

Good Life & Leadership: 1. Honouring God's Rule Alone

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading. You'll find it, if I'm correct, on page 160 of the Church Bibles, Deuteronomy chapter 17, or at least the very end of chapter 16, and the whole of chapter 17.

A new section begins at verse 18 of chapter 16 and runs right through to the end of chapter 18. And the chapter division there at the beginning of chapter 17 is not really in a very helpful place, nor is the paragraph breaking in our Bibles.

But nevertheless, we'll try and make the most sense of it. So beginning at chapter 16 and verse 18. You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes.

And they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality. And you shall not accept a bribe.

For a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice and only justice you shall follow.

[1 : 14] That you may live and inherit the land the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not plant any tree as an Asherah beside the altar of the Lord your God that you shall make.

And you shall not set up a pillar of Baal, that is, which the Lord your God hates. You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish or defect, whatever.

For that is an abomination to the Lord your God. If there is found among you within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord, in transgressing his covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshipped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the hosts of heaven which I have forbidden, and it's told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently, and if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man and woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones.

On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses, the one who is to die shall be put to death. A person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

And the hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So, or thus, you shall purge the evil from your midst.

[2 : 45] If any case arises requiring decision between one kind of homicide or another, one kind of legal right or another, one kind of assault or another, any case within your towns that is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go to the place the Lord your God will choose.

And you shall come to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision. Then you shall do according to what they declare to you.

From that place the Lord will choose. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you. According to the instructions that they give you, and according to the decision which they pronounce to you, you shall do.

You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left. The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God or the judge, that man shall die.

So you shall purge the evil from Israel, and all the people shall hear and fear and not act presumptuously again. When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it, and say, I will set a king over me like the nations that are around me, you may indeed send a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose.

[4 : 10] One from among your brothers you shall put as a king over you, and you may not put a foreigner over you who is not a brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses.

Since the Lord your God has said to you, you shall never return that way again. And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away. He shall not acquire for himself excess silver and gold.

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment either to the right and or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom.

He and his children in Israel. Amen. May God bless to us this his word. Well, this chapter is all about leadership and justice and what is right in society.

Well, let's turn to Deuteronomy 17, page 160 in the Church Bibles, to a section that's all about good life and leadership, and in particular, in this chapter, honoring God's rule alone.

[5 : 47] One of the most important things we need to realize about the law of Moses is that above all, it is prophetic. Jesus makes that very clear in Matthew 11, where he says that all the prophets and the law prophesied until John the Baptist, whose ministry ushered in the kingdom of Jesus.

And it's why he says in Luke 24, that everything written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms about him must be fulfilled.

Because the law, too, prophesies about Christ and his kingdom, not only in its inauguration in the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also, ultimately, in its consummation when he comes again to reign.

So the law is principally a law of promise. I think we have on our website now the little booklet I wrote with that title some years ago, The Law of Promise.

I'd encourage you to have a look at it, because there is a great deal of confusion today about the place of the law of God. But we saw that last time, didn't we, in chapter 15, where there's that promise that there will be no poor in God's land if his people walk in complete obedience to the Lord.

[6 : 59] But, of course, that will only be so, at last, when we are free from these sinful natures, from these sinful bodies. But Moses points forward to that glorious reality to come.

And, of course, God's people who know God's ways, we are to live now in the light of that ultimate reality. Hence all of Moses' instruction to the people of Israel. And, of course, much more so for the church of Jesus Christ today, as the New Testament people of God.

We are the showcase, says Paul, of God's new society in the world. We are to give light to the world as to what true human life looks like. Life that is being redeemed by the grace of God in Christ.

Paul says to the Ephesians that even now, the manifest wisdom of God is being made known like that, not only on earth, but to the heavenly powers, the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

What a great responsibility that is for every church. No wonder Paul goes on to urge wisdom on the Ephesians to make sure that they do walk in God's light, in a manner worthy of their calling, understanding the will of God.

[8 : 12] And one of the things he goes right on to talk about there in Ephesians 5 and 6 is a right attitude to authority and to leadership in the family and in the church and indeed in the world.

Because, of course, the well-being of any society, from family to community to nation, depends on good and proper leadership and authority. Just look in the political realm, where you have strong, good government, you'll have prosperity and peace.

Whether government is weak or absent, there will be chaos. And so it's no accident that Paul, to the Ephesians, explicitly quotes the fifth commandment.

