

1 SAMUEL 8-15: THE RISE AND FALL OF KING SAUL

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 8/18/19, Matt Heerema

This morning we are picking up where pastor Brad left off last week, in 1 Samuel Chapter 8. Please turn there with me. We'll be going quickly, all the way through the end of chapter 15, touching down at a few points to track with the progression of the account of King Saul's life to see what it has to show us about **the importance of obeying the voice of God.**

1st & 2nd Samuel, which was really a single piece of writing (it was simply too big to fit in a single scroll and carry around easily), and historically also combined with 1st & 2nd Kings recount the rise of the Israelite monarchy after the time of the Judges when Israel first entered the promised land. The major thing we get to see in these books is God being faithful to covenant he made to his people through Moses.

That covenant includes many laws and regulations about how to conduct religious and civil life, and at the end God makes a set of conditional promises that encompass our relationship with him: Blessing for obedience, cursing for disobedience, and restoration for repentance. And last week, pastor Brad showed this illustration that encapsulates the cycle that Israel experiences throughout the writings of the old testament.

Important to note is that God knew exactly what was going to happen with Israel (and with us), he did not say "and IF you fall into these curses, and repent, I will restore you", he said "and WHEN you fall into these curses, and repent, I will restore you."

Let's get into today's text. And as we read, keep an eye out for the phrase "**Obey the voice of the Lord,**" and "**Obey the voice of the people.**" Contrast the results. There's your sermon spoiler alert for the morning.

THE STORY

Israel Rejects God And Demands A King

We pick up the story toward the end of Samuel's life. He is getting old. There doesn't seem to be anyone apparent in a succession plan to replace him, and they are getting nervous. "Who will protect us when Samuel is gone?", they wonder. They ignore the fact that God himself has always come through for them, they ignore his deeds in the past, and they demand a king to fight their battles for them.

Samuel warns them that a king will be bad for them. He reminds them that God is their king, and that they can trust him. But they refuse. They want a king that they can see, and one that looks like their expectations ("Like all the other nations.")

1 Samuel 8:6-8 (ESV) - v7 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.

Samuel goes on and warns them about what having a fallible, human monarch will be like...

1 Samuel 8:19-22 - v19 But **the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel**. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, 20 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." 21 And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. 22 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."

Notice their attitude here. "We want to be like all the other nations." Every parent here will recognize the attitude. You promise your children good and healthy things that will keep them safe and happy and they whine "*Nooo we don't waaannnt thaaaat!*" So God tells Saul to give them what they're asking for.

God Gives Israel the King They Think They Want

1 Samuel 10:24 - v24 And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

This is the kind of king Israel demanded. God gave them what they wanted in their heart in order to show them the problem there.

An interesting note here. The prophet of God, Samuel, authoritatively reveals to Saul that God has appointed him king. Rather than obeying faithfully, Saul disbelieves, and tries to run from God's command. Even with God's blessing and promise, he was timid about obeying the voice of God through the prophet. "Who am I??" , and hiding in the baggage like a coward. This our first glimpse into Saul's heart.

Samuel Restates God's Covenant With Israel

A little later on, Samuel has a reaffirmation ceremony for Saul and reminds the people of the Mosaic Covenant, with specific application to the monarchy.

1 Samuel 12:14-15 - v14 If you will fear the Lord and serve him and **obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment** of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well. 15 But **if you will not obey the voice of the Lord**, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.

Saul Continues In Unbelief and Disobedience

The narrative goes on and shows Saul's continued unbelief through his self reliance and religious superstition. Saul sets up an offering in a way that goes against God's command to him through Samuel. He does so because he thinks performing the religious ceremony would help them win the battle.

1 Samuel 13:13-14 - v13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. **You have not kept the command of the Lord your God**, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

What we're seeing here is that Saul is relying on religious form, rather than trusting God's words to him through the prophet. And in the final scene of Saul's kingship, this is the fatal flaw: unbelief resulting in disobedience. His heart wasn't in it, as Samuel tells him: "The Lord has sought a man after his own heart."

The Final Test

Saul is given a final test, probably many years into his kingship now, and that final test is to fulfill the conquest of the promised Land. To be God's hand of justice and judgement against a people who had turned away from him for hundreds of years.

1 Samuel 15:1-3 - v15 And Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; **now therefore listen to the words of the Lord**. 2 Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. 3 Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.' "

Just a brief explanation on this issue of divine judgement this morning. I recognize that to our modern ears, this is a shocking command. We must realize that to the ancient near east, the shocking thing would have been the destruction of perfectly good livestock. We assume that death is the worst thing that can happen to a person. They realized that disobedience toward and disbelief in God that was the worse fate. And suffice to say for us, in the new covenant, we are never called to go to war against a people group for religious reasons.

