

"Lost in the Wilderness?"

1 Samuel 8:19–22

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Background

Against the disdain our culture tends to have towards "sheeple", an old Children's Ministry worship song declares, "I just wanna be a sheep (baa!)". This desire is nobler than it may seem: sheep have terrible eyesight and almost no natural defenses, but they have decent enough hearing to distinguish between the voices of those they trust and those who would do them harm. Which raises the question, how many adult humans possess the discernment of a sheep? Whose voice can we trust to lead us home, and who's just pulling the wool over our eyes? Join us this Sunday for the third and final installment in our miniseries, "Israel: Like All the Other Nations?"

Sermon Text 1 Samuel 8:19-22

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

²¹ When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. ²² The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the Israelites, "Everyone go back to your own town."

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?
- What is the best thing you heard on Sunday?

2. Sunday Questions:

1. The Temptation of the "Cave" vs. Faithful Presence

The sermon opens with the humorous yet poignant story of Shrek the Sheep, with the speaker confessing a sense of jealousy toward Shrek's six years spent hiding in a cave. The speaker connects this to a collective exhaustion caused by cultural noise, political tension, and rapid, uncomfortable changes within the church body.

- **Discussion Question:** How do we distinguish between a healthy, Christ-like withdrawal for rest and an unhealthy "cave mentality" that isolates us, wraps us in a comfort blanket, and ultimately blinds us to the world around us? What does it practically look like to remain "present" to a changing world or church environment when everything inside us wants to hide?

2. Deconstructing the "Logic of Empire"

The text heavily contrasts the "logic of Empire" with the way of the True King. Samuel warns that a worldly king will only know how to do one thing: *take, take, take*. In contrast, Jesus reveals that the hallmark of the Good Shepherd is the willingness to *give*—specifically, to lay down His life for the sheep.

- **Discussion Question:** The logic of Empire is centered on seizing, consolidating, and maintaining power, profit, or prestige. In what subtle, day-to-day ways do we accidentally adopt this same logic in our careers, family dynamics, or personal relationships when we feel anxious or out of control? How can we pivot toward the self-denying, giving love of the Good Shepherd in those exact spaces?

3. The Discipline of Getting What We Want

A striking turning point in the text notes that God instructed Samuel three times to listen to the Israelites and give them the king they demanded. The speaker suggests that "getting what we want isn't always a blessing... Sometimes, giving

us what we want is how God teaches us to want something better or entirely different."

- **Discussion Question:** Can you share a time in your life when getting exactly what you prayed for or demanded ultimately exposed your misplaced desires? How can a community or an individual discern whether their intense desires are aligned with God's best, or if they are simply trying to trade away their "true glory for status in the eyes of the world"?

4. Overruling Judgments with Transcendent Mercy

The sermon makes the provocative statement that "our God breaks other people's promises". The speaker notes that while Samuel's theological warning was completely accurate—and God had every right to turn His back on Israel when they suffered under their chosen kings—God chose to overrule that boundary out of sheer compassion .

- **Discussion Question:** What does this tension between God's absolute right to execute judgment and His choice to erupt in mercy tell us about His core character ? How should this reality challenge the rigid boundaries we sometimes place on who we think is "deserving" of God's forgiveness, or who we think God is "supposed to hate" ?

5. Tuning Our Ears to the Shepherd's Voice

The text points out that domesticated sheep have poor eyesight, a mediocre sense of smell, and virtually no natural defenses—but they *can* recognize their shepherd's distinct voice . Jesus states that His sheep will run from a stranger because they don't recognize a stranger's voice.

- **Discussion Question:** The modern world is a "cacophony" of competing voices—political ideologies, social media metrics, cultural expectations, and internal anxieties . If the Shepherd's voice is consistently characterized by self-denying love, mercy, forgiveness, and scriptural truth, what specific spiritual practices help us "tune our hearing" to His frequency so we don't accidentally follow a "hired hand" ?