

Live For The Lord

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] We'll read a couple of verses in 1 Samuel chapter 8, verse 5. He said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways.

Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing is pleased, Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee.

For they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. Now we might think, looking at this purely at the human level, might think, Well, what is Samuel hoping for here?

I mean, if the people want a king, is it simply because his own sons are such a godless shower? I mean, we're told here at verse 2, the name of his firstborn was Joel, which means, you know, Jehovah is God.

And the name of his second, Abijah, which means literally, you know, my father is Jehovah. It's the same name as, for example, we have in Luke chapter 1, verse 5, where we're told that Zacharias was of the course, the priestly course of Abijah.

[1 : 12] Now that's not this Abijah here, but rather it says simply Abijah, which is the same as Abijah. And 1 Chronicles chapter 24, at verse 10, it gives all the listings, the 24 courses of the priesthood and how they were to serve in rotation.

And we read, the seventh was to Hakkos, the eighth to Abijah. And it is of this course of Abijah that Zacharias, the husband of Elizabeth, was a priest. That's just to demonstrate that the name is a comparatively common one amongst the priesthood.

It means, as we said, that Jehovah is my father. But despite the piety of these names, you know, Jehovah is God, Jehovah is my father, and so on. But these sons of Samuel had turned out badly.

There is just the suggestion that perhaps in sending them to Beersheba, which was just about as far south as you could get before you started hitting the desert, and about as far as, you know, Israel itself would extend in real terms before you start the desert that then would lead on into Egypt.

Maybe he'd send them to sort of the extremities of the kingdom as it were, so they could do as little damage as possible. But even there, they're taking bribes and perverting the course of justice.

[2 : 32] And all the elders of Israel know that his sons are rotten, because they say, Thy sons walk not in thy ways. Now make us akin to judges, like all the nations.

But Samuel, see, he's suggesting, no, no, make my sons judges, make them rulers, just like I am. Instead of thee, even though they're rotten. No, he probably wasn't suggesting that.

And the people are not saying, you know, give us a king because you're so bad, Samuel. But rather, they are looking for that which will be, to use modern jargon, a quick fix. The problem is not whether you're a theocracy headed up by a senior prophet like Samuel, or whether you're a monarchy with someone like Saul or David or Solomon or whatever as the king who's reigning.

Whichever form of government is deployed, whether we have a monarchy or we have a theocracy or whether we have a democracy or whatever form is utilized, you will have good men and bad men, and women too, in every generation and under every form of government.

So whatever the civil magistrate form takes, that is not going to solve the problem of the kingdom. That is not going to solve the problem of the nation. The problem of the nation and the problem of each generation is whether or not they know the Lord.

[3 : 54] And it would have been reasonable for Samuel in the days of his youth, and for Israel perhaps to think, now we have a true priest.

Now at last we have one who is going to be the prophet for the Lord's people. Chapter 8 is still comparatively early on in a book that runs to 31 chapters.

You know, 1 Samuel goes all the way through to the death of Saul and the king. It paves the way for David in the 2 Samuel and so on. But 1 Samuel, if you remember, it begins with, you know, childless Hannah and her plea for a son, and then the boy Samuel is born.

And we read how in those days the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, that they were the priests of the Lord, and they were there. Verse 3 of chapter 1 in 1 Samuel.

Now, the sons of Eli, Eli, again, just thinking in terms of what names mean, Eli means my God. And if you think about it, it's exactly what Jesus quotes in Matthew's account of the gospel.

[4 : 57] Rather, we pronounce it Eli, it would be in the Hebrew Eli, my God. And it's my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Jesus quotes directly from the Hebrew scriptures of Psalm 22, verse 1, Eli, Eli lama sabachthani.

But the Eli, or Eli, is my God. And that's what the old priest, Eli, that's what he's calling it, my God. His own sons, for whatever reason, you know, Samuel has given his sons devout names, you know, Jehovah is God, and my father is Jehovah.

