

1 Samuel 15:12-23 CC9am 3rd Aug 2014

During summer we are going to have a new series on Kings of Israel. While at 10.30 we see snippets of five kings here at 9am we are going to have a more in depth look at these five kings.

Today we look at the first king of God's people, Israel, Saul, who we touched on in our recent series on 1 Samuel.

In this short passage we see Saul rejected from being king because he did not obey God.

Let's just check the background. Following creation and the fall God is at work to establish his people, in his place under his rule. We have God's people in the land that God has given them.

However, they still refuse to come under the rule of God. God had given them Judges to rescue them from the results of their sin. However, as we saw a few weeks ago Judges ends with the words, "In those days Israel had no King; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25). It is a picture of anarchy and also moral decadence. In that climate God provided another Judge, Samuel, but as he got older God's people asked for a king. So, reluctantly, God anointed Saul the first king.

The immediate context for these verses is that God told Saul to totally destroy the Amalekites but 15:9 he spared the king and the best of the cattle. We pick up the story with Samuel being sent by God to make Saul aware of his disobedience.

1. What have I done? 1 Sam 15:12-15

Samuel turned up to see Saul who bounced up to him pleased as punch and says, v13, "I've done what God said". That's not how God saw it and as Samuel put it, v14, the air was full of his failure to obey the word of God. He could hear the noise of the sheep and cattle that should have been destroyed.

Saul had known God's will through his word but had chosen not to obey. You would have thought that with these words of Samuel he would have simply acknowledged his wrong doing.

However Saul defends himself and he does it in three ways that may seem very familiar to us when we have done wrong.

a. the soldiers did it, v15. The finger was being pointed at Saul but he deflects the blame onto others. It is what we do. It is not my fault, you can't blame me, they did it. Does that sound familiar to you when you do things wrong?

b. we brought them for sacrifice, v15. God can't be angry because we spared the best ones for sacrifice. On the surface it seems a plausible excuse. I did it for God. I thought God would be pleased with what I did. However it is the excuse of the suicide bomber isn't it? God will be pleased if I blow up the infidels.

c. We destroyed the rest v15. Having tried to avoid the blame for the wrong he tries to take credit for the good things done.

In all of this we can almost hear him say “but what have I done?” It is as if he really can’t see where he has gone wrong. God had clearly said destroy everything and he hadn’t but doesn’t seem able to see what he has done wrong. This is the deceitfulness of sin.

We experience it in our own lives and it is often prefaced with words like “Did God say...” “You don’t have to take God/the Bible literally”. I just thought it might be better if....” “Surely God can’t mean....”

Saul was very human and so are we and so we should not be surprised that his failings are also ours. We see this in the way we deal with God’s word when we don’t like what it says. Sometimes we argue it away, surely God can’t mean that. Or we adapt it leaving out bits that don’t fit our idea of God and his ways. Or we just ignore the plain word of God because it is uncomfortable.

I was at a conference some months back and we were looking at John the Baptist and his ministry. We were asked to read a passage and see what it said to us. One of the verses was Matt 3:10, “The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” The response from one group was enlightening in that they said as there is no such thing as God’s judgement therefore can’t mean that.

Saul’s disobedience began with him refusing to follow the clear word of God and often that is the same for us.

2. Remember who you are 1 Sam 15:16-21

Samuel almost seems to shout stop at Saul. It is a bit like a detective show where a suspect is protesting his innocence over and over again. Samuel seems to say it is not me who is judge but God and let’s see what he has to say.

a. you are the king Samuel reminded him, v17 “The Lord anointed you king over Israel”. This is who he is. He is God’s anointed king. Yes he was the king but because God chose him. When Samuel first approached him Saul’s response was to recognise his lack of worth (1 Sam 9:21). Later when he got the people together to proclaim Saul king, Saul hid among the baggage (1 Sam 10:22). He knew he was not worthy of this honour. We see a similar response to Jesus in the New Testament. Peter knelt before him and said “Go away from me Lord I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8); the centurion said “Lord I do not deserve to have you come under my roof” (Matt8:8).

The point they recognised and I’m sure many of us recognise is that we are children of God because God chose us and not because of our own worth and value. As such it is not a matter of pride.

Saul was king yes but because God chose him. However he seems to have lost sight of that fact and so firstly v12 had set up a monument in his own honour but also he seems to be acting as if he is in control.

In our life of faith we need to keep in mind who we are. We are sinners and as such outside the love of God but through God's grace in the Lord Jesus Christ we have been ransomed, healed restored, forgiven and so crowned with honour and glory. Never forget who you are, children of the King, but children by the grace of God.

b. you are the king with a mission was, v18, a king with a God given mission to bring judgement on the Amalekites.

In the light of these two things Samuel asked "Why" v19. "Why did you not obey?"

You are God's king with God's clear word why did you not obey?

In Saul's response we again see how sin deceives us "But I did obey" v20.

