

Let's open our Bibles to 1 Samuel 15.

If you haven't been with us, Samuel was the last judge, the first prophet to the nation of Israel, and we meet him in this book - this historical book. And it is when he was older, and his sons not doing very well, that the people came and used him as an excuse to ask Samuel, "Could you find us a king that would be like the other nations?" And they weren't satisfied being God's people. This was the era - the 300+ years of the judges; it was a terrible time of ups and downs and mostly downs. And so it broke Samuel the prophet's heart. He's been at it for five or six decades, and this is what he hears. He told the LORD through tears that he was so upset. The LORD told him, "Don't take this personally. They've been rejecting Me since I brought them out of Egypt. So we're going to give them what they want, but tell them the cost." And so old Samuel went and said to them, "You're gonna be taxed, your property's gonna be seized, there's gonna be corruption, they're gonna take your children, and they're gonna put 'em in the army and maybe lose their life." When Saul was called by the LORD, he was just what the people wanted - good looking, taller than everyone else; he was the stud guy, right? He was the UFC fighter. He couldn't have looked any "badder" and yet "gooder." It's right there in the Bible. So the LORD calls him in such a way that everyone knows he's been called: miracles that no one could deny, the outpouring of God's Spirit upon his life, the surrounding of his life with men who God had touched. God told him He would use him to begin to deliver His people from the Philistines, their great enemy. And yet for Saul, that wasn't enough. When he came home from this experience on the road, his uncle wanted to know where he'd been; he didn't tell him. When it came time to be anointed in front of the people as the king, he was hiding. When the anointing was finished, he didn't go to rule; he went home to farm. He just really didn't have a heart for the LORD at all, but he was everything the people wanted.

In chapters 13 and 14, and tonight chapter 15, God summarizes Saul's life - forty years of rule, about 1050 to 1010 B.C., somewhere in that range, forty years in three chapters; and in two basic military campaigns that are separated by about thirty years, or at least twenty-five years. Chapter 14 and 15 have a twenty-five- or thirty-year gap between the two of them. But one of them was against the

Philistines, their perennial enemies, most of them to the west where the Gaza is today, if you will, in Israel; the other, the Amalekites - which we will see tonight - to the south. Though he reigned for all that time, here's his heart revealed in just two campaigns, and both of them resulted in tragedy and judgment from God. The first one, twenty-five or thirty years earlier, against the Philistines - he was told, because of his disobedience, that his family wouldn't be allowed to continue on the throne; there would be no succession of rulership. Twenty-five or thirty years later, in the Amalekite case, he will be told that God's just going to pull the plug on him, period; he is finished. Now, he wouldn't leave that day that he was finished. He would, for the next seven-and-a-half years (and the last seven-and-a-half years, if you will, of his life) make...his only goal was to destroy David, the man he knew, and everyone else knew, God had chosen. So that's really the story of the rest of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel to the death of David; it's David's forty years of reign as well. So, you do get, in three very short chapters, if you will, but I don't mean short in terms of verses but short in terms of reporting, God's judgment and Saul's loss - his self-will, his disobedience, his know-it-better, his fleshly life. Could have been so much. You have to read the first couple of chapters to see his calling and what might have been and then to see what really was.

One thing we want to learn, or at least mention to you between these two chapters, is how patient God is. I'm not sure you and I would do a good job of waiting on Saul for twenty-five or thirty years. He's a wretched guy in many ways. In fact, all he does is horrible, it's all self-serving. But the LORD gives us plenty of time to repent, and yet, after losing the right of succession, that didn't change him. Tonight he loses his position altogether; that doesn't change him at all. God forgives weak men who repent. Saul was a weak man who never did. He might have said so, but his heart and his behavior certainly didn't show it. Compare him to David who we'll start with next week in chapter 16 (and stay with through the rest of the next book and a half). David was a very weak man in many ways who stumbled often but sincerely repented, literally, every time; and God met him and forgave him and restored him. He was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22).

Tonight you could entitle chapter (I only remember the Bible, not by verses but by chapters; it helps me - I can cover a lot more verses in my head that way). But this is really Saul's last call. He won't disappear for a while, but this was his last opportunity, and it's a story of "A Heartbreaking King" who could have done better.

