

XVII. Contending and Defending the Faith in Biblical Perspective
Contending and Contenders—Defending and Defenders
“The Messy Messiah State”

I Samuel 8

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I'd like to start by looking at I Samuel 8. This is not a sermon but I certainly want to work from this matter of the inevitable mess or the messiness of a messianic state. I thought one of the best ways I could explain this is by sharing with you a story that I've shared before. As a historian I enjoy greatly 18th and 19th century American history but particularly 19th century. I love to study history within the framework of what happens to people and what God does through people. One of the key individuals is the 16th president, Abraham Lincoln and I was able to get my hands on some primary research in looking at his life. Part of that primary research led me to looking through some material that had been developed by his pastor when he was president of the United States. He went to New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and his pastor was Dr. Phineas Gurley. Dr. Phineas Gurley's great, great granddaughter was a member of the church I pastored in Charlotte, North Carolina so that gave me so access as well and I also did some research as I visited New York Avenue Presbyterian Church.

There was a sermon preached in the 1950s by the pastor of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church at that time who was Peter Marshall. He preached a sermon about the conversion of Abraham Lincoln and it was documented all the way back when Lincoln lost his oldest son in Springfield, Illinois. A Presbyterian pastor came and ministered to Lincoln during this time. Lincoln's family would attend church periodically but at that time Lincoln did not attend. At that time Lincoln would have been best seen as a religious sceptic and in fact he had already written a book attacking and assaulting any notion that the Gospels in the New Testament could be dependable. In fact, when he ran for president they tried to find all those books they could to get rid of them because he had written so pointedly against Christianity, the reliability of the Bible in general and the Gospels in particular. This Presbyterian pastor in Springfield had quite an influence in his life though and it began with a process to the point that when he was elected president he decided to go attend New York Avenue Presbyterian Church.

Lincoln also met a woman who came into visit him not long after he had taken office and she was a Christian woman from New York who sat in to talk with him. He gave her thirty minutes and she ended up spending over an hour and when she left he told his administrative assistant that anytime this woman would come to let her in for he had all the time to meet with her and said “I have met a Christian in whom there is no guile.” She would regularly visit and pray with him.

Then Lincoln's son Willie became ill with cholera and was in the process of dying and this marvelous African American Christian woman who was a servant in the White House attending Willie while he was dying would sit and talk to Lincoln while he watched his son move toward death. She would begin to share with him the Gospel that she had shared with Willie and telling him of his surrendering to Christ and that Lincoln needed to do the same.

He then began to work and think his way through at that time all the contingencies of a military conflict like the Civil War that they were going through at the time. He wrote down all this in a journal called Meditations on the Divine Will of God. In it he was trying to understand what they were going through, why they were going through it, is there a God and what would be His purposes in all this.

There have been a number of statements from that journal that past presidents have quoted from. For instance when we were going into war while George Bush Sr. was president was asked “Saddam Hussein says that God is on their side and Billy Graham just left the White House after praying with you so do you think God is on your side?” George Bush quoted from Lincoln’s journal saying “The question is not, is God on our side but the question is always, are we on God’s side?”

According to Phineas Gurley’s accounts Lincoln’s conversion is sometime between the Battle of Antietam and the Battle of Gettysburg and you can hear the clear evangelical language as it comes to fruition in the Gettysburg Address. Then he made what I think is the second greatest presidential speech in the history of our country in the second inaugural speech that he made. If you read his first inaugural address almost any politician could have spoken that one but then read the Meditations on the Divine Will of God, the Gettysburg Address and then read the second inaugural address you will see all the evidences of saving and what I believe is sanctifying grace in it.

When I went to New York Avenue Presbyterian Church I sat on a couch that Lincoln used to sit on when he would come on Sunday and Wednesday nights to listen to Dr. Gurley. Then they would process the issues and talk for hours afterwards on issues such as emancipation, how do you allow these states back into the Union, what about what came known as the 14th Amendment. No one ever mentions in all these movies that come about Lincoln all the hours he spent talking with Dr. Gurley to get a world and life view. Then he scheduled his baptism after Easter to take place two weeks after the Inauguration because he didn’t want his baptism to be seen in a political setting. He was assassinated before he could get there and Dr. Gurley refers to that in the notes around the eulogy that he gave at the funeral.

