

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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The Path to Rebellion, Part 5

Scared Straight

In 1978 a documentary aired called *Scared Straight*¹. *Scared Straight* was about a group of teen-age kids who had trouble with the law. These marginal offenders were sent to Rahway Penitentiary, in Rahway, New Jersey a maximum security prison which houses some of the worst and most hardened criminals.

The teens selected for this program were placed in a room with a select group of these criminals. The criminals were serving life sentences. They proceeded to warn the teens about the life of prison. They related to them how difficult it was to survive behind bars in very graphic terms. The objective of this program was to so frighten these juvenile offenders that they would be scared into obeying the law. They would be literally “Scarred Straight.”

As you might guess this program saw mixed results. For some the sights, sounds, and message was enough to curb their lawless activities. But for the majority, though initially sobered, the warnings and dread soon faded. A study of this program in the 1980’s questioned the effectiveness of this and other deterrent programs.²

That is similar to the effect that Samuel's message had on the people of God in our passage. The past couple of weeks we have beheld some brutal warnings regarding the cost of sin! If we actively rebel against the Lord we will observe these outcomes:

- One or more of our children could be lost.
- That which God has given as a foretaste of glory, our property and prosperity, could become sour and yield no kingdom benefit.
- We may become unproductive when it comes to the things that really matter.
- Our worship may be compromised.
- And though our delight and joy is the service of God, we will become the servant of sin.

¹ Arnold Shaprio, Director. He also directed the movie *Scared Straight 20 Years Later*, 1999. These movies contain graphic language and this should not be taken as a recommendation for them.

² Finckenauer JO. *Scared Straight and the Panacea Phenomenon*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982. And see also this study: Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development Commission. *Evaluation Report: Menard Correctional Center Juvenile Tours Impact Study*. Carbondale, IL: Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development Commission, 1979.

Now under normal circumstances this laundry list ought to scare anyone straight! And yet amazingly, it didn't even cause Israel to blink.

1 Samuel 8:19, “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, **Nay; but we will have a king over us.**”

Brothers and Sisters, how could these people be so blind? How is it that these warnings could be met with a deaf ear?

These are the people of God who just enjoyed years of peace and prosperity in their relationship with God in chapter 7. And we are going to begin to answer these questions as we consider, “The Specific Course” of all planned or purposed rebellion in the Kingdom of God.

Begins with Callousness

The path of rebellion has a specific course. And this course begins with callousness to the word of God. The words of warning as given in verses 11-17 are book-ended with an emphasis on the word of God.

1 Samuel 8:10, “And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king.”

Though we are privy to the statement that Samuel “spoke all the words of the Lord” here, upon a first reading of this text it is not obvious that the elders would have received Samuel's message in verses 11-17 as a word from the Lord, especially in light of the phrase in verse 19.

1 Samuel 8:19, “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.”

Yet that is “only on the surface.” For if you dig a little here, we are left with no question that the elders would have received Samuel's words in verses 11-17 as a message from God. Consider the context.

A Message From God

In verses 4-5 we read of the elders formally coming to Samuel as a group and requesting a king.

Why did they come to Samuel with their concern?

They came to Samuel because he was a prophet and therefore stood in the position of authority over the ruling body of Israel, the elders. Samuel was a spokesman for God.

After being personally offended, Samuel then prayed to God in the presence of the elders.

1 Samuel 8:6, “But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.”

Now evidently the word which God gave Samuel in verses 7-9 was not audible. Nevertheless you would have to be a complete fool if you were present at this time not to recognize that, following Samuel's prayer to God, his response was the word of God! These people didn't go to a prophet in order to just get

his personal opinion. They came to the prophet in order to receive a word from the Lord!

And this is exactly what the elders in our passage got, a message from God!

Now, some question this because of the way 1 Samuel 8:19 reads. After Israel received the six-fold warning of the Lord with regard to their sin we read this: “Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel” (1 Samuel 8:19b). It is this phrase which puts the “fly in the ointment” here.

Why didn't Israel heed the warning of this text?

Was it because they understood it to be NOT God's word BUT the good advice of Samuel?

This again would be a misunderstanding of this text. For the teaching of Scripture is clear that this is God's word. Exodus 20 is crucial when it comes to our understanding of the prophetic office, specifically God's word in relation to the prophet's word.

Recall, God's people were brought to Mount Sinai following the Exodus. And the glory of God rested upon the mountain such that the people were terrified.

Exodus 20:18, “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.”

Accordingly they made a request of Moses. This request would forever change the course of redemptive history.

Exodus 20:19, “And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

God was pleased to honor their request such that from the time of Moses onward, the Lord spoke to His people through the voice of the prophets! Moses prophesied this:

Deuteronomy 18:15-19, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”

Accordingly when Moses communed with God and received a message from the Lord, the people of God were not confused, they knew who was speaking.

