

To Obey is Better than Sacrifice (1 Sam 14:49-15:35 & Mark 12:28-34)¹

23-Jun-19

G'Day Church Family!

We're continuing our look at the life of King Saul

So, it would be great to have your Bibles opened up to 1 Samuel 14, from verse 49 and we're going through to chapter 15, verse 35.

There's the usual outline for you to jot down notes if you wish.

Let's ask God to give us His understanding before we begin

Let's pray...

Intro

There's the true story of a good little Roman Catholic boy - who used to go to confession - every 2 weeks - to confess his sins to the priest

His confession was pretty much the same each time - "Bless me Father, for I have sinned - it is 2 weeks since my last confession - during this time - I've told lies and been disobedient to my parents"

The Priest would say - "I absolve you from your sins - say 3 "Hail Mary's" and 2 "Glory Be to the Fathers"

He was such a good little Roman Catholic boy

He even went to church - to mass - every morning before school - because it really pleased his class teacher - and after all he was Teacher's pet and he was well ahead of the rest of the class - on the class awards board.

He was such a good little Roman Catholic boy

When he went to High School - there was no need to please his class teacher anymore - so he just went to confession every 2 weeks -

Soon it became - every 4 weeks - then every 2 months

But he still had to please his parents

By the time he reached his late teens and early twenties

Going to confession was a thing of the past

He'd only go to church - when he his conscience made him feel so guilty - and when he did go - he didn't go to Holy Communion - because his religion - said you can't go to communion without going to confession first

He was still the good little Roman Catholic boy at heart!

One day in his mid-twenties - he was asked to be Best Man at his cousin's wedding. The wedding ceremony included mass and Holy Communion

So, he felt compelled to go to Confession - the day before the wedding

This should be interesting he thought - what will he say - "Bless me Father for I have sinned - it's been Years since I've been to confession"

He decided - it was all a bit hypocritical - so he went in - and told the priest -

"I'm only here because I'm best man at a wedding and have to go to Holy Communion tomorrow - so I need to confess"

Surprisingly, the Priest - was so excited "Welcome back my son, to the flock - the Prodigal Son has returned - I absolve you from your sin - say 25 "Hail Mary's" and 10 "Glory be to the Fathers"

Surprisingly the Priest - didn't say anything about having a truly repentant heart.

I'm not sure whose religion was worse, the good little Roman Catholic boy or the Priests?

True story!

Is that the sort of worship and obedience God expects from us?

Is 95% obedience enough? 75%? 50%?

Is coming to church for an hour or so on Sunday enough?

What about God's commandments?

Are they just guidelines or ideals to aim for?

What about Hell? God's a loving God - He wouldn't let people wind up in Hell, would He?

(pause)

Context (1 Samuel 14:49-52)

In our OT passage from 1 Samuel - we see the "religion" and "worship" of Saul - and it's not that much different to the good little Roman Catholic boy - in our story.

[Powerpoint 1-Context]

Let's look at the context - in chapter 14:49-51

We're told about Saul's family and close friends

Why?

- a) Because Saul's actions as King will affect them all
- b) And because the people named will be characters throughout the remainder of the book of Samuel

And in v52 - we're also told that Saul was always at war with the Philistines throughout his reign as King and he never missed an opportunity to add a mighty or brave man to his army.

Why are we told that?

To show that Saul **trusted in his army** to win his battles - and **not God**

The Lord rejects Saul as King (1 Samuel 15:1-35)

And so, we hit chapter 15 of 1 Samuel

This chapter can be summarized as God rejecting Saul as King

[Powerpoint 2-Heading]

Why does God reject Saul as King?

[Powerpoint 2.1]

1. Because God is Holy, Holy, Holy (vv1-3)

First - God rejects Saul as King - because God is Holy, Holy, Holy and Saul is not

In verses 1 to 3

- Samuel reminds Saul he anointed him as King and has a message for him from God
- Saul is to **totally destroy** the Amalekites
- The Hebrew word for totally destroy (*herem*) means complete dedication of a person or group of people who had offended God - and it usually involved total destruction and no hostages or plunder were allowed to be kept. It was God's judgement
- The reason the Amalekites were to be totally destroyed was because they had attacked God's people - the Israelites - some 400 years earlier
- The Amalekites were totally wicked people - who worshipped false gods - and God knew they would corrupt the Israelites if they were allowed to exist - because God's fledging nation - were weak and easily influenced
- God's call for destruction of the Amalekites is an expression of God's holiness - and how he feels about sin - and shows the consequences of sin for those who are against Him

