

Title - A future for failures

Reading - 1 Samuel 12:1-25

Prayer

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything." Or as my Dad said, "If you aim at nothing you'll hit it."

Inventor Thomas Edison spent more than \$100,000 to obtain 6000 different fibre specimens, and only three of them proved satisfactory. However, each failure brought him that much closer to the solution to his problem, and that solution, which we have all benefitted from, is the electric light bulb.

Edison learned from his failures and moved on. Later in his life his manufacturing facilities in West Orange, New Jersey, were heavily damaged by fire one night. He lost almost \$1 million worth of equipment and the record of much of his work. The next morning, walking about the charred embers of his hopes and dreams, the 67-year-old inventor said: "There is value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Now we can start anew."

Amazingly, three weeks after the fire, Edison managed to deliver the first phonograph.

This morning we are going to look at failure. We have all failed in one way or another and that has probably brought us shame and embarrassment.

I can confess that I have been a failure as a son, husband and a father, and regularly feel like a failure as a Christian. However I am relieved, happy and excited that God uses failures to achieve His will.

So let's look at the character from our reading, that of Samuel.

So who was Samuel? Samuel was a prophet, judge and king-maker.

Samuel was the only son of Elkana and Hannah, and like many other parents in the Bible they had to wait for their first child. Remember, Abraham and Sarah or Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Samuel was presented before the Lord and was brought up by Eli, the priest, and he served in the temple. You are probably aware of Samuel's calling by the Lord. If not you can read about it in 1 Samuel 3.

Samuel is the first prophet after Moses, he was also the last judge of Israel, because the children of Israel wanted something different as we will see shortly.

The pattern of leadership throughout Israel's history is quite clearly defined.

The father of Israel was Abraham and he was the first of the **Patriarchs**, followed by Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and we can read of their exploits in Genesis.

Then followed the **Prophets** from the time of Moses and the children of Israel's time in captivity in Egypt through to Samuel. During this time we have a period when they were led by Judges, more about them shortly.

After the prophets and Judges we have the **Princes** or Kings from Saul to Zedekiah which ended with the exile to Babylon.

When the Jews were re-established in Jerusalem some 70 years later, under Ezra & Nehemiah, we then have the **Priests** from Joshua to Ananias.

These leaders were the measure of the people's obedience towards God. Kings David and Solomon were highly successful, although they had failures in their lives. Most of the Kings did evil in the sight of God and this was reflected in the spiritual health of the people. The people are also condemned because they did not listen!

So what about the Judges? - if we read Judges 2:16 we see their principle purpose...

Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.

While the Judges lived, the children of Israel were safe and followed the commandment of their Lord their God. Once the Judge died the people slipped into a cycle of sinning, then being overwhelmed by their enemies, followed by supplication, crying out to the Lord to save them.

God heard their cries and a new Judge would be appointed. But this cycle of disobedience continued on and off for round about 400 years!

So why was Samuel the **last** judge?

Like Eli's sons, Samuel's two sons, Joel and Abijah, had sinned before God by seeking dishonest gain and perverting justice. Samuel had appointed his sons as judges, but the elders of Israel told Samuel that because he was too old and his sons did not walk in his ways, they wanted Samuel to appoint a king to rule them like other nations had.

Samuel had failed as a father, and he was also displeased with the people's demand for a King because he felt that he was being abandoned and rejected. However, in 1 Sam 8:6-8 we read this...

But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.

7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.

8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.

So Samuel accepts God's view graciously and hands over the reigns of the kingdom of Israel to King Saul. But before Samuel steps down from the administration, he makes his farewell speech.

I would imagine a number of have been to a works do where someone has retired and they are called on to make a speech. Well Samuel is making such a speech, and what a speech it is!

We will use the following C's to focus our minds on the passage we read earlier.

Confirmation; Confrontation; Certainty;
Confession; Consequences.

Confirmation

First of all in v1-5 Samuel is putting himself in the firing line. He is putting his reputation on the line. "Tell me what I have done wrong?" Samuel is intending to convince them of how hurt he is by them setting him and God aside. v12 confirms it...

"No, we want a king to rule over us" – even though the LORD your God was your king.

He may also be intending to preserve his own reputation. In today's world we regularly see people resigning from various positions and later their misdemeanours come to light. Maybe some in Samuel's day may have wondered if that was the case here.

These verses **confirmed** his good standing with the people he had led for so long.

Is it possible for us to stand before our friends and family as ask them to confirm our good standing, I know I couldn't. Could we stand before a Holy God and do the same - **NEVER** - why?

Romans 3:23 tells us

'...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.'

