

How (Not) to Lose God's Mission

1 Samuel 8

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I am thankful to be here with you. It is a privilege to be supported, prayed for by this church, and counted among those serving the Lord overseas or locally, as we all are. But thank you! It is a real privilege and we are thankful.

It was a little shocking, though. We are still in transition. We hit traffic and it was raining all weekend. So we thought, "Oh, no! We left Morocco, where there was no traffic and it was sunny." Leaving Morocco for us was much harder than it was going.

I'm going to read a passage today and let's ask the Lord to bless this.

Lord, we want to open Your Word for You to speak to us. We are hungry to hear from You. I pray the words of my mouth and all of our hearts would delight You. Thank You, God. You are the Lord. Lead us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

My assigned topic is to connect this passage with Who God is and what He is for us, particularly about missions and about being a called out people. First Samuel 8 is a unique passage regarding missions, God's people and their calling in the world. It is a counterintuitive approach but it is true. We are just looking at one day in the life of Israel that became a turning point. This was when they went from having hereditary judges ruling the people to a hereditary monarchy. From reading the rest of the Bible, we know how Israel's history unfolds with kings that God gives them. He opened the door initially with a king they asked for (Saul) before He gave them the king He appointed (David, who was called a man after God's own heart in Acts 13:22). Every Christian community faces this same temptation to get off track, lose direction and forget the larger narrative in which we live.

We can relate to this scenario that may have even prompted them to ask for a king. Samuel was a great prophet and judge, yet about 50 miles south his two sons ruled; they were corrupt, unjust and perverting justice. Therefore, the people despaired about their future leadership. Samuel was old at this point and it seemed as though they could be left with these two sons. So they panicked about the leadership by another country and nation.

Along with that storyline there are enemies—the Philistine and the Ammonite armies. They were gearing up, creeping in and getting closer to attack. So they had both failure inside

and pressures outside. The solution they came up with was for God to give them a king like all the other nations. They looked around and thought, "Hey, it works for the Ammonites. They seem to be winning. And the Philistines also seem to be winning. Let's just do what they're doing. Give us a king! That's how their system of government works." So that was their strategy.

It sounds like great ideas, not unlike our own: "Let's just do this!" But it didn't please Samuel and more importantly, it did not please the Lord. Our passage, therefore, begins with the Lord responding to them and warning them about leaving Him. At the end, they refused and say, "No, we want a king!" So ironically the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and give them a king" (verse nine).

So we want to look at this passage and flesh it out, walking through the ruins of this bad day and understanding what God is doing. Let's think about this in three categories:

- First, the larger story behind this event was God's mission.
- Second, how did they get off track from God's mission, and how can we get off track?
- Third, how is it possible to stay in God's mission, even when we are in a fallen and dangerous world?

The Larger Story Is God's Mission

First, consider the background. God's mission is the background of this chapter. God's mission is the overarching story for why Israel was even there. Why were they a nation? Why did they exist? What was going on? The idea of a nation and a people did not just come about on that one particular day; there is a background to be understood. In the midst of this story, think about God's rule over His people. God rules His people through His Word. He gives them a king to rule His people through His Word. This is God's plan and how the Bible lays out His mission.

We should be fair to Israel when they asked for a king. During Moses's leadership (as told in Deuteronomy 17 and 28, as well as back to the time of Abraham), God promised that kings would come. So that prophecy and the idea of the position of a king would happen. It was there; it was in God's Word. However, notice that they did not ask for a king, *per se*, but they wanted a king "like all the other nations." The heart of it was when God said, "Samuel, appoint for them a king to lead them because they are rejecting Me as King."

Let's think about God's mission as King for His people. Where did this start? Think about creation and the Creator? He rules with authority. He is the sovereign Monarch of the world. He created all things. In this way, everyone is under God's sovereign rule, whether you like it or not. Whether you are a president, king, viceroy, policeman, judge, lawyer, architect or whoever you are, you are under God's authority in God's Kingdom.

However, there is a second way to look at God's Kingdom and that is what we see with the nation of Israel. God related to them based on a covenant relationship—a promise. We see this particularly in the life of Abraham. God came to Abraham and called him out of Ur, promising to make him a great nation. Look at this promise, particularly how it related to surrounding nations. Genesis 12:3 says, *“I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Think about God's mission there. He wants to bless all peoples on the earth through this one man. To be more precise, He wants to bless this one family, or one nation. That is God's design and mission. He wants to bless all peoples of the earth through Israel. As Tim Chester wrote, “Abraham was not chosen instead of the nations. He was chosen for the nations.” So the nation of Israel was not to replace other nations. They were there for other nations. They were there to attract people to the worship of Yahweh. That was their mission. That was God's identity for them.

