**Week Ten – October 25 (Megastudy) – I Samuel 15-16**

**Introduction** - These two passages are packed with difficult questions. Whole-hearted obedience is a major theme tonight. Here’s our warm-up: **As a ten year old, were you a rule-follower, a rule bender, or did it depend on “what was at stake”?**

**Read I Samuel 15:1-9**

The opening verses give an opportunity to ask our first tough question - why are the Amalekites to be eliminated and in such a ruthless manner? **From verse 2, what reason is given for the command? Read Deut. 25:17-19. In these verses, what indictment is spoken against them in v. 17-18? What prophecy is given in v.19?** This gives a little insight, but there are more thoughts on this command in the notes section at the end of the study for those interested.

The key phrase in verse 9 is “they were *unwilling* to destroy.” Saul and his men did not spare out of mercy, but out of greed and pride. They disobeyed God because they wanted the spoils of war and the glory of capturing another king. In Samuel’s coming response we are reminded that incomplete obedience is disobedience. **Can you relate with Saul’s disobedience adjustment to “partial obedience”? Have you ever tried to cover up disobedience or modify what was asked of you and came only with partial obedience? What are we saying to God when we try to “rewrite our own contract” when it comes to obedience?**

**Read I Samuel 15:10-23**

The next tough question comes in v.11 - “Does God change his mind?” Since this also comes up later at the end of this chapter, we will hold that question for a few more verses.

Twice Saul dismisses his own responsibility by blaming the soldiers (v.15 & 21.) All of us at one time or another pass the blame in order to not deal with our own sin and responsibility. **How are you growing in your ability to not get defensive and/or avoid temptation to blame others?**

**Read v. 22 again - how would you word an explanation of this verse for consideration and application today?** It is fitting that as we are about to meet David, we learn from him in this area. **Read Psalm 51:16-17. What overlapping truths do you see in I Samuel 15:22 and Psalm 51:16-17?** V.23 makes it clear that God has removed his favor over Saul as king.

**Read I Samuel 15:24-31**

**What do you notice about the timing of Saul’s “repentance?”** (*Saul “repents” only after hearing that God has rejected him as king*.) **How might this shape our understanding of Saul’s repentance? Do you find yourself repenting only when you’re “caught?”**

Saul’s excuses and partial obedience are continual indicators of his insincere repentance. Sincere repentance includes confessing sin, having sorrow for sin, and turning from sin, and “bearing fruit.” **Read Luke 13:5-9. According to the parable, what is a necessary result of true repentance?** *(a life of fruitfulness)* **For the follower of Jesus, what do you think a fruitful life looks like?**

**Read I Samuel 15:32-16:1**

Though Samuel has confronted Saul about God removing him from kingship, Samuel still has to deal with Saul’s incomplete obedience. Recall in 15:3 God commanded Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites. No one was to be spared and yet Agag, king of Amalek, remained. **In what manner did Agag come to Samuel? How does this reveal Agag’s understanding of God’s view toward sin?**

Back to the question from v.11 that surfaces again in v.35, “Does God change his mind?” God expresses regret that he made Saul king. This is an anthropomorphism - assigning human attributes to God as a “close approximation” example. *Leaders, sharing the anthropomorphism example and the underlined quote in the end notes may be helpful here.* Many commentators on this passage point to God’s compassion for his people - that he is grieved for all that Israel is experiencing/will experience because of the kind of king they had begged for. **Read James 1:17. What does this verse speak to us about God’s consistent dependability?**

**What other verse in this chapter aids our understanding of God’s “regret”?** *(v29 - it shows that God is constant and we cannot apply the way we regret to God.)*. **What stands out to you the most about v. 29? How might this verse be unsettling to you in your walk with God? How might this verse be encouraging to you in your walk with God?**

**Read I Samuel 16:2-13**

God directs a grieving Samuel to take steps to fulfill God’s plan to provide a new king to rule Israel. In verse 2, Samuel asks, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.” **How significant is it that Samuel’s faith leads him to ask God “how” instead of “why”? Are there places in your life where you need to be asking God “how” instead of “why?**” Samuel expresses a faith that knows “The true King never loses control of his kingdom” (Davis p.169). **How do you stand in the confidence that God will deliver you through uncertainties?**

We have seen when Israel’s choices prevail, it is disastrous. In chapter 4 the people choose the Ark, and disaster follows. Chapter 8 shows the people choosing a king - disaster. Tonight we have godly Samuel discerning the best king candidate, and he fails as well. The kingdom of Israel is only safe with God. **How does God correct and instruct Samuel directly in v.7 to choose a king? What does this reveal about God’s priorities? How do we walk in these priorities instead of our own “outward appearance-based” tendencies? What do we learn about God as we continue to see Him choosing the least likely to fulfill his plans?**