God does not allow you to go down this path of destruction, like Saul, without warning. But there comes a time when the warnings run out. There's that Scripture in Proverbs 29:1 that says, "He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." And that really is Saul's unfortunate end in the way that he chose, if you will, to live his life. God is faithful to warn, but we have to listen. Saul, here, shuts the door on himself, shuts the door on the grace of God, sets aside everything the LORD has promised him, will spend the next seven-and-a-half years of his life (before he dies) trying to wipe out what God said He was going to do (wipe out his enemy), actively seeks to destroy David, who's anointed by the LORD. It's a horrible story. I do not expect to see Saul in heaven. I don't. I don't find one verse in the Scriptures that would convince me otherwise.

So, let's read it anyway. Verse 1, "Samuel also said to Saul," (and, by the way, we ended chapter 14 with just a review, remember, of years of his battles and all and verse 52, his building of his army with strong men and valiant men - he took them all; it's just kind of an overview, beginning in verse 47, just the wars of Saul; it covers twenty-five to thirty years without saying much of anything at all) "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." ' " Destroy them all. Now, notice the words in verse 1, "Samuel also said to Saul." If you're keeping track of what we're studying, back in chapter 13:13, twenty-five or thirty years earlier, God had said to Samuel about this fight with the Philistines. He had refused then as well. So those are kind of tied together, at least by the Holy Spirit, to give us these two stories. So here's one more opportunity for Saul to listen to the words of the LORD. And notice that Samuel made it clear, verse 1 and verse 2, "This is the LORD's word to you. This isn't my word. This is God's marching orders." This was not to be a war of aggression; it wasn't to be a war of defense. He was going to carry out God's judgment - once and for all - against a very savage and wicked people who had come to the end of God's grace. Notice the words, there in verse 2, "I will punish." God was going to punish this nation, the Amalekites, for their wickedness. Saul and the army of Israel were going to be the hammer or the stick He used to bring home, if you will, the judgment. The Amalekites were one of Israel's oldest foes. In fact, they descended from Esau through his son, Eliphaz. They, for the most part, in

the Bible, dwelt in the southern deserts of Judah. They were the first to wrongly attack Israel when they were coming out of Egypt, at a town called Rephidim. You can read the story, there in Exodus 17. It was there that, you might remember, the children of Israel - hardly equipped to fight - were called upon to fight Amalek and his people, and the LORD said to Joshua and to Moses, "Moses, I'm going to go stand up on the hill. I'm going to hold the staff in my hand over the battle, and then you're going to fight down in the valley." And Israel wasn't equipped to do that, but God was giving her favor. This was the anointing of God; they were under the staff that God had given to Moses. Well the battle went long. Moses was older. His arm got tired. Every time it fell down, they'd start to lose. "Get your hand up, man. What're you doin'?" So they sent Aaron and Hur up to the top of the hill to put a stone under him and kind of help him to hold up his staff and all. And this was the place that they fought. And Moses put a banner there: "The-LORD-Is-My-Banner" because he said, "The LORD has sworn that you will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." And, as you go through the Scriptures, the Amalekites become a type, in the Bible, of your flesh. It's a war that you fight until you die. It doesn't go away. But you're to consider it dead. And from Exodus forward, you'll find these guys periodically popping up in the Bible, and they are always there to destroy Israel, and they are always bound together with those who hate God's people. In Deuteronomy 25, as Moses gets ready to hand the people over to Joshua, Moses said to the people through the words of the LORD, "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way that you were coming out of Egypt, how he attacked you from the rear, how he went after the stragglers in your midst, when you were tired and weary, how he didn't fear the LORD." And so the LORD says to him, "I'm going to one day give you rest from all your enemies round about. I'm going to blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. Don't forget." God promised to one day deliver us from our flesh, where it will no longer be in our minds or even in His mind. So whenever you run into the Amalekites, think about the flesh being that kind of typology.

