

**September 16, 2012 - 11:00 a.m.**

**Pastor Jonathan Falwell**

## **Hail to the Chief: Whom Do YOU Serve?**

### **Scripture: 1 Samuel 8**

Summary: Expounding on an Old Testament story of King Saul in 1 Samuel 8, Pastor Jonathan talks about the importance of allowing God to truly be “on the throne,” in charge of our lives.

Think about what we were just listening to, the statement about the majesty and the awesomeness of God, about how He is everything. Charles shared that passage out of Philippians, and in the midst of that song he talked about one day the heavens will split wide open and Jesus will come back to gather His Church—1 Thessalonians 5:4 talks about that moment—and in that moment literally all of us, regardless of our backgrounds, regardless of where we’re from or what we do or what our jobs are or whether we’re rich or poor or whether we’re fat or skinny or tall or short, that every one of us will look at Him as the King of kings and the Lord of lords, in all of His majesty and all of His glory, and in that moment all of the stuff that we deal with from day to day, all of the conflicts that we have on this earth and all of the disagreements and arguments and things that seem so very important today will be absolutely nothing because we will be standing in the presence of Almighty God. That’s a pretty awesome thought, isn’t it? Pretty incredible thought for all of us today to know that He is coming for us.

I don’t know about you, but the moment that we’ve experienced and the music and worship, that feeling that you’ve had that inspires you and encourages you, the emotions that you feel, you know the greatest problem with the church today is we feel it here and then when church is over, we leave it here. That’s a problem, because that’s not how God wants us to live. He wants us to take it from here and take it out to the world. He wants us to live in that experience and live in that emotion and that power, live in that thought, and so today everything that you have already experienced and everything we’ve talked about, everything that you have heard, the words that we’ve lifted up to the King of kings, make sure that when church is over today, don’t leave it here. Take it out there and let it be that thing that drives you every day for the rest of the week.

That really is what we’re talking about today, because today we begin a new sermon series entitled *Hail to the Chief*. Now before any of you think that this is a political series, that we’re going to be talking about elections or who’s running for president or the November election, who is going to win or lose, it’s not at all about that. It has nothing to do with politics. It has everything to do with leadership and it has everything to do with power and who leads us and who is our power and the source of our strength, the source of everything we need.

These last few weeks, we've been talking about our mission statement as a church that I've shared with you over and over again: to change our world by developing Christ-followers who love God and love people. We talked about those values that we use as a pathway, as a road for us to walk so that we can carry out that mission statement. And the one thing I know is this: If we as a church and we as individuals and we as families, the family of believers that gather here each and every week, if we begin to carry out that mission statement and let that drive us and move us each and every day, the natural result from that will be this: every single one of us will become leaders. And we all want to be leaders, don't we? We all want power, don't we? We want influence, don't we? But you see the problem is oftentimes we think, "I'm not a leader. I don't have any influence."

I was talking with Charles on Friday. We were talking about this sermon series and he shared with me a statistic, a statement, a study that they've done, and it said that regardless of how introverted anyone might be, the most introverted person, the person who is shy, the person who is afraid to speak, that every single one of us, whether we are introvert or extrovert, the most shy person alive today, through his lifetime, will influence at least 10,000 people. Ten thousand people. That means if you are sitting here today and you are afraid to even meet someone and you're afraid to even talk, you're kind of quiet and shy, listen: You are a leader. Ten thousand people is a lot of people, isn't it? That's a lot of influence, a lot of impact that each and every one of us can have.

So what we're going to be talking about over the next few weeks is about leadership and influence and power and how to do things the right way. Obviously behind me we look at the set and it represents, you know when you walked in because it's so recognizable, the Oval Office, arguably the most powerful room in all the world. I'm glad our team made it so believable, so powerful, because to be honest what we're going to be talking about, the issue of power and influence and leadership in our lives, this is a perfect place to do it. Because you see this is without question the most recognizable, the most powerful room in all the world today, and this is as close as I'll ever get.