And he says to them, it's the first commandment with a promise. He's quoting from Deuteronomy chapter 5, honor your father and mother, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land your Lord, your God, is giving you.

Now, if you were looking carefully during our reading this morning, you may have seen that that promise really brackets the whole section. Chapter 16, verse 20 there, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord, your God, is giving you.

[9 : 21] And chapter 17, verse 20, about the king, that he may continue long in his kingdom. And in between, you see, is material dealing with authority and leadership in the land of Israel.

See, fathers, parents, but especially fathers, are the first form of social authority. That's why, rightly though, we speak also about city fathers, about national fathers even, as well as church fathers.

And really, fatherhood, real leadership and authority, is vital in every sphere of human life. We know that, don't we, where there's no father in the home. Well, the sad truth is that their children, especially their sons, are much more likely not to thrive, to turn to crime, to be caught up in addiction.

All sorts of things. Statistics are horrible. But it's the same on a wider scale. If you look at the failed states in the world today, you'll see that is where law and order has broken down, where there's no authority, no leadership.

Venezuela today, beginning to fall apart. So you see, this whole realm of authority and leadership in all areas of life, that is what the fifth commandment about honoring parents is really all about.

[10 : 36] Begins in the home, but it reaches out into every level of human society. So the Westminster Larger Catechism, question 124, it says this, who are meant by mother and father in the fifth commandment?

Answer, not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts, and especially such as by God's ordinance are over us in place of authority, whether in family or church or commonwealth.

You see, and it's to expand and to apply into all these areas what the fifth commandment implies, that we have these chapters from the end of chapter 16 right through chapter 18 in Deuteronomy.

Chapter 17 is dealing really with civil authority in Israel, the judges and the king, and chapter 18 with spiritual authority, the priests and the prophet. And notice, by the way, it's very important that the authority of the former depends upon the proper ministry of the latter, as we'll see.

Because remember, Jesus' encounter with a centurion to hold authority, to exercise authority, you must be under authority. All fatherhood on earth, whether it's in the family, the community, the nation, all of it derives ultimately from the true fatherhood of God himself in heaven.

[11 : 53] And therefore, all true leadership among God's people and indeed, among any people. It's only going to be just and good and true in as far as it submits itself to God's rule alone, through listening to God's revelation alone.

So I want to focus this week on this section we read in chapter 16 and 17 and try to think about what these verses prophesy, what they promise about what God is going to achieve in his great plan and purpose for the future of his people.

And therefore also what they teach us about how we are to live as we wait for and as we hasten, as Peter says, the coming of the Lord and the home of righteousness in the new heavens and the new earth.

That perfect world where Jesus Christ alone does rule. So I want to focus our thoughts in these two main sections under two headings. First, the righteousness we all long for and then the ruler that we all need.

So look at chapter 16, verse 18, down to chapter 17, verse 13, all about the righteousness or the rightness that we all long for. And indeed, the supreme Lord under whose law alone we will truly find it.

[13 : 10] So that, as verse 20 puts it, we will live and inherit the land the Lord our God is giving us. Now people are crying out for righteousness, for justice, all around us, all over the world, all the time.

Just think of the fury this past week about the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry and how people are wanting the right justice, not the wrong one and they're worried they won't get that. But it's a constant cry in our world, isn't it, for justice.

It's strange though because that urge for justice doesn't actually sit well. It's hard to reconcile with the prevailing secularist outlook in our Western society.

That everything, as Richard Dawkins wants us to believe, is just down to chance, down to DNA. Remember he famously wrote, there is no design in the universe, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.

DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is and we dance to its music. There's not much hope there, is there, for the grieving. But it's worth asking, isn't it, if you are a committed secularist and atheist, why is it then, that is your world view, that your world view clashes so much with your deepest instincts as a human being?

[14 : 31] Not least, this cry for justice, for righteousness, for the world to be other than it is. Deep down, you see, we know, don't we, that there is evil and injustice.

justice. And there is good and there is justice. There is what is right. That is what we long for. And what's described, you see, in verses 18 to 20 of chapter 16 here is what we all long for and what we know we need.

We want, verse 20, justice and only justice so that we will live long and live well on earth. And if we are to have all this that speaks of human health and flourishing, then the truth is that we need what verses 18 and 19 describe here, don't we?

Proper and good authority and government who will judge with righteous judgment, who will promote what is right and punish what is wrong, who will not pervert justice, who will not show partiality, who will not be paid by bribes.

