

Can You Ever Truly Be Independent of God?

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[0 : 00] Well, do take up your Bibles, if you would, and join me as we read together from the Old Testament, from the first book of Samuel, and from chapter 10, verse 17.

I think if you have one of the church visitors' Bibles, that's page 232. And Andy Ritson has been leading us through some of these chapters here in these exciting narratives in the Old Testament. And we're going to read from verse 17 of chapter 10 down to the end of the chapter. Now Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah.

And he said to the people of Israel, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.

But today you have rejected your God who saves you from all your calamities and distresses. And you have said to him, Set a king over us.

[1 : 10] Now therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your thousands. Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by Lot.

He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its clans, and the clan of the Matrites was taken by Lot. And Saul, the son of Kish, was taken by Lot.

But when they sought him, he couldn't be found. So they inquired again of the Lord, Is there a man still to come? And the Lord said, Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.

And they ran and took him from there. And when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. And Samuel said to all the people, Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen?

There's none like him among all the people. And all the people shouted, Long live the king. Then Samuel told the people the rights and the duties of the kingship.

[2 : 25] And he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord. And then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home. And Saul also went to his home at Gibeah.

And with him went men of valor, whose hearts God had touched. But some worthless fellows said, How can this man save us?

And they despised him and brought him no present. But he, that Saul, held his peace. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Well, please do have 1 Samuel chapter 10 open in front of you. It'll be really helpful as we go along, if you have it to look at as we go along. Everybody is talking about independence at the moment, aren't they?

Nicola Sturgeon, well, she's after independence from Westminster. She doesn't want to be tied down to the same laws as the rest of the UK. Others want independence from Brussels.

[3 : 40] They don't want politicians on the continent dictating how they should live their lives here in the UK. And, well, children, they've always wanted independence from their parents.

Independence is seen by many, at least, to be a very desirable thing indeed. And God's people saw it as a desirable thing too.

They weren't after independence from Europe or Westminster or from their parents, but from their God. They wanted to appoint a human king to rule over them in place of God.

That's what we've been looking at over the last few weeks together. And we've ascertained over those last couple of weeks that this idea of independence from God is a really terrible idea.

God condemns it and he warns them that it's going to have bad consequences in their lives. But we don't just need to know whether it's good or bad, do we?

[4 : 43] We also need to know whether it's even possible to be independent from God, truly. Can God's people ever really be independent of him?

Or is an attempt to do so going to end up looking much like our exit strategy from the EU?
Seemingly unworkable and futile.

Well, let's start answering that question with our first point for this evening. God's word relentlessly pursues his people.

God's people have made their intentions quite clear already. They don't want anything to do with God. And yet, they don't seem to be able to silence him.

In fact, God seems to find a way to speak at the most formal of occasions, even though nobody has offered him the microphone. Read verses 17 and 19 with me, if you will.

[5 : 43] Now, Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah. And he said to the people of Israel, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.

But today, you have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses. And you have said to him, set a king over us.

God had already made the exact same point as he makes here back in chapter 8 of this book, when Israel first requested a king.

God was quite clear with his people that this course of action displeased him, for in asking for a king like the other nations, they were rejecting God as their king.

If you like, that God had already made his peace two chapters back. He didn't really need to say anything else. He'd already said it. And yet, he chooses to reiterate what he has said before at the most inappropriate of times, at least from one of God's people's perspective.

[7 : 06] This assembly at Mizpah was supposed to be a historic moment in the life of God's people, a special moment when a king would finally be appointed to govern over God's people.

And yet, God decides to sour the hour. As Samuel reminds God's people that God's stance on the matter hasn't changed at all.

It's really quite awkward. It's somewhat like a wedding guest standing up before the marriage ceremony happens and letting everybody in the church know that they disapprove of this marriage that's about to happen.

It's got that kind of toe-curling tone to it. But yet, we recognize, don't we, that sometimes truth must come before propriety.

