

17. The Beginning of the End

– Part 4 Disobedience

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Obedying God is not always fun and easy. Rather, it goes very much against the grain of our sinful nature that often wants to dominate our lives. Disobedience does not start right away in our Christian lives. It starts very subtly and very slowly. But before we know it, it goes into a full blown stage.

This is a pivotal chapter in the story of king Saul. The Lord gave him another opportunity to prove himself, but he failed again, lied about it, and was judged. Saul had a habit of substituting running his mouth for action and of making excuses instead of confessing his sins. He was more concerned about looking good before the people than being good before God.

A. MISSION ELIMINATION

1 Samuel 15:1-3 Samuel also said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. 2 Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. 3 Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

The word 'heed' is 'shama' in Hebrew. It is more than just hearing the sound of voices. It is hearing with full attention given to the speaker.

Centuries before this, the Amalekites were the first peoples to attack Israel after their escape from Egypt according to Exodus 17. When Israel was weak and vulnerable, the Amalekites attacked the rear of the people where the sickly, old, and young were. They did this with no provocation, no reason except violence and greed.

Amalekites represents the sin that still remains in our lives. It is one of those things that continuously pops up in our paths, because we didn't completely eliminate it. We should not think that because we don't face the temptation that leads to sin right now, we would be OK forever. At any given time, it will reveal its ugly head again with a new disguise that entices our sinful nature. Our hearts cannot be trusted, because we tend to justify our wrong doing.

While such judgement against Amalekites and the people inside of Jericho is severe, it came in the command of a holy and just God. A holy God cannot let sin go unpunished.

B. ATTACK

1 Samuel 15:4-7 So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley. Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed

from among the Amalekites. And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt.

Who are these Kenites? They had been loosely associated with the Israelis since Moses' marriage to the daughter of Jethro who was a Kenite.

C. THE START OF DISOBEDIENCE

1 Samuel 15:8-9 He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 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 unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

What do you see here?

These are sad verses. God commanded Saul to bring His judgment on all the people, including the king. They knew what they were supposed to do. Yet they didn't want kill king Agag with an intention to show off him and the spoils as their victory trophies. A bad and dumb move.

Agag means "I will overcome." What a name for flesh! Our flesh says that it will overcome our spirit. If we don't kill the flesh, the flesh will kill us later. Saul was killed by an Amalekite young man eventually:

2 Samuel 1:6-10 Then the young man who told him said, "As I happened by chance to be on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul, leaning on his spear; and indeed the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. 7 Now when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' 8 And he said to me, 'Who are you?' So I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' 9 He said to me again, 'Please stand over me and kill me, for anguish has come upon me, but my life still remains in me.' 10 So I stood over him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord."

Haman was preparing to kill all the Jews in the land of Susa where the Jews were exiling including Queen Esther.

Esther 3:1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

Did you notice "unwilling to utterly destroy" in v9? It is a complete and direct disobedience to God's command. We do the same thing. We know that temptations are going to lead us to sins. But we come up with some lousy excuses and false justifications to protect the very traps we are going to fall in by sparing some root of evil and our favorite sins.

Whether people would like to admit it or not, partial obedience is complete disobedience. Saul and his men obeyed as far as it suited them.

D. GOD REJECTS SAUL AS KING

1 Samuel 15:10-21 Now the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, 11 "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night. 12 So when Samuel rose

early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." 13 Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord." 14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" 15 And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." 16 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak on." 17 So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? 18 Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?" 20 And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."

What is your interpretation of this?

How can God say, "I greatly regret" in v11 and "repent" in v29 of KJV? Does this mean that God did not know what would happen? God wanted things to happen a certain way, but He was powerless to make them come to pass? Not at all. This is the use of anthropomorphism, when God explains Himself to man in human terms, so man can have some understanding of God's heart.

Saul is really heading for a deep self-destructive pit. In his own eyes, he is no longer little. As a matter of fact he thinks so highly of himself that he had to set up a monument. I am sure that it totally appalled the prophet Samuel.

When we start to read our own clippings, set up our own monuments, love to listen to people's praises to ourselves, we are heading for a fall. Just like Lucifer started his fall by trying to set himself up as high as God, Saul was setting himself up for tragedy. God will not share His glory with anyone else.

The greeting from Saul to Samuel was so spiritual. A lie just rolled out of his mouth without any problem. Saul was using spiritual jargons to be associated with the prophet like any carnal Christian would do.

Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" It sounded ba-a-a-d, but it was mo-o-sic to Saul's ears.

