

SERVE HIM FAITHFULLY WITH ALL YOUR HEART

1 Samuel 12:1-25 (Key verse 20, 24)

“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”(20)...“But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for ;”]

As believers serving God with all our hearts is our basic calling in this world, in fact I can go as far as to say it is the meaning and purpose of our life. The difference is on how we practically serve Him in our daily lives. However, the principle is that however way we live or practice, we are called to serve God faithfully with all our hearts. However how can we serve God faithfully? On top of that how can we do it with all our hearts? We may have head knowledge of what it means to serve God faithfully with all our hearts, however knowing and to really live that life of serving Him is two different things. In this passage Samuel gives this command to the nation of Israel, to repent and serve God faithfully with all their hearts. We want to learn how Samuel helped Israel to do this, what are the key ingredients? Samuel served God faithfully with all of his heart from the time of his youth. Now he was old and handing over his leadership. Will it not be wonderful to also reach our old age as a faithful servant of God, who served with heart. I pray that this message may encourage us to repent and strive towards serving God faithfully with all our hearts, so we too may grow to our old age like Samuel. Part I is about God's righteousness revealed through Israel's ancestors and in part II will try extract key ingredients that are needed to live a life that serves God faithfully with all our hearts.

Part I: God's righteousness revealed through Israel's ancestors

Let us look at verse 1-2, “Samuel said to all Israel, “I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. 2Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day.” Israel had just won a great victory over their enemy king Nahash. It was clear that Saul could now lead them as their king. The time of the judges was over, the new way of leadership had began which is the use of kings. So then Samuel gave Israel a reminder of what they had wanted, which was a king. Samuel had served the Lord faithfully since his youth with all of his heart. He was now old man and handing over leadership to Saul. What a beautiful site, to reach old age having and while served God faithfully with all your heart.

So, what could be important for Israel and Saul in Samuel's speech?

Firstly, Samuel reminds Israel of how he led them, he also calls them and Saul to be witnesses,

Look at verses 3, “Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right.” Samuel could lead this way because he was serving God with all of his heart. He served honestly before God, he served as though God was watching every step and decision he made. To the extent that even if he had wronged someone without knowing, he asked that such persons should come forward and he would correct his wrong. Samuel led with sincerity, a true servant leader before God. And the people's response is that, indeed he had not cheated, he had not oppressed or accepted bribes and not wronged anyone unknowingly. Look at verse 5, “Samuel said to them, “The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” “He is witness,” they said.” Samuel served the Lord with all his heart that he could even call upon the Lord as his witness. The Lord and Saul would be witness against the people if in the future they were to claim Samuel was a bad leader. In this way this shows the faithfulness of Samuel in serving God with his heart. This now leaves a good example for Saul to follow of what it means to serve God with all his hearth faithfully.

Secondly, Samuel reminds Israel of the Lord's righteousness, their repeated sin of their forefathers and what they should do,

Look at verse 7, “Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the **righteous acts performed by the Lord** for you and your ancestors.” The Lord had performed righteous acts before their ancestors from Egypt to having them settled at that place [8]. But their ancestors forgot their Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. The Baal was the sun god known as the chief male deity, whereas the Ashtoreth was the female deity. The Baal was regarded as the god of the heavens while the Ashtoreths was a goddess of love and fertility. Both were seen to complete what mankind was meant to worship and serve. The sun provides what nature needs so mankind can eat and live. Whereas for the goddess of love and fertility, mankind would reproduce and grow in number forming communities and nations. All this seem to make sense, however, there is but one true living God who created all things. When Israel served these other gods, the Lord would punish Israel by handing them over as slaves to the other nations (hazor, Philistines and Moab) [8]. From time of old, the Lord has been delivering them from their enemies through His servants, Jeru-Baal, Barak, Jephthah and now in this generation Samuel [11]. The Lord their God has been faithful and righteous

through their unfaithful ancestors to this very point. God's righteousness did not tolerate sin, if they served other gods they were left in the hands of their enemies. Whereas if they repented and turned to God, they received deliverance. Israel now behaved like their ancestors when they requested to have a king.

