

Samuel 6 - In the Meantime...

1 Samuel chapters 1-8 cover the transition in the Theocratic Kingdom¹ from the times of the judges to the monarchy. We want to remember that even though we are not looking at the book of Judges, these first eight chapters occur during that time period. Samuel is the last judge of Israel. Up to this time, the period of the judges has been marked by a repeating cycle of complacency, sin, judgment, and revival. So far, the transition from the time of the Judges has been characterized by judgment and turmoil in Israel. Now, in chapter 7, things are going to become more stabilized.

1. Sort of normal -

After the Ark of the Covenant had been retrieved and Samuel was at work as a judge, the kingdom was not yet ready to be introduced. *In the meantime*, we have a record in chapter 7 that covers a time period of relative tranquility for Israel. Life always has its difficulties, but Samuel's ministry had something of a stabilizing effect.

There is a difference between being *functionally* normal and *statistically* normal. When we think of being *functionally*, normal we mean that things are not chaotic. *Statistically* normal refers to merely what is usual, which means that chaos could be what is normal. If you ask someone how they are doing and they say that things are *normal*, they could be talking about how their day is just as crazy as any other day. We will never achieve a perfectly functioning society, but we are happy when things are *sort of* normal.

Isn't it nice to go through a time of no drama? Sometimes I'm asked, "How are you doing?" and my response is, "Everything is nice and boring." By that, I mean there's no sickness, there are no emergencies, there are no big battles. We're just happy to keep moving along with the main job of encouraging and sharing the gospel. As we read in chapter 7, life for Israel is not at perfect peace, but it is sort of normal.

1Sam 7:2 And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

The Philistine domination continued for another twenty years while the Israelites were lamenting, or repenting and turning their hearts toward God. As we have noted before, this speaks to the issue of how long it can take for spiritual growth to truly take hold in a person's life. We might be tempted to give up without trying because we don't think we can last. If you don't try, how old will you be next year? If you *do* try, how old will you be? You are going to be the same age either way, you might as well get started! Along the way, each victory multiplies our strength to achieve the next.

Ps 84:5-7 Blessed *is* the man whose strength *is* in thee; in whose heart *are* the ways *of them*.
6*Who* passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.
7They go from strength to strength, *every one of them* in Zion appeareth before God.

2. Epiphany -

¹*Theocratic* - rule by God, compared to *Democratic* - rule by the people

Along the normal road, it is also normal to have breakthrough moments. We should not be surprised that this happens. An epiphany or come to Jesus moment occurs. Revivals are exciting because they mark a great difference in the way things have been spiritually. That would make them statistically *not* normal. However, revivals are *functionally* normal. We should not be surprised that when we diligently turn our attention to God that He works with us. They lived their lives lamenting after the Lord and the time came for a breakthrough.

1Sam 7:3-6 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, *then* put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

4Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.

5And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.

6And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured *it* out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

There is no reason why this can't happen often and there is equally no reason why they need to take time. In the meantime, on the way to the monarchy, there were victories for Israel.

1Sam 7:7-12 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard *it*, they were afraid of the Philistines.

8And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

9And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered *it for* a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and **Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.**

10And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

11And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until *they came* under Bethcar.

12Then Samuel took a stone, and set *it* between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it **Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us. [Do you remember how we sang that in *Come Thou Fount?*]**

This battle stands out in stark contrast to the battle of 1 Samuel 4 when the Israelites tried to use God as a good luck charm. They were presumptuous and had a false confidence before and God let them fight the battle in their own strength. Now, in chapter 7, they had humbled themselves and prepared themselves for God to fight their battle and He did. Instead of *Ichabod*, "the glory is gone," describing Israel, their new byword was *Ebenezer*, "a rock of memorial where God had helped them." This should be what is normal in our lives. The turmoil before the judgeship of Samuel gave way to a stable victory.

1Sam 7:13-17 **So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.**

14And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

15And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

16And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

17And his return *was* to Ramah; for there *was* his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

The Philistines continued to be a threat just like the temptations of this world continue to be a threat to us. Temporarily, the Philistines were held at bay. Later, we will see the Philistines rise up in battle against Saul. The same theme of carnal vs. spiritual strength will be on display in the valley of Elah where Goliath will be killed. The carnal Saul will be in a stalemate until David, the man after God's heart, will step up to defeat Goliath. In the meantime, Samuel will judge in Israel before the altar of the Lord.

3. Normal Christianity -

In the meantime, until Jesus returns and calls us to glory, we strive to have a normal Christian life. Life will have its temptations, but victory should be normal. We might not be successful as the world measures success with dollar signs, but spiritual victory can be the normal state we are in.

Prov 15:15-17 All the days of the afflicted *are* evil: but he that is of a merry heart *hath* a continual feast.

16Better *is* little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.

17Better *is* a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

Prov 17:1 Better *is* a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices *with* strife.

Ps 37:16 A little that a righteous man hath *is* better than the riches of many wicked.

In trying to be a normal Christian, there is a perception of what that means that can make people a little fearful of getting involved in a church.

Some people are turned off to even considering Christianity because of their misconception of what a church is all about. Sometimes they think that church consists of boring rituals. Or perhaps it means a cult where you check your brains at the door and become a smiling, koolaid-drinking zombie.

Then there are those who realize the negative stereotypes for what they are. They sincerely seek understanding. They discover that salvation is a free gift from God based on Jesus taking their punishment of Hell. They confidently ask Christ to be their Savior because they see in the Bible that whoever calls on the Lord *will be saved* (Rom 10:13). But, then they get a little overwhelmed with how involved and informed some people are. They can't imagine being like them. They think they have to become a super-saint who is a crusader and Biblical scholar. There are times to engage in activism and we should certainly be striving to know God through His Word, the Bible. But, this all happens in the *normal* course of Christian living. It doesn't happen by being transformed from an

average mild-mannered church member by simply slipping into a superhero leotard.