He just can't see it. In the same breath as saying he completely destroyed the Amalekites he says he spared their king, Agag, and some of their cattle.

I hope we can see just how sin blinds us. It enables us justify actions which are contrary to God's word and, as in this case, to make ourselves feel virtuous.

God's mission was being undone because God's chosen king did not obey God's word.

We too need to remember who we are. We are Jesus' followers involved in his mission.

As such we need to obey God's word so that his mission may be fulfilled, and the mission we have is to go and make disciples of all nations.

In doing that we can sometimes be like Saul and adapt God's commands. On the one hand we might say surely God can't mean us to go to them. The on the other hand we might say well they are such nice people surely they don't need the gospel.

God's word to Saul was comprehensive "**totally** destroy everything which belongs to them" (1 Sam 15:3). God's word to us is equally comprehensive, "**all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Ro 3:23) and "go and make disciples of **all** nations" (Matt 28:19)

3. What does God require? 1 Sam 15:22-23

I don't know whether you have ever stood on a headland at night and seen the beam from a lighthouse cutting through the dark?

Well God's word to Saul through Samuel does just that. It cuts through Saul's seeming blindness and the presenting issues of them holding on to valuable animals to the real issues of disobedience and God's desire for obedience.

a. the requirement v22

God makes it clear that what he wants from his people is obedience, v22 "to obey is better".

Saul had made the excuse that they only kept some of the animals so they could use them for sacrifices to God. You can almost imagine Samuel saying "really?" It was an excuse. However, God made it clear to Saul that disobedience can't be compensated for by religious activity. Even if that

was his real motive for not killing the animals it still is not acceptable to God. It does not remove the stain of rebellion in which Saul has ignored God's expressed will.

But how common is the idea. Today many will go to church and sing their hymns with the clear idea that somehow because they have made that "sacrifice" God will be pleased with them. Yes I am sinful but I did this so that must make it OK.

I hope we realise that is not so. There is no offering, no sacrifice, we can make which will make us, who are sinful, acceptable to a holy God. The good news is that what we cannot do God has done for us in Jesus. Through his death on the cross our sin is dealt with and we are made holy.

But here the point to Saul and us is that what God wants is us to obey him, that is the expression of our heart and will.

b. the failure v23

God then rams home the point that lack of obedience is sin. I'm sure Saul saw it as cutting corners, perhaps not doing everything God said. But as we have been seeing he didn't see it as sin. God calls a spade a spade. What Saul had done was rebellion. He had acted against the clear instructions of God. In so doing he was acting as if he knew better than God, which is the common arrogance of humanity. The phrase, "I like to think of God as...." is common. It is the human way to make God in our own image. No wonder here God sees it as idolatry because we make ourselves God not him. That was what Saul had done. God said this but I do that, in other words I am in control, I am God. This was his sin this was rebellion.

It is the rebellion that is there in every human heart. The rebellion which says I will live my life my way. I rule my life and so God is denied his rightful place as King in my life.

It is only when the beam of God's word cuts through the darkness and shows us our sinful state as it did here that there can be any hope for change. Here as we will see in a moment it was too late for Saul. However, for us here and those listening on download it is not too late. So if you are living your life your way, if you are telling God how it should be, then let me ask you to stop and listen to God's word "to obey is better". Let me ask you to repent of this rebellion and, through Jesus death, find forgiveness from God and allow him to be God and king in your life.

c. the result v23

The final word for Saul was , v23, "God has rejected you as King".

Saul had rejected God's word and so God rejected him as king.

Now that may alarm some of us because we recognise that we just cannot fully obey the word of God. We know only too well that we often fail to obey God's word. Will we too be rejected?

We need to see that this passage isn't talking about *that* kind of failure. It is not talking about what we might call the 'normal sinfulness' of the Christian life, as you aim with sincerity to obey the Lord,

but constantly fall short of your aim. This passage is talking about insincerity. This passage is talking about a heart that's already made up its mind that it's going to do its own thing.

The result is rejection. It is God allowing us to have what we want, our own rule over our own lives but that cuts us off from God. That is the end result of rebellion, that God allows us to go our own way but the end is rejection.

Jesus made this very clear in Mark 8:38, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." To be ashamed of God's word is to ignore it, to reject it.

Let's be clear, we cannot hope to live our lives in rebellion against God and his word and then expect to be accepted by God at the end. The Bible shows us that is not going to happen. We need to hear God's call to repent and to allow God to be God in our lives.

Saul was not a good king because he led his people away from God rather than to him. So in part the story is there to make the readers and us long for a better king who does obey the word of God fully and who leads his people to God and of course that King has come and has died on a cross to open up the way for all who will come into the presence of the holy God.

It is in Christ alone that we have our hope because like Saul we are all rebellious and when the beam of God's word lights up our lives and shows us our sin and rebellion our only hope for forgiveness is in Jesus and our only means of change is through the power of the holy Spirit. We praise God that many of us here know that and that because we have made that step and make that step each day we are not rejected by God but instead are "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col 1:22).