

“God is Great, but Give Us a King” //

1 Samuel 8 // *The Life of David* #3

Announcements¹

Introduction

1 Samuel 8 if you have your Bibles... I’m reading a great book right now called *The Nineties* by Chuck Klosterman and one of the things he points out is that my generation (Gen X) will probably go down as the generation who experienced the most technological and scientific shifts in history.

Gen X’ers, along with some of the baby boomers, and maybe a few of millennials, X-inneals, they are called, fully experienced the world without cell phones and the internet and then one with those things. You millennials and Gen Z’ers, for the most part, have never really known a world without those things. I know this makes me sound like a cranky old man, but people my age remember how the only place you could get a phone call was at home, and if you were waiting on an important phone call you literally wouldn’t leave your house. Also, if you’d made plans with someone, once you left the house, they were fixed. There was no “running 5 minutes late” or “let’s meet at Chipotle instead of Panera.” ~~(My kids and I are watching some of the *Seinfelds* right now and I keep explaining to them how almost none of the plotlines of *Seinfeld* would work if they had cell phones.)~~

¹ Works Consulted: Tim Chester, *1 Samuel For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading (God’s Word for You)*, The Good Book Company, September 15, 2014; John Sailhammer. *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Skip Heitzig, “1 Samuel 8,” published by Calvary Church with Skip Heitzig, June 10, 2021; Alistair Begg, “Give Us a King,” published on Truth for Life, June 12, 2019.

Any of you Gen-X’ers or Boomers remember when you wanted to go on a road trip, there was no Google or Apple Maps; you had to get one of those giant Atlas maps and spread it out and chart your course (how many marriages almost ended over trying to interpret one of those things? My parents had a good marriage, but man, I remember observing some spicy conversations from the back seat.) ~~Or even worse, you had to ask someone for directions and there was no telling what you’d get, usually somebody just trying to reconstruct the journey from memory: “You’ll see the yellow house, it has this dying maple tree out toward the side, and I think a tire swing, and then it’s the next road after that, I can’t remember its name, but turn there, if you get to Bobby’s Tire Shop you’ve gone too far...”~~ When you wanted to go on vacation, you didn’t research hotels on Expedia and book one, you had to dial up an operator and get the number of a Holiday Inn and book a reservation that way. Or, you just showed up in a city and hoped for the best. You millennials and Gen Z’ers have it so easy. And stay off my lawn!

Another thing we had to deal with was the onset of computer viruses. We didn’t have all the fancy programs to block them that we do now, and because we were all new to this, you were constantly doing dumb things to pick up a virus. Plus, at the beginning of the internet revolution, we were all still so gullible--“What? A Nigerian prince wants to wire me a million dollars? I should at least open up this attachment and check it out!” There was this one virus that would take over your email and start emailing all our friends solicitations for money, or even worse. I got one from Danny Akin requesting a dog sitter, and telling me that if I was willing to do it to wire him my bank account info so he could pay me. Of course, he didn’t need a dog-sitter, he just needed updated virus protection software.

One of the worst computer virus stories I heard was from a friend who was working on his Master’s Degree thesis; he said that he was putting the final touches on his term paper when suddenly he

watched as every single line of his paper methodically turned into a series of X's and O's. His computer had downloaded a virus that systematically erased his computer's entire memory. And this was before google drive and automatic back-ups. His entire paper, which was the grade for the whole class, was gone! He had to start over.

Well, the reason I take you on this trip down memory lane (or, for you younger millennials and Gen Z'ers, this foray into "the land before time") is because Israel's demand for a King is going to function like a computer virus: he promises so much, and looks so innocent and appealing, but when it's all said and done, he's going to take over everything.

Let's start reading in vs. 4. 1 Samuel 8:4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah 5 and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."

That's an important phrase. Let's keep reading: 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the Lord. 7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey 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.

