



## BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# Saul

## 1 Samuel 15

~ Brent Russell ~

- We continue with our journey alongside Israel
- And we now enter a new era in their life – but let us first remember where we have come from
- Up till now we have:
  - **begun** in Eden with Adam and Eve
  - **floated** across oceans with Noah
  - **received** the promise with Abraham
  - **journeyed** with Joseph into Egypt and into slavery
  - **slogged** with Moses through the desert for 40 years
  - **rejoiced** with Joshua as he leads Israel into the promised land
  - **waged** battle alongside Gideon for freedom
  - **promised** things to God with Jephthah
  - And we have been **dedicated** to the Lord with Samuel
- **But now Israel head into a new epoch**
- The **Monarchy** – the time of the Kings
- Israel not only forsake the last of their great leaders
- In forsaking Samuel they have **forsaken God too as their King**
- **The fundamentally human pattern of rejecting God is repeating once again** and so now desire an **earthly king** to lead them onwards
- **God allows them to have their way as he does with all of us when we choose to follow evil**
- God warns Israel bluntly before they continue:
  - **He will make your young men go and fight wars**
  - **He will make your daughters to be perfumers, cooks and bakers for him**
  - **He will take the best of your crops and livestock**
  - **And you yourselves will become his slaves**
  - **And when you cry out I will not listen to you...**

- And so the great man of God Samuel **anoints Saul** as king of Israel
- And so begins the **chronicle** of one of the most **tragic characters** in all the Bible

## Read 1 Samuel 15

- **Saul has everything going for him**
- He is **good looking**
- He is tall and strong probably has a **body to die for**
- **"A man without equal" 1 Samuel 9 tells us**
  
- **A man who's father is a man of good standing in the nation**
  
- But not only in terms of his **physical appearance is he superior**
- not only in terms of his **family lineage is he outstanding**
- **But even when God calls him it is something special**
  
- **The call of God in the life of this young man is something of a powerful display of prophetic revelation**
- God uses Samuel to prophesy that **Saul will meet two men** that will tell him that the donkeys of his father that were lost have been found
- **And this comes to pass**
- Samuel carries on to tell him that some time later he will meet **three men who will offer him two loaves of bread**
- **This happens**
- **But that is not all Samuel says - when you get to Gibeah you will meet some prophets who will be prophesying and the Spirit of God will come upon you and you will join them**
- **And this too happens as the Spirit of God rests on Saul**
- **This is no vague call by God – some fuzzy sense of God's choice**
- If you ever wanted to see the **writing on the wall** this is it
- Saul has a **distinct and clear revelation** through God's power, and so according to the word of the prophet Samuel the Spirit of God is with Saul and he is anointed as the first King of Israel
  
- **It is a classic hero story**
- **He is chosen as King**
- **He wins battles**
- **He saves his people**
- **And he gets the girl**

- **But In chapter 15 things begin to change in the life of Saul our hero King and the chosen one of God**
- **The meteoric rise to power of this young man begins to unravel**
- All the success and honour attributed to him come to nothing as Saul's **life begins to spiral into disaster**
- **"The bigger they are the harder they fall" I was taught as a child**
- And man does **Saul fall long and hard**
- In fact his life gets so out of control that he finally descends into **madness**
- Finally ending it all by **committing suicide** on his own sword
- **It has often been said that every journey starts with a single step**
- **And this long hard fall from grace begins with a single small step**
  
- For Saul the step is allowing his **soldiers to take plunder** that God said that they should leave and destroy
- In the bigger scheme of things he has done so much right
- And yet this **seemingly irrelevant detail** is the tip of something **deeper and far more sinister** in the life of Saul
- **Like a spot of rot on the outside of a fruit is just a hint at the rot inside**
  
- **God has given Saul explicit instructions about how to defeat this people** and yet Saul finds them **so hard to follow** to the letter
  
- So God sends Samuel to Saul again
- **Before Samuel prophesied for Saul blessing and election**
- **Now but now Samuel prophesies curse and rejection**
  
- **1 Samuel 15:22-23** *"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."*
  
- **Eugene Petersen in the Message:** *Then Samuel said, do you think all GOD wants are sacrifices-- empty rituals just for show? He wants you to listen to him! Plain listening is the thing, not staging a lavish religious production. Not doing what GOD tells you is far worse than fooling around in the occult. Getting self-important around GOD is far worse than making deals with your dead ancestors. Because you said No to God's command, he says No to your kingship.*

