

March 30

1 Samuel 15

From today's reading in chapter 15 I would like to open with one basic principle. Samuel's final, tragic encounter with a good-king-gone-bad, comes this priceless bit of biblical advice. **"To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams."** Saul, like so many others both before and after him never quite managed to understand that God is never overly impressed by the worship of people who do not first obey him. The best worship is obedience to His commands, and without that obedience no ritual or act of public religiosity is of any real value. On another level, recognizing that the sacrifices Saul was bringing were intended as propitiation for the sins he had just committed, Samuel's words also point to the fact that God wants obedience not the sacrifices brought to atone for the lack of it!! Now do not misunderstand me here. The blessed truth of I John 1:9 still stands: "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But it would be better far if, because we have fully obeyed Him, we did not find the need to confess those sins in the first place, and we dare not allow ourselves to presume upon the grace of God by saying, "I don't need to be careful about how I live because I can always ask for forgiveness and God is obligated to give it!! That is apparently where Saul had come to in his thinking and it is a terrible place to be. "I know I didn't obey," Saul was saying, "but I'll just make a sacrifice and God will have to forgive me." That is a dangerous way to think!!

So what exactly was Saul's disobedience? He didn't fully and completely follow through with what God commanded - to destroy the Amalekites. These people were a nomadic tribe in southern Judah and were known for being plunderers. Back in Exodus 17 we see that after Moses and his people made war on Amalek the Lord declared this promise, "I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven." The Lord wanted to avenge the Amalekites for attacking and robbing Israel back in Moses' day. Fast forward now 200 to 300 years later (LA - I estimated this time frame based in what I read in ESV Study Bible) and the Lord is going to make good on his promise.

Saul was instructed by Samuel to totally destroy everything of the Amalekites, to not spare anything...not even the people. Unfortunately, Saul spared the best of the animals and King Agag himself. When Samuel heard of this news he was grieved, cried out to God, and immediately went to meet with Saul. On a side note here I think we see a great leadership lesson - Keep short accounts with those you lead and always go to God first with the problem. Did you see it said, "Samuel was troubled and he cried out to the Lord all night long?" He took his emotions to God and sought him first. Then, he acted immediately by getting up early in the morning so he could meet with Saul. Ok back to the story.

We see a few indicators of the state of Saul's heart from his actions following the attack of the Amalekites. First, we see pride as Saul set up in a monument in his honor. Instead of pointing people towards God it was all about him receiving the attention. Second, we see his fear of man trumped his fear of God because he

acknowledged he was afraid of the people and gave into to them. Third, we see his lack of genuine repentance and brokenness over his sin. In the same breath of admitting his sin he asked to be honored before his people. Saul just didn't get it did he. And as the ole idiom says, "This was the straw that broke the camels back." Never again did Samuel go see Saul after that encounter. Not only did scripture say that Samuel mourned over Saul but the text says that "the Lord was grieved that he has made Saul king over Israel."...you'll notice this is the same comment the Bible said earlier in verse 10. Now I don't know about you, but those verses raised some questions in my mind. Did God regret his choice? If so, isn't that against his character? How can a God who knows everything, grieve over a decision he made? Samuel addressed this concern as well in verse 29 when he says, "The Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind..." I believe God felt genuine sorrow over Saul's sin. In his sorrow, it doesn't mean God made a mistake or acted unwisely in his choice to make Saul king. God never makes mistakes but I believe he experiences sadness when he sees his children make the mistake of doing life their own way.

Our story today offers many points of application to think about. You may find yourself like Saul, wanting to compromise when it comes to obeying God fully. Or maybe, like him, after you have been confronted about sin in your life you are more concerned with your standing with the people around you than you are with God. How about the lessons of leadership we learned from Samuel? Are you keeping short accounts with the people you lead? Are you taking your grievances to God FIRST asking him to speak to your heart and work in the situation before you go talking to others? Are you willing to act immediately and do the hard thing if you know it is right?

Let me remind you of the Biblical advice we opened up with today, "To obey is better than sacrifice." God wants our wholehearted and immediate obedience more than our theatrical worship later. He IS a God who will readily forgive but his grace is not one to be taken advantage of.