**Read I Samuel 16:14-23**

Another tough question! God’s spirit has left Saul and now the Lord has sent an evil spirit to Saul. Whether God directed the evil spirit or simply permitted it, it is clear that God is in complete control. Be careful with assumptions here - the Hebrew word here does not equate exactly with the New Testament word for evil spirit. The N.T. understanding of evil spirit is clearly about the demonic, where this passage can possibly be taken as “bad disposition.” **Is it possible yet to see some of the purposes of this evil spirit being sent to Saul?** (*One thought: We see judgment in God sending the spirit AND mercy in David’s ability to soothe it.*)

**Conclusion**

Tonight we see that Saul and Israel have suffered and will suffer consequences of Saul’s short cut of partial obedience. This negative example points us to the positive choice of putting your unconditional “yes” to him on the table before God, even if we have no idea where He will lead.

**Do you ever find yourself saying, “I will obey God, but I won’t…”**

* **Change my plans for the future that I have decided**
* **Forgive that person OR ask for forgiveness from that person**
* **Speak my faith out loud outside of a gathering of christians**
* **Anything that God has spoken to your heart about that you have not acted upon**

**What is your point of hesitancy that could be in the way of expressing a full and unconditional obedience of Jesus? Share and pray together about growing in faith, trust, and obedience to overcome those hesitancies.**

**Additional Notes:**

**I Samuel 15:1-9**

As stated in the first section, I Samuel 15:1-3 has a very difficult pronouncement - verse 3 seems especially harsh and unmerciful. It is not an easy answer when questioning the heaviness of judgment in this passage. It is hard to get a quick sense of clarity on this, but here are some thoughts to keep in mind:

* **Don’t miss the clarity of the God who brings justice against perverted injustice.** We saw a microcosm of this in chapter 11 as Saul rescued Jabesh, but our example here is a longer and more pronounced history of injustice. The history of the conflict between the Israelites and the Amalekites goes all the way back to when the Israelites were making their way out of Egypt (earlier we read the Deuteronomy passage, see also Exodus 17:8-16.) “Throughout Israel’s history the Amalekites were constantly provoking and pillaging Israel. They were renowned for their excessive violence and ruthlessness… This (the pronouncement of 15:1-3) was not a war of conquest but of judgment. The goal of the attack was not to make Saul rich but to execute justice on a rebellious group of people.” (Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel, Thomas & Greear, page 104)
* **Don’t miss the clarity of the mercies shown.** This is not only seen in the long time of mercy before judgment came and the mercy over so many ongoing offenses, but the sparing of Kenites. The Kenites were warned and spared.
* **Don’t miss the clarity of a God who won’t be thwarted in his redemptive purposes.** Israel was the vehicle through which God was bringing his plan of salvation. God would not sacrifice the chance to show eternal mercies through his people Israel, and to do so he eventually limited the number of times mercy was shown to the Amalekites.

**I Samuel 15:10-11, 27-29, 35**

Here is an anthropomorphism example from Isaiah 66:1 - Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.” It is not saying things like “God needs to prop his feet up every once in a while” or “God’s feet together are about the size of the earth.” Instead this is a way of indicating that he is greater than and above the whole earth.

Good quote on anthropomorphism - “...in order to indicate that sometimes the Bible must use the grammar of humanity to communicate the truth about deity, …sometimes Scripture stoops to use human categories to tell the truth about a God far beyond all our categories.” (Davis, p. 160)

One other note is that some would say that this description of God’s response is more accurately anthropopathism, assigning human feelings or attitudes to God.

**As we allow scripture to inform our understanding of this concept of “regret” as it relates to God, what does this teach us about the way God interacts with His people?** God is not a static, monotonous being, He personally interacts with and relates with His people. Due to our own sin, there was bound to be conflict in this covenant relationship we have with God, but this does not mean there is conflict within God Himself. “It is the nature of our covenantal relationship with God to know God as one who responds and reacts, which ought to appear to us all the more amazing because it it the nature of our covenant keeping God never to lie, repent, or change his mind (Num. 23:19)” (Kevin DeYoung).

**Read I Samuel 15:24-31**

Yet again we see Saul putting on a facade of holiness. **What is other evidence here of his insincere repentance?**

1. **Who did Saul appeal to?** He sought forgiveness from Samuel but we see no evidence to do the same with God. Only God can forgive sin.
2. **What excuse does he provide for his sin?** He blames it on fearing the people (v24) rather than taking ownership of his actions.
3. **What is Saul’s priority?** His concern is his appearance before the elders and the people (v30). For Saul, the support of men is more crucial than reconciliation with God.

Saul wants to address the situation and move on but Samuel is not falling for it. He says what he had already spoken to Saul in v 26, “as if to say, ‘Did you really hear me, Saul?’ It’s hardly a matter of saying ‘O.K., I admit I did wrong; now let’s get things back to normal (Davis p. 163).’”