- **This is a significant and serious message from God to Saul**
- **As much as his call was a powerful testimony to God's blessing**
- **This condemnation is a serious judgement by a Holy and Righteous God**
- **Psalm 103 tells us that God is slow to get angry and abounding in love**
- **But he does eventually get angry**
  
- Through the voice of a prophet **God rejects** this great and powerful leader
- **And the message is as serious to each and everyone of us today who are in the same place as Saul**
- **Saul's fall from grace starts with disobedience**
- It is the pattern of behaviour of every person since Adam and Eve
- God looks at humanity in **Genesis 8:21** and recognizes that *"every inclination of heart is evil from childhood"*
- **In Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"**
- Again in **Romans 3:23** God acknowledges that *"all have sinned and fallen short of His glory"*
- **All Christians are sinful people**
- And yet what we see in the life of Saul though is not just **"normal" disobedience** that is common to all Christians
- This is not the **typical everyday sin** that we all struggle with
- What we see in him is a **deep-rooted disobedient attitude** to God
- **And it is with this that gets God angry enough to reject him as King**
- **There are Christians in every part of the body of Christ who reflect the same deep seated disobedient attitude to God we see in Saul**
- **Entrenched defiance** against the rule of God
- And there is point where God will say to us all: ***Do you think all I want is sacrifices-- empty rituals just for show? I want you to listen to me! Plain listening is the thing, not staging a lavish religious production. Not doing what I tell you is far worse than fooling around in the occult. Getting self-important around me is far worse than making deals with your dead ancestors. Because you said No to my command, I will say No to you.***
  
- **If you allow this kind of disobedience to God's rule your life you may find yourself stepping outside of God's grace so freely given in Christ**
  
- **Understand this: For Saul this was a literal fall from grace**
- He became a **deeply paranoid and troubled** man
- **Isolated** from those closest to him and isolated from God
- **Finally feeling so alone that he even sees suicide as an option**

- **If we allow this kind of all pervasive disobedience to infect our lives we too may find ourselves this far from God**
- Let me be a little sharper here
- **There are people sitting here who's lives are in disarray**
- **Damaged relationships** in families
- **Troubled marriages**
- **Out of control children**
- **Unmanageable habits**
- **Poor finances**
- **All sorts of trauma**
  
- **These things are often, not always, but often – more that just the predictable disobedience of normally sinful people – but rather the symptoms of a deep and terminal cancer of the soul**
- And for me saddest thing is when peoples lives are in **confusion**, but they **refuse to acknowledge their guilt or even the fact that they are spiritually sick**

### *Saul fails to acknowledge his own guilt*

- A clear symptom of this **terminal spiritual sickness** in Saul's life is that he fails to acknowledge he has done wrong
- He finds it **hard to confess**
  
- For Saul his disobedience with the plunder from the Amalekites is a case in point
- **"Saul what is all of this livestock" – Samuel asks**
- **"Wasn't me it was my men, they spared the best for the Lord"**
- He tries to **justify His disobedience** instead of falling on his knees and repenting
- When Samuel tells Saul of God's message about his sinfulness, **Saul listens and then responds with the most awful three letter words in the English language - BUT**
- We love it **justifying our actions**
- **When we want to avoid the truth of sin in our lives – we justify ourselves**
- When you hear BUT coming your mouth you know the next sentence is
  - An **excuse**
  - A **justification**
  - Or an **accusation**
- **I went gambling last night with friends – BUT they made be go with them**
- **And I won a whole lot of money playing blackjack BUT I gave 10% to the LORD!**

