

Since we’re sitting in the upper Midwest of the United States of America on a hot Summer day – it may be a super stretch to get our brains to kick around the question: What would it be like to have a king? – I mean, what would it *REALLY* be like to be the subjects of a king? How would a king structure things? Would there still be some form of local, county, or state government that would be answerable to a king? Would there be a cabinet or inner circle of advisers to the king who would ensure the king’s orders and pronouncements were carried out? How would that change our day to day lives? How would that change WHO we are – or WHAT we could do?

Do you remember why some of our ancestors rebelled against being governed by a king? It seems to me that it had to do with some of the same kinds of things that Samuel listed out: heavy taxation; forced conscription; what the king wanted the king got. . . . Sure, Samuel presented his list as a kind of “worst case” example of what a human king would do and be like, and his list does seem harsh and one-sided. But why did Samuel lay it on so thick? Why did he make it sound like a king would be totally self-centered and exploitive of his own people?! Why was Samuel so “anti-king” – especially *after* God had told him to listen to the people and their demands for a king? Oh, I don’t know – maybe because the people who came to demand a king basically said that Samuel was old and washed up, and that his sons were lousy and couldn’t be trusted? Would Samuel take offense to *that*? Or was Samuel annoyed because they claimed they wanted a king so they could be like all the other nations? Was Samuel thinking: Why weren’t they satisfied with being the unique chosen people of God? Had they forgotten their covenant relationship with God, the one living God, the ultimate King of All Creation?! Did they really think a human king would have more power and authority to govern them and to go out before them to fight their battles than God does? Had it slipped their minds that God brought them up out of slavery in Egypt? Did they not like their freedom? Hello! Pharaoh is just another name for “king”! Have they not listened to a word Samuel has said to them?! No, they did not listen. They actually REFUSED to listen to Samuel!

And when Samuel talked to God about it, God was like, “Hey! It’s not you – it’s them! They haven’t rejected you, but they have rejected ME from being king over them. And, truthfully, they have done nothing but complain since I brought them up out of Egypt. Trust me when I tell you that you’re not going to be able to shift them off this notion of having a king. You can warn them all you want, but they’re too stubborn to listen. This is going to be their choice. Samuel, you need to listen to them and set a king over them.”

Were you surprised that God didn't put up a fight? Or wonder why God didn't at least remind them of all they were turning away from? I mean God could have turned the day to night, or water into blood, or sticks into serpents – or SOMETHING to refresh their memories of God's power and authority! But this total lack of signs and fury? Do you think that God had grown so tired of governing this stiff-necked people that God was ready to let somebody else give it a whirl for a while?! . . . Or did God just take the long view? After all, God is going to be around for all eternity. If they want a human king, let them have a human king. Because these human kings? Pfft! They come and they go. But God? God is still going to be there.

And then we fast forward to the New Testament where the Son of God introduces the concept of kin-dom. Not “king”-dom. Maybe you didn't hear it exactly that way when we read the passage from the Gospel of Mark, but Jesus was talking about “kin”-dom. And in Jesus' kin-dom whoever does the will of God is Jesus' brother or sister. If you do the will of God you are kin, you are sibling, you are a child of God, part of the family of God – right alongside your brother Jesus. So if the Holy Spirit is flowing through your DNA, if your heart has been strangely warmed, if you love God with all your being – you're part of the kin-dom. And in the kin-dom all will receive the water of life; pain and death will be no more; God will wipe away every tear; and the glory of God will be the only light that anyone needs for ever and ever more.

Basically Jesus had been showing them a glimpse of the kin-dom each time he healed someone. Each time Jesus cast out demons that had tormented poor souls. Each time Jesus was welcomed by someone the scribes had labeled as “unclean” or untouchable. Each time Jesus spoke about God and the Holy Spirit. Each time Jesus made himself available to someone who needed him, who needed to be seen, who needed to be heard, who needed to be touched, who needed to know that God loved them. And each time Jesus showed them a glimpse of the kin-dom – there was someone else who didn't believe it, who sought to deny it, and who even claimed it was the work of Beelzebul and not of God. You may have noticed that Jesus didn't seem to have much patience with the nay-sayers who wouldn't believe the kin-dom had come when they saw it breaking out in front of them. And Jesus wasn't trapped by the niceties of social conformity – he didn't care that he wasn't doing what everyone else was doing, or what his own relatives would have liked him to do or not do. Jesus didn't tone things down to fit in to other peoples' expectations. Jesus turned things upside down in order to lift up the kin-dom of God. This is what he came to do, and it was what he was going to do. So bring on the crowd! Fill the house of God with all the brothers and sisters that it can hold! The kin-dom is here!

Amen.