Sometimes it's right for social decorum to be trampled upon if it helps people to see the error of their ways. Classically, I think that idea is best expressed in the rom-coms that we may or may not watch.

[8 : 16] The woman is about to do something she's going to regret forever. She's going to marry the wrong man until somebody finally plucks up the courage to tell the truth that this man is not the man for her and that she's dutifully overlooked that dutiful man who has looked after all these years and been a good friend to her.

And let's be honest. It isn't easy, is it, to stand up and speak hard truths when nobody is wanting to listen. When the whole audience is for the very thing that you are condemning, many people would just watch and allow people to make those terrible mistakes rather than dampen the spirit of the occasion.

But not God. He's like that friend that will always tell you what you need to hear, that which you don't want to hear, rather than what you want to hear.

Friends like that are gold, aren't they? For their greatest concern is ultimately your welfare, rather than what other people think of them or what you think of them. So although Israel made it clear that they wanted rid of God, well, they seem incapable of stopping him from turning up at festivities and speaking his mind.

They couldn't stop him from speaking the truth to them. But that's not a bad thing. When you're in the wrong, you need someone to help you to see clearly, don't you?

[9 : 47] And hopefully bring you to your senses that you might repent. God isn't prepared to let his people think that by allowing them to appoint a king that he endorses their actions and their behaviors.

God wants to be clear that although circumstances are changing, his word never does.

And what they are doing is still sinful and wrong. His opinion hasn't changed one bit. And I think that's something that we're often quite confused about in our own lives, isn't it?

We think that because God allows something to happen in our lives, then he must be behind it in some way or another. But that obviously isn't the case here in 1 Samuel.

God's been quite clear. And I think the classic example for us today is the example of a Christian dating a non-Christian. The Christian persuades themselves that because God hasn't stopped this relationship from happening, indeed has allowed it to happen, then he must be behind it.

[11:03] He must have plans for it. He must want to use it for good. Perhaps that other person might even become a Christian through it. And you know what? In his mercy, God might bring good out of that sinful situation.

But he doesn't want you to think that he endorses it. Rather, what he wants is for you to repent, just like he wanted his people to repent here.

This site of meeting at Mizpah is not a random coincidence. It's a place where God's people last gathered after they had turned their back on God and then were subsequently defeated in battles of judgment.

God accused those people back then of forsaking him, just like he accuses his people here in these first few verses of forsaking him too. But the difference was, back then, his people did return to him. His people did repent and they did fast and come back to the Lord in obedience. And that's what he wants his people to do ultimately. But sadly, that isn't what happens this time round.

[12:16] And the ceremony goes ahead. God's people don't heed his words. But just because they don't heed his words doesn't mean that they can escape his words.

They still hold them accountable to God whether they want to be or not. And that is a good thing. It's a good thing for us to have that niggling voice in the back of our heads.

But sometimes we want to drown God's words out and go our own way. It's a mercy when his word seems to relentlessly pursue us and not allow us to get away.

We may not like that sensation. It might rain on our parade at times when it goes against what we wrongly desire. But we so desperately need it.

God is kindly warning us in that situation and nudging us towards repentance which is the way towards blessing. So no matter how much you want to be independent of God you just cannot escape the implications of his word.

[13:22] His words will always have a bearing on you and hold you accountable to God. And that's not bad. It's good. You also can't rid yourself of needing his help.

Our second point this evening God's help will always be needed. Samuel divides the people up into tribes and then thousands.

Verse 19 For it's time to cast lots and decide who is going to be king. God has already determined in the last chapter that Saul will be king but now that decision goes public.

And it's done so in such a way that nobody could have any scruples whatsoever about what happens. Every tribe had the chance of being the tribe in which the king came from.

It was fair. But as well as being fair the lot method also highlighted God's involvement in the procedure. Casting lots was deemed the method by which God displayed his sovereign choice.

[14:30] I suppose God's people could have chosen a king by a different method perhaps a ballot or a lottery yet they choose the method that relies entirely on God being at work and doing the work and the choosing for them.