That doesn't solve the problem of their hearts. But of course, Eli's sons, perhaps prophetically, are given names which are rather less flattery.

So, let's look at the H in the original. The H in the original would be a slightly harder H as opposed to a soft H. It's not so much a H as a CH. So, it would be CHOFNI.

Now, Hophni is from a Hebrew term, CHOFN, meaning a fist. It's never used in a singular. It's always used in a plural, as in fists.

[6 : 02] So, HOFN would be a fist or fist. Now, the E or I at the end means my, just as L was the genetic term for God.

Eli is my God. So, HOFN would mean fist. And it would mean, HOFNI would mean a pugilist or a fighter, one who puts their fists up. So, HOFNI literally means my fist.

And so, Eli's understand it's called my fist. And his second son, Phineas, is again a word that drives from words meaning mouth of a serpent.

Not in the sense of being evil, but the serpent being a subtle creature and so on, as we have in Genesis. That which comes out of its mouth was sometimes taken as being an oracle. Or, you know, deep kind of wisdom would come out of its mouth.

That's the kindest way to look at it. But HOFNI and Phineas, of course, were likewise evil and a shadow of gross. Eli himself was obviously devout, but weak, indulgent of his sons.

[7 : 06] We know from chapter 2, verse 20, 22. Eli was very old. He heard all that his sons did unto all Israel. How they labelled the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

And he said, then why do ye such things? For I hear your evil dealings by all these people. They also stole the sacrifices of the people. And other things, as we see earlier in chapter 2.

Now, my sons, for it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people to transgress. If one sin against another, the judge shall judge him.

But if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding, they hearken not to the voice of their father. Because the Lord would slay them. And then the Lord sends a prophet to Eli to say, look, judgment's coming on you because your sons are such a bad lot.

And you haven't restrained them. You just indulge them. Even though he was not in sympathy with them, he didn't do anything to restrain them. And this begs the question then, so how come Samuel doesn't get a rap over the knuckles from the Lord?

[8 : 11] If his sons do, what I shall address, if they were rotten as well, how come they aren't judge? And how come he doesn't get into trouble as well? This doesn't seem to all that fair.

But we don't know the details of their lives in the way that we don't know all the details of Eli's life. But what we can say is that, you know, when Samuel came along, people must have hoped, okay, at last things are going to change.

We read at the end of chapter 3 in 1 Samuel. Remember, that's the chapter where the little boy in the temple hears the voice of God. And Eli says, go back and say, you know, speak, Lord, for your servant's listening.

And now the Lord spoke to him of the judgment that was coming on Eli's house. But we read, Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in shadow, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in shadow by the word of the Lord.

[9 : 17] And on into chapter 4, the word of Samuel came to all Israel. So in other words, he's judging Israel throughout all the years of his life. We don't know how long it is that he lived.

We're just told he's old. We don't know exactly what age he was. But wouldn't you have thought, wouldn't you have hoped, that such a child of the temple, such one anointed with the spirit of the Lord for childhood, would surely be one who would become a father godly son, and of those who would be the next generation of the faithful.

But of course, we have no guarantee through ordinary generation, or through mere biological transmission of our posterity from one generation to the next, there's no guarantee that grace goes with it.

Grace is just that. It is an act of God's free mercy and gift to each individual's soul. And Samuel, of course, is faithful all the way through to the day of his death.

But those who come after him are not. It doesn't mean that, oh no, everything's going to go down here after that. Because before Samuel dies, he is already anointed David, the beloved of the Lord, to be king in Israel after Saul.

[10 : 35] But it doesn't happen right away. In each successive generation, the Lord will have his sins. He will have those who perhaps in the days of their youth, or perhaps in old age, come to the Lord.

But the point is, it's not uncommon for us to think that if, say, there's two or three choice young Christians, or people who are called to particular, now at last the tide is going to turn.

Now at last we're going to see great things in our day. Samuel's been raised up, or this person or that person's been raised up. A new generation. Surely we're going to see the tide turn back, and the beginning of reviving, and so on.

