

Close Doesn't Count

1 Sam. 15

(preached 7/1/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

John Kenneth Galbraith was an expert on economic matters in the 50s and 60s..

He has written books about economics, and taught for many years at Harvard University.

He was good friends with President Kennedy, and became a close friend of Lyndon Johnson after Kennedy was killed.

One day, Galbreath was exhausted after staying up all night working.

So, he told his housekeeper Emily Wilson that he was going to take a nap and to hold all phone calls.

Well, wouldn't you know...

The phone rang at Galbraith's home.

Emily answered and on the other end of the line was Lyndon Johnson, the president of the United States.

Emily politely told President Johnson that Mr. Galbreath was sleeping...

Johnson replied, “Wake him up. I need to talk to him.”

Emily replied, “No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you. And he has instructed me to hold all calls.”

Johnson hung up.

When Kenneth Galbreath woke up and returned the President’s call....

The first thing that Johnson asked him was the name of that housekeeper.

When Galbreath told him it was Emily, Johnson said that he was so impressed with her ability to follow orders...

That he wanted to hire her at the White House.

Perfect obedience makes an impression on people because the normal thing is to obey to a point and then stop.

Tonight we are going to look at a case of almost obedience.

However, we are going to see that God is not pleased with almost obedience.

In fact, he is very displeased with it.

So, let’s look at 1 Samuel 15 tonight.

We have been in the book of 1 Samuel for a few months now..

We have seen the story of Samuel, who was a true man of God in the opening chapters...

Then we have seen the story of Saul, who was Israel's first king.

WE have seen him rise to power based on his humility and we have seen him fall based on his inability to obey God.

Tonight is really the final nail in Saul's coffin as king of Israel.

God has removed the kingdom line from Saul, and now he is preparing to remove Saul.

I have broken chapter 15 into 4 parts tonight...

I. Obedience Expected (1- 3)

II. Obedience Rejected (4-9)

III. Disobedience Defended (10-21)

IV. Consequences Delivered (22-35)

So, let's take a closer look at 1 Samuel 15 tonight....

I. Obedience Expected (1- 3)

Verse 1....

15 Then Samuel said to Saul, “The Lord sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the ^{la}words of the Lord.

Now, we may think that these are unusual words here...

Had Saul not already been anointed?

Yes, he had.

Had Saul not already been told that the kingdom was not going to continue in his line?

Yes, he had.

So why does Samuel begin with this statement in verse 1...

Well, Saul is still the king of Israel, and even though his days are numbered, God is still working through Saul to lead Israel.

So when Samuel begins in this way, it is a reminder to the reader and to Saul especially that he is still under the authority of God.

You may have sinned and disobeyed, but Saul, you are still under God’s authority.

And then Samuel continues in verse 2...

² Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘I will ^[b]punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. ³ Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

The clear instruction from God was for Saul to go and destroy the Amalekites.

In the book of Exodus, as Israel was leaving Egypt and headed to the Promised Land, they were attacked by the Amalekites.

Here is a map of what that attack looked like...

And here is what the LORD said about the attack..

Exodus 17..

8 Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. 9 So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”

13 So Joshua [l]overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. 14 Then

the Lord said to Moses, “Write this in [m]a book as a memorial and[n]recite it to Joshua, [o]that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” 15 Moses built an altar and named it The Lord is My Banner;16 and he said, “[p]The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.”

And even though many years had passed since that attack, the Lord had not forgotten about it.

So, in 1 Samuel 15, Samuel tells Saul to go and execute the Amalekites completely.

The command that Samuel gives to Saul is clear.

Go and destroy the Amalekites completely.

You are the king and I am calling you to do what I have commanded...

And it is clear from what we know about God is that he expects complete obedience from Saul...

And so in verses 1-3, obedience is expected...

Now, let's turn to verses 4-9 where obedience is rejected....

II. Obedience Rejected (4-9)

⁴ Then Saul summoned the people and ^[c]numbered them in Telaim, 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 men of Judah. ⁵ Saul came to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the valley. ⁶ Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, so that I do not destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the sons of Israel when they came up from Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. ⁷ So Saul ^[d]defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is ^[e]east of Egypt. ⁸ He captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. ⁹ But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

Saul gathers up soldiers in obedience to the Lord’s command and he sets out to defeat the Amalekites.

