

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Samuel 13.

I heard a story several years ago about a young boy that was a 5<sup>th</sup> grader; got called in to the principal's office, and somebody had ratted him out that he had been swearing out on the playground. And the principal said to him, "You've been cursing, Michael?" And he said, "Yes, sir. But I have a good reason."

And I guess that's what this chapter would be: "Sin with an Explanation." Maybe you know about that.

Chapters 13, 14 and 15 - where we are now, in 1 Samuel - are really Saul's career summed up in two campaigns. He would rule for almost forty years, but it is these two reports that God gives us. Remember we've been telling you on Wednesdays that the narrative is God reporting on what turns out, oftentimes, years of history. But this is just what He wants you to know. And narrative is a place you learn when you stand at the feet of the people you're reading about. So here's Saul in the things that God would want you to know about those forty years. One of the campaigns was against the Philistines; the other ones - actually most of them in the West (of the Philistines) - were to the south in the battle with the Amalekites. And, like I said, though he would reign for forty years, these two battles kind of clearly revealed his heart, where he stood with God, the uncertain future that he brought upon himself because of it. And because they're so important lessons to learn, we're going to spend, I think, the next month on these three chapters. They're important for us. I think they're kind of the turning point of Saul's life. We'll certainly see Saul's heart. We'll see the genuine faith of his son, Jonathan. We'll see the judgment of God pronounced against Saul in two stages: first he loses the right of succession for his children to the throne, and then God will remove him from the throne permanently. Even when God says, "You will no longer be king," Saul hung on for seven and a half years, by force, and God allowed him to kind of fight that through as David waited upon the LORD to open the door for him to begin to rule.

At the start of chapter 8, if you've been with us on Wednesday night, our hero, Samuel, was in his 70's. He had a history, for fifty years, of sharing God's Word

faithfully amongst a people that were not doing very well. The years of the judges were highlighted with great downfalls and really short upticks as far as the people's spiritual well-being. Back in chapter 8, the children of Israel had come to Samuel, and they said, "We'd like to have a king like the other people around us." And it offended this prophet of God. For years, God had been faithful to them. They had always succeeded without an army, without a battle plan. God was just with them, and wouldn't that be the best way to go always? And having brought them out of Egypt, God said, "Don't be angry, Samuel. They're not upset with you. They're turning their backs against Me. They've been doing that for years. So tell them what having a king will cost them, and then we'll give them a king."

And, in chapters 9 and 10, Saul is chosen by God or given by God to them; not really chosen (the people chose him). And, if you were with us through chapters 9 and 10, it is a series of miracles intended to convince Saul that this was God's will - the miracles of his calling, of his choosing, the Spirit of God coming upon him, his heart being changed, the LORD surrounding him with men after His own heart. After Samuel's private anointing of Saul, he arrives home to an uncle who said, "Where have you been?" and he doesn't even tell him about the things that had happened on the way home, if you will. At his public anointing at Mizpah, they couldn't find him; he was hiding. And the LORD had to say to the prophet, "He's over there." God knew where he was hiding. Saul then goes home to his place of dwelling; not to rule but to farm. And, surrounded by godly men, every opportunity that God gave to Saul, Saul laid aside. It wasn't that there wasn't great hope here. There was. Tremendous hope for a godly life. But Saul never embraced anything that, really, God wanted for his life or wanted to do.

In chapters 11 and 12, which we looked at last week, early on in Saul's career, the battle at Jabesh turned to the side of the Jews because they began to pray, and God met them, and Samuel's leadership brought victory. And it was really a confirmation that if you trust the LORD, you don't need a king; you have a King. You don't need an army; you have the LORD. But instead the people, as the battle turned their way, began to say to anyone who disagreed with them, "Hey, if you didn't want Saul to be the king, we're gonna put you to death because obviously he's the right guy. Look at the victory we found." And Samuel, in chapter 12, as he gathers the people at Gilgal - with really just to say to them, "Let's commit ourselves to the LORD, this is what we can expect if we let Him be our God" - used the occasion to say to the people, "Look, never forget where your real victory lies, where your strength really comes from. It isn't from your army. It isn't from your

king. You serve God, both you and the king will be fine. You don't serve the LORD, both you and your king are goin' down." And this old man in his 80's or 90's, although we'll see him around a little bit more in the days to come, his effective public ministry was pretty much over with, here in chapter 12.