And it is perhaps the hope, sincerely, of each generation in the days of their youth that they come to know the Lord. There is a measure of vanity goes with it.

I can remember, to my shame, coming through the young ranks of the ministry and thinking, we are the ones that are going to change the church. Now the older generation, ah, they're the ones holding everything back.

[11 : 40] How foolish they were, how blind they were to the real leaders. Thank goodness we have come now, this young generation. And it was so vain and short-sighted, and the world, the unbelieving world, is remarkably resilient to all the efforts or gifts and abilities one may think one brings to such work of the gospel.

Those who went before us will likewise have been filled with each generation with its zeal and its youth and its determination. This is going to be the generation that changes it all.

And likewise, no doubt, people thought, this is going to be the one that turns back the tide. But of course, the next generation may be rotten. And even if they may continue for a while with the Lord, I mean, I don't imagine in the days of their youth that Eli's sons suddenly were visibly bad right away, they probably deteriorated.

They probably started out well and began gradually to deteriorate. Because they did not know the Lord. They did not maintain a relationship with the Lord.

They did not seek to know the Lord. That can happen to the very best, no doubt, of those who once would have been the Lord. Think of what it says about David's son Solomon.

[13 : 04] Of course, you know, we know that in the days of his later years that he was turned away from the Lord when he was old. We read his heathen wives turned him away from the Lord.

It came to pass when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods. And his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites.

And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father. So, you would have hoped, surely, Solomon, you know, beloved of the Lord, is the one that's going to change it.

He had a brilliant kingdom, a brilliant career in kingship, but he turned away. The Lord, we trust, redeemed him, that we trust he is amongst the elect.

But we see how easy it is, even if we start out well, to fall away. None of us can say, oh, that's it. My son or my daughter or my grandson or whatever, that's great.

[14 : 11] They know the Lord. So, that's then sorted. It's never sorted. It's never sorted till the last day when we're finally through into that blessed eternity. We were looking at Judas just yesterday.

Judas fell away in the last 48 hours of his life. And likewise, we cannot make assumptions about how good things are going to be.

You know, we trust, we believe, we pray that the Lord will keep and sustain our own souls and those of our loved ones. We pray for that. We seek to do everything to encourage them, but we have no guarantee of any other soul.

We commit them to the Lord. But the primary thing that we must do ourselves in every generation is we must, first of all, believe the grace that the Lord seeks to give us.

Believe the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This, first of all, is a witness in itself. Because what we'll often hear from the world is, oh, nobody believes that stuff nowadays.

[15 : 19] Well, of course the church has to change and embrace this new thing or that new thing or this particular thing. You know, nobody believes that stuff that's in the Bible anymore. And as long as nobody will stand up and nobody will say, well, yes, actually, I believe it.

Of course I believe it. That's what God's word says. So I believe it. And you think, well, you must be a minority then. You can't possibly be representative of normal people. Nevertheless, if there is one willing to stand up and say, yes, I believe this.

Of course that's what I believe. That's what the Bible teaches. I'm a Christian. Of course I'm meant to believe this. Then they cannot deal with it. They may seek to ridicule. They may seek to downplay. They may seek to ignore.

But they cannot make that witness go away. The first and most important thing any follower of Christ can and must do is believe the record the Lord has given of his beloved son, Jesus Christ.

Believe the revelation he has made of himself in his word. Believe it. And all the unbelief in the world will not be able to prevail against that faith and that belief.

[16 : 26] And as we believe it, and if we believe it, then what we likewise must do is live it, model it, exemplify it.

Because most people in the world will not read the Bible. But those with whom you come into contact will see the witness, will see the style, the advertisement of the faith that you claim to believe.

And they will be affected one way or another. They may not accept it. They may not believe what you believe. But they will be touched by it. They will be colored by it.

It will rub off on them to an extent. And you may never perhaps realize the influence that you may be having in a person's life until that influence is removed.

