

## 1 Samuel 12:1-25 – “Samuel Bows Out”

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**Intro:** Famous last words. Always we are interested in the last thing anyone has to say when they leave an office; retire from a job; or close their eyes in eternal slumber. Last words might carry special meaning; or they might mean nothing at all. Nevertheless, we’re always interested. Tonight, we have Samuel’s famous last words as he ends his judgeship over Israel. The transition from judgeship to kingship has been completed. Samuel would continue as part of the nation’s story in his role as prophet – one who speaks God’s words to the king and the people – but from this point forward, Samuel no longer occupies the office of Judge. His time in day-to-day leadership was finished. What did he want to say to the people as he stepped from the scene? He had one urgent word as he bowed out:

**Proposition:** The heart is the heart of the problem and tomorrow’s blessings depends on today’s faithfulness.

Billboard:	(vv.1-5)	A Leader with Integrity
	(vv.6-12)	A Lesson from History
	(vv.13-18)	A Finger Toward the Future
	(vv.19-25)	A Path to Victory

(vv.1-5) A Leader with Integrity – Samuel bowed out of national leadership, transitioning the nation from government by judges to government by kings, as we see in verses 1-2 **1 Samuel 12:1-2** - **1** And Samuel said to all Israel, “Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. **2** And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. Before leaving, Samuel had to confront the heart of Israel’s problem one last time. When Israel asked for a king – demanded a king, really – they were saying, “Our problem is leadership. If only we had a king, everything would come out right for us! We’ve had nothing but bad leadership for as long as anyone can remember!” Samuel therefore invited the nation to look more deeply into the situation and he began that conversation by saying, “Was I then a leader who lacked integrity? Examine the evidence!” **1 Samuel 12:3** **3** Here I am; testify 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 taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.” By challenging the people to examine his ministry, Samuel was saying, “Have I been a leader who lacked integrity? I have obeyed your voice and given you a king. I am now stepping off the scene. But before I go, I want to ask you – Did I serve you honestly, or did I seek my own good rather than yours?” The people had to admit before God and the king that Samuel had served with integrity: **1 Samuel 12:4-5** - **4** They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man’s hand.” **5** And he said to them, “The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they said, “He is witness.” After making this point, Samuel followed up with:

(vv.6-12) A Lesson from History – Samuel now reviewed the sad history of God’s people, showing them that the leaders God had given His people were not the problem. The problem was in the people themselves. **1 Samuel 12:6-12** - **6** And Samuel said to the people, “The LORD is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. **7** Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous deeds of the LORD that he performed for you and for your fathers. **8** When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the LORD and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. **9** But they forgot the LORD their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the

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king of Moab. And they fought against them. **10** And they cried out to the LORD and said, ‘We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.’ **11** And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. **12** And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the LORD your God was your king. Samuel’s point was simply this: Whenever the people called on the name of the Lord, God sent leaders to deliver them. Notice the leaders Samuel includes in his list: Moses and Aaron; Gideon; Barack; Jephthah; and Samuel himself. None of these men were perfect, as we have seen in past studies. But all of them served faithfully as God’s appointed surrogates and delivered Israel when the people called out to the Lord. But notice verse nine: **9** *But they forgot the LORD their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them.* Here is Samuel’s point: Leadership was never the heart of their problem because God himself was leading them through their leaders. Leadership was not their problem. Their hearts were the heart of the problem.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The heart is the heart of the problem.

[ILLUSTRATION] Someone has well said that “Facts are stubborn things.” You can try to ‘spin’ them, but they won’t be spun. You can deny them, but they refuse to disappear. You can attempt to refute them, but they won’t give in. Facts are stubborn things and always point immovably to the realities behind them.

[APPLICATION] Samuel pointed the people of his generation to a stubborn fact: God had faithfully supplied effective leadership to the nation every time God’s people turned from idols and cried out to Him. Israel had demanded better leadership, but leadership was not their problem. Their real problem was their heart. Whenever the nation turned aside from obedience to God and put their faith in worthless idols, trouble quickly followed. This is still true today. Like Israel we tend to blame our troubles on outside forces. Bad leadership. The impersonal “those people.” Bad leadership sometimes happens. “Those people” sometimes cause problems. But by far the greatest source of trouble for believers doesn’t come from the outside. It’s found in our own hearts. When waters around us get choppy, the first place to look for relief is within. Are we keeping faith with the Master? That’s the question.

