

“They Have Rejected God”

I Samuel 8:7

June 7, 1936

*My last sermon in the First Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove.*

One day the people come to Samuel and said that they did not want him as a judge any more. They also said that they wanted a king instead. They wanted to be as the other people around them who had kings instead of judges to rule over them. Now this request of the people hurt Samuel. Not because he was going to lose a job, though he did feel the sting of it. He was old and would soon be gathered to his fathers, the request hurt Samuel because Israel, the chosen people were according to the plan of God to be ruled by judges representing Jehovah himself, just as the Presbyterian Church according to the desire of the Lord is to be ruled by elders elected by the people and representing the Lord Jesus Christ. When Israel, therefore rejected the judges to rule over them, they really rejected God as their king. The old man who had labored so unselfishly and devotedly among them was broken hearted. Samuel's people, whom he loved, rejected his God whom he loved more. In his great distress of heart the Lord came to him and said, “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them”

May I take these words as my text. If I would compare myself with Samuel who labored so diligently and so unselfishly to help his people worship in truth and spirit the only God, than indeed these words would not apply to the condition in which we find ourselves. For almost eleven years I have been the pastor of this church. I have tried to do my work faithfully, I have taught as many Bible classes as it was possible for me to do. I have visited you in your homes, have endeavored to be courteous and kind always. It was ever my desire to adorn the gospel for Jesus Christ in word and deed, who found me a sinner, dead in my sin, and who by grace snatched me as a firebrand from the fire. I have worked hard on my sermons. I ever studied diligently the Word of God. It was always my desire, not to tell you what I thought, but what the Lord said in His book. I have not been a respecter of persons among you. Whether a man gave ten dollars, or a hundred, or nothing; made as far as my relation to him was concerned no difference. You were to me souls, souls that could be saved by the blood for the house with its many mansions and only as such did I think of you and love you. Perfectly I have not been able to do this great work of telling the story of Jesus to perishing sinners, but I know that my imperfections and often dreadful shortcomings hurt me even more than they did hurt you. I have tried hard to be honest, impartial and sincere. Nevertheless, though my conscience is void of offence, I would not dare to compare myself with Samuel that mighty man of God, who at the end of his life, by his life and conduct constrained the people to say of him, that he had done all for God's sake.

Neither directly, nor indirectly do I compare myself with Samuel. I do not want to talk about myself. If the events of the last few months had issued only in the loss of my position, it would not be very important. If all that has happened, meant only that I had lost my position as Pastor of this Church, I would say good bye to you people and move away from this village, as indeed I have sinfully enough, often been tempted to do. I would advise you to go on worshipping God in this place and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for a world dead in sin and I would apologize for the pain and trouble which I had caused you. But I am persuaded by the work of the Holy Spirit that the events of the past constrain us to think of these awful

words of God to Samuel, “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should no longer be king over them”

On these words of the Scripture I am going to preach a gospel sermon today. The Presbytery has ordered me to preach a gospel sermon. I have never preached anything else but gospel sermon; indeed I do not know how to preach sermons which are not gospel sermons. And in preaching this gospel sermon I want to remember that I will have to stand before the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus Christ not many days hence to give an account of all that I say. As I trust only in his power to help me speak the truth, so also do I appeal to that final judgment day for the vindication of this my gospel sermon as well as for the justification of my conduct which is the product of my faith. I will, therefore, give you not my private reasons, but God’s own reasons for saying to every one of us today “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should no longer be king over them”

Let us take the last expression of my text for the first thought. “That I should no longer be king over them” You are familiar with the history and that simple but beautiful Bible history can best express the meaning of the words, “King over them.” Israel came out of Egypt redeemed by the direct power of God. They could not deliver themselves from the power of the Egyptians. God sent Moses. By ten manifestations of his power God made these people his own people and he became their God. And after he had delivered them he gave them a law. These people saved directly by the power of God had no king to rule over them save God himself only. Israel was a theocracy, that is, a nation ruled by the Lord. Every man in that nation was equal in the sight of God with his fellowmen, and no one, or group of men, ruled by his own, or their own right, among the people.