So although Israel were saying that they didn't want God to be their king anymore they still come to him for help. It's quite ironic really.

Well unsurprisingly for us at least as the reader the lot falls on the tribe of Benjamin verse 20 and then on Saul in verse 21.

But for a person there at the time one of the Israelites this would have been a very exciting time.

Things would have been finally reaching the climax and they would have all been eagerly asking the question which tribe is it going to be from?

What family is this king going to come from? They're about ready to do it. But then wait a moment where is he? Where's the man they've chosen?

[15:40] They've just said Saul's going to be king but where is he? Verse 21 when they sought him they couldn't find him.

It seems that God's people are just as incapable as appointing a king for themselves as Saul and his servant were in the last week in finding those lost assets.

It's laughable. So they seek God's help yet again in verse 22 asking God if there's still a man yet to come because they can't find him.

but no he's here it's just he's hiding in the baggage. I'm sure that moment would have stuck in the memory of God's people for some time but day finally arrives that momentous occasion when there's going to be a king in Israel and when he's appointed he's nowhere to be found.

Has to be dragged out of the baggage. God's people wanted independence from God but keep going back to him for help again and again with the choosing of the king in lots and then having to ask God again where to find him when he's been chosen.

[16:58] They behave somewhat like that student who's convinced they're all grown up now they're ready to leave home and do life on their own and yet you look in their freezer and what do you find but lots of lovingly prepared frozen meals from mum who's stacked it full to keep them safe whilst they're away from home or they find themselves on that having a phone call with their dad yet again needing to be bailed out because they're nearly at the bottom of their overdraft.

They're delusional saying they can do life without God one moment but then begging him for help the next. But presumably we're prone to do the same or at least similar.

We might not want rid of God altogether but presumably there'll be moments like that in our lives.

We might not explicitly say that we want to do away with him but we act in a way that says a similar thing.

We're perhaps so confident in of ourselves and our abilities that we think that there's not much place or need for God in our everyday lives. We think our natural charm will bring us through that people might even become Christians because of our personality so we don't even ask God for much help.

Or we think our programs are so polished that they guarantee success. And in so doing we don't rid ourselves of God completely like Israel were trying to do here but we somewhat push him to the periphery of our lives and say he's not as needed as he says he is.

[18:40] Yet the truth is we always need God's help whether we recognize it or not and he's always at work whether we recognize it or not. In Acts 17 we're reminded that it's in him in God that we live and move and have our being.

And Colossians reminds us that all things hold together in Christ. Every breath we take every electrical signal that pulses through our hearts is only possible because of his upholding of us. Everything we do from the big moments in life like getting a new job or bringing someone to know Jesus for themselves right down to the little things like brushing our teeth in the morning or having our breakfast is only possible because God is at work keeping everything running.

The truth is we can never rid ourselves of God's help. If we could then presumably the universe would have to stop existing.

Even the person who doesn't know God the atheist who says he's absolutely independent of him and vehemently wants nothing to do with him is utterly dependent on him.

[19:57] whether he likes it or not. Now just as a side note before we go into our next point can we also just notice for a moment how easily impressed God's people are with Saul.

They've just dragged him from the baggage because he's so reluctant and cowardice and doesn't want to step up to the task of being king but that's forgotten in a second isn't it?

it's okay because why? He's really big and tall. They're mesmerized by his appearance. They're somewhat like the aliens in the Toy Story films who are mesmerized by the claw absolutely unthinkingly.

They worship him and overlook his obvious flaws overlook the warning that Samuel has said to them in the previous chapters that his natural disposition will be to take everything dear from them. But aren't we just the same with our substitutes whatever they may be? We find ourselves so captivated by them that reason goes out the window.

[21:11] We ignore the warning for it just looks too good to our eyes. We're driven by our senses rather than wisdom or by the word of God.

We make foolish and sinful decisions all the time based on appearances alone. We convince ourselves that we need that which entices us even though God has told us that it will be detrimental to us.