Jump quickly to the New Testament. Think about how the Apostle Paul understood this very plan. When he was defending his ministry with Gentiles, he didn't go to the Great Commission passages at the end of the Gospels. Instead, he went to this passage about the ministry of Abraham. In Galatians 3:8-9, he said, *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”*

Paul understood ministry to other nations in this passage was through the promise to Abraham. Think of key words like gospel, grace and faith. Think about this centuries-old promise, a pledge that God would redeem a people from every tribe, tongue and nation. The promise that God was going to do that was given to Abraham. How was it received by Abraham? By faith. It wasn't his religious service or keeping the law or anything within him. Rather, it was the promise—the contract, the covenant, the agreement, the pledge—God kept and Abraham received it through faith. That is the gospel in the sense of receiving God's promises by faith.

So we participate in this promise as believers, not because we are a great people. On the street, we may be strangers but God has brought us together. He has united us under one Leader and one Lord. He is creating a unique identity and a new community to be His witnesses in the world. We have come by faith. We participate in faith.

This is how the story unfolds: Before 1 Samuel 8, there was a promise to Abraham that they would become a nation. Remember in Exodus, they were treated like slaves and God rescued them out of slavery. They came out as a mixed congregation—already Jews and Gentiles.

They were already becoming a people group because the idea of Israel was not a racial people. It was a theological people—a people of faith and belief. They were to be a unique community in order to witness to the nations. That was God's mission for them and He shaped it through them as they were carried on eagles' wings out of Egypt.

They were given the Promised Land under Joshua, and God continued to rescue them. It wasn't as if God left them at the hands of their enemies. Turn to 1 Samuel 7:10 and see how the Lord saved them from an attack: *"But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel."*

It is foolish to reject God as King. God is a great King! He commanded thunder and routed Israel's enemies. Isn't that attractive? Isn't that the kind of King you want? Somehow, they lost the mission and forgot Who God is and who they were. Instead of attracting the nations to this God, they were attracted to the other nations. Instead of influencing the nations, they were influenced by the nations. They wanted a king like all the other nations.

Thus, they were threatening God's mission. What is God's mission here? God's mission, as it is stated, is that they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation unto the end. He did give them Saul, the king they asked for, and then He gave them an appointed king, David. But even David did not fulfill the qualities of the leader they needed. So God Himself came as a King in Jesus Christ, and He is the One Who came to show us His Kingdom. Remember, He announced it. He said, "...the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Back in 1 Samuel 8, they did not know all this was part of God's plan. Because we have our Bibles, we see what really happened, including the full story of God's mission.

How We Lose Sight of God's Mission

Let's reflect for a minute about how we get off track from God's mission. We have the full story, so how do we lose sight of it? How do we lose the narrative by which we should be governed? We are living in difficult times ourselves. How do we, then, lose this narrative?

Notice in 1 Samuel 8:1 that Samuel heard their request for a king, and he immediately did something. Like a good leader, the text says, *"And Samuel prayed to the Lord..."* He heard their request and probably knew something was wrong with it. He did not form a committee to figure out if it was a good idea or not.

What do you do with elders? When they come with these ideas, do you just form another committee and then decide if it's a good idea or not? No, he prayed to the Lord and the Lord spoke to him, saying they rejected Him as king through *"all the deeds that they have done, from*

the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.”

We get off track from God's mission through unbelief, neglecting God and losing sight of Who He is. That is exactly what happened in Samuel's day. They lost sight of Who the Lord was in their midst. They put their trust in and served other gods and lesser powers.

Tim Chester spells this out pretty well:

- First, notice that God has been ruling His people through His Word, but now they want to be ruled by human word. Notice they first got away from God's Word.
- Secondly, God designed His rule to be distinct and holy, but now they want to be accepted by and fit in with those around them. They want to conform to the world.
- Third, God purposed Israel to be a light to the nations and that they would draw worshippers to Yahweh, but instead, they were more influenced by the others nations and drawn to them.

As God's unique community, we need to reflect on this as well. What is the church? What is God's mission for the church? This is how 1 Peter 2:9 describes our mission: *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

We live in a fallen world that is hostile toward Christ and therefore hostile toward your faith. Who are we? What does it mean to be holy? What does it mean to be distinct? Holiness does not mean that we are better than others. It doesn't mean we should practice one-upmanship over our neighbors, as if they will see us as being better than they are.