Exodus 24:1-3, “And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.”

From this point onward, the “voice of the prophet” was understood to be the voice of the Lord! Thus we read blessings were promised to the people of God by Moses.

Deuteronomy 13:18, “When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God.”

When a prophet spoke it was understood that though the people heard the words of a man, they nevertheless were listening to the word of God! Saul disobeyed God in the matter of the Amalekites. Notice the exchange between Samuel and Saul.

1 Samuel 15:19-20, “Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.”

The significance of this exchange comes to the forefront when you come to realize that Saul did NOT receive direction from God in a dream. Rather, SAMUEL instructed him³.

1 Samuel 15:3, “Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

And yet in verses 19-20 both Samuel and Saul speak in terms of heeding the “voice of the Lord.” Though Saul heard Samuel's voice declare God's will, nevertheless because Samuel was a prophet, the king fully understood that he was listening to the voice of God!

1 Kings 20:35-36, “And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, [in other words as a prophet] Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him.”

We could go on and on here giving Biblical examples of a “confusion” regarding the voice of a prophet and the voice of God in Scripture. On account of the establishing of the prophetic office, the voice of a prophet was understood to be the voice of God. With this, again listen to the people's response to the word of God.

1 Samuel 8:19, “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.”

When we read this phrase in light of the Biblical teaching on the prophetic office, there is no doubt that the people here understood that Samuel's voice was as God's, for he was speaking by divine revelation!

Rebelling Against God

Accordingly we conclude that when the elder's here refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, they

³ See also 1 Samuel 15:1-2

knowingly were rebelling against God. And that brings us to the first step when it comes to rebellion in one's walk with God: the refusal to listen to the Word of God! Notice the particulars of this verse: "The people refused." This term *refused*⁴ means to actively repudiate. It is a word of extreme coldness and advanced rebellion toward the Lord. In the Scripture we find it used this way.

Psalm 78:10, "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law."

When Israel forgot God they stubbornly rebelled against His commands. They refused to repent.⁵ They refused to receive God's instruction.⁶ It is used of Pharaoh and his hard heart in refusing to hear and obey the word of God.⁷

Refused used in this context indicates a gross hardening on the part of Israel such that we conclude that the love and devotion which fueled the revival of 1 Samuel 7 was matched here by the opposite emotions of rebellion and disdain.

Well what is it that they refused to do?

Refused to Obey

They refused "to listen/obey to the voice of [God]" (1 Samuel 8:19).

This word *obey*⁸ is an active word. It means far more than simply hearing the voice of someone. Rather, it means to heed it. And yet that still is not strong enough. For you can be in conformity to the letter of the law and still be in violation of it on account of your heart. Accordingly, the heart also is involved when the word *obey* is utilized. This word not only refers to one's outward conformity to the law of God, but also to obedience from the heart!

Romans 6:17, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."

If Paul were writing in the Hebrew he could have simply written, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you listened to [obeyed] the teaching to which you were committed."

The Israelites failed to strive to obey God from the heart. This failure resulted in their amazing rebellion against God.

I hope from all of this you see the first reason why God's people did not heed the warning with regard to their sin. Sometime between chapter 7 and 8, their heart became calloused when it came to God's word. Therefore, no amount of warning, drama, or pulling on the heart strings on the part of Samuel could have "scared them straight" for they were cold toward the Lord.

In fact, this raises a very important point. Of all the relationships you and I have or could have today, what do you suppose is the most fundamental, important, or crucial to our well-being as people?

⁴ מִנְּמָן maen

⁵ See also Hosea 11:5, Jeremiah 3:3; 8:5

⁶ Compare Jeremiah 5:3; 9:6; 11:10; Zechariah 7:11

⁷ Compare Exodus 4:23; 7:14; 10:3

⁸ עִמְּךָ shama

It is our relationship with God! This comes before our relationship of marriage, family, the church, and our relationships with one another. God created man for the purpose of enjoying a relationship with Himself.

We were made in the image of God that we might walk with God and co-reign with Him.⁹ Thus, reasoning from the greater to the lesser, when one grows cold, rebels against, and tramples underfoot one's love, devotion and relationship with Christ it is evidence of a callusing which will numb you toward the rest of life.

God vs. Idols

Psalm 115 contains a comparison between the one and only true God and the idol. In it some incredible statements are made. Notice these with me.

Psalm 115:4-8, "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them."

This passage teaches a fundamental principle housed in creation: the object of one's trust or worship will dictate these things:

- What one will become as a person!
- How one reasons and thinks!
- One's affections!
- How one processes life!