Look at verse 19, how powerful that lure of personal gain can be, blinding those who are otherwise wise and subverting the cause of righteousness. Well, indeed, the Bible teaches us, doesn't it, love of money can be the root of all kinds of evil.

[15 : 55] But that's the world we want, that's the world we need. Real justice, real righteousness, a right order of authority in our world. Well, how do we get that?

Well, that is what verses 21 and 22 and verse 1 of chapter 17 tell us. As I said, our Bibles don't help here with these paragraph divisions and chapter divisions, but verses 18 to 20 link vitally with these following verses because the point is you will have justice and only justice only if you honor the Lord and the Lord alone.

You see, if we want a society, if we want a world that is like verses 18 to 20, then verses 21 and 22 and verse 1 of chapter 17 must be real.

There can be no space beside God's altar for any other. Verse 20 and 21, or 21 and 22 rather, no corruption of the worship of the one true God, no idolatrous perversion of worship, no rival to the Lord our God by an Asherah or a pillar to Baal, in other words, in our language, no pluralism, no multi-faith approach to worship, no relativizing of the worship of the one true God.

And verse 1, no contempt for the will of the one true God, no presumption in worship, ignoring God's clear commands, his commands about how he's to be worshipped, not just my way, but his way, not just anything goes, but what God commands, real reverence for God's word, no relegating his word, as not being of much importance in life.

[17 : 35] You see, if people are to have what they long for and what they need, you can't ignore the prerequisite for that, which is that there can be no perversion of worship, no rival to the Lord, and no presumption on his will, but real reverence for his word.

And that's why God tells his people Israel that such things are an evil to be purged. That's what verses 2 to 7 and verses 8 to 13 go on to describe and to discuss. Look at verse 7 and verse 12.

So you'll purge the evil from your midst, from Israel. Verses 2 to 7 describe the purging of the evil of idolatry, of that corrupt worship, transgressing the covenant, serving other gods, because the Lord has been relativized, his worship has been perverted.

And verses 8 to 13 describe purging the evil of contempt for God's word. Presumptuously, verse 12, ignoring, disobeying the clear word from the sanctuary of God on earth.

God's word has been relegated and refused and presumed upon with contempt. Now you may think it harsh, these sentences, and they are harsh, but you see, these crimes are the very things that will utterly destroy the whole fabric of justice and righteousness in the land.

[18 : 58] They will plunge Israel into a place where injustice, where bribery and corruption reigns, where exploitation reigns, where misery reigns. It's deadly, deadly serious.

None of us would expect anything other, would we, of armed police to shoot dead the terrorist who is running amok with a machine gun and with suicide bombs because the terrible consequences must be stopped. Well, God says just so here in his society.

If Israel was to be flourishing, then evil must be purged, not tolerated, far less promoted. If you doubt that, go back and read what we read some weeks ago in chapter 12 at the end of where that Canaanite culture and idolatry led to, even terrible things like sacrificing children in the fire to their gods.

Derek Kidner is right when he says that there's no limit to the deliberate cultivation of evil once the light of God has been quenched. Man then grows to love and even revere everything that the Lord hates.

Now, there's a word here, isn't there, for our world, for our society in general in the West. If we want the society that verses 18 to 20 here describe, right and just, then the more that we incline to the Lord alone and to his ways alone, the more just and the more right our society and nation is going to be.

[20 : 24] That is the key reason why Western society, and especially in Great Britain and Northern Europe and the United States, why it has flourished for 500 years since the Reformation, 500 years this year since Luther nailed his theses.

That's something that is acknowledged even by the atheist historian Neil Ferguson in his excellent book on Western civilization. He demonstrates that the key influence on the rise and the prosperity of the West has been that of Protestant Christianity.

But alas, in his books he charts the rapid decline in that influence over the last 50 years in the West, coinciding with increasingly cracks in the West's power and wealth and influence.

Now we who are Christians should not be surprised by that. And as the West becomes more and more post-Christian rejecting the Judeo-Christian foundations of our society which have underpinned our society and all its institutions, we should not be surprised that we will not see more justice and righteousness but less, more injustice, more and more and more that is not right but that is wrong.

I'm afraid that is what God's Word is teaching us to expect and as Christians we've got to be realistic about that. That is where the West is heading today. Now of course ancient Israel was a theocracy.

