

MONDAY, 4/22

Read 1 Samuel 15:1-9.

Last week, we looked at some of the events that took place during Saul's reign as Israel's first king. So far, we have encountered Saul's rise to fame and have begun to see his demise. By the time we get to 1 Samuel 15, Saul has already been rebuked by the prophet Samuel and turned down by the people. Here we will find the events that led to Saul's third and final rejection.

Samuel gives King Saul a message from God to destroy the Amalekites. This is a response to the events that took place in Exodus 17, when the Amalekites attacked the Israelites. While Israel ultimately won the victory, God promised the unprovoked attack would be punished someday. It turns out to be that day.

In one of the only occurrences of such orders outside of the book of Joshua, God commands Saul to destroy all of the Amalekites and their possessions. The people and possessions are considered defiled and therefore must be rejected. Saul follows *most* of the command. He spares their king and the best of the king's herds. This is another instance where Saul fails to follow God's commands.

There is a saying that partial obedience is still disobedience. This is another instance where Saul does what he thinks is the right thing to do. Rather than trusting the Lord, he retains property that he believes could be of value. He follows his own ideas rather than submitting his plans to the Lord. This is a pattern for Saul, which is problematic given his prominent position.

This is not what God wants from the king He has chosen. It also isn't what He wants from His children. We trust that His ways are better and higher than our ways.

Isaiah 55:8-9 reads, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways My ways', declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.'" God's children believe that; as a result, we are able to trust His ways rather than our own.

Obedience is one of the ways we show God we love Him. We say 'yes' to Him. In John 14:15, Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commands." Jesus goes on to repeat this at least another five times in just two chapters. Obedience is putting our actions where our mouth is. We are to speak our love for Christ through prayer and praise. They are both important. Obedience is the pinnacle expression of our love and commitment to Christ.

Praying Together:

"God, great are You and worthy to be praised. We want to bring You glory. As we consider all that You have done for us through Your Son, You deserve our adoration and praise. We want to honor You and bless You. We return thanks to You by saying 'yes' to Your will over our wills and Your way over our ways. We love You and trust You. Amen."

TUESDAY, 4/23

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-21.

There is a saying that "Pride goes before the fall." That saying pretty well sums up Saul's reign as king.

Our passage picks up with God's regretting that He had made Saul king. It was clear by now that Saul had made a habit of trusting his own inclinations rather than those of the Lord. Saul had some of the right qualities to lead, but his heart continually drifted from the Lord. Before we roll our eyes at Saul, let's be honest: it's much easier to be like Saul than we would like.

Saul's spiritual stubbornness will eventually get him removed from power. God needs someone who trusts Him. God wants someone to look to Him and do His will so that His people can thrive. Saul would not be that person. He is too filled with pride.

We see that in how he goes to build a monument to himself at Carmel. When Samuel finds him, Saul is all too proud of himself. Samuel tries to open Saul's eyes to his disobedience by pointing out the sounds of animals that he shouldn't be hearing, but Saul doesn't appear to get it.

Samuel states that Saul had "pounced on the plunder" rather than disposing of it as he had been instructed. Now, you might ask, *why is that a big deal? After all, it never hurts to have a little extra stashed away for a rainy day.* Let's go back to the two main themes in 1 & 2 Samuel: God opposes pride and God honors humility. Pride says, *I know better. I can bend the rules.* Pride turns the attention and focus on one's self. We see that with Saul, and the result is that God cannot trust him. That's a problem given that Israel's king was the extension of God's rule.

Humility says 'yes' to the Lord without stopping to weigh other options. Humility leads us to realize that God's ways aren't our ways and that He knows best, so we surrender to His plans. We trust Him, so we obey Him. When we do this, we show God that we can be trusted. God wants to bless us, but we cannot always be trusted with some of God's blessings. Look at Saul. He was blessed with the responsibility to lead God's people, but pride led to his ruin.

Praying Together:

"God, we want to be the kind of people You are able to trust. We say 'yes' to Your will and seek to follow Your ways. Rid our hearts of pride so that we might become true partners with You in the work You want to accomplish in Your world. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 4/24

Read 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

Saul had tried to bend God's rules. He didn't see that it was a big deal. Saul could just use the plunder as an offering to the Lord and call it good. After all, God liked offerings. Everyone wins, right? The prophet Samuel saw it differently.