So, notice that Saul is going to be the arm of the LORD's judgment. In verse 3, it says "utterly destroy." It's one word - it means "to ban" or "to erase." It's the same word that the LORD used when He told the children of Israel to go after Jericho (in Joshua chapter 6), to "destroy" it. Right? This word "destroy" or the word translated, maybe, differently; but the same word is translated seven times just in Joshua 6 alone. It is the victory was going to be the LORD's. No one was going to get any spoil or get any credit. There'd be no remnant, there'd be no residue, there'd be no mercy, there'd be no survival. That's what the word

"destroy" means. And for Saul and his troops, in this case, there's supposed to be no sacrifice, no gain, no spoils. God wanted to destroy this nation for their wickedness. "Okay, Saul. Now what are you gonna do?" Now there are people that read the Bible, and they go, "That seems kind of severe." But Moses gave God's direction before they went into the land (in Deuteronomy chapter 20), and he warned about destroying those that were in the land, the "ites," those seven big groups of "ites." And then he said, "Lest they bring their abominations into your family and teach your children how to live this kind of life." And so you find that God, in desiring to protect His people.....it's kind of like a rabid dog. Nobody wants to kill a dog, but if that dog bites you, and he passes that along to you and you die, it's probably better that the dog dies. Now God is faithful, and He is patient, but there comes a time when there has to be destruction. So this was God's judgment upon a very wicked people. And the only solution for your flesh is don't make peace with it; seek to count it all dead, right? Render it dead. Consider it dead. Because it'll hurt you if you let it live. The old man should be reckoned dead (Romans 6:11).

Well we read, in verse 4, that, after these orders were given by the prophet Samuel, old timer, "So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley." Now, I want you to notice the numbers because, in the last chapter, thirty years earlier, he had six hundred men. Now he has two hundred thousand foot soldiers besides just ten thousand men from Judah, of all places, to fight.

We read, in verse 6, "Then Saul said to the Kenites, 'Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.' So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites." The Kenites were a division of the Midianites to which Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, belonged. In the days of Abraham, the Kenites were really strong as a nation. Afterwards, they broke into small little clans - you'll find them hanging around the desert in biblical history, if you will. But years earlier, when Moses was passing through, they had made more than one league with him as friends, and so Saul now reaches out to show them kindness and warns them it's probably good to leave the area.

Verse 7, "And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly

destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed." So, three verses to summarize our guy thirty years later. Three verses describe the entire assault, and it was basically to let us know that Saul was not doing what God said yet or still or again, if you will. The key words in verse 9 are the words "Saul and the people were unwilling." The word is very straightforward. They were "unwilling" to destroy everything. So they, making themselves God, decided, "I'll keep what's good. We'll wipe out what we despise or count as worthless. But other than that, this is what we're gonna do." So rather than following the LORD's orders, they put themselves in His place and decided what they would save and what they would not. Now, how often do you suppose, just carrying it forward in a spiritual sense, we make decisions like that about our flesh? "Well, that's not as bad as this, so if I'm hangin' on to anything, this is all right," and we make a lot of bargains with our flesh; we let the flesh kind of live around us, if you will, sometimes way too much. And so we have this tendency to defy God. We call Him Lord, but we won't forsake everything that we know is our flesh. Well, that's kind of the position Saul was in. And so he made decisions. King Agag, the king, would be kept alive. The choicest of the flocks and the herds would be kept by Saul and the people. It was a direct, rebellious attitude and action against God's word. We just read it in verses 1 and 2, "The LORD sent me to do this. Now the LORD told me to tell you to do this. So now you have a choice." No doubt Agag was kept alive because to capture a king would be to wipe out a nation; he would symbolize their overthrow. The animals were spared under the guise of later being offered to the LORD, which I can't see at all because these aren't folks that tend to worship God at all. Saul was living in a pretty depressed spiritual time. And plus most of what you gave to the LORD in worship you got back in terms of BBQ. Right? A lot of it was you eating with the LORD. So these guys were gaining a lot and losing very little. So it sounds spiritual, but it was anything but spiritual amongst Saul or the people. Saul wasn't a very godly leader. Apparently Saul wanted to stay on good terms with the people. He had suffered some major setbacks. You remember, years earlier, he had ordered some people to kill Jonathan, and they had defied him, and he had gone home. And so Saul is still the man pleaser he's always been; not a God pleaser at all. But here's his opportunity to do the right thing, and he doesn't.

