

# SAUL, THE FAILED KING

**+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

When those in authority fail to obey God, they may be disqualified from leadership.

**+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

1 Samuel 13–15

**+ SETTING:**

Following Jabesh-gilead's deliverance, the people, in the Lord's presence, installed Saul as king of Israel, and Samuel gave his final public speech as the leader and judge over Israel. Saul was now the Lord's anointed man, the highest representative of the Lord's will and work. But before long, the once fearful, humble leader accumulated power and grew increasingly deaf to God's voice. Saul listened to himself, or to the people of Israel, more than to God. The Lord tested Saul's faithfulness with a series of commands, and Saul's responses revealed the condition of his heart and his unfitness for ruling God's people.

# DAY 1

**READ:**

**1 Samuel 13:1-7**

**FOCAL PASSAGE:**

**1 Samuel 13:6-7**

NOTES

We often talk about Israel's stubbornness, pride, and rebellion, and we do so for good reason. After all, much of the Old Testament feels like a "What Not to Do" highlight reel. However, we often don't talk about Israel's amnesia problem. It seems that time and time again, God's people simply could not remember His past acts of faithfulness, provision, and deliverance. Rather, as Saul's troops revealed in 1 Samuel 13, they tucked tail and ran in the face of their enemies instead of calling on the Lord for His help.

Why would they have this problem? Why would they struggle here in the face of the Philistines? We probably could surmise many reasons, and not the least of which was the issue of leadership. As leaders go, so often do their followers. It could be argued that the soldier's fear here is the first indication of Saul's failure to trust the Lord—they were simply reflecting their king's attitude, as we will see. But on a deeper level, Israel put so much stock in their human king that they forgot about their divine King. And when we take our eyes off the Lord, everything seems bigger.

In a sense, then, it's appropriate that Israel would feel fearful considering the Philistines' physical threat. In another sense, however, such fear is meant to turn us to the Lord, who is our refuge and strength, a helper always there when we are in trouble (Ps. 46:1). We can hide in the proverbial caves, thickets, and holes of life, but only when fear drives us to Christ do we find a true hiding place (Ps. 32:7). By consistently fixing our minds on our sovereign King, we can avoid the pitfalls of God-amnesia and lean on the Lord, our everlasting rock (Isa. 26:3-4).

**What are you most afraid of? How does this fear manifest itself? What will it mean for you to rely on the Lord in the midst of this fearful situation?**



# DAY 2

## READ:

1 Samuel 13:1-9

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 13:8-9

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Christian warfare is utterly unlike the conflicts of this world. It does not depend on the strong arm, the quick eye, or the swift foot. It is not waged with carnal weapons, but with spiritual. Faith is the hinge on which victory turns. Success depends entirely on believing. *A general faith in the truth of God's written Word* is the primary foundation of the Christian soldier's character."<sup>1</sup>

-J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

I played on the offensive line in high school football. If you know anything about football, then you know linemen play with a bit of a chip on their shoulders, doing the dirty work of blocking and never getting the score or recognition. On a rare occasion, a special play was called that had me, an offensive lineman, sprint from the huddle and line up as a wide receiver. For a brief moment, I felt like one of the "skilled" players. But I was never thrown the ball. My role was simply to be a diversion, to cause confusion, so one of our real receivers could make the play.

As silly as this experience was, it reminds me that God designed us with gifts and limits. That's why, for example, the body of Christ is made up of all kinds of parts; otherwise, the body couldn't function properly (1 Cor. 12). But for all our giftedness, we must remember that we have limits. In other words, there are roles God has not called us to fill and duties that we are not responsible to carry out. In fact, if we were to try to be someone we were not created to be, we might sin against God and potentially harm others.

This is precisely what happened when King Saul, anxious over his disintegrating army, decided to offer a burnt offering himself rather than wait for Samuel to arrive (see 1 Sam. 10:8). Though Saul was the ruler of his people, he was not permitted to offer the burnt offering, and in doing so, he brought judgment not only on himself but his entire household as well (see also 2 Chron. 26).

Faith not only looks like trusting the Lord in the midst of uncertainty but also being content in the knowledge of who He has called us to be. You may never be a king or a quarterback, but you are remarkably and wonderfully made, nevertheless (Ps. 139:14).

