



1 SAMUEL: IN SEARCH OF A KING (TALK 5/9: OBEDIENCE BETTER THAN SACRIFICE)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT: If you had to summarise what you've learned so far from 1 Samuel, for someone who isn't yet a Christian, what would you say?

WARM-UP

1. What do you think are the most dangerous temptations for a Christian leader?
2. What really was wrong with the people asking for a king 'such as the other nations have'?
3. What was the determining factor that would provide the potential for this situation to be 'good'?

READ 1 Samuel 15:1-6

4. Who was it that made Saul king? Why is it so imperative (for Saul) to be reminded of this fact?
5. How do you respond to the command in verse 3? Why are judgment and mercy both important?
6. How is God the only one truly qualified to be judge? How can we trust in him?

READ 1 Samuel 15:7-23

7. Does Saul do what he was commanded to? How is he obedient? How is he disobedient?
8. Who does Saul blame? How does he try to 'reframe' his disobedience? Is this acceptable?
9. Do you think when it comes to our disobedience (and sin) that we're ever in danger of blaming others or trying to 'reframe' it so that we appear to be justified in our actions? Can you think of an example?
10. Why do Saul's excuses fail to fool God? What does this mean for us?
11. In what way is obedience better than sacrifice? Do you think that you're ever in danger of trying to bargain with God instead of just doing what he has commanded?
12. What is idolatry? How is 'rebellion' (or disobedience) as bad as idolatry?

READ 1 Samuel 15:14-28

13. Who is the earthly king pointed to as one 'better' than Saul? What makes him better?
14. Who is the ultimate king pointed to as one 'better'? Spend some time as a group naming the various ways in which Jesus is the ultimate king and better than all others.
15. Why do we so desperately need a king like Jesus? How does Saul point to this need?

APPLY: Is there one area of your life in which you are not taking Jesus' commands seriously? Confess it and ask for God's help to change.

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, we thank you for our ultimate King, Jesus. We thank you that he is the only one who can save us and who is worthy of our worship. Please help us, in the power of your Spirit, to live lives that increasingly submit to Jesus' authority. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*



GOING DEEPER

1 SAMUEL: IN SEARCH OF A KING (TALK 5/9: OBEDIENCE BETTER THAN SACRIFICE)

GOING DEEPER RESOURCES

On Your Front Line this Week

- How has God used ordinary ways to work in the life of the one person you are praying to become a disciple? Give thanks!

For Families

- A Five-Minute Devotional on Saul for Families:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alH9tzKfG6M&t>

Audio and Video

- AUDIO: "Why Does God Command Violence in the Old Testament"
<https://subsplash.com/providencecitychurch/lb/mi/+yss4s2f>
- AUDIO: "The King we Have vs the King we Need"
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/54375/>
- AUDIO: "A Rejected King" by Aaron Roberts
<https://stjohnsvancouver.sermons.io/sermons/a-rejected-king>
- AUDIO: "To obey is Better than Sacrifice" by Richard Bewes
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/PlayMedia.aspx?download=file&media_id=135614&file_id=227112

Key Resource

"1 Samuel For You" by Tim Chester is an excellent introduction to 1 Samuel that will be suitable for people reading at a range of levels. The guide includes helpful discussion of the content of 1 Samuel, along with plenty of practical and devotional application. Watch an introduction to the book by Tim Chester.

📄 <https://youtu.be/8FIBKzhnOdw>

Other Helpful Books

- "Is Hell for Real? And other questions about judgment, eternity, and the God of love" by Erik Raymond.
- "1 and 2 Samuel: Hope for the Helpless" by Andrew Reid ("Reading the Bible Today Series")
- "1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart" by Dale Ralph Davis ("Focus on the Bible Series")

TALK 5/9 (ACTS SERIES): 26/05/19

“Obedience is Better than Sacrifice”

by the Rev'd Adam Lowe

Bible Passage: 1 Samuel 13-15 (with focus on 1 Samuel 15)

Over the last couple of weeks in 1 Samuel, we've witnessed the people's demand to have a king, *just like the other nations*.

- There's a sense that they want to have a king **to be** *just like other nations*, but that they also want a king **made in the likeness** of other nations.
- God of course warns them that it won't end well, but the people insist, and so God gives them precisely what they've asked for.
- *Last week we read* Saul was chosen by God to be that King: *tall, impressive, fierce in battle*. But it doesn't take long for any giddy unrealistic optimism to be crushed, as some of his deep character flaws begin to be exposed.
- Yet even at the end of chapter 12, we're left with a slither of hope, that Saul might be the king that they've longed for.
- **Saul has the opportunity to be the sort of king, the type of leader, that his people so desperately need.**
- And the one determining factor of Saul's kingship, is the quality and direction of his obedience.
- Remember: that underlying this situation, as identified *previously* by Samuel, is that with the insistence on having a king, *the people have rejected God as their leader*.
- Yet, in God's grace, this situation could still be **good**. *We read in 1 Samuel 12:14....*

If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God—good!

- But this *could also end badly*, as we the very next verse tells us... verse 15...
-

[But] if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.