The Final Verdict

And so we have the final verdict. Saul failed to obey God this time as well: he does not destroy every living thing. He spares the expensive livestock and King Agag. (Note that it was greed and not mercy that caused him to spare these...) Samuel confronts him about it.

1 Samuel 15:19-26 - v19 **Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord?** Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?" 20 And Saul said to Samuel, "I **have obeyed the voice of the Lord**. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. 21 **But the**

people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."

22 And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, **as in obeying the voice of the Lord?** Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king."

24 Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for **I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.** 25 Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the Lord." 26 And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel."

Saul true heart is revealed

Saul is busted, and he knows it, and he can't escape it. So he makes a very familiar move. He throws other people under the bus, and makes excuses for himself. His true heart is revealed. He wants to look good in front of the people. He wants power and influence. Knowing that he's had it, he makes one last plea: "hide my sin from the people..."

1 Samuel 15:30 Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the Lord your God."

But Samuel won't have it. He very publicly finishes the job with Agag, which points out Saul's failure. And then they part ways.

We understand Saul's heart here when we later get to compare with King David, when he commits an even more grievous sin, and his response is true repentance. No blame shifting, no downplaying, no excuse making. "I have sinned against you and you alone."

OBEY THE VOICE OF GOD

Of the many things we learn in this passage, the thing I want you to take with you this morning is **the importance and the blessing of obeying the voice of God.** This passage shows us what happens when we listen to the voice of man rather than God's voice: we see the foolishness, the curse that we bring down on ourselves.

Now, I want to be very clear about what it means for us to obey the voice of God: we obey Jesus.

Hebrews 1:1-2 - v1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days **he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

In our passage today: Samuel was God's mouthpiece for God's people. For us today, and for the rest of time, Jesus is that mouthpiece.

Matthew 28:18-20 - v18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to **obey all that I have commanded you**. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

We no longer need to wrestle with the minutiae of the technical outworking of Old Testament law in the modern day. We obey Jesus.

We no longer need to worry about whether a human being who is claiming to speak for God these days is a true and false prophet. That type of prophecy is done.

We listen to Jesus. We have his revelation in the New Testament. Which his why we must read this book, know this book, and preach this book.

From our passage today we see that **it is important to obey God's voice**.

Because God All-Knowing (he knows what he's doing)

God knew exactly what would happen when he made Saul King. He knew exactly what would happen to the people when they put their trust in a human king over God. He gave them what they were asking for as a lesson to them.

Trusting this truth, that God is all knowing, is especially important **when it seems the odds are against us**. God's people saw the immediate threat of the Philistines. Instead of trusting God to protect them, just like he always had, they feared and demanded a human solution to the problem. This got them in trouble. We can be just like them, can't we? It is easy to say we trust God when things are going well. It is difficult to actually trust him when we can't see how things are going to work out.

It is important to obey God's voice because God is all powerful (he is in control)

And we are not. Several times throughout today's passage we see Israel, and King Saul on their behalf, seeing a course of action that seemed to them to be more effective, more practical. "Can we really trust God to protect us? Don't we need a military commander? Isn't that how wars are usually won?" Or Saul: "Surely God wouldn't want all this delicious livestock to go to waste? And think of the advantage of having a hostage king..."

Trusting in human strength and human wisdom gets us in trouble. Are there truths in scripture that you find it more convenient to ignore because **other routes seem more immediately practical or effective?**

What comes to mind for me is the call for us to believe and proclaim the whole truth, when it seems more culturally sensitive or politically expedient to ignore or underplay harder-to-swallow teachings of the scripture. Perhaps one area here is in telling your unbelieving friends the gospel message. We wouldn't want to offend them would we? Telling someone that their whole way of understanding reality is wrong doesn't seem like a very effective way to influence people does it?

It is important to obey God's voice because God wants to bless us

I was recently talking with a non-Christian friend about this idea of God demanding our worship. And how if we don't understand the big picture, God demanding worship and obedience can seem extremely egotistical. "Worship and obey me or I will curse you!", says the all-powerful being to helpless mortals. Not precisely the kind of God that inspires faith, is it?

But we have to understand that this God who demands our obedience created us in the first place, created us to receive joy and pleasure from him in the first place. The purpose of obedience is to operate in line with who we were created to be!