The Lord was not Saul's God. Saul himself was his own God. The Lord was the God of Samuel, not Saul according to v15. Disobedience comes from our pride that makes us think that we know and are better than God.

Pride and disobedience make us blind – or deaf – to our sin. We all have blind spots of sin in our lives, and we need to constantly ask God to show them to us. We need to sincerely pray the prayer of Psalm 139:

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

Let's take a look at Saul's lame excuses:

- 1) He blames the people, not himself. – *"They have brought them from the Amalekites"*
- 2) He includes himself in the obedience. – *"the rest we have utterly destroyed"*
- 3) He claims to have done it for a spiritual reason. – *"to sacrifice to the Lord your God"*

When we were kids, we did something wrong and got caught. In effort to get ourselves out of trouble with a lame excuse which revealed worse mischief of ours, we ended up in deeper troubles. This is the case in point. Until now, Samuel didn't know that Agag king of Amalek was still alive.

Saul was continuing his favorite game – blaming someone for his faults. A wise man said this once, "You are not a loser until you start to blame someone for your own fault."

E. SAMUEL'S PROPHECIES AGAINST SAUL

1 Samuel 15:22-23 So Samuel said: "Has the Lord as great 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. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king."

These are the theme verses of tonight's study.

We can serve God without loving Him. But when we love Him and obey His Word, the service to Him will naturally follow. Our God wants our broken and contrite heart, not sacrifice and service without obedience.

"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft." was a prophecy for Saul's end in 1 Samuel 28:7-15.

F. MORE EXCUSES

1 Samuel 15:24-29 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed 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." 27 And as Samuel turned around to go away, 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 a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent."

What do you get out of this?

Saul said that he feared the people and obeyed their voice over God's. That is the typical excuse of carnal people. They are concerned about other people's opinions more than God's truth. However, he was not afraid of what they would say when he ordered everyone to fast in the middle of the battle for his revenge in chapter 14.

To Saul, the image of a good spiritual king is very important. He couldn't afford to have his spiritual reputation being ruined.

V23 and 26 repeat the same comments from Samuel to Saul. How did Saul reject the Word of the Lord? By disobeying the Lord's commands. Does it mean whenever we go against the direct words from the Lord through the Bible, are we rejecting the Lord's words? You'd better believe it. Unfortunately, we all fall into the same category. But our God is full of grace and mercy, He gives us a way to come to Him and makes it right with Him. You see, the problem with Saul was that he sinned against God, and he didn't think twice about it. To him, Saul was more important than God. He could care less about what God says as long as God makes him look good.

Saul was desperate to keep his image in the presence of his soldiers. He grabbed Samuel's Calvin Klein designer robe and tore it accidentally.

This is the first introduction of David whom we are going to meet and study about him in the next few months.

Samuel says that God will not relent. In other words, God will not change His mind later. But Jonah said that God would be the One who relents from doing harm in Jonah 4:3. Which one is right? Both. God relents to those who are going to change their minds and turn to Him. But in His infinite wisdom God already knew that Saul was not going to follow His commands.

G. IS IMAGE EVERYTHING?

1 Samuel 15:30-31 Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God." 31 So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

What do you get out of this?

V30 reveals what Saul has in his mind that he was more concerned about what the people thought than what God thought. He wanted a good reputation, but he did not want a true character. Reputation is what people think about us, but the character is what God knows about us. Which one is the true reflection of us? Character.

I admire what Samuel did. He was full of grace and love like His God. If I were him, I'd smack upside of Saul's head.

H. COMPLETING THE MISSION

1 Samuel 15:32-35 Then Samuel said, "Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me." So Agag came to him cautiously. 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 hacked Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. 34 Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeath of Saul. 35 And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Who has an interpretation of this section for me?

Samuel killed Agag as the Lord had commanded, since Saul didn't finish the job.

Saul had lost his best friend. He had lost the Lord's blessing. He had lost the kingdom. Samuel was dwelling on the tragedy of Saul. God was telling him to move on, because God is on the move. If we stay in the past problems, we will miss the present moves of God.

I. APPLICATIONS

1) We need to kill the fleshly desires completely and utterly.

If we don't do that, our own fleshly desires are going to lift up its ugly head against us later. One way to do that is keeping short account with the Lord. When we sin, we stop and make it right with God on that spot by confessing our sins to Him.

2) We need to remember that obedience to the Lord is better and more important than any sacrifice or service to God.

Our obedience comes from the love we have for Him. When we are disobedient to Him, we are telling God that our love for ourselves, others, or other things is more valuable than Him.

3) It is better to be broken and humbled before the Lord than He breaks us.