

Immanuel. Reflection for Sunday 11.07.2021

1 Samuel 8 v4-v11 and v16-v20. Mark 3 v20-35.

Two different bible readings which ask us to think about power.

What is a Monarch? A king, queen, or leader, or prime minister, or president is supposed to be a barrier between us and chaos. Anything that threatens to destroy us is chaos. A monarch is a strong wall protecting us from whatever we fear the most: marriage problems, a faltering economy, illnesses, crime, or drugs, for example. A monarch promises to bring order out of chaos. Whatever we are afraid of in this world, there is a leader to tell us why we don't need to be afraid. For Christians, our king is Jesus. He came to give us the protection we need in the form of a restored relationship with God.

The Israelites wanted a king for three main reasons. First, all of the surrounding nations had kings, so the people of Israel wanted a king too. Second, the Israelites were concerned about who would lead them after Samuel died. You see, Samuel's sons were leaders in other parts of the country, but they weren't very good leaders. Third, the Israelites wanted a king who would represent power and security and lead them into battle.

Deuteronomy gave the Israelites the right to have a king as long as they chose a king from among themselves and not a foreign king. This same passage places restrictions on the king to prevent some of the abuses Samuel outlined. The king was not to have many horses or wives or great amounts of silver and gold, and he was not to exalt himself above the people. Human nature being what it is, these restrictions were largely not observed, and sometimes they are not observed today.

The problem the Israelites had was two-fold-wanting to be like other nations and forgetting about God. God saw the Israelites' desire for a king as a rejection of him and everything he did for them. They forgot (as we sometimes do) that God must be first and foremost in our lives. God can and does go along with demands that are not in our best interests in order to teach us a lesson.

The people were wise in that they saw an upcoming leadership void. Samuel was getting old and the people knew that his sons would not be capable of assuming the leadership role. They didn't see a succession plan, and they certainly didn't see God's plan for succession. They made their decision with their hearts and not with their heads. They did not think things through. They made an emotional decision and not a logical decision.

We are the same. We often look at things through an emotional filter when we make decisions. For example, if we do not make our funeral arrangements and pay for our funerals before we die, our families have to make the necessary arrangements at a time when emotions are running high and might cloud their judgment.

Samuel knew that the decision to appoint a king was a rejection of God's authority, and the decision would lead to dire consequences for Israel. To make matters worse, Samuel knew that his sons were not fit to succeed him. God warned the Israelites that most of the kings would pervert justice, levy taxes and help themselves to the best of everything in the land. In fact, Israel had something like 43 kings over 450 years, and most of the human leaders created more problems for the Israelites than they solved.

The same situation exists today. While we do have some good human leaders, there are leaders who start with good intentions but over time they become concerned only for themselves and their supporters and friends. Others are bad to begin with and get much, much, worse. We only have to look as far as the latest news programme to see that this is the case.

This lesson is about free will. God gave us the ability to choose between right and wrong and then suffer the consequences. Sometimes we choose the lesser of two evils, especially during an election, and sometimes we choose between the better of two good choices. God limits his power to allow for us to make decisions, but he also shows his power of grace by sometimes allowing good things to happen from our poor decisions. One example was - staying in ancient Israel - the dynasty of King David, which had a historical significance beyond measure.

We have been called by God to do good works. We have to be on guard against anything that would hinder that work. One enemy of good works is pride. We must remember Samuel's words in this passage. God has called us to specific situations, and not anyone else. When we live in the world, we are influenced by the political and cultural environment more than we realize. Consequently, we often lose our ability to distinguish between what comes out of our environment and what comes out of our relationship with God. When we turn from God in sin, our worth is downgraded, but God does not stop loving us.

Samuel's sons abused their power just like some modern-day politicians and CEOs abuse their power. God warned the Israelites that most of the kings in their future would abuse their power. The people wanted stability and security, but they left God out of this equation.

Seek out God? What can God have to say about our Twenty-First Century problems? You must be out of your mind!

Have you ever done something that made other people wonder if you have lost your mind? If so, you can probably understand what is going on in Mark 3:20-35. This takes place early in Jesus' ministry when word of his teachings and miracles is starting to spread. Jesus' earthly family and friends didn't understand his ministry. They didn't understand that he was the Son of God. To the people of Nazareth, he was just the son of Mary and Joseph-earthly parents.

We are the same. Sometimes we can't understand Jesus and his ministry. Sometimes it's hard for us to understand who Jesus is, what he does and why he does what he does. Often we make a rash judgment about Jesus. We need to ask God what his will is for our lives. We need to ask God why he is doing what he is doing in our lives.

Because the Pharisees did not understand what Jesus was doing, they accused him of being possessed by the devil. They wanted to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people, but their claim had one big flaw. How could the devil defeat the devil? Evil can't defeat evil. A strong man can only be defeated by someone who is stronger. Since good is always stronger than evil, good will always defeat evil. Jesus is the champion of everything that is good, so he will always defeat evil. That's how the biblical logic goes.

Normally, when there is a champion of any type-sports, politics, etc. - most people will follow the champion. In other words, many people will "jump on the bandwagon", but there will still be some opponents. There is a similar situation in this passage. By accusing Jesus of using the devil's power to cast out demons, the Pharisees rejected the work of the Holy Spirit. They willingly rejected Christ as their Saviour because they did not want to give up their power,

prestige, authority, etc. Because they chose not to believe, they refused to accept forgiveness for their sins. Refusing to accept the Holy Spirit is the only sin that cannot be forgiven-and not blasphemy as most believers would think.

How many people in our modern world have refused to accept Christ because it would mean giving up an earthly way of life that is more important to them? The list is endless, but it includes the famous and not so famous. I leave you to think up your own examples.

If you are worried about doing the wrong thing in the name of the Holy Spirit, don't be worried. The fact that you are worried means that you are likely not guilty. The fact that you are concerned means that you have a conscience that will keep you safe.

Jesus' earthly family was concerned about his physical and mental health, but Jesus was more concerned about the spiritual health of the people he dealt with. For Jesus true "family" is not a matter of biological relationship, but of kinship in obedience to God, and that kinship begins when God through his grace adopts us into his family. In a world where there is so much opposition to the Christian faith, and where our homes and families demand so much of our time, our one priority is to love one another wherever we are, and with every breath of our being.

Those who accept the Holy Spirit will do the will of God and thereby become part of the new concept of family that Jesus creates. That is, they will become part of the family of God. This is not meant to exclude our biological family unless they refuse to accept the Holy Spirit and therefore refuse to do God's will.

When we allow the Holy Spirit in our lives, nothing can stop us. We have a power that can overcome everything the devil throws in our way-even the opposition of our earthly family. That power is the awesome power of God! When we unite with fellow believers, the power is even greater.

Amen.