There are basic, normal ways of Christian living. Some principles are foundational. There are other things that we grow into. I might usually refer to the principle of holiness, Godly love, and stewardship, for example, but we will look at some other principles that can enhance your walk in the Lord this morning. If you stay faithful in church you will discover more over time. For more complete lists of normalcy, examine the last part of the books in the Bible by the Apostle Paul. The first part of his letters tend to be doctrinal, but the last parts are usually about practical, normal Christian living.

- Faithfulness (better known as being responsible)

Prov 20:6 Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?

Being responsible means engaging in activity where you can be held accountable. This is one of the troubles with volunteer organizations. People think they are doing the church a favor instead of having a sense of obligation and commitment. If you are employed, there is a contractual relationship that obligates you to perform. At church, if someone is confronted they might simply reply, "Well, I don't *have* to be here." What is more likely is that they simply disappear and avoid you, often after they profess their Christian love and compassion. If we hold ourselves accountable to God then we will be able to endure the times of reproof.

Prov 15:31 The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.

Prov 13:18 Poverty and shame *shall be to* him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.

- Attend all services.

One of the first things that Nancy about each other was that we were each totally committed to serving God. Neither one of us had to convince the other. It was not just to attend Sunday morning services occasionally, but every service. I recommend it to anyone who expresses their desire to grow spiritually. A lot of life problems can be addressed and put in order by simply attending regularly.

Col 3:1-3 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Heb 10:24-25 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Each service provides something different for our spiritual growth and service. The Bible Class at 10:00 provides a variety lessons to help us be more proficient in our Christian walk. The worship service gives us an opportunity to express our love for God and a challenge to examine ourselves.

In the afternoon study we cover more advanced topics. On Thursdays we take time to pray together.

Someone might resist this because they think there is more to life than going to church. For them, minimally going to church is just an add on, if they bother with God at all. They think that pursuing entertainment and amusement is "life." The more they can get out of the world the more they think they are "living the high life" or "living large." Without devoting a whole sermon to this, Solomon testified in Ecclesiastes the vanity of such a life. Having a full church life prepares us to keep God in all of our life whether it be worshiping God as we enjoy His creation, raising our children, or having more than a superficial work relationship.

- Engage in fellowship

We need to engage in fellowship. Even though we should know that fellowship is more than a enjoying coffee and cake, there is still a tendency to grossly underestimate the importance of it. In fellowship we exercise our spirituality. Some make the mistake of thinking that they are doing okay and don't need a support group, which is kind of self centered. It's not just about you. Others need *your* support. Furthermore, we *do* benefit from and need the fellowship. In talking with others, we reinforce in our *own* minds our faith and understanding.

Rom 15:14 And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

Eph 4:14-16 That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

16From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

- Express appreciation

Learning to express appreciation is something we don't have to wait for November and the Thanksgiving table to focus on. We are told to be thankful in *all* things.

Rom 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. [**Those who are not thankful fall into greater sin.**]

Col 3:17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

1Thess 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Being thankful praises God. When we read that we should pray without ceasing we can maintain

such a state of prayer-mindedness by being thankful for the steps we take and drinking in the goodness of God as we move about freely. We can progress to the wonder we have for His creation and on to how good we have it in spite of whatever difficulties we are facing.

Expressing our appreciation acknowledges our finite insufficiency. Even though we might be enjoying good health or a degree of prosperity, to regularly say "Thank you" or to take time to appreciate what God and others have done for us helps us stay realistic. It keeps our perspective on life from being warped and prideful. Nancy especially expresses her gratitude to waiters and waitresses. She has always been sure to express her gratitude to any missionary, special speaker, and any military personnel we see our in public. We can say thank you to the crossing guard, the bus driver, a store employee who helps us, the person who holds the door for us, the cashier.

Spiritual mastery is the functional norm and it will become the statistical norm as we discipline ourselves in it. Even the Apostle Paul exercised self-discipline so God would continue to use him.

1Cor 9:26-27 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:
27But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Being a normal Christian starts with surrendering our will. The Israelites discovered that. They had treated God superstitiously when they took the Ark of the Covenant into battle. Under the leadership of Samuel, they learned to yearn for God. They took action and got rid of the idols in their lives. For more than twenty years they lived in normalcy. Similarly, turning to Christ is the first step of normalcy. It requires humbling oneself and being thankful to Christ for going to the cross for our salvation. Normalcy sets in as we turn over the idols of our lives. When we cease worshiping and serving wealth and entertainment we are ready to focus on a normal life in gratitude to God. Is your heart ready for a dose of true sanity? Instead of numbing our minds with toxic chemicals, are we pursuing God in worship, praise, and thankfulness? Instead of complaining how bad everything is, are we able to focus on how *good* God is to us? We can't ignore the normal pressures and problems of life, but thankfulness to God and for each other can give us a proper perspective. Pursuing a normal Christian life in church can be your new normalcy. Whether we are waiting for a breakthrough in our lives or the return of Christ, in the meantime, normal can be extraordinary. Are you ready for a new normal today?

Matt 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

1. Sort of normal - 1Sam 7:2, Ps 84:5-7
2. Epiphany - 1Sam 7:3-17
3. Normal Christianity - Prov 15:15-17, Prov 17:1, Ps 37:16, Prov 20:6, 15:31, 13:18, Col 3:1-3, Heb 10:24-25, Rom 15:14, Eph 4:14-16, Rom 1:21, Col 3:17, 1Thess 5:18, 1Cor 9:26-27, Matt 6:33