First thing: it was not categorically wrong for Israel to ask a king. This is a common misconception. In Deuteronomy, God had actually told them that one day he would provide for them a king, and Deut 17 even laid out for them the characteristics of the King they should look for.² The problem was not their request for a King, the problem was the motivation behind it; namely, that it came from a place of fear, not faith. They were not saying, "God, we trust you, and we're asking

² The king that God had recommended in Deut. 17:14 was supposed to be a godly man who knew the law inside and out. He was supposed to hand-write the whole Law (Deut. 17:18) And, to note, Israel had already tried to elect Gideon as their king (Judges 8:22–23). Abimelech was Israel's first king and it did not go well.

for the King you promised, but only on your timetable and your choice." No, they felt like they *needed* a King for 2 reasons: vs. 5, we want "to be like the other nations;" and in **verse 20** you get a second reason: "...that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

They wanted a King because when they looked around at other nations, other nations had a King that seemed to provide a **sense of national pride, identity, and gave them security.** They didn't have that. All they had were the promises of this invisible God.

God considered this a rejection of him. They weren't supposed to be *like* the other nations; they were supposed to be different. Set-apart. Fundamentally different from the other nations. Unlike the other nations, they weren't supposed to trust in the size of their army as their security, or be constantly and feverishly trying to accomplish in order to establish their identity and give them a sense of meaning. Their relationship with God was supposed to be the source of those things.

God continues:⁸ According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you (Samuel).

From the very beginning, God says, I've never been enough for them.

Think back to the beginning: Moses went up into the mountain to receive the Law; they had just seen God deliver them miraculously through the Exodus and destroy the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea, and when Moses was delayed in coming back down the people panicked and demanded Aaron make them a Golden Calf so they would have a god to protect them "like the other nations."

As they made their way through the wilderness, they didn't trust God to take care of them, even though he promised he was taking them to a land that overflowed with milk and honey, and every day provided for them miraculously by means of Manna spread out on the ground and gushing water from a rock. They demanded the delicacies of Egypt to be satisfied, like the other nations.

After all they'd seen, they still didn't trust that God was enough!

They are still saying, "We need a King like other nations who can go out and fight our battles!" What's especially ridiculous about this is in the chapters leading up to chapter 8, which we skipped, God had just defeated Israel's greatest enemy by means of a cart and two cows. God had let the Philistines steal the Ark as a punishment for Israel's unbelief and disobedience to try and teach them not to take him for granted. But just as quickly, he brought the Ark back to them. It's actually a pretty entertaining story. After the Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant, they put it in the temple of their god, Dagon. Well, the next morning Dagon's statue was lying face down before the Ark with his hands chopped off. They thought, "That's weird," and they set Dagon back up. Next morning, same thing. Then all the men of the city got smote with tumors. They thought that was weird and random, so they moved the Ark to a different city, and the same thing happened there. Eventually, the Philistines were like, "Get this thing out of our country." So they put the Ark on a cart and attached it to a couple of cows, cows that had never been to Israel, and the cows miraculously walked the Ark straight back to the Israelites. The Israelites didn't do a thing. The Ark just showed back up. It was udder-ly amazing. Get it? Sorry. I had to milk this one. OK, Moooooo-ving on ...³

The point is this: When you have a God who fights for you like this, why are you demanding to have a King, too? That's the entire point of those chapters. On one level, they are pretty silly (and the author

actually makes them sound silly). But they make a serious point: Israel has a God who fights for them. Sure, they have an army, and one day God will give them a King. But they are not supposed to trust in those things, they are supposed to trust in him.

Listen, this is important. **In none of the stories I've shared with you from Israel's history** did they want to totally walk away from God. It's just that he wasn't enough. It wasn't that they didn't want God; it's that they needed something else besides God to feel safe and significant. And God considered this a rejection of him.

Write this down: **Usually, we replace God not by walking away from him, but by adding to him.**

So, let me ask you: Where have you done this? Where have you said, "God is not enough." God is great, but I need something else to ensure my significance and happiness.

- Maybe you've said, "God is great, but I have to have a husband, like everybody else, or I can never be happy..." So you're asking for a spouse, and that's not wrong. What's wrong is that you're asking from fear, not faith. Fear of being alone, unwanted, unloved, and a husband or wife is the only way you can see that happening...
- "God, I have to see some career advancement, like other people." It's not that it's wrong to ask for these things, just that when you can't be happy without the professional advancement or the income increase, that shows you are being motivated by fear. I can never be happy, or feel secure, until I am at this level of income and significance."
- "God, I have to look like this... change my body so it looks like this." There's nothing wrong with wanting to look better. But when that's driven by this fear that I can never feel good about myself until I look like this, like all the other beautiful people..."

³ Thanks, Brittany Riley-Stafford and Erin Piner, for loaning me your humor here. I hope I don't butcher these jokes in the delivery.

