

Samuel—Faithful in Disappointment

Intro: Reading through the Bible gives us the opportunity to reflect upon many great characters in the Scripture. If you're following the reading of the Daily Bible you've read this week about the great prophet Samuel. He played an important role in the plan of God.

Samuel has been traditionally considered the author of the two books of the OT that bear his name.

The prophet Jeremiah associated him with Moses as one of the greatest intercessors in the history of God's people up until his time (Jer. 15:1).

In the NT he is often considered the beginning of the prophetic era (Ac. 3).

The Hebrew writer includes him in his faith hall of fame (Heb. 11:22).

Ironically, this so-called “man of God” would spend most of his life surrounded by people far from that description. He would suffer numerous hurts and disappointments; yet in spite of it, he kept the faith. So I'm entitling my lesson tonight: Samuel—Faithful in Disappointment.

In observing Samuel's life story, we can see his faithfulness in several critical times of disappointment. First, we can see that he was:

Faithful though witnessing the religiously corrupt

Samuel as a young boy was dedicated by his mother Hannah to the Lord's service. Separated from mother and father, Samuel grew up in the presence of Eli the priest. Day by day he would help in the service of the tabernacle and learn the law of the Lord from his mentor Eli.

Yet while living in such holy circumstances, he would witness Eli's sons totally profane God's tabernacle.

When people brought their sacrifices to the tabernacle at Shiloh, Samuel witnessed how they ignored the procedures for sacrifice given by Moses to the Levites and selfishly took for themselves whatever they wanted:

Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for the men despised the offering of the Lord. (1 Sam. 2:17)

They even engaged in fornication with the women who served in the tabernacle area (1 Sam. 2:22).

Regrettably, Eli, the man whom God had entrusted to teach the young boy Samuel had little impact on his own boys. His inadequate rebukes and actions only hardened them in their sin.

Consequently God announced to Samuel as a boy the end of the house of Eli.

You no doubt remember that story. That night as Samuel lay on his bed, he heard a voice calling in the night, “Samuel, Samuel.” Naturally he thought it was the voice of Eli calling for assistance; yet each time Eli revealed that he had not called. After three such episodes, Eli

recognized that God was speaking to the boy and urged him to respond with these words, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." And thus God revealed to Samuel a most unpleasant message. The house of Eli would come under God's judgment.

Not long afterward, Eli's two sons Hophni and Phinehas were killed in battle against the Philistines; and when the news reached their father that the Ark of the Covenant had been taken, he fell backward in his seat, broke his neck, and died.

And Samuel is witnessing all of this first hand! Yet in spite of these evil and disappointing influences as young man, Samuel did not depart from the path of faith, though he might have simply walked away in disgust at the whole sordid affair. Instead he remained true to the word of God and became a great prophet in Israel:

Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. (1 Sam. 3:19-20)

Faithful though surrounded by the spiritually apostate

During Samuel's young manhood Israel continued that same cycle of repentance and apostasy that had been going on for years.

For a time, they would be faithful to the Lord; but then they would turn away from Him and start worshipping idols.

The Lord would send afflictions upon them by foreign rulers; and then when they would cry out to the Lord, and He would send a "judge" to deliver them.

The most recent deliverer had been Samson who used his mighty power to give the Israelites temporary relief from the oppression of the Philistines.

But that relief was short-lived; and once again Israel fell into apostasy and found themselves once more under Philistine domination.

How disappointing it must have been for the young Samuel to see his generation forsake the Lord he had known from childhood.

Yet, while the people of Israel were turning away from the Lord, Samuel was growing ever closer to him. God was preparing him to lead the people back to the truth. He called the people together and urged them to repent:

Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the Lord with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the Lord and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines." (1 Sam. 7:3)

Since the people showed signs of repentance, Samuel called them together at Mizpah to confess their sins. He offered sacrifices for them and interceded with the Lord to forgive them for their sinful lives. As a result the Israelites at last threw off the oppressive yoke of the Philistines. In the

years that followed God blessed and helped Israel conquer many of their enemies. Things were looking up for Israel and for Samuel.