- **The best one I ever heard of happened in the US about two years back when a man sued McDonalds because he was overweight**
- It is a **symptom of deep illness** in our lives if we cannot admit to God or to others around us that we have done wrong
- As much as if you do not put on **deodorant everyday** you begin to stink
- If your lifestyle does not **incorporate daily confession** of your sin to God and to others
- **You may begin to stink**
- And Saul begins to **smell**
- If you were not here last Sunday evening you **missed a powerful testimony** of a young woman in our church who had been **living with her boyfriend for 7 years**
- (You will hear Rod and I preach against living together until we are all living in truth)
- She testified that when she came to Christ she understood that she had to **change the lifestyle** she was in – she understood that she needed to be obedient to God
- She was **scared to bits** that she might lose this man whom she loved
- But she did not lose him – they got married and he met Jesus for the first time ever this Alpha weekend and they are changed forever
- **1 John 3:9 "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."**
- And so God honours obedient people
- **Romans 2:10-13 glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.**
- God is saying these  **blessings are for those who are OBEDIENT to the law not for those who KNOW the law**
- **So God desires our obedience not religious action**
- **He will richly bless those who are obedient to Christ**
- He will **also reject** those who have no desire to admit their guilt and fail to acknowledge the disease of sin in their lives
- Let me be very, very clear here
- **If you cannot admit your fault before Christ – there is no grace or salvation for you**
- Almost every Sunday we will use a passage of scripture in our prayers of confession

- **1 John 1:9-10** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*
- If you cannot admit your guilt of sin you are calling God himself a Liar
- And Jesus Christ has no place in your life
- Please comprehend this very carefully and if you have any questions come see your ministers as soon as possible
- This is an issue of eternal life and eternal death

### *Fails to repent truthfully*

- **There is a second warning sign in Saul's actions revealing the fact that something is desperately wrong**
- **He is unable to repent truthfully**
- Saul's **belief affects his behaviour**
- He **believes he is not guilty** he believes he is not sin sick and so his action is one of **false repentance**
- Have a look at His words to Samuel in vs 25
- **1 Samuel 15:25** *"Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD."*
- It seems from the outside that he does seek to make right
- But there is **one word** in the sentence that is giveaway to his counterfeit repentance
- **He is still not worried about God**
- He is **worried about what Samuel thinks** about Him and so he asks Samuel to forgive him
- **Really Saul is not sorry at all – He is just sorry that he got caught**
- **Instead of I beg YOU to forgive it should have been I beg God to forgive**
- If one of your fellow **members** of this church or your **spouse** or your **child** should find you in sin
- **Don't ask them to forgive you - ask God to forgive you**
- **Make your repentance something real and God will bless and honour you**
- A minister colleague was sharing about an **AGS minister** gambling at a casino
- It was his first time and it was just for a laugh and someone tapped him on the shoulder and it was AGS students

## *Fails to return to God*

- **The tragedy of Saul's life starts with his disobedience**
- It gets worse as the sin becomes part of his **lifestyle**
- It is aggravated by his **fake repentance**
- **But the tragedy finds itself complete in that he does not ever seem to get back to God**
  
- **He gets so caught up in this spiral of evil**
- He gets so **distanced from God**
- and descends so **deeply into disobedience**
- **That he never seems to find his way back to God**
  
- In **bitterness** He chases David all over the show trying to kill him
- In **hopelessness** He gets caught up in a depression that is debilitating
- In **unbelief in God** He lands up at witch to see the future
  
- **The one things his heart desires more than any other is the one thing he never returns to**
- **The grace and mercy of a loving and forgiving God**

## *Conclusion*

- **Shakespeare** wrote these words for hamlet when he was in a place of profound disobedience "I am so far into the river of blood it is easier for me to wade on than to return"
- **Please do not believe that – Saul must have believed something like that**
- **You can NEVER EVER be too far in sin for Jesus to save you**
- No matter **what sin** you are in
- no matter how **far down the road of disobedience** you may have walked
- No matter how **ingrained** the lifestyle of waywardness is in your life
- **If you turn to Christ he will heal you**
  
- **That is what this meal today is about – Christ offering himself to us again**
  
- **But don't think you can fool God**
- Don't think that this **sacrament is a forgiveness itself**
- **Don't think that by coming to church or having all the outward appearance of goodness will help you**

- **He is not desiring religious action from us – but simply our obedience to Him**
- He is **waiting patiently** for each and every human life that walks this planet of ours
- He is **waiting faithfully** for every one to offer forgiveness when we repent
- **He is patiently waiting to hear their confession**
  
- **And the promise of scripture is that Jesus has at his disposal a measure of grace that will cover all**
  
- **And so we can say with absolute assurance even in the face of the horror of sin in the world around us :**

***For I am convinced that neither death nor life,  
neither angels nor demons, neither the present  
nor the future, nor any powers, neither height  
nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will  
be able to separate us from the love of God that  
is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***