

OpenTheo

July 21st: 1 Samuel 12 & 2 Corinthians 4

July 20, 2020



Alastair Roberts

Samuel declares the Lord's faithfulness to the people. Treasure in earthen vessels.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

1 Samuel 12 And Samuel said to all Israel, Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and grey, and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day.

Here I am. Testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? or whose donkey have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me, and I will restore it to you.

They said, You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand. And he said to them, The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand. And they said, He is witness.

And Samuel said to the people, The Lord is witness who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous deeds of the Lord that he performed for you and for your fathers. When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the Lord, and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place.

But they forgot the Lord their God, and he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them, and they cried out to the Lord, and said, We have sinned because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served the Baals and the Ashtoreth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.

And the Lord sent Jeroboam and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, No, but a king shall reign over us, when the Lord your God was your king. And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked.

Behold the Lord has set a king over you. 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. But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.

Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the Lord, that he may send thunder and rain, and you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking for yourselves a king. So Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day.

And all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said to Samuel, 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. And Samuel said to the people, 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.

And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great namesake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. 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.

Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for consider what great

things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king. First Samuel chapter 12 is a chapter where three parties are placed on trial in a sort of legal scene.

They are in Gilgal to make Saul king and to renew the kingdom. Perhaps we should think of the kingdom here not just as the new kingdom of Saul but as the kingdom of the Lord, but now as Saul as his vice-gerent. Gilgal was the place where they were first circumcised when they entered the land for the first time in Joshua chapter 5. It was also where they celebrated the Passover.

It was a place of national dedication back then, and now it is a place of national dedication again, connected with the deep covenant memory of Israel. Samuel puts himself on trial first. He wants Israel, witnessed by the Lord and by their king Saul, to confess to the fact that he acted righteously in all of his dealings with them.

He didn't wrong or oppress them in any manner. Samuel described the oppressive behaviour a king would adopt in chapter 8 of 1 Samuel, but here he makes very clear that he has never behaved like such a ruler, and the people confess to his innocence of such wrongdoing. The people acknowledge that they have no charge to level against him, and Samuel emphasises that the Lord and Saul are their witnesses in this acknowledgement.

Saul is still going to be active as a prophet, but he will no longer function as the judge of Israel, as he has been doing to this point. Samuel will be ministering for many years to come. He will, for instance, anoint David, probably a couple of decades later.

Samuel moves on to declare the righteous deeds of the Lord, the ways in which the Lord was faithful in his covenant dealings with Israel, even in Israel's unfaithfulness. He recounts the history of Israel, from Jacob's descent into Egypt, to the Exodus, to the entry into the land, and then the various deliverances under the judges. At each point God showed his faithfulness to the covenant, even as his people were unfaithful.

He continually delivered them, he brought them back, and he restored them. After seeing all of these deliverances in the time of the judges, when they saw Nahash the Ammonite starting to get territory in Israel, the Israelites lost their nerve and demanded a king. The suggestion here is that the threat of the Ammonites and Nahash preceded chapter 8, and was the immediate cause of them asking for a king.

They wanted a king like the nations to go out in battle before them, because Nahash the Ammonite was causing trouble for them on their eastern border. Part of the irony, of course, is that the Lord delivered them from the threat of the Ammonites, by Saul, but Saul acting more as a judge than as a king. Saul had not yet been anointed.

The Lord their king was quite capable of raising up deliverance from the Ammonites for

them, even without them having a king to lead them into battle. Recounting the history of redemption, as Samuel does here, is an important element of covenant renewal events. Israel stands back from the immediacy of time, and reflects upon the way that the Lord has brought them to this point.

The Lord has given them the king that they requested. What's more, he hasn't abandoned them on account of their sin in the request, but has graciously incorporated the king into the covenant order, allowing for them to enjoy blessing, even in a situation that originally arose on account of their sin. God's grace can continue to reach people, even in situations that they have brought themselves into through their own sinful failings and disobedience.

The Lord gives them the sign of thunder and rain at the time of the wheat harvest. This is extremely unseasonal weather, like having snow in July, perhaps. Israel was very dependent upon the blessing of the rain in its proper seasons, and this is a sign of God's rule over the land, and the Israelites' dependence upon him, and the sin of rejecting such a king for another.

