

Opening Scripture: 1 Sam 11:12–15

Introduction: In his final farewell sermon titled “The LORD is Our Righteousness,” the greatest preacher of his time, George Whitfield, delivered these words in a passionate plea for middle-aged, the elderly. He then turned his attention to children and youths to trust in Christ: “Do not think, that you are too young to be converted. Perhaps many of you may be nine or ten years old, and yet cannot say, the Lord is our righteousness... If your fathers and mothers will not come to Christ, you come without them. Let children lead them and show them how the Lord may be their righteousness. Our Lord Jesus Christ loved little children. You are his lambs; he bids me feed you. I pray God make you willing early in life to take the Lord for your righteousness” (George Whitfield, “The LORD is Our Righteousness, 9/29/1770). Today, in this place, we carry on his tradition of baptizing young and old. Amen.

Whitefield delivered that final sermon on **September 29, 1770, at Newburyport, MA.**

The next day, he passed away, leaving the church with the singular most powerful example of tireless integrity and diligence and mastery of the art of preaching, and an unwavering commitment to the truth of God’s Word.

Transition: The text we’re reading today has a similar farewell speech given by Israel’s prophet Samuel. Samuel has served as the epitome of a godly, faithful servant of the LORD. And he’s now passing the leadership baton to Saul, a lesser man who, as we learned last week, seems to fit the bill in terms of superficial things. But he reveals two sides of his character.

In Chapter 11, Saul’s calling is put to the test. Israel faced a serious threat from the Ammonites and decided they needed a king to ensure their security. They believed that a king with a standing army could provide the protection they sought. God assured them that He would provide a leader, but this leader had to uphold Moses’ Law.

Chapter 12 begins, and the people aren’t sure what kind of King Saul is going to be. Will Saul lean into his fearful, craven, faithless, blame-shifting tendencies (as evidenced in Chapters 9–11)? Or will he instead grow into this new position as Israel’s fearless, godly, faith-filled King who takes responsibility for his own actions and mistakes? Sadly we know where it’s

going.

Chapter 12 is Samuel's farewell speech and a coronation speech for Saul.

12:1–3 "Then Samuel said to all Israel, 'I have carefully listened to everything you said to me and placed a king over you. ² Now you can see that the king is leading you. As for me, I'm old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have led you from my youth until now. ³ Here I am. Bring charges against me before the Lord and his anointed: Whose **ox or donkey** have I taken? Who have I **wronged or mistreated**? Who gave me a **bribe** to overlook something? I will return it to you.' ⁴ 'You haven't wronged us, you haven't mistreated us, and you haven't taken anything from anyone,' they responded. ⁵ He said to them, 'The Lord is a witness against you, and his anointed is a witness today that you haven't found anything in my hand.' 'He is a witness,' they said."

We make several observations about **faithful leadership** from this passage.

1. Samuel appeals to his own faithfulness. If you have a Reformed bone in your body, this first point probably chafes a little bit. In our way of thinking, this is exactly what Christians shouldn't do—draw attention to our attempts at righteousness. But Samuel feels no such constraint. Now notice what he's not doing; he's not claiming that God chose him or anointed him as a prophet *because God foreknew that Samuel would be faithful*. God foreknows that Saul won't be faithful, and yet God still chose Saul.

Samuel's appeal to his own integrity is as a model of leadership, not a reason for his election.

Integrity is a gift of Christ's righteousness. Colossians 1:22 (CSB): "But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him." Blamelessness begins with our change of status.

Integrity is a process leading to our future perfection at Christ's coming. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (CSB): "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let me ask you, have you ever had a change of status that it took you a while to live up to?

Illus. It may have been a job promotion to a position with enormous responsibility requiring a scary amount of expertise—expertise that you had to grow into. It could be a military promotion in Rank—which comes

with new responsibilities and duties, but the minute after you were promoted, you were the same person with the same experience, knowledge, and education.

Or remember your first child. The day that baby boy or girl comes into the world—your status changes, but that doesn't mean you've arrived as a parent that your knowledge of parenting has grown infinitely or even significantly.

Blamelessness is firstly a status change—God declares us in the right, and we begin the sanctification journey to become all that God has declared us to be.

So what does Samuel teach us about the integrity of heart in leadership?

