

MESSAGE - Part 08 - “When Allegiance Drifts” - 12.28.25

I was reminded this week of a sermon I preached a little over 6 years ago now... it was the first sermon I gave as the pastor here at Refton. There was a story I shared about a well-known author who, unfortunately, walked away from his faith in Jesus.

You might remember Josh Harris? He wrote books like *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* and *Boy Meets Girl*—his books were pretty impactful on “teenage me.” So, as you can imagine, hearing he walked away from his faith years later was heartbreaking for me.

But as I reflected on that this week, one thing stood out:

His faith didn’t collapse overnight.

It seems that his rejection of Jesus came after many years of a slow shift in trust.

And I don’t bring that up to judge him. I bring it up because Scripture is honest with us about how this often works.

[SLIDE 1] Faith doesn’t usually collapse in the waves of a storm. It often erodes when our trust in Jesus drifts over time.

Have you ever been on a boat and realized you were much farther from shore than you thought?

That’s how our trust in Jesus can drift.

And it’s often without us realizing it.

Now, for many people, walking away from faith is anything but easy. It can be incredibly emotional and even costly — Josh and his wife parted ways, he stepped down from his position as a pastor... this wasn’t a quick and comfortable decision.

But what often *is* comfortable is replacing trust in God with something that feels safer and more predictable... something we can **manage** rather than **trust**.

That’s the danger 1 Samuel 8 confronts us with.

This chapter isn’t about dramatic rebellion. Instead...

[SLIDE 2] 1 Samuel 8 invites us to watch something more subtle take shape in the hearts of the Israelites.

And, you know, I can't help but think that there must be a reason why their hearts drifted away from God. *Something* must have been slowly forming in them over time.

Because, after everything they'd been through...

War... loss... and even a spiritual awakening...

Why in the world would they choose to *reject* the LORD?

The Bible often talks about faith as a *way we walk*:

It's the narrow *road*... the *path* of righteousness... Jesus is the *way*...

Faith is not only about the moment we decide to follow Jesus.

Faith is seen through the direction our lives are moving over time.

But the danger we face is that we don't always notice when we've drifted onto a different path. That's the pattern of drift we've been seeing in 1 Samuel...

[SLIDE 3] (Israel's Pattern of Spiritual Drift)

In chapters 1–7, the people of Israel had lost their way. They still went through the motions of worshiping Yahweh God, but their hearts weren't in it. And over the years, they started looking more like the other nations rather than the people God had called them to be.

But in the midst of their drifting, God raised up a faithful few.

Hannah's heart knew who the true King was. When she was in distress, she didn't go to her husband, or her priests, or even the little-g gods everyone else worshiped. She found a quiet place and poured her heart out to Yahweh God.

And it's through Hannah that the LORD raised up Samuel — a faithful prophet. Samuel would grow in favor with the LORD while the rest of the nation continued to drift. And in Israel's most desperate moment, they finally listened to Samuel and turned their hearts to Yahweh.

But, over time, their spiritual drift became more noticeable...

[SLIDE 4] 1 Samuel 8:1-3 - When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his

second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

Let's pause here for a moment.

Samuel is now old. He has two sons. And they're using their position for their own gain. They're not following in the ways of Yahweh God.

Sound familiar?

Remember Eli and his two sons? When Eli was old, his sons were doing the same things. They were using their position of power to take what they wanted by force. And Eli did nothing to stop them. He just let it happen.

But things are different with Samuel. Samuel was actually following in the way of the LORD. This is why the words "follow" and "ways" are important in chapter 8.

To "follow" is to pattern your life to look like someone else.

When I took drum lessons, I patterned my playing after his. I watched his hands closely. I repositioned my fingers on the sticks according to what he was doing. I matched the height of his sticks. I followed his speed. I followed his lead because I wanted my playing to be shaped by the "ways" he played.

This is how Samuel *followed* in the ways of the LORD.

When the LORD would reveal Himself to Samuel, He took His Words seriously. He recognized the holiness and majesty of Yahweh God. And He was willing to say, "*Speak, for your servant is listening,*" when the LORD called Him.