In the N.T. we find this same principle of direct divine rule. God is King and God must be obeyed. Not by their own merits, but by the Lord Jesus Christ a limited number of people have been saved from eternal misery. In our confession, which every minister in our church says he believes, we read that Christ died for the elect. There is, therefore now in this world a spiritual body which has been saved from sin and the wrath to come, by the Lord Jesus Christ. Of this group in this world the Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased them with his own blood, is the only King. The members of that body are equal; there are no rulers among them who are rulers by their own right, for only the Lord Jesus Christ is their ruler

This great principle of the sovereignty of God taught in both Testaments, accounts for that form of church government, which from the beginning has been and now is the common thing in the purest Christian Churches. These churches are ruled by elders, elected by the people, who in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ exercise a limited authority over these people. In accord with the gospel truth which I am trying to express this morning, and indeed finding its source in the gospel truth are the words found in our Form of Government; “That all church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative, that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; and that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws, to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded on the revealed will of God” I once heard a man who understood and loved the gospel, of which the sovereignty of God is an important part say, “I stand in the presence of every man, his equal, owing allegiance and obedience to none, only in the presence of God do I bow my head saying, speak Lord thy servant heareth.”

It was because the Apostle believed this gospel that they stood in the presence of the Sanhedrin, the highest judicatory of their church, and said; “we ought to obey God rather than man.” They went out rejoicing to bear reproach for Jesus sake. It was because he believed this gospel that Martin Luther said to the highest church authority of his day “I cannot obey the pope, since I must obey the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ.” It was because he believed this gospel that John Knox without compromise refused to obey either the authorities of the state or the church. It is out of this gospel that the great democracies of the world were born and it is only by this gospel that these democracies can be maintained. Unconditional obedience to God makes a man free; obedience to his fellowmen makes a man a slave and a puppet, unworthy of the name man.

Now on this specific gospel truth, that God alone is King of His chosen people a severe attack is being made in our day. Christian people are doing in our day exactly the same thing that the Israelites did in the days of Samuel. The Israelites wanted a king as the people of this world around them, and the church people are substituting for the authority of God the authority of judicatories. Not knowing any more the plain commands of the Lord, not believing that the Bible is the revealed will of God for all time, men in the church today are replacing the only legitimate authority of God for the authority of the Assembly. Apparently it does not even occur to some Presbyteries in our Church to ask a minister whether he will be loyal to the Bible and obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ who on the cross suffered on our behalf. They do however ask a man to loyal to the church and its agencies which sometimes is quite a different thing from being obedient to the Lord Jesus. It has been so before in the history of the Christian Church. Had Luther been loyal to the church and its agendas there had been no Reformation. Had Luther obeyed the pope when the pope forbade him to tell the people what use was being made of their money; there had been no Christian church worthy of the name today. Calvin too, though not in the same words, was ordered to discontinue adverse criticism of the Church and its agencies in his day, had he obeyed there had been no statue of liberty in one of the harbors of America. Yet in spite of the lessons of history so plain, we witness once more today the efforts of men to fasten an authority of the Lord. They have rejected me that I should no longer be king over them.

My people, I would like to speak longer about this utterly false authority which is being exercised in our own and other protestant churches, which authority is more severe in its demands, soul-destroying in its commands than ever was the authority of Rome, which church our fathers left for the sake of the only King our Lord Jesus Christ. My believed, the yoke of Jesus is easy and his burden is light, we must either willingly wear that yoke, or otherwise the iron yoke which men would hang on our necks. If we reject the Lord our God as king over us, we will have to obey men, which is hard.

The second thought in my text is found in the words, “they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me.” Samuel was a special servant of the Lord. As the other writers of the Bible he too was under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God. This special servant under the control of the Holy Spirit the Israelites rejected and chose in his place the man Saul. Now Saul started out very fine and at first it did seem that he was going to be a very good king. Strong of body, keen of mind, clean in conduct, he was a man who would have been welcome as a member in any society of men who desire the best in this life. But Saul was not regenerated; he was not under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Now we can understand what

the Lord meant when he said “they have rejected me, they have not rejected thee” For in rejecting Samuel the servant of the Most High and in choosing Saul, the keen mind, clean bodied without regeneration, the people did indeed do much more than reject one man for another. Now in this rejection of Samuel the Bible writer and in choosing the man Saul who was in a general sense also religious we have a parable.

