

Called To Obey

1Samuel 15:1-35

One of the more familiar characters in the Bible has to be Moses.

Like many people who are called to serve the LORD he had a tough assignment.

God speaks to him from a burning bush and tells him to go to one of the most powerful if not the most powerful king on the face of the earth at the time and command him to let the people of Israel go free from slavery.

Right from the beginning of the assignment it is clear it is going to be a bumpy ride.

His first meeting with Pharaoh ends up making things worse for the people and it doesn't take long for them to get angry with him.

After several plagues the king of Egypt is forced to yield to the power of God and lets the people go.

Shortly after that he changes his mind and chases down the Israelites finding them at the Red Sea.

When the people see the Egyptian chariots they basically say thanks a lot for bringing us to our destruction.

God saves them by parting the sea, but it's not long before they are grumbling about food and water.

It is a constant cycle for Moses. He puts up with the grumbling and complaining of the people for forty years.

One of those occasions of grumbling is found in Numbers 20.

They complain about being in the desert without water.

God tells Moses to gather the people around a rock and speak to it and water will come out.

In anger and frustration with the people Moses takes his staff and strikes the rock twice instead of speaking to it.

Water still comes out, the people get water, but God says to Moses that on account of his disobedience he would not be able to enter the Promised Land.

I can't help but feel for the guy. Who among us could put up with all that complaining without losing our cool?

I feel bad for the guy, but what happens to him is the cost of disobeying what the LORD clearly commands.

[There are many stories in the bible like that. Stories of people failing to obey God. One of the things that the experience of people like Moses teaches us is the important of obedience. That is certainly true of our text this morning. In 1 Samuel 15 we are told about an assignment given

to Israel's first king named Saul. What happens here has at least four important lessons for us in regards to obedience. As Christians we are called to obey the LORD. Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey my commands." Do you love Christ this morning? If you do then give your careful attention to this text. The first thing we see here is that...]

Point #1 – Obedience depends on accepting God's authority. (Verses 1-9)

As the creator and sustainer of all things, the LORD has the right command whatever He wills over the whole of creation.

Verse 1 and the first few words of verse 2 clearly establish the authority of what is about to be said to king Saul. (Verse 1-2a).

Anointing in the bible is when oil is poured over someone's head for the purpose of setting them apart for the service of God.

In this case it was Samuel who was sent by the LORD to do that to Saul showing that God had set him apart to be king over the nation.

This is a reminder that God had chosen to speak through Samuel.

God is called "LORD Almighty" here, your bible might say, "LORD of hosts" referring to God as holding power over all things, that there is no authority greater than His.

So, the most powerful being in existence has something to say to you and that is reason to listen up.

Now, what God tells Saul to do is difficult for us to hear/accept, but we do ourselves no favors by ignoring it so let's listen together (Verses 2-3).

Texts like these are horrifying and they are meant to be.

We tend to think of situations like this as unjust because we do not appreciate the great offense of our rebellion against the LORD.

The Amalekites clearly demonstrated their hatred for God when they attacked His people on their way out of Egypt and as the centuries past from that time up until the time God gives this command to Saul they carried on in their rebellion and sin.

Further we need keep in mind that individual sin is never restricted to the individual, it always impacts the people around us.

Every single child amongst the Amalekite people was being trained and encouraged towards a godless life.

If these children had grown up they would have followed their parent's footsteps along the road to hell.

It may very well be that God's command here spares them that fate.

God alone sees all things from beginning to end. He knows what the future of these lives would be. He alone knows what evil He restricts or permits by every action He takes.

He is the beginning and end of all things; therefore, He has the right to grant life and take it away at every stage whether He does it at one hundred or six months He does no one any wrong.

No human being has that right over another only God can give this command.

It is also important to point out that this is NOT a standing command.

Meaning this is specific to this situation and must not be applied in an open ended fashion across time and circumstance.

While the command is brutal, God has the authority to give it.

We are not intended to feel good about it. God does not delight in the destruction of the wicked and neither should we.

What we are supposed to see is that the instruction is understandable and clear.

Verses 4-9 tell us that Saul gathers together an army, marches them to where the Amalekites live and wages war with them killing everyone except the king named Agag and he destroyed all the livestock that was “depised and weak” but kept the good animals alive.

Was that the instruction?

No. By not carrying it out in the way in which it was commanded Saul and the army set aside God’s authority in favour of their own.

[Years ago I was working on a construction job where the engineer on the job specified that a certain size wire be used for the wiring in the apartments of the building. It was one size bigger than what the electrical code required. My foreman at the time made the decision to ignore that and use the smaller wire instead. I think we were on the third or fourth floor and drywall was already being installed when the engineer made the discovery that it was the wrong wire. Needless to say he was angry. He was angry because the electrician disregarded his authority and did what he wanted instead.]

That is what we tend to do with instructions if we do not have proper regard for the authority of the one giving the instruction.

We feel the freedom to change it, to do things part way, or sometimes not at all.

