

## The LORD Will Not Reject His People

### 1 Samuel 12:20-24 (NIV)

<sup>20</sup> “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. <sup>21</sup> Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. <sup>22</sup> For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.

The Israelites, God’s chosen nation to bring about the Savior of the world, have a messy history, especially in terms of leadership. Several times after the mass exodus from Egypt the Israelites grumbled and complained against their leaders. “You have led us to a place with no food.” “There’s not a drop of water to drink; we’re going to die from thirst. Good job, Moses.” “What makes you so much better at leading?” “Who put you in charge anyway?”

Their attitude did not get better after they reached the Promised Land. Sure, they followed Joshua in and fought the battles, but after the fighting was done, they quickly forgot about God and stopped following the LORD who had brought them out of Egypt. Then the LORD would send foreign invaders to oppress the Israelites. The Israelites would cry out to the LORD to save them, and the LORD would raise up a leader, a judge, to carry out the rescue. The Israelites would have peace for a time, but the next generation would fall into the same spiritual stupor and follow other gods, foreign idols. And then the LORD repeated the cycle.

This went on for some 400 years until Israel decided that these judges are not enough; they wanted a king, a human king. Why? They say it’s because Samuel, their current judge, was getting old and his sons did not follow in his godly ways. But when they requested a king they said that they wanted a king just like all the other nations have. (1 Samuel 8:5) This is what we call coveting – wanting something for yourself that other people have even though God has decided not to give it to you.

This troubled Samuel. So he prayed to God about the matter. The LORD made it clear that the Israelites did not make this request with an innocent or pure heart. No, the LORD told Samuel, “It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.” (1 Samuel 8:7) Behind the scenes with the other leaders the LORD had been their true ruler, and Savior, but now the Israelites wanted someone else. They had rejected the LORD as their king and Samuel called them out on it in his farewell speech. “What an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king!” (1 Samuel 12:17) They traded the LORD for a man, for a wood carving, for a rock formation. They rejected the LORD as their king.

Have we ever requested that someone take the place of king, ruler of our lives, other than the LORD? Now, I’m guessing that not many of you have put up a shrine at home with statues of other deities such as the Israelites had done. Our idolatry tends to be more subtle, but we still let other things and other people be the ruler of our lives. What controls your life? What’s the most important thing to you, the thing that pushes everything else in life to be secondary? Is it a drive for money, for a sizable nest egg, for the newest and latest toys? Is it accomplishment in work, grinding for 60, 70, 80 hours in a week because this is what I have to do, this is most important? Is it a drive for pleasure – working for the weekend, alcohol, drugs, Facebook, whatever. When any of these things become number one in your life, you are making them your ruler while rejecting the LORD as your king.

Or consider this: When you have problems, worries, and concerns, do you look down at yourself and say, “I have to take care of all of this. No one will help me. It’s all on me to fix this”? If this is how we tackle problems and concerns and challenges in our lives, who are we really saying is in charge? We are saying that it’s me. I fix it. I deal with it. I’m in charge. We put our trust in ourselves to get the job done with no help from anyone else. You have rejected the LORD as your king in favor of you ruling your life. You made yourself an idol, but you cannot save you. “[Idols] can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless.” (verse 21)

So, what do we do? The Israelites called out 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.” (1 Samuel 12:19) They realized what they had done, how their request for a king was actually a rejection of the LORD as their king. They are afraid that since they rejected the LORD that he would in turn reject them. They needed to be delivered by the only God that had ever delivered them, the LORD who had brought them out of Egypt, who had rescued them from the hands of the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and others. Pray for us, Samuel, because we have grievously sinned against God by asking for someone else to rule our lives than the LORD.

And what did Samuel say? He could have said, “Well, you made your own bed. Now sleep in it. God is right to reject you.” But, with the LORD as his king, Samuel said, “Do not be afraid. You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.” (verse 20) You are afraid of being rejected because you recognize your sin. You are afraid that God will not save you anymore. Don’t give up. Don’t turn away. Don’t be afraid. Why? Because God is not going to turn away from you or give up on you. Instead, “For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.” (verse 22) Even though the Israelites had rejected the LORD, the LORD had not rejected them.

The LORD will not reject you. Why? Two reasons. One, is because he has a reputation to uphold. He is the God who delivered his people from the Egyptians in the mighty show of power with the 10 Plagues. He is the one who cared for them, providing food and water all through the 40 years when they wandered in the desert. He gave the Promised Land to Abraham’s descendants just as he said he would. He is the one who raised up the judges to rescue his people from the foreign oppressors. The LORD promised to deliver us, that he would never leave us or forsake us. That’s what he promised and the LORD keeps his promises. He delivers and saves. That’s who he is. That’s his reputation, his character. He won’t let people say otherwise by rejecting his people.

The second reason that the LORD will not reject his people is because “the LORD was pleased to make you his own.” (verse 22) The LORD chose you. He chose the Israelites to be the people from whom the Messiah, the Deliverer, would come. And the LORD chose us to be his people, to belong to him. He did this when he put his name on you in Holy Baptism – in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He adopted you. He washed away all the evil that you had done and then all the rest of the evil that you would ever do. He raised you up out of those waters of baptism as a new creation, with a new life. The old has gone. The evil is gone. The LORD has delivered you from it. That’s what he did when he made you his own. Because he did this, he will not reject you.

With the LORD as his king, Samuel showed the Israelites the heart of the LORD. Even though his time as the judge over Israel was now at an end, even though the Israelites had done all this evil in addition to asking for a king, Samuel assures them, “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.” (verse 23) Your pastor follows that same mentality. Even when you sin against the LORD, the pastor is not going to reject you because the LORD is not going to reject you. Instead, your pastor is going to remind you that God was pleased to make you his own. You belong to him, and he will not reject you.

What do we do, then, knowing that God was pleased to make us his own and will not reject us as his people? Samuel said, “But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.” (verse 24) By following Samuel’s words, we get refocused on our LORD. Instead of looking to myself, my job, my pursuit of pleasure to be the most important thing in life, the thing that rules my life, I look to God. I look to him to rule my life. I live for him, not for myself.

Here’s one way to do that: “consider what great things [the LORD] has done for you.” (verse 24) I challenge you today to make a choice to spend time considering the great things that the LORD has done for you. Start a simple journal. This can be done with paper and pencil, on a post-it, as a note on your smartphone, as a Facebook post – wherever you would like to keep a list. Pick any time during the day, whether it’s when you get up, lunch time, break time, supper time, during a commercial break, right before you go to bed, whenever, and write down one thing the LORD has done for you. Here’s the catch: each day it has to be something different than the day before, and you can’t repeat at any time. Do this until Thanksgiving. If you make it that far, then keep going until Christmas. After that, try it for 2017. By doing this you will consider so many great things the LORD has done for you. It will keep you focused on him as your LORD, as your king. This will be part of you serving the LORD with all your heart. You already have two entries. Entry #1 The LORD was pleased to make me his own. Entry #2 For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject me.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, leave today rejoicing that the LORD was pleased to make you his own through your baptism. Rejoice that for his great name’s sake he will not reject you. Consider what great things he has done for you. Amen.