

“Serve Our Household and Country”

Thank you very much for taking care of the church while I was away on one month of sabbatical. I especially appreciate the support of Rev. Okawa and Rev. Nakajima, as well as the brothers and sisters of God who took the initiative to continue the church’s ministries during the time I was away.

During this month, many things occurred which I could not have ever been prepared for. During my month long sabbatical, I faced numerous unimaginable challenges that under normal circumstances I would not have faced. Right after my sabbatical began, I was informed that my brother-in-law’s daughter passed away. Immediately after I heard the bad news, I went to Ooita pref. to pay my respect. While I was still in Japan there were earthquakes in the Kumamoto pref. and Ooita pref. which the people are still experiencing as I speak. I pray that the many people who evacuated from their homes as a result of the earthquakes have been able to secure a safe place to rest physically and mentally, as well as the restoration of the affected cities and individual homes.

Since we took a break from our series during Holy Week and Easter at the end of March, I will be continuing the series that I left off on March 13th which is based on of this year’s slogan, “In times of health, in times of malady, in times of prosperity, in times of poverty.” Please take look at the book of 1 Samuel for today’s message. In this story, God used Samuel, who was Israel’s prophet for king Saul and his successor David. Today, I would like to first talk about managing a country then transition to managing one’s home.

The book of Samuel is a chronological sequel to book of Judges.

That is why at the close of Judges, it is written, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.”(Judges 21:25) During the era of Judges the people of Israel did as they pleased, but after 400 years they felt that they could not go on living they way they were, so in the book of Samuel they pleaded with Samuel for a king. “They said to him, ‘You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.’”(Samuel 8:5)

Above were written about Israelites to entreat king for themselves.

Before Saul became the King of Israel, the nation was governed by the heads of the tribes of Israel and also governed intermittently by people called the judges. When

May 1, 2016 “Serve our household and country”

Saul became king, it was the first time the nation of Israel would be unified under a monarchy. From then on, this monarchy would be at the center of how the nation of Israel ruled itself.

Presently, our world changes on a daily basis. The United States', Japan's, and the world's growing trends are something that we must keep a careful eye on.

This year there is a presidential election-taking place here in the U.S.; we are choosing our nation's leader. Although, the United States is not a monarchy like ancient Israel, the president has the authority to direct the immense amount of power our country holds, so we can still learn from the mistakes and successes of the Israelites.

During the era of the judges, people governed their lives and beliefs individually. Presently, the citizens of both the United States and Japan do the same thing. We live in a world in which we are free to live our lives according to what we believe. However, this freedom that we find ourselves surrounded by is causing us to lose sight of what should be most important to us.

In this country we used to allow prayer in schools, and the Ten Commandments were respected and displayed in public places. However, presently those values and beliefs are almost non-existent. Furthermore, we are not even allowed to mention god no matter what religion you may believe. It has gotten to the point in which a simple cross on a hill results in a lawsuit for its removal. Today, we have forgotten the beliefs that founded our nation, and instead pick leaders whose positions we can personally gain from in an effort to make our lives easier. With this in mind, in six months we will find out who will be the next leader of this nation.

Why did the Israelites want to be united by a monarchy? After 400 years of individualistic governing of themselves, the Israelites realized that division was not beneficial for the country, so they asked Samuel to provide them with a king. The underlying reason for their desire to unify Israel with a single king was the presence of their greatest enemy the Philistines.

During that time, the Philistines occupied the Mediterranean coast and were trying to extend their territory east into Israel. At the time the Philistines commanded a very formidable military. The Israelites believed it would not be wise to face such a strong opponent while divided into tribes. This is why amongst the Israelites the idea of unification was brought forward. The circumstance has not been changed for today in

May 1, 2016 “Serve our household and country”

our society. In the recent trends of the Middle East and Asia, with our global war on terror our elected leader must lead us in the face of the menace of other foreign countries and choose right direction for his country.

Because of this, the Israelites lost faith in their God as the true King of Israel. The Israelites used to be bound together because of their faith in God. With the absence of God as their leader, the Israelites wanted someone who would make decisions for them. With the establishment of a king, the Israelites removed the role of God as the leader from the country. What happened to the Israelites is the exact same thing that is happening to us today in our own country.