This is given in much greater detail on the Sunday night in 1954 at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church as a congressman and a senator are sitting in the audience listening to this account of God’s saving grace and His providential grace at work in the life of Abraham Lincoln. In it they heard Marshall say that Lincoln delighted to write the phrase ‘This nation under God’ the Gettysburg Address and that after his conversion he came to the conclusion that he would love to have officially adopted George Washington’s desire that never did occur that officially the national motto of this country would become ‘In God We Trust.’ These two officials were so astounded by what they heard that night that they went back and introduced two resolutions.

First of all, I’m astounded that a congressman and a senator would even be at church on a Sunday night. So the phrase from the Gettysburg Address was officially adopted and placed within what today is called the Pledge of Allegiance. The reason we always pause at the phrase ‘one nation under God’ is because it was later added for the words were never there in the beginning when the pledge first came about. They were introduced years after the pledge had been adopted which was a statist humanist pledge and they said we do not want a pledge that exalts the State so we will do a pledge that

declares the State under God. Therefore that phrase was put into the Pledge of Allegiance.

Then officially 'In God We Trust' became our national motto in 1954 and by act of congress was adopted and then placed upon our coinage but it actually was not the problem that Washington or Lincoln saw that would be 'in money we trust.' No, Washington and Lincoln understood the real problem was, would we as a people put our trust in God or in government. They knew that the tendency of men and women is that you have to have a Savior in a Genesis 3 world and if it is not the Savior of glory then throughout history men and women have reached to the savior of government. There have been many politicians and many kings who are ready to take advantage of that moment so that the government becomes savior, messiah, defender and provider. They knew they did not want that to happen.

I believe that we are headed in that direction, if not almost arrived there. I want to substantiate this in a passage of Scripture but I want to remind you of what the new growing religion in America is today. In our own state we had a survey that came out and George Barna took the evidence of that religious survey and made the point that even in a Bible-belt buckled state like Alabama the fastest growing entity are those when asked 'what is your religious preference' they write 'none.' Barna said there were eleven responses but about a third will say 'none' when asked about their religious preference, a third would fall into the category of mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism and then another third would fall into the category of evangelical Protestantism both black and white churches. I don't feel comfortable making those differentiations but they did so that is how I report the survey. The growing entity is 'none' and it is the other two entities that are feeding that growing entity.

Barna's deduction was that the bankruptcy in the mainline by the most pronounced enemy against Biblical Christianity which is theological liberalism, has now produced a church that is rapidly shrinking into almost nothing and most of the people leaving the mainline churches are going into the category of 'none.' Then Barna says that the evangelical churches are not growing because the loss of weightiness (*gravitas*) in doctrine, worship and life and the younger people are leaving, not because they are not being entertained but because they are not being challenged. They are disappearing into the 'none' category. Out of that George Barna wrote his book titled Churchless.

I love to read Barna's surveys because I think he a marvelous demographer but I would disagree with his title Churchless. I don't think anybody is churchless. From Acts 17 we know that everybody is a believer, even the devil believes. Whatever you believe will develop your world and life view and that means you have a religion. Whatever you believe with your religion is going to show up in what you worship with your adoration, affection and allegiance. Whatever it is that you're believing, following and worshipping that is not the Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) then you can be assured that it ain't working but let me tell you what you are not. Nobody is churchless. Ok Mr. Barna if you want to define church as the gathering of those who love Jesus Christ under the authority of His Word by the power of the Holy Spirit, write the book but functionally nobody is churchless.

The church today for many is increasingly the halls of the government of this society. I would suggest to you that the religion of the day is secular narcissistic humanism for that is the growing religion of this day. Secular is meaning that it is the

notion that you can live life outside of the sacred. The secular says if you want the sacred go put it in a box, go to your building, talk to your God and to each other but when you come out to the public square you can't bring the sacred to there because the public square is secular. What about the first amendment? We are about to change all that for people now no longer call it the free exercise of religion because that would demand that you could do something in the public square so they now call it freedom of worship. You will find that in the constitution of the Soviet Union. What they mean is – your God in that box, tamed, put there in that building, at that hour, on that day is what you are free to do if you need to but you leave it there. You can't bring the claims of that Christ into college, business, the public sphere or life.

