

HOLY VIOLENCE #2

The High Cost of Incomplete Obedience

I. Introduction: We Continue Our Teaching Series

Theme

As the fate of our nation hangs in the balance, the time has come for the true Church of God to rise up and recover what the enemy is trying to steal. We do not need physical force. But we do need "Holy Violence".

Our text is taken from something Jesus said about John the Baptist...

Matthew 11:12

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.

Matt 11:12 Apologetics Study Bible

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence, and the violent have been seizing it by force.

NIV

...forceful men lay hold of it.

Matthew 11:12 AMP

And from the days of John the Baptist until the present time, the kingdom of heaven has endured violent assault, and violent men seize it by force [as a precious prize — a share in the heavenly kingdom is sought with most ardent zeal and intense exertion].

We believe God is using the current crisis to expose the difference between the true believer from the mere professor; and we believe that 'Holy Violence' is the mark of a true believer.

Tonight I want to go a little deeper with an Old Testament example of "Holy Violence" and what can happen if you don't have it.

Tonight's message is "The High Cost of Incomplete Obedience".

II. The Story is Found in 1 Samuel 15

A. Saul and the Amalekites

1. Samuel has anointed Saul as Israel's first king, and now summons him for his first assignment; a commission to execute what we could call 'holy violence'.

1 Samuel 15:1-2

And Samuel 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. 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.'"

2. Notice that God remembers a nation's sins! 400 years earlier, the Amalekites had attacked Israel as she came out of Egyptian bondage. And God spoke these words to His people through Moses...

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

"Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.

3. Notice how the Amalekites were the original terrorists; the sons of Esau; the perpetual persecutors of Israel; but God made a promise to destroy them; and now, 400 years later, He assigns the task to Saul in a verse calling for 'holy violence'!

Matthew Henry

Injuries done to God's Israel will certainly be reckoned for sooner or later. God often bears long with those that He marks for ruin. The sentence passed is not executed speedily. But though he bear long, he will not bear always.

Matthew Henry

The year of recompence for what Amalek did to Israel will come at last. Though divine justice strikes slowly it strikes surely. The longer judgment is delayed many times the more severe it is when it comes. God chooses out

instruments to do his work that are fittest for it. This was bloody work, and therefore Saul who was a rough and severe man must do it.

4. What we have before us today is a spiritual battle of epic proportions; the enemy is not flesh and blood; but vile, spiritual wickedness in high places designed to destroy America as founded. What is our attitude toward them?

1 Samuel 15:3

“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.”

5. I can hardly read these words in the current Christian culture without hearing an objection (or three)!

*Testimony: I actually was publicly challenged once on this verse. “My God would never say that”. My reply: “Well, the Bible says God did say it!”

6. Remember that the Old Testament stories are physical events that teach spiritual principles; God is not calling us to physical violence but to an attitude of ‘spiritual’ (holy) violence when it comes to the utter destruction of the things He has marked for judgment.

1 Samuel 15:4-5

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

“Telaim” in Hebrew is ‘lambs’

1 Samuel 15:6

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.

Matthew Henry

When destroying judgments are abroad God will take care to separate between the precious and the vile, and to hide the meek of the earth in the day of his anger. It is dangerous being found in the company of God's enemies,

and it is our duty and interest to come out from among them, lest we share in their sins and plagues, Rev 18:4.

1 Samuel 15:7-8

And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

7. Now comes one of the most heartbreaking ‘buts’ in the Bible-the key to this message on ‘The High Cost of Incomplete Obedience”:

1 Samuel 15:9

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.

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Saul succeeded and failed. He conquered Agag, but disobeyed God. And so the glory of his victory is lost in the darkness of his defeat. A man may conquer the greatest of earth’s kings, but his life is a consummate failure if he disobeys the King of kings.

The Biblical Illustrator

Saul has whittled down the Divine commands a little, but only a little; and who is so foolish as to think that God will notice the swerving of a hair’s breadth from what He commands? And reasoning thus we sometimes pare off the edges of God’s commandments, blissfully unconscious that we are doing anything positively wrong.

The Biblical Illustrator

We think, ‘it is enough if we kill the Amalekites. There is no need of killing Agag’. We take delight in slaying the Amalekites, but we are opposed to killing Agag. And later on we discover to our sorrow that Agag is the chief of the Amalekites and that ruin lurks in the survival of anything which God commands us to destroy Saving Agag costs many a child of God his crown.

a. Testimony: I heard a sermon 40 years ago on this story where the preacher referred to this as Saul’s ‘sorting machine’; the mechanism in our minds that ‘sorts’ through the things God has told us to destroy in our lives; we ‘spare’

some things; we allow some things to live on in our lives that God has called us to 'kill'.

b. Testimony: I have seen many good brothers who have done many good works yet finally fall to one pet sin they failed to slay with the sword.