If the Lord can control the elements themselves, why can't they trust him to deal with a threat like the Ammonites and Nahash? Samuel and the Lord then have put themselves on trial and been vindicated, but Israel has been proved to be unfaithful. The people request Samuel's intercession, and Samuel reassures them that, although they have sinned seriously, they can still go on to serve the Lord and be blessed by him. However, they need to learn not to turn aside to empty things, putting their trust in idols and kings.

They should look to the Lord. The Lord and Samuel have both been faithful, and both will continue to be faithful to Israel. The Lord will not forsake his people.

He has put his name upon Israel, and he has determined to make them a people for himself. Samuel, on his part, will never cease from interceding for the people, as Moses interceded for them in the Exodus. He will also teach and guide them.

Samuel will continue to act as a father figure to Saul, and then later on he will anoint David. The people must also move forward in faithfulness. They must bring to mind the works of God on their behalf in the past, and serve him faithfully with all of their hearts.

If they don't do so, they will swiftly be destroyed. A question to consider. What can we learn from the grace that God shows to his people in this chapter? 2 Corinthians chapter 4 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

But we have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word. But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke, we also believe and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. The first part of 2 Corinthians chapter 4 closely relates with the argument of the chapter that preceded it, exploring the nature of the new covenant ministry and the way that it both contrasts with that of the old and was anticipated within it, Paul giving the example of Moses' veiled face.

Paul also discussed the contrasting responses to his ministry back in chapter 2 verses 14-17. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing.

To one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity as commissioned by God in the sight of God we speak in Christ. This began Paul's discussion of the nature of the new covenant ministry, and now Paul reintroduces some of the threads of thought from the first two chapters, not least in his discussion of the importance of candour and frankness as those in the service of the Lord.

He discusses their comportment in their ministry. He connects his discussion here with that which immediately preceded it also, beginning with a therefore. What renders Paul and his companions sufficient for their ministry? They have been granted it by God's mercy.

The ministry of the new covenant is a ministry of unveiling, and a ministry of faithfulness and truth. This informs the way that Paul comports himself, not as someone manipulating or misleading others, but as someone presenting the truth openly. Although some might claim that Paul's message is veiled, it is only veiled to those who are perishing.

Satan, described here as the God of this world, is the one who shuts their eyes to the truth. Satan is spoken of as the God of this world, as he has a dominion and servants. He is not a God in the same way as God is God.

Any veiling of the gospel does not arise from the way that Paul communicates it. He communicates it with clarity, candour and truth, but to those whose eyes have been darkened by the evil one, they do not see. To others, however, it is a ministry of glory and unveiling.

The gospel displays the glorious illumination of Christ, who is the image of God. The description of Christ as the image of God is also seen in Colossians 1.15. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For Paul, Christ is the archetypal image of God.

We are created in the image and are transformed into the image of Christ as he enlightens us. As we look upon the face and the life of Christ, we see the glory of God therein. Paul routinely identifies closely with his gospel, which sets the terms for everything that he does.

However, the content of the gospel is not Paul himself, but the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord. Just as Paul isn't communicating the gospel with deceit or with obfuscation, he is very clear about the content of the gospel and doesn't want it to be admixed with some proclamation of himself. Paul is not the master of his message, as if the gospel gave him license to focus on all of his personal hobby horses.

Faithful presentation of the gospel requires a certain modesty and self-effacement of the messenger, to ensure that their personal fixations are never allowed to take the place of an unadulterated and unvarnished presentation of the truth of Christ and his Lordship. As a slave of Christ, beholden to him, Paul's position as a gospel minister is the humblest and most unassuming one. And as a slave of Christ, he is also a slave of the Corinthians for Jesus' sake.

Once again, Paul's ministry is not about him. He is a slave. He is, as he described it in

chapter 2, like someone led as a captive in a triumphal procession behind Christ.

As a minister of the gospel, Paul does not lord it over those to whom he ministers. Rather, he serves them as the slave of Jesus. While he does represent the authority of his master to the Corinthians, he does so as the slave who is charged to serve the guests of his master.

