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“Give Us a King”



**A Sermon Delivered by
HARRIS J. DARK
At Franklin Road Church of Christ
Nashville 4, Tennessee**

"Give Us a King"

AFTER the children of Israel came out of Egyptian bondage and God took Moses away from them, Joshua was appointed to be their leader. He led them in the conquest of the land of Canaan. When Joshua passed away "the Lord raised up judges" to oversee them. That was God's plan and it prevailed for something like 400 years, Samuel being the last in that line of judges.

When Samuel was old, he appointed his sons to do much of his work. His sons were unfaithful. They "turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." (I Samuel 8:4.)

"Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah; and they 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 displeased 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." (I Samuel 8:4-7.)

Please note that last statement: "They have rejected me that I should not reign over them."

Israel Rejected God

In substituting their own plan for the one which God had given them, the Jews rejected God. In this request for a king like the nations about them they were

taking the example of their neighbors as their standard instead of the will of God. It makes little difference what the particular issue might have been, when they took "the nations" instead of God's will for their standard of conduct, the sin would have been basically the same. They rejected God.

God does not force people to do that which is right. He allows them to exercise freedom of choice. When people are determined to do that which is evil, He gives them rope enough to hang themselves. That's what happened in this case.

However, He told Samuel to warn the people about the sort of king that would reign over them. And Samuel said, "This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots; and he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties, and he will set them to plow his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day." (I Samuel 8:11-18.)

Even after such warning, they still said, "Nay; but we will have a king over us;

that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." (I Samuel 8:20.) So the Lord let them have a king. He let them hang themselves. Later He said, "I gave thee a king in mine anger and I took him away in my wrath." (Hosea 13:11.) So even though the Lord tolerated this, He was never pleased with it.

It came to pass just as Samuel had warned the people. Things appeared to go well for awhile, but when Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, came to the throne the people petitioned him saying, "Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee." (I Kings 12:4.) He answered them roughly saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." (I Kings 12:14.) Things went from bad to worse until both parts of this kingdom, now divided, were finally taken into captivity.

God's Plan Is Workable

Our failure to work at God's plan does not justify our substituting our own plan for His. It is true that the people in this instance were failing to properly follow God's plan. Samuel's sons turned out to be unfaithful. That created a bad situation. They should have been made to reform or some faithful men put in their place. In other words, the people should have tried to make God's plan work. They could have done so. It had been working for many centuries. *Under God's plan of government* they had been led out of Egyptian bondage; they had been guided safely through the wilderness; and they had conquered the land of Canaan. If they

had insisted upon following God's plan, success would have continued to be theirs. Instead of correcting the evils that existed they said, "Give us a king. Let us have a plan like the nations about us."

Family Responsibility

We should never use our own failure to work diligently at God's plan as an excuse for substituting some other method or arrangement.

In the fifth chapter of First Timothy the Holy Spirit said by the pen of Paul, "But if any widow have children or grandchildren let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. . . . But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. . . . If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."

You see this chapter teaches emphatically that one should provide for his children, his parents, his grandparents, his widowed kin, those who by nature are dependent upon him. One who refuses to do this is worse than an infidel. This duty pertains to the home, the family.

What if the home fails in this duty and children are not taken care of as they should be? What if people leave their fathers and mothers and aged relatives to be cared for by someone else? What should we do about it? Should we say, "Give us a king?" Should we substitute some other plan or some other organization or institution to do that which God ordained that the home should do? Or should we do everything within our power to restore the

family, to teach people to make their homes what God would have them be?

"If any man or woman that believeth have widows let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; . . ." That makes a clear distinction between an individual Christian duty and the duty of the assembly of the saints. That doesn't say you should relieve them if it's convenient. It doesn't say relieve them if you can do it without mortgaging your home. It doesn't say relieve them provided you can keep on riding in a fine automobile while you do it. It just says, "relieve them." If you don't do it, when it is within your power to do so, you have denied the faith, and you are worse than an infidel.

In many instances couples who were able to take care of their own children have left them to the charge of someone else just because they wanted to be free of the responsibility. Some concrete examples have come under my own personal observation. A man and wife, both of whom were working, each making enough to support the family as far as necessities were concerned, made a request that a place be found for their children in an "orphans' home."

