

— IN SEARCH OF A KING —

Understanding 1 Samuel

Small group questions

1 Samuel 15 - The fall of Saul

Leaders - if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer - please contact the preacher!

1. What do you think are the most dangerous temptations for a Christian leader?

What is the passage about?

2. What was wrong with the people asking for a king 'such as the other nations have'?
3. What do you make of Saul's attitude toward himself, God, his soldiers, and Samuel?
4. How might we seek to justify our sins?

What does it teach us about God?

5. How do we cope with God's command of v3? (As background, consider Ex 17:8-14; Dt 25:17-18)
6. "They had no fear of God (Dt 25:18)." If this is the basic problem with the Amalekites, why might that history lesson have made Saul feel uneasy? What about us?
7. In what way does God's treatment of the Amalekites mirror what is coming for the whole world? (See also Rom 1:18-20)
8. "To obey is better than sacrifice." (1 Sam 15:22). How might we get this wrong in the same way that Saul did?
9. What does this chapter teach us about God's attitude to sin and his place in judgement?

How does it point us to Jesus?

10. In what ways is Jesus' kingship better than Saul's?
11. 'Jesus' death is where God's wrath and mercy meet.' Discuss.
12. Read Acts 13:36-39. How does Paul's teaching here put 1 Samuel 15 into perspective?

Conclusion

13. Give thanks for the wonderful kingship and atoning death of Jesus, who turns away God's wrath! Pray for one another that we might live lives that submit to Jesus' authority, to the glory of God the Father.

The Fall of Saul 1 Samuel 15

Opener: FAILURES OF LEADERSHIP – the political landscape of Australia over the last ten years

Leaders: who do not have the loyalty of their party

Who listen to bad advice

Who rule according to the polls, not according to what is right...

Not surprising that a former opposition leader this week mourned the state of politics in Australia!

Leadership is a key theme of this book of 1 Samuel that we have been reading together...

Context: Over the last couple of weeks we've watched as Israel demanded a king like the other nations around them. God warned them through Samuel: this won't end well! But the people insisted and God let them have what they asked for.

Last week we heard about how Saul was chosen by God to be that king: tall, impressive, and good in battle. Things look pretty good! The people are overjoyed as they affirm Saul as their king.

But as Samuel pointed out in ch 12, there's an elephant in the room: By insisting on having a king, the people were rejecting GOD as their ruler.

It could still be OK: as Samuel said in 12:14 - ¹⁴ If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God-good!

But what if they fail? Look at 12:15 -

¹⁵ But if you do not obey the LORD , and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

We've had the rise of Saul, now as we come to ch 13-15, we have the fall of Saul.

In ch 13, preparing to go into battle, Saul should have waited for Samuel to come and make a sacrifice. That was the deal! But when Samuel was running late, Saul stepped into the gap and made the sacrifice himself. He was presuming to take on the role of priest as well as king. And God was not happy. He promised through Samuel that Saul's family would not stay on the throne beyond Saul; God had already chosen a replacement.

In ch 14, Saul adds stupidity to his disobedience. A bizarre oath that prevents his soldiers from eating during the battle almost ends in disaster: his son Jonathan is nearly killed! His men break the food purity laws! Saul is looking more like the kind of king God warned them about.

Now, in ch 15, we see things get even worse. As usual we are looking at the passage through this lens:

What is the passage about?

What does it teach us about God?

How does it point us to Jesus?

What is the passage about?

First, Saul gets a mission from God

- V1 – Samuel reminds Saul that he is not king by accident, not by his own will or decision. GOD chose him. So, he had better listen to the message Samuel is bringing to him.
- And the message is here in v2-3: Go and smash the Amalekites. Kill every last one: adults, kids, even animals. That's pretty disturbing, isn't it? We'll come back to that in the next section.

Next, Saul and his men carry out the mission...or do they?

- So, v4-9. Saul gets together a huge army. They let the Kenites get away. The Kenites lived near the Amalekites and had helped Israel in the past.
- And so the Israelites set an ambush for the Amalekites and attack them. They completely destroy them.
- BUT, they keep King Agag alive
- And they keep the best of the sheep and cattle
- Everything despised and weak, they destroyed, but the good things they keep.
- Now compare that to v3... They were explicitly told to NOT spare anything! And yet they have.

And so, God calls Saul to account

- V10 – God speaks to Samuel: I am grieved that I have made Saul king...devastating words!
- Samuel goes to give God's message to Saul, finds out that he's set up a monument – not to God, but to himself! Is this guy interested in God's glory at all?!
- And when Samuel catches up with him, he's on the front foot: v13 I've completed my mission!
- But Samuel is not stupid. You've completed your mission? Moooo-Baaaaa! What?!
- And look at Saul dodge and weave: v15, it wasn't me, it was these soldiers - Notice how Saul was like Adam in the garden of Eden: it was this woman you put here with me...
- And why did they spare the animals? To make sacrifices to the Lord your God – whose God? The Lord YOUR God! You can see how he's drifting away from God even in the way he speaks.
- But neither Samuel, nor the Lord his God, is fooled: Just stop talking, Saul. V16. God spoke to me last night and told me all about it. Why did you keep the best stuff for yourselves?
- And Saul does the sensible thing: he blames his men – Again. It's like the year seven boys Heather taught, who would keep disrupting the class, and when she took them to task, "but I didn't even do anything, it was HIM!"
- *And Samuel's response in v22 is so important. Look at it: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice." Hear those last words again: to obey is better than sacrifice.*
- Saul finally breaks, he admits that he has sinned by fearing the people instead of God, but it is too late. He may be personally forgiven, but it is too late for his kingdom. God pronounces the judgement, Saul will be replaced as king.
- Finally, Samuel, the old prophet, has to do finish the job by executing the Amalekite king.

