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1 SAMUEL 15

1 Samuel Series

[PRAYER] Donald Trump has a lot of challenges personally, integrity challenges. Lord, we want to ask now that you would touch him, that you would use this experience of tremendous power in his life to recognize the power that you have and that you offer to him for his personal life. We pray for the vice president, Pence, that you would give him wisdom to know how to speak and when to speak and how to share his faith, knowing he believes in you and serves you with his whole heart. Lord, we pray for our country, that you would use this experience under this new president to draw us closer to you. We pray that Donald Trump would function in a way that the Bible talks about the purpose of government – to punish those who do wrong and to reward those who do right. We pray that you would give him such an ethical and moral stance that he would be able to use some of his strengths of courage and perseverance to take a stand for righteousness, even when others oppose him. We pray that you would help him to be gracious with people who disagree with him. We pray that you would help him to be relational in a way that is helpful with other countries like Russia. Lord, there's so much about this guy that we do not know. But we know that you know what's going on in Donald Trump's heart and we ask that you would work in our country, work in him, and work in us as a result. So we ask your blessing on this week's events, both the blessing on those who will be at the inauguration and then there will be protests. We ask for your blessing in the midst of all of that. We thank you that we live in a country where we can express our opinions and views. But give us the ability to support and encourage and pray for our new president. Heavenly Father, we're going to look at your word and we ask that you would use it to speak to us and to teach us what it means for us to live our lives in the midst of the challenges that we face this week. In Jesus' name we ask, amen.

I'm convinced that every one of us can live today now the victorious Christian life. It doesn't only get lived when everything goes well. We don't have to wait till we get married, till we get that new job, till we have kids, or till we retire, or till we have money in order to experience the victorious Christian life. We can experience it now today in the midst of the challenges. So we have to live within the challenges continuously. All of us experience challenges in our lives. We have to know how to live within the challenges today so today can be a great day, so we can experience the victory that we have in Christ.

Today we're going to look at a passage in 1 Samuel 15 that's going to help us do that. We're going to look at a king, the first king of Israel, whose name is Saul, and we're going to see some mistakes that he made. Saul didn't have the ability to deal with two things that we all must be able to deal with in our lives. If we're going to have this victorious life inside of our hearts, we're going to be victorious in our walk then we must be able to deal with these two things that

Saul wasn't able to deal with. One is success and the other is failure. So today as we look at this story of Saul we're going to see that Saul is going to make a mistake.

He's not one of those guys that's an open rebel. He's the kind of guy that would probably attend church. He's the guy that would hang around good people. He would look good on the outside and often did religious things, but his heart was crowded. Because his heart was crowded he had a hard time obeying God when he didn't understand fully or agree fully with what God was telling him to do. And so we're going to see in the midst of this instruction God is going to reveal in him the weakness that exists inside of his heart because he doesn't obey. And that's going to cause him to lose the kingdom as the king. God's going to bring another king on the scene. I'm getting ahead of the story here.

In 1 Samuel 15 as the curtain rises we see Samuel having a meeting with Saul and introducing himself. So verse 1 says this: *Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord."* He's saying listen up. Up with the arrow. Listen up and pay attention. Recognizing that all of us always need to be listening up. Recognizing that God might speak to us today through His word, but He also speaks to us through other people. He speaks to us through creation the Bible says. We always need to be listening up to what might God be saying to me today.

Samuel says in verse 1, "Listen up, Saul. I'm about to say something really important to you." Verse 2 – *"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt.'"*

Let's go back and let me retell the story just about the Amalekites just so you understand. God rescued the people out of Egypt away from Pharaoh with the Ten Commandments and Moses led them out. When they crossed the Red Sea then they started wandering in the wilderness and God started training them. They complained about water and God provided them with water. God started to lead them through the land as they were progressing toward the Promised Land. Well out of nowhere the Amalekites attacked them. These Amalekites come, and you have to remember these are not soldiers. These are Israelites. By trade they are all bricklayers. That's what they do for a living. And now they're being attacked by the enemy.

