

Obedience is Better

1 Samuel 15:7-29

November 8, 2009

Intro

We come now to the 15th chapter of first Samuel. Last week we studied about how God had chosen a man by the name of Saul to become the first king of Israel. They had rejected God as their king and demanded to be like the nations around them with a king over them as well.

So God gave Israel a man after their own heart, someone who was head and shoulders taller than other men and exceptionally good-looking. In fact, it was said of him that he was better looking than any other man in Israel. So this was a man like the people wanted, but God also gave to Saul everything he needed to stay on course. He strengthened his unbelief by giving him many confirmations of the Word of God. He anointed him with the Holy Spirit and even allowed him to prophesy with the prophets of Israel.

But even though God gave everything Samuel needed for life and godliness to stay on the course which he had been given, it was up to him to stay on that course. Unfortunately, we began to see the cracks in Saul's character grow wider. At one point, when Saul grew impatient waiting for the arrival of Samuel who was to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, he took matters in his own hands and assumed the priestly office. He was then corrected by Samuel. He began to show a lack of wisdom in refusing to allow his soldiers to eat unless they had become victorious.

So when we come to Chapter 15, Saul has been given another opportunity to demonstrate his heart of obedience to the Lord. Saul did not do well here either. As we see Saul veering off course, it becomes an opportunity for us to learn how to stay on course. His defeat becomes an opportunity for our victory.

I. God Disciplines Those whom He Loves

- 1 God had sent Saul on a mission to settle the Amalekite issue once and for all. The Amalekites had brought an unprovoked attack against Israel as they were crossing through the desert after leaving Egypt. They had attacked from the rear, attacking those who were straggling behind; mothers with infants, the elderly, etc.
- 2 God had also told Moses that when Israel had entered into the Promised Land that this issue must be settled.
- 3 Saul was given that mission, but he did not obey what God had told him to do. He spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, as well as some of the best of the sheep, oxen, lambs, and all that was good.

A. God loves us more than our service

- 4 In verse 11, God told Samuel that he regretted having made Saul king because he has turned back from following him.
- 5 The word "regret" refers to God grieving because Saul was not doing what God commanded. It seems that Samuel reflected God's heart when he cried out to the Lord all night because of Saul.
- 6 God makes it clear in his Word that he loves us with an everlasting love and so it grieves Him when we get off course and bring pain into our lives.
- 7 God loves the servant more than the service. In other words, God doesn't love us because of what we can do for him.

Illus - We don't have children so we have someone to mow the lawn.

- 8 The scripture also tells us that when God disciplines us it is evidence that we are his son or daughter.

Hebrews 12:6-11 God deals with us as with sons.

- 9 Saul had been going farther and farther from obeying God's Word and for the sake of the nation this would need to be dealt with.

B. Make no excuses

- 1 In verse 15, Saul tries to shift responsibility onto the people saying, "They have brought these things from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep in order to sacrifice to the Lord."
- 2 This is a classic example of making excuses for why he didn't follow the direction of the Lord.
- 3 At first, it sounds like such a good reason, but it still wasn't what God asked Saul to do. People have been making excuses for a long time.

Illus – Here are some classic excuses...

- 4 In the book of Luke, Jesus was very straightforward about those who gave excuses rather than action.

Luke 9:59-60, And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."

C. Don't shift the blame

- 5 In verse 20, after Samuel directly confronted Saul by asking, "Why did you not obey the voice of the Lord?"
- 6 Saul responded, "I did obey the voice of the Lord... but the people took some of the spoil."
- 7 Finding someone else to blame is as old as, well, Adam. When God asked him if he had eaten from the tree of which he was commanded not to eat, Adam responded, "That woman whom you gave to me, she gave me from the tree."
- 8 When Eve was confronted she shifted the blame and said, "The devil made me do it."
- 9 But accepting personal responsibility for our actions is the cornerstone for lasting change.