- You see even though it's 400 years since the Amalekites offended God - in God's eyes sin is never erased by time. Because God is holy - sin must be punished - otherwise we don't have a consistent God - we have a God who flip flops and changes His mind
- Saul does not understand just how holy God is as we'll see
- Just as an aside - we shouldn't see this chapter in Samuel as a justification for us today - as Christians - to go and attack people of other religions and wipe them out. NT passages such as John 3 and Hebrews 10 shows us that holiness can be attained - not through the destruction of people who offend God but through faith in Jesus. God sent Jesus not to condemn people but to save people

[Powerpoint 2.2]

2. Because obedience can't be half-hearted (vv4-9)

Second - God rejects Saul as King - because obedience to God can't be half-hearted - that's in verses 4 to 9

- Saul's reliance on his brave and strong men - means he amasses a huge army
- 210,000 men altogether (600 last week!)
- Saul ambushes the Amalekites
- And he kindly lets the Kenites go - because they were kind to Israel when they came out of Egypt
- But Saul does not fully obey the Lord's instruction to totally destroy the Amalekites
- Saul and his army only destroyed people and things that were not seen as useful to them - and kept everything that could be useful to them,

including the Amalekite King, Agag, and the best animals. This was not simply an act of disobedience - although of course it was - it was a direct affront to God - a refusal to take His holiness seriously - and to take seriously His command to dedicate all the Amalekite people and their goods to God. Saul and His army kept for themselves what was God's

- Their obedience to God was half-hearted
- Application- what's about our obedience to God's word and instructions - is it 95%, 80%, 50% - 10%?
- There will always be consequences for our half-hearted obedience to God

[Powerpoint 2.3]

3. Because failure to obey God affects others (vv10-11)

Third - God rejects Saul as King because His failure to obey God affects others - that's in verses 10 and 11

- Saul's actions brought grief to God and Samuel
- Here the writer - express God's emotions in human terms (anthropopathism) - it says God regretted he had made Saul king - it's not like God made a mistake - He gave the people the King they wanted - a king like the other nations - and God foreknew it would end in tears. The writer tells us God's feelings in human terms because it helps to show the reality of God's involvement with humanity and the cost to him of that involvement. God is never portrayed as separate from creation or his people
- Saul's failure brought great pain to God
- And to Samuel too - Samuel had a sleepless night - he cried out to God all night -it's not easy to go and tell someone they've done the wrong thing -

is it? [Samuel had to do the same thing with Eli when he was a little boy - he had to tell Eli, God's decision]

- Saul is accountable for his actions - it affects God, it affects Samuel - and Saul's actions ultimately affect the whole nation
- Application - for us - our failure to obey God can bring great pain to God and to others and especially to our family
- Application - we may have to point out someone's failure to obey God - it is distressing to do so - but necessary
- Application- Samuel; serves God in his old age - and stands as an example to us all of how we should react to the disappointment, frustration and the failure of the people we love

[Powerpoint 2.4]

4. Because Saul forgot who he was serving (vv:12-21)

Fourth - God rejected Saul as King because Saul forgot who he was serving - that's in verses 12 to 21

- In v12 Saul sets up a monument for himself - how very proud
- Saul's honoring himself and he's lost sight of honouring God
- To make matters worse in V13 - Saul blatantly lies to Samuel - that he has carried out the Lord's instructions
- But Samuel - in v14 - doesn't buy the lies - what are these sheep bleating and cows mooing then? - You see we can't lie to God or hide anything from Him
- In V15/21 - Saul blames the soldiers - they're the ones who brought the best sheep and cattle - and they were going to sacrifice them to God - but

the soldiers were only copying their King, Saul, who spared the life of King Agag [ironically he wasn't so keen last week to spare his own Son]

- Samuel can't stand the lies and excuses anymore!
- And notice too - three times - in v15, v21 and v30 - Saul when talking to Samuel refers to God - as YOUR God - Here we see the heart of the problem - Saul is not in a close personal relationship with God - God is somewhere over there - at a distance
- Application - Saul was all about serving himself and doing what he wanted rather than what God wanted. So, to Saul, God wasn't personal. What about us, who are we serving? Is God personal to us?
- Application - Are there bleating sheep and mooing cows in our lives - are there inconsistencies or hypocrisies in how we worship and obey God - that people can easily point out to us? We need to confess and repent of them?