- **It all depends on one thing: obedience!**
Saul's priority *therefore* as God's King, is to submit to God's will.
- **GOD** *speaks*, the **KING** *listens*, the **PEOPLE** *obey*.
- But in chapters 13-15 we quickly discover that things get flipped.
That instead of it being: God > King > People,
it quickly becomes: People > King > God. //
- But instead of God calling the shots, Saul is more interested in saving his own skin.
- In chapter 13, instead of waiting for Samuel to arrive with instructions from God,
Saul, overwhelmed by the people deserting him, dispenses with God's timing and God's plans.
- In chapter 14, instead of consulting God, Saul goes rogue, making two bizarre oaths,
the first putting his soldiers at risk, the second almost resulting in the death of his son.

3

- And so Samuel tells Saul, that there will be no kings that follow from his family line.
- Yet things only get worse in chapter 15, where we focus today,
for Saul's fate as king is sealed, as he not only fails to listen and obey God,
but makes excuses, blames others, and substitutes ritual for obedience.

And so as we focus on chapter 15 today, we see:

- *God's Judgment of Sin;*
Saul's Half-Hearted Obedience; and
The Longing for a Better King.

4

#1 GOD'S JUDGMENT OF SIN \\ VERSES 1-6

So *first*, **GOD'S JUDGMENT**. Chapter 15, verse 1...

Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord. (v.1)"

- Massive hint *or reminder* to Saul, buddy, this is God speaking through Samuel, that remember: you're only king because I made you king, which means you're not in charge, you're just the deputy, **so, you need, you must, listen to what I say!**
- *Sidebar for us: I wonder if we need to be reminded of that too! Of where God has placed us, of what God has set us apart for. That it's not ultimately of our own doing or our own achievements, but that God has placed us in our families, workplaces, communities, Which means that we're ultimately there for him and not for ourselves...*
- **See** if it's not clear enough, *the verbs for listen/hear/obey occur eight times in this chapter!* Saul's one job, as king, **is to listen to and obey God.**
- And so, what is the message? *Verses 2-3...*

5

'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. (vv.1-2)

When we hear this, we can have all sorts of reactions, we can have loads of questions.

- You might be wondering, is this truly something God would command? You might think this sounds absolutely horrid, and that's because it is!
- *Sometimes people will use passages like this to characterise God as inherently violent. Sometimes people will use passages like this to justify their own violence.*
- And whilst we don't have time to fully explore this, we must remember a few things:
- First, despite what people sometimes think, this is actually only one of a handful of *examples in the Old Testament in which the total destruction of a people is commanded.*
- Second, this can in no way be used to justify violence by Christians today, for Jesus has commanded us to love even our enemies.
- Third, this is not God being impetuous or out-of-control, but this is the judgment of God on the Amalekites *through Saul.*
- Jesus taught that we all will face judgment on the last day, this is God's judgment being brought forward. //

6

- *The Amalekites, in heinous ways,
had been the first to attack Israel as they escaped out of Egypt.
And despite God waiting some 300 years, they had not changed as a people.
Can you imagine, if an atrocity had been committed against you,
having to wait some three centuries for justice to be done!
God has been incredibly patient with them, but now his judgment has arrived. //*

As people read the Bible, and even the accounts of all that Jesus did and said, we can so readily emphasise either God's mercy or God's judgment. Some seem to completely ignore all that Jesus taught about mercy, Some seem to completely ignore all that Jesus warned about judgment.

- But a full picture of God, indeed a full picture of the Good News, always will include both judgment and mercy coming together.
- Mercy without judgment means that there is no justice, Judgment without mercy means that there is no hope.
- *Often the problem with our view of justice is that we know that we make terrible judges. And that's why we can only trust God to be the one and only just judge.*
- And the question that remains, is that do we trust that if God is God, *that he not only has the right to judge, but that he is the one only who rightly judges? //*

7

So Saul is commanded, you have one job!

- In fact, the terms of the command are repeated over-and-over again. But Saul doesn't do it... *verse 9...*

BUT Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. (v.9)

- Now let's be clear:
- Saul doesn't disobey the Lord's command, because of an outpouring of sympathy; **they saved all the best things, not the weakest things.**
- Saul doesn't disobey the Lord's command, because of a misunderstanding. **they were unwilling to destroy everything.**
- Saul disobeys, simply because he thought he had a better idea.

8

#2 SAUL'S HALF-HEARTED OBEDIENCE \ \ VERSES 7-23

It's a classic example of SAUL'S HALF-HEARTED OBEDIENCE.

But that's not how Sauls sees it.

In fact, when Saul encounters Samuel after the battle, he's super upbeat!

- He's really chuffed with himself, we know that because in verse 12 we read that after the battle was won, he went down and built a monument in his own honour!
- Samuel is furious, the Lord regrets, *that is full of sorrow*, for all that Saul has become, but Saul is blissfully oblivious to all of that, *waving the 'mission accomplished' banner*, and you can almost imagine him whistling as he skips up to Samuel, saying, G'Day...