- “God, I have to have this healing... I don’t even want to live unless you heal me this way... “ You are being motivated by fear. I can’t be happy or feel secure unless I have *this* in addition to God.

Whatever that thing is that you demand in addition to God is your King.

One of the many problems with the prosperity gospel is that it assumes life can’t be good without physical prosperity, so it teaches you that if you follow God correctly and have faith, he’ll guarantee those things. That’s built on the assumption that the good life is an abundance of those things, which is exactly what the Gentiles think. But God’s people were supposed to be different. They were supposed to say, “God’s presence and promises make me more secure than money; God’s will in my life gives more significance than worldly prominence.”

I’ve told you before, I was watching one of those TV preachers one day and he encouraged the viewers--he actually said this--to give sacrificially to his ministry even if it meant going into significant credit card debt. He said, and I quote, “Maybe you have only \$3000 of available credit left on your credit card. If you give at least half of that to this ministry... and people will be amazed when they see you driving that new BMW with that big smile on your face.” Now, that is abusive and manipulative, but the most dangerous thing is the premise undergirding it: you can only have a smile on your face when you are driving a BMW.

But that’s just like the Gentiles! Who doesn’t smile when they are behind the wheel of a new car? But God’s people were supposed to be *different*. What was supposed to amaze our neighbors is when we don’t have all those things but we still have a smile because we have him.

Like I often say, God is a good God who loves to bless people, and when he does, thank him for it and use those blessings for his Kingdom. But when you depend on those blessings in order to feel significant and secure, and demand them from God, you’ve become like the Israelites in this chapter demanding a King so they can feel safe and secure like the other nations.

In the NT, James calls this praying like an adulterer. (This was in our Summit Bible reading plan last Sunday.) James 4:3: **“You have not because you do not ask.** You are missing a lot of blessings simply because you don’t ask for them. But then he also says, **You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people...!** (James 4:3–4)

- **Sometimes you don’t receive the blessing because you don’t ask. But sometimes you ask and don’t receive because you are praying like an adulterer. What does that mean?** Adultery is when one spouse finds certain delights in someone else he should be finding in his spouse. Spiritual adultery is when you find happiness and security in other things that you ought to find in God. **So how do you pray like an adulterer? E.g. think of a man saying to his wife....** “You’re supposed to find those things in me!” **You pray like an adulterer** when you demand something in addition to God to find the peace and significance and security you should find in God alone. You say, “God, I need *this* to be happy. I must have this! Be this. Experience this.” And God says, “Why don’t you find those things with me?”
- We ought to be able to say, like David, *“The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore I have no needs. As long as he’s close by, I don’t have any anxiety, because he knows all I need and will take care of me. He is enough.”*

Write this down: **Rejection of God is not usually walking away from God, it’s demanding something in addition to God.**

So God considers Israel's demand for a King a rejection of him. **Watch what God says next to Samuel about Israel—because this is what you can expect from any King** you demand in addition to God. This is where you see the computer virus really go to work:

9 God says to Samuel) ...Obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

10 So Samuel said... 11 "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots... 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. 15 He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. 16 He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

18 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 key word in that whole warning is the word 'take:' 13 He will **take** your daughters... 14 He will take the best of your fields ... 15 He will take the tenth of your grain... 16 He will take your servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys... 17 He will take your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

He's going to promise so much. But he's going to take, take, take from you. And, in the end, he's not going to make you secure. The King that they demand, Saul, who is so physically impressive--a great warrior, literally "head and shoulders" above everyone else, will end his life dying in a battle that he lost *against the Philistines*. He failed against

the one enemy they were most afraid of, and wanted a King to protect them against. And, by that point, his administration was wracked with scandal and he'd become a national embarrassment.

He promised so much, but delivered so little. That's what happens with any King you give your heart to instead of God.

Write this down: **Every king but God enslaves. Whatever king you give your life to will take, take, take from you.**

I'm reading this great book right now by Arthur Brooks called *From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life* (which is depressing to me that that's what I'm in now). Arthur Brooks, who is not an evangelical Christian, says that when you have built your **identity on success**, when that's the King you've given your heart to serve, you're in for a miserable life in your 50's and 60's, because you can't go on succeeding at the same pace. You start battling irrelevance and boredom and frustration. He says if you define your self-worth in terms of your job title or professional position, or quantify your success in terms of money, power, or prestige, or if your "retirement plan" to go on and on without stopping, you're fighting a battle which will get more and more frustrating year by year.