What needs to be done about such a problem? Take the children and relieve the parents of their responsibility? Or teach them to do their duty?

Last week I heard Brother G. C. Brewer state that in Tipton Orphan Home only 3% of the children were orphans in the full sense of that word. Just three out of a hundred! As far as I know, Tipton Orphan Home is typical in that respect.

Demand Greater Than Supply

It is easy to provide for that 3% and for all the others who are available for adoption. According to today's *Tennessean*,

for every child subject to adoption in this state there are five homes waiting. Those who are orphans in the full sense of the word are usually adoptable, unless some of their close relatives prefer to take them in which case they would be no longer dependent. It seems to me that whoever exercises his right to refuse to let a child be adopted into a Christian home thereby accepts responsibility for the child.

The United States Department of Welfare states that for every child available for adoption, there are fifteen homes waiting. The Vanderbilt Law Review puts it at thirty. When I asked Dr. John Cayce to help me find one, he said that he had one hundred applications for every such child. So far as orphans are concerned there is no problem except the problem of finding enough to go around to the people who want them.

Where do all the other children in the "orphan homes" come from? Some of them represent cases of genuine and legitimate need. They should be cared for according to God's plan and will. In other instances they come from fathers and mothers who should be taking care of them. Readily relieving such couples of their parental obligations encourages a breakdown of the family and home—maybe even a home where the father and mother are both members of the Lord's church.

Shall we try to work God's plan or shall we say, "Give us a king?" If we would spend as much money, time, and effort advertising, teaching and restoring the family to its God-given function as is being done and spent to promote some substitute plan, our problem, I think would largely disappear.

God's Plan for the Church

Let us turn to another situation which

perhaps more exactly parallels what happened in the Old Testament incident under consideration. It was God's plan to rule the people through judges but they said, "Give us a king to rule over us." Coming now to the New Testament we find that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18; Matt. 28:18.) All authority hath been given unto Him in heaven and on earth.

According to the Bible there is no head for the church on this earth. Jesus is the king. He is on David's throne. He is the head of the church. Through the apostles who have given us God's word in this book we call the Bible, He is reigning and ruling over all of those who are faithfully following Him.

According to this divine plan, each congregation is entirely independent under God and no Christian is answerable to any other person upon this earth. Christians associate themselves together in small groups called congregations for the purpose of worshiping God and carrying out certain functions that he has given us to do as a group. The only organization even in the congregation is that which is necessary to get the job done.

That's God's plan—Christ the head over all; each congregation amenable directly unto Christ; no congregation having any power, authority or jurisdiction over any other congregation. Furthermore, in God's plan there is no central organization of any sort having any jurisdiction over the congregations. Just as surely as we can take the church in the days of the apostles as our example, just as surely as what they tell us is a complete plan for God's people, then that is God's plan.

The Order of the Day

The above plan is not according to *human* wisdom. It is not the plan that pre-

vails in the world. All about us, in every type of association I can think of, there is what might be called a pyramid organization coming to a point with one man or one office and then spreading out again. For instance, take our national government. It comes to a point in the president's office. The people elect him. Then he has others working under him. But everything comes to a focus in his office.

The same thing is true in our state government. It's usually true with business organizations. There is one man called the chairman, or the president of the company, and everything comes to a point as far as administration and executive affairs are concerned in that one man or that one office. It's true in our school system. We have our superintendent of schools. He has a great many people working under him, supervisors, principals, and teachers spreading out like a fan. He, in turn, is amenable to the people who put him in office. But all comes to a point in the superintendent's office. That's the order of the day.

God just didn't see fit to organize His church that way. I have no argument about that plan as far as worldly affairs are concerned. I'm not discussing that. As far as I know, it is all right in those realms. But that's not God's plan for God's church.

The other day I heard someone explaining a fault of another by saying, "It's the order of the day." Well, what if it is the order of the day? Does that prove that it's right? There are many things which are the order of the day, but shall we be like the nations about us? Shall we take them as our example? If so, we will be figuratively saying as the Jews did of old, "Give us a king."

God's ways are above man's ways, and his thoughts are above our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth,

so God's thoughts and God's ways are above ours. (Isa. 55:9.) Shall we follow the plan that He has given, or shall we be guilty of saying, "Give us a king?"