[21 : 52] That is the church and the state were as one and now it's very different. Nevertheless, God's instruction to Israel about what is right and just and good gave light to the world and it still gives light to the world about the righteousness that exalts a nation and the sin that is a reproach on any people as Proverbs 14 puts it.

So if rulers are wise they will take heed to the light of God and if Christians are wise we will pray and we will work so that they do so. We must distinguish of course between the proper role for church leaders, church fathers and city fathers, secular governments and leaders.

God has not given to the church in our age the power of the sword, the power of punishment, corporal or capital or any other in that way. Our only weapon in that regard is the gospel but God has given that power to the state.

Paul is clear in Romans 13 as is Peter in his letter. In fact, secular powers he says are God's servants for our good, ministers of God even doing his will and Paul says very clearly they will answer to God for their actions whether good or evil in the world.

And their chief duty he tells us of civil authorities is to praise and to promote that which is good and to punish and to prevent that which is evil.

[23 : 17] And of course it's God alone the true God who can tell us what is good and what is evil. So God holds all rulers responsible not to ignore what he teaches about these things.

That's why as Christians today we're commanded to pray for authorities for all who are above us that they will know what is good and right and promote it and what is evil and bad and prevent it. And in a democracy remember democracy is the rule of the people through our representatives we have a responsibility in that.

We have a duty to play our part in that rule. We have a duty to do all that we can to make our representatives know what is right and what is wrong because we are part of the government in this land and God will hold us to account.

See the Bible doesn't allow Christians to put their head in the sand doesn't allow Christians to try and escape from the world we live in. No we are told we are commanded we have a duty to engage in the world for the sake of truth and righteousness.

That's what loving our neighbors means isn't it? And that is part of loving God. So there is something here very much to make us think about the world and our society and our place in it and our duty to God within it.

[24 : 40] But God's chief concern in what he writes in his word is always for his own people and for our instruction as the church of Jesus Christ. After all that's where the world is to see true human flourishing blessed by God's revelation blessed by the liberation of God's rule.

We are to be a pillar and buttress of truth in the world says Paul. We are to be living as light and these things are written to give us hope and to help us to show the hope of Christ to the world.

So what are we to learn as Christian people and as a church about good life and good leadership to show the world the way of righteousness that all of the world deep down does long for?

Well there are many many things but let's just note one thing that we can learn I think from the process that is outlined in verses 2 to 13. Verses 2 to 7 outline the process of true justice don't they?

They give us this example of the most obvious case a most serious crime rank apostasy and idolatry. That's no doubt so they are to see that that sets a pattern for all other kind of cases too things which might be much less serious.

[25 : 49] But notice how carefully how rigorous this process of justice is. First notice the clear concern for truth over against hearsay verse 4. You are to inquire diligently you investigate properly and act only if you discover something is true and certain.

So no hearsay. And notice verse 6 not just the word of one there must be more than one witness very realistic isn't it? Because people tell lies people have grudges but we must get to the truth.

Second notice the concern for impartiality look at verse 2 and verse 5. No bias is there unlike other ancient codes in favor of men.

Men and women just the same all are equal under the law that's very important. Not so by the way in Sharia law is it? Third notice the concern for punishment as just retribution verse 5.

That's very important and we'll see that again in these chapters. Punishment must fit the crime. You do not punish principally to deter others from doing wrong although that is important.

[26 : 59] Verse 13 makes that clear. It's a secondary thing. But that is what dictators do isn't it? Remember Saddam Hussein when anyone annoyed him he would round up a whole lot of people and hang them and hang them on the lampos in Baghdad.

A very effective way of deterring others from annoying him. didn't matter whether you got the right people or not.

But no punishment is about retribution it is about punishing an evil that is deserved. Fourth notice the concern for public justice not just private vengeance verse 5.

It's done in the city gate that is the public court that's very important you don't take vengeance into your own hands. Fifth notice the concern for responsible litigation not frivolous accusations.

That's the point of verse 7 isn't it? The witness must cast the first stone. That certainly would give you pause. You can't just make an accusation and then hide from all the consequences that flow from that.

[28 : 01] No anonymous criticism no anonymous accusation you must show your hand and be part of the process. Take it seriously. And finally sixth notice the concern for the real consequences of sin and evil verse 7.

It's an evil that must be purged because otherwise it will infect it will corrupt it will destroy others. You must take sin and wickedness seriously.

