

Looking on the Heart (Summer Bible Exposition 3)

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00] I must say it's a real pleasure to be with you tonight. I think when Wayne and I were planning this series of four weeks, I think Paul had probably just announced his resignation and we didn't know what would happen, but we thought it was a good idea that I came along anyway.

And so in one sense we've got a little prelude, haven't we? And so it is really good to be here with you. It's something special because I know you come in January because you love hearing the word of God and I've become your vicar because I love preaching it and I want to do so in the company of you as God's people.

And so I hope in the next four weeks we can get to know each other a bit and that'll be a bit of a prelude to later things. I'm only a small man and Paul's shoes are very big ones to fill and I feel that so you might pray for me in these coming months as well.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you very much for your word. We thank you particularly for this passage which speaks to us about such rich things, both about ourselves and about you.

We pray tonight that as we look at it together, you might be with us, that you might transform us, that you might build us more into the likeness of your son. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

[1 : 32] Amen. Now, in 1998 and 1999 there were a series of critical meetings that happened within Australia. Most of you will remember them.

They culminated in a national referendum and every Australian of voting age was required to express their views and their desire as to whether Australia should be a republic or not.

You might remember it. And all of those events I think had probably been brewing for a hundred years. All of a sudden they had been swept up to the top of the agenda and Australians were voting on whether our head of state would be the Queen or someone else.

And undoubtedly in the room here, some of us voted one way and some of us voted another. We were debating though, weren't we? We were deciding on some incredible and fundamental changes to our national life.

If Australians had voted yes on that day, we would have had to have gone back and rewritten our constitution perhaps and reorganised ourselves and the way our government functioned perhaps.

[2 : 34] The changes being contemplated would be huge in administrative ways. But they would be huge, wouldn't they, in terms of our identity. No matter which way you decided on this, were we to have decided that we would change, it would have been a huge change.

We would have said, look, we're breaking free of our colonial past. We're acknowledging we're our own nation in some way that we haven't been up until now. And in many ways, that process that Australians went through in 1999 might have issued in one of the most significant changes in our whole 200-year history.

Some of us would have liked it. Some of us would have hated it. But no matter which it was, things would never have been the same for us as a nation. Well, today what we're going to look at in the passage we're looking at tonight is one nation grappling with a similar level of change.

They are engaging in a sea change administratively. But it is also a sea change in terms of their identity. However, let's remember that there's something very special about the nation that we're looking at.

It's not a bunch of Australians. It is the nation of Israel. They are not a colony of the British Empire. This is the nation of Israel. God's chosen people are called by God to fulfil his purposes in his world.

[3 : 55] They are God's special people. His holy nation. His special possession. They were called into existence by this God. He is their God.

They are his people. He is their king. They are his subjects. This is not just any nation we are dealing with. And you can't just tinker with the constitution of this nation without some various thought, some very serious thought and consideration.

So let's see what happens as they engage in this process. And let's take a look at the changes that they are contemplating in this very special part of their history and this very special part of the Bible.

You see my opinion is tonight that as we look at this passage we are going to learn some incredibly valuable things. We are going to learn deep things about God.

And we will learn deep things about ourselves. And the actions that the Israelites are going to take this day in this passage and God's interaction with them will tap into some of the very deep aspects of what makes Israelites work.

[5 : 02] And I will argue that the Israelites have much in common with us. And I will argue that God's response has much to teach us in the modern world. Now before we get into our passage I need to just give a word of explanation as to what we are going to do tonight.

You see when Wayne asked me to do these books what I thought I'd do is focus on key passages throughout 1 and 2 Samuel. And this passage is one of them. It is a pivotal passage throughout the whole of the books of Samuel.

And I had a choice tonight. I could either spend all my time on one chapter or take a bird's eye view of about six or seven chapters. I've decided to spend my time on one and I'm going to summarise what happens after this on Wednesday night.

So let's get down to this passage and have a look at it. Open your Bibles with me please. Now I need to give you a brief historical and political framework. The people of Israel had come to this point with a very long history.

You remember God had called Abraham. He told Abraham, Abraham I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm going to give you a land. I'm going to bless you and I am going to make you a blessing to the whole world.

