

Have you ever played the game where you stand up, close your eyes, and do a trust fall? You're told to just fall back and believe that you'll be fine. And you're to open your eyes when you're told to. Often in a trust fall, the person who says they will catch you comes around and tells you to fall back, only to call to you when they are standing in front and asking you to open your eyes. And in that moment, the person falling has this horrible feeling: who is there to catch me?

We want to have people who are watching out for us. We depend upon good governments to lead us. We want leaders who will watch over us, do what is for the common good, and allow us to live peaceful and quiet lives.

But so often, we find ourselves disappointed in leaders. They let us down. They make bad governance decisions. They make our lives more complicated. If we've seen anything this past year, we've seen how hard it is to trust our governments. We question everything they do. We feel disappointed.

God wanted his people to trust him. And in trusting him as their king, they would flourish. But for various reasons, Israel wanted a king. God had told the people that they would have a king, but the request for a king in 1 Samuel 8 was very wrong headed. Why did God promise a king, yet see the people's request as evil? And what are we to do about trusting leaders in a time when things are so hard?

### **Trust the One Good King**

By the time we come to 1 Samuel 8, we are approaching the end of Samuel's life. He has been a faithful judge over Israel, restoring true worship to all of Israel's life. But as his life approaches an end, Samuel does something that no other judge did – he appointed his sons to be judges. But they aren't full of integrity like their father; they accept bribes and pervert justice, and their behaviours are condemned by the law of Moses in Deuteronomy 16:18-19.

So when the leaders of Israel come together, they express concern about their future. "Listen, Samuel, you're getting old. And your sons – they don't walk in your ways." These are legitimate concerns! Israel has seen what happens with good leaders and bad leaders – good leaders lead the people towards the Lord and experience the blessings of obedience; bad leaders lead the people away from the Lord, resulting in the curses of the covenant.

What's their solution? "Now appoint for us a king...." (1 Sam. 8:5b). Nothing wrong with this request so far. God had promised Israel that he would provide a king for them. From the time of Abraham, God had promised that from him would come kings who would rule over the nations (Gen. 17:6). God had repeated this promise to Jacob (Gen. 35:11). Jacob explained that this king would come from the line of Judah (Gen. 49:11). Even unbelievers could see that God would raise up a mighty king in Israel to rule over the nations (Numbers 24:17-19). And Moses

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had prophesied that God would raise up a king, giving clear instructions on what this king was to be like (Deut. 17:14-20). Even the book of Judges ended with a common refrain – “There was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), implying that Israel needed a good king to lead them in the right way.

So why does Samuel – and ultimately the Lord – say this request is a bad thing?

For Samuel, he seems to take it as a personal rejection. This may be why the Lord tells him not to see it as them rejecting him as judge. What Israel wants is for a king to judge them, not Samuel’s unfaithful sons. The people want Samuel to adopt a son for the service of kingship to judge them, just as Eli adopted Samuel.

But the reason the Lord says it is a bad request is that the people are rejecting him as their king. The people aren’t asking for the king that God had promised. The people are asking for a king SO THAT they could be like all the other nations. Instead of being God’s own people, a people who were a holy nation, a kingdom of priests to reveal God to the world (see Exod. 19:5-6), now Israel wanted to be like the world. They do not want Samuel as judge, they want to replace him with a king as judge. But what happens when God is not the One True King? Three things:

First, the people were supposed to be governed by the Word of God. But instead, they are being governed by what others around them are doing. The pressure to be like everyone else is causing them to conform to the pattern of the world around them instead of being renewed in their minds by God their King and his good Word.

Second, they were supposed to be a distinct people, devoted to the Lord. But now, the people wanted to be the same as others, to fit in.

Third, they were supposed to be a light to the nations, revealing God’s good rule as king. But now, instead of the nations seeing that God is their king, Israel was looking at how they could be like the nations.

Ultimately, Israel is saying that they do not want to identify as God’s chosen people, his treasured possession, his kingdom of priests to mediate his presence to the world. It’s an issue of trust. And whenever we look to the practices of everyone else, when we compare ourselves to what others are doing, when we try to adapt business models to the life of the church, and we are not first and foremost governed by the Word of God, we begin a subtle drift away from the Lord. Our identity has to be rooted in God our King and his sustaining, life-giving Word. How are we being shaped? What word is the primary driver and influence on our lives? These aren’t subtle issues – they are issues that reveal who we trust and who will shape our identity.