- **Faithful leaders listen. They listen to God and to their people.** (v.1) “I have carefully listened to everything you said to me and placed a king over you.” A listening leader demonstrates patience, approachability, understanding, and models respect and dignity. Samuel says, “I’ve taken the time to hear you out, to listen to your feedback and your requests.” Good and faithful leaders listen to God above all and listen to their people to see how the Spirit is leading.
- **Faithful leaders last. They practice *a long obedience in the same direction*. They remain steadfast in their commitments and responsibilities.** (v.2) “I have led you from my youth until now.” This is Samuel’s way of saying, “I have kept the faith, I have finished the race marked out for me,” As Paul the apostle would say so many years later. Faithful leaders don’t get bored with their responsibilities, always looking for the bigger, better opportunity. They have a certain longevity that flash-in-the-pan leaders don’t have. They choose to reap the harvest of a long and well-tended field. Faithful leaders endure through the ups and downs and the highs and lows of their calling.
- **Faithful leaders long for moral excellence. The leader with integrity of heart has an unquenchable longing, and desire to be found faithful, above reproach or public rebuke.** (v.3) “Here I am. (remember the first time Samuel said that? As a boy in the tabernacle responding to Eli and God) Bring charges against me before the LORD

and his anointed: Whose donkey did I steal? Who can accuse me of wrongly judging them or taking a bribe to turn a blind eye?” Samuel throws down the gauntlet, “Which of you finds fault with me?” A blameless leader knows they’ve been declared in the right (righteous in Christ alone) and then can get on with the business of striving for integrity of heart, moral excellence, taking responsibility for their actions, being teachable, and being accountable to others (a community of leaders). And we are under no illusions that we have or will ever (apart from Resurrection Day) “arrived.” Paul said to the Philippian Christians (Phil 3:12–14), “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but ***I press on to make it my own*** because Christ Jesus has made me his own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ ***I press on toward the goal*** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Summary: Faithful leaders listen (prioritizing hearing God and are responsive to the people they serve), **they last** (they reap a harvest that can only come through steadfastness and longevity), **and they long for moral excellence** (without the pretensions and pride of moral perfectionism though they are being morally perfected—they are in progress).

Samuel set this leadership example for them and unapologetically appealed to his incorruptible example.

2. Samuel reminds them of God’s faithfulness despite their unfaithfulness (1 Sam 12:6–12). Notice what he immediately turns his attention to in this farewell speech. He highlights two things—their unfaithfulness to God’s covenant, and God’s continued faithfulness to them. “Then Samuel said to the people, ‘***The Lord, who appointed*** Moses and Aaron and ***who brought your ancestors up*** from the land of Egypt, is a witness. ⁷ Now present yourselves, so I may confront you before the Lord about ***all the righteous***

acts he has done for you and your ancestors. ⁸ When Jacob went to Egypt, your ancestors cried out to the Lord, and **he sent them Moses and Aaron**, who **led your ancestors out** of Egypt and settled them in this place. ⁹ But they forgot the Lord their God, so he handed them over to Sisera commander of the army of Hazor, to the Philistines, and to the king of Moab. These enemies fought against them. ¹⁰ Then they cried out to the Lord and said, 'We have sinned, for we abandoned the Lord and worshiped the Baals and the Ashtoreths. Now rescue us from the power of our enemies, and we will serve you.' (he reminds them of the period of the Judges) ¹¹ So **the Lord sent** Jerubbaal, Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel. **He rescued you** from the power of the enemies around you, and you lived securely. ¹² But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was coming against you, you said to me, 'No, we must have a king reign over us'—even though the Lord your God is your king."

What stands out in the farewell speech is how quickly he transitions from presenting himself as the model of transparent, accountable, and blameless leadership to addressing their historical failures and unfaithfulness. Don't mistake this as lashing the folks or criticizing the people to leave them depressed and defeated. No, Samuel's brief history of Israel's unfaithfulness highlights God's faithfulness. **Notice how many times Samuel mentions what the LORD did on their behalf in the text.**

