

SAMUEL'S FAREWELL MESSAGE

1 Samuel 12:1-25

Key Verse: 12:23

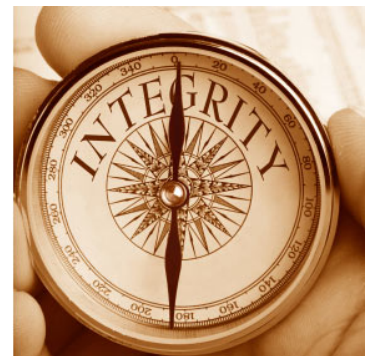
As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.

If you were to make a retirement speech today, what topics would you include in your speech? In his farewell speech, Samuel set out to do three things: to confirm his integrity as a leader, to encourage his people to serve the Lord with all their hearts, and to announce his future plan. Samuel served the Lord and his people all his life. Still, he promised them to continue to serve as a prayer servant and a Bible teacher. Samuel's life is an inspiration for those who want to live as God's servants and spiritual leaders. Let us examine his farewell speech and learn from his life.

First, question my integrity in the presence of God (1-5). Samuel served the Lord all his life since his childhood. He was the last judge of Israel. Now a new era of king's rule was about to begin. So at Mizpah, after installing Saul as the first king in a public ceremony, Samuel had something important to say to his people for the last time. He had listened to everything they said to him and set a king over them even though he did not like the idea (1). Now it was their turn to listen to him.

The first thing Samuel wanted to establish was his record as their leader. He said in verse 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, I will make it right.*" Samuel asked them to bring charges against him if they had any. He told them to examine his financial accounts and other records during his tenure. My life is an open book, he implied. He did not take anything from anyone, did not cheat anyone, and did not oppress anyone. He did not take any trip to Riviera with the temple offering money or buy any luxury things for himself. Still he said he would make it right if he had done anything wrong.

Many leaders of the world routinely steal fortunes from their people when they are in power. Last week, Switzerland confirmed that its banks were holding 300 million Swiss francs linked to the deposed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and 410 million francs tied to former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. When the dictatorship of the Philippine President Marcos ended in the mid-1980s, they discovered in the palace that his wife Imelda amassed 1,000 handbags and 1,060 pairs of shoes. But Samuel was different. He was a leader and a shepherd who served Israel with integrity and humility. The Israelites were blessed to have had such a great leader.



Samuel knew that he had a clean record. But as he began his speech to the Israelites, his two sons were there with him on the podium. Unlike their father, his sons had abused their office when they served as judges of Israel. They took bribes and perverted justice. Despite the failure of his sons, Samuel had a clean conscience before God and before his people. Samuel wanted to make sure that the Israelites listen to what he was about to say as the words of their trusted leader. What was their response? The Israelites acknowledged his integrity. They said, “You have not cheated or oppressed us. You have not taken anything from anyone’s hand” (4).

It is a privilege for us to serve the work of God in leadership positions. But any leadership position presents with opportunity for corruption, especially with money and women. As I studied the book of 1 Timothy with Chris in the last couple of weeks, I was reminded by St. Paul how church leaders should have integrity in serving. They must be the husbands of but one wife. They must not be greedy, learning to be content with the material things that God provides. To serve as spiritual leaders is a great honor and blessing. Like Samuel, we should have a clear conscience before God and his people by conducting ourselves with integrity and humility.

Second, serve the Lord with all your heart (6-22). After getting their attention, Samuel first gave them a history lesson. He wanted to confront them with the historical evidence on how God loved them and cared for them. He reminded them that it was the Lord who brought them out of their bondage to slavery in Egypt (This was the third time Samuel told them about this wonderful grace of God). When they cried out to God for help there, the Lord sent Moses and Aaron to bring them out of Egypt and lead them to the promised land. But once they settled in Canaan, they forgot about the Lord their God (9). It’s like some people today who cry out to the Lord for help when they are in trouble, but as soon as things get better, they forget about him.

God whose love for his people is deep and wide gave his people over to their enemies. He sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them (9). It was to help them to come to their senses. Indeed, that’s what they did. They cried out to the Lord for help (10). They said to God, “*We have sinned; we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you*” (10). Then, God would send judges to rescue them from their enemies. He sent Gideon, Barak, Jephthah and Samuel. They would have peace for a while, but they would fall into the sin of idolatry again. This vicious cycle was repeated many times as we learn in the book of Judges.

Our depraved human nature is that we cry out to God for help when we are in need, but when things go well, we become proud and do not seek the Lord. Our hearts are occupied by things of this world. God and his word are put on the back burner again. When I look back my own past, I had the same problem. When I was in Pittsburgh working at a minimum wage and going to school, we barely had enough for food and shelter. One time, we had only rice and soy sauce for a meal. So we depended on God for our future. In his mercy, God blessed me with a good job, and that’s when my heart

became occupied with many other things of the world, making God sad in so doing. We become proud when we forget the grace of God. Our God is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love. Still, we must remember what God has done for us, personally and nationally so that we don't fall into the sin of idolatry.

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.* Remember Nahash, the ruthless man who had the habit of gouging out the right eyes of his enemies? When the Israelites heard about him, they trembled with fear. They forgot about God and his grace again. They forgot how God protected them throughout their history. And they demanded Samuel to set a king over them. After inquiring God about this matter, Samuel listened to them and anointed Saul as their first king. And Saul did not disappoint them. He defeated the feared king of the Ammonites in his first battle. The victorious king Saul was on the podium as Samuel made the speech (13).