In verse 6, we see that the Kenites were another group of people who lived near the Amalekites.

And since God had only ordered the destruction of the Amalekites, Saul tells the Kenites to leave the area so that they aren’t destroyed as well.

Once the Kenites have left, Saul and the soldiers move in and destroy the Amalekites.

But in verses 8-9, Saul disobeys the LORD.

Verse 8 says that he spared Agag, who was the king of the Amalekites.

And verse 9 says that all the desirable livestock was also spared.

In other words, Saul led the people to disobey by keeping the best livestock as well.

They replaced God's wisdom with their greed.

And that is going to lead to consequences..

So, let's look at verses 10-21 where we will find

III. Disobedience Defended (10-21)

¹⁰ Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹ “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from ^[f]following Me and has not carried out My commands.” And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the Lord all night. ¹² Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul; and it was told Samuel, saying, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself, then turned and proceeded on ^[g]down to Gilgal.”

The Lord speaks to Samuel and makes him aware of Saul's disobedience...

And I think we see something very interesting here and helpful in our own lives at the end of verse 11...

Samuel was angry at the disobedience but cried out to the LORD for Saul.

We live in a culture that almost enjoys seeing others fall into sin.

And though we should always have a hatred of sin, we must cry out to the LORD for the people committing the sin.

So Samuel cries out to the LORD all night and decides to go meet Saul the next morning.

According to verse 12, Saul was busy building a nice monument for himself...

Pride always goes before destruction...

And it is interesting to see the incredible change in Saul...

When he was first chosen king, he hid behind the luggage and didn't even want to be seen...

Now, he is out building statues to honor himself...

Verse 13...

¹³ Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have carried out the command of the Lord."

Now, stop right there...

Yes, you heard that right..

Saul said "I have carried out the command of the LORD."

Even though the Amalekite king hasn't been destroyed and the livestock has been taken alive...

Saul is confident that he has perfectly obeyed the LORD's command....

He is even happy when he meets up with Samuel...

That is how far sin can blind you.

You even deceive yourself into thinking that almost obedience is full obedience....

And you think that a little sin is really no sin at all.

Verse 14..

¹⁴ But Samuel said, “What then is this ^[h]bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the ^[i]lowing of the oxen which I hear?” ¹⁵ Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

Samuel says, “IF you have carried out the command, why do I hear sheep and oxen in the background.”

This is like mom who comes home to find magic marker all over the walls of her home...

She goes to find her little toddler and asks him if he knows what happened...

He tells her that he doesn't even know where the magic markers are....

And all the while, he has a long red streak of magic marker on his face.

Here is Saul standing here saying that he has obeyed the Lord's command, but all the while all Samuel hears is "BAAA!" in the background...

And then after getting caught red-handed, Saul shifts the blame to the people....

"They" decided to keep those sheep.

The people decided.

And on top of that, we are only keeping them so we can offer them as sacrifices to the LORD.

My imagination tells me that Saul is what we call "shooting from the hip."

He is making this up as we go along here.

And though it is a humorous scene, it is incredibly heart breaking to watch people make excuses for their sin.

"Oh yea, I sinned. But it was his fault or her fault or their fault."

Sin is the only thing that no one wants to claim.

And if Saul thought that he was off the hook for this sin, he needed to think again...

Verse 16...

¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, “Wait, and let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.” And he said to him, “Speak!”¹⁷ Samuel said, “Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the Lord anointed you king over Israel, ¹⁸ and the Lord sent you on a [j]mission, and said, ‘Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.’ ¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord?”

Samuel simply reminds Saul of the incredible privilege that he has as king of Israel...

But also the incredible responsibility that he has to obey the LORD who had put him in this position.

Saul had fallen to a point in life where he thought he commanded his own destiny.

Yet, he is quickly reminded that since the LORD had given so much to him, much was also required of him..

Unfortunately, instead of falling on his knees here...

Saul digs in his heels...

Verse 20...

²⁰ Then Saul said to Samuel, “I did obey the voice of the Lord, and went on the^[k] mission on which the Lord sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹ But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal.”

