Sunday 15th August 2021

1 Samuel 8: 1-9

Deuteronomy 17: 18-19

Affections and the kings

We have spent a few weeks now looking at a few of the kings who reigned over both Judah and Israel before the time of exile at the hands of the Babylonians.

The passage in Samuel takes us right back to the beginning when the Israelite’s asked for a king. We can look at this with the benefit of hindsight to help us explore a little more in depth and most importantly to see how it applies to our life today – in the light of affections.

Perhaps the first thing to expand upon are some words that I will be using:

Affection. Definition is the feeling of liking or loving somebody or something very much and caring about them.

Affect. Definition is that this is a verb, a “doing” word. Means to act on or produce a change in someone or something.

Effect. Definition is that this is a noun, which is the change that somebody or something causes in somebody or something else.

Subtle differences, and I confess that I often get confused with which one is which. But for today, let us try to keep these in mind.

The passage in Samuel describes how his sons were appointed judges, but they did not follow in Samuel’s footsteps of righteousness and faithfulness, but rather turned aside after dishonest gain. Therefore the people went to Samuel and asked for a king to be appointed over them.

Before we go any further, let us re-examine these verses in the light of affection.

Do you think that Samuel was aware of how his sons were acting or was this encounter the first that he knew about it? Have you considered how Samuel would have felt?

When his sons were born, Samuel would I am sure have loved them. His affection towards them would have been to want the best for them. His actions in life would have changed when he became a father – the affection would have caused an affect in his life. At each milestone their actions would have caused Samuel to be affected – a change in how he acted, the things that he would have done, the way he would have taught them. It would have meant that he would have wanted to teach them everything so that they could live safely and happily. Isn’t that a natural affect that the affection of having children causes. The effect, the change, would have been that he taught his children all that he knew, so that they had the knowledge, knew the difference between right and wrong.

But the affection has to be shown by both parties for the desired effect to come to fruition. So, the fact that the two sons both turned away from what Samuel had taught them meant that their affection for their father was not enough to affect their actions in the way that he desired.

So how would Samuel have felt? What emotion would be going through his mind? When he prayed to the Lord, it says that God said that “it is not you they have rejected”. Now we read this with the meaning that it was intended as a response to the Israelites who were asking for a king, but it could also be taken at a more personal level for Samuel meaning his sons.

The sons that he had lavished his love upon, had taught them everything he knew, for what purpose? Had he taught them so that HIS reputation remained in tact? Was it a pride thing? Or was it that he wanted to teach them how to live so that they would thrive for their own sake?

As I say those words, it also applies for the rejection that God would have been feeling.

God’s affection was for His people. When He created people it did affect how He had to act. He had allowed himself to become vulnerable in His love for His creation. He opened Himself up to rejection. The effect was that He had to become a judge.

The response from God saying “they have rejected me as their king” was deeply personal to God. If we see God as an entity too big to be personal with our individual attitudes then we do not know Him enough.

Why had the people asked for another king? Was it because of Samuel’s wayward sons? No, the truth was their desire to become like other nations. Their affections had turned to what other nations were displaying – wealth, power and status. It was following their affections that affected their lives. They stopped trusting God. They stopped seeing God in their everyday lives. They began to seek the ways of the surrounding nations. The complaints that they were raising against Samuel’s sons were a reflection of their own behavior towards God.

They rejected God because their focus had been diverted away from Him.

And it was in God’s response to Samuel’s prayer that we see the deep hurt, when He said “As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt”. Deep hurt can only come from a place of deep love.

Even through the rejections, and the lack of reciprocated affection, God’s affection of love never dwindled for His people. He continually forgave and protected them.

As we have seen in our series on the kings, the affections of the people continually changed. Yes, it was usually from the top – how the kings wanted to gain peaceful relations with surrounding countries, the marriages to many women, marriages to foreign women, again to gain the affections of other countries so that peace could be maintained, alliances formed and some kind of power gained. But the people all followed very easily.

Whenever a king would turn back to God, humble themselves, trust in Him, when they acknowledged His affections and returned the affection, it affected their lives and their reign, and the effect was forgiveness. God was not affected – His character had always remained the same, a deep love for His people, mercy and grace in abundance. But this could not be effectual unless it was accepted and returned.

God has always had a deep love for everything that He has created, and that includes each of us. His affection for us is beyond words of explanation – but can be seen in His actions towards humankind throughout history.

In Deuteronomy we saw that God instructed that each king should write out the laws and decrees, to read them regularly and take them to heart. He wanted the king to remain affectionate towards Him and only Him, because of His great love and desire for our wellbeing.

If we spend time away from someone, how can our affection towards them grow? If a barrier is placed between two people, then a relationship cannot be nurtured or grow. If we do not accept Jesus into our hearts then how can we be affected by His affection for us?

So the question for us must surely be, where are our affections? How much affection do we have for reading the bible and for prayer? Do we want to do these disciplines, or do we allow other things – or other people - to gain more affection so that we turn our focus away from God?

Consider if you have two dogs. (Show the picture). The one that you feed is going to be the one that grows strongest. Trust, faith and following God has to be our first affection.

Do we read the bible and pray in such a way that we gain head knowledge, but not allow it to soak into our very being, from our hearts? Do we allow the affection of God affect how we live our lives?

We have a personal responsibility for our relationship with God. Through kings we have seen God’s judgement on His people and we can easily blame the kings, those in power for the cause of His wrath. But the people followed. For those who remained faithful to the Lord, His mercy continued. Although they were taken into exile, they lived and eventually returned to their own land. He spoke through the prophets to continually plead with everyone to turn back to Him. His affection never dwindles.

Take some time now and reflect on where your affections lay. Our trust should be that if our foremost affection is for God, then He will care and provide for each of us, and know that He works all things for good – including for our family and friends whom we love, and God loves. If you have lost focus then there is no need to despair – we know from the history written in the bible that God will willingly and hastily forgive and meet with us afresh.

God loved His people so much that He sent His son Jesus to take on our sins, to be burdened by them, to be separated from the Father for a short while when crucified at the hands of those that He created and loved. He loved each one of them deeply – so the rejection at that time would have hurt deeply. But He was willing to allow that so that we could be shown forgiveness. His love and mercy, His grace and forgiveness. All through Jesus, when He rose again.

As we focus our affections back on Christ, be assured of His affection for you. His love and care has never waned or dwindled. In the knowledge of His affection for you, allow your life to continually be affected to reflect His character. And the effect will be seen in how the community sees each of us – a beacon of light for Him.