It is secular narcissistic humanism. We are now totally buyers in Burger King where we want it our way and that has infiltrated the church. It's worship my way. It's evangelism my way. It is commitment my way and we are bringing in a conformity to the world which is that it is all about me, thus secular narcissistic (meaning self-absorbed, self-exalting) humanism is growing. I'm not talking about humanitarianism. I'm not even speaking of humanists. I am speaking of humanism where man is the measure of all things. It's where we determine our own truth, ethics and rely on ourselves. We are not only absorbed with ourselves but we're reliant on ourselves. That religion of secular narcissistic humanism is where the 'none' group is headed, where our society is headed and it is the growing religion in America today.

To get there we're in a nation right now that is undoing our first amendment which is the first of all of our liberties which include the freedom to speak. The freedom of speech is now being reinterpreted to governmentally and culturally approved, politically correct speech. If it doesn't fall into that category then you can't speak. Secondly, our freedom of religion is being undone. That is now turned into freedom of worship which I think we've even gone beyond this at this point. The unquestioned liberty that we are pursuing at this point is the unfettered sexual eroticism, declaring all sexual activity that you deem gratifying as natural.

The Bible only defines one kind of sexual activity as natural. It is marital heterosexual activity which is sexual relationships between a man and a woman and everything else is unnatural which includes adultery. Adultery is not natural acts gone astray. It is unnatural and sinful. The fact that the church has not been ready to recognize that is why we can't speak to the other issues of sexual anarchy. We need the radical days of raising our covenant children to take that glorious gift of God and say "Outside of marriage I'm embracing chastity and inside of marriage I'm embracing purity and I want that great practice to be given in marriage so that I can bless my spouse." O that, that day would come! If that day would come then the first liberty would begin to be erased that is now being promoted in secular narcissistic humanism.

Finally I would suggest in these opening comments that are national motto is no longer 'In God We Trust' and either by saving grace where you come to a personal trust or a common grace where a nation would culturally acknowledge 'we must trust in God' through the influence of believers, it won't happen. It would be like the way a George Whitfield influenced a Benjamin Franklin. In one meeting of the Continental Congress Franklin says "I think we should pray" and another man said "Why should we pray, you don't believe in prayer." Franklin said "No, but every time we do it something happens and all these Christians keep telling us to do it." It is this call to prayer that affected

Franklin and the lives of other Christians that affected him. It was a life of a Jonathan Adams that affected the life of a Thomas Jefferson. So even by common grace those who have not yet come to a saving relationship would recognize that they could not trust in themselves or government so let's get a system where you don't so that. Yet the constant movement of men and women by default is to make it 'in government we trust' where we can walk by sight instead of by faith.

I believe that when you decide that the government is the messiah there is an inevitable mess and it can't be cleaned up except by a Gospel awakening. God not only tells us what that mess is but He tells people like me and others who are called to prophetic proclamation of His Word to warn the people and tell them there is a more excellent way. I want to take you to a text of Scripture where we are able to trace this out. Let's look at I Samuel 8 and walk our way through a request, the reason for the request, the response to the request and the results of the request in this passage. So let's start by looking at the request.

I Samuel 8:1–6 says *[1] When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel* (this might have been Samuel's first mistake for there was already a judge named Gideon who had refused to do that – it was the first judge who decided to make this hereditary). *[2] The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. [3] Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.*

[4] Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah [5] and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."

Here is the request – we want you to give us a king like all the other nations. I'm going to apply this to our government and not because America is Israel. I'm going to apply it to us because we happen to live in a system where our forbearers, influenced by Christianity, knew you couldn't trust everybody so they didn't put in place a democracy. You can't trust one so they didn't put into place a monarchy. They wanted to be able to elect people that would have to answer to king Law. So when the Bible tells me as a Christian living in this nation that I am to render under Caesar the things that are Caesar's, then Caesar in context to this nation is the constitution. He is not the president. I'll honor and respect the president but he is not Caesar here. What is Caesar, is the king.

We have a very unique system of government here. That is the uniqueness of this that I want to address and not that we are the replacement for Israel for that would be terrible theology, misleading, misguiding and self-serving as a nation and that has to be rejected. We are in a unique situation because not one king rules us, nor does the mob rule. We are in a situation where there is something called a constitutional law that is in place.