Incredibly, Saul defends his disobedience...

I spared the king, and the people spared the livestock to offer as a sacrifice.

And before you feel sorry for Saul, you better check your understanding of who God is and who you are.

You may think it good to not kill the king or the livestock.

But you, like Saul, lack the wisdom of God.

We operate based upon what we can see and that is a very limited field.

God operates based upon what he sees..

And He sees everything, everyone, past, present and future at once...

When God gives a command, it is based upon who HE is and what He knows...

And who we are and what we know are so much smaller.

God speaks and we obey.

IT is truly that simple but also truly that difficult.

And Saul has had much difficulty obeying God...

And there is but one thing that follows disobedience and those are consequences....

Let's finish up by looking at verses 22-35....

IV. Consequences Delivered (22-35)

***²² Samuel said, “Has the Lord as much delight in
burnt offerings and sacrifices
As in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.***

***²³ “For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
He has also rejected you from being king.”***

Verse 22 needs to be starred and underlined in your Bible...

What a helpful truth to describe what pleases God.

To obey is better than sacrifice.

This is the foundational truth of heart-centered obedience.

God desires obedience over sacrifice.

This is the truth that the Pharisees never understood.

And they built an entirely false religious system based on external actions and rituals, and never considered their hearts...

They offered sacrifices day after day, year after year, and they would have been better off just staying at home.

God doesn't want sacrifices from a disobedient people.

He wants obedience.

Jesus said this in Matthew 15:8 to describe the Pharisees..

⁸ ***'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me.***

And Saul and the people were going to sacrifice to God, even though they didn't have obedient hearts...

And then in verse 23, Samuel puts down another great truth...

Sin is sin.

He compares rebellion to the sin of divination or witchcraft...

He compares disobedience to the sin of idolatry...

Idolatry and witchcraft were the sins of pagan nations....

Israelites saw these as the worst kinds of sin, yet Samuel is reminding Saul and the people that the sin of disobedience is just as bad....

And then at the end of verse 23...

Samuel reminds Saul that he is being rejected as king over Israel....

And I want you to notice why he is being rejected...

Look at verse 23...

Because you have rejected the Word of God, you are being rejected as well...

That is the high price that God places on His Word.

If you reject it, God rejects you.

That's a great reminder as we live in a nation that has rejected God's Word..

And God is abandoning us as a nation.

Finally, let's close out this chapter and look at how Saul responds to his sin...

People debate whether he truly repented from his disobedience at the start of chapter 15..

In my opinion, I don't see any signs of true repentance.

Let's look at verse 24....

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the^u command of

the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice.²⁵ Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the Lord.”²⁶ But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.”

People argue that Saul admitted his sin, and it is clear that he did...

I have sinned.

But look at what he tacks on to his sin...

He still blames the people for his sin...

I feared the people and listened to them.

When I look at that, I see a man who sees his sin but still doesn't see his responsibility in it...

And let me say this...

Many people acknowledge their sin, but do they accept responsibility for it?

Saul doesn't seem to acknowledge his responsibility here...

And then he says in verse 25.

Pardon my sin so that you can return with me.

Ever since Samuel had departed from Saul, it made him look bad in the people's eyes...

Here was Israel's king, but Samuel was nowhere to be found.

And everyone knew that Samuel was God's spokesman to the people and especially to the king...

Yet, Samuel had not been with Saul for some time, and that created a real image problem for Saul...

He may be the king but he had no way of hearing from the LORD...

And it seems here that Saul is simply acknowledging his sin so that he can get Samuel to join back up with him.

The point of repentance was to fix his relationship to the LORD not to the LORD's spokesman.

And so many people today want to be affiliated with a God so that they look better....

But have no interest in being affiliated with the God of the church...

So, I don't see this as true repentance.

Then we see something else in verse 27-31...

27 As Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. 28 So Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you. 29 Also the ^[m]Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind." 30 Then he said, "I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the Lord your God." 31 So Samuel went back following Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

Again ,we see Saul admit his sin...

But once again look at this motivation to admit his sin...

He wants to be honored before the nation...

It is similar to the person who is sorry for being caught but not sorry for what he has done...

And there is a big difference...