[6 : 12] And Abraham had his first child you might remember or his wife did Isaac. And Isaac had two sons Jacob and Esau. And Jacob you remember had 12 sons and one daughter.

And God gave Jacob another name that is the name Israel. Anyway eventually those sons grew up. And they had children. And those children ended up in slavery.

They became 12 tribes. They became enormously numerous. And in the end they became slaves in Egypt and cried out to God for him to rescue them from slavery and from Egypt.

And you remember that God did exactly this in the book of Exodus. He rescued them from Egypt. He bound them to himself in covenant. And he brought them into the promised land which they slowly began to conquer.

And at the time of this story that we're looking at tonight. Israel was a loose confederacy of loose tribal confederacy. Sometimes they worked on things together.

[7 : 11] At other times they just lived together in their little tribes and they did things their own way. God ruled over them though through these figures called judges. And we read about it in the book of Judges.

And these judges were people that God gave to his people in order to help them defeat their enemies and to bring justice and stability. And Samuel was the last of them.

Samuel was a judge. And in the chapter immediately preceding this chapter God had used Samuel to help the people of Israel defeat their latest enemy the Philistines.

So this is the historical, the political background to our chapter. The nation of Israel is God's special people. God rules over them and uses human people called judges to exercise that rule.

And at this point in their history Samuel is their judge. And let me tell you something. They are feeling enormously under pressure at this time. You see the nation that surrounds them, the Philistines, are technologically and militarily far more sophisticated than they are.

[8 : 15] And they are on their borders and they are pressing into Israel's territory. And with that in mind let's see what happens. Have a look with me if you could to chapter 8 verses 1 to 22.

But I want you to remember where we've come from. And Martin I'm sure would have covered this ground. Remember how we began the book of Samuel? We began with a childless woman just yearning for a child.

We began with the story of Samuel who was born to that woman. We were told of Hannah's character. She taught us the way in which God works in his world.

She concluded the song, the prayer that she said to God by connecting her experience with an anointed one, a Christ, a Messiah who would come. And finally, do you remember what happened halfway through chapter 2?

She left her son at Shiloh. And somehow we knew that her son and kingship were inextricably linked together, that they belonged together.

[9 : 13] Samuel and kingship belonged together. And the rest of chapter 2 showed us how the internal factors of Israel led to kingship. There was a corrupt priesthood.

Chapter 3 revealed that God had a way of sorting that out by giving his word to Samuel. Chapter 4 showed us that there were some external factors that seemed to indicate the need for kingship.

An enemy, the Philistines, who were already well known in the book of Judges. However, now they're aggressive and they're pressing in on Israel. However, chapters 4 to 6 showed us that the enemies were no real threat.

Do you remember the story of the Ark of the Covenant? How God manages to fight for his people without any armies, without any weapons, and he just defeats the Philistines by giving them plagues.

God can counter the Philistines and humiliate them and their gods without any assistance from any armies from anywhere. But not only that. As chapter 7 had indicated, Samuel was an able leader.

[10 : 15] So Hannah taught us, kingship is coming. However, everything that has been said since that day has told us that kingship is not necessary. Internally, they don't need a king because they've got God's word.

Externally, they don't need a king because God can defeat the enemies of Israel without armies. And Israel itself acknowledges it. Let me show you a very important verse just before this chapter.

Look at chapter 7. Chapter 7 is a fitting summary of the story from chapter 2 to chapter 7. And I want you to read with me verse 12 of chapter 7.

It reads like this. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshunar and named it Ebenezer. For he said, thus far the Lord has helped us.

Can you see what Israel is saying? It is saying, God has won a great victory for us. Samuel has taken this stone. He's plonked it down there.

[11 : 17] He's put it between Mizpah and Shen. He said, this is Ebenezer, which means the Lord has helped us. The point is, you see, Yahweh is king. The Lord is king.

He needs no army to look after his people. He is their saviour. He is their help. They need no one else but him.

That is the background for chapter 8. Have that ringing in your minds as we look at chapter 8. Thus far the Lord has helped us. Now let's look at what happens.