Look at verse 12, "But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'—even though the Lord your God was your king." They had behaved like their ancestors is requesting for a king because of their fear of Nahash. However, look at verse 13, "Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the Lord has set a king over you." Never the less the Lord gave them a king they had chosen to rule over them. Here Samuel was reinstating that he was stepping down, since they now had a king who would rule over them. However, the Lord God has not changed, he is the Lord and God of their ancestors. Look at verse 14-15, "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! 15But 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." Instead of fearing other nations, they should fear the Lord. It is the fear of the Lord that would help them to serve and obey God. They were to be careful not to repeat the ways of their forefathers. But to instead to fear the lord, serve Him faithfully with all their hearts. The current nation of Israel did not need to be like their ancestors, there was nothing in the past that was holding them back to follow the ways of their ancestors. Rather, Samuel is encouraging them to repent, fear the Lord, serve him faithfully with all their hearts.

We too have all kinds of ancestors, different family backgrounds. Some of our family have a great history of believers and some of us not really. However, we here today can start a new generation of believers, a generation that fears the lord and serves the Lord faithfully with all our hearts. I pray that we may be touched by the word of God, so that God's fear may remain in us to serve him faithfully with all our hearts. Amen!. However, what are the ingredients of serving God faithfully with all our hearts. I hope part II of the message will help us greatly on that.

Part II: Key Ingredients to serve God faithfully with all your heart

Israel was no different from their ancestors, though they had a great victory we will see from this passage that actually they had done an evil thing. Humanly speaking, all was good, they had a king they wanted and had won a great victory. However before God they were in deep sin. They were so carnal that Samuel had to help open their spiritual eyes. Look at verse 16-18, "Now then, stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes! 17Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call on the Lord to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king. 18Then Samuel called on the Lord, and that same day the Lord sent thunder and rain. **So all the people stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel.**" The wheat and harvest time are a dry season, what we would call a summer season. No one expects rain and thunder at that season, however because of Samuel's word, God made thunder and rain. This was remarkable, the stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel. However was this just for a show? Absolutely not, this was a sign that whatever Samuel says of God, was truthful and God is behind him. As if to say, he is the mouthpiece of God and the rain and thunder were a stamp of approval from God. Samuel declared to them, that they had done an evil thing before the Lord when they asked for a king. After what they just saw and experienced, they were convicted of Samuel's words. That they had done an evil thing before the Lord. All along, they could not see this, they were blind to this truth. All seem to have gone well, they requested for a king the Lord provided, they overcame Nahash and gained great victory. All seemed to be going well, however they were so spiritually blind. They could not see the evil they had committed before the Lord. What they did was not simply wrong, Samuel says it was evil before God. Because they could realize and accept the evil they committed, they could ask Samuel to pray for them [19]. What an amazing thing that when they got convicted of the word of God, they could realize the history of their sin problem and request for prayers. They became greatly afraid that the lord will destroy them.

Look at verse 20, "**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.**" Great and paralysing fear fell upon the people. They fully understood what they had done and the consequences of their sin. Samuel exposed their sin problem not to condemn them, but so that they may choose a new life direction. A life of serving the lord faithfully with all their hearts. It is possible to repent and serve the lord with all their hearts even though they had done such evil before the Lord. Having sinned and done this evil does not disqualify them from serving the Lord with all their hearts. How can this be? Look at verse 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.**" God was pleased to make Israel his own. They are the Lord's possession. They do not belong to themselves but the Lord. This means that, they are not serving the Lord with all their hearts so that they may be God's people. It is because they are God's people, that they can serve the Lord with all their hearts. They are not serving God so that they can please God to be God's own. It is because God was pleased to have them as his own, that they can serve the Lord with all their hearts. Because of the love of God for Israel, they can serve the Lord with all their hearts. Because of the lord's great name, His character and who he is, Israel has a great opportunity and chance to serve the Lord with all their hearts. **To serve the Lord with all our hearts is not a matter of our capabilities and efforts, but rather because, the Lord was pleased to have us as his own.**

May our study of the word of God, our prayers and the hearing of his word, convict us of our evil ways before the Lord, so we too may repent and serve the Lord with all hearts.

