

Grace in Transition | The Book of Samuel

Samuel's Farewell Speech

First Samuel CH 12

10.25.20

Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. ² Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. ³ Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right."

⁴ *"You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand."*

⁵ *Samuel said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." "He is witness," they said.*

⁶ *Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors up out of Egypt. ⁷ Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the LORD as to all the righteous acts performed by the LORD for you and your ancestors.*

⁸ *"After Jacob entered Egypt, they cried to the LORD for help, and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your ancestors out of Egypt and settled them in this place.*

⁹ *"But they forgot the LORD their God; so he sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them. ¹⁰ They cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned; we have forsaken the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.' ¹¹ Then the LORD sent Jerub-Baal, Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and he delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around you, so that you lived in safety.*

¹² *"But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'-- even though the LORD your God was your king. ¹³ Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. ¹⁴ If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God-- good! ¹⁵ But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors. ¹⁶ "Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes!*

¹⁷ *Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call on the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king." ¹⁸ Then Samuel called on the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel. ¹⁹ The people all said to Samuel, "Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king."*

²⁰ *"Do not be afraid," Samuel replied. "You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. ²¹ Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. ²² For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. ²³ As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. ²⁴ But*

be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. ²⁵ Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish."

We've been looking at a time of change in Ancient Israel. About 1000 years before the birth of Christ a gigantic shift took place that would persist for some 500 years – Israel goes from virtually no government to a monarchy, from regional Judges to Kings.

This CH is the "concession speech" delivered by the outgoing administration, the farewell speech of Samuel, the Judge, the official transfer of power.

And the outgoing leader (Judge) now takes advantage of this moment to conduct a kind of covenant renewal service. He leads the people to remember what they have, throughout their history, often, sadly forgotten. He reminds them who they are, to Whom they belong, that the God of Abraham has set His affection on them, rescued them and has committed Himself to them.

And this renewal – this reminder and celebration of God's initiative toward them and His rock-solid commitment to them leads them to a re-affirmation of who they are: "we are the people whom God has chosen for His own...and that makes all the difference in the way we think, see, speak and live."

A few weeks ago we discussed how God seems to be doing something in the world; a lot of things seem to be rapidly changing. We wondered if perhaps it might lead to revival in our culture. Today, we want to build on that by suggesting that revival begins with a church that is renewed in the covenant. What would that look like for THIS church and what would it look like for YOU...and your family?

Today, we consider, in this farewell speech, covenant renewal – what is a life of daily renewal. How to live a life of DAILY RENEWAL – a life with a sense of consistency (not flawless but progressing) not stuck in a rut... not spinning your wheels or aimless but steady and courageous and passionate.

Let's look at: 1) A Familiar Form

2) A Faithful Farewell

3) From Fear to Faith and Freedom (living in daily renewal)

If you're familiar with the Bible, you may know that this form or speech or genre is repeated throughout the Bible. There are some very well-known, famous, farewell speeches. Jacob and Joseph in Genesis, Moses gives us Deuteronomy – a whole book that basically IS a farewell speech. Joshua's famous speech and even in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul's big farewell to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20).

The context of THIS farewell speech is victory. The new king, the people's choice, Saul (remember Tall Saul?) Saul was anointed by Samuel (as God said) and then presented to the people. Then a foreign army showed up – the Ammonites. Tall Saul leads the charge against General Nahash. That name occurs in the third chapter of the Bible: "Now the NAHASH was more crafty than any beast of the field..." (Gen 3.1) Nahash is the word for serpent and now King Saul has crushed the serpent's head. He's got all the signs of being a true hero, like the promised Seed of the Woman (Gen 3.15).

So there's a lot to celebrate. The people's choice is apparently confirmed by God giving him victory over the serpent. So, it's time to pass the baton.

But the speech is like a trial. There are three defendants in this trial. First, Samuel stands in the place of the accused: "When I was the provisional leader/judge did I, in any way, distort justice or cheat or misuse my position in any way?" And the people have to admit, "No! You were just and solid" ("Annd, you wanted me out of office... OK?") They probably felt a bit foolish at this point. "Witness" (5)

Then, God is put on trial. Has God not cared for you when He appointed Moses and Aaron to get you out of slavery in Egypt? He says in v.7, "Now then, let me confront you with the evidence... as to all the LORD'S righteous acts for you and your ancestors."

"True...if we ever suffered it was NOT because YHWH ever failed to provide for us (Hmmm...never thought of that...) And YOUR ancestors were saved by God but (v.9) they forgot YHWH their God. So God gave you these little reminders during the time of the Judges – Sisera, the Moabites, Philistines (enemies!) And every time you cried out, God saved you – gave you men and women to lead and organize your armies.

Right up to this present moment – when the king YOU had to have (so you'd be like all the other nations) – God even honored YOUR badly motivated demand and God empowered Saul to crush the head of the Nahash (serpent). So that leaves only one defendant to accuse – and just to show you that I do see this clearly because I'm sanctioned from God Himself and just so you feel that...right here in the driest season of the year, when there are no clouds in the sky, "LORD, will you vindicate me here?"

And the LORD, sends thunder and rain and all the people feel convicted of their crimes against heaven: "So (v. 18) all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel (the Judge and the prosecutor)."

And in this state of conviction and awe the people ask the prosecutor to become their Defender/Advocate: "Pray to the LORD for us...for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king."

