

1 Samuel 12:1-25 | “Faithfulness in a New Year”
Preached on January 2, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to 1 Samuel, chapter 12.

After a short break for a Christmas series, we are back in our study, going through the book of 1 Samuel, and we have made it to chapter 12. *[pauseeee]*

As you think about this new year, 2022, what is it that you believe is most needed?

Some people would respond with, “I just need more knowledge, so that I can know what to do in the craziness of the world.”

Other people might respond by saying, “I just need some peace because life is so unpeaceful right now.”

And others might say, “I need patience because my patience is wearing very thin with everything going on.” *[pause]*

Each of those things can be helpful, but there’s something that we find, which Samuel brings out, that is needed for any new stage of history, or even new year...

We need to be faithful. [pause]

Why?

Because with any new year, new stage, or new anything, there’s a temptation to give in and no longer be faithful. *[pause]*

Just think of this new year...

There are going to be many things that will happen this year that will tempt you to give up and to no longer be a faithful servant. *[pause]*

There’s going to be some *trials* that will test you...

Maybe it will be sickness, the death of a family member, some political craziness, or the general chaos of our world.

These things will tempt you to throw in the towel, and give up on serving the Lord.

You might even think, “Is it really worth it to follow Christ?” *[pause]*

Maybe the thing tempting you this year will be some pressure from the world to *compromise* on the Word of God.

And if you don’t compromise, there are going to be unpleasant ramifications in culture, in your job, or amongst others.

What's going to happen then? Will you remain faithful or not? *[pause]*

Maybe the situation this year will be a situation that sneaks up on you unsuspectingly.

These are the situations where things are going well for you, but because it's so easy, this tempts you to start to trust in yourself too much, and to not look to God. *[pauseeee]*

The truth is, we need to remember the need to be faithful.

And each year, or in each new stage of our lives, we need a time whereby we remember the faithfulness of God, and our need to be faithful.

That's what Samuel does here in 1 Samuel 12.

Let me READ IT FOR YOU. *[pause]*

If you remember from previous chapters, Israel had sinned in demanding a king like all the other nations.

Yet God gave them a king, and we found out that it was Saul.

God orchestrates it so that Saul is anointed as king, and then proclaimed as king publicly.

That leads to the decisive battle against the Ammonites that Saul wins, which secures his kingship, as everyone finally recognizes that he is God's selection as king. *[pause]*

So as you enter chapter 12, you are entering a new stage in Israel's history, it's like a new beginning.

But what will Israel need as they enter this new beginning, going from the time of the judges to the time of the monarchy?

Faithfulness. *[pause]*

That's what Samuel will talk about as he gathers everyone together at Gilgal, and renews the kingdom.

As the spiritual leader of Israel and on his way out, Samuel takes up this transition opportunity to call Israel to covenant faithfulness. *[pause]*

He starts out in verses 1-5 by talking about his faithful ministry and leadership in the past.

He's like, "Hey guys, I've listened to you and gave you a king, who now lives among you. I am old now, and ministered before you since I was young."

All the people would agree with this, for it was evident - Saul was now king and Samuel had ministered practically his whole life in their sight. *[pauseeee]*

He then uses this moment to make a public record that they could never go back on.

You see, they could never blame their future troubles on what Samuel had done, for he was making them testify right then that his ministry was a good and faithful one.

He hadn't left them with a mess to clean up, but he makes it clear that he was faithful, he never defrauded, oppressed, or stole anything from them.

That self-less, faithful service is going to be a big contrast between Saul and future kings.

And His past ministry also gives him credibility to speak hard words to them now.

It's like he's saying, "Look, I've always ministered faithfully among you, you can trust me, so now listen to what I'm going to say."

They agree with his statements, and the Lord is witness to their agreement. *[pauseeee]*

So after getting the people's agreement about his ministry on record, he uses that as a foundation to talk to them about how they should live in the future.

Yet before he talks about the future, he talks about the past, for he makes the point....

