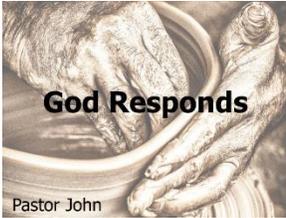


Scripture: 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 8: 4-11 and 16-20

*4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the LORD, 7 and the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. 8 Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. 9 Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." 10 So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, "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... 16 He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 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." 19 But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, "No! but we are determined to have a king over us, 20 so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles."*



As we begin today, I invite you to think of a time or two when God responded to a prayer that you prayed. Take a minute and think about it... Let us pray.

Today in our scripture we again join Samuel. Last week we looked at how God called him. Since chapter three, a lot has happened. The ark of God has been captured by the rival Philistines, the great prophet Eli has died, God has punished the Philistines for putting the ark in their temple (which they quickly returned), and Samuel has been acting as a judge and prophet for the nation of Israel. As Samuel got old, he appointed his sons as judges over Israel, but they were crooked and perverted justice. The elders of Israel look around at the Philistines and other tribes around them and decide that they want what others have. How many of you have witnessed similar behavior in your children?

There is one red ball and a thousand blue ones. Put two children in the room full of balls and they both want the red one. A child toddles onto the playground and sees another child happily playing with the dump truck. There are dozens of



other trucks on the playground. The new child wants the dump truck. The two lay ahold of the truck and it takes an expert in conflict resolution to mediate the dispute that has now broken out over the dump truck. These illustrations may

simplify it somewhat, but this must have been how Samuel felt at times. As judge he would have heard many cases or disputes between people every day but the Sabbath. At least one if not two parties would depart unhappy and

grumbling after he pronounced judgment. And as the prophet or voice of God, he was also speaking hard truths to the people and mediating between the people and God. Do you ever like to have someone remind you of your sins or of your shortcomings of faith? I do not imagine the Israelites liked it either. This was the day to day life of Samuel.

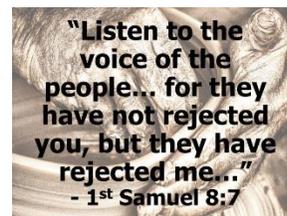
As we look at this picture of these two young toddlers fighting over the dump truck, I wonder, who do you think will give in first? If you answered “neither” I think you are correct. It is amazing how immovable a two-year-old can be, isn’t it? When we think of God, I think we often see God this way – as immovable. We think of God as unchanging, immutable, rigid, static, set in His ways. Yet in the Bible, when we delve a little deeper, we get a different impression of God. We find several instances where the people or a prophet changed God’s mind or swayed God’s decision. Think of Moses begging God to spare the people after they made the golden calf. Think of God being willing to spare the evil-filled city, Sodom. Abraham negotiated with God to spare Sodom if they could find 50 righteous men. God agreed and then Abraham negotiated it down to 45 then to 40 then to 30 and then to 20 and lastly down to 10. God listens to His children.



In our passage today, the people request a king. All the tribes around them have a king and look how green the grass is in their kingdoms. If we remember back to their time in the wilderness, when they wandered around for forty years, we remember God gave them some commandments to live by. Remember commandment number one –

I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me? Hmm. And now you want a king? Samuel knows in his gut that this is wrong. But the people whine and complain and plead and argue with Samuel that they need a king. Finally, Samuel goes to God on behalf of the people and hear God's

response: *"Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them"*. Do not fret Samuel.



They are not rejecting you with this request. They are rejecting God. What the people did in the desert, they now do again. God laments, *"Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods"*, the chosen people now do again, wanting a human king instead of a heavenly God.

Before we think too poorly of the people of Israel for thinking this way, how many times have we said something along the lines of: "No, God, I think I've got this one"? How many times have we tried to do it our own way, thinking that we knew better than God? We have all gone down those roads, haven't we? But God does something interesting here with the Israelites. Instead of sticking to the first of the ten commandments, to have no other God before the one true God, instead, God responds to the people's request. God does first send Samuel back to them with a warning – a solemn warning, in fact. God warns the people that a king will take their sons for his armies, will take their slaves for himself, will take one-tenth of their flocks, and will make slaves out of them. God then goes on to warn them that one day they will complain about the king they so

want now, but when they do complain, He will not answer their pleas. Even knowing all of this, the people still demand a king. And God responds.