But Samuel reminded them that it was the Lord who had given them the victory. He said in verses 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! 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 fathers.* It would have been a great mistake for them to assume that everything would go according to their wishes now that they had a king. Samuel told them that if they and their king would fear the Lord and serve and obey him, everything will be good. But if they rebelled against God's words, his hand would be against them. Samuel laid down the two choices for them to choose from. He made it clear what the consequence of their choice would be. They had the freedom to choose.

To make sure the Israelites understood the gravity of what he was telling them, Samuel had a surprise prepared for them. He said, *Now then, stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes!* (16) What followed was a fireworks display. It was a harvest season, which meant a clear weather in the region. God suddenly sent thunder and rain. The Israelites were shocked and awed. There was no doubt God was backing up what Samuel warned them in an emphatic manner. All the people stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel. They 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" (18-19). They finally acknowledged their sin of asking for a king.



Samuel did not ask God to send a huge thunderstorm just for fun. He wanted to help his people to obey the Lord. When he heard their confession, he comforted them. He encouraged 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."* He also told them not to go after useless idols as they had done before. The idols

could do no good, nor could they rescue them (21). He said in 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.* We can have hope in God even when there seems to be no hope, because the Lord is pleased to make us his own. For the sake of his great name, the Lord will not reject his people. God loves us because we are his people. M. Caleb reminded us of a TV commercial in which the boss of a company asks his slacker employee the question, “Remind me again why I cannot fire you?” The young man answers, “Mmm, because you are my dad?”

Third, I will continue to pray for you and teach the Bible (23-25). Let us read verse 23 together. *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.* After a lifetime of serving the Lord and his people, Samuel was finally stepping down from his position. Some people in his situation might say, “Yippee! I can finally enjoy my retirement! Now I don’t have to deal with these ungrateful people any more. Now I can sleep in in the morning, play golf everyday, travel around the world and spend time with my grandchildren!”

But Samuel’s retirement plan was different. He would not retreat to a retirement community or nursing home to spend his old life quietly. Instead, he promised to pray for his people continually and teach them the way that is good and right. In other words, his retirement plan was no retirement from his spiritual duties. He had been praying for his people and taught them the word of God all his life. And he said he would continue doing the two things. When God decided to punish Eli the priest for failing to discipline his sons, he said he would raise up a faithful priest. 1 Samuel 2:34 says: “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house, and he will minister before my anointed one always.” Samuel must have accepted these words of God as his life key verse and decided to live as a faithful priest before God, even after his retirement.

Samuel said, *“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.”* I was convicted by what Samuel said. To him, failing to pray for God’s people was a sin. We know killing someone is a sin. We know stealing from someone is a sin. But failing to pray for someone? I never thought I was sinning against God when I failed to pray for God’s people. Instead, I thought I was doing a favor for someone when I prayed for him or her. But Samuel said. *“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.”* I repent my sin of failing often to pray for God’s people. May God help me to grow as a faithful prayer servant!

Then Samuel said, *“And I will teach you the way that is good and right.”* Whether young or old, we can share the word of God with others. I met Missionary Florence E. Root (1892-1995) in Korea in the late 1970s. She served as a missionary all her life in Korea. She founded Speer Girls’ Middle and High Schools in Kwangju city. (She was the one who gave a Korean name, Bae Sara, to Mother Barry). When she returned to a retirement community in Harrisonburg, VA, she



continued to share the word of God with the people in the community through leading a Bible study group, even though she was in her 90s. She did this until she went home to God at the age of 103.

Today's young people grow up in a spiritual wilderness. Many times they don't know the way that is good and right. Many of them take things like abortion or gay marriage for granted because of what they learn in school and what they see and read on the popular media. They do not know about the blessed life God intended for them when he created them in his own image. Someone must teach them the way that is good and right. And each of us must be that someone. I can't get the image of little toddler lying on the street out of my mind after watching a video last week. This two-year old girl was run down by a van and lying on the street, left to die in pain. More than a dozen people saw her but walked around her, ignoring her. This video sparked a debate in China whether people became more obsessed with profit and materialism than human life. But this is not just in China. Many sinful human minds do not know that life is a gift from God and why it is valuable. Someone has to teach them the truth about this. And we should be the one!

Look at verses 24-25. *But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away.* In concluding his farewell address, Samuel once again told his people that they had two choices—to serve the Lord or to persist in doing evil. He warned them that they would be swept away if they persisted in doing evil. He told them to be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all their hearts. This was the third time Samuel told them to serve the Lord with all their hearts (14,20).

Likewise, we should serve the Lord with all our hearts, remembering what great things he has done for us. We live in a Christian nation. But many Christians do not serve the Lord with all their hearts. Many have this mistaken notion that if they go to a church on Sunday, preferably one with a huge cathedral and congregation, they have done their duties before God so that they can live the rest of the week, just like any other people. But Samuel says that we should serve the Lord with all our hearts as his people.

In today's passage, we learned that Samuel lived all his life as a shepherd and a judge for Israel. He carried out his duty faithfully with integrity. Even as he stepped down from his official position, he had a plan to serve the people continually through his prayer and Bible teaching. May God raise up servants of God like Samuel among us! May God help us to serve the Lord with all our hearts!