I. God has been always faithful, while we have not.

Anyone in here like history?

I love history, and did you know that the past can help us to live today?

They say that "history repeats itself," and so we can and should learn from history.

I believe it was Winston Churchill who said, "Those who fail to learn history are doomed to repeat it." *[pause]*

Well what we find Samuel doing here in verses 6-13 is that he gives Israel a history lesson.

But this history lesson isn't meant to just give them some knowledge, it's meant to propel them to faithfulness...

For in it, Samuel shows the people that God has always been faithful, while they have not. *[pauseeee]*

He first brings out the Exodus.

They were oppressed in Egypt, cried out, and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron to lead them out.

But then they forgot the Lord.

So there was deliverance, yet rebellion afterwards. *[pause]*

God, in righteous judgment, then sold them to people like Sisera, the Philistines, and the king of Moab.

That's when they recognized their sin, cried in repentance, and asked for deliverance.

God did deliver, for He delivered them through judges who were raised up. *[pause]*

So in the time of the judges, you had rebellion and then deliverance, time and time again.

You would think that Israel would learn from this cycle of rebellion and deliverance, right?

You would think that they would understand that all they needed to do was to trust God to deliver them, right?

But they don't, for Samuel brings his history lesson all the way to their modern day.

The Ammonites came up against them, and instead of turning to their Lord who was their King and Deliverer...

...They turned to having a human king like all the other nations.

Once again an example of their unfaithfulness. *[pauseeee]*

So Samuel has recounted a history of God's faithfulness and their unfaithfulness.

He has shown them that all they needed was the Lord, yet they had foolishly and sinfully demanded a king.

And you would think after such a history of rebellion against God that God would give up on them.

Yet notice what Samuel says.

Even though they have sinfully asked for a king, yet in verse 14, he says...

"If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well." *[pause]*

He was showing them that God wasn't done with them!

Even amid their great failures, God still wanted to use them.

In grace, God is a God of second, third, and many more chances.

And though they had another chance, though they had this new king, they must recognize that they are still under God's Kingship, and serve and obey Him. *[pause]*

So they cannot think that they will win every victory now because they have a human king to deliver them.

No, for it has always been God, who was their Deliverer.

And if they do not see God as their ultimate King, then the Lord is going to be against them and things will not go well. *[pauseeee]*

Then to get their attention, to show them that their demand for a king was truly sinful, Samuel gives a sign from God.

It was wheat harvest, and during the wheat harvest in Israel, rain was very rare.

So the sign he is about to do would be like if we had snow in the summertime. *[pause]*

Samuel calls upon the Lord to send thunder and rain, it happens, and all the people greatly fear Samuel and the Lord.

In fact, it was so fear-inducing that they thought they were going to die. *[pauseeee]*

So as we consider what we learned so far, what truths come out that can be applied to us?

Well like Israel, this passage reminds us of God's faithfulness and our unfaithfulness.

Like Israel, we have failed again and again.

We have turned away from God and gone our own way.

We have thought that we could do things on our own. *[pause]*

Anyone who thinks long enough with an ounce of humility would agree that they are like Israel, sinning time and time again, even after God has done so much for them.

We are fickle people. *[pause]*

Just consider this - what do you do when times get hard?

Do you always go to the Lord first and foremost? Or is He the last resort? *[pause]*

When money is low, what do you find yourself doing?

Isn't it trusting in your plan of getting another job, moving money from here to there, and things like that?

Now of course God uses things like that to provide for our needs, but I fear that we often just go straight to the plan, trust the plan, and leave God out of it. *[pause]*

What about when your health is not good?

Do you only trust in the medical plan of your doctors?

Again, God uses doctors and medical plans for healing, but if we just trust in medical plans and doctors, and leave God out of it, that's not a good place to be in.

God should be the first and foremost One that we go to for anything and everything.

He should be our ultimate trust. *[pause]*

What about easy and good situations?

