

My mom kept a scrapbook of my early years. She stapled in Mother's Day cards and report cards. Artwork and certificates of all sorts have prominent places. Every once and a while I found that book and it was like walking back in time. Right there could be seen how I changed through the years. It was a good reminder of my boyhood accomplishments.

Samuel was the prophet, judge, and leader of the people of Israel. But that wasn't enough for them. Other nations had kings and they demanded one too. What they needed to do was to pull out the scrapbook of their early years to be reminded of how they had changed and what they had accomplished. They needed to really ask themselves if demanding a king was the right thing to do. But the scrapbook of their past clearly showed they hadn't changed in good ways and their accomplishments were zero on their own.

Forgetting the past can be easy. We look at today and forget what got us here. We may even distort the view to make ourselves look better. That's when pulling out the scrapbook of our faith can be important. That's what we have opportunity to do in the first lesson. Samuel leads us to...

**Consider God's good works to you
Changed you into his people
Caused you to serve him in love**

With approval ratings where they are it may seem the American public just doesn't like any elected politician these days. But few are calling for throwing out this style of government to replace it with something else. Israel was rejecting God in a way just like that. No more did they want his guiding and protection. No more did they want him leading them or watching over them. God had been their king since he called them out of Egypt. But now they wanted an earthly king like everybody else.

Rejection and revolt, complaining and forgetting; they had done a lot of evil against the Lord. Samuel reviewed it for them like flipping through a scrapbook. Suddenly there was much to be afraid of with God. **"Do not be afraid, Samuel replied."** The Lord had not abandoned them. Instead he chose them. Was it their potential? Were they the best of the best on earth? **"For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people."** It had nothing to do with them and everything to do with God's name. The great name of the Lord describes him as the loving, saving, faithful Lord. He's slow to anger and mercifully forgiving. Amazingly this evil doing people would be the lineage for the Savior of the whole world. It was God's good works towards them.

When we go to the doctor for a consultation we expect they'll use their knowledge to find us a cure. Sometimes we expect miracles. But do we always stop and ask God for help for the day to day hurts? Do we even consult God at all? That doctor can be a useless idol like Samuel warned about. That doctor is useless without the power and knowledge that God gives. Unlike the Israelites we can get really comfortable with our specific kind of government. We like it when the government educates us, protects us, and cares for us when we're older. Have we forgotten our true leader and king? The government is useless without the authority the Lord grants. It's useless without the people God gives to provide the services we require. We've granted power to the useless and looked to what can't sustain us to be rescued.

Consider again the good works of God to you. You have a new name because of God's name. Like a parent finding joy in giving gifts to children, so God finds it a joy and pleasure to save you by his grace. It was his pleasure to rescue you from the tragedy of sin. It was the most loving thing when he sent Jesus to save you from death. God was merciful when he made you his own. These are the ultimate in God's good works. His good works in Christ are the basis for God calling you something other than what you deserved to be called. It pleases him now to call you his child.

What did the leper who recognized he was cured bring back to Jesus? He couldn't offer gold jewelry or riches. He offered Jesus praise. You've been made God's child by faith. Your life has been changed. God's grace is evident in your life. During the course of your day find the times when you can show God thanks. It might not be much, but it's there. Our offerings might be small, but they're there. Our gratitude might be limited to singing his praises quietly. Our thanks might take the form of inviting someone to the Fall Family Festival this Friday. That's praise and thanks to God. When we sing, speak, or give, we do it as children of God changed by the good things God has done for us.

On Wednesday after the earthquake minor damage to some buildings was discovered. Bricks had shifted and walls moved and it caused cracks. God did something earth shaking when he chose us to be his children. If we think that can happen without causing something in us to change we're mistaken. It causes something; it causes us to serve him in love.

Each of us probably has stories of sitting in church as young kids and acting up. We could each share how our parents got us to stop too. A glaring look, a well placed hand to the back of the head indicated what our parents wanted. But if we kept on and they had to look again or speak to us a second time we knew they were serious. Samuel called the children of Israel to faithfulness a second time. **"Be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart."** But it makes us think, how could Samuel ask something like this of people who time after time had shown they couldn't be faithful to God by themselves? Where would they get the ability to follow through?

All ten knew it. The skin disease was gone. This major change caused reaction in each, but only one had the right reaction. Recognizing the wonderful works of Jesus in his life caused only one to return and show love. The change to wanting to serve in love was immediate. Jesus' love for him changed him to a believer. Being a believer led him to serve Jesus in love.

You've struggled with faithfulness to the Lord. You've failed before and know it. I know I've failed too. We were completely lost and walking away from God in sin. But God didn't come with destruction. Instead, **"consider what great things God has done for you."** God stepped into this world to change our suffering. Christ brought healing and compassion. Jesus removed the burden of sin and gave you his lighter load to carry. His resurrection from the grave gives us hope for the future. God promises that pain will not overcome you and trouble will not take you away from him. These are only temporary. We face them in this life, not the life to come. But we don't face them alone. Christ changes our perspective and changes our hearts. And a changed heart causes a reaction.

The reaction is immediate. No longer are good works something we do to earn God's love. Rather good works are based on God's good works to us. We have God's love; now we thank him and devote ourselves to serving him. It happens in so many different ways. Simple things like obeying the rules of the road or saying hi with a smile to someone in the store. No matter how we serve we must come back to the power source. Even the simple will become impossible without God's goodness to us serving as motivation. When we come regularly, drink deeply, and let God's loving actions sink in we'll then have all the motivation and determination we need to remain faithful in serving God in love.

If the scrapbook my mom had put together had only contained memories of bad things it wouldn't have been much fun to look through. If God were to keep a record of every wrong that you or I had done it wouldn't be much fun for us either. But he hasn't. Consider again the good works of God in Christ. Consider the amazing demonstrations of love. Consider that he changed us for the simple fact that this is who God is, a God who loves, forgives, and saves. God's love changes us. On the basis of the good things God has done for us we live a life changed by faith serving him in love.