[When Samuel reached him, Saul said,] "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions." (v.13)

- Samuel, must be thinking: "Saul, what planet are you on?!"
- Verse 14: Saul, if that's the case... "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears?" ... *Have you been listening to God? Because all I hear is the sound of disobedience.*

9

- Verse 19: "Why did you not obey the Lord?
Don't you understand that partial obedience is still ultimately disobedience?
- Verse 22: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices?"
Do you think that God is more interested in hollow displays of devotion rather than submission!
- But Saul just tries to dodge and weave it!
- First, he **blames** other people.... he did that in chapter 14 as well with Samuel... remember, *you didn't arrive when you said you would...* but here he says:
verse 15: *the soldiers brought them, they spared the best of the sheep and cattle...*
verse 21: *the soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder...*
verse 24: *I was afraid of the men so I gave in to them...*
- Second, he **reframes** disobedience as obedience, saying:
verse 15: *they spared the best... to sacrifice to the Lord your God!*
verse 20: *I did obey the Lord... I went on the mission assigned to me...*
verse 21: *they took the best... in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God... //*

As we hear this exchange we might be thinking, "who is Saul kidding?", but if we're honest, we might also be thinking, "isn't this all a bit harsh!?" Didn't Saul *pretty much* do what God has commanded?

10

- And I think the reason we instinctively think that,
is because we can often see so much of Saul in ourselves.
- *But God isn't fooled here, and he's not fooled by us either.*
- Confronted by sin, it's so easy to want to **blame** and **reframe**!
- We can be tempted to put the **blame** on others: *it's their fault, not mine!*
We can be tempted to **reframe** as well intentioned: *well, I didn't mean to hurt them!*
- But God isn't asking for Saul's interpretation of his commands,
nor is he asking for ours.
- Jesus said, if you love him **you will keep his commands**,
Jesus said, go and make disciples,
teaching them to obey everything I have commanded.
- Moment for self-reflection today... That if there is anything in our lives:
in which we're just not taking seriously what God has commanded of us,
then we need to deal with it today.
- Perhaps something of God that we've just brushed off as unimportant,
Perhaps something of God that we're faking but not sincere about,
Perhaps something that we think we know better than God,
Perhaps sin that we've been quick to blame others, or reframe as obedience. //
God doesn't want our half-hearted obedience. He wants it all

11

- So often the reason why we can feel sympathy for Saul,
is that we, just like he, don't get the gravity of disobedience.

23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king." (v.23)

Disobedience, is at the same level as sheer pagan idolatry.

- Let's be clear, this isn't the same of trying to obey and falling short,
but this is intentionally disregarding or taking God's commands lightly...
- Samuel is saying, that when we do that,
this not mere misunderstanding, *but rebellion and arrogance...*
Saul hasn't just failed to obey, he doesn't really think he needs to...
He thinks its fine to make a few operational adjustments on the fly...
But that's a problem, because facing to obey, is rebelling against the one who saves.
It's saying, thanks God, but I'll call the shots, I'll decide what's wrong and right,
I'm actually the one in charge.
- Obedience is not some form of works righteousness,
that you need sufficient obedience to be saved...
it's the opposite of that: it's trusting the one who does.

12

#3 OUR LONGING FOR A BETTER KING \ \ VERSES 24-35

In response to judgment upon his kingship, Saul asks for forgiveness...

- It's unclear how sincere Saul is...
Three times he asks Samuel if they can go worship together.
- It's like he still doesn't understand the gravity of what he has done,
and he's saying, 'But Samuel, can't things just go back to the way things are?'.
- But whilst Saul may find personal forgiveness in the Lord, the verdict is in,
and we're left **LONGING FOR A BETTER KING**.

As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbours—to one better than you. (vv.27-28)

Who will this king be?

- It can't be Saul! **Because God's decision has been made...**
It can't be Jonathan! **Because the successor won't be from Saul's line.**

Who will this better king be?

13

- That he will be humble enough to recognise God as God,
willing to trust even when God's Word looks wrong.
That he will have a heart not like that of Saul,
but that he will have a heart like God.
- We'll meet who that is next week, that David will be the 'better' king,
but even David cannot fulfil all that was prophesied, or all that we need.
- But there is one who can.

"Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. (Acts 13:36-39)

14

- Saul, so tragically shows us, that we need:
 A king who lives in perfect obedience.
 A king who obeys only one voice.
 A king who is truly after God's own heart.
 A king who does not decay but is forever.
 A king who is not only just, but is the perfect judge.
 A king who loves us even to the point of death.
 A king who won't cause us to rebel from God but leads us to trust in God.
 A king who does not dodge the reality of sin, but dies to overcome it.
 A king who can take our disobedience and make us righteous.
A king through whom the ultimate freedom, ultimate salvation, and ultimate love are found!
- Do you know him?
- *He desires is not your stuff but your trust.*
He demands is not your rituals but relationship.
- Don't accept one lessor than Jesus as your king.
 Don't take the crown that he deserves.
 He's the only one he's worthy of our allegiance.
 He's the only one who can truly save.