Did you know that relatively easy situations are big temptations to start trusting in yourself?

Life is going smoothly, and that's when we think, "I've got this, everything is under control."

But in so doing, we have forgotten the Lord, just like Israel. *[pause]*

We are unfaithful people, who forget the Lord, and then when we are finally at the end of our rope, we call out to God.

That's what Israel did, yet amidst all of their unfaithfulness and *our* unfaithfulness, God is faithful.

You see, our unfaithfulness highlights His faithfulness, and His faithfulness highlights our unfaithfulness. *[pauseeee]*

This text shows us that we need to be people who regularly recount some history lessons in our lives.

We need to rehearse "all the righteous deeds of the Lord". *[pause]*

Think back on your life, I already made you think about your unfaithfulness, but now think about God's faithfulness through it all.

God never left you or abandoned you in your failures.

Though you have sinned against Him routinely, God has not given up on you.

He has helped you and been with you even in the darkest hours.

Though you have done the thing that you said you would never do again, He was there with forgiveness in His arms.

He is truly the God of second chances - or third, fourth, fifth, and sixth chances! *[pause]*

Just look at how many failures that Israel had, yet God remained faithful.

Look at how many failures you have had, yet God is still faithful to you. *[pause]*

God's grace never runs out, and isn't that the best news for sinners like us?

So often we go back to God, repent, and think that God is going to hit us over the head, only to find out that He continually and always forgives us in love.

Like 1 John says, "If we confess our sins, he is *faithful and just* to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."¹

He forgives because that's who He is, He is faithful and just. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't it good news that God doesn't treat us like we treat others?

When others sin against us, we are quick to anger, and resistant to forgive.

But God is truly "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."² *[pauseeee]*

God's grace is seen in his faithfulness to forgive, but also God's grace is seen in how He causes us to see that our sin is truly sin against Him. *[pause]*

In this passage, we see that God wanted Israel to know that they had sinned, and he did so by speaking through Samuel and then showing a sign of thunder and rain.

He was intent on getting Israel to the point of repentance, and in this was *grace*.

Why?

Like, how is it grace to have someone see their sin?

Isn't that unkind and unloving?

Our world says that it's unkind and unloving to confront someone with their sin and not affirm their sin, but here we see that confronting Israel with their sin was loving and gracious.

The reason is because it led them back to the Lord in repentance, faith, and service. *[pause]*

Letting someone go in their sin leads them to continue down the track of not turning to the Lord, and ignoring Him.

Yet lovingly confronting someone with their sin leads them to be aware of their sin, so they can go to God in repentance, faith, and trust. *[pauseeee]*

This is important for each of us.

¹ 1 John 1:9. (Italics added by me.)

² Exodus 34:6b-7a.

Although it's not fun to experience, we must see that anytime our sin is recognized and repented of, it is a good thing.

And God uses many means to help us see our sin, but one of them is using others to do so, like He used Samuel. *[pauseeee]*

The Bible is clear that sin is destructive and deceitful, so we as brothers and sisters in Christ must be exhorting and restoring one another out of those transgressions.³ *[pauseeeee]*

God in His grace does the thing that is unpleasant for us, but is the most loving and good thing for us in the long run...

He helps us to see the reality of our sin, so that we can grow in faith. *[pause]*

What faithfulness and love of the Lord!

Is God helping you to see your sin in some way? Don't neglect it, but see it as grace.

Don't let his convicting work lead you to turn away from Him, but turn back to Him in close fellowship. *[pauseeeee]*

You know, whenever you begin a new year, it sort of causes you to reflect upon all that happened in the previous year.

If you're like me, you probably think about all the good things that happened, but also some bad things, too.

And most likely, you think about how fickle you were at times.

You think about those times that you didn't cast all your cares on the Lord, but tried to bear the weight of anxiety yourself.⁴

You might even think about those times that you sinned against Him in some way.