Now, we aren't told it here, but I'll tell it to you now - that more than one Amalekite escaped. Because it just isn't Agag, the king. In fact, we will find

several Amalekites running around - in chapter 27 of this book, in chapter 8 of the next book - in the days of David where these Amalekites' uprising will continue. So Saul didn't even go as far as he said that he did, but he fails again, if you will. If you go, historically, in your Bible, about 550 years forward, to the book of Esther, you will run into a guy named Haman. Remember that guy? Haman. He wanted to destroy all of the Jews. His goal was to wipe out the Jewish race entirely. He was, according to chapter 3:1 of Esther, a distant descendant of King Agag. So the disobedience, here, of Saul - great consequences had this continued. Now, fortunately Samuel's gonna step in at the end of this chapter and fix that. But because other folks got away, that lineage would continue to the point where the enemy almost wiped out the entire race of God's people because that was his desire.

So, short-term problems when we disobey, but there're also long-term consequences that are built in. So, partial obedience - you should write it down - is complete disobedience. Right? Partial disobedience is complete disobedience. If you don't bring your flesh to the cross - you make allowances for it like Saul did, you save what you think is worthwhile - know this: it's like dynamite's gonna blow up on you. It's not gonna go well for you at all. So, it is better that we just set aside those things that are of the flesh. What did Paul say to the Romans? "In me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18). "If you live according to the flesh, you'll die." That's what he said in Romans 8:13. "If you live according to the Spirit, and you mortify the deeds of your flesh or put them to death, you'll live." So, in any regard, they just kept what God said, "Destroy." It was His judgment. It represented our flesh.

"Now the word of the LORD," verse 10, "came to Samuel, saying, 'I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.' And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night." When you read in your Bibles, "God regretted," it may make you wonder what that might mean. And it does not mean He wishes He hadn't done so. God doesn't make mistakes. God doesn't need to fix things. Nothing surprises Him. He is speaking, though, about the sorrow over the response of the one that He loves. God regretted that Saul would now be faced with judgment, he would lose his position, his people wouldn't be delivered. God regretted this man's response. God doesn't regret His actions. He knew what Saul was gonna do. God doesn't go, "Oh, man, I wish I hadn't done that." That's us. We do that all the time. "I wish I hadn't talked to that person, wish I hadn't hired that one, wish I hadn't gone to

that place." We do that constantly. God doesn't do that. He knows everything. But He regretted seeing what had taken place in Saul's life. So keep that in mind. "It makes Me sorry to have put Saul in his place as king because of his response." He had not been faithful, and because of that, God couldn't bless him. But God's not altering His plans. Saul has his own choices to make, and Saul was making them. So when you see God is sorrowful over the choices that He has made, it is always in the context of the sadness that He has in His heart towards what He sees in the response of the people. If you go to Genesis 6, you'll see there's a verse there that says, "God looked into the world, and He saw the wickedness of man was great upon the earth; every imagination and intent of man's heart was only evil continually. And God was sorry that He had made man." It's the same word there. And so it grieved His heart. When Jonah went to preach, and he didn't want the people he was preaching to to be delivered, he preached forty days in judgment, and he was happy to see it. But then you read in Jonah, when the LORD saw the repentance of the people, He relented from the disaster He had desired to bring upon them, and He wouldn't bring it. It's the same word. It means that God can now respond the way that He wants. His grief is when we won't listen, when judgment has to fall, when suffering follows. It's Jesus crying over the city of Jerusalem, "How often I would have gathered you as chicks, but you wouldn't come" (Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34). God's grief has to do with our response; not that somehow He made a mistake or He made the wrong choice.

Well, and look at not only is God's heart broken in all of this thing, but verse 11 tells us that Samuel spent all of his night crying, grieving. And, by the way, the word "grieve" in Hebrew means "to be broken-hearted and angry" all at the same time. It's kind of that anger, "Oh, man!" that breaks his heart. Samuel was furious - furious that Saul would dishonor the LORD through disobedience, furious that Saul wasted forty years of the people's lives by not being the blessing that God wanted him to be; his reaction to God's grace, His calling upon his life, that he had led so many people astray. Samuel's a right-on dude, you know? He's been around, and he's now maybe in his 80's, and he has loved the LORD. And it could have been so different, and it wasn't different, and he knew it, and it hurt him. It hurt him. Samuel was only one guy, in the midst of a whole bunch of people, that was walking with God; there weren't that many like Samuel. I think one of the downsides of ministry is seeing people you expect a lot from, do little. Or worse, do worse. You expect better. You long to see them better. And you don't see them doing that. Samuel loved Saul. You won't find Samuel.....every time he has to deliver a word to Saul, it's with grief. It's never with blessing. Samuel is frustrated. I get it. This