Illus -A University of Kent student who was caught plagiarizing decided to sue the university contending that, "He had been cheating for years and his teachers were at fault for failing to catch him sooner!"

- 1 In reality, Saul can't blame the people because he had the authority to do something about it. He was the king of Israel and he could have told them what to do.
- 2 If I have authority, then I have responsibility.

Illus - If I'm watching the kids and serve them chocolate cake for dinner I can't shift the blame to them when I'm the one in authority.

- 1 In the same way, I have authority over my own body and must take responsibility for its actions.

1 Corinthians 9:27, but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

James 1:13-16 When sin is accomplished.

II. Obedience is Better than Sacrifice

- 1 Samuel's response to Saul is powerful and to the point, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?"
- 2 There is great insight and understanding that it brings much delight and joy to the

Lord when we listen to his voice.

A. God desires our heart first

- 1 When God established the system of sacrifice it was to be a picture of the sacrifice that God made in our behalf; the offering of his own son on the cross at Calvary.
- 2 He then established sacrifices that were made to represent the heart of a worshiper.
- 3 For example, there were peace offerings that represented the peace that we have from God. There was the fellowship offering to represent our relationship of communion with him.
- 4 There was also the free-will offering. This was an offering made to God simply because a person wanted to express his love and his worship to God.
- 5 But all of these sacrifices were to be a representation. They were to be a picture of a greater reality. **In other words, the sacrifice should represent the heart.**

Illus -When a man gives flowers it's supposed to be a symbol of his love. If there isn't any love, then what's the value of the symbol?

- 6 In the same way, the symbols of God, such as communion, are a picture of a greater reality.
- 7 This is what God meant when he said, "to obey is better than sacrifice."
- 8 There are many scriptures that make the point very clear that what God desires is our heart.

Psalm 40:6-8, Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; My ears You have opened; Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required. Then I said, "Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart."

Psalm 51:16-17, For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Mark 12:33, "... to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

- 1 In verse 23, when it says that rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as idolatry, he is saying that this is a big deal.

- 2 In other words, Saul was trying to minimize obedience, but God was making it clear that it is a reflection of the reality of the heart.
- 3 The result, Samuel told him, would be that the kingdom would be taken from him and given to someone who is better, someone who had a heart after God. He was referring to David.

B. It comes back later to bite you

- 9 We have to go forward in time to understand what this means.
- 10 What we discover is that Saul's disobedience came back not only to bite Saul, but also became a problem for all of Israel 200 years later.
- 11 Saul would be defeated in battle at the end of his life while battling the Philistines, but while he lingered near death he called for someone to put him out of his misery. But the one closest to him was an Amalekite. So in the end, it is an Amalekite that takes his life.
- 12 Then about 200 years later when Israel had been taken captive into Babylon, when the king of Persia was on the throne, an evil man by the name of Haman came up with a plan to destroy the nation of Israel.
- 13 He just so happened to be an Agagite. In other words, he was an Amalekite.
- 14 In scripture, this is called the principle of the harvest, and it is a very important principle to understand. If we sow to the flesh, we will reap from the flesh.

Galatians 6:7-8, Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Illus - Throughout our lives we are either sowing the seeds of righteousness or sowing the seeds of death. We get to choose now what we will reap in the future.

Illus - If we find ourselves in a field of weeds it's probably because that's what we have been sewing for a long time. The key is to now begin sowing the seeds of righteousness.

Examples of Excuses:

"Please excuse Josh for being absent. I forgot to wake him up and I did not find him until I started making the beds -- by then it was too late for him to go to school."

"John didn't come to school yesterday because he was feeling like he was going to be sick. Thankfully, he wasn't!"

"Please excuse Janet's absence from school. It was Take Your Daughter to Work Day. Since I don't have a job, I made her stay home and do housework."

This one is my all-time favorite!

"Please excuse Mary for missing school yesterday. We forgot to get the Sunday paper off the porch and when we found it on Monday, we thought it was Sunday."