

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 31 October 2004

No. T0339

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Lessons from the life of Samuel: Man of God (1 Samuel 12:1-25)

Harry S Truman, the 33rd President of the United States of America, was known as a man of the people. During his time in office he was responsible for the Fair Deal, offering employment for all and better social security. It was, perhaps, because of this concern for the ordinary person that people could identify with him. He never lost sight of his roots as a Missouri farmer, and so was able to identify with ordinary Americans.

This morning, as we conclude our look at the life of Samuel, we shall see him, not as a man of the people, but as a man of God. Clearly, those around him recognised his identification with the interests of God, and his concern for the glory of God. Although we shall look at four aspects to the life of Samuel found in 1 Samuel 12, it is in 1 Samuel 9:6 that Samuel is referred to as a man of God.

There the people were clamouring for a king so that they could be like the rest of the nations around them. When the interests of God and His honour were being disregarded by an ungrateful nation, Samuel stood out from the crowd, as one who would maintain what was due to God. It is then, against this dark backdrop, that Samuel called the people together and said to them; *"Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms and from those who oppressed you.' But you have today rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations..."* (1 Samuel 10:18-19). None could doubt who filled the heart of Samuel, as he stood against the tide of moral degeneration in Israel. Doubtless there were others who loved God and did not want a king, but timidity held their tongues silent. Samuel alone stood up for the interests of God, because he was God's man.

Similarly, today we live in a society that does not recognise the legitimate authority of God upon the lives of His creation. His interests are drowned out in a tidal wave of materialism, political correctness and moral decay. More than ever before, men and women of God are needed, those who will tenaciously cling to His word, those who by their humble acceptance of all the Bible has to say stand as giants in a land of spiritual dwarves. There may also be times when we may need to speak up and speak out against all that openly defies God and usurps His authority.

As we move then, into 1 Samuel 12, we shall look at four qualities of Samuel that made him a man of God. In doing so, it is hoped that these same qualities will increasingly characterise our lives today, and make us men and women of God.

Samuel's personal integrity (1 Samuel 12:1-5)

"Now Samuel said to all Israel: 'Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and grey-headed, and look, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. Here I am. Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you.' And they said, 'You have not defrauded us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man's hand'", (1 Samuel 12:1-4).

What a life! As a young boy Samuel had been called by God (1 Samuel 3:1-18). Now, as an old man, he challenges Israel to convict him of any wrong doing in his dealings with them. And they can find no charge against him! At the very start of our calling to be people of God, we need to take a good hard look at ourselves to see whether we could survive a similar challenge. Society today is utterly rotten compared to the standards that God expects. Against this, as believers, we ought to be able to stand out, like a lighthouse in the storm, to show people what God demands. All too often though, sadly, we are no better than unbelievers - as we look at the church and see the arguments and disobedience to the Bible that has shattered it outwardly beyond human mending; as we hear of cases of child abuse by those in spiritual authority, as we see believers caught up in the rat race of making money and keeping up with the Jones' - then it is hardly any wonder that we seem to have difficulty in spreading the Gospel. Have no doubt about it! As Christians we should be increasingly different from those around about us, not in a superficial outward way, but by the choices we make and the actions we take.

To my shame, I remember my wife teaching me this very lesson a few years ago. We had been on holiday and were on our way home when we stopped to buy our children some new shoes. Having managed to get them all sorted, I was left to pay the bill, which I did. It was not until we got home that we realised that we had not been charged for one of the pairs of shoes. I was rather pleased; after all, it wasn't my mistake, and it was too far to go back to the shop. However, my wife insisted that we write a cheque for the balance, and sent it back with a tract and a note explaining our faith. Some weeks later, we got a reply from the manageress, who was very grateful, and didn't realise that Jesus made such a difference in people's lives anymore! What a powerful way to preach the Gospel.

So next time you are given too much change, give it back with a quick word about your faith. Samuel had lived a life that had been in the public gaze for much of the time. His honesty and upright behaviour gave him the moral authority to say the kind of things that he had to say to a disobedient Israel. His integrity had earned him the right to be heard. How sadly true it is that often others cannot hear what we have to say because our actions are shouting too loudly. Until we can show by the way we live that Jesus is able to improve our lives, then we cannot expect others to come and join us. When our colleagues at work throw a sickie on a Monday, are we known for our punctuality, and attendance, even when we are a bit under the weather? Is our homework always in on time? Is our bin less full than our neighbours because we buy less, and when we no longer can use something, give it to those who still can? Do we still have a clean driving licence? And when was the last time you got angry, sat idle while there was work to do, or jumped a red light? Such are the things that we need to challenge ourselves with this morning. We have no right to call ourselves Christians, like Christ, unless we are truly like Christ, though in His grace we may be saved even though our actions fall far short of what is expected.