They don't really know how to fight, and so Moses says to Joshua, "Joshua, I want you to gather some men and go out and fight the Amalekites." They don't know what they're doing. Moses is trying to lead the people, so Moses goes up on the hill to watch the battle take place and he's got two comrades with him, Aaron and Hur, and they go up and they stand there. Moses is saying, "Come on, guys. Go!" And Moses realizes that when his hands are up like this Joshua is winning the battle, and then he puts his hands down to rest they're losing the battle. So he puts his hands up again. "Come on, guys. Go!" He's cheering them on, as a good leader should be doing, and he's putting his hands up. But he's realizing this is an all-day thing and I can't keep my hands up this long. So he keeps holding his hands up as much as he can because he knows that as he holds his hands up his people are beating the Amalekites.

Well he gets so tired that Aaron and Hur come along and hold his arms up. You know the story. It's a beautiful picture about how we all need to come around leaders to support them and encourage them in order to empower them to do their work.

In the end, Joshua defeated the Amalekites. But God made a promise back then and He said there's going to come a day when the Amalekites will be eradicated from the earth. Now that happened in about 1446 B.C. Somewhere around that time. The story we're looking at today takes place about 300 years later. That's a long period of time for this account to be on the books before God brings the justice into the situation. But that's the history of the story as we're reading in verse 2.

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”

So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah. Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. Then he said to the Kenites (who had kind of mingled with the Amalekites – he's separating them out, an act of mercy and grace), “Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.

Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

Now God had given Saul some very specific, clear instructions. They were simple. Go attack the Amalekites and eradicate them all. Totally destroy everything. Granted that seems a little gruesome to us as we look at that, but the instructions were straightforward. Destroy everything, kill all the people, kill the animals. Did Saul do that? Well kind of. But he spared the best of the cattle and the sheep, the fat ones, and he spared King Agag. But he killed everything else.

Now in Saul's mind he probably thought this made sense somehow. He kind of talked himself into this or essentially he's saying, “I'm kind of obeying, I'm doing what you said, but I'm adjusting it a little bit. Why should I waste the good cattle and sheep? Why should I kill Agag? He's probably an influential guy.” Maybe Agag even offered Saul some piece of information that would help him if he would spare his life. But other than that, Saul obeyed. He just didn't obey completely. He obeyed based on his own mind, what he thought was a good idea at the time.

I want to park here for just a minute. I want to talk about obedience because I want you to understand a little bit more about what obedience is and how we need to view it. Sometimes as I'm working with parents and trying to help them to work with their children, a parent will tell me something like this: “I know my child is going to be a leader someday or he's going to be a

lawyer some day. He argues with me about everything. He always has a better way of doing that.” Of course leaders are like that. Leaders always have a better way of doing it and they have a way of telling everyone (including their parents) their agenda and telling them what they should do and how they should do it. That’s what leaders do.

However, a good leader always needs to know how to follow. So part of the work that we do in training children is teaching them how to follow so that they can be good leaders. Otherwise they grow up to be leaders who are tyrants instead of leaders who are responsive and faithful leaders. Sometimes children will obey, but they kind of twist the words. “Go put your shoes in your bedroom.” You go in there and find the shoes are thrown into the bedroom. You have to say, “Let me explain to you what I mean when I say put your shoes in your bedroom. What I mean is take the shoes and put them by the foot of the bed. That’s what I mean. Now do that and show me that you can follow instructions.”

How many times do you see a child running along and you say, “Hey, stop running,” so he starts walking really fast. Because he’s actually not running, he’s walking really fast. But what is he doing? He’s violating the spirit of what you said to do what he wants. That’s what Saul is doing in this story.

When you say to your fourteen year old, “You need to go clean up the kitchen,” and you come back and find out that “That’s not my definition of a clean kitchen. Let me show you what a clean kitchen is.” That’s a different story.

Here’s the one key about obedience that’s really important. If you’re going to learn how to obey, you must obey to meet the expectations of the leader (God, the parent, the boss, the coach), not just to satisfy the words. To say I cleaned my room might satisfy the words, but if that’s not meeting the expectations of what the parent said, then you’re not obeying in the first place. So obedience doesn’t have to do so much with the words as it has to do with the intent behind it and what the leader was expecting.