Summary

Israel demanded a king 'like the other nations,' and in doing so, they rejected God's leadership.

The problem is, their kind of king is just like them! He too rejects God's leadership! And it won't do to simply make sacrifices afterward. God demands obedience...sin is an affront to him.

Now, this chapter puts Saul in a bad light, and I've kind of roasted him here, but don't we see ourselves in him?

Do we seek to justify our sin? IT WASN'T REALLY THAT BAD...

Do we seek to blame others? IT WAS HIS FAULT, HE SWORE AT ME, SO I HAD TO HIT HIM!

Do we pretend we had noble motives? BUT I LOVE HER, I HAD TO FOLLOW MY HEART!

Let me guarantee you, God is not fooled by any of that!

And that is a major problem for us, because of the second part of this sermon:

WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

There are two major things it teaches us about God.

The **first** one we have already looked at in some detail. Look at v22 again: To obey is better than sacrifice. God wants people to obey him! You can't buy him off afterwards by making sacrifices!

You can't disobey God and then think it's okay because you've upped your service to him by going to church more often or by wearing the shoes that make your feet ache. He wants you to be pure in the first place.

The **second** thing it teaches us about God is how much he hates sin.

You can see that in the judgement on the Amalekites in the first place.

What had they actually done? It goes way back to Exodus 17. The newly born Israel had come up out of Egypt, still raw from being slaves, and the Amalekites attacked them. As Moses puts it in Deut 25: Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. ¹⁸When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God." After God leads them to victory in battle, God promises: Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered: I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven."

The time has come for God to deliver that judgement.

Now, we read v3 here and we are horrified! How can this be right? It's not even the same generation! And even the children have to die?

We have to remember:

- 1 God knows everything, he knows the hearts of these people
- 2 God made and owns the universe. He alone can decide what ought to happen to these people who despise him
- 3 God's judgement on all sin and on all sinners is coming!
- 4 If their basic problem was that they did not fear the Lord, isn't that the same thing of which Saul is guilty?
- 5 Isn't that the same thing of which WE are guilty at times?

Illustration: plasticine creatures

Application: what about my sin?

When I seek my own glory, not God's glory, like Saul, building a monument to himself. (I HOPE THEY ALL NOTICED HOW GODLY I WAS BACK THERE...)

When I seek the approval of other people, not the approval of God, like Saul, listening to his men. (I KNOW GOD DOESN'T WANT ME TO DO IT, BUT HOW CAN I SAY NO TO THEM?)

Or when I have vicious, cruel thoughts. I might not act on them, like the Amalekites did, but I know the thoughts are there...and so does God.

- 6 God's righteous anger at sin is real. When we look at what God did to the Amalekites, we should think, "There but for the grace of God go I."

And that is a very good point, because it brings us to the third part of our sermon:

HOW DOES IT POINT US TO JESUS?

Once again, there are two ways.

First, we cry out for a better king.

Saul started well enough, but he has emerged as a bit of a disaster. His repeated disobedience is a rejection of God's leadership. And so, God has decided to remove him as king. Saul's son will not carry on his dynasty. God has already chosen Saul's replacement, and we'll meet him next week.

But even the great King David cannot carry off all of God's prophecies. A greater king must come...from the line of David.

And of course, that is exactly who we meet in Jesus. When Paul made a speech in Acts 13, He said:

³⁶ "Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed.³⁷ But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

³⁸ "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

Did you hear that?

Jesus, the king from David's line, will not see decay. He lives and reigns forever!

And what sort of king is he? He is the one who always did the will of God, who lived in perfect obedience. He truly is the king after God's own heart.

And did you hear what else Paul said? It is through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you!

Jesus did not deserve to die, and yet he did die, nailed to a cross like a criminal, taking away the sin of the world, yours and mine.

We know how seriously God takes sin, the Amalekites teach us that.

And now, in Jesus death, God's wrath and mercy meet. God, in the person of his own son, has taken God's anger and exhausted it, so that Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

Illustration: The Tudors, people begging for mercy from the king. Sometimes the mercy is just a less horrific form of death!

Application: Throw yourself on the mercy of this king, and **you will be spared...**

God really does hate sin. All sin is an affront to the one who made us. Because of sin, the wrath of God is coming against the world!

But in Jesus, our Good King, we see God's wrath and mercy meet, because he died in our place.

³⁸ "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.