8. God had called for 'holy violence'; for radical obedience; but Saul stopped short; and so come to the title of my message: "The High Cost of Incomplete Obedience."

1 Sam 15:10-11

Now the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, "I greatly regret (repent) 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.

a. What does it mean God has a 'regret' about something He has done? Did He not know beforehand what Saul would do?

Matthew Henry

Repentance in God is not, as it is in us, a change of his mind, but a change of his method or dispensation. He does not alter His will, but wills an alteration. The change was in Saul:

b. And what was the change?

He has turned back from following God in the partiality of his obedience, and the prevalence of his covetousness. And thereby he did himself make God his enemy.

9. Saul seems to have no idea of the seriousness of what he has done.

1 Samuel 15:12

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."

a. Instead of repenting of what he had left undone Saul builds a monument to himself of what he had done! How we congratulate ourselves on what we have done for the Lord and conveniently forget what we've left undone.

1 Samuel 15:13-14

Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord.”

But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

b. A sure sign of spiritual blindness here; but the evidence exposes his hypocrisy; “If you have indeed performed the commandment of the Lord why do I hear the sounds of the livestock you were commanded to kill?”

1 Samuel 15:15

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.”

10. Instead of taking personal responsibility, Saul blames the people!

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Mark that word "they." We might have expected it. When a man is driven into a corner, the most convenient trapdoor through which he can make his escape is that little word "they." Conscience, when stirred, endeavors to shift responsibility. "They did it." So says every man not brave enough to face the consequences of his own misdeeds.

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We have used the same argument many a time We believe in saving the best of the sheep. We are so afraid of being reckless that we drop into disobedience. We would rather disobey God than kill one extra sheep. We are as afraid of killing good sheep as Judas was of wasting precious ointment and for the same reason. Many of God's commands sound reckless, and so we curb His Divine impetuosity by our prudence.

a. Why do you, my brother preachers, fail to preach on politics? Especially when the fate of our nation hangs in the balance? Dare not begin your answer by blaming ‘your people’ or telling me ‘the people’ will be offended; or that ‘people’ may leave the church.

b. Saul blamed his disobedience to God on the mood of the people; do you do the same?

b. Some preachers seek to say friendly things; their sermons will seek to slay low self-esteem among the people but will stop short of a sermon that seeks to slay the very spirit of antichrist that is trying to overturn our nation.

1 Samuel 15:16

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.”

1 Samuel 15:17-19

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?

(When Samuel told Saul he would be king he pronounced himself unworthy)

1 Samuel 9:21

And Saul answered and said, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?"

God exalted him when he was humble; but he fell into pride.

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.’ 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?’

c. Instead of confessing his sin, Saul wants to argue!

1 Samuel 15:20-21

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. 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.”

Matthew Henry

"Yea, I have obeyed, I have done all I should do;" for he had done all which he thought he needed to do, so much wiser was he in his own eyes than God himself. God bade him kill all, and yet he puts in among the instances of his obedience that he brought Agag alive, which he thought was as good as if he had killed him.

Matthew Henry

So it is that carnal deceitful hearts think to excuse themselves from God's commandments with their own equivalents. He insists he has utterly destroyed the Amalekites themselves, which was the main thing intended; he knew it was the Lord's will the spoil be utterly destroyed. But he thought that would be a waste. And it was the people's doing, not his. See what a hard thing it is to convince the children of disobedience of their sin and to strip them of their fig-leaves.

d. How many times have we found the spirit of Saul in the church! Someone refusing to forgive; sowing discord. Confront the sin and all they want to talk about is how much they have done for the church. Then they turn their guns on you!

The Biblical Illustrator

We blame our circumstances, we blame others, we blame God; how slow we are to blame ourselves! The first symptom of a right state of mind is when the sinner, in self-condemnation and sorrow, acknowledges his guilt as his own. Saul, so brave in the battlefield, so generous when his better nature was called into play, roils his guilt on others. The people did it; he himself was innocent. What moral cowardice!

e. What did Samuel say to Saul's excuses?

1 Samuel 15:22-23

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. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

11. If you love someone you want to please them; if we love God we want to please God; here we have the key to pleasing God; the thing that brings Him delight; radical obedience!

Matthew Henry

Nothing is so pleasing to God as obedience, no, not sacrifice and offering, and the fat of rams. See here what we should seek and aim at in all the exercises of religion, even acceptance with God, that he may delight in what we do. Humble, sincere, and conscientious obedience to the will of God, is more pleasing and acceptable to him than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices.

