

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Israel Demands a King”
II Corinthians 4:13-18
I Samuel 8:19-22**

**Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 1, 2018**

II Corinthians 4:13-18

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

I Samuel 8:19-22

But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, 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.” And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king.”

“Israel Demands a King”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In my youth I had a very nasty habit of disobeying my mother. She would tell me not to do something, and I would do it. She would tell me to do something, and I would ignore her. And of course my disobedience meant I was punished. And you would think that after being acquainted once or twice with the belt, I would have learned my lesson. Nope. I got well acquainted with the sandal, the fly swatter, the wooden spoon. One day I was acting up in church and misbehaving so badly that my mother took me to the bathroom and ordered me to go outside and pick the very vine with which she would switch me. And she said it can't be too thin or flimsy, otherwise she would go out there and find one with thorns on it. I don't think she would've gotten one with thorns, but in that moment I knew I didn't want to risk my mother's ire, so I picked one about the size of my pinky, received my lashings, and went back to worship.

Eventually I did come to learn that disobeying my mother was not an option. We could disagree and share different opinions, but to this day I will never disobey her. Sadly, it was a long journey for me to learn that. But I did learn it. I must say, my parents were not always beating me when I misbehaved. Sometimes they knew I would learn quicker if they just let me follow through on my disobedience to my own dismay. One such instance occurred when my mom told me not to climb the chain-linked fence on our property. Of course, I didn't listen and once she had gone back inside I proceeded to scale the fence. As soon as I tried to climb over to the other side, my belt loop got caught and I was official trapped. I think my dad was hiding around the corner

because he was quick to come out, but he did not lend me a hand, despite my wailing. He let me hang there for a few moments, then he came over and spoke to me. He said something along the lines of, “You see what happens when you climb fences? If I let you down, will you promise not to do it again? Otherwise you’ll just hang there until dinner time.” I can tell you, to this day, I have never caught myself on another fence.

In Prayer Fellowship this past week we opened by reading from the 78th Psalm. This particular Psalm recounts two main themes from Israel’s history. First, it tells the story of how God delivered the Israelites from bondage in the land of Egypt. How God plagued Egypt ten times, cleaved the Red Sea, made water flow from a rock, and provided meat in the wilderness. Then the Psalmist gets to verse thirty-two and says this about the Israelites: “In spite of all this, they still sinned; despite [God’s] wonders, they did not believe.” That’s the second theme of Israel’s history. No matter how faithful God was, no matter how steadfast and merciful God was, the people of the Israel turned away from him to seek after idols and iniquity. In discussing that Psalm, an observation was made that God really does relate to us as parents relate to children. The fact that the Bible refers to God as Father is no accident!

God, as our Divine Parent, deals with us as parents deal with children. God provides, nurtures, and instructs. God’s parental tactics include both forbearance and wrath. Just as parents know when to use punishments or let a child dangle from a fence, so too does God know how to interact with his children. And God knows this very well, just read through the book of Judges and you’ll quickly see the generational cycle of disobedience, punishment, repentance, restoration, then disobedience again. By some estimations, that cycle went on for nearly 350 years. This is how you know God is truly patient. God dealt with his people for 350 years! The U.S. as a nation isn’t even that old. Over and over and over again, God went through this cycle of disobedience, punishment, restoration, disobedience, punishment, restoration. This is how you know the Old Testament is full of God’s grace and mercy. God very well could have erased everything. He could’ve said, “You know, I’m done with this. These people don’t get it, they don’t understand. I am washing my hands of them.” And even when God tried with the flood, he couldn’t go against his nature and not show his compassion and love.

That’s God for you. His nature is unchanging. God can’t not love his children. What God does do, like many good parents, is diversify his tactics. Over the course of the judges’ 350-year leadership, the people of Israel began to be distracted by other idols. To understand this, we need to put the era of the Judges in perspective. During that time, a lot of kingdoms and empires were rising and falling around the Middle East, North Africa, and Southern Europe. You have events like the Trojan War, the birth of Hercules, the Egyptian and Assyrians conquests. All of these things and more are happening around Israel. And being on an important coastline and major trade roads, the Israelites were very much aware of the goings on of the nations around them. And so they got tired of the Judges. The last Judge was Samuel, and in the beginning of chapter eight, they say 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.”

Did you hear what they said? *You are old and your sons do not walk in your ways.* It's as if the Israelites had said, "Your way of thinking is antiquated. It's out of date and out of touch with the times. You are backwards and you need to enter this century." Where else have we heard that? Society? Politics? How about within the church? Now don't get me wrong. Modernity is not a bad thing. One of the things I learned from our mission trip is how necessary it is to have things like cell service, internet, and phone lines. But when modernity replaces God as our focus, then we have sinned and sinned grievously. The Israelites demanded a king from Samuel—and from God—not to bring glory to God but because they wanted to be like the other nations. They wanted a king who would go out before them and fight their battles. You would think they would've noticed who their true King was. For 350 years, God turned the tides of battle for the Israelites. Whenever the enemies of Israel stirred, God raised up a Judge to lead his people to victory. You'd think they'd notice?

Instead, they were blinded by the apparent successes of their neighboring kings. They saw mighty leaders such as King Menestheus of Athens, King Menelaus of Sparta, Pharaoh Ramesses of Egypt, and King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria. Truly great men of renown whose exploits are preserved in the annals of history, but men nonetheless. The Israelites got jealous. "I want a leader like that! He knows what he's talking about! He'll make Judah great again!" The people of God cannot put their trust in mortal men. Samuel knew this. He warned his brothers about the terrors that a king would bring. "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you:" says Samuel, "He will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots...He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his [cronies]...He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 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."

How often do we demand things from God even with the knowledge of imminent ruin? *God, I want to be popular! God, I want my neighbors to like me! God, I don't want to be called names! God, I want to look and act and sound just like your enemies, but I still want to be your chosen child!* Church, God is our King. Not money. Not power. Not tradition nor progress. God is our King. And we are called to be different. Not out rival. Not arrogant. Not complacent nor complicit. The body of Christ, the children of God, are called to be holy, which is set-apart for God's service. No matter how enticing, exciting, or revolutionary things may be, if they do not bring glory and honor to God's name, if they distract and detract us from living according to God's commands, then they are wanton and wicked. We should be weary of making demands on God. Because maybe, just maybe, he'll give us exactly what we want. Rarely, when that happens, are we better off for it. Instead, our responsibility is not to make demands of God, but rather to listen to his commands.

What do you think attracted the Israelites to these other kings? Perhaps their valor. Perhaps their good looks. Perhaps their charisma. Perhaps their military tract record. They said, "God, we like the way those kings look and sound. Sure they my rape, pillage, and steal, but look at the size of

his chariot!” God isn’t looking for valor, talent, or charisma. God doesn’t need those things. We are not reckoned righteous by such works. What God wants is obedience. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Not only that, these words “shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that [Christ has] commanded.” Let us not make the same mistake Israel made and demand God change for us. Rather, may each us look within our own hearts and see if and how we conform our talents, our charisma, and our very lives to God.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, forgive us for turning to the ways and people of this world and not placing our trust in you. Holy Ghost, help us in conforming our lives to the Father’s will so that we may not be distracted by the seductions of the devil. Jesus our Lord and Savior, open your Word to reveal your ordinances and cleanse us with your saving and transformative blood that we may be your disciples in this community and to the world. In your holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.