**Samuel’s Farewell Speech**

In the classic western film “She Wore a Yellow Ribbon” Captain Brittles wants take a column of soldiers to assist a young lieutenant he had left behind to hold a position against hostile Indians. His commanding officer reminds him that he had reached retirement and that the lieutenant would have to make his own way. Having Brittles coming to his aid would jeopardize his standing with the troops. In our study of 1st Samuel chapter 12, we see Samuel coming to the end of his leadership of Israel. After Saul had firmly established his kingship in Israel, Samuel knew that it was time for him to take a less active role in leading Israel. He spoke to the people of Israel in what was his last recorded public address. He began by saying that he had listened to the people and had appointed a king over them. He said that his sons were with the people which is an indication that he had removed them from positions of authority and they were among the general population. Samuel challenged the people to bring any accusations against him that he had personally profited from his ministry or had cheated anyone. They acknowledged that he had not. This may have been a subtle reminder that they would not fare so well under a king.

Samuel then recited the history of Israel going back to the days when they were enslaved in Egypt and cried out to God for help. This was an approach used by Moses and Joshua before him to confront the Israelites with their history of sin in the hope of getting them to repent. He told how God sent Moses and Aaron to lead them out of Egypt and then He settled them in Canaan. Then they forgot God and He sold them into the hands of Hazor, the Philistines and Moabites. After the people repented, He sent judges over a long period of time to lead the Israelites and deliver them from their enemies. Samuel noted that the people had undergone a significant change by demanding a king to rule over them instead of being led by a judge. He said they told him “We want a king to rule over us” even though God was their king. He said “Now here is your king”. He said that if they would obey the God and not rebel against him and if both the people and the king followed God then they would do well. If they did not obey God, then His hand would be against them as it was with their ancestors. Whereas Moses had pronounced specific blessings and curses that awaited Israel (see Deut. Chap. 28), Samuel simply said that it would be good if they obeyed God and His hand would be against them if they did not.

Samuel then told the people to prepare for a sign from God which would confirm that Samuel had spoken to them as God had led him. Samuel called on God to send thunder and rain on the wheat which was about to be harvested. Such a storm would have been unusual at harvest time and likely damaged some of the crop. It seemed to be a warning to the people to heed the words that Samuel had spoken. The people were afraid after seeing the power of God displayed but Samuel gave them words of comfort. He said that although they had done evil, they must not turn away from God, rather they should serve him with all their heart. He warned them not to turn to useless idols which would do them no good. He told them of God’s promise that He would not reject His people then Samuel promised to pray for them and teach them in the ways of righteous living. He repeated that they were to serve God faithfully but if they persisted in evil, God would sweep them and the king away.

Samuel was threading the needle by relinquishing some responsibilities but reaffirming his role as the spiritual leader of Israel. When God told Moses that his time of leading Israel was coming to an end, He appointed Joshua to take over for him after which Moses died. Unlike Moses, Samuel remained in office so he made clear that his role would differ from what the king would do. I think it was similar to how John the Baptist allowed his ministry to diminish so that Jesus’ ministry would flourish. Humility is required to accept such a role. It is customary for a retiring pastor to move to another church so the ministry of the new pastor can take hold without the members looking to the retired pastor for leadership. It is equally important that people in non staff leadership positions within the church should be willing to step aside to allow new people to take over. Even if someone is not ready to retire from a role, allowing another person to take over can is healthy discipleship.