**Do you find yourself consistently dissatisfied with the way the Lord has made you or the station He's called you to in life? Why? How would your outlook be different if you repented and chose faithfulness in what the Lord has called you to?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

1 Samuel 13:10–14:52

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 13:13-14

## NOTES

Last fall, my wife and I took our children camping. Overall, we had a great experience together, enjoying God's creation, time together, and evenings around the "fire." We eventually got a good fire going, but we struggled for the first twenty-four hours. No matter how hard we tried, all we could manage to produce was smoke. What I didn't realize at the time was just how wet the wood was. Unless the wood is dry, it's difficult to produce flames, so while you might create a great smoke signal in the case of an emergency, you won't achieve the warm glow you had planned on.

Every human faces a similar problem—not wet firewood but defective hearts. The reason we don't think, feel, or behave the way we should is because our hearts are sinful. In God's grace, we might do some things that are beneficial for others, but even those works aren't righteous in God's eyes. In essence, we produce a lot of smoke but no fire.

Ultimately, Saul was rejected as the king of Israel because he did not have a heart that followed after God's, meaning a desire to obey and a desire to repent. As a result, he failed to do what the Lord required of him.

We sin because we are sinners. But if we are to walk in obedience to God's commands, our hearts must be renovated, or as Jeremy Pierre explains:

Before redemption, Christians were against God, but now they are under him: a willful submission of the heart both to acknowledge the truth of God and to agree with his supreme value. The new commitment results in choices that honor God.<sup>2</sup>

So, does your life produce smoke or fire? The difference is whether you have been born again (John 3:3). If you haven't, will you turn from your sin and trust Him today?

**Do your thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions reveal the smoke of morality or the fire of heartfelt obedience to God?**



# DAY 4

## READ:

1 Samuel 15

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 15:22-23

## NOTES

When we lived in Dallas, Texas, I taught an adult Bible study one Sunday morning. At some point in the lesson, I used an illustration about running to convey a point. I mentioned how I was attempting to run farther and faster and that achieving these goals would require discipline and consistency. Afterwards, an elderly gentlemen approached me, thanked me for the lesson, and humbly offered advice on how to run. As he was talking, I thought to myself, "What does this old guy know about running?" I thanked him for the wisdom and went on my way. It wasn't until later that I learned the "old guy" was Kenneth Cooper, founder of Cooper Aerobics and the "Father of Aerobics." He literally coined the word "aerobics" and wrote the groundbreaking book on the subject! Because I failed to recognize who I was talking to, I didn't take his word very seriously.

Saul had the same problem. You see, he thought little of his disobedience because he thought little of God. But Samuel reframed the situation for him by explaining that his "partial" obedience was equal to the sin of divination and idolatry! Because Saul had rejected the word of the Lord in its entirety, the Lord rejected Saul as king of Israel.

In essence, sin is a vision problem. When we fail to see God for who He is, we do not regard His Word with the reverence and obedience it deserves. Because God is great, His Word is great, which means neglecting His Word is a great sin. With all the trappings of our advanced age, we are tempted to neglect the thought of God altogether, in light of our own perceived greatness. Thus, if we are to treat God's Word rightly, we must come to see Him more clearly. And as we rejoice and tremble in His presence as beloved children through our adoption in Christ, we will learn to honor God's commands for the prize they actually are (Ps. 19:10-11).

**What are some ways you recognize your view of God is deficient because of your sin? How will you cultivate greater thoughts about God?**

# DAY 5

**READ:**

**2 Timothy 3**

**FOCAL PASSAGE:**

**2 Timothy 3:15-17**

NOTES



**ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #6:  
CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE**

Because God gave us His Word as authoritative in all matters related to life and faith, we believe His Word was written in a way that can be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit. Believing the Scriptures are clear does not mean that every part is equally easy to interpret, neither does it mean we will never make mistakes in our interpretation. It does mean that with God's help, people are capable of understanding the biblical text for themselves as they employ correct methods of interpretation.

I've noticed an interesting trend in sports lately. Specifically, both professional baseball and football teams seem to be showing a greater interest in multi-faceted talent. That is, they like having versatile players who can play multiple positions and possess multiple skills. Why? Perhaps teams feel they're getting more bang for their buck. But it might be that versatile players keep the opposing team on their toes. It's harder to anticipate what might happen when a player can compete at multiple positions.

