

1 Samuel 15-16

Introduction

Recently I was counseling with one of my seminary students who is handsome, incredibly gifted and talented, and has already received more than his fair share of human accolades.

- He asked me to mentor him for a while and give him counsel on his life and ministry.
- But he was greatly concerned because *he was failing in the things that really matter.*

I asked him, "Not listening to your press, *how does God feel about you?*"

- That's what concerned him.

God judges people based upon their **character**, not on their abilities.

Today's message is a story –

- How Israel got a king,
- How that didn't work out,
- Then how God gave them *a new king.*

It's the story of Saul and David.

Background

The story begins at the end of the period of "the Judges" – a very wicked time.

- God raised up a godly prophet named **Samuel** to deliver His word in a day when words from God were rare (3:1).
- Samuel was a faithful and godly leader, and God blessed his ministry greatly.

At the people's request (or demand) *God gave Israel a king* – so they could "be like the other nations" (8:5).

- God gave them **Saul** as their first king.
 - He was tall and handsome (9:2) – looked like kingly material.
 - *God anointed him* to be king over God's people Israel.
 - *God empowered Saul* with His Spirit to do the task he was assigned to do (10:6, 10; 11:6).
 - *God promised Saul His divine presence* (10:7) – the most vital promise of all.
 - With God's help, *Saul won some tremendous victories* in battle (11:13).

But the problem was that Saul started out a humble man, but the longer he was king *he began to believe that he was in charge* instead of God.

- Through a series of arrogant and disobedient acts against the Lord, Saul proved that he had forgotten that *God was his commander-in-chief.*
- Saul was to be God's servant – an obedient servant.

1. Saul offered **an unauthorized sacrifice** at Gilgal – and lost his dynasty (13:14).
2. Saul **made a foolish vow**, almost killed his son Jonathan over it – lost the respect of his people (14:45).
3. Saul **deliberately disobeyed God's command** – and was rejected from his kingship (15:26).
 - This last instance is most telling.

God commanded Saul specifically that he was to *destroy the Amalekites completely* for their wickedness.

- The Amalekites were ruthless and vicious – slaughtered many innocent people.
- Saul was to *bring God's judgment on the Amalekites*.
 - Kill them all – even all the animals – "utterly destroy" them (15:2-3).

Saul defeated them in battle – **BUT** –

- He spared the king and the best of the animals.
- The text says, "*they were not willing to destroy them utterly*, but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (v. 9).
 - They were saving the good stuff for one bang-up sacrifice they would offer to the Lord (v. 15).

The prophet Samuel showed up and confronted Saul with his disobedience.

1. **Saul blamed the people** – "*They wanted to do this*" (v. 15).
2. **Saul tried to explain his disobedience away** – "*I did obey – we just did it our way*" (vv. 20-21).
 - "It all depends on how you define 'obey.'"
 - (Explanation) Partial obedience is still disobedience.
 - Redefining terms may work in a Canadian court of law or before and American judge, but *not before the Sovereign Lord who is the supreme judge over all the earth*.
3. Finally, **Saul offered half-hearted repentance** – "Okay, I sinned, but now can we get on with the ceremony?" (vv. 24-25).

15:17-21

Samuel had to explain it a little clearer.

- "God sent you on a *mission* – why did you disobey Him?"
- "God gave you a *task to do* – but you contented yourself with religious activity."
- "Instead of *doing what God wants*, Saul, you would rather 'play church.'"

15:22-23

The sacrifices themselves made *no difference* to God.

- "*To obey is better than sacrifice*."
- "You have rejected His word – so He has rejected you" (v. 26).
- "Saul, you have *rebelled* against God's authority in your life."

Saul was wondering – "Can't God just forgive me and get on with it?"

"Saul, you don't understand.

- "The issue is **not** God's forgiveness – IT'S YOUR CHARACTER!"
- "God can forgive in an instant, but it takes longer to develop character.
- "*God demands obedience* when He gives a command.
- "Your job is to: (1) Trust Him, and (2) Obey Him.

Saul demonstrated that he was *not willing* to trust and obey God – and that is a **character problem**.

- God wanted an *obedient servant* to be king over His people.
- Saul was *disobedient*, so God rejected him.

15:28

"The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and given it to *your neighbor who is better than you*."

- So God raised up David instead.

16:1-3

Twice God mentions that the next king is "for Myself" or "for Me."

- In other words, *the king* is to serve *the True King*.
- He needs to remember that he is first and foremost a servant.

16:4-7

Eliab was amazingly like Saul – tall and handsome.

- Samuel reached for the anointing oil – but the Lord stopped him.
- If God had not stopped Samuel, we would have had "Saul, second verse."

God said, "Don't look at his outward appearance – *I look at the heart*."

- "I've rejected this one – wrong kind of heart."

Explanation

In the Bible, the "heart" is the seat of one's character.

- A person thinks, makes decisions, understands things in the heart.
- The heart makes the *hands* work, the *feet* move, the *tongue* speak.
 - "The mouth speaks what is in the heart" (Matt 12:34).
 - A person commits adultery in the heart (Matt 5:8).
 - The heart can be "far from God" (Matt 15:8).
 - God searches the heart (Rom 8:27).
 - We are to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Deut 6:4).
 - If you seek Him you will find Him if you seek Him "with all your heart" (Jer 29:13).

What this means is that *God is not interested in religious activity or outward appearance*.

- God is interested in **your heart**.
- "For the eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support *those whose heart is completely His*" (2 Chr 16:9).

16:8-13

When they finally brought David in, God said, "There he is!"

- "Here is the one I want."
- "This one has the right kind of heart."

Samuel anointed David, and God's Spirit came upon David to empower him for the task.

What was the difference?

- Both Saul and David were:
 - Chosen by God.
 - Empowered by God's Spirit.
 - Promised His presence.
 - Given all the potential to be a great king.
- Why was Saul rejected and David succeeded?

Ps 78:70-72

"He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds;
From the care of ewes and suckling lambs He brought him to shepherd Jacob His
people and Israel His inheritance.

"So he shepherded them *according to the integrity of his heart*,
and guided them with his skillful hands."

God said, "I will choose a man who will do My will" (Acts 13:22).

- God wanted a man with *the right kind of character*.
- Someone who would acknowledge His authority, and allow God to be Lord in his life.

At this point David was just a shepherd boy.

- But God saw in David's heart, a heart that was tender toward Him.

Application

What does God see in your heart?

- God will never take you further in your spiritual walk until you have settled this question – **Who is really Lord of your life?**

Is yours a heart that refuses to submit to His Lordship?

OR

Does He see in you the heart of a willing and obedient servant?

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