

Friday, October 13th

1st Samuel 15:17-22- “Samuel said, ‘Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸And the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, “Go, utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.” ¹⁹Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?’ ²⁰Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹But from the spoil the people took sheep and cattle, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.’ ²²And Samuel said, ‘Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the Lord? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”

Saul is the classic case of a man torn between his human nature and his desire to be obedient to God. Saul tends to have a bad reputation, due to the way he treated David and the fact that he wasn't the King God chose, but rather the one the people wanted. That being said, Saul starts his reign in faith and with great success, winning battles and protecting his people. But in the passage above, we see him make a critical mistake. Instead of doing what God wanted, Saul took spoils of war instead of completely destroying everything as God had instructed. What is interesting though, is that Saul says he only keeps the spoils of war that he then turns around and offers to God in sacrifice. Saul sought to do things his way, instead of God's, even though what he was doing was technically a good thing, worshipping God through sacrifices.

There are a couple of things we must really pay attention to here, for it is in the details that we learn how to live faithfully. First, we see that Saul blames “the people” for keeping the animals, that it was their idea. This leads us to think that maybe Saul’s story about offering the animals as a sacrifice was a cover for the sin, he knew he had committed. It also speaks to the idea that Saul was more concerned about losing the popularity of his army than he was about God’s disapproval. He was willing to break God’s command as long as the army kept him in his human seat of power. We also must understand that here, and throughout the Old Testament, we see God consistently asking for obedience over worship. God would rather us show that we are loyal and faithful through doing as God asks, instead of worshipping with our lips, while our hearts and actions are elsewhere. Saul hopes that he can ask for forgiveness through the sacrifice, since he didn’t ask for permission. Maybe his gifts can calm God’s anger, so he hopes.

We feel the same gravity don’t we. We often care more about the approval of those around us than we do of God’s approval. We often seek to be powerful and well respected on earth, even if that causes us to be disobedient to God. We know that God is forgiving, and that God will accept our brokenness, and so instead of following faithfully, we do things our way and hope that God will forgive us on the back end. We need to really think about that way of doing things, and what does that say to God about the truth of our faithfulness and the depth of our love for God. Are you seeking first the approval of others, and using God’s grace as a safety net? God will forgive us, but we must also seek to be obedient to God above all things: loving others, living generously, and spreading the Good News.

1. When have you sought worldly accolades instead of faithful obedience? What happened as a result?

2. How can you work on truly repenting of your sins, which means to ask for forgiveness, while also turning away from the sin and disobedience?