You must fear its effects. Now again of course there's a word for the world. All of these things we recognize don't we precisely because it is these biblical things that have shaped our legal traditions and thank God that they have.

in our land. We've not suffered the corrupt and the unjust systems of so many other parts of the world. But how very relevant this is for the conduct of God's people within the church don't you think?

That's why the Lord Jesus echoes this in Matthew 18 where he talks about disputes among the believers. That's why Paul echoes it in 2 Corinthians 13 and 1 Timothy 5 and other places where he talks about the need for two or three witnesses and so on because he's not naive because Christians also can tell lies and have grudges against people and do damage that way.

[29 : 22] Just think how different our churches would be if we really did follow this sort of pattern. If we really were concerned about truth and not hearsay before we pass on some gossip that we've heard about somebody to somebody else.

or if when we did have an issue with our brother or sister we did seek to deal properly and diligently involving others making it clear getting to the truth not having private vendettas or if we were willing always to put our name or even better put our face to any criticism or accusation against another instead of hidden things anonymous sniping but you know not only is the church not immune from this kind of thing sadly the truth is so often these things are characteristic of churches aren't they?

You know I was thinking about this the other day and I thought and here's a terrible thought I never in my whole life ever had an anonymous letter from anybody until I became a minister.

That's pretty sad isn't it? I've got quite a large folder full of them haven't had one for quite a while thankfully but you see the Lord Jesus would say to you if you have to stab a brother or a sister not that you do have to but if you do have to at least stab them in the front stab them face to face where they can see you not in their back not to others not anonymously does the church of Jesus Christ show to the world justice and only justice in the way that we live among ourselves in the way we treat one another if we don't how are we possibly going to lead the world to worship the Lord and only the Lord we need to think about that don't we dealing justly with one another it's part of loving our neighbor apostle John says whoever does not practice righteousness justice is not of God nor is the one who does not love his brother it's the same thing so you shall purge the evil from your midst

Paul uses exactly those words doesn't he in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 and likewise you see we can learn too from verses 8 to 13 which deals with I guess what we would call very difficult cases verse 8 reminds us that doing right can be very complex and when it is what counts is not just man's idea but God's idea you see you take it he says to the supreme court verse 9 that's where God declares the decision and it is that verse 10 that you do notice the repetition three times of doing as God has declared not verse 12 presuming that you know better and you can ignore God now this is very important we don't have time to go into all of this but it is about the fundamental distinction between the idea that all human law is subject to a higher law whether you call that God's law or whether you call it just natural law it's the idea that all law is subject to a higher law over against the idea that law is ultimately just made by man so called positive law law that is posited by the government of the day and western civilization has grown up with the understanding of just such a higher law that is why the Nuremberg trials for example were possible because the defense of people who murdered countless Jews we were just following the law of the land but no that was a crime against a higher law than any law of any land see that understands that there is an absolute standard an inviolable standard of right and wrong whatever any government might say but you see more and more that is being eroded and left behind in our society so what's right and wrong morally is being decided merely by man's presumption but we make things right or wrong by our decree so God cannot decide what human marriage is we can decide what human marriage is something very different and a whole host of other similar things but you see friends what the truth is and what this text bears witness to is that if the principles of justice are removed from an absolute morality from an absolute higher authority then ultimately there is no hope for justice in this world the move to such positive law man's law is the road ultimately to totalitarianism to tyranny to terror that is the law that murdered countless millions of people under the dictatorships of the 20th century

[34 : 29] Nazis communism and so on that's the law that's doing terrible things today in dictatorships like North Korea that was the law remember in the time of the Medes and the Persians that put Daniel in the lion's den that is the law that Revelation chapter 13 pictures for us with humanity burdened under that mark of the beast the mark of man the unfettered authority of a corrupted evil humanity calling evil good and good evil and again as Christians today we are to be realistic not naive that is where our society is heading we've got to be prepared for that but even more vital again is what we must heed for this word as far as the church is concerned because we are and will continue to be under great great pressure to come into line to bow down to the law of man in all kinds of things but no says the Lord to his people in all kinds of issues especially in difficult issues we have to make judgments about these things especially in matters of life and death but our guidance must always come from the supreme court of God the court of God's word and the place where for us