Paul has spoken of a new covenant, and now he brings in themes of new creation. Just as God spoke into darkness in the first creation, so God brings dazzling light into the new creation. Paul acts in the way that he does because God has initiated a work of new creation in his heart, bringing the radiance of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It's possible that Paul is alluding to Isaiah chapter 9 verses 1-2 here as well. The light out of darkness is not just the light of creation, but the eschatological light, the long-awaited light that God brings into the world in Christ. This is a theme that surfaces on various occasions in Paul's writings and also in the New Testament.

For instance, Ephesians chapter 5 verses 6-14, where Paul speaks of Christians as children of the light, brought to life by the light, and now radiating that light themselves. Paul explores paradoxes throughout this epistle. Here it is that of the light that is the light of Christ.

There he presented himself as an example of faithful suffering and true spiritual life, in contrast to the puffed up and arrogant spirituality of the Corinthians, which was no true spirituality at all. Here his point is somewhat different. He is trying to show that the apostles' nearness to death, their sufferings and their weakness actually testifies more effectively to the surpassing strength of God, which works powerfully through their limitations, being more powerfully seen on account of them.

Paul is here expressing in a more general manner what he already spoke about in chapter 1 verses 8-9. Paul compares his weakness to that of an earthen vessel, a fragile and inglorious container that could easily be broken and would readily be discarded. This sharpens the contrast between Paul and the power of God that is at work within him.

The vessel is not a delicate piece of precious pottery, but a cheap and expendable container. The value is entirely the contents. Such humble and unassuming vessels are by far the most appropriate vessels for bearing God's word.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Such an earthen vessel is a vessel of God's creation and a vessel that is completely at

his disposal. In Jeremiah 19 verses 1-2 and 10-11, Israel is compared to a potter's vessel, which the Lord will break. Thus says the Lord, Go by a potter's earthenware flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom, at the entry of the potsherd gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you.

Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and shall say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. A final possible allusion is to the story of Gideon and his three hundred men in Judges chapter 7, who held torches inside earthen jars that they broke. On the outside, what people see when they see Paul and his companions, are people afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, and near to death.

However, there is the power of a new life contained within them, so that their afflictions, sufferings, difficulties, and struggles are not the full picture. In all of these trying situations, they are not crushed, not despairing, not forsaken, and not destroyed. They are carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that Christ's life might also be made manifest in them.

Paul quotes Psalm 116 verse 10, words of confident faith declared by the psalmist even when in the greatest affliction. Paul has the same sort of faith, confident in the resurrection power that will one day raise them up. Death will not be the final word.

They will one day be presented with the Corinthians in the Lord's presence. Paul's entire purpose in undergoing suffering is to bring glory to God and to minister to the people of Christ. As Christ's glory reaches more and more people, the result will be increased thanksgiving to God and greater glorification of Him.

Paul began this chapter by saying that they do not lose heart, and he concludes it by underlining that same point, repeating the same expression. He draws a succession of contrasts between the inner and the outer self, between the self that is visible, temporary, and to be stripped off him in time, and the enduring, invisible, and inner life that comes from the illuminating work of God within. The inner self-outer self opposition is not based upon a soul-body dichotomy.

Rather, the inner self is the self in the sight of God. The outer self is the self in the presence of other human persons. Paul draws a succession of contrasts here, outer self, inner self, wasting away, being renewed day by day, light affliction, weighty glory, momentary affliction, eternal glory, things that are seen, things that are unseen, transient things, eternal things.

Paul is teaching the Corinthians a new way of perceiving reality and their situation here. And he isn't just drawing a contrast between these two states. There is also a

paradoxical connection.

The light momentary affliction is exactly what is preparing us for the eternal weight of glory. The two states are bound up with each other. Philippians 3, 10-11 That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him and his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Being conformed to Christ's death prepares us for resurrection. The inner self is daily being renewed. Just as the outer self is wasting away, the inner self is having its youth continually restored.

Recognising all of this, we must get our values straight. We must think about time differently, measuring the difference between that which is momentary and transient and that which is eternal, the difference between that which endures and that which wastes away. We must have a sense of gravity, discerning the difference between those things that are light and those things that truly have weight.

And as the things that really matter the most are things that are unseen, we must learn to walk by faith rather than by sight. A question to consider. What are some of the ways that the experience of Paul as he describes it in this chapter connects him with Christ?