has happened time and again. But I like a couple of things. Number one - that before he says a word to Saul, he spends the whole night praying; though he's angry, he's praying. What would keep you up all night praying? What would move you enough to cause you to just, "I can't sleep, I gotta pray this thing through"? Samuel would discover God's patience with Saul had run out. And I tell you what - you have to go a long way to run out of God's patience. If you can push God to the brink, you're way out there. Right? Because the Bible does say there is a line that you shouldn't cross. But that line is so often so far removed. I read, in Psalm 81:10-13, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." That's God's will. "But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!" Peter writes about the longsuffering of God in the days of Noah (2 Peter 2:4-5) and how the LORD waited while the ark was being prepared. Waited for everyone to come around. It turned out only Noah's family got in. Eight souls. We read, in chapter 6:3 of the book of Genesis, that the LORD said, "My Spirit will not always strive with man," and then He said, "His days shall be one hundred and twenty years." And, with the flood, man's average lifespan of eight hundred years got to one hundred twenty, and by the time David shows up in about 1000 B.C., the average lifespan was about seventy; and it's not much different today. So God would only wait for so long. But God waits! And now God was finished waiting upon Saul.

You remember those words in Romans 1:21 that talk about that "they knew God, but they wouldn't glorify Him as God, and they weren't thankful, and they were futile in their thoughts; and their foolish hearts were darkened." And it says (verse 24) "God gave them up, gave them over to their uncleanness, to their lusts, to their dishonoring their bodies one amongst themselves." There is a place you can get to where God just gives you up. It's not a good place. I don't ever want to know where that line is. Sometimes Christians want to live right up..... "Lord, can I still do this and be saved? How 'bout this? Is this all right? Am I still in?" You just don't want to lose your heaven hat, you know? Better that you go over here. "Lord, can I even see the line from here? It'd be better if I can't see them." Get right in the middle where you belong.

So, poor Samuel. Poor man. He's in his 80's, he'd been serving the LORD all year, and, man, this has been nothing but a disappointment.

"So when Samuel rose early in the morning" (verse 12) "to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, 'Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself:' (ah, this is good) "and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal.' Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, 'Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD.'" Blind Samuel. Verse 14, "But Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' " Samuel, in the morning, heads south. He's looking for Saul; was told he had left Carmel already to go to Gilgal. "He set up a monument for himself." Isn't that great? This guy cannot just stop from seeking glory. It's a far cry from, by the way, chapter 7, where the LORD gave him victory over the Philistines, and they put an Ebenezer stone. Right? And the word "Ebenezer" means "He's brought me this far." So, Saul has lost his way, certainly. But this is true of Saul - he's the self-seeking guy who thinks he's back on top. He just wiped out the Amalekites. So, Samuel had to kind of chase him down. Notice that Saul greets the prophet with typical spiritual jargon. "Hey, bless you of the LORD, prophet! By the way, I've been out serving God." And Samuel has no congratulations for him; he's blind, but he hears things. And so he exposes Saul's sin. "Don't give me that, Saul. I hear evidence to the contrary."

Verse 15, "And Saul said, 'They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.' " So, here's typical Saul - spiritualizing his behavior, blaming others when things don't look too good, taking credit when he can. Not walking with God. "Those people, you know how they are." And you can notice the "they" and the "we" in the story. Saul is distancing himself from the people. This is the biblical "throw them under the bus" approach. God had clearly ordered the extermination; everything was under the ban. It should have been wiped out. "You want to sacrifice it to the LORD? You should have just wiped it out. That would have been a good sacrifice to the LORD." And yet, the leaders - it appears from verse 24, we'll get in just a minute - hadn't been told by Saul what God wanted. He was just goin' along with the people. So, notice, also in verse 15, these words, "your God." "To sacrifice to the LORD your God." Not "to the LORD my God." "Hey, Samuel, what're you complainin' about? Your God's gettin' all this stuff. It's not like we're shortchanging Him. We've saved it for Him. This is a pretty honorable thing to do. Man, you're always complainin'! The rest we have utterly destroyed. Which part did we destroy? The stuff that we counted as worthless," back in verse 9. Personal gain with service to the LORD will pollute your service to the LORD. Know that. Remember Gehazi, the servant of