God has chosen to make his judgments known forever in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament and today we've got to be honest haven't we we face all kinds of difficult questions difficult ethical questions all to do with modern science modern technology and so on sexual issues gender issues embryo issues beginning of life issues end of life issues all of these sorts of things and the word of God says to us do not be presumptuous do not think you know best do not just be pragmatic going with the flow the church has been like that far far too often but the Lord says you must repent you must purge that evil of presuming on God and put his word where it belongs as the supreme authority in all such things it's the scriptures and the scriptures alone which will lead us to the life of human flourishing that we long for well of course as we think about the church and seeking the righteousness we all long for and are called to and the supreme lord under whose law alone we shall be able to find that even now as we foreshadow its great fulfillment in the time to come then we need also to think about what the next half of the chapter 14 to the end speaks about and that is the rulers or the ruler that we all need the servant leader through whose obedience alone we can be secure in a lasting kingdom what are we to look for in a leader well that question has been all around us all year hasn't it never mind the United

States and their elections think about this country we've had two labor leadership elections Mr. Corbyn was elected nearly all his party it seemed in the parliament were against him so they tried to get rid of him he was the wrong kind of leader but he got back in and now he's the kind of hero leader even though the unelectable leader actually wasn't elected but they underestimated how people love to hear about all sorts of promises paid for in fantasy economics what a change and then Mrs. May a year ago she was riding high wasn't she with her no nonsense get on with the job approach but now her popularity has crashed and she's the wrong kind of leader for her party and it seems for the country and Mrs. Sturgeon was riding high just two years ago but now she's crashed to the ground and she's trying to work out what in fact the people of Scotland do want because you see if you want a leader to please the world the world keeps changing its mind as to what kind of leader it wants and God's people too can think in a very worldly way about leadership that's why every time there's a vacant church and especially if the church pews are filled with nobody but octogenarians you can be absolutely sure that the new minister they want is a nice young man in his thirties with a nice wife and three children because magically then the church will suddenly become full of young families and children you see it's always been so hasn't it and Israel was no different so verse 14 the time would come says the

Lord when you'll say oh we want a leader a king just like all the world around us well verse 15 you can have a king says the Lord by the way notice it's not a command of the Lord this is something he allows them isn't it that might be significant given how often that we're reminded in the Bible that the true king of Israel alone is the Lord alone Moses himself in his final parting words to Israel reminds them of that the Lord became your king at Sinai but yes says the Lord you can have a king but because God is always your true king your king can never be a leader like the world like the nations around never a ruler who will be a rival to God but only a ruler who will represent God to them and lead the people always to their true God so what kind of leader does God say his people need and of course what's good for God's people demonstrates to the world doesn't it what is good for all people well notice verses 14 to 17 what is good for them is not the rule of a man of the world first of all

God chooses him he knows better than human beings even Samuel was shocked wasn't he when David was chosen over against his more impressive brothers and he must be a true Israelite obviously someone outside God's people couldn't possibly lead them in his ways but notice the chief emphasis in verses 16 and 17 is on the negatives there's great realism because you see everyone even God's people are so easily pulled to be like the world to want to impress like the world and what impressed in the world of ancient kings was their warrior status verse 16 many horses in our language that's tanks and ships and intercontinental ballistic missiles and their wife status verse 17 a great harem and their wealth status lots of silver and gold but among God's people he says the one from among their own brothers was to be elevated not by the trappings of earthly power but in a quite different way what was that well verses 18 and 20 he's not to be a man of the world but instead a man of God's word with his own copy of all

[41 : 22] God's word cherishing it reading it knowing it doing it all the days of his life a king or any leader of God's people is of no value unless he gives a lead in loyalty to God and that must be a lead in obedience to God and notice verse 20 you see that is what will protect him from being lifted up in pride above his brothers the hubris that always leads to nemesis in the end in a leader and that verse 20 again is what will prevent him from turning away from God's ways only one who remains a man of the word in reality all his life will be kept from pride kept from presumption and those he leads will only be kept like that if he is kept like that so he's not to seek warfare not to seek wives not to seek wealth but instead to seek what verse 19 wisdom the fear of the

Lord which is the beginning of wisdom and that look at the second half of verse 20 that is the way of well what could we say of that verse strong and stable leadership perhaps a good meditation for Mrs.

May don't you think there is a word here for the world and for the nation because good government won't come from power seekers from those who think they're above the law from those who think they're above their peers from those who want to be warmongers out of pride like the dominion of Mr.