History Repeats Itself

What happened in Israel's case has been repeated in the church which Jesus established. The Roman Catholic Church is the result of that sort of attitude. It did not come about in a day, or a year, or a century. It came about, or has come about, in almost two milleniums. It came very gradually, as centralized government always does, apparently very innocent in the beginning, with just a few brethren getting together for fellowship, maybe to eat dinner together or something else. They never thought it would grow into anything bad. If you could have shown them the Roman Catholic Church which has come through centuries of apostasy or drifting, it would have scared them to death. Yet what they did then has resulted in what we have now.

Some preachers in Nashville used to eat lunch together each Monday. Bro. F. L. Srygley attended but he warned us about the danger of it. I attended a similar meeting in Birmingham recently. The brother who invited me said, "We don't have any speech making. We just meet together to enjoy each other's company. We have agreed that church problems will not be discussed at all. We just have a social hour together." That sounded pretty good to me.

In another city of similar size preachers get together once a month and they discuss the problems of the local churches and make decisions concerning them. I've heard it said that they have what practically amounts to a preachers' union. They

are not as wise as the brethren in Birmingham.

Such things always begin in a small, apparently innocent way. I don't have time to outline the history of the departure which has led to Catholicism and denominationalism. That would be a whole sermon within itself. One "little" thing led on to another, until the Roman Catholics have one man on earth whom they regard as the head of the church—the vicegerent of Jesus Christ "Lord God the Pope" as they call him.

They have completed this system which is the order of the day. I suspect they have the most powerful organization on the earth tonight, coming together to one point in the office of the so-called Pope. They have said by their actions, "Give us a king." They not only have a king but they have a god from their point of view. It may appear to work for awhile but just as surely as it led to trouble in Israel's history, it will lead to trouble every time it is tried.

Reformation and Restoration

The organization of the church is usually the first point on which apostasy occurs; and the last on which reformation takes place. History demonstrates this.

An effort to restore the scriptural organization of the church is the chief distinction between what is known as the reformation movement and what is known as the restoration movement. The reformation movement in which such men as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others were prominent, undertook to reform the Catholic Church on a great many points but they did not attempt to reform it, and did not follow the Bible plan in their own movements, on this matter of organization.

One of the chief characteristics of denominationalism is this centralized form

of government, coming together in a point with one man or one small group of individuals, called by a different name in the different denominations.

The reformers didn't get back to the Bible plan of organization. The leaders in the restoration movement attempted to do so, and to a great measure they succeeded. Typical of their efforts in this matter were the repudiation of the authority of the Methodist Church by James O'Kelly and his associates in 1801, the writing of the last will and testament of the Springfield Presbytery in 1804, (this was before Alexander Campbell came to America, he was still a teen-age school boy in the old country when it took place) and the dissolution of the Mahoning Baptist Association in 1827. They were trying to get back to the Bible plan and reversed what had happened when their fathers said, "Give us a king."

That looked pretty good. It was good. It was just right in fact. But it's sad to say that that point of view was not constantly maintained. A few years later, Alexander Campbell, and some others, began to agitate for what they called cooperation among the congregations. As a result, the American Christian Missionary Society came into existence in 1849, and growing out of that a number of other associations, all of which have now been combined in what is known as the United Christian Missionary Society.

The United Christian Missionary Society

This society represents the churches. It was created by the churches, the congregations. The congregations send representatives to it just like we send representatives to Washington. Those representatives make the laws by which the society is to be governed, and to the extent that their representatives have their

wishes, and to the extent that the representatives represent the congregations, the congregations control the society.

The society in turn spreads out in the other direction and carries on a program of missionary work, maintenance of hospitals, homes for the aged, orphans' homes, schools, and such like. But where does that put what is known as the Disciples of Christ Church? For all practical purposes, that puts them right back where the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Baptists are. They have a central organization to which they send their representatives and their money, which organization makes decisions for the churches and spends their money for them. Unless I am mistaken, and I have been studying this matter for twenty-five or thirty years, they have said in effect, "Give us a king." They have done just what the Israelites did a long time ago. Instead of working at God's plan—and it is workable—they have substituted their own instead.

The Current Cry

There are many brethern among us who do not understand these things, who have not studied them. Today they are crying for things which the denominations have. There are not very many who will openly say, "Let us have a central organization." There are some who will. There are some in Nashville who say that. Frequently we hear the expression, "Oh, just think what the churches in Nashville could do if we would just all get together." I don't know how many times I have heard that. Well, just think what the churches in Nashville could do if we'd all work independently, if we'd all work according to the plan that God has given us.