It seems that his sons followed in this way as well. But at some point along the way, temptations led his sons to choose a different path. And over time...
their ways no longer looked like Samuel's.

Look at verse 3 again...

[SLIDE 5] 1 Samuel 8:3 - But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

“turning aside” means to deviate from the path.

To use Sermon on the Mount language: They drifted from the narrow road and started down the wide road. And, unfortunately, we know the wide road leads to destruction.

The last time Israel followed this path, they felt the devastation of war. But this time was different...

[SLIDE 6] 1 Samuel 8:4-5 - So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”

I actually wonder if the elders of Israel recognized the pattern that was happening? I wonder if they saw the parallel between Eli’s sons and Samuel’s sons and were afraid that history might repeat itself?

And so, out of their fear, “all the elders of Israel gathered together.” That’s not random. Their getting together wasn’t on a whim... This was something that developed over time as their anxiety grew.

And so, they’re like: *Hey, before our nation loses another war, let’s pick someone as our king! The other nations have one and it seems to be working for them?*

So they went to Samuel, explained their concern and their solution — They wanted him to appoint a king. Watch Samuel’s reaction...

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 8:6 - But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.

Their words didn’t offend Samuel. He didn’t get angry. He wasn’t even defensive...

It's actually quite the teaching moment because, instead of reacting...
He didn't say anything!

He modeled a heart that follows in the way of the LORD — one that's slow to speak, quick to listen, and slow to anger.

But there's more than that... Samuel's reaction tells us that he *really was listening*. Because the phrase, "this displeased Samuel," is *so much* heavier in Hebrew than our English translations make it seem.

The English translation is good because it's faithful to Samuel's reaction, **but it doesn't tell us why he was "displeased"**.
But the Hebrew shows us why...

[SLIDE 8] "The request was evil in Samuel's eyes."
(Color coded for reference — there's more Hebrew that you might expect)

Samuel was displeased because he immediately saw the *evil* behind their words. I can't say this for sure, but my guess is that the elders didn't think their request was evil. They saw it as a good solution to the problem.

But they weren't seeing clearly. Their hearts were deceived.
Samuel, on the other hand, was seeing clearly.
 The point here is this:

[SLIDE 9] God's people only recognize patterns of deception when they're actively following Him.

This is a truth that's all over Scripture.
 Samuel saw through the deception because he followed the LORD.
 And when deception tried to sway him, he knew exactly what to do...
He went to the LORD in prayer.

And man—I wish we knew exactly what Samuel prayed. The text doesn't tell us. But what the LORD says next gives us a clue. After Samuel speaks, he listens. And the LORD says:

[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 8:7 - “...it is not you they have rejected...”

That sounds like a correction.

It's like the LORD is about to reframe Samuel's thoughts...

I'm thinking that Samuel might've been carrying something that wasn't his to carry. After all, the elders did say: “**You** are old, and **your sons** do not follow **your ways**.” There's a lot of finger pointing in that statement.

So, maybe Samuel was feeling like *he failed*?

Whatever Samuel prayed, the LORD gently reframed this moment.

Because *ultimately*, this wasn't about *Samuel's* leadership.

This was about rejecting *God's* kingship.

And so the LORD was saying:

Listen to what's behind their words...

because this isn't actually about you.

This is about Me...

[SLIDE 11] 1 Samuel 8:7 - “...they have rejected me as their king.”

This kind of rejection is a refusal to follow in the ways of Yahweh.

It's a “turning aside,” or “deviating from the path.”

It's knowing the right path, but leaving it for another one.

And this is nothing new...

[SLIDE 12] 1 Samuel 8:8 - “As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.”

So what's going on is that the elders think they're rejecting Samuel's ways.

But in reality, they're rejecting the LORD.

Again, this isn't about rejecting Samuel's leadership.

It's about shifting their allegiance away from God's kingship.

And here's where something unexpected happens.
 You'd think God would have Samuel tell the elders that judgment was coming.
 But instead, look at what the LORD said...

[SLIDE 13] 1 Samuel 8:9 - “Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.”

Rather than bringing judgment, God gives them what they asked for...
 but not without warning them of what their decision will mean for the future.

In verses 11-18, Samuel was clear about these warnings. Like:
If you want a king, okay. But here's what will happen if you go down this path...