At this time, the Israelites felt very uneasy with the direction they were heading. Likewise, in modern times, don't we all worry about our future? We all have the fear of not knowing what will happen in the future. We are disorganized and lack a sense of direction. This uneasiness, lack of organization and direction may be the catalyst for a return to faith in God. But, the Israelites, instead of returning to God, wanted a man, a strong leader who would lead them. Likewise in this modern era, the more the times become uncertain the more people look to political leaders who have strong policies. (When I visited Japan this time, I saw a bestseller in bookstores everywhere. The book describes the type of leader the Japanese covet. One such leader used to be the Prime Minister of Japan. He was very charismatic, had strong leadership skills and was held up an idea of “Structural Altering of the Japanese Islands”.)

In those days in Israel, people wanted strong leader because they were worried about Samuel's old age but not only that also there was the other reason.

At the beginning of the book of Samuel, there was a high priest by the name of Eli. 40 years before the Israelites desired a King, Eli judged the Israelites and led them. Because he was the High Priest of Israel not only did he solve problems related to the country, he also lead his people in spiritual matters. In addition, Eli apprenticed Samuel.

Because Eli was the High Priest of Israel, all the Israelites knew him. He was responsible for representing the people of Israel to God. However, Eli had a problem that had to do with his household - his two sons. As the sons of Eli, the two were next in line to become High Priests. However, the sons would take offerings of meat dedicated to God for themselves. When the people commented about their

May 1, 2016 “Serve our household and country”

actions the brothers would threaten them and forcibly take their offerings for themselves. These sons also had nefarious relations with the female servants of the shrine. The Bible says, “Eli’s sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord.” (1 Samuel 2:12) Even though Eli was the High Priest, he favored his sons more than God (1 Samuel 2:29) When Eli heard of what his sons were doing; he gave them an initial warning against their wrongdoings. (1 Samuel 2:24) However, his sons continued to act against God and Eli did nothing to stop them. (1 Samuel 3:13).

This is why God placed Samuel as the inheritor of Eli’s position instead of Eli’s sons. When young Samuel was serving under Eli, God would often wake Samuel in the middle of the night to talk to him. Eli asked Samuel what God said to him. The message that God gave to Samuel was **13** For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God,[a] and he failed to restrain them. **14** Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘the guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’” (1 Samuel 3:13-14) It was very hard for Samuel to tell his teacher Eli what God said, but young Samuel told Eli about God’s message. Eli knew that he had no excuse for God’s punishment and accepted God’s judgment. As God foretold to Samuel, Eli and his son died as a result of their actions. Samuel took the position of High Priest and became the leader of the Israelites. The Bible states “**19** The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. **20** And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.” (1 Samuel 3:19-20) After that time, Samuel became the person that would dedicate the first King of Israel, Saul and the Second King, David with oil.

However, even Samuel had a problem of his own. What do you think that was? He had the same exact problem as Eli. “When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel’s leaders.[a] **2** The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. **3** But his sons did not follow his ways.” (1 Samuel 8:1-3)

When Samuel was younger he told Eli about God’s stern words about Eli’s sons’ sin. Samuel knew the wickedness that Eli’s sons did. He also saw how his teacher Eli treated his sons on the matter. Yet, Samuel’s sons did not grow in the way that God found pleasing.

I have said previously that one of the reasons the Israelites wanted a King was because Samuel grew old, but that was not the only reason why. So what do you

May 1, 2016 “Serve our household and country”

think the other reason was for this desire? This is what the Elders of Israel said to Samuel, “5 They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead[b] us, such as all the other nations have.”(1 Samuel 8:5) Samuel’s sons were working with their father in the political situation of Israel. If they followed their father’s belief the Israelites would not have wanted a king. Instead they would have listened to the words of their prophets and placed God in the center of their lives. This would have applied to Eli and his sons as well.

Brothers and sisters, Eli was the High Priest, he represented the Israelites and was the only person who could enter the Holy of Holies and Samuel’s reputation was renowned throughout Israel as the dedicator of the kings with oil and prayer as he appointed the kings to their posts of God. These men had the right to debate about matters of the country and influence the nation’s fate. But, in spite of their positions the two had a common problem in their households. Although they had very important position in the government of their country, they could not take care of the thing closest to them, which were their own children.