The implications are legion. That which dictates our thoughts, words, and actions in life is our relationship with God, or the lack thereof! That which determines how we process life — our values, that which is a crisis, what is important, etc — is not our nurture, or our nature (though these obviously will have their impact¹⁰) BUT OUR WORSHIP! That which determines how we process life is our relationship with God! This is what will determine how we view and so process life.¹¹

And that is why with little shock we behold the response of the people of God in our passage. Though they received such a dire and brutal warning as given in verses 11-17, nevertheless they long before had grown calloused toward the Lord!

Accordingly, before they had done any good or bad in the matter of a king, their heart already was calloused toward life. And they hid this very well for from the outside looking in, you'd never know it!

So what did it matter that

- Their children would be lost?

⁹ Compare Genesis 1:27-28; 3:8; John 17:3

¹⁰ Compare 1 Corinthians 15:33; Ephesians 2:1-3

¹¹ Compare Romans 1:21

- That which God intended to be used as a means to enjoy Christ and His kingdom would be forfeited?
- They once again would become enslaved?

None of these warnings had any impact because the people in this text already were hardened!

Are You Scared Straight?

In light of this, let me ask you these questions: Aside from making you sit up and think briefly the last couple of weeks, what impact has this pulpit had on your pursuit of holiness? Has the knowledge of the loss of a child done anything to curb your practice of sin? Are you more holy today in practice than you were four weeks ago when we began this series?

Aside from giving you a sense of dread, I doubt that 1 Samuel 8 has had any impact in your quest for godliness. If the truth was known (and I anticipated this as we began this portion of Scripture) threats, promises of loss, the knowledge of judgment have little impact on conversions, much less holy living. In fact in the entire Bible, there are few instances where the threat or the reality of judgment has had any impact on the sinner.

Consider the end times. The book of Revelation contains the prophecy that in the end, millions upon millions (billions) of people are going to die on account of the judgment of God.

Revelation 6:7-8, “And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.”

And yet arising out of the ashes of this judgment, how many are going to repent? We don't read of any repentance at this point, just the longing for death.

Revelation 6:15-17, “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

Why is that? Why is the knowledge of judgment such a poor motivator when it comes to repentance or holy living?

As we've seen it is because when ones walk with God (the most fundamental of all relationships) is compromised it calluses you toward the rest of life. When you grow cold toward God's word, then no amount of warning, threat, or punishment will enliven you.

Affair Proof Your Walk

In order to “affair proof” your walk with God so that you will flee from sin, you must first address the real issue: Your responsiveness to God, His word, and His grace. Accordingly, let me give you one of the most important exhortations I could ever set before you!

The necessity of the exhortation arises when you understand that the inclination of our heart on account of our sinful nature is to flee from God.¹²

Why did Samuel's message fall on deaf ears?

Because Israel had become calloused to God's word.

Why did Israel become calloused to God's word?

Because it was their sinful nature to do so!

In light of this, it is not enough to just read God's word, learn Bible doctrine, have a daily quiet time, and be immersed in the word. And I hope we all do these things. We must ever and always strive to obey/listen to the voice of the Lord! We must, in the words of Paul, "become obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed" (Romans 6:17).

And yet what does that mean?

When we "listen to the voice of God" this means that we must be in God's word. This is the first hurdle. Today and for the rest of this age, God speaks only in His word, the Bible. Thus if we are going to cultivate hearts and lives which are responsive to God, we must first spend time reading, examining, and studying the word of God.

Secondly, flee at the first appearance of sin.

Thirdly, we must also meditate upon God's word!

Joshua 1:8, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

The idea behind "meditating" is filling your mind with and so mulling over the word of God. It's taking any truth-statement about God, His kingdom, or man and contemplating it. It is asking these questions:

- What are the implications?
- What does this mean when it comes to my life?
- What difference ought this to make in how you process this world?

Lastly, we must settle for nothing less than Transformation. This involves personal and specific application whereby God's word penetrates into our heart!

Family of God, it is not enough that you learn about the grace of God and how that grace saves the sinner from his sin. It is not enough to know God's mercy whereby He has declared the sinner "Not guilty!" when it comes to his sin. We must personalize these truths unto our growth in grace. We must behold their application and impact in our life. We must strive in this area until our heart softens and we behold the Great I Am!

¹² Compare Romans 1:21

A Pliable Heart

Now insofar as this is true of us today, I'm reversing what I said earlier, this passage I know has had a huge impact on our lives. You have sat under this pulpit as one with a soft and pliable heart. As such, the warnings that Samuel has given here have riveted your soul! And these warnings have scared you half to death!

If this is true of you, praise God! But in response, do not live with the threat of the consequences of sin hanging over your head, which would be a mistake. No! We must continue to live ever and always worshipping God from the heart! We must always heed the voice of the Lord as it is given in His word! And we must obey from the heart that form of teaching to which you were committed.¹³

¹³ Compare Romans 6:17

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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