Dr. Brooks quotes this accomplished classical musician who said, **"Getting famous is exhilarating. Staying famous is a miserable combination of boredom and terror."** In fact, let me talk with some of you other success-addicts. Success addiction works like other addictions. You medicate your boredom and terror with work. You feel best, because you feel most in control and most valuable when you're working. Your spouse complains about how much you work, but the truth is, *you have to work*. That's when you feel best, most in control, most valuable, most at peace. What drives you, of course, is not a love for work, it's the success and significance and relevance that work brings. Success is where you've built your identity, security and

happiness. But workaholism in pursuit of success creates fear and loneliness--and fear and loneliness need to be medicated, so you medicate fear and loneliness through more work in an attempt to gain the success that will make you feel significant. And then, as your creativity and relevance inevitably start to fade, and people start to look away from you to others, you don't know what to do. So, you just run harder on the treadmill, trying harder and harder to hold onto what you feel like you're losing. That King just took, took, took, and never fully delivered what it promised.

Dr. Brooks talks about people who have achieved their lifelong dream--they won some award, some accomplishment; some position; some contribution they made to science; admirals who won the greatest battles; political leaders who made monumental contributions to human history; you'd think after that they'd say, "I did it. I can just sit on this and die happy." But it never works like that. It leaves you wanting more. Dr. Brooks tells the story of Charles Darwin, whom I know is not us Christian's favorite scientist, but just historically speaking, Darwin made arguably the largest contribution to science in a millennium. Even if we disagree with him on a lot of things, he changed science, and you'd think after that, he'd say, "I'm out!" But Darwin died a miserable man, wanting so desperately to accomplish something more and frustrated that he was no longer at the forefront of the scientific revolution.

Serving success enslaves. It takes more and more and never delivers.

All earthly kings are that way: Addiction to money enslaves. This is basically cliche now in our society. Even secular society recognizes that obtaining money doesn't satisfy your craving for riches. If anything, it makes it worse. Like John D. Rockefeller, who was asked after he made his billions, was asked how much money is enough. His famous answer? "One more dime." The Jewish philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said: "Wealth and fame are like sea-water; the more we drink of them, the thirstier we become."

Romance is that way: I think of the woman at the well in John 4 who has had 5 husbands and still feels starved for love, still searching for that special someone who can make her feel special, and cherished, and safe. Jesus shows us her that just like she drinks water every day from the physical well and ends up thirsty, so she's been drinking of the well of romance to satisfy the deepest needs of her soul and it's left her thirsty, too. **Moviestar Matt Dillon**, after one of his romantic movies had come out, was asked in an interview, why all these rom-com movies work even though they follow the exact same plotline. He said because people are relationship junkies. They go from relationship to relationship because they are really just scared of being alone. And so they give themselves to it out of fear. Matt Dillon said that's what he had done with drugs, and it's the same pattern some people follow in romance. Some of you know this first hand. You are serial daters. You can't be happy, or feel complete or significant, if you're not dating. The arms that you are looking for are not the arms of a romantic partner; you'll never find security in that King. They are only found in God.

All kings, take, take, take and leave you thirsty and exposed.

One special one I want to mention: Samuel specifically warns the people of Israel against putting their hope in human government. Governments are a *powerful* temptation for our trust and our hope.

Let me be clear: **Government is good; God ordained it to fulfill certain essential roles in our society**—to protect the weak, to pursue justice, to prosper our freedoms and to promote the common good. But human governments (of any variety) tend to say, "Put your hope in me. I can ensure peace, prosperity and happiness. I can bring utopia." They call for absolute allegiance because they alone can bring the good life.

Now, some forms of governments wear that claim of totality on their sleeve: trust in me, give up more and more real estate in your life to

me: I'll be your educator; your moral compass, I'll guarantee your prosperity. Give me everything and I'll take care of you." God never designed human government to fulfill all those roles and Christians are rightfully wary of government structures and leaders that want to take everything and create absolute dependence on them.