Regarding God's Word, the apostle Paul wrote that it is "profitable" for multiple reasons; it can serve many functions. In other words, Scripture does it all! Whatever God's people need for pursuing godly lives and proclaiming the gospel is found in the Bible (God's Word is sufficient). That's because it comes directly from the mind and heart of God (God's Word is inspired) to His people for their good and for His glory. And if the Bible comes from God (it does) and is sufficient for shaping and equipping us (it is), then that means God intends for it to be understood (God's Word is clear).

So here's the good news for folks like you and me. We don't have to be a genius to understand and benefit from reading God's Word! If you have repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then the Holy Spirit has come to live inside you, and He will lead you to know His Word as you prayerfully and diligently study it (John 16:13). Of course, there are many things difficult to understand in the Bible (2 Peter 3:16), but that doesn't mean they can't be understood. We simply need to humble ourselves, acknowledge to God that we need His help, and diligently seek after the truth, not only in personal study but also with the help of brothers and sisters in Christ. And as we do, we'll come to experience greater joy in God (Ps. 119:2).

**Have you grown discouraged in your Bible reading lately? If so, why? Who are some people you can trust for encouragement in your reading and for counsel in understanding of God's Word?**



# GROUP

NOTES


## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Mark what I say, a faithful man is a fruitful man . . . When a man will say he hath faith, and in the meantime can be content to be idle and unfruitful in the work of the Lord, can be content to be a dead Christian, let him know that his case is marvelously fearful: For if faith were in him indeed, it would appear, ye cannot keep your good hearts to yourselves, wherever fire is, it will burn, and wherever faith is, it cannot be kept secret."<sup>3</sup>

-Thomas Hooker (1586-1647)

### **POINT 1: The people's king acts apart from the Lord** (1 Sam. 13:5-9,13-14).

The Israelite army was outmanned and ill-equipped for a battle with the Philistines. This resulted in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, and many soldiers fled.

 **What were some signs and wonders God had performed that should have sustained the faith of the Israelite soldiers?**

Fearing his own circumstances, King Saul became \_\_\_\_\_ and made a rash decision, which resulted in a loss of \_\_\_\_\_ with God and the loss of a \_\_\_\_\_.

### **POINT 2: The people's king disobeys the instruction of the Lord** (1 Sam. 15:13-21).

Saul was sent on a mission by the Lord, and he was content with his \_\_\_\_\_ obedience, but the Lord saw it for what it was— \_\_\_\_\_ covered over with \_\_\_\_\_.

Samuel \_\_\_\_\_ Saul with the truth of his disobedience, but still Saul could not see his sin. Instead, he made excuses, blind to his \_\_\_\_\_.

 **What are some ways believers today might justify their sinful actions?**

### **POINT 3: The people's king is rejected by the Lord** (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

Samuel's summary conclusion helps us understand the significance of our sin and \_\_\_\_\_ against God. No matter how large or small a sin is in

our eyes, it is a \_\_\_\_\_ of God and His good and holy Word.

**?** How should Saul's downfall encourage us to think differently about our own sin?

NOTES

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #6: CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

Because God gave us His Word as \_\_\_\_\_ in all matters related to life and faith, we believe His Word was written in a way that can be \_\_\_\_\_ with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Believing the Scriptures are clear does not mean that every part is equally easy to interpret, neither does it mean we will never make mistakes in our interpretation. It does mean that with God's help, people are capable of understanding the biblical text for themselves as they employ correct methods of interpretation.

**?** What are some clear instructions from the Lord in His Word that apply to all believers at all times and in all places?

## MY RESPONSE

Because Christ has provided us with the example of obedience to God at all costs, we live as if our lives are not our own, willing to lay everything down for the sake of God's kingdom

- **HEAD:** How do you need to think differently about your sin and obedience in light of Saul's failure?
- **HEART:** What sins of rebellion and idolatry are competing with your desire to obey the Lord? Confess and repent to the Lord in prayer today.
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will obey the Word of God today?

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"This is the greatest fault under which humanity labors, that after sinning they take refuge in excuses rather than prostrate themselves with repentant confession."<sup>4</sup>

-Cassiodorus (c. 490-583)