Samuel asks Saul, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?" What a question. Let's think of it this way. My girls love to make crafts. I am frequently gifted a lovely drawing or creative craft that is inscribed with the message, "I love you, Dad." Now, I am grateful to receive those, and I realize my window for getting such things is rapidly closing. That being said, would that gesture and message mean much if my girls refused to listen to me? Would a card make up for their rolling their eyes when I asked them to clean their rooms? Would one of their coloring creations be enough to overcome sassy responses? I think not. I love that they think of me when they're making something, but that is quickly forgotten if they don't care for me enough to listen to me the rest of the time.

Samuel highlights the point that while God appreciates sacrifices, He desires obedience more. A sacrifice was necessary because it was a way of righting the wrongs the people had committed. God's greatest desire, however, is that we listen to Him. That is the best gift of all. By doing this, we show that we trust Him.

In verse 22, Samuel relates disobedience with rebellion and pride. His message is that when we refuse to listen to God, it is like we are worshiping someone else. More often than not, that someone else is ourselves. We are the idol we worship. That is what happens when our will is placed above the Lord's will. Since Saul is guilty of this, especially given his important position, God rejects him as king. God will seek to replace him with another, which leads us to David's story.

As I have said before, we are often more like Saul than we would like. As I'm typing this, I can think of so many times I chose my way and my will over the Lord's. Perhaps you can think of the same in your own life. We might both be wondering, *where is our hope then?* Our hope and our help are in Jesus. He is the One who loved His Father's will more than His own. In fact, He loved His Father so much, He embraced the Father's will as His own. Jesus is perfectly obedient where we stumble and fall. This is why we need Jesus. We need Him to first recreate us so that we can then be shaped to become like Him.

We need not fear where we have failed in the past. We need to turn to Jesus and seek Him. As our love for Jesus grows, obedience becomes easier. The more we know Jesus, the easier it is to say 'yes' to Him.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, You are the faithful One. You show us what it means to be a child of God in the fullest sense of the word. We put our hope in You, that through You we might grow in faithfulness. We can do this only through Your work within us. Amen."

THURSDAY, 4/25

Read 1 Samuel 15:24-31.

King Saul had messed up. Rather than following God's commands regarding his battle with the Amalekites, he did what he thought was right. While he seemed to brush it off at first, it now becomes clear to him that he has once again missed the mark.

In these verses, Saul confesses his sin to Samuel. He had bent the rules. He had turned from God's way to his own way. Why did he not follow God's commands? He failed to follow because he was afraid of what the men would think. He felt pressure from them, so he gave in. These are not the actions of a leader, especially the leader God wanted Saul to be.

We feel some of those same pressures. We know what it is like to feel confined by others' expectations. We get ourselves in danger when we value what people think of us more than what God thinks of us. Saul loses sight of that, and, as a result, he is unfaithful to God.

Saul repents of his sin, but his decision has already set in motion consequences that he must face. While we can have confidence that when we repent, we will receive God's forgiveness, Saul's situation is unique. As king, Saul has an awesome responsibility. God expects faithfulness and humility from the king. Leaders are held to greater accountability than others. It's part of the call. In his tenure thus far, Saul has developed a pattern of disobedience. His actions led God to go in a different direction regarding Saul's leadership. God could no longer trust Saul to lead His people. The people's well-being was at stake. Saul's reign must come to an end.

One takeaway for us from this passage is both the seriousness of our sin and the mercy of God. Saul shows us that our sin often comes with consequences. While we have not been given the

role of king over God's people, God has entrusted us with some of His people. We have family, church family, friends, and co-workers whom God has called us to serve. We are stewards of these relationships. What we do and say matter.

We also know that we fall short of God's vision for our role in their well-being. We need to repent. That means a change. We turn from what we have been and turn to the Lord and His way. We ask for grace so that we can be renewed. Repentance is also about a change in our mind and heart, which impacts our actions moving forward. This will also lead us to ask for forgiveness to the one we might have hurt. The good news is that God is pleased to pour out His mercy upon us when we repent.

I wonder if there are any actions or attitudes from which you need to repent. How might your mind and heart need to change? Call on God's grace. Receive His mercy and move out with a restored spirit.