But regardless of your political position, all forms of human government tend to over-promise and over-demand. All forms of government say that support of its platforms is more important than any other commitment that you have, because it alone can guarantee the good life. Conservatives and liberals in our country disagree on many things, but one thing they agree on is that if they are in power, we can be assured of power, protection, and prosperity. ~~the government as the vehicle~~. And I'm not trying to say that all forms of government are equally bad--some are inherently more oppressive than others and some better pave the way for human flourishing. I'm just saying they all over-promise, over-demand, and then under-deliver, so we should not put our trust in, or give absolute allegiance to, any of them. It's why I often say that Christians should not primarily identify with the elephant or donkey but with the Lamb.

All earthly kings that we demand, whether literal, like an actual King, or metaphorical, like success or money or romance, are going to not only let us down, they are going to enslave us.

18 And in that day (Samuel says) you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

19 But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles..."

22 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king."

Sometimes the only way God can break your enslavement to an idol is to give it to you. In the next chapter, God gives Israel a King. And like I said, he's going to be impressive, good looking, tall, a great warrior. Literally "head and shoulders above everyone else."

One of the saddest phrases in this whole book it says, "*all of Israel's hearts went toward Saul.*" But he's going to disappoint them, bitterly. He's going to take, take, take, just as Samuel predicted. He's going to serve himself to the point that he lies, betrays, and extorts the people for his own benefit. He'll prioritize protection of his position over the best interests of the people. Like all worldly kings, he takes, takes, takes, and leaves them broken.

Can I tell you the most amazing line in this story? 18 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."

VAMP

In one sense, that was true. Israel had to learn some hard lessons through Saul. He left them broken, and defeated, and disappointed. But in another, much more profound sense, God in mercy pulled back from this threat.

You see, through all this, God would create in them a desire for a better King, his King, a King after his own heart. And the first representative, the first symbol of that King is going to be David. But he's not the ultimate fulfillment. The ultimate fulfillment is JESUS. He's the King God wanted to give us all along.

- He was a King utterly unlike Saul. Of Jesus it was said, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45).
- The Jewish people rejected Jesus as King. But unlike Saul, who murderously oppressed those who opposed him, Jesus bore in his body their rejection. He willingly went to the cross under their treason, bearing their shame and suffering. No other King has ever done that. He took my sin and my sorrow, and he made them his very own; he bore my burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone! I wounded him, but through his wounds he gave me life and peace.

I love how Tim Keller says it, **“Jesus is the only King that if you obtain Him, will satisfy you, and whom, if you fail Him, will forgive you.”** **Tim Keller**

- Every other king says, “Please me, obey me, and I’ll guarantee you happiness.” **Money** says, “Find me, and I’ll make you happy.” **Marriage** says that. So does **family and success and fame**. And these same kings say, “Disappoint me, and I’ll make you miserable.” Money says “Fail me, and you can never have a good life.” Marriage says, “Fail to get me, you’ll be lonely and vulnerable your whole life.”
- Jesus is the only King who if you obtain him, will satisfy you, and if you fail Him, will forgive you. He’s the one you’re truly safe with.
- Trust in him.

Let me close with a story I used to tell my kids when they were younger... **Viking King**. I heard it as a true story, but I can’t verify that....

That’s the King you want to trust your life to. That’s the King you want to lean your whole weight on. He’s always faithful. Like David learned to say, “The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore I have no needs. As long

as the Shepherd is close by, which he’s promised always to be, I’m good.”

I’ve quoted a lot of philosophers and historians this weekend. Let me close with one more: **Will Smith, the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air himself, of Chris-Rock-smacking fame. A few months ago I read his biography, and in it he said this:**

I have done hundreds of interviews and been asked thousands of questions... The single greatest question I’ve ever been asked was by my 15 year-old son, who started going to church with his grandmother and asked me one day, “Dad, what do you worship?” Dismissively, I told him, “Of course I worship God, son.”

And then he asked me the second greatest question I’ve ever been asked, “Dad, are you sure?”

Are you sure that Jesus is your King? Is there anything else you have demanded of him; something about which you’ve said, “God is great and all, but unless I have that--marriage, money, success, a great-looking body, health--I can’t be happy. What other king have you given your heart to? Because that King is going to come in like a computer virus and take over everything.

Can you say to him right now, “Jesus, all I need is you. I’ll follow you anywhere, go anywhere you want me to go, do anything you want me to do. All that I care about is that you go with me. As long as I have the Shepherd, I’m good.”

Can you surrender to him that way?

Bow your heads... a relationship with Jesus starts with surrender.