Saul is sorry that he sinned because it made him look bad before the people...

He should have been sorry because it made him look bad before the LORD....

On this second occasion, Samuel does agree to return with Saul.

Most likely, Samuel knows that the nation is on the verge of disaster if the people lose more confidence in their king...

So, he does go back with Saul.

And let me offer one more reason that I don't think that Saul was truly repentant...

Look at verses 32-33....

³² Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him ^{ln}cheerfully. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." ³³ But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal.

In a very graphic picture, Agag is finally destroyed by Samuel at Gilgal.

But what is interesting to me is that Samuel is the one who did this...

If Saul were truly repentant, he should seek to correct his sin.

He should have been the first to first to follow through with this act.

Now, I can't be confident in that claim because the Bible doesn't say that Saul refused to do it..

When I try to determine if someone is truly repentant, I want to know what they have done after their confession of sin...

If they are willing or have already taken steps to right their wrongs, I always take it as a good sign of true repentance...

Sometimes, things are not fixable, but if their opportunity to do right, truly repentant people should try to make it right....

And if anything, the first thing out of Saul's mouth, if he was truly repentant, should have been his willingness to fix his disobedience..

And that would have required him to destroy Agag like the LORD had originally commanded...

But instead, we see Samuel carrying out the command that the LORD had given to Saul...

And then one final proof of false repentance is found in verses 34-35...

³⁴ Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵ Samuel did not

see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

I think it is interesting that Samuel doesn't seek to be reconciled to Saul.

As I look at the situation, it would make sense for Samuel to restore Saul back to fellowship if he showed true repentance here...

But it seems like he decided to part ways with Saul here...

And there is a lesson for us there as well....

This is the NT model of dealing with a sinning brother....

If he refuses to repent, we are to treat him like an unbeliever....

In hopes that he will miss the fellowship, see his sin and then truly repent....

And when he does truly repent, we are to restore him quickly to fellowship...

That never happened between Samuel and Saul...

Samuel left Saul on this day and never saw him again until the day of his death.

And with that, the book of 1 Samuel and the nation of Israel begin to change directions...

David is going to come front and center for the next few chapters...

We will see Saul again, but this is really the sad ending to Saul...

Conclusion

Let me wrap this up by offering a one thought on this chapter...

Let us see the importance of complete heart-centered obedience in our lives...

God desires an obedient people...

And He desires obedience from the heart...

The best way to check your heart is to check your motivations behind what you do...

Why are you reading your Bible?

Is it to check a box in your mind or is it to understand more about the LORD and how you can please him?

Why do you come to church?

Is it so you look better in other people's eyes?

Or are you there to offer a small sacrifice of praise and learn more about the God who made you and cares for you?

And remember "heart" is not the organ of your body, and it is all of who you are...

It isn't only your emotions. It is also what you think.

Your heart is your decision making center.

It is what drives you to do what you do...

Don't be confused into thinking that your heart is how you feel...

In fact, your feelings play a very little part when you consider your heart....

Let me say this....

Say you get in your car and you jump on I-20 and head to Columbia...

Along the way, you may think of a lot of things while your drive...

Some may make you happy, some may make you sad..

You may hear a happy song and be dancing....

You may hear a sad song and start crying....

But none of those emotions make you turn back home...

The reason that you continue on to Columbia is that your heart is set on going there.

Even though your emotions may make you want to turn back home at times, your heart is motivated to go to Columbia so you drive on...

That is why our heart can't always be measured by how we feel...

We simply obey because our hearts have decided to please God in all we do...

At times, you may feel like your heart isn't in your obedience....

That's ok. You still obey...

Because you have set your heart to obey even though you may not feel like it at the time...

And that is why it is important to constantly look at our heart...

To make sure that we are driving down the road of pleasing God...

And we haven't decided to turn around and headed down the road of pleasing ourselves or others..

At some point in his life, Saul decided to start pleasing himself..

And when his heart got set on pleasing himself and looking good before others....

All of his actions reflected where his heart was set...

We need to constantly check our hearts...

We need to always be asking ourselves why do we do what we do...

Are we so self-centered and people-centered that we are no longer God-centered in what we do...

Let us pray..