

1 Samuel 14.24-15

Good morning and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 14? We left off last week in verse 23, so we'll pick up in verse 24 and go through chapter 15 as well.

Last week we saw Jonathan, King Saul's son, step out in faith, and the Lord delivered Israel. And you'll recall the character flaws of King Saul have begun to leap off the pages at us, as we've seen him succumb to the lure of power and ego

This morning we see the dramatic fall of Israel's first king.

The title of this morning's message is Who's sitting on the throne?

Let's pray

Let's remind ourselves of the scene by reading verses 20-24

20 Then Saul and all the people who were with him assembled, and they went to the battle; and indeed every man's sword was against his neighbor, and there was very great confusion. 21 Moreover the Hebrews who were with the Philistines before that time, who went up with them into the camp from the surrounding country, they also joined the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. 22 Likewise all the men of Israel who had hidden in the mountains of Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, they also followed hard after them in the battle. 23 So the LORD saved Israel that day, and the battle shifted to Beth Aven

24 And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, "Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies." So none of the people tasted food. What was Saul thinking?

Saul showed that even in doing something spiritual like fasting his focus is on himself, not the LORD.

Again we see Saul's sense of authority was wrong. Saul was king, but he wasn't the spiritual leader of the nation-that title belonged to Samuel. If any such fast was to be declared and a curse attached to it, Samuel had the spiritual authority to do it, not Saul.

Saul has taken a rash vow to fuel his own ego. And the consequences are devastating-it deprived the people of the fuel and energy they needed to sustain and finish off the battle. Starved soldiers are never successful soldiers.

25 Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. 26 And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. This group of soldiers saw the honey dripping right in front of their eyes. Yet Saul's foolish oath prevented them from receiving what God put right in front of them.

27 But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened. Jonathan didn't know of his dad's command and curse, so he ate some of the honey and immediately, it did the weary soldier well. Jonathan needed the energy to fight, and here it was, provided by God.

Here's an important spiritual lesson for all of us. We can't allow ourselves to get so busy fighting battles for the Lord, that we don't take time to feed our own soul. If a person is always giving out, and never replenishing - they'll grow weak.

This is the reason it's critical to have many volunteers. I won't let someone serve every Sunday or Wednesday or even the majority. Everyone needs to be in service, to worship, to listen to the word, to pray and fellowship to strengthen themselves.

An empty vessel cannot satisfy the needs of others. The vessel must first be filled. This is why it's so critical you have your own bible devotion time each day, allow the Lord to fill you so He can use you.

28-30

28 Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats food this day.'" And the people were faint.

29 But Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. 30 How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?" Jonathan sees the error of his dad's command-the people were faint on a day when they should have been strong. They were weak and distracted and the victory was limited.

A microphone is a dangerous thing, for it automatically implies authority, whether real or not, for the person speaking. How many today lay spiritual burdens and guilt trips from microphones and end up robbing the people of great joy and leave the people faint. This is why James uttered this caution in **James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.**

31 Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. So the people were very faint. 32 And the people rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood. God specifically commanded Israel that they should always properly drain the blood from an animal as they prepared it for eating back in Deuteronomy 12. All life belongs to

the creator, almighty God. And since blood is the symbol of life, the blood especially belonged to God.

On this day of battle, because of Saul's foolish command, the people were so hungry they broke God's command.

Look carefully-their obedience to man's foolish command led them to disobey God's clearly declared command.

BTW, This is always the result of legalism.

We often think that legalistic rules will keep people away from sin. I know of a bible college that made the young women not leave their dorms with wet hair for fear it could stir up the libido of the young men! How foolish!

But the fact is that legalistic rules lead us into sin because they either provoke our rebellion, or they lead us into legalistic pride

Saul should have never made such a foolish commandment, and his commandment provoked the people into sin

33-35

33 Then they told Saul, saying, "Look, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood!"

So he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a large stone to me this day." 34 Then Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people, and say to them, 'Bring me here every man's ox and every man's sheep, slaughter them here, and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night, and slaughtered it there.

35 Then Saul built an altar to the LORD. This was the first altar that he built to the LORD. It was Saul who kept the honey from the people—but now not only is he blaming the people for his sin, but he's once again assuming the role of priest and trying to correct the situation in a way he wasn't called to do.

If this weren't so tragic it would almost be comical-Saul just keeps making things worse because of his ego, and pride.