Tonight in chapter 13 - and we're just going to look at chapter 13 - two years have passed since what we read last week. The reason I know that, verse 1 says, "Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose for himself three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the mountains of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent." In the second year of Saul's rulership, he established the first standing army in Israel's history. Remember that was one of the things (back in chapter 8) that the LORD had warned the people, "You want a king, he's gonna start takin' your boys out of their home, he's gonna make them to fight for him, they're gonna die in the battlefield, they're gonna be conscripted into an army." And the people could have cared less. So, two years in, Saul begins to take the best of Israel's young men; and he made an army for himself. He was mimicking the ways of the other nations. Israel's glory has always been that God fought their battles. I mean, if you read before this the battles during the days of Joshua or whatever they might have been, these were poor farmers and ranchers fighting very sophisticated armies, and yet God gave them victory. They would kill each other, the walls of cities would fall down. The LORD had a hundred ways to cause His people to have victory. That had been their glory forever. But now they wanted to be like the other people. So we find, for the first time here in chapter 13, a standing army. No longer was God their defense and their armor or their strong tower or their hiding place or their deliverer. They had now begun to trust in the ways of the world.

A couple of places mentioned here - just to kind of give you a visual image - Michmash is about ten miles or so north of Jerusalem. It still exists today. Geba, which we'll read here in verse 3, where the army of the Philistine garrison was, is about two miles short of that. So up here Michmash about ten miles north of Jerusalem; two miles short of Jerusalem, eight miles out, this place where the Philistines were gathered. And then below them, about two more miles, was Gibeah. So Saul is up here, his son is down here, the enemy is kind of in the middle, and Jerusalem is just five or six to seven to ten, now, miles (depending on where you're at) to the south.

We read, in verse 3, "And Jonathan" (at that point) "attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, 'Let the Hebrews hear!' Now all Israel heard it said that Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel had also become an abomination to the Philistines. And the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal." So Jonathan went to fight. The name Jonathan means "God" (or Jehovah) "has given him to us." It's a great name. But he was a man of tremendous faith. We're going to see, next week in chapter 14, how he had a faith in God that his father absolutely didn't share. He was an amazing, young godly man who seemed to walk with the LORD all of his life. In protection of the people - because his father had been chosen to be king - Jonathan, with a much smaller army (one thousand men), goes after the enemy which has now infiltrated themselves right into the heart of Israel and not too far away from Jerusalem as well. And so, with a much smaller army and with (what we read towards the end of the chapter) no real armaments (they have no weapons, really; there's one sword that Jonathan has, everybody else is fighting with plowshares and shovels and who knows what they fashioned for themselves), it doesn't look like a real threatening army. But these are God's people who are being protected. These are God's enemies that were threatening them. And so he goes after the battle; and apparently maybe not a complete victory yet but certainly found some success with God's hand. Saul, who had been nowhere near the place, then blows a trumpet so that people can begin to hear publicly that he had done this. He blows the trumpet. The word goes out, "Saul has brought great victory for God's people." He'd been laying with two thousand men under some trees, not doing, really, anything. In fact, he calls (in verse 4) the people after this battle to Gilgal, a city that is miles to the south and to the east of Michmash, where Saul and the people had renewed a covenant (back in chapter 11). It was near the border where the celebration was that God had brought them into the land. So Saul moves everyone far away from the battlefield. "Oh, I've had a great victory. Let's go over here." And he calls everyone to this very known historical place, if you will, and begins to celebrate what he had done nothing about; a place that was two miles away from, if he'd have just wanted to come help, he could have gotten there in an hour, with an army, two thousand of them. But he didn't come. And so, instead of that initiative, he goes to Gilgal, the place of religious significance for the people, and he begins to celebrate the victory that he didn't buy, with his initiative that he didn't have. He begins to take a victory lap, tries to glory on the wages and the work of another; neither acknowledging Jonathan's faith or the risk that he took nor the glory of God that He would give them any victory. Saul was just a bad guy in many