Our problem is that, like the Israelites, we humans have a tendency to ignore God's voice and listen to the voice of men who tell us that we should forge our own identity.

OBEDIENCE IS A HEART ISSUE

Finally, it is important, when talking about obedience, to remember that obedience is a heart issue. It's a matter of your heart, your motivation, the thing you value most highly. As we see with Saul, he did many religious seeming things. But it was from selfish motive or superstitious motive. "Perhaps if I pray and offer a sacrifice, then God will bless the army." God had already promised to use the army to deliver Israel! Saul did not need to compel God to do so through a religious ceremony!

God is after your heart, not after your performance. We obey not to receive God's favor, we obey because we have it. Obedience to God's commands do not save us. We'd all be lost otherwise! Because none of us obey perfectly. A lesson we can take from Saul's life is the dire consequence of pretending that you have obeyed when you haven't. Stop pretending and stop hiding.

I wonder how many of us attend church regularly, donate our money, serve in a ministry, sing songs, because we think that somehow doing so will earn us God's favor. We're like Saul offering a sacrifice that was not commanded in order to try to win God's favor for the army. Saul had it backwards.

Obey, yes! As a result! In response! We obey God's commands as a response to his goodness to us.

This is the reason Jesus said we need a new heart. He did not say we need to make better decisions or try harder, we need a new heart. So if you struggle to obey God's word, let your takeaway from this morning not be, "I need to try harder to obey God." That will get you nowhere. Your takeaway should be this: pray for new motivation: "Lord help me want you more than anything else in this world. Help me desire you above anything else. Help me understand just how good you are, how fulfilling, how worth it..."

The truth is that God is a good, loving, and wise creator, who loved us and designed us to operate in a certain way, in relationship with him, and receive blessing and joy as a result. Because of our stubbornness and insistence on being in control of ourselves, or sometimes because we get caught up in worshiping the creation rather than the creator, we have turned our backs on him.

Blessing for obedience is a promise, not in an ultimatum – "do this or else" – sort of way, not in a bribery sort of way, but in a "I know you better than you'll ever know yourself, and I care for you and want you to be happy, healthy, and safe sort of way." The path to lasting peace and joy is through hearing God's voice and obeying.

And we hear his voice most clearly through Jesus Christ. Who entered in to our world of rebellion, showed us the right way to live in relationship to God and each other, and then paid the debt for sin, took our punishment, on the cross, in order to buy us back from slavery to sin and death.

The ultimate act of love, dying to save another's life. This is a gift that we did not deserve and could not earn. And he gives it to us freely. He says "trust me, obey me, follow me, don't fall into the trap of obeying any other voice, obey my voice. Let's respond to his voice today, this week, and for the rest of our life.

Pray with me.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- We should obey God because he is all-knowing. (He knows what he is doing) - talk about some times you have struggled to believe this.
- We should obey God because he is all-powerful. (He is in complete control) - talk about some times you have struggled to believe this.
- We should obey God because he wants to bless us. Talk about times you have struggled to believe this.
- How to these three truths relate to one another? (e.g.: It is sometimes difficult to believe that he wants to bless us when our circumstances do not seem like a blessing, yet he is in control and knows what he's doing... what are the implications?)

A NOTE ON "GOD HAVING REGRETS"

This issue might come up in discussion, but I did not have time to address it in the sermon. 1 Samuel 15 contains a thought that some have pointed to as contradictory: Read verses 10-11, 29, 35.

Does God have regrets or not? This passage can be confusing. Different English translators have had trouble with the Hebrew word נָחַם [nacham /naw-kham/] - which has a range of meaning from "repent" to "regret", to "grieve", to "console" to "comfort" - different translations use a lot of different words in this passage.

The big idea here is that in verses 10 and 35, the word is referring to the genuine grief God feels over the result of having made Saul King. The grief came not because God didn't know what was going to happen and was somehow surprised by the result, but because Saul's unbelief and disobedience, which led the people astray, caused him sorrow. It is difficult for us to relate to God's perspective: knowing the future and yet still emotionally reacting to it. We somehow think that if we knew everything, then we would be free from pain and sorry. If we could just never be surprised and always be in control we would be impervious. This passage shows us otherwise.

Verse 29 is trickier. It is saying that God is not like man, who makes mistakes and regrets the outcome, or makes less-than-perfect decisions and wish we would have made another one.

So on one hand, God made the right decision to make Saul King, because he needed to show us the outcome of our faithlessness. And on the other, he grieved over the pain that was caused.