And then everybody says, oh, we didn't realize this was actually the glue that was holding out on you. And this person, this one person in the workplace or this one person in the family was actually the one that was having the positive influence that was making things better.

[17 : 28] We didn't realize until they were taken out and put somewhere else or whatever the case may be. We owe it to our fellow men and women, whether in our family, whether our colleagues at work, whether those we mix with in our daily life to live, to model, to exemplify this gospel that we claim or ought to believe.

Believe it and live it. Exemplify it. Model it. And as we do so, the best, the most that we can hope to do is to be an influence to perhaps help, to educate, to train up, to give the necessary witness and testimony and information to others, to strengthen the witness in our generation.

Because ours is the only generation we get. We can't live in the next generation. They will have begun before we end, just as Samuel announced David, who is just a ruddy, young, good-looking youth in the days of Samuel's ancient dotage, we might say.

But still he has anointed David before Samuel dies. So the next generation is already in place. But we can only serve in our generation.

We can only live, witness, and exemplify the gospel ourselves. There will be those over whom we have some influence. If we have children, they will be our children.

[18 : 58] If we have other family members, we may touch their lives. If we have work colleagues, we may touch their lives somewhat and influence them. But we cannot compel. Otherwise, out of love we would.

We cannot force the gospel down anyone's throat. Otherwise, out of love we would desire to force feed grace to every soul that we could possibly touch and reach.

And even those who may begin with a bright profession of faith may, like the seed that falls on the shallow rocky ground, they may be those that may wither and fall away.

We have all known examples of that over the years of our lives. One generation is all we get. Our generation.

Our generation. That when we are young and we begin just like Samuel began as a child in the temple, no doubt he and others would have thought, this is it. This is the time.

[19 : 55] Everything's going to come spiritual, right, and good. But, of course, he was an exception. And Israel was not transformed. They thought they could fix their problems by having a king.

Rather than fix the deep-rooted problem of humanity by turning to the Lord with all their heart and soul and mind and strength. If they had done that, it wouldn't matter whether they had a prophet over them or a king or whether they had an elected assembly or whatever it might be.

If the nation's heart is right with the Lord, then all else will fall into place. But, of course, human nature being what it is, the most, even the most godly and well-meaning of civil magistrates or prophets or those seeking to make an influence, the most they can do is to restrain evil, as David did.

They cannot change the hearts of their subjects. They cannot change the hearts of their generation. We see that Elijah, in his day, although he felt so completely alone at one stage, there were those who loved the Lord, even in his day.

In 1 Kings 18, we read in verse 3, A hundred prophets of the Lord!

[21 : 28] Well, of course, it would be prophets in a lesser sense. In other words, those who studied the Scriptures and spoke the Word of God to others and so on. In chapter 19, as you know, of course, the Lord says to Elijah in 1 Kings 19, I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which have not kissed in him.

Wow! Seven thousand! Fantastic! So much more than just Elijah on his own. But it's still a tiny minority of the population. By the time Elijah dies, he already has what we might call colleges of prophets, albeit these junior kinds of prophets, in Bethel and in Jericho, which he goes to visit just before he is taken up to heaven in his fiery chariot.

And Elisha goes with him. And Elisha stays with him. Chapter 2, verses 1-7 of 2 Kings, you've got that account. He goes to Bethel, he goes to Jericho, and wherever he goes, these prophets say to Elisha, do you know the Lord's going to take your master away today?

And so they stand to see what will happen to them. But it is only Elisha who sees when he goes up to heaven in a fiery chariot. But they are the prophets, these faithful servants of the Lord that are such.

Elijah has obviously worked to train up, to raise up, to teach those who will seek to be faithful and diligent in following the Lord. But they are few in comparison to the rest of Israel.

[22 : 57] They are few, and it will always be the case that whatever laws may be passed, if we had godly laws in our land, if evil was restrained as we longed for it to be, if righteous legislation was passed, if our lawmakers again feared the Lord, in all too many cases, it must be sadly conceded, it would be simply fear in the sense of didn't dare to put a foot wrong, rather than being converted hearts, and those who loved and served the Lord.