Within the churches of Christendom an intense struggle is going on between historic Christianity and paganism, between the Christian religion and something which is not at all Christian. Let me mention only a few of the gospel truths which are being seriously questioned today. The gospel teaches that the Bible is the Word of God given by inspiration, which Bible chiefly reveals what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of him. Paganism says that God reveals himself to the race through good men, both in olden times and today. It teaches that the most beautiful revelation of God came through the most perfect man Jesus Christ. One of the last prayers I heard in the Presbytery of Milwaukee included the words, “Father we thank thee for the revelation of thyself through the prophets of old and all other good men through the history of the world, but especially for the best revelation of thyself in Christ” Without in the least defaming that gentleman’s character fact is that his prayer is not Christian; it is pagan, though paganism of a noble kind as paganism can be. The Christian truth teaches that Samuel was a unique servant of God who in his life and person revealed the will of God for all time.

Again the Christian gospel teaches that all men are dead in trespasses and in sin. That all men have come short of the glory of God is an evident truth of the Bible. All men are hell bound sinners without hope in this world or that which is to come. For these sinners Jesus Christ died. In his own body on the tree he suffered for the sin of those who according to the foreknowledge of God are elected unto eternal life. This is the good news. This is Christian doctrine taught in the Bible. But paganism teaches that man can be and must be his own savior. It teaches that man must adopt the religion of Jesus and have the spirit of Christ. It teaches that there are indeed some things wrong with man, but that he can correct these things himself by imitating the great religious genius of Galilee. The difference between these two religions is so great that they are mutually exclusive, both cannot possibly true.

I might go on and mention still other differences between these two religions which are struggling with one another for the mastery in the Christian Church. You have during these last months been witnesses to a small and in itself unimportant part of that the great struggle going on in the churches. There are no personalities in our struggle, we are not fighting with one another about insults received or given. It is entirely about the gospel. Those of us who have been watching with interest the struggle between the fundamentalists and modernists in the churches know that our struggle is about the same thing in this our little church. It surely was about the gospel when in 1893 Dr. Briggs was asked to leave our denomination because he could not believe among other things that the first five books of the Bible were written by Moses. It certainly was about the gospel when in 1923 the Assembly asked the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church of New York to release Dr. Fosdick, who had preached a sermon on the subject, “Shall the fundamentalists win?” In 1929 when the Princeton Theological Seminary was changed into something it had never been and ought not now to be it certainly was about the everlasting gospel. It was the struggle between Christianity and paganism which brought about the conflict

over the Board of Foreign Missions. It was only because of the gospel that seven or eight men were recently suspended from the ministry. In that great conflict going on I have been compelled to stand on the side of the gospel and hence this pulpit is taken from me. They have not rejected me, that would be an unimportant thing altogether, but they have in rejecting me rejected the Lord God and his everlasting truth.

And finally there is the last thought in my text, "Hearken unto them in all that they say unto thee." It does seem that even the Lord himself is approving the sinful deed of rejecting his only rightful authority and the gospel he alone has given us. For he commands Samuel to do as they requested. And we would surely be at a loss to understand these words of our God if we did not have the subsequent history to explain them. But you know what happened. For many years the keen minded, clean and able bodied Saul ruled over the Israelites. But he committed suicide. The man whom the people had chosen in preference to the Lord utterly failed. God had mercy. He called a ruddy complected shepherd boy from behind the fold and made him king over Israel to rule the chosen place for the Lord and in the Lord's place. All of which is also a parable which we must apply to the situation in which we now find ourselves.

The paganism for the present triumphant in the Churches of Jesus Christ seems to promise much. Modernism now successful apparently is also keen minded and able, but lacks the power of the Holy Spirit. Like Saul of old the time is coming when in the battle with sin this modernism will fall upon its own sword on the battle field and shriek out, "it had been better if I had never been" And God will again have mercy. By his power he will intervene in behalf of his church and from some unexpected place salvation will come for the people who love the Lord in truth and in Spirit. Since God is God and the Lord Jesus sits on the throne of the universe, saddened though we are, we may not be discouraged. It is our duty to go on bearing witness faithfully to the everlasting gospel and we may be sure that the day will come when men will again seek Jerusalem and its message of salvation come down from the Father of all lights with whom is no shadow that is cast by turning. And so God is also compelling us today to hearken unto them in all that they say unto us without compromising what we know is true.

Amen.