Elisha, who ran after Naaman who had been healed of his leprosy, who had offered the prophet a great reward? (2 Kings 5) And he said, "No, no, no. I was just serving the LORD, I don't want a reward. I'm not in it for the money; I'm in it for the LORD and the fact that you should know him." Gehazi said, "Man, we lost out. That could have been a bundle!" And so he chased him down after he left Elisha's house and said, "There're a couple things he could probably use," and he gave him a little list; and the king was more than happy to give it to him. But the minute he took it, he got the leprosy that was on Naaman before. And, for the rest of his life, he lived with leprosy because he was using his place of service for a place of profit. So here's Saul. He clearly defies God's direction. He blames the people for the choices. He's not sorrowful. He's not repentant. This is more sin with the explanation. This is cheap talk. So, religious excuses for sin are the most damnable. And, "They did it for a good reason. We're gonna give it to your God, okay? Back off, man!"

I like Samuel; 85-year-old guy. "Then Samuel said to Saul," verse 16, " 'Shut up!' " I know, it says, " 'Be quiet!' " But trust me, it's "Shut up!" " 'And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night.' And he said to him, 'Speak on.' " He stops Saul in his spiritual yapping and says, "Let me tell you what God says. I told you already what God wanted. Let me tell you now what He says."

Verse 17, "So Samuel said, 'When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? Now the LORD sent you on a mission and said, "Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed." Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?' " "You're so arrogant! Why did you do that?" He reminds Saul. "And now you're no longer humble, you're no longer listening, you're too big for your britches. You're very arrogant. You disobeyed the LORD. You didn't fulfill the mission. You swooped in for your flesh. You looked for the spoils. Look at everything you're throwin' away, man! What're you doin'?" The prophet's heart is broken.

Verse 20, "And Saul said to Samuel, 'But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.' " Saul is not a bit moved. I want you

to see that. It's the way unrepentance works. You see yourself as different than everybody else. He's doggedly arguing. He knows full well he's done the wrong thing. He's off-loading his guilt on the people around him. He's a cowardly, weak leader who has absolutely no concern for God or love for the people he's overseeing. His position has not changed. "Why didn't you just teach them the ways of the LORD? Why didn't you speak up, Saul? Why didn't you lead and be an example?" Here's Saul. Saul says this, "I went. I captured the city. I overthrew their leadership. I destroyed the troops. They took some of the stuff. Look, I can't do everything. Give me a break. There was a lot to do, and we darn well did it well, if I say so myself."

To which Samuel responded, verse 22, " 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,' " (which you are proposing to bring to Him) " 'as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed' " (His word) " 'than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.' " I love verses 22 and 23. You should remember them well. It is futile to rely on religious ritual to replace obedience. People do it all the time. They try to replace a daily walk with God by writing a big check and putting it in the offering. They try to discount a whole year of not walking with God by showing up for four days or five days and working at Vacation Bible School. "I've done it! We're even now. The books are....." They're never even if you're walking with God. You owe Him. You owe, you owe, you owe. And you will continue. But that's not the issue. For Saul, he wanted to balance whatever disobedience there was with trying to point out what good he had done. We can't cover rebellion with ceremony. You can't buy God off. Sacrifice without obedience is an abomination. God hates it; doesn't want any part of it. You read, in Micah 6:6-8, "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" "Shall I bring Him my firstborn?" That's not nearly as good as just humbly walking with God. That's what He's looking for. That's what He wants. "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." That's what He said through Hosea (6:6). "And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." David, when he got caught with Bathsheba in chapter 51 of Psalms wrote and said (verses 16-17), "I know that You

don't desire sacrifice. I would give it to You if that's what it would take. You're not delighting in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart. Those are the things, God, You don't despise." Saul was trying to buy God off, trying to make a case for himself. And Samuel, the old timer, man, he's just absolutely right. Learn that God looks for obedience, and He's not taken in by outward gestures of devotion that betray hearts that are far from Him. It doesn't work. You can't buy Him off. You look good, maybe, tonight here. I'm impressed. But you want to make sure He's impressed. That's where we're at. That's where the heart has to be. We should know that tonight. Saul is rejected because he ruled while failing to be ruled by God. That's his problem. Saul, in action, had declared he would reign and rule; and God said, "Fine, then you can do it on your own." And He lets him. He lets him run on his own. For the next seven-and-a-half years, Saul is out there all by himself; no protection. God is his enemy because he's made God that way.

