



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone

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“But I Waaaant It!”

1 Samuel 8:4-22; Ephesians 3:20-21

God, gave Israel judges. For more than 350 years God raised up women and men of fine judgment and wisdom to lead the people....The judges did not have supreme or arbitrary power, but rather they decided the most contentious issues. The system worked well. Not unlike a circuit court of judges, and Supreme Court judges.

For centuries wise men and women had kept the peace and a semblance of order, while the people of Israel prospered. At the close of the Period of Judges, Samuel as essentially chief justice.

But as Samuel was nearing the end of his life the people of Israel looked to Samuel's son's and didn't see in them the potential for leadership (to say the least)...then the people looked around at their neighboring nations and said, “Hey wait a minute! How come we don't have a king like the other nations do?!?! What we need is a king.”

God's system of judges had been far ahead of it's time. Maybe too far ahead of it's time. The period of the judges in Israel was stable, because the people essentially governed themselves, in a system that worked.

But Israel wanted to be ruled by a king. It reminds me of how young children need – and want - parents to tell them what to do. Israel wanted a father figure, a king over them. The people imagined that then they would feel safe, and cared for, and normal...like all the other nations.

Samuel saw the folly in the desires of the people for a king. Here God had blessed them with an inspired form of governance that respected their ability to self-govern, but they wanted to give over their destiny to a king....because ...well.... everyone else had a king.

Samuel counseled them against this idea.

But we want a king.

A king will take your sons and daughters into service.

But we still want t a king.

He'll draft you into his army.

OK, we still want a king.

He will take 10% your crops and animals in taxes.

But we want a king.

Even the Lord does not want you to have a king.
We don't care. We waaaaant a king!

Certainly they didn't just want it on a whim. We can assume Israel's elders wanted what was best for their nation. They were just sure they knew what was best, and apparently nothing was going to change their mind, not even a message from God Almighty!

So God gave them what they asked for in Saul, and as you might remember, it did not turn out well.

Why would you ever want something that God does not want for you??? Can you imagine?
Saying, yeah God, I know you don't want this for me, but I do, so just hand it over!

As I have studied this text I have found that – unfortunately - Israel's folly is not unknown to me, and I am guessing it is not unknown to you either. This brings us to our topic for this morning: what we'll call "attachment".

I don't mean the good kind of attachment....like the form of attachment a healthy parent and baby have for one another. (that's how it is used in psychology)

I mean attachment in the spiritual sense....wanting something, longing for it, craving it, connecting your well being with having it or doing it, or being it.... like Israel's attachment to getting a king.

In ancient Israel attachment spelled disaster, and it still does today.

We get attached to our possessions, our treasure, our stuff. We get attached to how things are, or how things were, or how things should be different than they are.

We don't need to possess a thing to be attached to it. We can be attached to getting it, or changing it.

We imagine that we have to have certain things to be happy....we might imagine that if we had a spouse, or our spouse would act differently than they do, a job or a better job, more time, a degree, or a youthful body, or in our churches we imagine that we have to have more members, or more and bigger pledges. You get the idea. It is all attachment.

Now this sounds like an urban legend, but I checked it out. I did some research on the internet and it is actually true....

In many parts of Asia and Africa people have learned an easy way to catch a monkey. They take a jar and strap it to something solid, like a tree. Then they put a piece of fruit in that is just big enough to fit through the opening. They leave it and when a monkey comes along they will put their hand in and grab the fruit. Only the opening is not large enough for the monkey's hand and the fruit to come out. Interestingly, often monkeys will not let go of the fruit. They hang on and hang on even when it means their demise. They will hold on, refusing to let go of the fruit and a human can just walk up and grab them.

And we do the same thing... holding onto the things we want so tightly... unable to see it is killing us.

Whenever we imagine that something is not as it should be and that getting it would be the ticket....that's attachment. Getting that thing may indeed improve things for you, but in the meantime, longing for it will suck the life out of you.

If we look closely I think we will find true what our Buddhist brothers and sisters say: that attachment is our single greatest obstacle to living a divine life. In fact they contend that attachment is the source of all suffering....big.... the source of all suffering. For this reason, THE central tenant in Buddhist teaching is overcoming attachment.

But then I got to thinking....really?

Aren't there sometimes when being attached is a good thing?