Samuel's purpose (1 Samuel 12:6-12)

"Then Samuel said to the people, 'It is the LORD who raised up Moses and Aaron, and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did to you and your fathers'" (1 Samuel 12:6-7)

Samuel then goes on to rehearse some of the highlights of Israel's history and the ways in which God had kept them safe, despite all those who had come against them. He would show the people just how good God was in all His actions. How much Samuel wanted his God to be their God also!

I don't suppose Samuel had to lock himself away in his study to come up with his sermon. No, he was so familiar with the actions of his God that it was just natural to speak of what He had done, in the way that my children might tell their friends about my doings. Samuel would show the people that God was right in all His actions on behalf of Israel. What He had promised, He did. If we are to be people of God, we also need to have this living daily familiarity with God. We need eyes that see the hand of God at work in the ordinary circumstances of life. The quiet, ordinary life is just as powerful a testimony as the life that has experienced the highs and lows, when the actions of God are recounted. There needs to be a time at the end of each day when we examine our lives to see the times when God has helped us that day.

Sometimes the Christian life is very hard. As followers of Jesus we have been warned to expect trouble (see John 16:33), as Satan tries to discourage us. However, we do need to get beyond looking at the difficulties of our circumstances to the God who is with us in them, and the goal to which we press on. We can hardly wonder that others don't want to listen to our message, when our faces read, "Come and be as miserable as me"! As those who have been saved, God has already given us so much. We have hope, where once we had none. We have been set free from the power of sin in our lives, where once we were its slaves. We have been brought into the family of God with a new home assured, where before we had separation from God, and Hell to look forward to.

We are a part of His glorious body, and we can enjoy the benefits that fellowship imparts. Recently, we were sharing a meal at home with an Indian brother from Canada. We didn't know him before he came to Liverpool and he didn't know us. But the fact that we both knew the Saviour was more than enough. What a privilege to know that I could go to the other side of the country, or the other side of the world, and know that I would be welcome and cared for even by those who didn't know me personally, just because I'm a part of the Church. How very much we need to have our minds full of what He has made us, if we are to be men and women of God. Samuel wanted to show the people that God was still as active then as He had been at the beginning of the nation's history. God is still at work today, and those with the eyes and the time to look will see just how wonderfully He is completing His work, even in the world today.

Then we see Samuel's power (1 Samuel 12:13-18)

"...Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired. And take note, the LORD has set a king over you. If you fear the LORD and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the LORD your

God. However, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers. Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes: Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking a king for yourselves.' So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel" (1 Samuel 12:13-18).

Today we hardly dare say that something is wrong for fear of being branded narrow minded or bigoted. Not so the man of God! In wanting a king, Israel had denied God His rightful place. They rejected God so they could be like everyone else. Samuel knew that the people had to confront their sinfulness. So he stands up, and using plain language that none could misunderstand, Samuel tells the people just how far they had fallen from God's standards. What a painful task this must have been for Samuel! After a lifetime of service to Israel, perhaps Samuel could have wished for better from his people. Inevitably, disappointment must have filled his heart. But still, in love, he speaks to the people. What he says is right, because it maintains the honour of God. He presents the people with a clear choice. If they turned back to God in repentance, a path of hope lay before them. If they continued in disobedience to God, then only judgement waited for them.

A similar choice faces each one of us today. God has His standards and they have not changed. What He has said is right is right. What He has said is wrong is wrong, no matter what we may think. We should never be afraid to stand up for what God has said, not in an offensive, in-your-face way, but with a desire, like Samuel had, to see genuine repentance. Samuel then backs up his message with a clear demonstration of his authority. Though it was the wheat harvest season, and the weather should be settled and fine, he tells the people there was to be a violent thunderstorm. Later in Israel's history the prophet, Elijah, would tell the king a similar message, with the opposite happening as proof, a drought of over three years duration (see 1 Kings 18:1-19). In Deuteronomy 11:28 God had said that disobedience would lead to judgement. So these prophets were on safe ground, claiming the promises of God. Amidst the violence of the storm the people are filled with a godly fear. They realise the foolishness of disobedience to God. The desired effect was produced in the lives of the people. Had Samuel kept quiet, not wanting to offend the people, they would have continued in disobedience to God. Love moved Samuel to speak, to seek the best for the people, and love gained its reward.