So let me pursue that just a little bit more and show you some verses about obedience today that I think may be helpful to you as you try to understand this concept. Let’s go back into Israel’s history and let’s go back to Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy this is the second law, this is the law that was given to Joshua and the people before they go into the Promised Land.

These are the words that were said to them: *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep his commandments* (the word there is to obey) *and statutes, which I command you today* (and then the last words) *for your own good.* Obedience is for your good. That’s what he’s saying there. You do this for your good. God has set up the boundaries in our lives. He’s set up the guidelines of how we are to live for our good. If we have to keep going outside of the limits to find our happiness or to find satisfaction then we are in trouble. The boundaries, the rules, the guidelines are there for us so that we can move forward.

So if we go a little further back in Israel history in Exodus as they escaped, and came across the Red Sea on dry ground, and came out, and they're wandering in the wilderness out there, God pauses for a moment and says to them this: *"If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and will do what is right in His sight and will listen to and obey his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these disease upon you which I brought upon the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you."*

The guidelines that God has established for us are guidelines that protect us and lead us in the right direction. Jesus takes up on this same idea in the New Testament when He tells us, *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."* So now it's not just we're obeying because of rules and regulations, but now we're tying this obedience to something bigger. We're tying it to love as He did in Deuteronomy – *love the Lord your God with all your heart*, and so on. So obedience is reflected in love.

John writes Jesus' words – *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."* And then later on in John's writing in 1 John he says – *For this is the love of God: to keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.* Isn't that interesting? "Oh I have to obey." No, this isn't "I have to obey." These commands are not burdensome. In fact these will protect you so that you can be successful.

I try to communicate this regularly to young people. This week I was working with a sixteen year old girl's parents about how to communicate this issue about the relationship that she's in. She's in a relationship with a guy that she really likes. The guy's not really on fire for the Lord, but he says he's a Christian. I don't think that's enough. I don't think that's enough to say you're a Christian. If you're getting involved with someone (this is what I'm saying to the parents), you want to communicate you can't just find a Christian. That's very important. You must find a Christian that's going somewhere in their faith. Someone who is on fire for the Lord. That's what you want in that relationship. So I'm trying to communicate this to a young person who is sixteen years old. If a sixteen year old can catch this, it would be so powerful. It would change their lives.

If you will abide by these principles that God has set up for relationships, it will set you up for success in your marriage relationship. But if you're involved in bad stuff now or you get yourself involved in a thing... I'm talking to a guy and trying to help him deal with pornography as a teenage boy. Let me explain to you some of the problems of pornography. I try to explain to him here are the dangers of pornography. One of them is you're going to have a hard time in your sexual relationship with your wife eventually. You do not to be involved in that.

There's a whole bunch of things I talk about with male sexuality and female sexuality when I talk to young people, but the point is God has designed a plan for this. It's not burdensome. If you stay within the boundaries, if you follow God's direction you can move toward a successful marriage relationship. It's powerful.

But the reality is all of us have failed. We have not obeyed. In fact we have disobeyed God and so when we have disobeyed does that mean we are put on the shelf? No. God has a plan for getting us back on track. How do you get back on track? 1 John 1:9 says – *If we confess our sins,*

he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. So we have to have a plan for doing the right thing, being successful, and we have to have a plan for when we do the wrong thing to get back on track. Success and failure we need a plan for. In both cases those will help us to adjust.

Now Saul doesn't really have this plan. He's not doing this very well, and so he doesn't do the right thing. Well now Samuel hears about it directly from the Lord. Look at verse 10 again. *Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."* I need people who can follow instructions. He's not doing that, He says to Samuel.