(vv.13-18) A Finger Toward the Future – Samuel now pointed the people from their past to their future: He spoke about what would happen now that God had granted them the king they had demanded. **1 Samuel 12:13–18** - **13** *And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. 14* *If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. 15* *But if you will 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 and your king.* His message was plain and simple: Keep doing what you’ve always done, and you will keep getting what you’ve always gotten. But if you obey the voice of the Lord, all will be well. Then he sealed this testimony with a sign – Samuel prayed for God to put His stamp of approval on his message by sending thunder and rain out of season. **16** *Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. 17* *Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of*

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*the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king.” 18 So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. The people got the message: the problem isn’t our leadership – the problem is us.*

(vv.19-25) A Path to Victory – Having diagnosed the disease, Samuel now prescribed the remedy – Remain faithful to the Lord and stop turning aside after empty things that cannot profit. **1 Samuel 12:19 - 19** *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 this evil, to ask for ourselves a king.”* Samuel’s reply was masterful – Serve the Lord with all your heart, for the Lord is full of grace (cf. v.22). SAMUEL GROUNDED HIS APPEAL ON THE BEDROCK OF GOD’S GRACE. Israel repeatedly turned aside to worthless idols because the people didn’t trust God to keep His promises. Now, in his last words as their leader, Samuel turns to the people and reminds them of God’s gracious character: **1 Samuel 12:20–22 - 20** *And Samuel said to the people, “Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. 21 And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. 22 For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. GOD’S GRACE IS NEVER IN DOUBT, BUT OUR FAITHFULNESS IS CONSTANTLY ON TRIAL.* Samuel said to them, “If you want God’s blessings tomorrow, remain faithful today, for God’s willingness to bless you is never in doubt.” God is always gracious to repentant people, and Samuel was too! **1 Samuel 12:23-25 - 23** *Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. 24 Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. 25 But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”* He said in effect, “Of course I will pray for you and instruct you – you can count on that. But if you do not fear the Lord, my prayers for you will be of little value.” What was Samuel’s point? It doesn’t matter who the leader is; nothing can save people who turn aside from following the Lord, putting their faith in empty things which cannot profit. Before stepping from the scene, Samuel told the people what they most needed to hear – “The problem is not your leaders; it’s your own hearts, and the future will look just like the past unless you remain faithful to the Lord in the present.”

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Tomorrow’s blessing depends on today’s faithfulness.

[ILLUSTRATION] On January 1<sup>st</sup> of 1773, a pastor in England preached a sermon to his congregation expositing the Scriptures faithfully. As was this man’s habit on New Year’s Day, he also turned his sermon into a poem and that poem later became perhaps the most famous Christian hymn the world has known. The pastor was John Newton, and the hymn, “*Amazing Grace.*” Newton was a man who knew about grace. Saved from a miserable life captaining a slave ship, he became one of the leading evangelical voices of his generation and is largely credited with inspiring William Wilberforce in Wilberforce’s long successful campaign to end slavery in the British empire. As we’re told in the hymn, Newton never got over the fact that God’s grace could save a wretch like him. But armed with that knowledge, he faced the future with faithful confidence in God, writing, “Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; ‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.” Newton understood that God’s past grace is the sure foundation for tomorrow’s further blessings.

[APPLICATION] Who needs to hear this? Anyone worried about tomorrow needs to hear that faithfulness today is the pathway to tomorrow’s victory. It’s the plodder, the one who faithfully follows God day-in and day-out, who will best know God’s blessings ultimately. We need look no further than the astounding promises of a glorious future eternity to realize the truth of this statement. Christian

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don't be like the people of Israel who turned aside continually from following the Lord because they didn't trust His grace. Look at the fact of God's grace and walk faithfully forward. After all, "The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures; He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures."

**Conclusion:** Faithful Samuel would continue to serve in the role of prophet – one who spoke God's words to the people and their king, and one who prayed without ceasing for them. Samuel knew that tomorrow's blessings depend on today's faithfulness. Do you?