Don't people only achieve really great things when they have a that kind of single minded craving for it. Could one win an Olympic Gold Medal or a Nobel Prize without a being possessed in a way by what they are up to? And what about being attached to good things, and to high ideals, like your beloved, or your parents, your ministry or your mission? And isn't it okay to be attached to the things we really do need?

So here's what Jesus said about attachment ...

Food - John 4:34

Shelter - Mt 8:20

Family - Mt 10:37

Jesus all told rich a man (when he asked Jesus how to get to heaven) "Sell rid of everything you have." And he warned about the folly of storing up our treasures on earth.

Over and over Jesus teaches and preaches against attachment to ANYTHING but God, and God alone.

Still it is hard for us humans to turn off all that acquiring, and storing, and collecting and wanting, and craving?

Years ago I was in the market with our youngest, Gwendolyn. She must have been 5. We were walking down the aisle, and the marshmallows are always down low. They put them there so they can be easily accessible to 5 year olds. Gwennie walked up and took a bag, and hugged it and smelled it and said, "oh mommy, I want these."

I said, "No Gwennie, we're not going to buy marshmallows. That is just pure sugar. Put them back." She seemed exasperated, but she put them back.

Then we went by the chips. Same thing. "Mommy I want chips." "No you can't have chips."

And several more times she wanted things. And I said no. Finally she looked at me and said, "Mommy, I wasn't asking if we could get them. I'm just saying I want them."

I thought "wow!" She hadn't been asking for them. She wanted them, but wasn't attached to

getting them.

We get to want things. We get to want WHATEVER we want. God even instructs us to ask for it. But that's different from attachment... that feeling that we want it AND we have to have it.

I joined Gwennie that day, in sharing the things we like and the things we would like to have. We went back and smelled the marshmallows again and agreed how lovely it would be to eat a bunch of them, then we put them back on the shelf.

We get to want things. We are human beings, and we want things. How then can we practice Christ centered non-attachment? We can turn to Jesus and hear again the story of his wanting that night in the garden. He knew that before him lay his own suffering, and said basically, "I want out."

He did not want to suffer. He told God so. Please take this part of the job away from me, but then he prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." And there is the answer... right there. "Nevertheless, even though I want it, not my but your holy will be done."

What if the elders of Ancient Israel who wanted a king had had the faith to pray that?

And what if after every desire that crosses our minds we stop ourselves and with a singleness of purpose pray, yet still, THY will be done here.

I ask you to take a moment now and scan your life....where are you wanting in your life? Have you put that desire under the Lordship of Christ?

Pulling the threads from this morning together then...
There are good reasons to work against our own attachment.

- #1) God in Christ asked us to let go. He modeled nonattachment for us.
- #2) Attachment does lead to our own suffering.

And #3), perhaps the most compelling reason to let go our attachments is that the things we want for ourselves are so paltry... so measly....compared to what God wants for us.

When we get attached to what WE can imagine, we're like the monkey, grabbing for a fistful of fruit, when God wants for us - fruitful lives.

When we get attached, we settle for so little...like Israel did. Why did they want a king? Because everyone else had a king. Having a king was the normal way to do it. God intended Israel to be a light unto to world, but they were just hoping to be normal.

When we give up our puny attachments we invite the Holy Spirit to create amazing things in us and through us...things we can't even imagine.

Ephesians 3:20 reminds us that is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we could ask or even imagine.

My friend Charmaine prayed for a husband and children as long as I had known her – decades. She was attached to the idea. When she gave that over to God, prayed, nevertheless thy will be done, God called her to west Africa where she has planted three orphanages for mostly children who are victims of the of AIDS epidemic. Then God did give her a loving husband who shares her passion for these kids. Through their faithfulness God gave Charmaine and her husband hundreds of children and allowed their union to be a blessings for generations.

God is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we could ask or even imagine. Why settle for less? Why settle only for the good you can see from where you sit today?

Our invitation as followers of the Risen Christ is to hold this world and its treasures only loosely in our arms.... And to hold to God tightly. In that place there is not suffering. There is grace upon grace, upon grace, and blessings we cannot even imagine.

May you allow yourself your desires, even as you hold this world loosely in your arms.

May you attach yourself only to God, and God alone.

And, in fulfilling Ephesians 3:20, may God do in your life exceedingly abundantly beyond what you could ask or even imagine, according to his power at work within you...to God be the glory in the church and in Jesus Christ through all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church of Auburn, CA on October 25, 2009 by Rev. Lydia Richards.]