Is that not the case? It is for me anyway. But back to the main point. The big point is that we can't rid ourselves of God's help.

And one of the ways in which he helps us is by interfering in our lives when we make these foolish and sense-driven senseless decisions.

Often God intervenes and finds a way to bring good out of us foolish and sinful actions like he does here. And that's our next point.

[22 : 15] God's interference is always a positive thing. Interference is I think mostly considered a very negative and bad thing in our world.

We often say things don't we like if I needed your help then I would have asked for it. Or just keep your nose where it belongs. In other words out of my business.

We're generally against interference. interference. But sometimes interference can be a very good thing. Brace yourselves for a memoir from my days as a junior doctor that will bleed you of all confidence in the medical profession.

The year is 2013 and I have just graduated medical school and I'm working my first job in an infectious disease unit.

And a man comes in with a massive swelling right in the center of his forehead almost the size of a tennis ball. And my consultant well he's somewhat of a hands-off kind of guy so he asks me if I'd like to perform the procedure of draining this on my own and tells me if I do need help well just to give him a call.

[23 : 36] So I say yes that's fine I perform the procedure I put a dressing on the wound I send off the sample of the contents from this big swelling to the lab and I feel pretty pleased with myself and I'm secretly quite looking forward to the ward round in the morning where I can flaunt my victory before everybody else.

But the next day comes round the ward round happens and the dressing comes off this man's forehead and the consultant asks me a question Andy have you ever heard of Langer's Lines? Now I had heard of Langer's Lines and eager to impress I said yes they are the natural contours of the skin how the skin naturally folds but then the penny dropped although I knew exactly what these things were I had paid no attention to the concept at all whilst performing the procedure and rather than making an incision horizontally along the man's forehead which would have hidden a scar in his skin creases I decided instead to make an incision right down the middle of his forehead right through all these natural contours and left him with a scar that made Harry Potter's seem rather tame I felt like an idiot indeed I had been an idiot but the situation could have been very different couldn't it my consultant could have popped his head around the curtain and checked that I was on track and actually knew what I was doing

I might have deemed it interference at the time I may have ground against my sense of pride and that can do attitude but it would have saved me a lot of embarrassment in the long run of etching an inch long scar in this man's forehead sometimes interference is a good thing if you're heading down the wrong road and in our passage tonight God interferes in the lives of his people for good they desperately want a king like the other nations but that is going to end really badly for them so God gets involved and in a way he kind of out maneuvers his people they're still cheering saying long live the king and absolutely mesmerized by Paul when God makes a move that might seem like meddling to us but in reality is a massive mercy in the life of his people he restrains them and reels them in he gives them a king like the other nations but

Saul isn't allowed to be just like the kings of the other nations notice Samuel tells the people the rights and the duties of God's king and then lays them before the Lord in verse 25 back in chapter 8 Samuel had described the rights of the kings of the other nations that they could take take take but now God's people are told that their king isn't allowed to do that their expectations of their king is quite different Saul is going to have to strive to keep the regulations that God has described which I imagine is similar to the regulations described in Deuteronomy 17 he couldn't just be out for self advancement he couldn't ride roughshod over his people but now would only succeed as long as he stayed subject to God and his law and all God's people knew that they knew what was expected of him and could hold him accountable to that what a move by the almighty you wouldn't want to play chess with him would you and that had always been his plan for this moment remember last week

[27 : 54] Saul was never actually given the title of king he was always referred to as the prince or the leader of God's people God had always planned to interfere and restrain his people and not allow them to go the whole hog and appoint a king who would be devastating for them he was always going to make Saul somewhat like a vice regent subject to him for that was the only means by which blessing could actually fall upon his people and Saul seems to get this I think he doesn't

start barking orders once he's been declared king he doesn't start pushing his weight around in fact he just goes home in verse 26 presumably to await orders in fact it's Samuel who is the one who's telling God's people what to do the man who represents God's word he's the one barking orders in verse 25 now some people will be upset about this idea that

