**Fear the Lord and serve Him** 19/6/22 dkm

Read: 1Samuel 12:13-25, James 5

Text: 1Samuel 12:16-25

Psalms: 29:1-5&9-11, 34:8-16, 18:13-19, 72old

Dr Paul Brand was a missionary doctor whose main ministry was to leprosy patients in India. After working among lepers for many years, he saw first-hand the importance of bodily pain. Leprosy effectively kills the nerves in the part of the body it affects, often hands and feet. Lepers do not feel pain when they touch hot things. This doctor found lepers without toes because rats had chewed them off in the night and they felt nothing! Pain, he concluded, is a wonderful thing!

C.S Lewis looked at pain from a more theological perspective in his book, ‘The problem of pain’. He asked, like so many, if God is good and has the power to stop all suffering, why does he allow us to suffer? Pain and suffering came into the world with sin, and will be removed in the new heaven and new earth (Gen 3, Rev 21:4). In the meantime, God has a purpose for pain. Dr Brand pointed out one purpose, but C.S. Lewis draws a broader theological conclusion: ‘God whispers to us in our pleasures, speak in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is his megaphone to raise a deaf world’.

The prophet Samuel had gathered the people of Israel at Gilgal to crown Saul king - ‘now here is the king (12:2) - but also to renew the covenant the Lord had made with them- ‘to renew the kingdom’ (11:14). If they thought having a human king would be their salvation, they were wrong. The ‘Lord your God’ was already their king, and he had saved them from their enemies on many occasions, going back to the time of Moses and Aaron and their salvation from the brutality of Pharaoh.

Samuel told the people to stand still and listen as he reasoned with them before the Lord ‘concerning all the righteous acts of the Lord ‘(12:7). Reasoning does not convince or convert a lot of people. Despite the evidence from history of the Lord saving them, the people still wanted a king like other nations.

As Samuel continues his farewell address or sermon, he again tells the people to stand before the Lord, this time to see a great work of the Lord, not just to listen to Samuel preaching. If they were sleeping while he preached, they would soon wake up and stand trembling before the Lord. God would get their attention, through pain or disaster if necessary. Our subheadings are: ‘Power of God’, ‘Promise of God’ and, ‘Prayer of Samuel’.

**1. Power of God**

Samuel told the people to stand still while he reasoned with them regarding the many times the Lord had heard their cry and delivered them from their enemies (12:7). Now he calls them to again ‘stand and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes’ (12:16). Did he think that reasoning would not be sufficient to convince these people of their sin? If so, he was correct! They had to be shocked into fear and trembling before the Lord before they confessed their sin (12:19). Perhaps C.S. Lewis was thinking of such people when he wrote about God speaking through a megaphone to a deaf world; or was he thinking about you!

Most of the people were farmers, working the land allotted to them by Joshua. As they gathered at Gilgal after Saul led them in victory over the Ammonites, their wheat crops were ready for harvest. In this region summer rain was unheard of. Here in NSW we get rain at any time of the year, even during wheat harvest; I recall trying to gather grain from the ground after a hail storm decimated my experimental plots. The farmers in Israel had not experienced such a loss, not until now. Samuel said he would call upon the Lord to send thunder and rain that they might realise their great wickedness in asking for a king (12:16).

The Lord had preciously sent thunder upon the Philistines to drive them away- a time they seem to have forgotten (7:10). This time the thunder and rain would be on their own crops if the Lord answered Samuel’s prayer - which he did (12:18). The people could not believe their ears or their eyes. They stood in awe and fear at this weather miracle, and at their crops which would been damaged by the rain.

Because Samuel told them what was about to happen, they greatly feared the Lord and Samuel (12:18). Their pagan neighbours would have started crying to Baal or whatever their weather god was called, even though such gods had no power over the weather or climate, of course. It is amazing all the theories people come up with when they see unusual weather events. It is amazing how many people live in fear of weather events, of storms or floods or huge seas. Samuel called for thunder and rain. Elijah prayed that there would be no rain and there was no rain for three years (Ja 5:17). Jesus, of course, called for the storm to stop and it did. Since the Lord can send storms and rain, and withhold rain, should we not be fearing him rather than the weather or the climate in the way so many are doing these days?

Seeing thunder and rain at harvest time shocked the people. They trembled in fear, not fear of the climate but fear of God (12:19). They saw the power of almighty God, power they denied when they asked for a king like other nations; they had previously worshiped the gods of these nations also. They forgot that almighty God made the land they were farming, and the sea and everything in this world, and that with the same almighty power he ruled over his creation. God set in place and controls the hydrologic cycle that brings rain.

Fear of almighty God led the people to cry to Samuel, asking him to pray for them that, ‘We may not die’ (12:19). They realised that God was angry with them, so called for the prophet to intercede before almighty God. You will recall the people pleading with Moses after seeing the thunder and lightning on Mt Sinai: ‘Let not God speak with us lest we die’ (Exod 20:19). God was testing the people, and he was testing them again here at Gilgal. They realised their demand for a king had angered the Lord, and knew the only way to appease him was to confess their sin and plead forgiveness. For the first time in this chapter we hear the people speak, and they do so to confess their sin and plead for Samuel to intercede before the Lord. Very few are prepared to sit and listen to the word of the Lord these days; all they want to hear is their own voice, which does not tell them to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!