It amazes me that God acquiesces and gives in to the people's demand. God has to know that this was the people taking a step away from Him, from trusting in God and in His

leadership. God had to also know how unreasonable this request was. How could any earthly king ever compare to God Almighty? Yet as unreasonable as this request was, God relents. God bends and gives in. Can you remember doing just such a thing as a parent? Can you remember the times when your child came to you with an unreasonable request, something you just knew was a bad idea, something you just knew would not turn out well? You too relented and allowed them to do it anyway. Sometimes you even issued a solemn warning too. Even though we can probably all relate to this scenario of rebellious children, in the big scheme of things, we are just us and God is God. We are the created, and God is the creator.

God, yes God Almighty, gives a gracious and loving response. If His children are demanding a king and, in doing so rejecting Him, well, He loves them enough to respond and to grant their request. It is a marvelous grace to step aside. It is a wonderful gesture to offer a boundless love that allows His children to walk down this road that leads away from Him. I think that God is willing to respond as He does because He knows that relationship at times requires one to give of oneself. A loving relationship at times yields ones rights up for the other. A loving

relationship sometimes calls for sacrifice. We see a similar scenario played out about a thousand years later when the religious leaders reject and crucify the Son of God in favor of maintaining their own places of power and authority. Our God is a God of love. Sometimes love requires much. Sometimes love will even require much of us.

Even though we go our own way at times, through His unimaginable grace, God's response is always the same: "I love you". Although the dynamics of the relationship were changing with the advent of a king, God said to Israel, "I still love you. I'll always love you. This will be a different relationship, but I'll still love you". God says the same thing to us as our relationship with Him changes, as it evolves, and even in the times when it regresses and involves our rejection of God in favor of our own selfishness.

For most of us, we seek to live into God's plans for us and to follow God's ways as we live out our faith on a daily basis. Every once in a while, though, when we are trying to live out our faith on a daily basis, God will come calling. Last week I spoke of the calls that we receive from God. Sometimes the call is voiced by another who sees something in us, sometimes the Holy Spirit whispers to us, and sometimes, yes, sometimes, God might speak to us, as was the case in Brody's testimony last week. When God calls, the call is often to do something for another. The call that God places upon our lives is usually to make a difference in one person's life. One thing that we heard last week in Brody's call story was how over and over God responded. No matter what situation Brody found himself in, God was present and responded to his needs. This week we hear

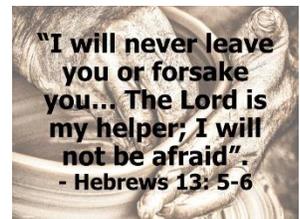
another testimony of how one of our own heard the call and how God responded over and over. There was a tragedy in our community in October of 2016. That morning, as she left home, Eva thought that she knew what her day held in store. But God had other plans. Please listen to Eva's story of how God called and of how God responded in the midst of Eva accepting and living out that call. Please turn your attention to the screens.



Eva was sensitive to and attentive to the way that the Spirit was leading her that day. God was present and responded to her needs as they arose. This is the story we see in 1<sup>st</sup>

Samuel and in many other places in the Bible. God calls someone and then He walks alongside that person, responding as a loving and caring Father. The same is true when we receive God's call on our lives. These words from Hebrews 13 remind us that God will always be present to us and will always be there for us: *"For He has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'*<sup>6</sup> *So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"*

He will never leave or forsake us – God is always present and near to us, ready to respond and ready to help us.



Today, on Pentecost Sunday, we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the first Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit, the gift that Jesus had promised, arrived large and loud. With a "sound like the blowing of a violent wind", the Holy Spirit

entered the house where the believers were gathered. Tongues of fire fell on each one and they began speaking in many languages. The noise of the Holy Spirit's arrival drew a large crowd of Jews who were there for the Jewish holiday "Shavuot". As they came to where the believers were gathered, these people from all over the world hear the Word of God proclaimed in their own native tongues. The Holy Spirit allowed ministry to happen. Peter goes on to preach to the crowd and about 3,000 are added to their number that day. The church grows by leaps and bounds as the Holy Spirit moves the church out into the wider world.

Through the power and presence of the same Holy Spirit, God will bring us the courage or skill or whatever else we need for the task at hand and He will give us the words we need to say for just that situation. He will never leave us, He will never forsake us. God will be with us. May we trust in God this week as we seek to live out our faith, trusting that God responds whenever, wherever, and however we need Him to. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) When has God responded in your life, leading to a growth in faith? How can this story help another to grow in their faith?
- 2) What area (or areas) of your faith life are you wrestling with God? Pray that your spirit becomes willing so that you can give God the control.
- 3) Are you feeling any Holy Spirit nudges lately? Pray for God to respond as you step out in faith. (And then actually step out!)