The people who use that expression don't know what they are saying, they do not intend to be digressive. They don't

want to encourage an apostasy. They don't know what they are saying in effect, "Give us a king."

I am sure if they were aware of what their statement implies and signifies, that they would not use it any more. It has become my duty and your duty to try to enlighten them upon that point.

We hear a cry today that the church secure a hospital. People say, "Let the church do this" and "let the church do that" when they haven't thought the matter through.

Some have lamented the fact that the churches of Christ did not buy what is now called the Mid-State Baptist Hospital. They say, "Oh, if the churches of Christ had only beat them to it."

What are they taking for their standard? I just dare you to find anything in the Bible about the church's owning and operating a hospital. That's not where they got it. Where did they get it? They got it from "the nations" about us. The Baptists, the Catholics, and other denominations have hospitals. So somebody says, "Let us have one."

Where did they get the idea? You might read the Bible for a hundred years and you would never find it there. Had to get it from somewhere else. What are you taking for the standard? God's word, or the nations about you?

Until we have a central organization representing the churches, it's impossible for God's congregations to own and control any sort of an institution. Before the churches in Nashville could get a deed to a hospital, even if somebody wanted to give us one, we would have to create a central organization to hold the title to the property. We would have to create a denominational headquarters before we could even get started.

Yet we say, "Oh, we don't want any de-

nominal organization. We don't want a central headquarters." But we want to do the things that are done by those who do have one! That leads to complications. The churches cannot jointly own and control anything until they create a central agency through which to do it. The very minute we do that, we will be right where our denominational neighbors are. In fact, we'll be a denomination, for that's the principal characteristic of one. People thoughtlessly are crying for something which they cannot possibly have without at the same time having something else which they themselves say they do not want.

A Good Example

The simplest plan, the best plan, and the right plan, is to do just what the Bible says—each congregation doing its own work as Franklin Road is doing. Franklin Road is doing every phase of work that God wants a congregation to do and doing it without adopting the principle of "Give us a king." We may not be doing as much of it as we should, but we are doing some of all of it, and we can start doing more any time we will, and yet we are not involved in any inter-congregational enterprise. We have not surrendered to the cry for a king. What Franklin Road is doing other congregations can do if they will.

The Current Trend

There are some who realizing that we should not have a central organization try to substitute something else. What happens? A group of men volunteer to act as the central agency for the churches. They are not selected by the churches. They do not represent the churches. They are not answerable to the churches. They

volunteer their services and form themselves into a corporation and in effect say, "We'll do for the churches of Christ just what the Baptist Sunday School Board does for the Baptists, what the Presbytery or Synod does for the Presbyterians, what the Conference does for the Methodists, and what the United Christian Missionary Society does for our digressive brethren. We will serve as your central agency, as your clearing house."

What's the difference? It is admitted that the denominational plan binds the congregations together more closely and in that respect is more objectionable. But there is also another difference. In the case of denominations, they have a control over their central agency; they send representatives to it. In this other case we have no control over the members of the board. We didn't select them. They are not answerable to us. The only thing they expect us to do is to furnish the money.

Do you think that's good? Is taxation without representation any better than taxation with representation? If taxation with representation in this matter is wrong, do you prefer taxation without representation? Which do you prefer—intercongregational enterprises with intercongregational organization to own and control them, or the enterprises without ownership and control?

There is much else we could say along this line but we must hasten to cite some other examples of the "give us a king" principle.

One Man Rule

Among the denominations we see this same plan of centralized control within the congregation. They have one man in the congregation whom they call the pastor. He is the central agent. He is the focal point within the congregation. In

that matter, shall we say, "Give us a king?" Or shall we stick to the Bible plan of a plurality of overseers in each congregation?

In many congregations of the Lord's people there is a tendency toward one man rule. In some instances that one man is the preacher; in others he is one of the elders. I know a case where they have elders but that one man who runs things is someone else who tells the elders what to do. That one "man" might even be a woman, the wife of one of the elders, who tells him what to have the others do. It makes no difference whether that one man is the preacher, an elder, or someone else, the principle is just the same. The Bible plan is a plurality of elders or overseers in each congregation—wherever there are men qualified to serve as such.