However, notice that God pointed out Israel's idolatry. He pointed out their forsaking Him and choosing other gods. That is what you repent of and what it means to be in God's Kingdom. You forsake other gods to worship the Lord as your own. What does holiness mean? In this context, holiness means you are coming in as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. You are coming in as one person whom God has rescued, saved and forgiven, wanting to live for the Lord and His Kingdom.

Do you still struggle with idols, such as the idol of comfort? I do. Even living in Morocco didn't cure me of that. I wish it did! When I am feeling good, what is my go-to response? Do I want to eat? Do I want to want to watch a movie? What do I want to turn to? Is it the Lord? Is it really the Lord Who governs my heart or do I turn to lesser gods? Am I'm living in a community and really wanting to live a holy and repentant life?

It's really important for us to see that holiness is not sticking our noses up at people but, rather, coming in as someone who experiences the grace of God every day. We need this gospel and this Jesus, and that gives us the good news. That makes us unique, doesn't it? We should

turn from the common, everyday idols of our world and live for the Lord in a place that is surrounded by lesser gods. That is our unique calling. That is what we are called to do as God's people. It is going to become visible. It is going to become very clear in the workplace, in our neighborhoods and in conversations. Our choice of idols and who we worship will come out in little things each day. That makes us distinct and unique. Even publicly and culturally, it is really hard to figure out what distinctiveness looks like.

I have a friend who is a pastor in Arizona who has been befriending an imam, a religious teacher in a mosque. He has gone to the mosque and met this imam in his office to exchange ideas and conversations. Then it was announced that an armed motorcycle gang was going to come and do caricature drawings of the Prophet Muhammad in the parking lot outside this very same mosque. He thought, "Oh, great, now what do I do? I have befriended this guy and now this crazy group is going to show up. What do I do?" He decided to get some people together and they asked the children's ministry to make up notes saying, "Hello, we welcome you if you are from another country. We want you to know the Jesus we follow." They got a group together to stand in the gap between the bikers and the mosque, greeting people going into the mosque. This event turned out to be a blessing and even made the local paper there. They quoted my friend directly, explaining they did this because they love Jesus.

There is no textbook for this. You don't know what your community will be like. You don't know what's happening in your world today. So what does it mean to be distinct, unique and missional? We just need to figure it out every day. We walk with the Lord and try to make good decisions to be unique in our own setting, asking the Lord to use us. It will become obvious that there is a difference and it will turn out well. Maybe God will do this in our mix of poor leadership that we live under and the opportunities we have.

Remember though, that we get off track through unbelief, through forsaking the Lord and losing sight of His unique calling for us. Again, the background of the 1 Samuel story is God's mission. Why were they even there at that time? They were losing it through their unbelief and turning to lesser powers. It is what we are all tempted to. So many times, we turn to lesser things and get off track from God's mission.

Third, how and why is it possible to stay in God's mission when we live in a fallen and dangerous world? It is possible to cut to the chase because you have been freed up to do this. You have been rescued to do this. You have been identified for this.

Look at 1 Samuel 8:9-18. This is a powerful passage with an interesting contrast. By rejecting the Lord, they did not just become neutral. They actually worshiped someone else. You

don't reject the Lord and then worship nothing. You worship something. It is like Bob Dylan sang in his 1979 lyrics:

You're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

In verse nine, the Lord warned of this. He said, *"Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."* What will the king claim as his rights? What is it like to reject the Lord? If you are in Christ, this is what you have been freed from.

It is really important to see the main verb in verse ten. It says he told all the words of the Lord to the people. He didn't hold anything back. Verses 11 and 13-17 say:

These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: 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 servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

Did you catch the word? It's a return trip to Egypt. It is one direction. God's mission is going somewhere. God's Kingdom is going somewhere. If you want to forsake that, you are going back to Egypt. You will be under a leader who takes and takes and takes and takes. That's what the options are. Do you want a king who is like the world? Do you want to trust lesser powers? They will take from you because they are lesser powers. They are needy powers. They are tyrants, usurpers and pretenders. They are fake kings. They are false. They are pretending. They are imaginary. They rob from us.

Verse 17 ends by saying, *"...you shall be his slaves."* They are going to take everything we have and everything about us, even ourselves. If we reject God, we reject His identity. We don't want to be His people. We don't want the pressure, the threats or the unique calling. When we reject His mission, we end up in slavery.