Countries all over the world, maybe people who've never even been to America, they look to this room for leadership. They look to the person who sits at this chair, who occupies this office, because the most important decisions that happen each and every day around our world are made in this place.

Certainly the White House is a place of great power and influence, but it wasn't until 1909 when Teddy Roosevelt decided that at that time the Oval Office was actually a room on the second floor of the White House, actually in the residence—in fact the office was right next door to his bedroom. He decided he wanted to get everybody out of his house, so he built what we now know today as the West Wing.

In 1933, Franklin Roosevelt came along and decided what Teddy had done was nice, but he thought the office, which was in the middle of the West Wing, should be built on the outer part of the West Wing, so he had built what we know today as the Oval Office.

But regardless of when it was built or how many presidents have sat in that seat, the power and the influence and change that has taken place in our world because of what takes place in this room is overwhelming. And when we talk about power and leadership—and that's something that we all want, isn't it? That's something that we all desire—and when we talk about power, we understand that not much has changed in thousands of years.

Turn with me to 1 Samuel chapter 8. We're going to look back in a time in world history when things weren't a whole lot different than they are now because people wanted power. People wanted influence. People wanted to lead. And we're going to look at the nation of Israel, a nation that had experienced the great power of God, had experienced the great leadership from God, had experienced great things in following after God. They had been delivered from Egypt, delivered across the Red Sea, delivered in the wilderness and brought into the Promised Land. Over and over and over again they'd experienced the great power, the awesomeness, the majesty of God, the provision from God.

But like us today, they decided that they could do it better. They decided that they had a better plan, and so in the midst of that time period when they were being led by God through prophecy, through judges that God had put in place to lead His people, the people of Israel decided, "No, we want a king because we want to be just like everyone else."

They looked at all the nations around them and saw the kings that were leading there and they liked what they saw because they had been following around someone they couldn't touch, someone they couldn't see, someone they couldn't talk to, and God was leading them and now they decide, "We want a king." They wanted to be just like everyone else, and they wanted it right now.

I've got four kids, and I can tell you I understand the principle of "I know what I want and I want it now." I've been hearing that now for 16 years, and I heard it before when I was saying it. We all want that. We want what we want and we want it right now. That's what Israel was doing in 1 Samuel chapter 8.

In Judges chapter 17 verse 6, before we get to the passage, it talks about that period of time. It says, "In those days," in the days of the judges, the days when God was leading through the judges and the prophets, "there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

In other words, the people of Israel, because they didn't have a king, because they didn't have a system of government like everybody else and what they desired and what they wanted, they just decided, "We'll do what we want and we won't care what everybody else says," and through that period of time, through that situation they were going through, they decided, "God, we want a king."

It says in 1 Samuel chapter 8, what Israel did after following God for such a time, they changed things because they wanted a different way, a different plan, doing what was right in their own eyes, and so they began to do what we know today as crowdsourcing God's plan. Crowdsourcing is the idea today that a lot of Internet and tech companies use where they actually will take an

idea and put it out on the Internet to millions of people all over the world to try out and to tweak and to find the good things and bad things, and from that they will determine and discover the things they need to do to make that product the absolute best. And they will look to lots of different sources, they'll look in lots of different directions to find the best idea.

Israel started doing that in their own lives. Look what it says in verse 5 of 1 Samuel chapter 8. They came to Samuel and they said, "You are old and your sons are not like you, so give us a king like all the other nations have." Israel looked at Samuel, who was leading at that time, and said, "Samuel, you're getting older. You can't do what you once did. You don't have the power that you once did. You don't have the authority that you once did, and your sons are messing everything up. They're doing everything wrong. All they care about is money, themselves, and they are sinning against God. We don't want them leading us. We have decided we have a better way, a better plan: give us a king."

In essence, they were shaking their fingers in the face of God, saying, "We think we can do it better than you. We think we have a better plan than you do."