The other plan may *appear* to be better. It may look like it gets better results. You may be in favor of dictatorship in politics. You may be in favor of a strong centralized government in Washington, I'm not arguing that point. I'm talking about God's plan for God's church. When we set aside that plan for some human plan borrowed from our neighbors, then we reject God, just as the Jews of old did.

Entertainment

The denominations try to hold their people together by programs of entertainment and recreation in the church. If I understand it correctly, the Bible places on the home the responsibility of providing recreation and entertainment. Shall we be like the nations about us on that point, or shall we stick to the Bible plan?

God's Power to Save

Ever since I can remember I've heard

the Catholic Church quoted as saying, "Give us a child from seven to twelve. He'll always be a Catholic." That sounded good to me when I first heard it. But the Bible says that the gospel is God's power unto salvation. (Romans 1:16.)

There are some today who think that our best opportunity to make Christians is to get children while they are infants and put things in their mind before they are able to decide for themselves. I'm in favor of parents teaching and training their children. I know that Solomon said, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6.) But there are some you can't train. If you could take a child from seven to twelve and train him so he would always be what you wanted him to be, regardless of his own wishes in the matter, that would deny him the power of choice. Anything that rules out the power of choice on the part of the individual is basically wrong.

You can take one whom the Catholics have trained from seven to twelve, or from seven to eighteen, or from seven to thirty, and preach unto him the gospel of Christ and if his heart is good and honest he will be converted. When the word falls into good and honest hearts it brings forth fruit abundantly, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold. To overlook the fact that the gospel is God's power unto salvation and try to copy the Catholics on this point is to take the nations about us as our standard.

Emphasis on Numbers

The denominations place great emphasis upon numbers. A few years ago I got a letter calling for a mass meeting of the churches in middle Tennessee. (No one on earth has any right to call such a meeting.) The letter included this statement,

"Certain denominations have had big gatherings in Nashville lately, impressing the public very noticeably. Let this be OUR turn to demonstrate our numerical strength and loyalty to the cause in this county."

Denominations make census reports to the United States government. They'll tell you how many members they have. Those reports are padded, I can tell you that. There was a county in Virginia that reported more members of a certain denomination than there were people living in the county. They claimed a lot of people who didn't even live in the county. They were already dead or had moved away. So those statistics are not very reliable.

The phase of applied mathematics which interests me most is that of statistics. I used to think I would like to get myself appointed by the United States government as a statistician for the churches of Christ. I was going to find out how many there were, and how many members there were, and how much money they were spending for this and that and the other. But I was taking my cue from what the denominations were doing.

Furthermore, I wouldn't know whom to count. If I were counting the churches of Christ in Tennessee and ran across one as bad as the church at Corinth, I might not want to count it. But the Lord counted Corinth and wrote it a letter and called it the "church of God which is at Corinth." So I wouldn't always know whom to count among the churches. I wouldn't know whether the congregation's candlestick had been removed. Nobody knows but the Lord. There is only one accurate church roll in existence and it's not on earth. It's the Book of Life, the Lord's roll in heaven.

Conclusion

Let us not make the mistake that Israel

of old made when they said, "Give us a king." In doing that they rejected God, because they were rejecting God's plan of government and setting up their own instead. The Bible furnishes the Christian completely unto every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) The instructions and approved examples which we have in the New Testament furnish the Lord's congregations on earth today an opportunity to use all their resources in doing that which is good according to a plan that the Lord himself has given. When we do that we shall not be rejecting God, we shall be following His plan. Let us never be guilty of saying in word or practice, "Give us a king."

What we've said about God's plan for church government of course applies to his plan of salvation. If you are here tonight and have never conformed to that plan of believing, repenting, confessing your faith, and being baptized for the remission of sins, we beg of you to do so tonight. We invite you to make your choice known while we stand to sing.



NOTE: This sermon was electrically recorded when delivered by Harris J. Dark at the Franklin Road Church of Christ, Franklin Road at Caldwell Lane, Nashville 4, Tennessee. At the request of some interested brethren, he gave his permission for it to be transcribed and published in tract form. For additional copies, without cost, write to Harris J. Dark, 1103 Morrow Avenue, Nashville 4, Tennessee