[SLIDE 14] WARNING: This human king will claim the right to take your sons, your daughters, your possessions, those under your employment, your livestock, and even yourself. You will become his slaves.

Man... this is sobering.

God is saying that this human king will take what he wants by force.
 That's a familiar posture.
 This is the pattern that keeps showing up throughout history...

Adam and Eve took what God had forbidden.
 Israel constantly took matters into their own hands rather than trusting God.
 And now in 1 Samuel...
 Eli and his sons took what they wanted.
 Israel took the Ark in an attempt to use Yahweh as a weapon.
 Samuel's sons took bribes for their own gain.
 And now Israel's first king is going to take their very identity.
 —He's going to turn God's people into *his* people.

**And the sobering part about all of this...
 is that Israel was going to let it happen.
 They *wanted* this!**

They were trading trust in Yahweh for human control.
 They were trading dependence for predictability.
 They were trading God's power for human power.

**Their allegiance to Yahweh had been drifting for years.
 And now, in this moment...
 Their spiritual drift clicked into outright rejection.**

They were saying:
*We don't want Yahweh God as our King anymore.
 We want a human king over us just like the other nations have.
 That king won't depart from us — he'll fight our battles for us!*

[SLIDE 15] This moment in Israel's history is about way more than a change in leadership. This is about a shift allegiance.

And surprisingly, the LORD *let it happen*.
 He said to Samuel, *"Listen to them and give them a king."*

This has a very sobering Romans 1 flavor to it.
 In Romans 1, Paul describes people who suppressed the truth.
 They *knew* God, but they didn't follow Him.

And so, Paul said God *gave them over* to their own sin.
 God was giving them exactly what they wanted.
 Sometimes that's how God's judgment works.
He doesn't force people to walk His path.
 Instead, He lets people make the choice for themselves.

Again, I think of those that decided to leave Jesus behind.
What caused that decision? Well, Scripture shows us that...

[SLIDE 16] God's people don't usually reject Him in the moment. Their decision is usually after a long and slow drift away from seeking Him.

A few summers ago my family and I went kayaking at the Outer Banks. We stayed on the Sound Side, so the water was nice and calm. But what was

surprising for me was that it didn't take much effort to be farther away from the shore than I realized.

That's the uncomfortable reality of a drifting faith.
Most people don't wake up one day and say:
"I don't want Jesus as my King anymore."

It's more like being on that kayak.
You're still in the water.
You're still upright.
You're still moving.

But you look up...
and you're farther from the shore than you ever intended to be.

And there's a lot of reasons we can drift...

Maybe it's the busyness of life.
Maybe it's the comforts of the world.
Maybe it's the need to control our own lives.
Maybe it's neglecting to go to the LORD in prayer.

Honestly, maybe we're just unaware of the spiritual impact the world has on us?
Maybe we don't always see its patterns of deception clearly, as Samuel did.

So how do we recognize those patterns?
How can we clearly see what's forming our allegiance?

Well, it's all about trusting the LORD enough to surrender. Again...

[SLIDE 17] God's people only recognize patterns of deception when they're actively following Him.

No matter how young or old we are...
No matter what's going on in our lives...
No matter what we've done in the past...

Are we willing to surrender our busyness,

Our comforts, our control...
And are we willing to give our full allegiance to the LORD...
trusting His ways?

I'm reminded of Romans 12 where Paul said...

[SLIDE 18] Romans 12:2 - Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Long before Paul ever wrote these words, Samuel lived it.

While everyone else was being shaped by fears of the world,
Samuel's mind was shaped by the LORD.

That's why Samuel recognized the pattern of deception in front of him.
But we won't recognize it if our minds are clouded by the patterns of the world.

And so today's message is *pressing us* to ask ourselves:

[SLIDE 19] Who or what is *shaping our allegiance*?

Because faith isn't just about the moment we decide to follow Jesus.

We were formed to follow the One who came near to us...

The One who saves us from our sins and adopts us into His forever family.

And we follow Him by surrendering our will to His,

Trusting that even though we may not be in control, He is.

May that be our focus as we enter into the new year.

Let's Pray