ways. But he wanted the glory and the honor. So, as he is outwardly glorying, and the fact that Jonathan had beaten, if you will, to some measure, the Philistines who were their greatest enemies there at Geba, the Philistines got word out that these guys were being attacked. And so they send out to their constituents - the different cities and the lands that they controlled - and they're a bad people. I mean, they're a tough bunch of folks. And they begin to gather again there in the land but this time in record numbers. This wasn't just a little garrison like Jonathan had dealt with; this was a serious fighting army. And between Saul's glorying and Jonathan's attacks, the Philistines were angry, and they came back armed to the teeth. And all the while, Saul's way over here; he's way over here with his people, goin', "Aren't I the greatest king you've ever had?" "No. You're the only king we've ever had." And his son had brought him the victory, but he was taking credit.

So we read, in verse 5, "Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel," and then we read, "thirty thousand chariots" (I should say to you there's no way they had thirty thousand chariots; the land wouldn't have held thirty thousand chariots; I think the NIV, if any of you are using it, says three thousand; I think that's more accurate; if you know anything about Hebrew, those words are very close together in terms of pronunciation, but I suspect that three thousand was far right; thirty thousand seems way too many) "and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude." (They couldn't be counted.) "And they came up and encamped in Michmash," (which, by the way, was where Saul was) "to the east of Beth Aven" (just to kind of give you a historical landmark). "When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling." So there's this massive troop buildup. Remember Saul, two years, has done squat. Nothing. He's done nothing. He's gotten an army together, and when there's a need to fight, he and the army aren't doin' a thing. So the people, they look out; not everyone's at Gilgal. But they're all stretched out (and this is in the middle of the land), and the people begin to look out, and they see a nation that's coming that's very equipped to destroy them, utterly. In fact, there're so many of them you can't count them. The sheer numbers were enough to put the fear of God in most of these folks. But instead of being organized, "Hey, let's trust God, we're gonna fight," the king should lead them in the ways of the LORD, Saul's just baskin' in the glory of the last battle that he didn't fight. And the people are beginning to

run for cover; they begin to defect. Those who are stickin' around are stickin' around with their knees knocking. Saul was not the spiritual leader that could encourage them to stand in faith, and so people began to defect. It's kind of like the ten of the twelve spies who came back because they didn't see the LORD (Numbers 13), and they said, "Man, the enemy in the land is huge. They're like giants! We're gonna get devoured!" Because they didn't see the LORD. "We're like grasshoppers in their sight," they said. Or those twenty-two thousand out of the thirty-two thousand who met with Gideon and saw the Midianite army (Judges 7) and went, "Yeah, we quit. We're frightened! We're leavin'! We're not gonna stay." There were just a lot of defections. Disheartened people who had no relationship with God, being led by a guy who had no relationship with God, hadn't called upon the LORD. You're not reading anywhere here that Saul is praying. He isn't thinking to do so now. Hard to build your house in a storm. If you're not right with the LORD when you hit the battle, you're probably gonna have a hard time in the battle. And so the king that returned home to the farmlands after he was elected isn't very helpful now, when there's pressure, and the people don't know where to turn, so they're starting to take off.

I thought about Peter. Peter - you remember that story. It's in Matthew; it might be in Mark as well. But Matthew 14, there's that experience where the Lord, in the Galilee area, sees the people who have such a need to eat and the whole test that He gave to Philip and all; but eventually the Lord fed the five thousand men plus women and children along the lakeshore. And the people ate till they were full, and they gathered twelve baskets that were left of food (the disciples did). And then you read (in John 6) that the people came to take Jesus by force to make Him the king. They were so excited about a guy that could make 'em all eat out of a little basket of someone's lunch. And the Lord took their demands seriously. He saw that this wasn't a joke. He grabbed His twelve apostles and pushed them literally, forcefully, into a boat and told 'em to go to the other side. The disciples wanted to..... "This is cool. They're gonna make Jesus Lord. This is exactly what we want. Make Him King!" "Get in the boat." He told them to go over to the other side, and they began to row. And you remember the story - how there were twelve baskets of food rocking back and forth in the boat with them; they began to labor, and the wind came up. And the Lord, after He got rid of the crowds, just sat up in the mountains watching and praying with them and for them. And it wasn't until the fourth watch, 3:00 in the morning, and they were just beat to death; they only had gotten halfway across the seven miles that they would have needed to cover. And they're good fishermen. They're used to being on this lake. They just couldn't

move the boat....when the Lord came walking towards them on the water. And, for a while, they thought, "Maybe that's a ghost." But someone said, "I think it is a ghost!" And Jesus yelled out, "No, no, no! Cheer up. It's Me. How you doin'? Don't be afraid." Peter said, "Lord, if it's You, then bid me" (or command me) "to come out onto the water." And I think the original Greek says that Jesus responded, "All right, Peter. Come on with your bad self." (Laughing) Pretty sure that's how it read. And Peter got out. The winds were swirling, the waves were moving, there was great diversion from his attention and, no longer looking at Jesus, he looked around; he began to..... "What am I doin' out here? This is crazy!" And he began to sink. Fortunately he knew the Lord, and he knew enough about Jesus to look up immediately and cried out, "Lord, save me! Help me!" And the Lord reached out His hand and pulled him in, and He got him in the boat. And immediately all of the storm and wind stopped. And Jesus said, "You of such little faith, why did you doubt?" And they got in the boat, and they looked at each other, and they went, "This is the Son of God! Who else could this be?"

It can be extremely hard to stand by faith when you see around you the things that look like they're overwhelming to you. "Why did you doubt?" The Scriptures tell us Peter began to look at the waves. Well here're God's people in Israel, under a very poor leader, who are lookin' at the waves. They're lookin' at the trouble. They're lookin' at the difficulty. They're seeing their lives come to an end. They're hiding in holes in the ground. They're defecting across the Jordan, because that's where Gilgal is. They're running east. "Let's just get out of the country and get away from the trouble." And they're terrified. And they have no one to help them to get their eyes back on the LORD. All they can see is the winds and the waves of life. Earlier on (in the story in Matthew 8), the boys had remembered when the Lord had gotten into the boat and steeled the waves (it was another day), they said to one another, "Who is this that can calm the seas?" Now they're in a boat again, and they said, "This is the Son of God." They answered their own question; it just took two boat rides. But it is so easy if you get your eyes off of the Lord to lose heart. When, earlier on in that story, the hungry crowds were there, the Lord had said to Philip (John 6), "Hey, where are we gonna get enough food to feed these guys?" He was giving them a challenge. Their answer should have been, "Man, I have no idea, and there's not even a 7-11 nearby. Fortunately, Lord, You're with us, and You can feed the multitude." That would have been the right answer. Philip did this..... "Man, we checked everybody's pockets. We haven't got near enough money to give everybody a bite." "Well, then, what're we gonna do?" And the Lord ..... it does appear from the gospels (and I think that story is actually in all four of

the gospels) they had an afternoon to think about it before the Lord kind of went back to them, and they said, "Here's our wisdom: Lord, send them home before it gets dark and they're stuck without any food. Our plan is just get rid of them. If you could just get rid of them, that would be great." The pressure of the situation drove Philip and the others to go by what they saw and conclude by logic rather than by faith. And all that they saw was clouding the perspective of who they were serving. And remember, like I said, even in the boat there were twelve baskets of food at their feet to remind them of what had happened just seven-eight hours earlier on land.

At a time when the people, here, needed a spiritual leader to refocus their eyes on the LORD, Saul was at Gilgal. It was, by the way, a prescribed place of meeting where the prophet had said to him, "If there's ever trouble, meet me there at the altar. I'll sacrifice to the LORD. We'll talk to God. We'll ask Him what He wants to do. Just wait for me there. Let's go seek the LORD." And so the people were scattering, and soon Saul was going to stumble badly. But, look, here's Saul's heart, here's the problem for Saul, and it's only gonna get worse. As Saul waited for Samuel.....and Samuel had told him, "Wait a week if need be. I'm comin'. Don't worry, I'm comin'." Old guy, can't move so fast, big country, big circuit. He'll get there. Takes time. The people began to leave, the enemy began to grow. And Saul has no hope in God. He is now waiting for a religious prescription of something he could care less about. "Oh, yeah. Samuel'll come. He'll do one of these, and then we'll do somethin'." Oh, forget it. By then, it'll be too late. And so it was religious superstition to Saul. The pressure was mounting, the days were passing, the enemy was growing, the people were leaving. In fact, when Saul gets back home, his two thousand men have shrunk to six hundred. So he's already lost fourteen hundred of his best guys. Things aren't going well.

Verse 8 say this, "Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel." (You can find that in chapter 10:8.) "But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him." Saul was told to wait. Why? Because Samuel was a priest. There was no one that was even as close to Samuel in terms of accurately speaking for the LORD over the last fifty or sixty years. This guy wasn't a new upstart that you might not have any confidence in; this guy had a proven track record of a life serving the LORD. With every day that passed, the crisis for the nation grew worse. Remember, a lot of this was brought on by Saul just goin', "Yeah, look what I did," and they went, "Oh, now he's comin' back, Saul. Way to go." "Wait as much as a week. I'm coming. God will direct us." But with

the ever-threatening, growing army and the panic of the people scattering, and his own lack of courage, and the fact that his pride was on the line, and he has no spiritual kind of proclivity at all, waiting upon the LORD was killing him. And old Samuel was running late, and Saul felt like, "Gosh, I've gotta do something or it won't be long before everyone has deserted me, and we'll be done." So, he waits for seven days. On day seven, though, he takes matters into his own hands. He decides he's gonna go in and do the role of the priest. He's gonna take the burnt offering, he's gonna take the peace offering; he's gonna bring it to the LORD and seek God. He's gonna go through the religious ritual so that the people, maybe if they believe it, can hang around. "Maybe I can instill some hope in them." But understand.....Saul had no hope in this. Saul's a church-goin' guy. He's not a believer in that regard. He isn't convinced of God. He doesn't believe in God. He doesn't trust God. He only responds to God when he's in big trouble. And even then, he does so on his own terms. No respect for the Law. This was a religious charade to him; meant nothing to him. But if the people believed it, and they would stay, well, he would do whatever it would take.

So we read, in verse 9, "So Saul" (after seven days) "said," (and notice, verse 8, Samuel wasn't there yet, and the people continued to leave) " 'Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.' And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him." "Why wait a minute longer, Saul?" And the answer is pretty simple, "God told you to wait." Right? "God told you to wait." God wanted to lead the nation. Samuel was a priest who could stand in that place of offering, who God would honor. If he wanted to seek the LORD, he should seek the LORD in His way. If anything, this delay was God's doing. It didn't say that Samuel didn't come in seven days; it just said it was probably the seventh day, towards the end of the day. And nothing was looking good. Right? So, "Saul, why don't you wait?" The delay was His doing. It was His doing as much as it was Jesus' delay for not showing up before Lazarus died. He could have gotten there in time; He didn't. It was day seven. It was down to the wire. But God had been faithful. Saul should have waited a bit longer by faith. But here's the problem: Saul has no confidence in God. And if you don't have any confidence in God, waiting upon the LORD is the worst. "He's not gonna do anything. Why am I waitin' anyway? I've got all kinds of ideas." Now, look. Saul had seen the work of God in his calling. He had seen God's work at that battle of Jabesh, which had happened two years earlier, in response to prayer. He had come to know, in no uncertain terms, that the victory that he enjoyed was from the

LORD; even told that by this old, blind prophet, Samuel. Now it was time to finally put into practice what you should have learned by now. But he doesn't do it.

How do we see ourselves that way sometimes? Putting feet to our faith is a big step. "Saul, do you really want God's help? Then come to Him in His way. Wait for Him in His timing. And don't sin in the process." Don't be like that kid in the principal's office. "Yeah, I didn't do what God wanted, but I got a good reason." There is no good reason. When the situation seemed extremely distressful, when all hope seemed lost to Saul, when everything was absolutely vital to get moving, to stand by faith and not be moved, what was to Saul almost a death knell - it was as hard as it could possibly be. He couldn't wait. "The testing of your faith works patience," James (1:3) said. But there wasn't any faith here to test. Saul was like the guy who was trying to build his house, but the storm was coming, and he was building it on the sand. He didn't have what it took. The storms of life will test the foundation of your faith. It's easy to say, "I trust the LORD" when you don't need to, to brag, "I'm a Christian, I trust God for everything." Until you need Him. And that's what Saul was all about. When the pressure arose, he didn't trust the LORD. It's easier to talk about forgiveness than to forgive, easier to read about love than to love, harder to stand in faith than just speak a word of faith. Right? Saul, when the chips were down, showed what he was all about. His character was being exposed. He was a man unwilling to trust God and unable to spiritually lead His people. And he so distrusted God that it wouldn't be long before he would disobey the LORD; and when you disobey the LORD, then the consequences follow. Then the enemy has you the way he wants you.

So, in the midst of these two offerings, Samuel shows up; which shows that he was so close to waiting long enough, which is a horrible thought, isn't it? Saul was unwilling to wait any longer. He justifies his actions by the present need that he sees - the people are leaving. "You're late." He steps into a role where he doesn't belong, offers sacrifices to the LORD that God won't accept and, as God would have it, in the midst of the defiant act of Saul, the prophet of God shows up at the eleventh hour to confront this man's heart. Saul had not gotten to the peace offering, which is the offering of fellowship. But the burnt offering, which was burnt in toto, was the offering of consecration. He faked total commitment. "Let me just burn this completely. That's what we're like. Our lives are in it all for the LORD." Just a joker. Completely removed from what God wanted.

Samuel, verse 11, "said, 'What have you done?' Saul said, 'When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, "The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD." Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.'" Samuel, as the voice of God, seeks to arouse the conscience of this man to lead him to repentance, and instead Saul comes up with a litany of reasons why this was sin with an explanation. He blames Samuel for cutting it too close; he blames the people for not standing with him; he blames the enemy who are growing in size; and he says, "And because of all of that, I haven't even been able to seek God. It's really not my fault in this." And when is it our fault, anyway? Saul knew he had done the wrong thing. Look, Saul didn't see this as a big deal. After all, to him it was just simply a practice of the religious, of crowd control. He didn't move his heart. He didn't think he could find God's will or His direction or deliverance through this method anyway. "So I went through the deal. You would do it. You weren't here, I could do it. We can all do it. You know, just start a little fire. That's pretty much how it works." No faith in the system, no faith in God's Word. His own answer condemns him. He literally says, "What options did I have?" That's his reasoning, isn't it? "What am I supposed to do? People are leaving, you're late, the Philistine army is almost ready for battle, we're in imminent danger. I felt compelled. Literally, what else could I have done?"

I can't begin to tell you how many times over the years, as pastor, I've heard people try to explain sin away in their lives with that. "What else could I have done?" How 'bout wait on the LORD? How 'bout trust God? Nothing. Do nothing. When in doubt, punt. Don't do anything. He acted on a compulsion, a feeling, an urgent need; doing the wrong thing and defining it as, "That's the only thing I could do." It's hard for us as saints to wait upon God when the pressure is mounting, when support is abandoning you, and the enemy looks like he's stronger than you are, when every minute sounds and feels like a lifetime, and your case is desperate. How much harder would it be for Saul, who doesn't know the LORD, really, to wait? The answer is: impossible. Because he doesn't see that it's valuable. We wait on the LORD because, as hard as it is, we know He'll come through. Right? We make it through because we know who He is. Saul didn't know who He was, so he couldn't make it through. He couldn't. Because his relationship with God was non-existent. He didn't know what every believer does know - that God knows; and the desperation and the timing. We wait on Him because He is always on schedule. He's always on schedule. Psalm 27:14, "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and

He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!" Wait! Isn't it the hardest thing in the world? I hate waiting on the LORD. I love when He delivers. Answered prayer is my favorite. I like to pray, but answered prayer is my favorite, all-time favorite. How 'bout you? Same thing, I'm thinkin'. Isaiah would write (33:2), "O LORD, be gracious to us; we've waited for You. Be their arm every morning, our salvation in time of trouble. LORD, we wait upon You." That's what we need to learn to do. But it is because we know Him that we can wait upon Him. Because if you're in a position like Saul, where you're a church person and you're a religious guy and you go through the motions - you have no relationship with God - letting God do His work and waiting upon Him is impossible. It can't happen because you have no compulsion in your heart; your compulsion is then just to do what you think is best. I'll tell you what. We've been in this building project for a long time. And I got a note today. I can read it to you. It tells us tomorrow we're gonna get this signed paper that we were supposed to get yesterday. And I thought, "Oh, LORD, I'm so glad You're bigger than the City and whatever that dude's name is. You're bigger than he is. You're bigger than the issue." And we think, "Gosh, we're just waitin' so long," and yet God's God. So what am I sweatin' it? It's His problem, not mine. "You want that dirt? It's just layin' up there. It's fine, God. It's Yours." It was very relieving. When we ran out of the ability to meet at the school here, years ago, when we started.....we were running out of a lease because the school was going to reopen. There were more kids now. They didn't use it before. And we had to wait within two weeks of our final lease before we got out of there. It was like last-minute. I think the LORD likes last-minute. I don't know. Don't write this down, "Jack said the LORD likes last-minute." But I think He likes last-minute because we always seem to just be hangin' over..... "There You are." He never disappoints, but He'll take you right to the limit. Right? Learning to wait on Him. And I suspect it is more valuable to the LORD than we know that He teaches us to wait.

Saul's not repenting here, right? You read that. He's justifying his sin. When David was confronted by Nathan the prophet about his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12), and Nathan was scared to death to say a word because this was the king, it was David who said to him, "I have sinned against the LORD. I've done the wrong thing." And Nathan was able to say, "The LORD will put away your sin. You won't die." God has a way of forgiveness for the repentant. But this isn't Saul. We will never hear anyone in the Bible see what Saul said here, which is literally, "I had to sin to obtain God's blessing. The people are running, the enemy is growing, I haven't had a chance to pray, you didn't show up. So I did it myself. I took over."

Well, you're a clown. But I hear people do that all the time. They sin with an explanation. They gossip behind someone's back and then say, "Well, I just wanted to share so I could get prayer." Okay. God knows your heart. Saul had gone to Gilgal, at first to celebrate his victory; then, when he saw that things were going south, to wait for Samuel. But he had no belief that obedience to that direction from God's man would bring God's blessing. He didn't believe that. If he believed it, he would have waited.

He's such a contrast to his boy, Jonathan, who goes out to fight because he wants to protect God's people, and he trusts the LORD. We see him in the next chapter, and I'm sure you've read the story before, that he wants to go fight with his armor bearer a big army of the Philistines, and he's able to say to his buddy there, "Let's go see what the LORD might do as we fight the garrison of this uncircumcised bunch of people because maybe the LORD'll work for us. He doesn't need a lot of people; He'll work by many or by few." And his armor bearer, a guy that shared his faith, went, "Yeah, that's cool." These are two nutty people that you don't want to hang around with unless you trust the LORD like they do. They want to fight a garrison of people with the two of 'em! And they only had one sword! "Hand me the sword." (Pastor Jack moves as if handing a sword back and forth.) "Thank you." "Okay, you can have it back." Doesn't sound like a good battle plan. Amazing.

So, Saul's conscience knew it was wrong. His mind said it was justified. Sin with an explanation is an all-too-familiar problem. We see it in believers marrying unbelievers. "I can only wait so long. I've looked everywhere else. We fell in love, what could we do? God shouldn't have let us fall in love." Could have just not hung out with 'em. "God's blessing us. I know God's hand's upon us. We're gonna do it anyway." We just set aside what God says because we don't believe what the consequences tell us. But I should just say this to you - there's no ever, ever a good reason to sin, ever. There's never a good reason to sin. When resources diminish, when pleas of what we see as necessities begin to tempt us to ignore the cries of our conscience which is, "Do the right thing," when the witness of the Holy Spirit is set aside because I figured out I need something, now I have sin with an explanation, and there's no good reason for that. I'll tell you what Saul does. Saul does what a lot of people do; he does the wrong thing and then covers it up with outward religious ritual to make it look more palatable - "Let me offer the burnt offering," symbolic of a complete consecration to God - when offering that in that kind of heart is useless. Proverbs 21:27 that says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with wicked intent!" God knows.

God knows. So, Saul figured it must be okay what he did - if it would bring some immediate relief. Sin will never fix anything.

Now, understand, this is two years into a forty-year reign. Two years in. They've got thirty-eight more years to put up with this guy. After all the miracles that he saw.

"And Samuel said to Saul," verse 13, " 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.' " Short explanation: "If you're not gonna represent Me well, I'll get someone who will." This situational ethics argument where both sin and godliness can somehow coexist - the prophets, Samuel wasn't putting up with it. Here's God's first judgment against them on this one campaign, and the judgment was pretty clear: there's no descendant of Saul that's going to sit on the throne. "You're gonna be a one-term ruler with no lasting fruit or blessing." And the answer was and the explanation was, "You failed the test of faith and obedience. God would have." That's what it says, "God would have." Now you might say to yourself, "Well, how's God going to let him rule forever when He's going to pick a king that's coming through Judah?" I don't know. But, "God would have." That's what he said. He would have ruled. What might have been good, what God would have been willing to hand to Saul if he had been obedient, was now negated by a justification of sin and the thought that sin would improve his situation; and in the curse of saving the present, he loses the future. Right? Sin saves the present tense, but it loses everything beyond that. It's a pretty good way of looking at sin. It might serve you well in the short-term; it'll never serve you well in the long-term. So he negates God's best for him, to his own demise, by simply just treating a relationship with God and seeking His Word as a religious practice without a heart. So, "Your kingdom won't continue," verse 14. The delay had flushed out Saul's heart. This next king would have a heart for God. He would be after God. He would seek to please God. This king had done none of those things and had no intention of doing them, either. And so he's called by the prophet of God a fool. "You're a fool." Why? Well, there're only two definitions for the fool in the Bible. The first one is, "He says there is no God." The second one decides that disobeying Him is fine; there are good reasons to disobey God. There's little difference between the two in terms of behavior. So Saul fearlessly

decides to act based on the appearance of things, he makes light of God's Word, and he leaves the only path of victory to be surely defeated. "No succession for your family at all."

Verse 15, "Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin" (just a few miles south of where the Philistines were gathering). "And Saul numbered the people present with him, about six hundred men." So Samuel goes back to Gibeah as does Saul. And when he returns, the numbers of his army have just shrunk. I guess Saul's ways didn't work. He's overwhelmed. He hasn't gotten a word from the LORD except judgment, and now he's sittin' in hot water. So we leave Saul there, hopelessly sitting by, watching his enemies grow stronger, plundering; and you will read of them going to the north and to the south and to the east and to the west. Truly it's folly to sin with an explanation.

So we read, in verse 16, "Saul, Jonathan his son, and the people present with them remained in Gibeah of Benjamin. But the Philistines encamped in Michmash" (two miles to the north). "Then raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned onto the road to Ophrah, to the land of Shual, another company turned to the road to Beth Horon," (so they went in three directions) "and another company turned to the road of the border that overlooks the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness." So they were literally surrounded by these troops, and they were ever-growing, and now they were stuck.

Verse 19, "Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, 'Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears.' But all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man's plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle; and the charge for a sharpening was a pim for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to set the points of the goads. So it came about, on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son. And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash." So in other words, they started to come towards where the people that were left were hiding there in Saul's land. So, to make matters worse, the Philistines monopolized the iron industry. Israel was so dependent upon them at the time that to sharpen their implements of farming, they would have to pay a pim. A pim is about two-thirds of a shekel or about a third of an ounce, if you will. But regardless, it was costly to keep in business, and you had to pay your enemy. And when all was said and done, the whole of Israel's

army had two swords. Maybe you should have been better off having the LORD be your King. Now they've got Saul and his boy. "Whoa! We gotcha." Three thousand chariots, six thousand footmen, and enough army where you couldn't count. "We got ya." Israel was outnumbered, it was out armed, it was out of touch with God, it was not being led by Samuel, the prophet of God, but by Saul, a man far from God who didn't want to lead them anywhere. The tension began to mount. The hordes of Philistines surrounded what was left, really, of the brain trust and the power in Israel, if you will. They came out of Michmash into the hills, and the question becomes - now what happens? And the answer is - I'll see you next Wednesday.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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