**Who’s in Charge Here**

**Sermon for Cashmere Presbyterian Church for Sunday 9th June 2024**

**Preacher: Very Rev Hamish Galloway**

**Text: 1 Samuel 8**

**Who’s in Charge Here**

**Introduction**

There was political debate going amongst the people of Israel. It was the 11th century BC and they had been through a long period of being ruled by Judges, successive non-hereditary leaders from a variety of tribes who were unelected but chosen by God to rescue the people in times of crises and maintain justice. The people of Israel thought it was time for a change. They wanted a king to rule over them so they could be like the other nations around them (v5).

The big question was, who do we want to be in charge around here! That was 2,000 years ago but the issue of who do we want to be in charge remains totally relevant among the nations. We have just seen election results in South Africa, Mexico and India. In each place the people where deciding on who they wanted in charge – in India alone 642 million people voted! In each case there was an element of time for a change in the way the voting went. And we have elections looming in the UK and the US – we will watch carefully to see who the people want to have in charge.

And we have had a change of government here in the last year with the forming of an interesting coalition which has raised questions about who is actually in charge! There was a cartoon in The Press a while back which depicted Chris Luxon seeking to bring Shane Jones and David Seymore into line. They were dressed up as school boys in the school yard, with Jones and Seymore behind the bike sheds saying to each other, he’s not the boss of us!

Time for a Change

The need for change was understandable in Samuel’s day – he was getting too old (ironic given the age of the candidates in the US elections) and his succession plan was flawed in both method (nepotism) and practice (corruption in the next generation of leaders). Moreover, they were under pressure from aggressive surrounding nations like the Philistines and the thought was that a king who was able to lead them in battle was needed.

The thinking was that it was time to move to the King model of leadership. Now this in itself was actually ok with God. Way back in Deuteronomy this change was predicted by Moses:

**14**When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, “Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,” **15**be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses.  (Deut 17)

And it is clear the line of King David was used by God to set up the coming of the King of Kings Jesus.

And yet both Samuel and God are upset by the people’s desire for a king here – why would that be? And what can we learn from this?

The Flawed Reasons for Change

I think that there are 2 main ways the people got this wrong

1. **Peer Pressure**

While the Deuteronomy passage is clear that deciding on a king needed to be a God inspired decision, the reason the people here wanted a king is totally swayed by what others are doing. And God gets Samuel to warn them about the kind of kings the other nations had – kings that would take, take, take from the people. By comparison in Deuteronomy the kind of king that God had in mind was a God fearing leader with the people’s needs in mind:

**16**The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, “You are not to go back that way again.” **17**He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

**18**When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. **19**It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees **20**and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

The problem here is that God had set a high bar for his chosen people to aspire to and they were prepared to lower themselves to what everyone else was doing. Paul talks about this phenomenon in Romans 12:2

**2**Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect. (GNB)

The Living Bible puts it this way:

**2**Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your own experience how his ways will really satisfy you.

So firstly God’s calling to Israel and to us as people of God – don’t sink to the ways of the world, but rather listen carefully to the higher calling of God for that is where the fullness of life is found.

1. **God above kings**

The second reason was the most disappointing for both Samuel and God, that the people made no acknowledgement that any king is subject to the ultimate ruler of the universe, God.

The best of the Judges knew that they were chosen by God and any victories came to them by the power of God. Perhaps the best example of that was Gideon! After his amazing victory the people wanted to make him and his heredity line kings! We read this Judges 8:

The people of Israel said to Gideon, “You saved us from the Midianites. Now, we want you and your son and your grandson to rule over us.” But Gideon told them, “The LORD will be your ruler.

The people so quickly turned away from the saving power of God to human ways. This is a repeating pattern in our human relationship with God. We see it so clearly in the Exodus, after witnessing so many saving miracles of God, when Moses is held up on the mountain the people quickly turn to man-made gods!

Psalm 20 puts it this way.

Now I know that the Lord gives victory to his chosen king;  
    he answers him from his holy heaven  
    and by his power gives him great victories.  
**7**Some trust in their war chariots  
    and others in their horses,  
    but we trust in the power of the Lord our God.  
**8**Such people will stumble and fall,  
    but we will rise and stand firm.

**9**Give victory to the king, O Lord;  
    answer us when we call.

**Conclusion**

The fact that our national anthem acknowledges above all that God is ultimately in charge and the one we trust is a fine thing. But that is under fire in that it does not really represent the way we are governed as a people and there are those who agitate for a change that better reflects the self-sufficiency of our governing structures!

And so it was with the people of Israel – while there were times of Godly and just rule, most of the time the will of God was disregarded and injustice and corruption were the flavour of the day! When the people begged Samuel for a King, the Lord told him to warn then that a king would take and take from them! This turned out to be true over and over and obviously was highly dissatisfying and by the 1st century AD the clamour for a king to out-king them all was at fever pitch. And into this fever-pitch Jesus is born! And he begins his ministry with the good news that the king they had been longing for has arrived:

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. **15**“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1)

And in Jesus we see a king in tune with the will of God and one who in not ‘on the take’ but rather the king who lavishes riches on his people! Humbly serving the people of the world, crowned with a crown of thorns yet raised to the highest of heights!

So he calls us, invites us, to citizenship first and foremost of this kingdom of God.

That we might always seek for God fearing leaders, yes. But ultimately know where our help comes from. It is not from human leaders but from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth!