

# 1 Samuel 8

Intro June 22, 2008 Quest for Security

What does it feel like to be safe and secure? Chances are you really can't define that feeling, other than you don't feel anything negative. We know what it feels like to be safe only in the absence of danger, threat, or insecurity. The sense of security and vulnerability were heightened this past week when I contrast being at the General Assembly and crossing the boarder into Mexico. Let me explain.

While in Dallas, at the Hyatt filled fellow Presbyterians, Michael blurted out: "it feels safe to be surrounded by Presbyterians!" It's safe because we've no enemies there, there's no threat.

But when we arrived at the boarder, the feeling of security dissipated entering Reynosa. Not because my blond wife and son or my odd bearded face made us stand out, but because I was climbing into a cab in a city where Americans and Mexicans alike are being kidnapped, robbed and killed at an alarming rate. The insecurity eased as the bus finally pulled out of the station on its five-hour trip to Victoria in the south. Friends surrounded us. We felt secure. But on Tuesday's return trip, as we walked out of the bus station in Reynosa to hail a cab, there before us was a cadre of Mexican soldiers in armored vehicles. As we quickly piled into the cab, we received what felt like an armed escort to the boarder bridge. Soldiers should make me feel secure, but there is something unsettling about a Humvee with a .50 caliber M2 machine gun pointing at you.

The feeling of security is the absence of the perception of danger. It comes when we feel like we fit in, that we don't stand out from the crowd. There is a benefit to blending in, to being a part of the crowd. It is something we strive for in everyday life. It dictates the way we dress, the cars we drive, where we live. Security by conformity is a way of self-preservation.

The quest for security causes us to conform to our environment, but also to seek sensations of well-being. Simply removing the sensation of insecurity does this, by adding reminders that we are secure, like an adult security blanket. We do this with locks on our doors. We invest in mutual funds to comfort us for the future. We set aside convenience in air travel, subjecting ourselves to screening and searches by TSA agents so we can have the sense of security.

This is termed *Security Theater*; safety countermeasures intended to provide the feeling of improved security while doing little or nothing to actually improve security.<sup>1</sup> Security with no real change is evidenced by the failure of TSA screeners to detect fake bombs brought through security by undercover TSA agents. In 2006 TSA agents failed to identify 75% of fake bombs at LAX and at O'Hare they missed 60%.<sup>2</sup> On a personal note, Milwaukee screeners did detect Michael's long lost knife in his duffel bag the other week. He was informed had the blade been just a tad longer, the County Sheriff would have been involved.

All this to say, we love the feeling of safety. We achieve it by conformity with others so as to blend in and by safety measures to give us the sense that no harm will come to us. While there is nothing wrong with that, the quest for security can easily be a quest of idolatry. And that is what we see in 1 Samuel 8.

We see it as we look to our leaders to make us safe from harm, so that, when faced with the choices of anarchy and tyranny, people always opt for the latter. Tyranny of the right or left matters little, as long as there is law and order. We want our leaders to ensure our sense of well-being and demand that they give us the economic, military, and spiritual security we long for. That is what happened in Israel 3000 years ago and that is what happens every election year in our own country. That can also happen in the local church when we consider leaders there, too. READ 1 Samuel 8

We are at a critical juncture in Israel's history, a great turning point from a clan-based series of localized judges to a unified, national monarchy. That change, directed by God, reveals a common tendency in all of us to seek security in our systems of government rather than knowing we are secure in our sovereign God. How does God fit into our quest for security?

Samuel was now old. No longer the boy-priest in Shiloh, no longer in the background while Israel floundered, not the priest interceding for a repentant nation who witnessed God's help and erected the stone Ebenezer, pointing to God's constant aid all along. Years have passed; the repentance at Mizpah is forgotten but the insecurities remain. Their concerns are understandable. Israel is being lead by an aged priest with two reprobate sons.

Samuel's solution to the problem of his impending death provided no security, as his sons would not be welcomed leaders in Israel.

Some years before, after Gideon successfully judged Israel, the people clamored for Gideon and his sons to become a dynasty. In Judges 8:23, Gideon wisely forbids such action, for at the heart of such a request was their seeking security in someone else other than God. Neither he nor his sons would rule over Israel, but the Lord will rule over them. Samuel would have done well to heed that example.

In light of all this the elders seek a solution to the present problem. The last time they gathered like this was in chapter 4 when they thought it was a good idea to get the Ark to defeat the Philistines. Again they perceive the problem well: Samuel's old, Joel and Abijah are corrupt. But an accurate perception does not produce a godly solution.

The concern the elders express is understandable. There is a leadership vacuum. With Samuel's death there is an immediate risk to the nation's personal interests. An obvious response would be to seek God's guidance in finding a new judge. But that is too easy.

With a pragmatic thirst for change, they clothe their request with pious language, lacing it with worldly wisdom. They want a king. They want the security that a king will provide. A stronger, centralized government without the uncertainties of regime change.

There should be some alarms going off here. There are there glaring problems.

First, their solution is utterly inane. They complain that Samuel's sons are inept at best, so they want a monarchy in which the son will always be the next ruler. Their proposal undermines their own analysis of the crisis. Their request reveals something about their heart.

Second, their request for a king is to do what is already being done. They want a king to judge, but they've had judges already. So, what is the difference? Again, we have to ask whether there is something deeper here. Albert Einstein, commenting on the political turmoil of his day, spoke words applicable here when he said, "Politics is a pendulum whose swings between anarchy and tyranny are fueled by perpetually rejuvenated illusions."

Change for change sake. We don't know what we want, but it is not this. That is dangerous territory. Yet, in our quest for security, it is so easy to embrace what we don't know because we vainly imagine it is better than what we've got.

They are seeking political stability rather than spiritual responsibility. The problem is not just that they are brainless, but faithless. The last phrase is the key: "to judge us like all the nations"

They want not just a new judge, but a new institution. The security they seek is conformity with the nations by adopting the appearance of change. The idol of security blends in with the nations who surround them and by enacting change, they engage in Security Theater.

They neglected what God said when He spoke to them at Sinai (Ex 19:4-6). There unique status evidences that God owns them. Their security is to be found in Him. Leviticus 20:26 clarifies it more: they are holy, set apart, to be different. God foresaw this event and made allowances for it.

It is not sin to have a king. In Deuteronomy 17:14 God permits a monarchy (with certain limitations), for the form of government is secondary to the reason for its adoption. The sin was in the idol of security, wanting to fit in, seeking a strong, stable, predictable center of political authority so that they could depend on their king and not on God.

For this reason, Deuteronomy allows a king, as long as it is not a king like the other nations. But their quest for security makes them chase culture rather than resting in God's mercy to guide them. They want to blend in with the crowd rather than be distinct.

This quest for security, the need to conform and desire for another to insure my security is still part of our lives today.

Listen to the political rhetoric in the coming months. Candidates of either party issue the siren call to find security in big-government or big business that promises us the benefits either enjoyed or envied by other nations. As a Christian, when you go to the polls to cast your vote, examine your heart as to what you are saying by your choice. Does my vote reflect this same quest for security, that my candidate will provide me with the confidence that my future will be better with him or her in power? If so, does that certainty erode your confidence in God's grace to guide you and our nation? Do you feel less secure because the *other* party is in control?

Let's take it from the national level to a more personal place. What about life in the church? How often do we hear the rhetoric calling for revamping worship, church life and how the church should operate? We are to be *semper reformata*, always reforming...but is the motivation the command of Scripture mediated by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or the need not to appear so out of sync with the times?

It is easy to want to be like all the other churches, with programs that draw in crowds and a worship experience that thrills. Without judgment on the activity, we must always ask: "are we in a quest for security in which we strive to conform to those around us more than seeking God's face on our knees?"

We are still susceptible to the quest for security, engaging in security theater when we become disenchanted with the effects of the fall and think that change, any change would be good change.

As we are faced with an election this morning, we must keep that in mind. This is not to say that change is wrong nor does it mean that what has always been must always be. Rather, what is behind your desire for change?

Do you think that if we get the right pastor or ruling elders we could achieve a spiritual security? Will new deacons assure me that ministries of mercy will be more effective in the community and less intrusive in my life? Give us a pastor like a CEO we see in business, he could do a better job than this rambling hack.

The mistake of the elders of Israel was to imagine that a king like the nations would grant them security that they imagined they did not have with God as their king.

So also in the church today. The security your session provides is the gospel, pointing you to the cross as your only hope. We cannot insulate you from the terror of sin any more than the TSA can cover every contingency. The elders are not TSA agents, screening for sin bombs to ensure your safety. Rather leaders are to point us all to the work of Christ on the cross.

When Samuel heard their request, he was dismayed. It displeased him; literally, the thing was evil in his eyes. What displeased him was the gist of the request: "give us a king to judge us." He certainly is not unbiased in his response. Their request hit him hard. It was a personal rejection.

God responds to his prayer with a rather surprising concession: Obey the voice of the people, it can also be translated as "listen to the voice of the people in *all* that they say to you. It is not just about wanting a king.

God wants Samuel to see it from a different perspective. It is ultimately not about him, but God. It is God whom they've rejected. God's people have done this from the exodus (v8) to that day; they are turning their back on God and going after other sources of security.

This is great advice for all of us.

Don't take sin personally. It is not really about you. It is about God. It may be directed our way, we will feel the sting of it, but at the core, it is what we all do, all the time – we turn our backs on God. The good news is God is not surprised.

Samuel is to do as they say, but give them a warning. God will grant their request, much to their dismay.

Samuel must show the Israelites the ways of the king, literally, the *mishpat*, the justice of the king. What does justice look like for a king who rules like the nations? What should we expect? Verse 11

To be like the world, to seek the security of conformity comes with a cost. Samuel lists what to expect from seeking security of their rulers – the king will take (v11,13-17 6x's). You want security? There is a tremendous cost, the cost of your sons and daughters, what is labored long and hard for, what is typically owed to God (15).

The cost is personal. We think when we vote for our government to make us more secure, our vote will cost some other taxpayer. But the personal pronoun lets the leaders know it will cost them personally. It will be *your sons, your daughters, your fields, your tithe of grain and flocks, your servants*. In the end (17) you will be subjects...slaves. You will have your meals and homes, a leader when invading forces come. You won't have to worry or even pray...you have a king to do that for you.

The cost is tremendous. God will grant this request, but promises not to hear their plea for help when all this comes true (18). God will give exactly what they ask for now, but will not remove the sting of foolish choices later. Be careful what you pray for, because you just may get it.

We should see ourselves in those elders' demand for a king.

That quest for security is one in which we assess our problems mechanically, rather than spiritually. We assume this is an issue of techniques. We need an adjustment, not repentance. A gimmick, some doctoring is all it takes. It is better to move ahead than to see where we need God.

We don't need God, other than to inform him what we need and how he can best respond.

Prayer becomes our informing God what deliverance looks like rather than confessing our idolatry of security, of personal peace at all costs. God's kindness may well be in our unanswered prayers.

Don't miss the painful truth here, too. That God may well answer those most unholy prayers. He may well give us the government, the pastor, the elders we seek. If we want to stop thinking, praying, reading God's Word on our own and learning from those who are mature...then we will get the leaders we deserve. They will take from us, rule over us, crush us...but we will be secure.

But in the end, their request for a king was a request God answered, for it served His sovereign will. The kings he gave would drive them once again to repentance.

But God has a king for them, one who would not take, but give, one who would serve and not use. This otherworldly king is seen standing before the world's king in John 18. Pilate inquires whether Jesus is a king. He does not deny, but He is not a king, as Pilate would imagine. He is a king whose royal title was nailed above his head on the cross. A king who suffers in our place, rather than we for Him. He is a king who becomes a pauper, so paupers like us will become princes with Him for all eternity. That is a king we can serve. That is the king God offers us. Are you prepared to worship that king?

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<sup>1</sup> ^ Schneier, Bruce (2003). Beyond Fear: Thinking Sensibly about Security in an Uncertain World. Copernicus Books, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-10-17-airport-security\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-10-17-airport-security_N.htm)