If you have not yet confessed your sin and asked for forgiveness in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, can I ask what it will take for you to do this? Samuel reasoned with the people, as preachers of the gospel do today. The Bible is a perfectly reasonable book. You will not find it to contain any error, either historical, scientific, or even theological- depending on your preconceived theological ideas course! The people did not respond to Samuel’s reasoning, so it seems, but they did respond when the Lord hit their harvest with a thunderstorm. God impacted their lives in such a powerful way that they fell to their knees pleading for mercy. The Bible says that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, which means your knee, as well as mine (Phil 2:10). The only question is, when? Will it be today that you confess your sin or will it be when it is too late; it will be too late after you die! The decision is yours.

**2. Promise of God**

When Samuel saw the people ‘broken’ by the miracle of nature, and heard them confessing their sin, he said, ‘Do not fear’ (12:20). ‘Broken’ is a term used when wild horses are tamed, when a bit is put in their mouth and they become useful to man. You may not like this analogy, but Jesus speaks of us taking his yoke and learning from him, which is not so different (Mat 11:29). Sin is rebellion against God. Sin makes us useless to God, and indeed to everyone, including ourselves. Samuel goes on to warn them about empty things ‘which profit no one’ (12:21). The Lord wanted these people to live useful lives, trusting in Him.

God is not a capricious God, punishing for the sake of punishment. He is a gracious God, punishing for the sake of turning his people away from sin and drawing them to himself. Samuel told them not to fear, but he did not say their wickedness didn’t matter (12:20). He goes on to say that the Lord saved them ‘for his great name’s sake’ (12:22). He chose them, and he would keep them, because in his great grace he forgave their sin, even their sin of asking for king like other nations. He graciously gave them a king, but still they and the king, must follow the Lord, and ‘serve the Lord in truth with all your heart’ (12:20, 24 cf. John 4:24).

Samuel had previously called upon these people to put away foreign gods and serve the Lord only, serve him with all their hearts (7:3); they were being attacked by the Philistines at that time. Foreign gods were of no help whatsoever. What was obvious to the prophets, to Samuel and later Isaiah, and I hope obvious to you, is that lumps of wood or trees, like lumps of stone or houses, or piles of money, cannot hear you or save you. Yet these people had gone after useless and empty things, things that amount to nothing (12:21). If people tell you to follow your dreams, remember what dreams are- nothing! If you are following a human hero, they may well be nothing before you know it. But if you follow the Lord he will not let you down; ‘The Lord will not forsake his people’ (12:22).

This is a covenant promise under both the old covenant and the new covenant (Heb 13:5). As a promise, it is not dependant in any way on your worthiness. It is a promise the Lord makes because he had chosen us to serve him with all our hearts and honour his holy name. Man’s chief end is to glorify God and bring glory to his great name. He forgives our sin and saves us for his name’s sake, for the sake of the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**3. Prayer of Samuel**

Samuel was addressing the people of Israel at the coronation of King Saul. He was old and stepping down as their judge and leader. But he would remain as God’s prophet and priest. As prophet, he would bring God’s word to the people, and as priest, he would intercede for them. The words in verse 23 are familiar to us, and for good reason. Listen to what Samuel promises: ‘As for me, far be it for me that I should sin against the Lord is ceasing to pray for you’ (12:23).

You know about sins of commission, about doing what is wrong, but what about sins of omission, about failing to do what is right? Have you ever thought that in failing to pray you are actually sinning against the Lord? If you fail to pray for your family, for your spouse and for your children, you are sinning against the Lord! Do not think it is the job of the priest or pastor to pray. They must pray, but you must pray also. Paul prayed for all the churches and the people in these churches. ‘Pray without ceasing’, he said (2Thess 5:17). Followers of Jesus will pray like Jesus. Jesus prayed for his disciples, and even now he intercedes for you (John 17:9, Heb 7:25).

Samuel the prophet would also continue to teach the people ‘the good and right way’ (12:23). Children will not learn what is right if they are not taught what is right. A great fallacy of modern education is the idea that children must be left to make decisions for themselves. Sure they have to make decisions, but they do so in the context of the sovereignty of God in creation and redemption, and of God’s holy law. God has declared what is the good and right way. We who know this way, the way shown to us by Jesus, must teach others this way, especially our children. How the church would grow if parents prayed for their children and taught them the good and right way.

Samuel concludes his address, urging the people to fear the Lord (12:24). They feared their enemies and the weather because they did not fear the Lord. When we fear or revere the Lord, we will serve him in truth with all our heart. The Lord will not have any half-hearted followers. No king wants half-hearted men serving in his army. He wants men and women he can trust, but above all who will trust him to lead them to victory.

One thing too many Christians forget is the warning given by Samuel, as it was given by Moses, and as given by the apostles in the NT: ‘If you do wickedly you will be swept away, both you and your king’ (12:25). No one, not even you or the king, will escape the judgment of almighty God. If you reject the grace of God you remain under his wrath and he will destroy his enemies. It is Jesus who says, ‘He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him’ (John 3:36).