This chapter is very different from everything that's gone on before. All the previous chapters have been dominated by story. This chapter is dominated by speech. And these speeches are introduced with a small introduction in verses 1 to 4.

Some time has passed. Samuel has judged Israel well. He's now old. And in his old age he introduces us to a common theme of the books of Samuel. The failure of parents to have godly children.

[12 : 17] Now it's very interesting. If you want to read 1 and 2 Samuel sometime, look out for all the bad parents. They are studded through the book. They are all the way through it.

Actually, the thing that intrigues me is one of the highlights of the books of Samuel is the man Jonathan who has Saul as his dad. So somehow Saul got something right.

Which is just an interesting thing in passing. Anyway, let's move on from that. Samuel's sons are sons like the sons of Eli. Verse 3 tells us that they did not follow in Samuel's ways.

When he judged Israel, where he judged Israel, they perverted justice. They turned aside after dishonest gain. They broke covenant law by accepting bribes. And so it is that the elders come to Samuel.

And look at what they say to him in verse 5. It's this background that's going to shape the rest of the chapter. You are old Samuel. And your sons do not follow in your ways.

[13 : 15] Appoint for us then a king to govern us like the other nations. Now if you're reading the New International Version instead of the NRSV, then you'll notice that the words to lead are there rather than to govern.

But there's a footnote in the NIV which gives us the lead to what exactly is going on here. It says the word actually being used is judge. So let me just read it to you with that word in place.

You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways. Appoint for us then a king to judge us like the other nations.

Can you see what is going on? Can you see what the elders are saying? You see, they've seen through what Samuel has done. You see, in the Bible, judges are not appointed by judges.

They are appointed by God, by his spirit. Samuel has not left the appointment of judges to God. He has usurped God. He's taken God's prerogative.

[14 : 15] He's appointed judges himself. He's made himself. He's made the role of judge hereditary. And so let me tell you what I think the elders are saying to him. They're coming to him and they're saying something like this. Listen, Samuel, you're getting on.

Now, look, if you're thinking about a hereditary role, let's think a bit more laterally, as it were.

After all, do you know what everyone else is doing these days? Everyone else is having kings, not judges. So why don't we follow suit? Let's have kings.

It seems to work for them. Let's go that way rather than having this perpetual judgeship that you're foisting upon us. The proposal being put forward is very radical.

It is much more radical than Samuel's option. It implies a whole new structure. In fact, it implies a whole new identity for Israel.

[15 : 14] No longer will they be this loose confederacy of tribes ruled by judges. No, they will be a state ruled by kings. So there's the proposal.

Now, let's see what Samuel does to it. And verse 6 lets us into Samuel's emotions. And I wonder if you can hear him and feel him here. Look at it and I'll read it to you. But the thing, this thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to govern us.

And Samuel prayed to the Lord. Now, I want you to think about the context of this passage. What do you think it is that is displeasing Samuel? What do you think it is that is displeasing Samuel?

Well, I think the context tells us. I don't think he's displeased with the alternative proposal of the elders. No. In fact, I don't even think he's displeased with the idea of kingship itself.

I think he is personally offended. You see, he's a man who's brought this new way into Israel. He said, Let's have judges that are hereditary. And the elders have said, Well, actually, we don't like that idea too much.

[16 : 17] And I think you can see this in his response to God. In the response from God. Look at verses 7 to 9. The Lord said to Samuel, Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you.

And here he touches on what Samuel's feeling. For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Justice they have done to me from the day I brought them out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me, serving other gods, so also they are doing to you.

Now then, listen to their voice only. You shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall rule over them. Can you hear what God is saying? He's saying, first, he surprisingly is going to give in to what the elders have asked.

Three times in one Samuel 8, he will tell Samuel, Listen to what the people are saying. Second, effectively, he tells Samuel that he hasn't been listening very well.

God says, They have not rejected you, Samuel, but they have rejected me from being king over them. God is telling them, telling Samuel, You have overreacted and reacted emotionally.

[17 : 27] You are not hearing what is being said. You have not heard and passed on their comments about your corrupt sons and the problem that poses. Nor have you heard and passed on the comment that they want a king like the other nations.