This grieved Samuel's heart. Look at verse 6, it says Samuel was very upset with their request and he went to the Lord for advice. Man, he must have been distraught. He must have been brokenhearted. After all these years of God blessing over and over again and now to have Israel show up and say, "We can do it better than God can, so give us a king. Get out of the way," is basically what they were saying.

Now listen. This is an important leadership lesson right now that I want to give you: don't even make a critical life decision when you are living in the midst of unconfessed sin. That's what grieved Samuel's heart, because he saw in Israel a people who were living in unconfessed sin, going away from God and going against God, and here they are making a decision that would change everything. Let that be a lesson to us.

But look what he goes on to say here. Samuel was upset, he came to God with his request, to the Lord for advice, and listen what God said, "'Do as they say,' the Lord replied, 'for it is me they are rejecting, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer. Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually forsaken me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment. Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about how a king will treat them.'"

That's God's form of "Be careful what you ask for because you might get it."

God told Samuel, "Don't be grieved over this. Don't be brokenhearted over this because they are not turning their backs on you; they are not rejecting you as a leader. They are rejecting me. They are saying that they don't want me to be their king anymore. They are saying that they have a better plan, and they have been doing this for some time. They have been forsaking me and looking to other gods. They've been doing this over and over and over again. They are turning their backs on me. They don't want me to be their king. They don't want me sitting in the seat of authority in their lives anymore."

Does that sound a lot like us today? It sure sounds a lot like our country today, doesn't it? Look in the newspaper any day of the week. God is being thrown out all over the place. God doesn't play a role. We can't talk about God. We saw this week one of our nation's largest retailers, a choir went there on 9/11 and started singing "God Bless America" and were thrown out of the store. We see things like that happen and we see that what happened thousands of years ago is a lot like what's happening here today. They are turning their backs on God. We are turning our backs on God and saying, "We don't want God to be our king anymore."

As a result of their desire to have it their own way, as a result of their desire to do it the way they thought was best and the idea that they thought was better than God's, what happens is they began looking in different places for leadership, and that comes up in the idea that even today we have where it's more important to have likeability than it is to be someone who is able. Likeability versus ability.

Look what it says in 2 Timothy 4:3, "For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths."

That is what was taking place in Israel. They decided, "We want to do it a different way. We want to go a different direction. We don't like the way that God is doing it, so we want to find someone who will do it the way that we want." I read to you a few moments ago out of Judges 17:6, in that day there were no kings in Israel so everyone did whatever they wanted to do; whatever they thought was right.

In 1 Samuel 9 verse 2 we begin to see the picture of what was set in motion. Remember God told Samuel, "Warn them about what they are about to get into. Warn them about what they are getting ready to experience." Verse 2 says, "His son Saul was the most handsome man in Israel—head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land." This is the person who would now become king.

Now make no mistake, God actually ordained Saul to be king. God put Saul in place as king because the people of Israel desired a king, so God put His man there, but oh, can you imagine what Israel experienced when finally, finally they could walk away from having to be led by God all the time and now they're going to get a king, and the person that was chosen as king was that day's equivalent of a Hollywood movie star? The tallest, the best-looking, the most powerful. When he walked into the room, everyone stared. This was the man who would become king. Israel must have been thrilled because no longer was it about what is the right thing to do; it's now about what do we like, what do we want?

We've got to realize that when we get to that place in our own lives, in our own homes, in leading our own homes and the power seat in our homes, we've got to realize that our choices always have to have consequences. Something always happens as a result of what we choose to do.

And so just as God commanded Samuel to do, Samuel began to give the people of Israel a warning.

*Samuel said to them, “The king will draft your sons into his army and make them run before his chariots. Some will be commanders of his troops, while others will be slave laborers. Some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, while others will make his weapons and chariot equipment. The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own servants. He will take a tenth of your harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. He will want your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but the LORD will not help you.”*

This is Samuel basically saying, “When this all happens, when this takes place, when everything goes wrong, when everything goes south and the warnings I give to you today happen, don’t come crying to me, because there is no help for you then.”