We can only strive to be leavened, to be salt and light, but our one generation that we get, those generations will have been influenced by those who came before, that overlap with us, and those who will come after us, who likewise will have begun to overlap with us as well.

But our generation is the only one we get. Many years ago, when pop music was still young, there was that group, of course, called The Who, that had the song, Talking About My Generation.

They thought they were so modern, and we all thought everything was so modern then in the 60s. Now, of course, they're ancient then. They are old then. Some of them are dead already, but, oh, they thought they were so cutting edge, and so young, talking about my generation.

Well, my generation, your generation, our generation, it's the only one we get, in which to live for the Lord, in which to witness, and testify, and believe, and make a difference.

[24 : 29] and although we cannot cause others to put their trust in the Lord, we can live and model and exemplify that faith, and also, we can make sure that we hold fast to it.

because, for the unbeliever, of course, the biggest danger to his or her soul is that very unbelief, which, if it's persisted in, will send them to hell. For the believer, the greatest danger to their soul is that they may fall away.

Now, as we've mentioned so often in the past, that which is in the physical world, and the physical realm, points us to spiritual truths. You may build a perfect house.

You may use the best quality of stone, and the best kind of drainage, and all the electricity, and the roof slates, and the wood, and the windows, and all the most modern, up-to-date, best materials.

And you can make it a perfect house as neat as possible. But the fact of the matter is, if it is anything that is made of earthly materials, fabric, in other words, anyone who's had anything to do with fabric, knows, fabric is an ongoing requirement.

[25 : 47] You're always having to maintain it. You're always having to clean out the gutters, or replace the slates, or make sure the wiring is up to speed. Make sure that the drag thing is sorted, or that if there's a wee bit of cement coming out the bricks, you've got to put that back.

If the windows are beginning to come loose, you've got to replace them. If you don't maintain the property, then it does not matter how perfect it may have been on the day it was opened.

It will deteriorate. It will deteriorate because that is the nature of things in this fallen world. For it will decay. And the same is true of our relationship with the Lord.

It may be pristine. It may be perfect. It may be privileged. It won't be perfect, of course, but it may be privileged and blessed. But if it is not maintained, it will decay and deteriorate.

This is the biggest single danger for the believer. This is the only generation you get in which to make that difference. In Hebrews, we read in chapter 10, verse 23.

[26 : 57] Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promise. And if we're going to get the context of that verse, go back a couple of verses.

It says, Having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promise. Now, what is the focus of those verses? They're like, oh, it's about holding onto our faith, making sure we are strong.

But what is the assurance there? It is that we have a high priest over the house of God, that we are sprinkled from an evil conscience, our bodies washed with pure water, and we can hold fast our profession.

How? Why? Because we're so brilliant? No, because he is faithful that promise. It is about who our great high priest is. Turn back a couple of pages, and we see likewise in chapter 4 of Hebrews.

[28 : 04] Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens. Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession, for we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. That ongoing supply of grace, that ongoing supply of mercy is not because of how good we are, but rather because of who our high priest is.

Maintain that relationship, and you will maintain that profession. You see, you see, in Revelation chapter 2, where the Lord, the risen Lord, is speaking to the different churches in Asia, the seven different churches, we read of what he says to the angel of the church in Smyrna.

Smyrna is one of only two churches, there's that in Philadelphia, about which the Lord has nothing bad to say. And in verse 10 of chapter 2, he says, ye shall have tribulation ten days, that means for the limited period, be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

We read that and we think, yes, of course, well he's talking about persecution and martyrdom. Be thou faithful unto death. In the midst of persecution, in the midst of martyrdom, hold fast, be faithful unto death. But it doesn't just mean persecution, it doesn't just mean martyrdom.

[29 : 38] every single soul who knows, loves, and serves the Lord, must be faithful unto death. Must continue all the way through to the final day when the Lord pronounces our earthly life complete.