Notice Samuel's response. I feel this way sometimes. Maybe you do too. *Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night.* Why is he angry? Why is he so upset? Is he angry at Saul? Maybe. Angry at life situations? Angry at the pressures of life? I don't know what he's angry about, but you see someone who's failing, someone who's making a mistake, someone who's suffering in their lives, and you know that if they would just do the right thing and follow the Lord and get the help they need to do that right thing then their life would be better. But they're not doing it. So Samuel feels the agony that you and I feel, and so he's angry about it, he wrestles, *he cries out to the Lord all that night.*

Well early *the next morning then Samuel got up* because he has to do something about this *and he went to meet Saul.* So he's going hunting for Saul. Where is this guy? He's hunting for him, *but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."*

Wow, isn't that interesting. He goes down to Carmel to build a monument to himself. Do you see what's happening in Saul's life? What's happening in Saul's life is that he's becoming a little bit more prideful. As he's becoming more prideful, he's exalting himself instead of exalting the Lord. Instead of having this victory and building an altar to the Lord, as we talked about last week, he's building a monument to himself. That's what pride does. You start exalting yourself and saying, "I'm such a cool guy. I'm really valuable. I do good things. I've gotten here in my position because of how great I am," and so on. So he's building this altar to himself.

Finally Samuel caught up to him. In verse 13 – *When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."* That's what he says. *But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"* He's self-deceived. He has this pagan view of God.

A pagan view of God is a view of God that says God is distant and he's there if I have a problem. I'll go and try to help Him rescue me. Or a view of God that says I'm going to look good on the outside, I'm going to do a lot of righteous and religious things, but the inside doesn't have this understanding that God is living, He has a personal relationship, He's watching and expecting us to obey. He cares about what we do. He cares about our lives. Saul doesn't seem to grasp that idea.

Now Saul doesn't openly rebel against God. In fact he looks very pious and religious in what he's doing. We'll see that as he continues on. But he's missing the core. His heart seems to be pushing God out because of the pride in his life. Now he's being challenged. What is this sheep, the cows that I hear? Remember you're supposed to eradicate everything?

Here's Saul's response in verse 15. Does he take responsibility for his failure? Does he respond well when he's made a mistake? Does he say, "Oh, I was wrong. Let me take care of that right away." No. Here's what he says. *Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites. Those bad soldiers. It wasn't my fault. It was the soldiers who did it. They spared the best of the sheep and cattle, and here's why we did it, Samuel, to sacrifice to the Lord your God (we're going to do something religious with this), but we totally destroyed the rest."*

It occurs to me in our lives that our pride can push God out of our lives. So on Tuesday if you're reading along a psalm every day, then Tuesday was the tenth and this is the Psalm 10:4 that says this very thing. It says – *In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.* So in our lives we get so busy and consumed with all kinds of things and they're so important. We have to be doing these things that our pride somehow pushes God out of the picture and our arrogance takes over and bad things are then happening to us.

This idea right here helps me understand the words that are said three times in our passage. Look back at verse 15. At the end it says we brought these *sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God*. He's going to say *the Lord your God* three times. Now why is he doing that? Why doesn't he say the Lord *our* God, the Lord *my* God? But he says the Lord *your* God. Why? Because he doesn't have any room for God in his life. He's become his own God because he's prideful. On the outward he looks okay. To many people he looked like a God-fearing man because he's offering sacrifices, occasionally building an altar to the Lord. But on the inside of his heart there's not room for God.

So we have this significant problem that's going on. Of course it's the bad soldiers' problem. So Samuel stops him in his tracks in verse 16. *"Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied.*

Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes (he's saying you were humble at first), did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. The Lord brought you to where you are today. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites.'" You're on a mission.

I teach parents how to help their children overcome certain challenges. One of the challenges that kids face is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder today. One of the problems is these kids have a hard time focusing on a task. So one of the key things we work on is instruction therapy, obedience therapy in the home. Practice it over and over again. We tell kids you have a job to do. Take the shoes and put them in the bedroom and you need to do it as if on a mission.

That's what Saul is missing. Maybe he had attention-deficit disorder, but he's not focusing on where he needs to be. He needs to view this as a mission. I sent you on a mission, God says,

“*Wage war against them until you have wiped them out.*’ *Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?*”

Verse 20. Saul now again is going to respond to the challenge. Notice his attempted apology is again inadequate. “*But I did obey the Lord,*” Saul said. “*I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.*” He’s not really confessing, he’s just passing the buck here.