God meddles in our affairs and sticks his nose in where we don't want him to be along he but it's actually a really wonderful thing that God does stick his nose in when it's not welcomed but without him doing so the truth is we would actually destroy ourselves just like God's people would have here so let's be thankful for those times when we feel that god has restrained us from doing something that we wrongly desire when he's contained the collateral rather than getting angry at him but interfering let's be thankful when he out maneuvers us and finds a way to bring good about even from our sinful actions it's a wonderful thing that we can't keep him from being involved in our lives even when we try to but we need to be careful too don't we we need to be careful not to assume upon god's good interference in our lives god may work good out from our sin but our lives would be a whole lot better wouldn't they if we just listened to him and obeyed him in the first place and it would have been the same for israel their lives would have been better if they just listened to god in the first place they would have been spared of the rough ride they're going to have under the reign of king saul which wasn't as bad as it could have been thanks to god's kind restraining but certainly not as good as it would have been under a god a king of god's choosing well finally a final point god's king rules even though people reject him some people weren't happy with the king that they just got verse 27 some worthless fellows said how can this man save us it's not saul's stature that they have a problem with they were very impressed that he was so tall and presumably they were around at the time when everyone was shouting long live the king they were part of that crowd so it can't even be that the fact that he needed to be pulled out of the luggage that makes them think he's not fit for the job rather they object to saul being their king because they don't think that a king who is subject to god is capable of helping them that just looks really weak in their eyes but this is perhaps where saul best points to our lord jesus in his very flawed life people's reaction to him in these early days when he is indeed subject to god and willing to obey him is exactly the same reaction that people had towards king jesus when he came in the flesh jesus said himself that he came not to give peace but to bring division during this time and worthless people said of him it's not this jesus the son of joseph his father and mother we know how does he now say i've come down from heaven they doubted him they scorned him just like these worthless men here did with saul but yet many people like the men of valor here in this chapter bound themselves to him for they saw through what was apparent weakness and recognized that he was indeed the king that they needed for only a king who is obedient to god which involved for jesus going to the cross and dying for a people could ultimately bring blessing upon god's people so god's king here just like with jesus divides opinion but whether you bring tribute or not

it doesn't stop him from being king does it whether you see him as weak or the key to salvation it doesn't change the fact that he really is the king and that he reigns over you you can't live in his world and not be accountable to him you can keep scorn on him withhold tribute to him undermine his credentials if you like but that doesn't stop him from being king and you having to answer to him ultimately one day you will have to bow the knee to him when he has complete victory so i think the right response now then is to take the action of the men of valor and bind yourselves to him and recognize that he is the king that you need who brings that deliverance that you so long for in this life we can't escape his words we can't avoid needing his help we can't stop him from interfering in our lives and our opinion of him doesn't stop him from being king absolute independence from god is impossible in this world but that's a good thing it's a wonderful mercy that we can't disentangle ourselves from him completely for if we could the outcome would truly be hellish so if you are trying to screen him out of your life i don't know your situation perhaps you're a christian and you're backsliding perhaps you're not a christian at all and you're quite offended by the idea of god want nothing to do with him my only advice would be to use to think for it is a futile endeavor that you are striving upon and instead the right response would be to bind yourself to him and delight in him as the ultimate king and give absolutely everything up for him because he really is the only king who can bring you what you need in life and that's why in a moment's time we're going to see people in our congregation make a stand for that is what they have done just like these men of valor they're saying i'm binding myself to jesus and giving everything that i am to him because he really is the only king that i am JPY because some people in my life would be consistent on my list because if

you don't trust them i wish you some people ■■■ cycle of belief on and it's probably ■osen that
omelette moving to him or i will change it out and make them feel with him
A just be naked skyscraper and hop 1500 otheraheender That you guys don't trust them for him
because I have to make them make decisions you can trust them for him because your word has
been done I'm the ■■ of 42 years because my word has been done it's sckah by the way, that we're
doing to get everyone time just to drop them together with high risk in return ways of PROBA.
different impact brighter wood cheating