Confrontation

In v6-9 Samuel moves on to confront them with all the good things God had done for them as His people. There is, of course, so much evidence that he could only, sensibly, mention one of the greatest. Initially, going

into Egypt which effectively saved around 70 people from the famine in Canaan, this was Jacob and his family; and about 430 years later, over 1/2 million men plus the women and children who left under the leadership of Moses and Aaron and were brought safely to the promised land by God's guidance.

Great as God's deliverance was Samuel had to confront them about how their ancestors had forgotten the role of their God. We can see this in v9.

"But they forgot the LORD their God;

This confrontation demonstrated how their ancestors were convicted of their sin and then their confession. In verse 10 we read,

They cried out to the Lord and said we have sinned.

The Children of Israel were perpetual failures! We see that throughout the Judge's time, and looking forward to the time after Solomon's demise, it was a constant decline until the captivity by the Babylonians. Time and time again we read that the Kings did evil in the sight of God and the people did not listen to the Lord their God.

Even after all the historic evidence of failure and God rescuing them time and time again, showing them His unquenchable mercy, they still wanted a king, instead of God himself, so that they could be like other nations. Remember the children of Israel were a **chosen people**.

Verse 12 shows us that this chosen people wanted to cast off God's divine administration through Samuel. They wanted to be like other nations. What were the other nations like? Again, throughout the Old Testament we read that other nations worshipped their own powerless and emasculated gods. Their gods had no power to save.

The people want to be like other nations, to cast off the worship of the one true God; the LORD God almighty who we worship today.

Consequences

But even with a King there were still consequences for disobedience. Verse 14 & 15 tells us clearly.

*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!***

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.

Obeys and things will be OK, disobeys and they will be treated the same as their ancestors.

Certainty

The next few verses are sort of a cautionary tale, a demonstration of God's power and ability. It also highlights Samuel's role and relationship with God. Nothing has really changed. God has given them a King in the man Saul, and still Samuel has that great connection, through prayer, to the Almighty God.

The people were in awe of this mighty exhibition of Samuel's supplication and God's answering spectacle. It was certain who was in charge. V18
So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel.

Confession

In v 19 we get a confession. The people have realised their sin and along with the demonstration of God's power, the results must have been frightening.

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."

I think it's interesting to see that they have called upon the Lord to rescue them, **via Samuel** and not King Saul.

The next three verses sums up what John Piper calls the gospel.

Let's read them again...

*"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.*

This is what John Piper says...

This is the gospel: Even though you have sinned greatly, and terribly dishonoured the Lord, even though you now have a king which it was a sin to demand, even though there is no undoing that sin or its painful consequences that are yet to come, nevertheless there is a future and a hope. **There is mercy.**

But why should they not fear?

For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.

These verses should speak straight into our hearts. We are failures in the sight of God and there is nothing we can do to change that. We have all sinned and as you may know the wages of sin is death. God is Holy and cannot tolerate sin. And sin is the problem. It is the deliberate and wilful rejection of God, wanting to be like others, worshipping the idols of wealth, power and prestige, to name but three.

But we have a Saviour - God who came down in human form, His son - Jesus. He lived amongst us, taught us and showed us God the Father.

He died to take our sins away, he died so that the relationship between God and us could be restored. God does this because He created us and made us his own.

John Piper goes on to say,

That this should have two effects on you: heart-breaking humility and toe-tapping happiness. Humility because you're worth is not the foundation of your salvation. Happiness because your salvation is as sure as God's allegiance to his own name. It cannot get more sure.

So where does this leave us, Christians and non-Christians alike?

We, as individuals, are failures in the sight of a Holy God, we have all sinned and don't kid yourself into thinking that you haven't, we have **all** sinned.

The only way back to God, is through the cross of Christ. Old Testament worship required repetitive sacrifices. Now we just rely on one sacrifice, that of Jesus. This is the gift of grace, God's riches at Christ's expense. We can do nothing to earn it, we have no merit of our own to purchase salvation or status to demand it.

God's gift of Grace is freely given and all that needs to be done is to accept it. Roman 10:9 states clearly...

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

There is an invitation to know Jesus personally. And I can tell from personal experience he can and will change your life. In Hebrews 3:7 we read...

So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

This might sound like an advertising slogan but...

Don't delay, accept Him today.

If you have made a commitment to Christ then we, as the body of Christ, welcome you, we will pray for you and we will teach you. What did Samuel say in v23

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.

There is in the last verses an encouragement verse 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.

But also a warning for carrying on without Christ verse 25...

Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish."

And to finish with words from that great hymn, *to God be the glory!*

Oh perfect redemption, the purchase of blood!
To every believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives

There is a **future for failures** - and that future is the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you want to know more please don't hesitate to speak to Francis or myself. God bless. Amen.