

We pledge allegiance to You, Lord, our heavenly King. You are seated at the right hand of majesty in heaven, to save us forever and to make us happy in Your kingdom. For the kingdom we inherit is Yours. Yours is the power to lead us into it. And Yours shall forever be all honor and glory, when we, Your redeemed shall be happy in Your kingdom, for the sake of Your manifold gifts of grace, extended to us freely here and on into everlasting life. Amen.

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for 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 to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking Me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be 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." And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king." Samuel then said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."

In Christ Jesus, our Ascended King who rules over all things for the benefit of His Church, dear fellow redeemed:

We are blessed in our country in that many other peoples from around the world, when they learn of our freedoms and prosperity, they desire to become U.S. citizens. Many will look at their own situations in their countries and determine that they are lacking. Similarly the Israelites looked about their country and requested of Samuel: "[A]ppoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." They were tired of the most recent history of being ruled by judges who came and went, without any consistency of ruling and as a result they would be overrun by their enemies on a periodic basis.

In truth, however, it was not the system God chose for His people to be ruled and governed which was flawed, but it was their constant waywardness into idolatry that brought about these great uncertainties and displeasures. When they looked about at other nations, they did not consider who in truth had been ruling Israel and how His divine rule was superior in every way. At this time when we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord to the right hand of the Father, we shall take note and glory in this: **While Kings of the Earth Take, The King of Grace Gives.**

I

In part, the Israelites wanted a king because the great judge and prophet Samuel's appearance of failing as a father. We read: "When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. ... Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice." You might remember Samuel's superior when he was a boy. He was given over into the service of the high priest Eli. Eli obviously failed in the raising of his sons even with warnings given him by God through Samuel. It would appear that Samuel fell into the same pattern of fatherly permissiveness.

Samuel, despite the evil dealings of his sons, appointed them as his successors, which God had not commanded. We can understand in Samuel's old age that he was fearful that Israel would now be left leaderless and set adrift spiritually once again. But he needed to resist taking things into his own hands. Gideon, one who served God and His people successfully as a judge as well, finished the work God had given him to do to deliver Israel. Then the people wanted Gideon, his son and grandson after him to rule over their nation. Gideon replied: "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you."

Apparently Samuel took the elders' concern personally. God responded accordingly: "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them." But our Lord was kind to his faithful

prophet judge, as He went on to say: “According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking Me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.” It was not God’s will that Samuel’s sons rule, but in the process of providing a king, they would quickly learn that earthly kings rule by fiat and normally with self-serving demands.

II

So Samuel was to “solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them. ... These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will **take** your sons ... He will **take** your daughters... He will **take** the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards ... He will **take** the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards ... He will **take** your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, ... He will **take** the tenth of your flocks.” Did you catch that theme – an earthly king, which they desired, would take, and take, and take, and take some more.

God who ruled His people in the Old Testament never set that tone in His rule, rather He gave, and gave, and gave, and gave some more. So it is with His Son, who ascended to the right hand of the Father. He did not ascend to that position of power and authority to be served by His people, but to be in a position to serve by giving.

You would think God’s people would have recognized the pattern of the Giver of all Good Gifts. Instead they were hoping to get this from human princes and kings who were sinners like themselves. How can that be? Well, sadly you and I can suffer from this same mischaracterization of God and often have. We come by it naturally on account of our sin. We so easily turn things upside down and imagine we deserve God’s goodness. We look upon others as undeserving, but ourselves as those to whom God actually owes.

Yes, yes, I know you have learned differently, but you are like me. We so often think and even act contrary to what we have come to know about ourselves. We are basically selfish. Our Lord is always gracious. The self-righteous tendencies so deeply rooted in our sinful natures have repeatedly manifested themselves in our thoughts, words and deeds. Those fed among the 5,000 by Jesus, you might remember were overwhelmed by our Lord’s gracious dealings with them. Yet in their perversion they sought to crown Him their earthly king. But we know His kingdom is not of this world.

Your King of kings gives. Consider the cross upon which He was laid bare to suffer for all your sins. The sign above His head was meant in mockery, but it spoke the truth. He is the King who gives,

not takes. Oh, I suppose you could say, He **took** your sins; He **took** your death; He **took** your hell. But this taking is a blessed relief for you. In the place of what Jesus has taken from you, He **gives** you His Righteousness; He **gives** you His shared inheritance - life everlasting, He **gives** you His complete and eternal salvation in heaven.

In the somber tones of Jesus' discourse with His disciples on the night He was betrayed, Jesus said this: "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." Jesus ascended on high, so that He might be able to shower upon you, His Church of believers, gifts from above. The Spirit, in Word and in Sacrament, gives to you Christ Himself and the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation.

Your exalted King set the pattern of His Kingdom among you. He gives. He does not take as all human rulers do. You are not deprived, but are blessed beyond measure. Your heavenly King is positioned well, so that You receive all you need for everlasting life.

Crown Him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark how the heav'nly anthem drowns
All music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity.

Amen. (ELH #55, v. 1)