In today’s society there are many people who are successful. Many people recognize their success and praise them for it. However, most people don’t know the condition of the successful men’s households. Society only knows the success of the businesses but do not know the cost in tears within the households. A businessman who leads a thousand subordinates successfully may not have a good relationship with the people of his family.

My niece’s sudden death taught me a lesson. My brother-in-law has another daughter who is 7 years old. It was April 4th, still during spring break. They went to a restaurant to eat, then went to view the cherry blossoms. My niece told her family that she wanted to view the cherry blossoms from the car where she could rest. It was during that time alone in the car that she went to heaven. My brother-in-law told me, “ It was the last supper with my daughter”. After eating dinner it did not occur to them that 2 hours later their daughter would pass away, that dinner would be her last dinner. He accepted that indeed it was their last dinner with her. Sometimes, things like this happen among us. Since we do not have the ability to foresee our future we live without knowing what will happen to us even an hour from now. For example, take the recent earthquake in Japan, nobody knew the earthquake was coming. I thought, “Many people may have regrets because that was last time they would see someone”. Often after losing something we realize the value of the lost thing. As long as we live on the earth these kinds of things are inevitable.

May 1, 2016 “Serve our household and country”

Often we hear, “I cannot help it because I have to provide my family,” or, “I am so busy that I do not have time for it,” or, “My values are different from yours,” yes, these are important to consider. But if we look at things through the eyes of faith, we will realize that, “We chose the jobs ourselves” and “the family you have, God has given to you”. If we understand this based on our faith, there is no reason that we should use our job as an excuse to neglect our family. Raising our family with the belief in the existence of God is the more important than accomplishing something big in business. This idea is certain to have a big impact on the world.

There is no such a phrase as, “what if “ in history; however, what if Eli and Samuel could have managed their families, then the Israelites might not have needed a king. In this manner, our families and countries are not to be broken apart, but are to be tied together. Certainly, each family is small in comparison to the country, but the collection of these small units is what makes up our country. Nowadays, people cry out for “World Peace” , but nobody is aware that the implementation of “World Peace” will not be possible unless we pursue the belief that “peace exists in families that God is present in”.

Everybody who believes in God knows that placing God at the center of one’s family all the time is easier said than done. No doubt, I will think “God, who is able to maintain peace in his family all the time?” It is impossible to accomplish/to fulfill anything without God’s wisdom, strength and love. Therefore, let us commune with God every day and seek necessary aid from God. It might be difficult to restore the past, but what is important is the future. Eli and Samuel must have worried about their families. Our family backgrounds are all different, but we should not overlook the grief of Eli and Samuel, rather we should learn from it.

Today, I talked about Israel’s new form of government and the change in the conditions of the human heart. By learning from the monarchical system and the heart of the Israelites, we can now improve our own country and all the nations in the world through the Bible. We, believers of God and the Bible, have been entrusted with the Bible and are to live by it. By reading the Bible, we can see the truth and nature of the problems we have. We must consider why these problems occur and take into consideration the condition of the doer’s heart. In this way we must also decide how we are to live our lives in this country. We must look hard at the reality of our own world, which tries to exclude our God. If you read the book of Samuel, then you will understand what the monarchy brought the Israelites. When

May 1, 2016 “Serve our household and country”

you know the path that the Israelite chose, then you will not be surprised or doubt what you hear and see regarding anything in the Bible because what happened is already written in the Bible.

And do not forget about when Israel was facing transformation to a monarchy; the Bible already drew attention to Eli and Samuel’s households, which were in turmoil. A man holding a big dream, like governing a country, establishing a company, running a business or being assigned to a new project are all fascinating events for anyone. However, the most important thing for us to do is to turn our hearts toward our own family who are entrusted directly by God.

Consequently, the title of today’s sermon is “ Serve Our Household and Country”. Both things are very important for us. But I purposely placed the title in this order. In order to serve one’s country’s it must be understood that the country’s future is dependent upon the how each and every household puts God into the center of their lives. Whether a country’s condition is good or bad, or the future outlook is secure or not, we must be with God every day. This fact does not change whether in the past or in the present. Let us pray.