



*God Has Freed Us*

*A Sermon On 1 Samuel 8:4-20 (11:14-15)*

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First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois

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A friend of mine recently told me a story from their childhood. When Ryan was five years old he saw Superman for the very first time. Instantly, he wanted to be like Superman. Superman was strong, determined, courageous, and compassionate. I imagine any parent would be happy to have their child want to be like someone of such good character. Shortly, after, Ryan saw Superman for the first time he got a Superman costume. Everyday for an entire year Ryan wore that costume because he wanted to be like Superman.

Ryan isn't unusual. We all want to be like some else from time to time. Fashion fads brings that truth to light. Maybe you've worn bell bottom jeans, a leisure suite, a polo shirts with the collar popped, a members only jackets, high top Nike shoes, or joggers because you saw some popular person wearing them. So you thought to yourself, "If I wear the same thing then I'll be just like them." Being like other people isn't a bad thing, but we do need to be careful about how far we are willing to go to be like them.

The Israelite also wanted to be like other people. They went a little too far because in wanting to be like the peoples and nations around them they were rejecting God who had called them to be - a holy people, a nation set apart. For a long time they had been ruled by a group of people called "judges." Some of them are well known: Sampson, Deborah, and Gideon. The judges were military leaders who directed the Israelites when conflicts arose. They were also arbitrators, settling disputes between fellow Israelites. The way a "judge" got to be a judge was through appointment. God would hand pick them and charge them with the mantle/responsibility of leadership. Under the "judges" Israel had its ups and downs. Unfortunately, they mostly remembered the down times. So one day they, after a particularly rough patch, they asked Samuel to appoint a king over them like the other nations had.

On the surface this doesn't seem like a bad request, but the reason why the Israelites wanted to be like every other nation is key to understanding this text. Their motives weren't like Ryan who wanted to be like Superman because of his positive qualities. They wanted to be like every other nation because they didn't think God was up to the job. They had experienced some very difficult times in the past: slavery in Egypt, wandering in the desert without much food or water. Life was extraordinarily hard during that time, which led them to question if God was really leading them. Soon they began to doubt God.

Then, when, God appointed judges over them they were attacked by the Philistines and King Og went to war with them. They also had to make many difficult river crossings. Wading across a river is a dangerous thing. The current is actively working to pull you down and there are things on the river bed that can trip you up. It takes courage and concentration to cross a river and the Israelites did it with all their household goods on their backs. At the time it didn't seem like God was doing a good job of leading them. Their motivation to be like other nations wasn't because of any noble reason. Their motivation to be like everyone else came up because they doubted God.

We need to be careful about pointing fingers at the Israelites because our motives for being like other people aren't always proper either. We have seen people for whom life comes easy. A classmate who doesn't study for the test and still aced it. A rival who doesn't put in the hours of training we do and, still, they get a faster time. A colleague who gets unsolicited job offers from companies when we've been looking for a job for months. A sibling who just can't do any wrong. Internally, we ask, "Why does everything seem to go their way? God why didn't you give us talents like they have? Why can't things work out for us? Are you even listening to us?" Those questions are fine questions to ask, and we have every right to ask them, but we need to be careful with them, for they can quickly turn from question into doubt.

Looking back on their history the Israelites doubted God could give them the security they longed for, so they decided they'd rather take a chance and become like all the other nations. Those other nations were ruled by kings who provided a sense of security for the people, even though it was a false sense. As history shares, the Israelites went through some truly horrible times. At first they questioned God. Then they began to doubt God. In the middle of doubting they forgot who brought them up out of Egypt. It was God who freed them (vs. 8). The Israelites had been enslaved by the Egyptians for many years. Under their rule life was backbreaking. They were forced, by whip and

hand, to do all of the building projects for Pharaoh. They were forced to farm his fields. They were forced to pay him taxes. They were confined to his city. In the midst of that pain they cried out for God. God answered them by setting them free. Literally, they went from being slaves to being free people. God had lead the Israelites to freedom, but that isn't what they remembered when they asked Samuel to crown them a king. Their request shows that doubt had crept into their hearts and minds.

There is no problem with questioning God, lots of people in the Bible did it, the church has done it for centuries, but when questions turn to doubt we often forget what God has already done for us. Just as God freed the Israelites from slavery, God has freed us too. The slavery from which we have been freed isn't so much a physical thing, although it can be, as much as it is a freedom from sin. We are no longer bound to it. Those chains have been broken. In God we are a new people. The old life has gone and the new life has begun. God has freed us.

Remembering the freedom we have been given by God, our responsibility is to transform this world. Rather than doing what everyone around us is doing, we point out another way. A way that recognizes God as king.

Ryan wanted to be like Superman so he wore a costume for a year. We want to be like other people so we wear some strange stuff from time to time. The Israelites wanted to be like other nations so they rejected God and asked for a king. It's clear that they went too far. We must be careful with how much we want to be like other people, because we can take it too far and, instead, of trusting God we begin to doubt God. When we doubt God we forget what God has already done for us.

God has freed us. Let this truth settle in your hearts and be at peace.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.