Look what Israel said in verse 19, “But the people refused to listen to Samuel’s warning. ‘Even so, we still want a king,’ they said. ‘We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will govern us and lead us into battle.’ So Samuel told the LORD what the people had said, and the LORD replied, ‘Do as they say, and give them a king.’ Then Samuel agreed and sent the people home.”

Can you imagine, in hearing the prophet, the one that had been leading them under God’s direction, Samuel telling the people of Israel, “If you get a king, he’s going to take all the stuff that you have. He is going to put you into servitude. You’re going to be like a slave. He’s going to take the best of everything that you own. He’s going to take it all.” And what did Israel say? “Even so, we don’t care. We want to do it our way.”

A few years ago Shari and the kids and I went down to the Outer Banks of North Carolina for a vacation. We were down at Kitty Hawk, the beach down there, and the day we were leaving, I’m a pilot and I love things about airplanes, so we decided to go by the memorial there for the Wright Brothers. Like every great memorial that we have in our country today, it had a really big gift shop, so right before we left the memorial we went to the gift shop, and as we were walking through I told the kids, “Go pick out something and we’ll buy it.” Of course, I’m hoping they’ll go buy a video about flight or a book about how airplanes fly or something like that.

So they’re out there looking at everything and Jonathan and Nicholas came back to me (this was seven or eight years ago) and they said, “Dad, this is what we want,” and they had picked out a pocket knife—because that has a lot to do with flying, right? They wanted a knife, and they each had picked out a knife, and I said, “Guys, knives are dangerous. You can get cut. You don’t want a knife. Get an airplane or something.”

“No, Dad, we want these,” and they made all the case, all the reasons why they had to have that knife to memorialize their visit to the birthplace of flight. And I, as a good dad, gave in. I bought them the knives. As we were walking to the car, they were carrying the bag with the knives in it because they had to have it in their hands, and I told them, “Guys, do not get them out. They are

dangerous. Don't play with them until we get home. Keep them in the box. Keep them in the bag."

They said, "Okay, Dad, we will."

We got in the car and we drive out of the Outer Banks, out of the memorial, and about five minutes down the road I happen to look back and I see this face on Jonathan and Nicholas that I've never seen before. Eyes that were this big around, eyes of fear as they looked toward me. You know why? Because both of them, even though I had warned them over and over and over again not to play with these things in the car, they decided that they knew better, so they got the knives out and were playing with them and five minutes after we got in the car both of them were bleeding profusely from their hands. As a dad, I was brokenhearted; as a human, I was happy as can be. Yes! I told you so!

That's what Samuel told Israel, "What you're about to do is stupid," Samuel said. "God should be on the throne. God should be leading you. You should be doing what God tells you to do, because now you are walking outside of God's perfect plan and you are telling God that you want something that even though He's promised you He will do, it's not God's timing," So He basically told them, "If you do this, you are making a huge mistake."

And they said, "Even so, we don't care. Give it to us now," and every day we do that in our lives. We do it in our nation, we do it in our homes, we do it in our workplaces, we do it in our individual lives and our walk with Christ. Every day we say, "We know better. We want to sit in the seat of authority in our house."

So what did God say? God said, "Okay. Give them a king." And immediately everything changed.

Samuel warned them over and over again. Samuel told them what to expect. Samuel told them that they shouldn't be sitting in the seat of authority, the seat of power, but they sat down anyway. They took over. They decided, "We can do it better than God."

So the question would be: Is there any hope? When you turn your back on God, is there any hope?

The last thing I want to share with you today from this passage is this: It's never too late to change. First Samuel chapter 12 verse 14, as they were beginning that time of coronation and putting Saul in as king, Samuel said this, "Now if you will fear and worship the LORD and listen to His voice, and if you do not rebel against the LORD's commands, and if you and your king follow the LORD your God, then all will be well."