Illus. When I was 14, my father's passing left me in a ten-month period of deep anxiety and restlessness within my soul. I felt lost, unsure of my identity and purpose. During that time, I rediscovered Jesus in a profound way. Though I had been born again and baptized at the age of 9, at 15, it felt like my life was reborn. I received a new sense of purpose, direction, and a calling that I couldn't ignore. Over the next two years, I faithfully served Jesus and experienced significant growth in my knowledge and understanding of the Word. However, at age 17, I really blew it, falling back into old habits and venting my anger on some individuals. I'll spare you the details, but the guilt overwhelmed me. I came home, confessed my wrongdoing to my mom, friends, and youth pastor, and assumed I was beyond redemption. I couldn't believe I had betrayed the God who had shown me such immeasurable mercy and grace. And an utterly selfish act of sin was how I repaid so great a salvation? My friends, mother, and Youth

Pastor all expressed their disappointment but also reaffirmed God's calling on my life; where sin did abound God's grace did much more abound. Praise God. I was washed clean. Have you ever been there? You've thought, how could God remain faithful when I've been filled with such doubt, such horrible thoughts, and done horrible things?

Samuel reminds them of the Character of the God they serve—yes, you were unfaithful. Yes, your decisions were disappointing and evil. But God was faithful.

Good leaders remind us of God's faithfulness without ever softening or revising our history.

3. Samuel leads them into covenant renewal (1 Sam 12:13–18). “Now here is the king *you've chosen*, the one *you requested* (Heb. לָאֵל, is the root of לְאֵלָיִם He is forever a symbol of your rebellious request). Look, this is the king ***the Lord has placed*** over you. (We see here a clear interplay between God's Sovereign choice and their choices. You say, “Well, how do those work together? How is it that God's predestinating will is compatible with the exercise of our human choices?” Answer: “I don't know, and anyone who tells you they do know is given over to pride. Not only do I not know, furthermore I highly suspect the answer to that question is above my pay grade). ¹⁴ ***If you*** fear the Lord, worship and obey him, and ***if you*** don't rebel against the Lord's command, **then both you and the king** who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God (into all the blessings of the covenant: prosperity, abundance, security and peace). ¹⁵ However, ***if you disobey*** the Lord and rebel against his command, ***the Lord's hand will be against you*** as it was against your ancestors. ¹⁶ Now, therefore, present yourselves and see this great thing that the Lord will do before your eyes (this *if-then* structure is technical language for Ancient Suzerain-Vassal treaties/covenants). ¹⁷ Isn't the wheat harvest today? I will call on the Lord, and he will send thunder and rain so that you will recognize what an immense evil you committed in the Lord's sight by requesting a king for yourselves.' ¹⁸ Samuel called on the Lord, and on that day the Lord sent thunder and rain. As a result, all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel” (Again, this is

covenantal renewal language—after God made the covenant with Israel, he ratified it with signs and wonders—in the middle of the hottest, driest season, the clouds roll in, the thunder claps, and the lightning flashes and the covenant is renewed).

Samuel charges the people with a duty that surpasses the authority of human rulers. They are to obey their rulers so long as those rulers are faithful to the laws of God. ***The king does not have the absolute right to rule as did kings in adjacent ANE nations. The King of Israel still lives under Moses' law.*** The people are tasked with upholding their national covenant, even if it means rebuking or deposing their kings. Accountability for leaders, including priests, prophets, kings, and elders, is vital. When a king strays, the people must not follow him; they must instead follow the LORD. When prophets falsely prophesy, the nation must rebuke and correct them. When priests stop teaching Moses' Torah law to the people at the festivals each year, the people shall instead follow the Lord and insist that their preachers and teachers teach rightly from the Word of God.

Faithful leaders lead God's people into covenant renewal and remembrance. As NT believers, we do this in a variety of ways, principally through the Lord's Supper or Communion once a month. That table reminds us of the price that was paid for us. It reminds us that Christ died so that we may live. It reminds us of what we all have in common (not our theories on predestination, charismatic gifts, or church polity)—what we all have in common is that Jesus voluntarily died for our sins that we might live for the praise of his glorious grace. And that table reminds us that our allegiance is ultimately and unwaveringly to Jesus our Savior and LORD. Not to a man, institution, denomination, or theological system.

Faithful leaders regularly lead the people into covenant renewal and remembrance.

4. Samuel reassures them of their election (1 Sam 12:19–22). The people plead with Samuel, asking for his prayers regarding their desire for a king. Samuel reassures them, urging wholehearted worship rather than pursuing worthless idols, and promises to pray and teach. He warns of consequences for continued wrongdoing.