And Samuel says, (v. 20) “Don't be afraid – it wasn't really that bad what you did – don't be hard on yourselves!” NOPE! “Don't be afraid YOU HAVE DONE EVIL yet don't turn from the LORD.”

Then, Samuel, the outgoing administration, rejected by the people, and their Prosecutor, becomes their Defense Attorney. He advises them to turn to the LORD with all their hearts, turn away from worthless things that can't save them – idols and superstition and turn TO the LORD OF THE COVENANT!

See, the faithful priest that Samuel is: he stands in the gap as a mediator between the holy God who hates evil and this people (GOD'S people) who like their ancestors just keep on DOING the evil that God hates... AND SAMUEL says, “For the sake of His great name, the LORD will not reject HIS PEOPLE because the LORD was pleased to make you His own.”

Do you know what you call that... in the Bible when a passage is focused on God's promise, His unwavering commitment, His good and gracious intentions to save and forgive and accept and bless and help His people? – That's called GOSPEL.

It's not a command... it's not advice...it's NEWS of what God has done and will do for His people. It's found in the Hebrew part of the Bible BEFORE the coming of Jesus Christ AND it's found in the New Testament as well – promises based on God's intent and commitment and love for His people.

Samuel the faithful priest ends his farewell address with the Good News that God has mercy for His people. “Don't run from Him because you've failed Him and rejected Him – run to HIM. You are HIS people – He married you (made a covenant with you) and He will not reject you.”

AND THEN the faithful priest adds, “As for my retirement – I plan to use it in praying for you... and continuing to remind you of the very truths I repeated today”. V. 23 – “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.”

And this of course, really reminds us of what is undoubtedly THE most famous farewell speech in the entire Bible. Also delivered by a faithful priest who was rejected by His people; also a speech that's grounded in the Gospel. The farewell speech I have in mind is called The Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17), in which Jesus Christ, THE Great and Faithful High Priest, prayed for His disciples and for all His people in all ages. And He prayed as if our lives depended on it (because they do!)

In that speech (Upper Room Discourse – John 13-17) Jesus Christ said to His fearful disciples, who would soon fail Him and abandon Him, and Jesus told them (QUOTE) “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.”

WHAT?!

God, the Father, loved God the Son infinitely and eternally. God has no beginning and the Holy Trinity was loving since then...eternity past. And Jesus Christ says, "I LOVE YOU the way the Father loves me!" (John 15.9). I think that has to be maybe the greatest, most comforting in the entire Bible.

And then THE faithful priest (to whom Samuel was a pointer) Jesus Christ ends His farewell speech by actually praying. And thē final words of that speech and that prayer are (QUOTE) "and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17.26)

Our faithful Priest, Jesus the Messiah, prayed for us and PRAYS for us... He prays that we might actually know God and know the love that's brighter than a THOUSAND suns!

It's the intimacy of being known and still loved. It's a quality of love that – when you get it, when it dawns on you and you (Edwards) "get a sense of it on your heart" – it enables you and compels you (2Cor 5.14) to love God and love people from liberated motives.

It's a new life received by faith – it changes fear into freedom. It turns our "have-to's" into "want-to's".

Rather than doing good things to get the approval of people and then finding that people's approval is really one of those "useless things that can do us no good and can't rescue us" (21) (Approval seeking is a form of idolatry!) But instead of functioning out of a place of emptiness and trying to get people to fill you – the Good News (the bedrock and bottom line of Samuel's speech AND of Jesus Christ's speech) the Gospel flips that normal and useless human approach on its head and GIVES you a love and a level of acceptance that FILLS YOU FIRST.

Then you're in awe of God and serving God out of fullness – out of undeserved love and acceptance – rather than out of emptiness.

See, to live a life of daily renewal, to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom 12.2); to live by faith...to every day take your stand as Martin Luther did and as Samuel did – (both men said, "Here I stand!" [v.3]) – to live by faith is not to be perfect and a flawless religious clone and robot – instead, faith says, "Because of the perfect life, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, my debt is paid, my past is forgiven, God declares me righteous and I don't have to lie or hide behind fig-leaves to prove myself – Jesus Christ has justified me."

And Jesus Christ continues to pray for me like my life depends on it (He says with Samuel, “far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.”)

He pours out the Spirit of Holiness on us who teaches us that Christ’s doing and dying are real and can be totally trusted...and the Spirit works IN US the desire to know God and glorify God.

You can live in openness and honesty about your flaws and your evil (you can call it what it is fearlessly) because it doesn't depend on you but on the faithful Priest.

And to take your stand on Him every day – to turn desperately to Him every day – to repent and believe everyday and many times each day – that’s the path of daily renewal. It leads to fullness and joy and that free and lovely obedience and love for God and people that little by little becomes organic (like fruit) NOT FORCED...

The Gospel GIFT received by faith – leads to what the Apostles called the NEWNESS OF LIFE (Rom 6.4) the NEWNESS OF THE SPIRIT (7.6) the NEW CREATION (2Cor 5.17, Gal 6.15) THE NEW PERSON (Col 3.10)... the RENEWED MIND (Rom 12).

If the world sees it in us – open about our faults – repenting and believing because IT DOESN'T depend on my sweaty works – but on Jesus Christ’s doing and dying and rising and HIS INTERCESSION for me... If the world sees that in us... who knows?

Maybe all the weirdness of this present moment... will indeed result in revival...

Let us believe and pray with Jesus Christ (Ps 2.8) that it will be so.