

God's Government

“For unto us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and **the government will be on his shoulders**. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.**” Isaiah 9:6-7

Read 1 Samuel 12:6-25; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

In these notes we are focusing upon the phrases ‘**the government will be on his shoulders**’ and ‘**Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end**’. The above readings give a context to the notes. 1 Samuel chapter 12 recounts the turning point in Israel’s history when an earthly king was appointed and the passage in 1 Corinthians gives a picture of God’s ultimate purpose and the point in history which he is working towards.

Background and context

Government is God’s blessing, it is a good thing. This was shown in the ensuing chaos in Iraq after the war when the dictator had been removed but no workable plan for government had been put in place. It would also be evident in a football match with no rules or referee! There is a need for government and leadership; that is the way we have been created, we are dependent creatures, ultimately dependent upon the Lord and his rule.

The Israelites faced this issue of government and leadership. Going back before the time of Israel, to the Garden of Eden, man was dependent upon God and that is how it is meant to be - that leads to emotional and spiritual health. When Adam and Eve chose to move out of God’s government, fear and separation came in. God set about establishing that which had been lost in the Garden by calling the nation of Israel, initially through Abraham, to live in a covenant relationship with himself and experience all the blessings of that. In 1 Samuel the history of the nation of Israel and God’s faithfulness is recounted. God established that there is a way to be in relationship with him and that is by submitting to his rule. The Israelites followed Moses and Aaron out of Egypt to the Promised Land but when they rebelled against their leaders and against God they got into trouble. When they submitted to God and their leaders they were fine. God sent Moses and Aaron and the judges listed in 1 Samuel to be his mouthpiece, to lead by his Spirit and to dispense law and order.

However, there came a time when the Israelites, out of fear and lack of trust, rejected Samuel as prophet and asked God for a king to lead them. They wanted a visible, tangible leader. This is an attitude which caused the Israelites trouble and which has caused problems throughout church history - the desire for a physical, tangible presence that becomes some kind of substitute for the more challenging interactive presence of God. It requires more of us to build a living relationship with

God and interact with him and his people than it does to have a practical substitute or idol. It requires more of us to live out that relationship with God in our daily lives allowing his peace and his presence to affect all that we do and are. It is a more difficult route but it is the route that will take us deeper and develop our character and make us into the kind of people who reflect the character of God himself.

In the upper room Jesus told the disciples that it would be better when he had left them, when they no longer had his physical presence with them because he would send his Spirit, the Counsellor, to live within them who would be with them and live in them all the time and in whatever situation they faced. The Spirit of God lives within us and is with us and we can experience the rule and reign of God within our lives here and now.

The Kingdom of God

The phrase 'of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end' tells us a lot about the Kingdom of God.

1. It tells us that government is God's blessing, that it is a good thing and we have to accept it. In the Christian life to submit to God's rule and government is to become free, that is one of the paradoxes of the Christian life. We see that very powerfully in the life of Jesus, he was completely submitted to his Father and had a humble heart.
2. 'Increase' speaks of steady growth. Jesus likened the Kingdom to the leaven in the dough and to a mustard seed, starting small but growing. That is how it works in our lives and, as we start the New Year, God wants the Kingdom of God to grow in our hearts and lives. In practical terms for the disciples, as they walked and talked with Jesus, it meant listening to Jesus, seeing how different their responses were to his - for example when they turned the little children away from him. It means the same for us, to consider whether we respond to situations in the way Jesus would, whether we portray his character in our relationships and interactions.

A New Year challenge

This year the Lord is calling us to walk with him in a very conscious way, listening to his heart, his attitudes, feeling how he feels about the people, the situations, the responses in our lives and evaluating how he would respond. To do so we need to hear and feel the Lord and his response. It means being honest about how we feel about situations and things in our lives but not allowing ourselves to moan or feel sorry for ourselves. Jesus had every reason to complain yet he never complained and he never took his feelings out on others; he was very human, he was honest and real about how difficult the cross was and how troubled his soul was and he wanted the friendship and support of his disciples, he wanted them with him.

If we walk closely with the Lord we cannot but become like him and people will notice that we are different, we will stand out because we walk with Jesus and allow him to challenge what is in our hearts that is not right. It does not mean being soft and sentimental and unable to face reality; rather the opposite is true, we live in reality and we draw on the strength and the goodness and the character of God in every situation.

The end result is 'shalom' which means 'wholeness' and 'completeness'. As we walk with the Lord through this year we will become whole. The Lord wants to strengthen us in those areas where we struggle and are weak, be it by guilt or anxiety or depression, so we can become whole because he is our perfect Father and we have been born anew into his family. As we live and walk together with Jesus there will be no end to the increase of his government and peace in our lives.

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