But don't *just* dwell upon your unfaithfulness, meditate upon His faithfulness. *[pause]*

In 2021, God was faithful through all of the ups and downs.

Through all of the chaos, through all of the upheaval, through all of your failures - God was faithful.

His grace didn't run out, or even get close to running out.

Your failures didn't prevent His faithfulness, but through it all, He was there, and because He was there, goodness and mercy followed you all of the days of last year.⁵ *[pauseeee]*

³ For a few passages about this topic, see Matthew 18:15, Galatians 6:1, and Hebrews 3:12-13.

⁴ An allusion to 1 Peter 5:7.

⁵ An allusion to Psalm 23:6.

God is faithful, while we are often not.

That's the history of Israel, and that's the history of our past year.

But what does knowing and remembering this do for us? What should be our response?

Does it lead to continued unfaithfulness or does it lead to repentance and service? *[pause]*

Seeing the vast difference between His utter faithfulness and our fickleness should lead to a response of faithful service.

And that's exactly what Samuel points out in verses 19-25... God has been always faithful, while you have not...

II. So serve God faithfully!

Let's say that someone kept giving things to you regularly out of the blue.

Over time, what would you want to do for them in return?

You would want to give back to them because of their generosity.

Their generosity stirred your generosity. *[pause]*

When someone is consistently kind to you, what does that lead you to want to do for them?

Be kind to them in return.

Their kindness stirred up your kindness. *[pause]*

Well that's sort of what happens with us and God.

His faithfulness to us stirs our faithfulness to Him.

Our duty and response to the faithfulness of God is to serve Him with all our hearts. *[pauseeee]*

You see, Samuel didn't bring forth Israel's unfaithful history to make them live in guilt forever.

He didn't bring it out to just say, "You guys are the worst."

He brought it out so that it would lead to repentance, trust, and service *[pauseeeee]*

Sometimes we like to make people feel bad for what they did, and that's the end goal.

We want them to feel horrible for what they did so that they can see the pain they caused us and so that we can feel better about ourselves.

But God doesn't work that way with us.

God's correction is never meant to make us stay in a state of guilt and shame, but to bring us back to Him in loving service. *[pauseeee]*

Notice what happens in verse 19 and following.

The people realize their guilt and say, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king."

They totally get their sin, and realize that they deserve to die for it, but ask for forgiveness.

And Samuel doesn't say, "Yeah, you guys should live in fear and regret."

No, he says, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart." *[pause]*

He tells them not to fear!

That's absolute grace!

They deserved to die, and Samuel even says, "yes, you have done evil," but he also says, "do not be afraid." *[pause]*

When a sinner repents of their sin, God doesn't say, "It's fine, it wasn't wrong."

No, he says, "Yes, you have done all this evil, yet do not be afraid." *[pauseeee]*

One of the greatest and most common statements of God is "do not be afraid," and what a marvelous word of comfort for sinners!

We have every reason to fear judgment from God for our sin, yet because our God is a forgiving God, we have every reason to not be afraid because we are forgiven in Christ. *[pauseeeee]*

Yet why can Samuel say not to fear?

He says, "for the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself."

Wow! What a truth to rest upon!...

God will not forsake His people.

Why? Because He has made Israel a people for Himself, and so for the sake of His great name, His reputation, His glory, His renown - He won't go against that.

Because God has intricately linked His people with Himself, then He will never forsake His people because of what it would do for His great name. *[pause]*

What this means is that our confidence in our future is not based on our performance, but on God's absolute commitment to His own glory!

If you are in Christ, that is, if you have turned in faith to Jesus Christ, then God will never ever forsake you.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus⁶ because God has intricately linked Himself to you in Jesus, and He will never forsake that union! *[pauseeee]*

There is no greater motivation to service than this: God has been faithful to you, God has forgiven you, doesn't want you to be afraid, and will never forsake you.

So when Samuel says, "Do not be afraid...yet do not turn aside from following the Lord," he's saying, "Don't live in regret and guilt, but serve the Lord." *[pause]*

You see, God doesn't want us to live a life of regret of the past.