[Powerpoint 2.5]

5. Because God must be served on His terms (v22-23)

Fifth - God rejected Saul as King because God must be served on His terms not on our terms - that's in verses 22 and 23

- Saul was going to sacrifice the animals he took from the Amalekites
- But as Samuel points out - sacrifice can never be an alternative to obedience. Why would God want an offering of animals which he had asked to be destroyed?
- Application - in today's terms - attending church on Sunday or at Christmas and Easter or on special occasions - can never be used to offset behaviour or attitudes which are offensive to God

We must serve and obey God on his terms - not just on the terms we think apply to us

[Powerpoint 2.6]

6. Because Saul passed the point of no return (vv24-35)

Sixth - God rejected Saul as King because Saul passed the point of no return - that's in verses 24 to 35

- Finally, in v24 - Saul admits he has disobeyed God - and that it was deliberate - and that he was more afraid of his men than of God!
- He even pleads for a second chance - v25
- But that was not how it could be
- The responsibility that God gives to all human beings and in particular, leaders, is a real one - and the consequences in failing in this responsibility will normally be allowed to stand
- The decision to take the Kingship away from Saul still stands - but that doesn't mean there is no possibility of forgiveness or future worship for Saul
- Application - Saul had gone beyond the point of no return - the consequences of his sin - could not be reversed - he had to lose his kingship. It will never be a possibility to side step the consequences of a sin - for example the person caught stealing will not be allowed to serve as treasurer - the person abusing children will not be allowed to work with children again - not because they cannot be forgiven - but because that's the consequences of ignoring the responsibility of obedience they have towards God - and they've past the point of no return

- The execution of Agag the King was a final reminder to Saul and the people - that God's will cannot be set aside
- Even Agag himself - because Saul spared him - was led to believe he would now survive
- Application - We should never underestimate God's sovereignty

[Powerpoint 3]

Conclusion - each of us is a bit like Saul - we don't fully obey God - and when we don't obey God - that is sin - and sin always has consequences.

The fact that we do sin - shows us why we need Jesus - In God the Father's grace and mercy - the Apostle Paul says -

God made him who had no sin [that's Jesus] to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness [made right with] of God. (2 Cor 5:21)

But we do need a response - we can't just say to ourselves - I can't fully obey God so I'll give up trying and anyway Jesus has got it covered - and then we can keep on sinning and come back and confess - just like the good little Roman Catholic boy did...

[Powerpoint 4-Romans 6:1-4]

The Apostle Paul makes this point in Romans 6:1-4

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was

raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a ***new life***.

So, we have a ***new life*** as followers of Jesus

Our Response (Mark 12:28-34)

[Powerpoint 5-Heading]

So how do we respond?

- Our OT passage says to obey God is better than sacrifice
- You see Saul thought sacrifice and lip service was enough but God wants obedience
- In our NT passage from Mark 12:28-34 [Turn there now] - one of the teachers of the Law is kind of pondering this idea of obedience by asking Jesus what's the most important command - the teacher's thinking is - if we can't obey all the commandments - which commandment should we focus on
- Jesus' answer is interesting - he gives 2 commandments as being the most important
 - Love the Lord God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength
 - Love your neighbour as yourself
- These 2 commandments - Jesus gives - are not specifically part of the 10 commandments - are they?
- But what Jesus does is summarize the 10 commandments down to 2
 - Love God
 - Love Others

- 1st 4 commandments are about loving God - and the last 6 are about loving others

- Basically, Jesus is saying - which command is most important - ALL of THEM - God requires you to obey ALL of them - and that amounts to loving God and loving Others - in fact it amounts to one word - LOVE

So, our response to God should be

[Powerpoint 5a]

- Have a **Heart** for God - Saul didn't have that - his heart was for himself
- Have a **Soul** for God - our soul is the part of us designed for eternity [Ecc 3:11] - so we need focus on eternal things - serving God in kingdom work - having a heart for people to come to know Jesus and be saved
- Have a **Mind** for God - Keep our thoughts pure and focused on Jesus and on what He would have us do
- Having **Strength** for God - giving our all for God - in obedience - never giving up - even when we face trials or when we are ridiculed for following Jesus - remember we have His strength too and Holy Spirit

[Powerpoint 5b]

Flowing out of our love for God with our heart, soul, mind and strength - is our love for others

That's our proper worship and obedience - Love

Why should we love?

[Powerpoint 6a-Love]

John tells us in 1 John 4:8-10

⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into

the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[Powerpoint 6b-Love]

So, the way we *fully obey* God is to **LOVE**

Let's pray...