Meanwhile Samuel would continue to faithfully carry out his charge as judge of Israel:

Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places. (1 Samuel 7:15-16)

I wish we could stop here and leave Samuel's story on that positive note; but Samuel would once again have to face disappointment:

Faithful though dishonored by unfaithful children

Now we come to that ominous chapter, 1 Samuel 8. As Samuel became older, he enlisted his sons in the work of judging Israel. After all, they had seen his faithful life. They had heard the word of God through him. Surely they would carry on the legacy of their father in faithfully judging Israel. But it would not be that way:

And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice. (1 Sam. 8:1-3)

Instead of following in the footsteps of their father, Samuel's sons misused their office and made the people long for alternative leadership. How disappointing that must have been to the man of God! There are not many things that hurt more than to see your own children reject the faith you have tried to live before them. He could have said, "What's the use. Faith will die with me; so why fight it?" Yet Samuel did not allow that discouragement to cause him to give up.

Regrettably the disappointing development in Samuel's sons would prepare the way for an even greater disappointment for him.

Faithful though rejected by misguided people.

Of course, the people could have returned to Samuel and said, "We want you to lead like you always have." Or, "Choose other men like you to judge us;" but instead:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." (1 Sam. 8:4-5)

It would hard to imagine how painful such a moment was for Samuel. He had served the people for decades. He had led them in successful battle. He had taught them to fear the Lord. Yet now they reject his leadership. They showed dissatisfaction with the arrangement by which he had brought them both spiritual and physical prosperity.

But God made clear to Samuel that the people were not merely rejecting him; they were also rejecting the Lord.

And the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. (1 Sam. 8:7)

The Lord allowed the people their wish; and Samuel, though rejected by the people, faithfully carried out God's will. He brought the people together and superintended the process of the selection of a humble man named Saul to be their king. He solemnly warned them that no king could deliver an unfaithful people. He left them with these final public words: Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way. Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king shall be swept away." (1 Sam. 12:23-25)

Samuel overcame his personal hurts and carried out the Lord's will with faithfulness. He even served as a trusted advisor to the newly-crowned king, seeking to help him be successful. However that was to lead to one other final disappointment.

Faithful though disappointed by a prideful leader.

Saul began his service with humility toward God; and with His help, he led the people successfully in battle with the encouragement of Samuel, the prophet. However he allowed his successes to go to his head; and he began to show indications of pride. It was culminated in his disobedience to the Lord in not carrying out the orders to utterly destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15)

It would be Samuel's task as the Lord's prophet to declare his sin and the Lord's rejection of him as king with these famous lines:

And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king." (1 Sam. 15:22-23)

All of this was to have a powerful impact upon the aged prophet.

Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel. (1 Sam. 15:34-35)

The prophet grieved greatly over Saul's conduct and rejection. Saul and Samuel would never see one another again.

But Samuel in spite of this disappointment remained true to his charge as prophet. Though disappointed by Israel's first king, he faithfully carried out the Lord's command to anoint the second. One of Samuel's final acts as prophet was to go to the house of Jesse and anoint David as the next king of Israel. However he would not live to see David ascend the throne.

So, over and over again, Samuel was confronted with the failure of others and the disappointment that comes from that. Maybe Samuel would have ended his life thinking, “What have I accomplished?” Yet those of us who know the subsequent story of Israel can answer that question more clearly. In spite of all the disappointments, Samuel would have served the Lord with integrity and faithfulness his entire life. Could he have known that he would be remembered as one of Israel’s greatest prophets, a man of intercession for a sinful people, and the spiritual bridge that enabled God’s apostate people to survive until a new and faithful king would arise to lead them?

Conclusion: The lesson for us from Samuel’s life, I hope, is self-evident. In your effort to serve the Lord you may face similar disappointments.

You may see corrupted leaders

You may see people around you becoming unfaithful

You may even see your own family turn away from the truth

You may be rejected by others in spite of your sincere efforts

You may see those in whom you made great investments of time leave the faith you tried to show them and teach them

If and when that happens I hope you remember Samuel. We may not see how God is using us to accomplish His purpose; but we must keep faithfully doing what is right.