Why would you deliberately disobey God? He’s edging God out of the picture, so he seems able to justify his disobedience. That brings us to the key passage here that I want you to see. Verse 22 and 23 are going to be the famous words now that Samuel is going to say to Saul that ring true to our lives and become so true for you and me today.

Verse 22 says – *But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? Does God delight in religiosity and looking good on the outside as He does in obeying Him? That’s the question. And then the statement: To obey is better than sacrifice.* Obedience is so important. It’s the most important thing. It’s more important than any kind of religiosity that we do. Obeying is better than sacrifice *and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

It’s the next verse, verse 23, that is a very interesting parallel that scares me to death, frankly, and has all my life. Verse 23 – *For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.*

I don’t have any idols, little figurines in my house. I don’t have any worship things in my home that I would worship, that’s what I mean by that. If I ever come into an understanding that maybe I’m making something an idol in my life, something that I’m valuing more than the Lord, I want to deal with it right away because I realize that idolatry is bad and I don’t want to have any idols.

But do you see what it says? *Arrogance is like the evil of idolatry.* It’s much easier for me to be arrogant, to make an off-handed comment, to be prideful, and to imagine that I’m a great person or that somehow I’ve achieved something because of who I am in my greatness. That scares me. I’d be much more susceptible to arrogance than I would be idolatry. But the passage is saying that arrogance is like idolatry and I need to be careful about that.

He also says that *rebellion is like the sin of divination.* Divination is something I would stay far away from. Divination is going to the evil world in order to discern some information about today. What’s today going to be like? It’s like going to a horoscope, or to tarot cards, or to a palm reader or to a psychic. All of those things are moving into the world of evil in order to find information about today. Because we’re so hungry, we want to know the future. If God wanted us to know the future He would tell us that. But the problem is those things are real. So what happens is you go in and there’s satanic activity there that gives you a little bit of truth and a little bit of error. You don’t know whether it’s truth or error, so you start living in fear, start

living as if you know the future, you start living the life that's wrong because of false information. That's what divination is.

I stay far away from that. I don't want to talk about my sign or I don't want to know what my horoscope is. I don't want to know any of that stuff. I don't even open fortune cookies myself because I don't want to have anything to do with anything to do with the future telling me anything besides what the Bible says for me.

However, notice what it says. Rebellion is like that. Oh that hurts me. Because that means if I disobey the Lord I'm opening myself up to this. The rain represents the darts of Satan that are taking, and if I stay underneath the umbrella of God's protection then I'm in that place of safety because of the obedience. The obedience is for my good. It is not burdensome that God has designed that. But when I get outside of that I open myself up to the realm of Satan and I can find myself in a dangerous place. That is scary and a warning to me.

So the conclusion in verse 23 – *Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.*” You're going to lose. You're going to lose your opportunity to be king. You lose it.

Verse 24 – *Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. (Even now he's apologizing, but he's kind of blaming it on his fears.) Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord.”*

But Samuel said to him, “I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!”

As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. And that person is David. David, a man after God's own heart, whom God starts to work with as a boy and starts to lead him so that David can follow the Lord, listen to the Lord, obey Him at a young age, and grow into a place where he can serve Him as king. But we're getting ahead of the story. That's next week's story when we'll be introduced to David.

Verse 29 – *He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.”*

Saul replied, “I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God.” So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

Then Samuel said, “Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites.” Agag came to him in chains. And he thought, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” He thinks he's going to get off now. But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel put Agag to death before the Lord at Gilgal.

Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

If we're going to experience the victorious Christian life, we must know how to handle success and failure. We do that in the confines of who God is and what God wants to do in our lives. That's God's desire for every one of us. He wants us to be able to experience that today that we can experience that victorious Christian life today.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I pray that you'd touch each of our hearts and remind us that we are small and you are big. You are God and we are not God. It's only because of your grace that we are able to move forward. Any plans that we have or accomplishments that we've made is because of your grace. Lord, we also realize that when we make a mistake, when we fail, the solution really isn't to defend ourselves, blame it on other people, but to come clean before you and confess our sins and ask you to forgive us. Lord, teach us how to deal with failure. Teach us how to deal with success in each of our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.