So the reason we need God as King is that he is the One we can trust. But second, we need God as king because we need to

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Andrew Hall  
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### Recognize the One Good King

God tells Samuel to warn the people what the consequences would be in choosing their own king who would judge them. Not only would he rule over them, he would become a judgment against them. In vv. 10-18, Samuel describes what rejecting God as king will result in: a king who takes. Over and over, this king will take from you. He will take your sons and put them into battle. He will take your daughters and make them servants. He will take the best fields from you for his own purposes. He will take their servants, cattle, and donkeys for his needs. And he will take their money. And the result: you'll become his slaves (v. 17).

When we fail to recognize God as the One Good King, we will find ourselves in slavery again. The king will take from us, returning us to the very thing we wanted to escape. God had led his people out of Egypt (v. 8), freeing them from the house of bondage and slavery. And now, the people are returning to the slavery; this time it's not in Egypt, but it's in their own land!

By wanting to be like the other nations, Israel is not only rejecting God as their king, forsaking their identity as a kingdom of priests to mediate God's presence to the world, but also rejecting the freedom that God has given them. And this was never God's plan. God wanted to give them a king – a good king – who would not take, take, and take, but who would give.

For this reason, God had described what a good king would look like through Moses. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the Lord had told them what a godly king would be like. First, he was to be chosen by God, who was to be a fellow Israelite, a believer in the promises and Word of God. Second, he was to trust in the power of the Lord, not in military might. Israel had won their battles repeatedly by the Lord's miraculous power – from the deliverance at the Red Sea, to Gideon's defeat of the Midianites with 300 men. Third, he was to be a one-woman man, devoted to his wife, not marrying for political alliances and having their foreign gods influence him. Fourth, he was to trust in God's provision, not in silver or gold. Fifth, he was to have his own personal written copy of the law. So that he would keep, remember, and fear the Word of the Lord so that he would not exalt himself above God, but serve the Lord.

And by so doing, this king would be fully submitted to the Lord, displaying that all power and authority finds its source in God alone. God is the ultimate authority. God is the Law-giver above the law. The king was to be in subjection to God and rule as the servant of the Lord.

But instead of trusting in God as their king, the people want it their way. And when they trust in their way rather than God, the results would be disastrous. Israel's history would be checkered from this point on – good kings and bad kings; kings who would submit to the law of God and kings who would defy the law of God. When Israel would recognize God as their king, things would go well. But when they refused, they would receive a king who would turn their hearts away from the Lord.

### **The Story of Everything: King – 1 Samuel 8:1-9:2**

So Samuel obeys the voice of the people, just as the Lord had told him to do, anointing Saul as king. Saul's name is connected to the verb "to ask" – and the people receive what they are asking. He is outwardly handsome and tall, a man of wealth and outward prestige. And he would start off well, but would ultimately lead Israel into all sorts of trouble.

But all of these things are to help us see...

### **The Glory of Christ**

One day a thousand years later, another king would come along. But he wouldn't be the kind of king who would take and take, but who submitted himself to the law of God. Obeying every word, having that law on his own heart, this king would be asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And his reply was quite simply, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:33, 36). In other words, he isn't like the kings of the nations. If we want leadership like those around us, we will be sorely disappointed. But if we acknowledge Jesus as the One Good King, what we find is that he will never lead us into disobedience. He will lead us into obedience to God, and he will show us the way. The reason he leads us in the way of righteousness is that he is not a king who takes and takes, but who comes to give: "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). He comes to give and give and give. And in the greatest display of power and authority, he gives up his own life. He dies for his people. He rescues them not by sending them to fight for him and serve him first, but he comes to fight and serve them by laying down his life.

And when we see that King Jesus comes not to take and take, but to give, everything about his kingship reorients our lives. Suddenly, the king who comes to us is shaping us to be free people, rescued from bondage and slavery. He comes to deliver us, to keep us from going back to Egypt.

The true identity that he comes to give us is as the people of God who are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pe. 2:9). We are to be governed by his Word. We are to be different from the world. We are to be a light to the nations. We are to stand and watch the Lord fight the battle for us. We are to wait upon him.

Even now, when things are so challenging and hard, we trust his rule. He reigns. And he will come to reign, and when he does, every enemy of his will be put under his feet, just like the promise to Eve said – that the serpent's head will be crushed. And when he returns, he will come riding as the victorious warrior, leading the charge as the One who is the King of kings and Lord of lords.



THE STORY OF  
*Everything*  
LUKE 24:27

Can you trust him? Can you recognize him as your One Good King? He's worthy of praise. So let's follow him.