At the beginning of the church period, God again worked miraculously to establish the authority of His word. So we read in Hebrews 2:4, "God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will." Of course, the resurrection of Jesus Christ stands as the ultimate validation of His authority. Today we have the written authority of the completed word of God. If we are to speak up as men and women of God, then we need to establish all we say foursquare upon the clear word of God. As we do so, then God will always establish His own authority. We are engaged in God's work, and it is His honour that we should always be concerned about in all that we do. We are not here to build our own reputations, or establish our points of view, but to direct others to a relationship with God. Undoubtedly, there are circumstances today, particularly where the Gospel is preached to those without the written word of God, where God will also use miraculous signs to confirm His word. Just because He usually chooses to work through natural means, let us never forget that we deal with a supernatural God, of infinite power. The response of Samuel to all this is beautiful and instructive. We do not see him writing to the daily newspaper editors, appearing on daytime television, nor do we see him standing aloof as he is vindicated in all he said. No! Finally we see him saying to the people, "*Do not fear!*" (1 Samuel 12:20)

Samuel's prayer (1 Samuel 12:19-25)

"And all the people said to Samuel, 'Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves.' Then Samuel said to the people, 'Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing. For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the 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, you shall be swept away, both you and your king'" (1 Samuel 12:19-25,

We see here what had motivated Samuel when he had spoken words of judgement against Israel. It was not a "holier than thou" condemnation, but a love for them and a desire that they would choose what was best. So Samuel busies himself in prayer for Israel, that the storm that had convicted the nation of their sin, would stop before inflicting further damage. There was no joy for Samuel in seeing his people suffer. If the heart of the prophet could be so moved, how much more so the heart of the One for whom he spoke. In compassion, Samuel reassures them with the words, "*Do not fear*" (1 Samuel 12:20). Samuel would not rest from prayer until the storm had abated. But then, he would again warn them of the essential need for obedience to God. Their repentance, perhaps a little fickle, was a start, but

Samuel would have them fully turn to God and know Him for themselves, so that He would no longer be just Samuel's God.

What a message the man of God has for today; *"Do not fear"* (1 Samuel 12:20). We fear the effects of terrorism. We fear the effects of financial insecurity. We fear for our old age. We fear family insecurity. We fear our children may take drugs or get in with a bad crowd. So much fear and worry! As believers we are not immune to these circumstances, although a living Christianity may help guard against some of them. However, we know the God of whom Peter has said *"Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you"* (1 Peter 5:7). There is no circumstance that we go through that is beyond His control. There is no event that we endure, where He is not with us also. Our faith should enable us to face the ups and downs of life with a calm reassurance that in all things He is working for our good (see Romans 8:28). We are not ostriches, burying our head in the sand, denying the reality of events. No, but we do know the One who is able to provide strength for each day. The peace that only God can give is truly beyond all understanding (see Philippians 4:7).

As men and women of God, then, we need to be involved in living out our lives in the good of this. When we find Him true to His word, then we can, like Samuel, involve ourselves in the important work of intercession for others. I wonder how many people do you pray for? I remember as a University student visiting an old lady who was a friend of a friend. And yet she seemed to know all about me, and wanted to update herself with my news, so she could pray for me more knowledgeably. In a world where the Devil is increasingly busy causing harm, as he realises his time for evil is short, how much we need those who are courageous enough to stand on the front line and pray for the well being of others. Samuel viewed his prayers as an essential part of his testimony. Not to have prayed for Israel would have been a sin. Do we have a similar sense of the importance of prayer? One can only assume that the lack of public prayer together today is matched by a lack of private prayer. It is no wonder that our country is in the state it is! Perhaps we, too, this morning need to be challenged as to whether we are guilty of the sin of omission as regards to prayer for others (see 1 Samuel 12:23).

What a challenge Samuel gives us this morning! No wonder he was known as a man of God (1 Samuel 9:6). Tirelessly, he had served Israel for all of his life. Time and again, he had stood up for the honour and interests of God. Often he had had to speak out, a lone voice against the moral degeneration of the nation. And yet throughout it all, he had remained true to his God.

By his personal integrity, he had earned the right to be heard. None could rubbish his message because of glaring inconsistencies in his life. In his purpose, he was not distracted by the trivialities of life but would have the people fully acquainted with his God. By his power, based upon his relationship with God and His word, he spoke with authority to the people of their need to repent. And with his prayers he covered them, as a hen would cover her chicks.

As we conclude this morning, let us remind ourselves of the words in Ezekiel 22:30, *"So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one."* God is still looking for men and women of God. Will He find them in our country today?

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