Verse 24, "Then 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.'" Again. " 'Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD.' " "Okay, I'm wrong. I feared the people. They wanted to take some of the spoil. You know, sometimes that happens. Let's get over it, man! I messed up. So forgive me, and let's go worship. Let's move on. Forgive me!" To which Samuel said, "I can't forgive you! This is a big deal! This isn't 'no harm, no foul.' I can't just move on. This is God rejecting you, not me. It's too late for that now." Verse 25 " 'So please pardon my sin, and return with me and go worship.'" Verse 26, "But 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.' And as Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. So Samuel said to him, 'The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent,' " or, if you will, change His mind. "You're not gonna scare God, Saul, and He's not gonna change His mind."

So Saul says this, " 'I have sinned;' " verse 30, " 'yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.' " Still not his God. "So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshipped the LORD." What Saul is asking for, "Can you at least make me look good in front of the people?" "No, no. God's rejected you." "Well, could you

at least walk with me to the place of worship?" No repentance. He just wanted to avoid public disgrace, and even the conviction of sin is not leading him to repentance. So, Samuel walks with him; doesn't mean he approves what he has done. Nothing's going to change as a result. But he walks with him, and he saves face, for now, for Saul. But Saul knows this is it, man. God has shut the door on him, if you will.

So we read, in verse 32, "Then Samuel said, 'Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me.' So Agag came to him cautiously. And Agag said, 'Surely the bitterness of death is past.' But Samuel said, 'As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.' And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal." Brutal. But, look, the LORD has to be obeyed. This was a painful duty that was left to an 85-year-old guy. It's not always easy to serve the LORD. Moses leaves Pharaoh's daughter's home. Nathan confronts David, whom he loved - could have cost him his life. Jesus clears out the Temple; declares judgment on Capernaum; leaves Nazareth - never to return; shares with the disciples the secret heart of Judas' betrayal; leaves the Temple, knowing their future is judgment. There's some tough stuff happens when you walk with God. But Samuel is all-in with God.

And then we read, in verse 34, "Then Samuel" (after this was done) "went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeath of Saul. And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel." Samuel leaves Saul to himself. It broke Samuel's heart. Notice how hard this is - to serve the LORD and watch people not do so well. By the way, their cities, geographically, were only ten miles apart. Never saw each other again.

Now, we will read, in chapter 19, that Saul went to lay himself out before Samuel; probably Samuel's dwelling place. We don't read any kind of discussion between the two. So I don't want you to freak out when we get there, "Oh I thought he was never gonna see him again." He may not have seen him at all. They certainly had no interaction. Saul is left on his own. From now on, the Holy Spirit would be removed from Saul. An evil spirit from the LORD would begin to torment him, and that tormenting will lead to David being called, because he was a good musician, to stand before Saul when he was tormented and lead in worship. And the spirit - this evil spirit - would leave for a while, tormenting Saul. I always tell people, "If you miss the worship, you're missin' out because you could leave with an evil spirit. We don't

know." No. I think there's something to be said for the healing of worship. Right? That God surrounds us, He occupies and inhabits the praises of His people. We will see Saul berserk for the next seven-and-a-half years. He will end up going to a witch to get counsel. He will die in battle as a defeated man. David will become a man that God can use. But what a tragic story! What might have been.

And let me say this to you - don't you be that person that people say about you, "You might have been something. God wanted to do great things in your life." Don't waste it. Life is short, and then you go to be with the LORD. Be the person that makes a difference in your home, in your family, with your children, in your community, in ministry. God can do great things. He'll even use you to do them. If you're willing. Or you can just waste the opportunities, lay aside the blessings and the assurances, and just coast. "Oh, we're gonna make it." Well, you'll get in. But don't you want to get in, in a glorious way? That the fruit of your life meets you at the gate? That would be the way to go, wouldn't it? When they cheer your name because you're comin' home. Much better. Saul, unfortunately, did not do that. I'm excited to get with David. He's a guy I like better.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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