- **Faithful leaders guide people to confession.** (v. 19) “For we have added to all our sins the evil of requesting a king for ourselves.” Confession begins with the truth; the truth convicts us and shows us how we’ve gotten off the path; conviction bubbles up in a confession of all that is true about us—we’ve sinned against you oh Lord. We’ve allowed self-indulgence, pride in achievement, self-sufficiency, and judgmentalism—we’ve let these things take residence within us. We’ve given bitterness and resentment, anger or malice safe harbor in our souls. Faithful leaders know that the Spirit will work in people’s hearts as they are steadfast in their proclamation and teaching of the truth.

Illus. Remember Peter on the Day of Pentecost. Peter’s preaching about Jesus dying and rising cuts through and brings conviction for sin and a desperation of heart to know “what must we do to be saved?”

Samuel's preaching cuts to the heart, inspiring a national confession of sin.

- **Faithful leaders pray for and instruct people in worship.** (vv. 20; 23–25). “As for me, I vow that I will not sin against the Lord by ceasing to **pray for you**. I will **teach you** the good and right way. ²⁴ Above all, **fear the Lord** and **worship him** faithfully with all your heart; **consider** the great things he has done for you. ²⁵ However, if you continue to do what is evil, both you and your king will be swept away.” Samuel knows that our first responsibility is to pray for the people in our care. Prayer acknowledges God’s sovereign will and his abundant resources. A good and godly leader knows that the most vital resource in his arsenal is prayer to the God of heaven, the Lord of Armies. Faithful leaders constantly point people back to worship—praising him for his greatness and power, acknowledging God’s rightful place, and showing gratitude for all he’s done in our lives. Godly leaders refocus their people to a life of worship—when that becomes their new vocation and orientation. Show me a church of praying, worshipping believers who teach biblically about God, and I will show you a powerful, Spirit-filled church.

- **Faithful leaders encourage people when they have failed.** (vv. 20, 22). “Fear not... ²² The Lord will not abandon his people, because of his great name and because he has determined to make you his own people.”

Illus. A friend of mine tells the funniest story about being a poor college student and going to the Church potluck. He had no money.

The only thing in his fridge was this crusty, freezer-burned dried-out old piece of bologna. So, he got out two pieces of stale bread, squirted some mustard a couple of years past its expiration date, and went to the potluck with his little pitiful sandwich. On the table, old church moms and grandmas filled it with the most delicious dishes, and he was in the corner choking down this nasty old sandwich. A woman saw him, took pity, and she took the sandwich and threw it in the trash. And handed a plate. He piled that plate a foot and half high with the most delicious church potluck food.

Remember the day you came to Jesus and confessed your sins? Remember you brought nothing to the table. All you had to do was throw away that vile rubbery bologna sandwich and come to abundant, rich, table of God’s inexhaustible grace.

Paul says, “While we were enemies of God, Christ died for the ungodly. If He reconciled us when we were enemies, how much more will we be saved from the coming wrath?”

Faithful leaders remind people of the inexhaustible riches of grace. They encourage us to remember all that God has done for us despite our failure and sin.

Samuel is here reminding them that they are God’s elect and chosen people from the people of the earth. And God chose them not because they were particularly lovable, capable, faithful, or holy. But he chose them because he wanted to display his Power through people who brought nothing to the table. They had no power, citizenship, prospects, or education in Egypt. Just a group of enslaved Semites that God chose to bestow his covenant love on.

Good, faithful leaders remind the people that we are in the same boat. God didn’t look down the corridor of history to see that I would

believe in him, so he chose me. God didn't see how righteous and pious you'd become, which was the basis of his election of you. No, God chose us in Christ before the foundations of the world because of his good pleasure, according to the counsel of his hidden will and wisdom, for his own reasons that I can't even fathom.

And we are reminded today—we are encouraged to reflect on such a great salvation.

Faithful leaders practice sympathetic listening (prioritizing a listening ear to God and to people), focus on lasting impact (rather than restlessness and boredom), and long for moral excellence (without the pretensions and pride of moral perfectionism though they are being morally perfected—they are in progress).

Faithful leaders speak the truth and redirect everyone's focus from their own failures to God's faithfulness.

Faithful leaders guide and direct God's people into covenant renewal and remembrance.

Faithful leaders encourage people with an assurance of their salvation—that they have been chosen, sealed by the Spirit, and are being sanctified on their way to resurrection glory—the high calling of God in Christ.