Praying together:

"Holy Spirit, open my eyes to any actions or attitudes for which I need to seek forgiveness. I want my life to bless others. I know You have entrusted many of Your people to my care. Teach and empower me to love them faithfully. Renew my mind and heart that I might love them as Jesus loves me. Amen."

FRIDAY, 4/26

Read 1 Samuel 15:32-35.

King Saul, look what you've done. As the first king of Israel, we had great hopes that you would be able to lead this nation well. We had hopes that the tribes once separating Israel would now be brought together as a whole. We had hopes that the people would follow you. Perhaps more than anything else, we had hopes that you would follow God and lead by His example. You have let us down.

God commanded you to kill every man, woman, child, and animal of the Amalekites. In no uncertain terms, you knew what you were supposed to do. There was no room for questions or redirection. There was no thought or desire on your part that would negate what God commanded of you. Instead, you decided to save the king, his sheep, and his oxen. In your mind's eye, you thought it was better to have animals to sacrifice than to obey God.

King Saul broke the covenant. He put his wants and needs and what he thought was right over what God commanded of him. He believed himself a king who had the power and the pride to do what he wished. This tension between what God wants us to do and what we want to do is a constant source of concern throughout the Bible.

Saul never repented. He says the right things. He talks about having sinned. He even talks about worshiping God. But God's commands were not followed. Samuel called for Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and told him, "As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women." With that, Samuel killed Agag. Though Samuel grieved, he did not go to see Saul again. Both Samuel and God regretted their choice to make Saul king of Israel.

Praying Together:

"Lord, strengthen us so that we can not only hear Your voice, but follow through with Your commands. Thank You for Your patience in all things. Amen."

SATURDAY, 4/27

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-7.

God has chosen a new king. He tells Samuel to fill his horn with oil and be prepared to anoint a new king of Israel. Samuel expressed concern to God that things were still politically tense; he was concerned that if Saul heard about what he was trying to do, he would kill him. God carefully crafted a plan to protect Samuel. The Lord told him to take a heifer and say that he has come to make a sacrifice to the Lord. His invitation to Jesse and his sons will be well received and Saul will never be the wiser.

Just as God instructed him, Samuel traveled to Bethlehem to speak to Jesse and his sons. When Samuel arrived in Bethlehem, the elders of the town were concerned that he did not come in peace. They had heard about what had happened between him and King Saul. Samuel reassured them that, in fact, he came in peace and to sacrifice to the Lord. He then asked Jesse and his sons to join him at the sacrifice.

We watch as Samuel is standing before all of the sons of Jesse to consider which one should be anointed king. Samuel was quick to consider the eldest child, who was the strongest physically, and who might make a great warrior. These are all the things that we might consider when choosing a king. In the final verse, however, the Lord warned Samuel not to consider the appearance of Jesse's sons when choosing whom to anoint. The Lord doesn't look at the outward appearance to know who we are. He looks at the heart.

Praying Together:

"Lord, help us change the way we define leadership in Your kingdom. Turn our heads away from what we like and toward what You know to be true. May we see the heart of a person before we judge them based on what we value most in our culture. Thank You for Your presence in all things. Amen."

SUNDAY, 4/28

Read 1 Samuel 16:8-13.

Jesse had eight sons. Samuel considered each one very carefully. As he looks at each one, Samuel waits for the Lord to speak to him. As he studies each son, somewhere deep inside, he knew that the Lord had not chosen any of them. After seven of his sons had been considered and not chosen, Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons that you have?"

Jesse told him that his youngest was tending his sheep. Saul then told him that it was very important he see this boy as soon as possible, saying, "We will not sit down until he arrives." This, in some ways, is like a Biblical Cinderella story. Instead of a glass slipper, it was God's choice based on the goodness of a person's heart. Each son was considered, and none fit the bill. The father did not consider it important that his youngest be present at the sacrifice, yet this very boy will be the one who will change the course of Israel's history as its new king.

When the youngest son arrived, he was "glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features." The Lord told Samuel with firm resolution, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed the boy in the presence of his brothers. From that day on, the spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him, the youngest brother. His name was David, the new king of Israel.

Praying Together:

“Thank You for showing us what You value most about us. Change our assumptions about what is right in Your eyes, so that we may know and live accordingly. Thank You for Your patience in all things. Amen.”