Matthew Henry

God is more glorified and self more denied by obedience than by sacrifice. It is much easier to bring a bullock or lamb to be burnt upon the altar than to bring every high thought into obedience to God and the will subject to his will. Nothing is so provoking to God as disobedience, setting up our wills in competition with his. This is here called rebellion and stubbornness and is said to be as bad as witchcraft and idolatry.

12. Samuel sent Saul out to do holy violence upon His enemies; but Saul stopped short of a complete obedience; and even when convicted of his crime, he finally confesses his sin but still is making excuses.

1 Samuel 15:24-25

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

- a. The sin of Saul was that he valued what the people thought of him more than he valued what God thought of him.
- b. How many Christians today do the same?

13. This is “The High Cost of Incomplete Obedience”; it cost him the kingdom!

1 Samuel 15:26

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.”

- a. The great founder of the Methodist church said of this verse...

John Wesley

Those are unworthy to rule over men, who are not willing that God should rule over them.

- b. Though he would continue to reign over Israel for several more years, his real end comes here.

1 Samuel 15:27-29

And as Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. 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. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should repent.”

a. Saul seized Samuel’s robe so violently he ripped it; if only he had been so violent toward God’s enemies.

b. So the Lord ‘ripped’ the Kingdom away from Saul to give it a ‘neighbor’ who was ‘better than’ him. David.

14. Even after all this, the next verse reveals that the heart of Saul was unchanged; he was still a slave to what the people thought of him.

1 Samuel 15:30-31

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.” So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

15. The footnote of the story is next:

1 Samuel 15:32-33

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.”

a. This wicked king assumed that since he had escaped the sword of Saul he had nothing to fear from the aged prophet Samuel.

b. He pleads for peace...

1 Samuel 15:33

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.

16. Here we have a prophetic picture of 2 kinds of Christianity:

a. Saul-the kind of Christianity that stops short of a full obedience; that fears the people more than God; willing to spare what God has ordered to kill.

b. Samuel-the kind of Christianity that will not stop short of holy violence and a radical commitment to obey the commandments of God.

17. The end of Saul comes years later on the battlefield;

F.B. Meyer

It is noticeable that in 2 Samuel 1, it is an Amalekite who claims to have killed Saul on the battlefield of Gilboa. If we spare what God has commanded us to destroy, it may later destroy us. Take care in your obedience; you serve an exacting though loving God. (Don't hold onto 'pet sins'!)

III. Close: A Prophetic Warning to the Church

A. Compromise Can Kill You!

1. The American church has been faithful to preach on many things; love, grace, peace, and the goodness of God.

2. But she has stopped short of preaching about our need for 'Holy Violence'-a church commissioned to attack the gates of hell and destroy the sinister forces of socialism threatening to take over the country.

4. But there is a 'Saul spirit' in the American Church today...one that fears more what the people think of her than what God thinks of her; a Saul spirit that refuses to finish the fight and falls short of a complete obedience. Let me close with...

B. A Spiritual Lesson from Margaret Thatcher

1. I believe that next to Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher was England's greatest Prime Minister. (1975-1990) She was tough. She was a fearless fighter against the forces of socialism and communism. The Russians called the "Iron Lady".

2. After election, she found herself surrounded by wimpy members of her own party. They had no stomach for her staunch patriotism and staunch conservative values.

Margaret Thatcher

“God needs no faint hearts for His ambassadors. They are faint hearts and I should have kicked them out when I had the chance.”

3. And one by one, she finally fired them all!

4. The fallout of the firings got her a call from the Queen who was concerned that she was making too many enemies.

a. Thatcher’s response to the Queen was to quote a poem by the Scottish poet Charles McKay from memory; it is a word to the American church in this hour.

You Have No Enemies?

Charles McKay (1814-1899)

**You have no enemies, you say?
Alas! my friend, the boast is poor;
He who has mingled in the fray
Of duty, that the brave endure,
Must have made foes! If you have none,
Small is the work that you have done.
You’ve hit no traitor on the hip,
You’ve dashed no cup from perjured lip,
You’ve never turned the wrong to right,
You’ve been a coward in the fight.**

5. Our enemy is not flesh and blood like the Amalekites; but it is a spiritual enemy just as real. It is the spirit of antichrist operating through the Socialist Democrats and the Democrat Party. We can give the enemy no quarter. We must finish the fight. Lest we found to be cowards in the fight.

Closing Prayer

A Declaration from Saul’s Replacement

2 Samuel 22:32-35

**"For who is God, except the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?
God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect.
He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places.
He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.**

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