

GLORY OF GOD'S GRACE

Supplement

Waiting on God:
The Tragedy of King Saul

Faith waits.
The flesh rushes

Introduction

One of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is not rebellion against God.

It is attempting to accomplish God's purposes by our own methods.

King Saul did not begin as an openly wicked king.

He began as a humble man whom God elevated to leadership (1 Samuel 9–10).

Yet over time, fear replaced faith.

Pressure replaced patience.

Human reasoning replaced dependence upon God.

Ultimately, Saul lost his kingdom—not because God was unfaithful, but because Saul repeatedly refused to trust Him.

His life stands as a warning to every believer who is tempted to move ahead of God's timing.

Historical Context

Israel had demanded a king “like all the nations.”

God granted their request, although it was never His ideal plan (1 Samuel 8).

Saul became Israel's first king.

Initially, everything appeared promising.

Yet the Philistines soon amassed an overwhelming military force.

1 Samuel 13 describes one of the most intimidating military situations Israel had ever faced.

The Israelites were terrified.

Many deserted.

Others hid in caves.

Some crossed the Jordan River simply to escape.

Humanly speaking, everything appeared to be falling apart.

This is precisely where faith is tested.

Faith is rarely tested when circumstances are comfortable.

Faith is tested when obedience appears costly.

The Command

Samuel had previously instructed Saul:

1 Samuel 10:8 (NASB)

And you shall go down ahead of me to Gilgal; and behold, I will be coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and inform you of what you should do.”

This command was not arbitrary.

God was testing whether Saul would trust His Word.

Waiting became the examination.

Would Saul rely upon God's promise?

Or would he rely upon what he could see?

The Crisis

1 Samuel 13:8 (NASB)

Now he waited for seven days, until the appointed time that Samuel had set, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him.

Saul waited seven days.

Samuel had not yet appeared.

The people were scattering.

The army was shrinking.

The enemy was advancing.

Everything visible suggested disaster.

Notice what Scripture emphasizes.

Saul evaluated reality through circumstances rather than through God's promise.

This is exactly what fear always does.

Fear magnifies what is seen.

Faith magnifies what God has spoken.

Saul Steps Ahead of God

1 Samuel 13:9 (NASB)

So Saul said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering.

Saul personally offered the sacrifice.

This was never the responsibility of the king.

It belonged to the priest.

His sin was much deeper than performing the sacrifice.

He abandoned God’s order because he believed God’s timing had failed.

The Hebrew narrative creates almost painful irony.

As soon as Saul finished offering the sacrifice...

Samuel arrived.

1 Samuel 13:10 (NASB)

But as soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him.

Think about that.

If Saul had waited only a little longer...

God’s timing would have become evident.

How often does that happen in our own lives?

We pray.

We wait.

Pressure increases.

Nothing seems to happen.

So we decide that God must not be working.

We step in.

Only later do we realize that God was already moving.

We simply refused to wait long enough to see it.

Samuel's Diagnosis

Samuel asks,

“What have you done?”

Saul immediately begins defending himself.

Notice his reasoning.

“The people were scattering.”

“The Philistines were gathering.”

“You had not come.”

Therefore...

“I forced myself.”

1 Samuel 13:11-12 (NASB)

But Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “Since I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come at the appointed time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord.’ So I worked up the courage and offered the burnt offering.”

This is exactly how the flesh always justifies itself.

It explains.

It rationalizes.

It points to circumstances.

But God never evaluates our decisions by pressure.

He evaluates them by obedience.

Samuel responds,

“You have acted foolishly.”

The Hebrew word carries the idea of acting without spiritual understanding.

Saul’s problem was not intelligence.

It was unbelief.

The Kingdom Lost

Samuel declares,

“Your kingdom shall not endure.”

1 Samuel 13:14 (NASB)

But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

Notice something remarkable.

Saul was not removed immediately.

He continued reigning for years.

But from God’s perspective, the decision had already been made.

The kingdom had already been given to another.

This teaches an important principle.

There are consequences to persistent unbelief.

Although our salvation is eternally secure, believers can lose opportunities, rewards, influence, and usefulness through continual refusal to trust God.

God’s plan continues.

The question is whether we choose to participate in it through faith.

The Second Failure

1 Samuel 15

Years later, Saul receives another command.

Destroy the Amalekites completely.

Instead...

Saul spares King Agag.

He keeps the best livestock.

Again, Saul substitutes human reasoning for divine instruction.

When confronted, Saul insists,

“I have obeyed.”

Samuel simply asks,

“What then is this bleating of the sheep?”

The evidence exposed the reality.

Obedience is never measured by what we claim.

It is measured by what we actually do.

“To Obey Is Better Than Sacrifice”

1 Samuel 15:22 (NASB)

Samuel said, “Does the Lord have as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than a sacrifice, And to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.

The issue was never sacrifice itself.

God had commanded sacrifices.

The issue was attempting to replace obedience with religious activity.

God desires surrendered hearts before outward rituals.

The Hebrew word translated “obey” (shama’) literally means “to hear attentively,” carrying the idea of hearing with the intention of responding. Biblical obedience is not mere external compliance but a heart that listens to God’s voice and aligns itself with His will.

Sacrifice without obedience becomes empty ritual.

Religion without faith becomes performance.

God is never impressed with activity that substitutes for dependence upon Him.

The Theology of Waiting

Waiting is never passive.

Biblical waiting is active trust.

Throughout Scripture, waiting develops dependence.

Abraham waited.

Joseph waited.

Moses waited.

David waited.

Israel waited.

The disciples waited.

Even Jesus waited for the Father's timing throughout His earthly ministry.

Waiting is often God's classroom where faith is strengthened and self-reliance is exposed.

When we refuse to wait, we often reveal that we trust our ability to solve the problem more than God's ability to fulfill His promises.

This perfectly illustrates one of the central truths we have been studying.

God's grace accomplishes God's plan through God's power.

Human effort always attempts to improve upon God's timing.

Saul could not make God's promise happen any sooner by taking matters into his own hands.

Likewise, we cannot produce God's results through fleshly striving.

Sometimes we conclude,

"God didn't answer."

But perhaps God never had the opportunity.

We stepped in before He stepped forward.

We solved the problem before we gave Him the opportunity to demonstrate His power.

Faith-rest means allowing God to be God.

It means believing that His timing is just as perfect as His promises.

Application

Every believer eventually reaches a "Gilgal moment."

The pressure mounts.

The circumstances worsen.

The answers seem delayed.

Everything around us says, "Do something."

Yet the Word of God says, "Trust Me."

That is often the greatest battle of the Christian life.

Waiting is not wasted time.

Waiting is often where God does His deepest work—not only in arranging circumstances, but in transforming us. If God answered every prayer immediately, we might receive the blessing without ever learning dependence. In His grace, He often uses the waiting itself to conform us to Christ.

Never mistake God's silence for God's absence.

Never interpret delay as denial.

And never assume that because you cannot see Him working, He is not already at work.

God has never been late.

He never will be.

Our responsibility is not to manufacture the outcome.

Our responsibility is to trust Him until His perfect timing becomes visible.

That is the life of grace. That is the life of faith. And that is where the power of God is most clearly displayed.