Why? Because a life of regret doesn't celebrate the forgiveness of God, but ignores it.

God is forgiving, and when you live in regret, you are essentially saying, "God didn't forgive me." *[pause]*

Living a life of regret is also self-focused rather than God-focused.

It's dwelling upon yourself in self-pity, while neglecting to look up to the Father for forgiveness, peace, and joy. *[pause]*

And thirdly, living in regret leads to an idle life.

When you're consumed with regret, it's going to hinder your service to God and others because you're only focused on the shame and guilt you are feeling.

This is way different than repentance and service which says, "Yes, I did wrong against God, but He has forgiven me, and now I want to live for Him." *[pauseeeee]*

God doesn't want His people to live in regret, shame, and guilt.

He wants His people's genuine conviction to lead to repentance, faith, and service. *[pause]*

So after their repentance, Samuel is saying, "Don't be afraid, don't live in fear and shame, God has forgiven you, and now go serve Him with all your heart." *[pauseeeee]*

Some of you are living in regret and it's hindering your faithfulness to God.

You are thinking, "How could God use a person like me? I have so many issues, I've failed Him too many times."

⁶ A reference to Romans 8:38-39.

But that's a lie straight from the enemy!

God desires to use you because He is a forgiving God, who uses even the most unlikely people for His glory!

Stop living in regret, but rest in His forgiveness!

Get to serving Him with all your heart! This is what He deserves and desires! *[pause]*

If God would still want to use Israel, with their horrible track record of rebellion, then He still wants to use anyone who submits to Him.

There's still an opportunity now to be faithful to God, even if you have failed in the past.

Don't let your prior unfaithfulness lead to more unfaithfulness, but rather, let it push you to faithful service to your faithful God. *[pauseeee]*

As you begin 2022, in what ways are you going to serve the Lord? There are so many opportunities in our church to do so.

It doesn't have to be standing up front, speaking in public, but it could be as simple as sitting down with another person and working through a book of the Bible together.

And not stopping there, but regularly encouraging them in various ways through the week to run the race of faith. *[pauseeeee]*

As we serve, we aren't left on our own, for we can know that we have a perfect Intercessor and Teacher.

Samuel is like a type of Christ here as he says, "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way."

Samuel promised to continue interceding for the people, and instructing them in the good and right way.

That's what Christ does for us now: he continually intercedes for us, and teaches us through His Word.

What a great support system we have to be faithful! *[pause]*

We have the motivation - God's grace and faithfulness.

And we have the support of Christ interceding work and teaching ministry to us all along the way. *[pauseeee]*

God has been and will always be faithful...so...

Serve God faithfully, for consider what great things He has done!

God is good and He is great.

He has done so many great things for you, and He has been faithful all along the way.

Consider them, dwell upon them, meditate upon them.

When you do, your unfaithfulness will be more evident, but His faithfulness will be even more so evident.

Don't allow this to make you live in regret, though.

But let it lead you to cherish and worship God for His faithfulness, forgiveness, and grace.

And let it lead you to serve Him faithfully. *[pauseeee]*

What greater thing has He done for you than the Cross?

Like Israel, we have sinned against God and deserved to die, but God in His forgiving grace, says, "Do not be afraid."

Why?

Because He made a way - Jesus Christ. *[pause]*

Christ came and died for our sins so that instead of us receiving death as punishment, He died for us.

And then He rose again.

So now because we place our faith in Him, we are saved, we are forgiven, and we are free.

We are inseparably united to God through Christ, and He will never forsake us, ever. *[pause]*

What great things He has done for us!

What faithfulness! What else can we do but serve Him with all of our hearts in gratitude and love? *[pauseeeee]*

I don't know what 2022 will look like for you, but I know this...

No matter what situations you face this year, there still remains two constant things: God's faithfulness to you, and your need to be faithful to Him.

So will you serve Him faithfully this year?