I want to tell you is this. We’ve been looking at a pretty sad story, a sad story that is made all the worse in that mankind has repeated it over and over again and suffered for it. But it doesn’t end here. Eventually, God says enough is enough and He does away with the king of rejection, and installs the king of God’s own choosing, David. That is the pattern. Rejection of God leads to tyranny, leads to extreme human suffering, leads to God being moved with compassion to bring deliverance, to bring in the King He Himself has chosen. Tyranny and bondage are the darkest and blackest of nights. But morning comes. With the dawn of God’s mercy, the sun rises and the light shines again. I’m wondering where you are in that pattern. Rejection, tyranny, suffering, the deliverance of God through a new King. I firmly believe that our own nation is moving from rejection into tyranny. Minus a wondrous outpouring of the Spirit in revival and reformation, the night is almost upon us.