So the question for us today is who is sitting in our seats? Who is sitting in the seat of authority in our lives? Are we shaking our fist in the face of God and saying, "We can do it better than you. We've got a better plan. We'll lead ourselves"? Certainly we look back and say there is no way we would ever say that to God. There is no way we would actually say to God, "We know better than you do. We can lead our lives better than you do." But listen: Every time that you

walk out of your home in the morning and you go out and live your life without reading the Word of God or talking to God and you go about your life without getting any direction from His Word that He gave to us to teach us how to live and how to walk and how to make decisions and the things that we need to do in our homes, the things we need to do in our careers, the way to live; every time we go about life without consulting God, we're saying to God, "I can do it better than you," and telling God to get out of the seat of authority in our lives because we know better. I've got a better plan. I want to do it my way and I want to do it now.

So here is the question for you today: Who sits in the seat of authority in your life? Are you allowing God to lead or are you figuratively saying to God, "I know better. I'll do it my own way"?

I promise you this: Every person in this room will at least influence 10,000 people in your lifetimes; at least 10,000 people, probably many more, and I promise you this: you will never be the godly leader that He wants you to be if you are not allowing Him to sit in the seat of authority in your life today. If you are a student, it matters today. If you are an adult with kids, it matters today. If you are 95 years old, in the last years of your life, it matters today. Who is leading you?

Would you pray with me today?

Father, we thank you for your leadership. We thank you for your power. We thank you for your majesty and for your glory. We thank you for your awesomeness. We thank you, God, for all that you do. We are so blessed because of what you've done for us, but God, though we are blessed, so often we are so clueless, because in the midst of experiencing all the great privileges and all the great benefits and all the things that you've done, we still say to you, "We can do it better," and we go about life in our own way.

God, help us to change that. Help us to stop. Help right now in this moment for moms and dads who are trying to lead their children and lead their home in the right way, help them to stop and put God back at the center of their home. For young couples how have been married for a short time and they've started off their marriage going away from you and not allowing you to be the center of everything that they do, God, change it now. for that young person who is just starting life, high school, college, just getting ready to roll through life and getting ready to experience the great blessings of life and haven't picked up the Bible in a long time and sought your direction, change it now. Help us today.

A lot of us are doing it our own way. You think you've got it all together. You've got all the plans, you think you're smarter than everybody else—including God. Let me give you a quick wake-up call: you're not. God gave us His book for a reason. He gives us His direction, His guidance for a reason, because He wants His best for us, but His best for us can't happen until we are seeking His best for us and letting Him lead us each and every day.

So if God is not sitting on the throne in your home, He's not leading your life, He's not King of kings in your life, change it today. Maybe He's not King of kings in your life because you never met Him. God loves you so much that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in



Him will not perish but have everlasting life. He came to give us hope, and that hope, as John 14:6 says, is through Jesus Christ and Christ alone.

Maybe you're a Christian and you've given your life to God, but now in everyday life you're on cruise control doing it on your own, not really looking to Him for direction anymore. It's time to stop, turn around and let Him be the authority. Time to let Him sit in the seat of authority in our lives, our homes, our workplaces and our church.

Is He king in your life or are you? Are you letting Him lead you or have you said, "I can do it better than you can, God"? Look inside and ask yourself the question and let Him lead you today.

(Singing "You Are My King")

If you know that He's not leading you, He's not king of your life and you're fighting it each and every day, it's time to let go. It's time to submit to the only one who knows the answers, the only one who can truly lead us the way we need to be led. If God is speaking to your heart today, make that decision right now.

Lord, we thank you for being our king. We thank you that you gave your all so that we could have it all. God, I pray that everyone who is listening to me would not be listening to me but to you and you alone. Lord, allow them the privilege of experiencing that great power, the awesomeness, the majesty of you. God, help us to submit to you, to let you be our king. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for sending your Son to die for us. Thank you that He rose again and thank you that one day you will return to take us home.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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