



1 Samuel 8:1-9
The Story
Standing Tall, Falling Hardⁱ

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So this morning I want to share just a brief message that continues the series we've been in the last several weeks, called The Story. The Story is a chronological walk through the Bible, sticking to the main thread of Scripture. Today's message correlates to chapter 10, titled, "Standing Tall, falling Hard" in The Story book. The last couple weeks we've heard how Israel's leadership ebbed and flowed in their faithfulness to God – that was the main emphasis two weeks ago, and then last week we looked at the life of Ruth, which is set within that time period of cyclical leadership. Israel didn't have a king at this time, like all the other nations around them, but rather, were led by judges – not judges as we think of them: wearing a robe, sitting at an elevated wooden desk, presiding over a court room. Judges were leaders who were raised up by God to meet a specific need at a specific time in the life of Israel – usually in the midst of a crisis – unlike kings, who were in the position for life. This was how they'd operated for about 400 years at the time of today's passage.

Also unlike kings, judges didn't "make a government." Israel's governing happened through adherence to God's laws, to Scripture. And it was the religious leaders who primarily led the people in adhering to God's laws and to living as God called them to. At the time of this morning's Scripture passage, Samuel is the primary religious leader, and he led well. He was faithful to God's call upon Him and upon the people of Israel. But he can't lead forever, and the plans for leadership going forward after his eventual death are a little uncertain, so the people start to make their own plans. And if this all sounds foreign and useless and like it's just a history lesson about something that happened 3,000 years ago or so, with no bearing on our lives, then I invite you listen with open ears and a soft heart, because we all have some kind of governance in our life...some kind of leading. Something or someone leads us, shapes us, guides us, influences us, informs our values, sets our boundaries, helps us decide what is important in life, and what isn't, and give us value and worth. And this passage speaks to that. So this morning we're looking at an Old Testament passage from 1 Samuel, chapter 8...

Scripture passage here.

Now: **Their desire for a king, in and of its self, was not bad.** God had called them to be set apart from the nations around them...to be different, especially in regards to their relationship with God who was above any and all other gods that other nations might worship, and that they might be tempted to worship. And they could do that – keep their worship focused on the God of the Universe – they could do that whether they were led by judges on an as-needed basis, or if they were governed by a king. So that wasn't really the problem. The problem was their motivation: **They wanted a king so that they would be like all the other nations around them (1 Samuel 8:5). They wanted to be just like everyone else.** They became more concerned about their position in the world, about how they appeared to others and how others viewed them...and they wanted to be just like everyone else.

So, rather than trusting God...rather than letting Him set the standard for who they were as a nation...rather than living for Him...rather than deriving their value and their place in the world from Him and their relationship with Him, they let the nations around them influence and lead them and even dictate their sense of worth and value. They wanted an earthly king so they'd be seen as legitimate in the eyes of their neighbors, rather than trusting in their heavenly King and his view of them that they are worthy in His eyes.

And still today, this is a problem for many of us. **We frequently derive our value from the views of the world rather than from the viewpoint of the One who created us.** Sometimes that makes us feel “less than.” We don't have a car that's as nice as our neighbor's. We don't have a home that's as fancy as our friend's. We don't have vacations that are as glamorous as the ones we see on Facebook. We don't have a job title that's as impressive as our relative's. Our family doesn't look like everyone else's. Our kids aren't going to an Ivy League school. We don't have a head of hair that's as full as pretty much everyone else's in the church. We aren't as tall as the pastors of other churches. Ok, those last two are personal, and actually, I really don't care about either of them. But there others, like the first few, that are real for many of us. And the problem isn't *theirs*. It's *ours*. **These kinds of thoughts reveal our own insecurities, and our own efforts to gain value and worth**

from how we perceive that others view us. That's partly why when good things happen, when we are on the positive side of the bell curve of life, we want to share that and make it known. We think that others will value us more highly if we can share about how successful we've been in some recent facet of life. Sometimes we share out of pure joy, and we just want someone else to join with us in that joy. There's nothing wrong with that. But sometimes, we share stuff because we want to impress others. Our motivation isn't always right and pure. The Israelites struggled with this. They were motivated to have a king to keep up with, and impress their neighbors.

But you know what? **Living like that...Living to try and impress others...Or living in a constant state of feeling like we aren't enough...Trying to get our sense of self-worth from how others view us and living up what we think their expectations are of us: that is exhausting.** I know: I've struggled with this in my life. And what I've found, and what you've probably found, too, is that that is a constantly moving target. And so it's tiring...it's exhausting.

Fortunately, there's another option and another way to live, and it's the way to live that God wants you to live, and intends for you to live. And that is to live for Him and gain your sense of self-worth and value from Him: to let him be the King of your heart and govern your life. The fundamental problem for the Israelites, and for us, is what verse 7 says, that: **"...they have rejected me (God) as their king" (1 Samuel 8:7).** Letting God be God...letting him be King is how He created us to be. It's how He created you. When we concern ourselves with living up to His expectations, with living as He calls us to live, then we no longer have a constantly moving target, because God's standards and expectations don't change.

And unlike the approval and love of the world around us, which can be summarized by the phrase, "what have you done for me lately?" unlike that, **God's approval of you...God's love for you...God's satisfaction with who you are does not waver.** He may not bless and approve everything we do or say...but his approval of and love for you is based on something much deeper in you than that.

Listen to these words from the Bible: **“Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens; your faithfulness, reaches to the skies” (Psalm 36:5).**

“I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with an everlasting kindness. I will build you up again” (Jeremiah 31:3-4).

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

“‘Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,’ says the Lord, who has compassion on you” (Isaiah 54:10).

“How great is the love that that Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1).

“I am convinced that neither death or life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).

God’s promise to love us unconditionally and eternally is seen most profoundly and most perfectly in Jesus Christ, the King who demonstrated his unconditional love for us on the cross, and proved the eternal nature of his love by his resurrection from the grave and blowing the doors off the captivity of death.

So wherever and whenever you’re tempted to gain your value and your worth and your identity from the world: don’t fall to that temptation. If you’re already gaining your sense of value and worth from something or someone in the world, then let it go. Stop trying to hit that moving target. Be released from its grip. Instead: gain your value, your worth, and your identity from the one and only King...the King of kings and Lord of lords: Jesus Christ. Turn to Him and let Him, the one who created you and has given you life...**Let Him be the one to define who you are: a child of God, loved deeply and**

inseparably, by Him. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 10 in "The Story." We took orders for copies of the book, "The Story" at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible" at their website.