You can see this attitude in the workplace, in the home, on the school yard, and sadly it often happens in the church as well.

We end up deciding for ourselves what is “good enough” and in so doing we satisfy ourselves with partial obedience or justify outright disobedience to those in authority over us even the LORD Himself.

[I admit there are things in the Bible that are on the tougher side of things to understand, but I think if we are honest the vast majority of the Scriptures are pretty straightforward. Why then do so many people live in rebellion against what God has clearly commanded? Because people disregard it as being authoritative in our lives. Here is a second lesson king Saul has to teach us about obedience...]

Point #2 – The Lord alone evaluates obedience. (Verses 10-15)

No created being gets to determine whether or not God is happy with them, only God decides that.

We see God's evaluation of the situation in verse 10-11.

God gave a clear instruction and He also gives a clear assessment of Saul's action.

He says to Samuel regarding Saul, "[he] has not carried out my instructions".

The NIV says "Samuel was troubled" at the news. The original language suggests Samuel was angry at the news.

In response we are told Samuel spends the rest of the night crying out to the LORD.

The text is silent on exactly what Samuel was saying to the LORD. Was he interceding for Saul pleading for God's mercy, was he lamenting, or something else.

What is clear is that the prophet immediately understands the seriousness of the king's disobedience and sets out to find him in the morning.

Samuel doesn't find Saul immediately but instead finds out in verse 12 that the king has "set up a monument in his own honor."

The original language suggests that he was honouring his own strength.

He is thinking, "Man I did such a great job on this assignment I deserve a plaque!"

That fits exactly with what is said when the prophet eventually catches up to the king. **(Verse 13)**

Saul's evaluation is "Mission accomplished I did an awesome job."

My guess is when he sees Samuel he is thinking he is about to get a pat on the back.

Samuel gets right to the point in **verse 14**.

What do you mean you carried out the Lord's instructions?

If that were true then I shouldn't be hearing the sound of sheep and cattle.

Saul tries again in **verse 15**.

The animals that are here are for the LORD, the rest we totally destroyed.

In his mind what he did was good enough.

Here's the problem! That is not for him to decide.

[Have you ever seen those shows that renovate or redecorate rooms for people? The show gets a professional designer, they get a feel for what the owners want, and then they get to work. Most of the time it works out well. The homeowners come home and they are blown away by how good everything looks, but sometimes it is a complete disaster. I saw one where they covered the walls in corrugated cardboard and another where they moved in a truck load of sand onto the floor. The homeowners walk in and they are in disbelief in the worst way about what

has happened. That becomes a whole lot worse when the designer is convinced he/she did a good job. Their opinion is irrelevant.]

I have to say it is troubling how often I hear people put words in God's mouth especially if it sounds like self-help mumbo jumbo.

Stuff like, "You will always be good enough for God!"

People who say stuff like that have no appreciation for what God's standard is?

Even when we just scratch the surface with any kind of realistic understanding we will see how desperately we need a saviour.

We don't get to give the LORD half-hearted worship and say to Him, "That's good enough be happy with that!"

We don't get to give ourselves a pat on the back saying I'm doing not bad with 3 of the nine parts of the fruit of the Spirit and think that is good enough.

It doesn't matter what we tell ourselves or what others say about us. At the end of the day the only opinion that matters is the LORD's.

[One of the most terrifying passages in the Bible is Matthew 7. People are at the judgement seat claiming to know the LORD, having prophesied, driven out demons, and done other miracles and Jesus will say, "I never knew you, away from me." Why because they did not do the will of God. They have a veneer of faith expecting that to be good enough for the LORD, but our own evaluation means nothing at all, the only One whose opinion means anything in a final sense is God's. That brings us to a third lesson on obedience...]

Point #3 – Excuses for disobedience accomplish nothing good. (Verses 16-26)

We may be able to think of a million or more reasons why our rebellion against God should be overlooked, but not one them will help us.

Having heard Saul's evaluation Samuel says, "Stop!" at the beginning of verse 16.

More literally it means "Be quiet!"

Samuel then goes on to tell Saul what God has said. He first reminds him of what he was supposed to do.

Saul still in denial says this is **verses 20-21**.

Why bring king Agag back alive?

It was customary to bring a defeated king back to your own territory to humiliate him before your people, it was a way of exalting your own power.

It is like he is saying to Samuel, "What's wrong with that? That is the normal way things are done!"

He then repeats the same thing he did in verse 15 blaming the soldiers for taking the livestock and adding a touch of spirituality on top of that.

It was them, not me and besides it is to make sacrifices.

Why would they be so interested in that? Multiple commentators think that they had the kind of sacrifices in mind where they would get to eat a good portion of the meat.

So the excuse here is basically we can't let a good BBQ go to waste.

Samuel shuts that down right away saying this in **verses 22-23**.

Hearing that, Saul continues with the excuses in **verse 24**.

Still blaming the people he shifts to the excuse of fear.