The warning in verse 18 is this: *"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."* This is a solemn word. *"The Lord will not answer you in that day."* But that day hasn't come for us. Like Carl F. Henry said, "The gospel is good news if it gets there in time." There is an urgency and a

priority to this warning. This is how we need to understand the world: You are either taken by false gods or you are within the Lord's mission, a follower of Christ who has been rescued and saved.

How to Stay on God's Mission

Remember how contrary Jesus was? Think about Mark 10:45: "*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" He has given to each one of us. He is giving to us now. He has given all over the place. Therefore, there is an urgency in His mission.

When Jesus saw a leaderless crowd under the prince of the power of the air, He felt compassion for them. He said they were like sheep without a shepherd. That was His most common emotion toward people and nations, and this is a great reminder for us. When we think about nations, we should think, "They are being taken. They are being eaten alive. There are millions of people who don't even know the true King."

The Wycliffe Bible Translators website states that there are still 350 million people in the world who do not even have the announcement of this King's reign. There are 350 million people who don't even have a portion of written Scripture in their language. That is a lot of people! When we think about kingdoms and monarchies, think about the countries that have tried to close their doors to our King and the gospel pronouncement. There are Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic countries that have worked hard to keep their people in their thinking and in slavery. They don't want others to enter their countries. There is a huge swath of people who are unreached and have not heard from anyone in their own language of the freedom that Jesus offers. There are peoples of the world who don't have access to the good news

In His sovereignty, God is moving many of these people to our country. They are studying here, as well as emigrating and getting jobs here. You are either going to be reaching the unreached, or you will reach someone who can reach the unreached. It is great to prioritize based on what God is doing. We must serve in our communities and love our neighbors. Just following Jesus is a great testimony in and of itself. This is God's mission and this is a huge priority for us as a church body.

Remember the vision of heaven in Revelation 4-5? We get a glimpse of what God is doing and where He is going with this mission. One day every tribe, tongue, people and nation will worship Yahweh Himself as their King and Savior. That is coming. Yet, we have a definite gap with many people still needing to hear the gospel. There are many languages and peoples and

nations still unaware. This is our mission. Trust me, God is going to use every ordinary one of us.

I have a friend who has a doctorate in physical therapy. He saw the need and moved his career to Morocco to help us establish centers to train families with handicapped children. The questions that came up were amazing: "Why are you doing this? What worldview would make you want to do this service that is unprofitable, time consuming and not good for advancing your career? What's going on in your heart that you would do this?" They became attracted to his story which is a powerful testimony in and of itself. That is what God can call us to do.

The good news is this: the same Lord Who moves us to take the good news will be moving at the other end in the lives of the people. While He moves us to go to them, He is also moving them to come to Himself. That should help settle our fear. The kind of people you are often looking for are the ones who are interested. In Morocco, the goal was not just to do one-on-one ministry, it was to meet someone who was interested and ask if they have a relative or friend who would like to study this. If they did, we knew God was at work. If they didn't, they didn't even want to talk about it with anyone else. We often wondered, "What's God doing on their end?"

God is at work and this is your hope. What does He call you to do? As part of the church, you are an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). He is your Lord and He has all authority over all the people to whom you will speak. He sends you as one who is broken, yet one who has good news to share. You go as an ambassador and as one who declares the good news. It becomes a simple obligation for you and something that marks your life.

If someone gave you \$100 to give to me today, you are obliged to pass it on to me. Think about what the Lord has given you. You have an obligation to pass it on to people around you because of His grace.

Let's thank Him for His goodness.

Lord, we want to thank You for Your grace. You have obligated us to the nations and we are so thankful that You have poured upon us an abundance of Your grace. We pray that You would continue to help us as Your people to realize the temptation of our hearts to fear and cower, to forget and neglect your mission. Lord, when our words come out difficult, strange or scary, remind us of Christ. Lord, thank You for the model of Jesus giving His life at Calvary for us. He rose from the dead and is enthroned right now at Your right side. The world's courts are trumped by the heavenly court. You are the appointed King. There is no other king in this world and You reign right now.

So rule in our hearts today, Lord. Encourage us. Draw us near. Remind us of Your promises and the joy You give us because of what You have done. Lord, give us joy and delight in

helping people who are still stuck in slavery to false ideas. What a privilege we have to be Your witnesses wherever we are. We are thankful for that, Lord. We are honestly thankful. We are called to follow You, and we are grateful. I pray for New Covenant Bible Church. Continue to fill us with joy, that we would reach well those who are around us because of Your grace and for Your glory, like the waters cover the sea. That is our desire in Jesus' name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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