I have been their ruler throughout all of history. And when God ruled, his rule was exercised by rescuing them when they called upon him. He appointed judges to rule over them and he cared for them in numerous other ways.

And so when they ask for a king, what are the people of God doing? What are they doing? Their request is tantamount to saying, We don't like your rule.

We don't like the way you treat us. And such rejection of God, God says, is nothing new. As God says in verse 8, They have done this from the very moment he rescued them out of Egypt.

It was not even 40 days had passed up on the mountain before they were committing idolatry down the bottom. They have been doing it from the very day he brought them out of Egypt. Can you hear what God is saying?

[18 : 29] Can you hear his criticism? He is effectively saying that the request for a king is another act of idolatry in a long series of acts of idolatry and apostasy.

Here is Samuel. And he's a bit worried and personally offended. And God says to him, Samuel, you have not heard what is going on here. My people are committing idolatry and you're worried about your personal offense.

You have not heard. And in verse 9, he says a second time, listen to them. However, he tells Samuel to spell out what this will mean for them.

He says, let them know what this king who will rule over them will do. Friends, I wonder if I might just give a little aside for a moment. You see, we live in a world that loves pragmatism, don't we?

I mean, we are people who look at problems, we think about solutions, we then make plans to implement them and they are often ingenious and they are practical and they work.

[19 : 37] We are intensely pragmatic people in the 21st century and let me tell you, our churches are much the same. We are pragmatic. So we find a problem, we see that problem, it could be our diminishing numbers, it could be our lack of appropriate facilities and we put our brains together, we get parish councils and we set up committees and so on and we think about solutions and then we make plans to implement those solutions and they are ingenious, very practical, it looks as though they are going to work and they do work.

Friends, let me tell you something though, we churches are theological entities, we are God's people and while it is right to be pragmatic, there is a real risk with pragmatism.

The risk is that pragmatism rules over theological truth and the danger is in making theological solutions, we do not think, sorry, practical solutions, we do not think theologically. We don't bother to ask what it is that God thinks and the danger is that our practical solutions end up being idolatrous for they diminish God.

Samuel's solution here did exactly that. Israel's solution here did exactly that. It diminished God and ours in our churches, though they look so godly can often, and so practical and so pragmatic, can often diminish God.

Please don't mishear me. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with being pragmatic. I'm simply saying we need to make sure that God's word, God's truth rules over pragmatism.

[21 : 12] God's word, God's truth governs our pragmatism. Our pragmatism should not be a theological, should be a theologically informed pragmatism. It should be a biblical pragmatism.

Let's return to our passage. Now, I want you to look at Samuel's speech in verses 10 to 18 and I want you to notice a number of things that he says. First, what did Israel want a king for?

They wanted a king because of what a king might give them. You see, God's response, though, is to tell them that kingship is more about taking than giving.

It is more about taking than giving. Now, we've already heard, haven't we, that the sons of Samuel took bribes. Now, Samuel tells us that Israel's king will take.

Have a look at it. Verse 11. He will take sons. He will take daughters. Verse 13. He will take the best of the fields and the vineyards and the olive groves.

[22 : 14] He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vineyards. He will take your male and female slaves and the best of your cattle and donkeys. And what's more, when he does give, you know who he's going to give to?

Not to you, the people of God, but to those people who serve his interests. He will give to his courtiers. He will give to his officers and courtiers in verse 15.

As well as taking things for his own use. Verse 16. Can you hear what God's saying? This is the first thing that Israel needs to know about the king that they're so desperate to have.

These kings will be characterized not by giving. They'll be characterized by taking. But there's more that God is going to say here. The second thing God has to say is that the elders of Israel have very short memories.

When was their last experience under a king? It was in the book of Exodus, wasn't it? Under Pharaoh. And what was that like? Well it was harsh and oppressive and it was slavery.

[23 : 20] Look at verse 17. God tells his people that having a king will effectively mean slavery again. It will mean a return to the bondage of Egypt. But there's more. The third thing that God is making clear is that having a king will not be without cost.