36 Now Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and plunder them until the morning light; and let us not leave a man of them."

And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you."

Then the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." Finally! A Levitical priest stands up and says 'hey before we do this, we should seek God's counsel'. And thankfully Saul does just that

v 37-38

37 So Saul asked counsel of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel?" But He did not answer him that day. 38 And Saul said, "Come over here, all you chiefs of the people, and know and see what this sin was today. Saul assumes that God's silence is the result of some specific sin in the camp. Now mind you, Saul doesn't know that Jonathan is the one who ate the honey and disobeyed his command.

Saul boasts...

39 For as the LORD lives, who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But not a man among all the people answered him. Saul was so sure that he was right, he was so sure that he pronounced another oath.

Of course, if Saul knew that it was Jonathan who violated his oath, he never would've said this. But Saul was so caught up in being "right" that he added this foolish vow to his previous foolish commandment.

Notice the detail at the end of verse 39 that the people knew Jonathan ate the honey, but nobody said a word. All the people

loved and respected Jonathan and they knew that Saul was in the wrong.

40-41

40 Then he said to all Israel, “You be on one side, and my son Jonathan and I will be on the other side.”

And the people said to Saul, “Do what seems good to you.”

41 Therefore Saul said to the LORD God of Israel, “Give a perfect lot.”^[fn] So Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped. Imagine Saul’s surprise when they cast lots to determine who the guilty party was and it shows that the secret sin was in the household of Saul.

42-44

42 And Saul said, “Cast lots between my son Jonathan and me.” So Jonathan was taken. 43 Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.”

And Jonathan told him, and said, “I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand. So now I must die!” 44 Saul answered, “God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan.” Saul should’ve realized the rashness of his oath and admitted his mistake. But now he’s made such a big deal over the matter he’ll lose face if he doesn’t follow through.

Notice Saul is so concerned about public perception he would rather slay his own son - than look weak in the eyes of the people.

But a surprising defender of Jonathan rises up...

45 But the people said to Saul, “Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.” So the people rescued

Jonathan, and he did not die. Saul is about to pronounce death to his son, when suddenly a coup rises up-the people come to Jonathan's defense to save their national hero from the pride and impulsiveness of his own dad.

46 Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

The implication in this phrase is that the victory might have been greater if it wasn't for Saul's foolish oath

Verses 47-52 describe Saul's many wars and his family tree

47 So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed them.[fn] 48 And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them. 49 The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Jishui,[fn] and Malchishua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. 50 The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. 51 Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.

52 Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself. Just like God warned the people, the king took the best for himself.

CHAPTER 15 describes a simple battle and a singular decision that fully reveals the faulty king's heart, which leads to his downfall.

1-3

1 Samuel also said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. 2 Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. 3 Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’ ” God clearly told Samuel to tell Saul to bring a total judgment against the Amalekites.

Centuries before this the Amalekites were the first people to attack Israel after their escape from Egypt (Exodus 17).

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God ordering the annihilation of certain civilizations because they were so corrupt and polluted that it was actually an act of mercy for Him to take them out of their misery.

4-6

4 So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. 5 And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley.

6 Then Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. Here, Saul shows wisdom and mercy in letting the Kenites go. God’s judgment wasn’t upon them, so he didn’t want to destroy them with the Amalekites.

7-9

7 And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. In a normal war in the ancient world, armies were freely permitted to plunder their conquered foes. This was often how the army was paid. But it was wrong for anyone in Israel to benefit from the war against the Amalekites because it was an appointed judgment from God.

Notice Saul was careful to keep the best-the king and the best of the animals even though God said to eliminate all of them.

You see what's happening here I'm sure-Saul has decided his plan is better than God's.

You can picture the scene-Saul thinking-why slaughter these perfectly good animals. We can use them! Justifying to himself why his disobedience to God made sense.

It's easy to obey God when it doesn't cost us anything.

10 Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, 11 "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. Notice how God views partial obedience-it's the same as disobedience. We can justify in our minds and to others all the reasons why we're only partially obeying God, but partial obedience is the same as full disobedience.

Does this mean that God made a mistake in having Saul king?
No.

This is the use of anthropomorphism, when God explains Himself to us in human terms, so we can have some understanding of God's heart.