With that in mind I see this request of give us a king like the other nations. What gave rise to this request? They are in trouble and I don't have time to go back and develop this but I will tell you one piece of their trouble. Militarily they were in trouble. The Philistines were pretty much whipping them every time they showed up. All the nations were around them. They felt isolated, insecure and militarily impotent. Not only that the one man that they revered was getting old and he had put in his place his sons who did not have character therefore now the government was ripe with corruption. They were taking bribes. So here is a situation where there is uncertainty, untrustworthy

leadership, ungodly leadership, corruption throughout the leadership and everything that is happening is ineffective.

Does it sound familiar? We need a savior. Give us a king like the other nations. Give us a king to judge us. Up until this point we have judges to judge us that God appoints to judge us. We don't want that. We want a king like the other nations. These nations who depend upon those kings i.e. governments, is what we want. That is the request in the context of uncertainty, untrustworthiness, ungodly leaders and corruption.

So what is their reason for making this request? I Samuel 8:6-7 says [6] *But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. [7] And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.* God was their King that had appointed judges over them therefore when they say 'we want a king like the other nations' they are rejecting God and not Samuel. You are a judge and so are your sons. They don't want to trust Me, they want to trust a king and government, like the other nations. So specifically they are rejecting God and secondly they want a king or government like the other nations. There is the answer to our needs and fears and the solutions to our problems of corruption and insecurity for there is our savior. We need a king like the other nations to deliver us from our present distress.

So what is the response? God says to Samuel to give them what they want. I Samuel 8:7-9 says [7] *And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. [8] According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. [9] Now then, obey their voice; only you (Samuel) shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."*

So God tells Samuel to give them what they want. I think the greatest word in the Bible is 'but' because there could be a period there and that means I'm in trouble. The first most frightening words in the Bible for me is 'depart from Me' and the second most frightening words for me in the Bible is 'God gave them over' to their desires. There is temporal present judgment of God's discipline. So God tells Samuel to do three things. One, listen to their voice. Two, give them what they want. Realize that they are rejecting Me and not you but when you do that be faithful Samuel. Don't go pout about this. Three, be My representative and warn them of what the outcome will be. When you choose any other savior and particularly the government as your messiah, deliverer and redeemer, then tell them what will happen and so Samuel warns them.

I Samuel 8:10-22 says [10] *So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. [11] He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. [12] And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. [13] He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. [14] He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. [15] He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. [16] He will take your male servants and female servants and*

the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. [17] He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. [18] And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

[19] But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, [20] that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” (That’s what these governments promise. We’ll take care of everything for you for we are your provider, deliverer and sustainer.) *[21] And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. [22] And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king.” Samuel then said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.”*

So the process began. God was going to give them a king and that was the Messiah but they said they wanted a king like the other nations. We want the government of that king and that king to be our messiah. So then Samuel was instructed by the Lord to warn them. He gave them these warnings and they all deserve more treatment but here they are. Number one he will bring you into military conscription. Your king will tell you that he is going to fight your battles but actually he is going to use you to fight the battles. Secondly, this king will enslave you. You will become the enslaved servants of this government. Thirdly, you will lose your property and your property rights. Fourthly, there will be taxation and inflation. Fifthly, will be the loss of personal liberties. The sixth one is that he will rob you of God’s tithe. The seventh one is that he will destroy your family, your sons and daughters.

I think when you look at this you may find the description of what is happening today. Today what is called progressivism is simply a movement to tell you that you can’t do anything without the approval and without the leadership of the government for the government is your savior. It tells you how to educate your children, how to take care of your family, how they will define marriage and sexuality and the reason it has the power to do all those things is because we have looked to that government as lord and savior. That is the mess of a messianic government. It not only brings death but it brings the end of life.

Finally, isn’t God glorious? Samuel didn’t know this part but you do. God told Samuel to be faithful. Do what I tell you and them warn them. Samuel didn’t know that God had taken this catastrophe and designed a eucatastrophe, a good catastrophe. They got Saul as king and oh my goodness this is a terrible king. Then they got David and then through David we got Jesus. The Lord even used this to get us our King so you go tell this world that it is not ‘in government we trust’ but it’s in God’s trust for we have a King that came down to die for us and He is our Sustainer, Deliverer and Redeemer. Good governments are good but they’re just bad gods. We have a Messiah who is the King of Kings. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. Bless us in our fellowship and bless us to learn to live for You in this nation, in a way that this nation is impacted by the King of Kings and the King of glory. O nation, lift up your gates and may the King of glory come in for I pray in Jesus’ Name, Amen.