Let us look at verse 23, "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." Samuel then decided to do two things, first **to honour their request for prayer**. **Secondly, he also decided to teach them the way that is good and right**. So Samuel also taught them the word of God, so they may learn the way that is good and right. It is from the word of God that they will learn what it means to serve the Lord faithfully with all their hearts. Serving the Lord faithfully and with all their hearts is good and right. Samuel further goes to teach them, look at 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.**" if they could but fear God more than their worries this world, and to also consider the great things the Lord has done. They will then be able to serve the Lord faithfully with all their hearts. In fact by simply considering the great things the Lord has done, will cause them to have the fear of the Lord. And when they constantly live by considering the great things the Lord has done, they will serve the Lord faithfully with all their hearts. Remember that, It was the fear of the Lord that united them in following Saul and Samuel to gain victory over Nahash. The Bible also teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [Pr 9:10]. I believe, each one of us here and those joining online, can attest to the great work of God in your life. **Please consider what the Lord has done and what he is continuing to do in your life**. It is all but the grace of God because none of us can say we are without sin. Like the nation of Israel we too commit evil against God. However, the Lord wants us to remember His great works in our life and serve Him faithfully with all our hearts. One great work of God in my life and I also believe in yours, is the calling of Jesus to save my soul. Because of Jesus' death on the cross for my sin, I now have a clear meaningful and purposeful life direction. Which is to serve God faithfully with all my heart for the rest of my life. May I live with the fear of the Lord by always considering the great things He has done in my life, most especially what Jesus did for me on the cross. So I may grow towards serving the Lord faithfully with all my heart.

I will try to summarise the key ingredients that may help us serve the Lord faithfully with all our hearts. **Firstly**, we need to repent. As we learned repentance is the work of God. Through Samuel's teaching of the word and prayers they could be convicted of their sin and repent. May the word of the Lord through prayer, convict us of sin so we may repent and serve the Lord. As we learn God's word each week may we repent daily and learn to practice what is good and right. **Secondly**, the key ingredient is realizing that we are God's possession, we are God's property and He was pleased to have us as His own. Being God's possession means that God will take care of us. Just as we also take care of what belongs to us. The Lord too will take care of us even better than we take care of our things. So this also further means we can cast all our worries to the Lord and prayerfully serve Him faithfully with all our hearts. **Thirdly**, we should always remember the great things the Lord has done. Instead of focusing more on our weaknesses or challenges. God wants us to rather focus on what He can do for us and what He has already done. God's great works happened while we were sinners, and so we can serve God faithfully with all our hearts because the Lord is on our side. We do not serve so He may do great works for us, He has already done great things and will continue to do them for us. **Fourthly**, the fear of the Lord, if we fear God more than our worries of this life, I believe we can serve the Lord faithfully with all our hearts. Look at Israel when they feared Nahash more than they feared God, they instead rejected God. Our fear of the Lord should rather lead us to persistent prayer.

In conclusion, Looking at Samuel's life has made me come to the conclusion that, to serve God faithfully with all our hearts is our life mission or purpose, what we are created for. It is the only life. Any other life is a lie and an illusion. Samuel could hand over his leadership in his old age with joy, for he had lived a great life of serving the Lord faithfully with all of his heart. We can now see that a great life is not about possessing things, or having travelled the world, or doing things for yourself but rather, a life that served God faithfully with all of its heart. What do you imagine Jesus would say when you meet with Him at the end of your life, I pray that these may be the words Jesus utters for all of us, as we live the remainder of our lives to serve Him faithfully with all our hearts. "...Well done, good and faithful servant!..." ---Matt 25:23.