God knew from the beginning Saul's heart, ways, and destiny. Yet as all this unfolded, God's heart was not emotionless. Saul's disobedience hurt God, and since we can't grasp all what happens in God's heart, the closest that we can come is for God to express it in the human terms of saying, "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king."

12 So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." There's not even a hint of remorse from Saul over his sin against the Lord, in fact Saul was quite pleased with himself! He even set up a monument to himself.

13 Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD." Saul is self-deceived. He probably really believed what he told Samuel that he had performed the commandment of the LORD." Unrepentant sin always leads us into self-deception.

14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" The livestock that God clearly commanded to be killed could be heard even as Saul said, 'I obeyed God'

The sin that was completely obvious to Samuel was invisible to Saul. We all have blind spots of sin in our lives, and we need to constantly ask God to show them to us. We need to sincerely pray the prayer of **Psalm 139:23-24: Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**

It's important that we seek God to point out our sin because we can't keep sin quiet! **Numbers 32:23 But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out.**

So Saul has clearly just been caught red handed, and how does he respond to Samuel saying 'I hear the sheep and ox that were supposed to be killed?'

15 And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." Notice the religious justification... It's ok Samuel, we plan to use these animals as sacrifices. Hey, it's for the ministry!

In his excuse, Saul revealed the real problem: he had a poor relationship with God. Look how he spoke of God to Samuel: "to sacrifice to the LORD your God."

The LORD was not Saul's God. Saul was Saul's God. In his pride, Saul had slowly removed the LORD God from the throne of his heart and elevated himself.

16-21

16 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night."

And he said to him, "Speak on."

17 So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? 18 Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?" In God's mercy, Saul

is given ANOTHER chance to repent of his sin. So what does Saul do?

20-21

20 And Saul said to Samuel, “But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.” Saul is like a teenager caught in a web of lies-he’s grasping at excuses and trying to justify his actions.

22 So Samuel said:

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

And to heed than the fat of rams. God isn't interested in the sacrifices from a disobedient heart and life.

Lot's of times folks sacrifice, or give to God or do things for God in order to cover their feelings of guilt. God doesn't need our sacrifices or good deeds. God's primary concern with us is US. He wants us - our hearts, our devotion, our submission. He wants an attitude of trust and obedience.

Obedience is serious business to God, for look how the opposite of obedience, rebellion, is viewed by God...

23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,

And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,

He also has rejected you from being king.” These are somber words.

God grades on a different scale than we do! On the surface, most people we know aren’t diabolical they’re not into witchcraft – no idols sit on your mantle – yet to God rebelling against Him and His commands, is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry.

We can deceive ourselves in coming to every church service, helping out everyone we need, giving all our money away, but if we’re not obeying God in area’s of our hearts, we’re rejecting God and saying our plan is best.

The end of verse 23 tells us God rejected Saul as king. Previously his lineage was removed, now he will personally be removed.

Saul wasn’t removed from the throne at this point. In fact he’ll reign for several more years. But something more dramatic happens. Saul gets ignored by God.

24-26

24 Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.

25 Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD.”

26 But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.” Why would Samuel say, “I will not return with you” when Saul just wanted him to worship with him? Because that worship would no doubt include sacrifice and

offering some of the animals that Saul wickedly spared from the Amalekites.

27 And as Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. Suddenly, the humiliation of losing his position is more than Saul can handle. Saul is now frantic, losing his position is such an assault on his fragile ego, he loses his composure. His world is crashing down, he wants his way no matter what - so as Samuel turns to walk away, Saul grabs and tears his robe

28-29

28 So Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent.” What an interesting name for God, “the Strength of Israel”. Hezbollah, Palestinians and Iran need to know the true God is named “the Strength of Israel”.

After such a devastating announcement most people would've hung their heads, and walked away - but not Saul. He's still worried about his image.

30 Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.” He's asking the prophet to help him maintain his image.

31 So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD. Samuel's concern is not Saul's image - Samuel has some unfinished business.

32 Then Samuel said, “Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me.” So Agag came to him cautiously.

And Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” Let bygones be bygones!

33 But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal. Did you notice here that Samuel did it before the LORD. It wasn’t before Saul, to show him how weak and proud Saul was. Samuel didn’t even do it before the people of Israel to show them how strong and tough he was. This was before the LORD, to be obedient to the LORD God.

This scene must have been shockingly violent; the stomachs of those watching must have turned.

34 Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. 35 And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.