Up until now, you see, how have Israel conducted their relationship with God? Well when they got into trouble what did they do? They cried out to God. And what did God do even when they were sinful?

He rescued them. Their relationship had been one of intimacy and dynamism and immediacy. Well God says to them that's going to disappear.

The escape from Egypt began with you plaintively crying out to God for him to save you and he saw and he came down and he brought out. And ever since they simply had to call on God and he would hear and rescue them.

But look at what God says in verse 18. That will be gone. There's a tragic irony here. Can you hear it? Israel is about to forfeit something precious for a king and doesn't even seem to notice that they're throwing it out the window.

[24 : 29] Listen to what God says. And in that day you will cry out to me because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves but the Lord will not answer you in that day.

Having heard God's warnings the people choose the path of self-rule and of God rejection. God had rescued them, made them a distinctive nation in the exodus.

He joined them to an incomparable God that Hannah had celebrated in chapter 2 but they no longer want to be distinctive. They no longer want to be joined to an incomparable God.

They want to be like everyone else, like the nations. And what's more they no longer want God to be their king, the divine warrior. He had been in Egypt just a chapter or two earlier.

Now they want a king who will go before them in battle. They don't want God what God has done with the Ark of the Covenant in chapters 4 to 7. No, they want a king. They want to plonk a king down there to do that battle.

[25 : 38] Listen to what? Listen to them in verses 19 and 20. But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel. They said, no, we are determined to have a king over us so that we also may be like the other nations that have a king that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.

Samuel listens to this awful act of idolatry. He repeats their rejection before the Lord in verse 21 and the Lord says for the third time, listen to them and set a king over them.

And then in the last verse of the chapter, Samuel defers the day of the appointment of a king and sends them home. There's the chapter. Now if you read on in Samuel, you'll find that despite this awful act of idolatry, God stays with his people.

Despite their rejection of him as king, he continues to be their king and their God. He grants them kingship. He even knits kingship into his relationship with them.

After all, you see, what is the nature of God? It is to be surprisingly and overwhelmingly gracious and kind. However, what I want to do just for the remainder of this talk is to reflect on what we've seen.

[26 : 56] I want us to allow it to help us examine our own inner attitudes and dispositions. You see, I think this chapter taps into a common theme in the Bible and a common theme among us humans.

You see, God's view is explained in the Bible and it is crystal clear and it starts on page two. And it says, or page one, it says all humans are created by God. They're created to be related to him, to have him as their king and their lord and their ruler.

They're created, in other words, to be dependent beings. But God is also clear in the Bible, isn't he? That all humans are fundamentally people who have a passion for self-rule.

We have a passion for self-rule. That is, we long to be independent from God. We long to be our own rulers, taking our own advice, depending upon ourselves.

This is our nature, which is why the Bible opens with chapters two and three of Genesis. To say, this is who you are. In the core of our being, you see, we are like the ancient Israelites.

[28 : 04] We have this passion for self-rule. Their attitude is our attitude. Their passion is our passion. Their idolatry is our idolatry.

And it is to people like us that chapter 8 sends a timely warning. Do you remember what God said about the king that would come? Basically, he said, living under his rule will be like hell.

It is about living in a world ruled over by people who are like us, who are self-interested. It is about living in a world ruled by people who are bent on taking and taking and taking for themselves, not for you, but for themselves.

It is about living in a world where people use other people for their benefit and their glory. It is about living in a world where people brutalize and enslave others for their own good or bad.

It is about a world, it is about living in a world just like the one we read about in the paper every day or watch on the internet every day or hear on our radios every day.

[29 : 14] Can you hear what God is saying? He is saying, that a world where we make ourselves king is a world full of people as self-centered as us.

It is a world dominated by rule that is self-centered. It is a world where God is shifted to the periphery of our existence. Friends, self-rule is hell on earth because it is a world full of people who are only interested in themselves.

So there is the human predicament. It is a predicament as old as one Samuel 8. In fact, it's even older, isn't it? It is as old as Adam and Eve in the garden. We know that God is good and great and able and loving and generous and kind.

But it seems so often so risky to allow that God to rule over our existence. self-rule is so ingrained in our existence.