One excuse fails and he tries another, but it does him no good. He begs Samuel to return with him for worship but Samuel says this in **verse 26**.

[How many people have ever been in a canoe, kayak, or boat that had a leak in it? If it is a small leak it's no big deal, when enough water makes it in the boat you take a bucket or a pump and you bail out the water and carry on. What if someone on the boat had a drill and put a hole in the bottom? Everyone knows that would do nothing to help the situation, it would only make it worse.]

That is a lot like making excuses for disobedience.

Saul's first excuse/denial is like telling God He has it all wrong and is making a mistake in His judgement.

God never misjudges any situation and to suggest otherwise is an insult to His glory (another hole in the boat).

He adds to that the idea that God doesn't really understand how He wants to be worshipped and that the ideas of the people are better.

When he turns to the excuse of being afraid, he is denying the power of the Almighty instead of believing that God will watch over him in every circumstance (another hole in the boat).

[It is the same for us. When we try and make excuses and blame others we are saying the very same things to God. No one will get a pass from God for their sin by trying to blame someone or something else. Though we may try very hard to justify ourselves with excuses the only thing we accomplish is making our offenses worse. That brings us to one more lesson from this text regarding obedience. Here's the lesson...]

Point #4 – God's consistency makes obedience necessary to salvation. (Verses 27-35)

Thankfully, the LORD can never be affected by anything outside of Himself. He can never be persuaded to go against His nature; therefore, our only hope is to listen to His voice.

Samuel's words in verse 26 seem to sink in with Saul which leads to this in verses 27-29.

This is a picture of desperation in the face of losing the kingdom.

In his pleading with the prophet he tears his robe which immediately serves as a picture of what is going to happen to the king.

As much as Saul wants to repair the damage, he can't.

Why? Because God has firmly decided that another king is needed and nothing Saul can do or say can alter that decision.

That is true of everything outside of God and that should make us all happy.

There is no force of strength, will, emotion, or anything else that exists that can act upon God to change Who He is or overcome His sovereign will.

We see that here in Saul being rejected as king and also the death of Agag.

It is true that Saul did not put the Amalekite king to death, but that does not mean he escapes God's judgement, it simply comes through Samuel instead.

Now this idea that God is immovable and unchangeable in His ways is difficult for us to wrap our minds around and it may at first seem difficult to reconcile with other passages in the Bible.

In fact that appears to be the case in this very chapter.

Go back for a moment to verse 10-11...and now go to the end of the chapter in verse 35.

Samuel says in verse 29 that the LORD "does not...change His mind.

That is the exact same Hebrew word is translated 'grieved' in verses 11 and 35.

I know some are ready to say, "That is a contradiction", "the Bible doesn't make sense!"

If it were a mistake or a contradiction we would expect to find different words used.

The fact that the same Hebrew word is used shows intentionality. We are supposed to see something important about the LORD here.

We are supposed to see that His sovereign will which He has purposed from all eternity past will always be carried out. God never fails.

You can go all the way back to Genesis and see that God plans for the kingship of Israel to come through the tribe of Judah, not Saul's tribe of Benjamin.

We may also remember that earlier in the Book of 1 Samuel God makes Saul king as a means of judgment on the people for their lack of trust in Him.

It was always in God's sovereign will that Saul's throne would not endure.

That said, God's sovereign unwavering will is worked out in real time with real events.

This man's failure brings God no pleasure; therefore, He can say that it 'grieved Him' to make Saul king.

At the same time He can remain absolutely unwavering in His decision to remove Him from the throne as the just consequence for the man's sin which in turn serves His greater plans and purposes over the course of history.

If that is making your head explode, that is a good thing! God's ordering of all things ought to do that!

What all this means is that the LORD does not change nor compromise His word in any way regardless of what people do.

That leaves us with two choices. One accept His word and live under its authority or two perish.

There is no middle ground at all on this point.

God's word tells us we are sinners and deserve nothing but His wrath.

We can ignore that but we cannot change that. We can however, believe that and be saved.

God's word tells us that only Jesus Christ has done what is necessary to deal with our sin.

First, He lived a life of total obedience. Every moment of Jesus earthly life proved again and again the necessity of obedience before a Holy God.

The fruit of His obedience is that He had the ability to become a perfect sacrifice to make us right with God. Only Jesus has done that.

We can disobey that and think that there are other ways, but we cannot change it.

On the other hand we can believe and obey and have the hope of eternal life.

The LORD does not change or compromise. We either listen and obey, or we suffer judgement.

Every single one of us is called to obey the LORD.

Do we believe that? Do we accept His authority? If we do then we will want to obey Him.

Do we believe that God is the only one whose opinion matters when it comes to our obedience?

If we believe that, then we must be willing to set aside every excuse for disobedience. That is what genuine repentance looks like and it will lead us into eternal life.

We can say that with absolute certainty because God is unwavering in Who He is and therefore His promises are sure.

If we listen to His voice we will be saved.

It's like the good old hymn *Trust and Obey* says, "Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