King in North Korea for those who are wealth seekers for themselves no it'll come from those who are humbled it will come from those who fear the Lord because therein alone is wisdom our monarch you know is their coronation is handed a copy of the Bible with these words this book is the most valuable thing this world affords here is wisdom this is the royal law these are the lively oracles of God and I thank God that our present sovereign Queen Elizabeth II knows that we must pray for her successes that they will but sadly our parliamentarians don't seem to believe it or pay very little attention to the world's greatest wisdom and we should pray for them that they will and we should pray for churchmen in public places and positions in our society that they themselves would believe that and then be in a position to teach that to those in power there is a word for the world but there's also very certainly a word for the church in all our thinking about leadership isn't there the rulers of the world says

Jesus lord it over their people but not so among you whoever would be great must be your servant for even the son of man came not to be served but to serve you see the church is called to show the world the kind of rule that it truly needs the servant leaders who lead by obedience and who are kept humble towards others and right with God because they are permeated in every sphere of their life by fidelity to God's word alone how is that going to be in the church well look at verse 19 only if those who lead God's word those who teach God's word are themselves readers and doers of God's word all the days of their lives not men of the world but men of the word and that's why friends the church all of us are held responsible as the people are here not only to select people like that for leadership

[45 : 13] Paul instructs on that doesn't he in the pastoral epistles but also also to keep them to it that's implicit here isn't it the people are responsible for the kind of king that they will have don't make the mistake that just choosing Christian leaders missionaries evangelists youth leaders pastors whoever that just choosing them well will mean that they will never go astray no we're sinners like the rest of people and we need prayers we need encouragement we need admonishment we need correction all all Christian leaders do to keep them true to the word and to keep the whole church true to God's word that's why Paul reminds the Ephesians of the promise of this commandment because it's an abiding principle if we want good and stable leaders good and flourishing churches then together we need to honor and help right leadership and right authority to prevail in the church at every level all the time we have a responsibility all of us to purge the evil of pride of presumption and to ensure reverence to the

Lord and ensure no rivals to the Lord in the midst but as we close just let me remind you what I said at the beginning about all of this being about promise and prophecy it's so obvious isn't it when you read these verses about the king because when in Israel did ever a king like this truly arise of course there's a little glimpse in David and Solomon in the great days but they fell a recovery a recovery and men like Jezus and Hezekiah but brief and partial and of course there was always as I said the recognition that the true king in Israel was God alone remember when Gideon was approached lead us Gideon he said I won't lead you the Lord will rule over you so what kind of man an Israelite from among his own brothers could ever be all that these verses speak of in utter harmony with the will of God exalted among men and yet humble and not haughty whose kingdom and reign could continue on and on and on so that

Israel would be blessed without end and if there were such a king and Lord how could he possibly not rival the true king of Israel God himself well only of course as you know if the true king of Israel the Lord himself became one of his brothers being exalted not through being served but by serving his own people so that through his obedience even unto death he might purge away all their evil and sin forever and save his people from their sins and lead them into his everlasting kingdom the Lord Jesus Christ he of course is the ruler that we all need and through his obedience alone we can be secure in his kingdom forever in his kingdom alone is the righteousness that all the world longs for and deep down knows it needs he is the supreme lord it's under his rule alone that we can possibly ever find these things you see all the prophets and the law prophesied until

John the Baptist said at last here he is this is the one follow him the one and only who can give us and will give us all that our hearts long for forever and ever if we trust him he is the ruler that we all need he's the one who can lead us into the righteousness that we all long for according to his promises Peter we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth the home of righteousness justice and only justice and you can trust the Lord Jesus friends chapter 17 verse 20 look at it it is true in him isn't it his throne will never fail his resurrection proclaims that to the world and therefore chapter 16 verse 20 can be true for us we shall live and we shall inherit the earth a place where justice and only justice dwells where righteousness has a home forever and that's our message to display to the world and to proclaim to the world in

Jesus Christ let's pray our heavenly father we thank you that you have set before us a vision of the glorious righteousness in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and that we who have trusted in Christ already have tasted and experienced and know the life that is to come even now even in this still broken and sinful world so Lord help us we pray that our light should not be hidden that our light should not be extinguished but that it should shine brightly so that people should see in us and hear from us all that points them to the glorious fulfillment in the coming kingdom of our savior may all who see us and hear us and come among us and have experience of us see enough in us of this great future that their hope might be turned to

[50 : 56] Christ that they might find in him all that they have longed for and under his rule all that brings health and healing and salvation so help us we pray to walk worthy of the calling we've received for Jesus sake amen