Because if we don't, if we stop a day before the end, if we let go of our faith 48 hours beforehand, like Judas said, or 24 hours, or in the last hour, and just reject the Lord, then we are as lost, as though we have never begun.

Be thou faithful unto death, right through to your closing breath. You must have the Lord, and you must continue with them, right through to the end.

And the temptation will always be to allow decay, and softening up, and slackening of standards, to get in. It is so easy.

And we've all seen it happen. You look at somebody who was once a, a towering giant of the faith, and you think, well, I can see a day when they would never have allowed such and such to happen, and they'll never have tolerated this or that, but look at them now, look at what they allow, look at what they're, they're prepared to live with.

[30 : 52] And how standards can so easily slip. God hasn't changed. His word hasn't changed. But the society around us, of course, it decays likewise.

And the temptation to go with the flow is so easy. Such influence as we are able to have, such impact as we are able to make in the one generation we are given, will only be of any effectiveness to the extent that we maintain that relationship with our great high priest, that we study to show ourselves approved, that we remain faithful unto death.

And then even if others may reject that, even if they may not accept the faith that we practice and believe, they will know that there has been a witness amongst them.

We think of what, you know, is the prophet Ezekiel and the witness that he has given amongst the people. And the Lord says to him in chapter 2, verse 5, they, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, for their rebellious house, yet shall know that there have been a prophet among them.

Jesus said to the cities of his day, woe unto thee Chorazin, woe unto thee Bethsaida, Hapernaum, and all these other places, because he had lived and taught and witnessed amongst them, and still they reject it.

- [32 : 23] Friends, that may be the case with many, perhaps most, of those with whom Christians may come into contact. but still you must believe it, live it, model it, exemplify it, and hold fast that profession.

Be thou faithful unto death, and he will give us a crown of life. We all have our burden of concern for loved ones, for family members, for friends, for work colleagues, for those who are so dear to our hearts that maybe we have been praying for for years.

But believe you me, part of any hope that they may have will likewise be dependent on you staying faithful to the God that perhaps they don't yet believe in.

Because if you turn against the Lord, if you turn away, then they'll say, well, why should I turn? Even so-and-so who's been a Christian all these years, and who always said they were praying for you, and they couldn't hack it all the way through.

Nobody believes that stuff anymore. Even he or she doesn't believe it in you. Look, they've rejected it. Look, they've turned against it. They've fallen away from it. So, why should I worry about it?

- [33 : 38] Part of your prayers for them, part of your burden for them is bound up with you and I and each one who loves the Lord staying faithful in their generation.

Samuel was not able to convert his godless sons. Eli was not able to convert his godless sons. They were each faithful men in their own way, in their own generation, but they were only able to serve their generation.

And others who came after them, some of them were godless, and some the Lord raised up to be faithful and devout and to give hope to the next generation.

we all like to think in the days of our youth that we may be the ones to change the world. It is reputed that Winston Churchill wrote that when he was when I was 14 he said, I thought my parents knew nothing.

By the time I was 21 I was amazed how much they had caught up. We all tend to think that we are the ones who are going to do it. We are the ones who know what to do.

- [34 : 48] And we find the world is remarkably resilient and resistant. But God, but God is the one who alone changes hearts, changes worlds, and changes generations.

This is the generation you have been given to serve. This is the generation in which you are enabled by grace to make a difference. You can't guarantee what will happen either after you are gone or what happened to those who went before you.

But you can give diligence to make your calling and election sure. You can have assurance not in yourself but in the great high priest who has offered that once and for all sacrifice for you.

You can serve him and in serving him faithful unto death. You will best serve those around you and those whom you love most.

You may not be the instrument of their conversion or you may but that we must leave with God and whatsoever befalls them whom we love so much.

- [36 : 03] Let it not be for the want of triumph or for the want of faith or for the want of holding fast on our part for this one generation which the Lord has given to us.

Let it not be. Let it not be.