We think that having God rule over us would expose us to a life of unpredictability and precariousness. We are reluctant to accept God's rule because we don't know where it's going to take us and what God might perhaps require of us if we allowed him to rule us.

[30 : 40] In other words, we're not sure that we can trust God to do a better job than we ourselves would do. Now if this is you, I want to show you God the King in action.

You see, in the story of God's action in the world, as it involves in the world and in the Bible, God tells us that if you want to see me active as King, come with me.

Come with me to a particular place, a definite act or moment in history, look here and you'll see me as King. And in the Bible, God tells us that that place is the person and work of his son, Jesus.

For Jesus is God in human form. And as God, he thinks as God thinks. He acts as God acts. And what Jesus does is clear from the pages of the Bible.

He and his father understand that we are people with a passion for self-rule. He and his father understand that self-rule brings hell on earth. They understand that since heaven will be filled only with those who are happy with the rule of God, then those who are into self-rule are headed for hell of a real sort.

[31 : 53] And so God the father sends his son into the world to do the task of a godly king and to rescue us from the tyranny of self-rule. And Jesus comes into the world and he lives a perfect life.

life and as a true king should do, he does not take but gives. And he gives even his own life on behalf of his people.

He dies in their place. He soaks up the punishment that was due to them because of their commitment to self-rule. What Jesus does on the cross is a picture of the rule of God in action.

God is not a cruel and distant tyrant. He is a just and kind and generous and benevolent king. He is always forgiving.

He always has the best interests of his subjects in mind. He is a king to love and a king to adore and a king that you can readily hand your life over to.

[33 : 02] And that brings us to the question of what a Christian is. You see fundamentally a Christian is someone who acknowledges the truth of what God says. A Christian is someone who acknowledges that deep in their being they are committed to self-rule.

A Christian is someone who acknowledges that deep in their being they are committed to being their own boss. Who acknowledges that this is hell and who wants to be free from self-rule and its consequences.

A Christian is therefore someone who turns to God and asks forgiveness for having been dominated by self-rule and accepts that from this point they want God to be their king.

A Christian does this by believing in God's king, Jesus Christ, by accepting the forgiveness offered in him and by abandoning self-rule and living with Jesus as their king and lord of their lives.

Friends, I've got just one more thing to say tonight. And on this hot evening, thank you for sticking with me. I wonder if you'd permit me this one final thing. You see, I wonder if there are some of you here tonight who are bound in self-rule.

[34 : 10] Perhaps you are distant from the loving rule of God as demonstrated through his son. Or perhaps you've drifted away from it just gradually or slowly or becoming disenchanted with God or perhaps come to lack confidence in God and his rule and his loving rule.

Or perhaps you have received ill at the hands of his people. If this is so, I want to urge you tonight to fix your eyes on God's kingship as exercised in Jesus.

That kingship is kind. It is benevolent. It always has your good at mind.

It always has your good at the forefront. And might I urge you tonight to turn back to this loving God through this wonderful King Jesus.

To do so is to become his child. It is to become a Christian. It is to reaffirm that you want to live as a Christian. Friends, let me assure you, self-rule is hell.

[35 : 20] Free yourself from it. Turn away from it. Turn away from its consequences. Turn back to God. Ask for God's forgiveness for clinging to self-rule.

And accept that from this point on you want Jesus to be your only Lord and Saviour and King. And friends, if you have never done this before, but want to do it today, then I urge you to talk to a friend or one of the leaders here before you go home tonight.

They will be more than glad to help you. I know most of you are in this place. That is, most of you know Jesus as King. Well, I hope tonight has refreshed you in terms of His kingship.

We know, don't we? We know and love this King, for He has loved us with an everlasting love, and there is no better place to be, is there?

If you don't know that love yet, please, please, friends, turn to it. Let's pray. Father, we ask You tonight to forgive us for clinging to self-rule.

[36 : 33] Forgive us that there is in us often the hearts that are the same as Israel's heart. That is a heart that thinks that we can do a better job than You can.

Father, please help us to fix our eyes on the cross and on Your love exercised there in Your Son and to trust Him and to live under His kingship.

We pray this in His name. Amen.