

## **Sermon 16: 1 Samuel 15: Saul rejected**

### **OUTLINE**

Saul's obedience  
Saul's rejection  
Saul's repentance

### **INTRODUCTION**

Let me begin with a question. Why does chapter 14 end with a summary of Saul's reign and then the story of Saul continue? If you were a literary critic this sort of thing would really get on your nerves, what is the purpose in this structure? Because Saul's story has come to an end and the focus is moving off from him to David. Saul is no longer the central character to the plot but merely background for the rise of David. This chapter this comes in order to show the moment when Saul's drives the last nail in the coffin. This is all about Saul's rejection which paves the way for David. We will look then at Saul's obedience in v1-9; Saul's rejection in 10-23; and his repentance in 24-35.

Once again our topic is Saul's false religion and God's rejection of it. When we think of bad people we often think of criminals and not religious people. The trouble is when the bible thinks of bad people, it is often the case that the worst are religious. It was the Pharisees who killed Christ. Think on the sermon on the Mount, we see the sermon talks about two ways, two fruit trees, and two foundations that we build on. as you go back through the sermon you will notice that it is not a contrast between criminals and religious people but two different types of religious people that are contrasted. Two types of people who pray, fast, give to the poor and obey the ten commandments, the difference lies in those who do it right and those who practice false religion. Saul falls into this second category, and we will note his false religious obedience and repentance.

### **Saul's obedience**

At the end of the last chapter we were told that Saul valiantly defeated the Amalekites, this chapter emphasizes the small print. Our account begins with the Lord's prophet commissioning Saul with a very specific job, v1-3, 'And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. 2 Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. 3 Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" How do these verses sound to your modern ears? After the Rwandan genocide, and the Bosnian crisis and the Holocaust we cannot hear the word genocide and think anything but negative thoughts. Isn't this the very reason why the God of the bible, is a fiction of Ancient Near Eastern imagination and we in our modern age have outgrown these infantile and vile notions? For those who are actually looking for answers and not merely excuses for unbelief, you will have to appreciate that the Bible is a book that explains itself and that you need to give it an opportunity to explain itself. These verses are in a particular context which if understood correctly will inform why this is the good will of God. Let me put it in perspective.

We are not ashamed of difficult passages like this in the bible this is God's word and is its own defence. We will not take short cuts and make cheap answers like the Liberals and create a different God in the OT to the God of love in the NT. The same God who gave His

Son for our salvation is the same God who ordered Saul to slay the Amalekites, men, women, children and animals.

Here are the things we need to understand. Firstly, let's begin with the reason given in v2, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt.' Hundreds of years before this Amalek attacked Israel in the rear, in other words her sick, wounded, old, women and children. This action is part of God's faithfulness to His people in bringing final justice against sin. God taking vengeance on the enemies of His people is part of our hope and prayer, think of the saints under the altar who cry 'How long?' until God judges and enacts vengeance upon the devil and his cohorts. You might say to yourself, but hang on this still sounds unfair, does God punish the sons for the sins of the fathers?

Secondly, the answer is no, we have clear evidence that Amalek was still guilty of these same action in Saul's day. In 15:18 the Amalekites are called sinners, who we know are worthy of death, and in v33 Samuel speaks about how Agag the king who would have led the Amalekites in battle is guilty of killing children, and is receiving eye for an eye justice. But I can hear the objection, yes but the children are not guilty, nor the women and animals!

Thirdly, we must understand the attack on the Amalekites, not in terms of a racial war, but an eschatological intrusion. In other words, this attack is a picture and foretaste of what will happen on the last day when God comes to judge all things. We must remember that the land of Israel was a deliberate mirroring of Eden, a place where God dwelt with His people and where no sin could dwell. Israel is set up as a look back to Eden and a look forward to the new creation. The original conquest of the land with its wiping out all sinful people and their possessions and idols is a picture us of what God will do to the earth when He comes again. Now that Israel has a king to lead her in her battles, the King is a type of Christ leading His saints on judgement day. The women and children and animals may not be guilty of war crimes, but they are all sinners fallen in Adam and liable for judgement. These holy wars of Israel are God's prerogative to enact a judgement which He will one day do to the whole world. God reveals His attitude to sin and idolatry in these actions. Let me ask you are you horrified? You should be, but you should also be shocked to realise that this is what sin deserves, that sin is a serious business. If you are disturbed remember that you have always underestimated what sin deserves and this gives you an inkling of its seriousness.

Fourthly, since as Christians we are no longer part of the Theocracy of Israel under a king and called to inhabit Israel as a picture of the new creation we cannot engage in warfare in the same way. We are under new orders, our marching orders are to take the gospel to all nations not to carve out a picture of Eden in Israel. Ours is the job of populating the kingdom not depopulating the land. The crusades or any Christian action that takes its norm from the OT armies and their wars is seriously in error not understanding the times we are in and what God requires of His people now.

Fifthly, remember that we cannot judge God, we do not have His knowledge nor know all His motives. We look to the cross to see a clear demonstration of His love, justice, mercy, grace, and wisdom.

The text does not give us the Hollywood perspective on the battle by focusing on the blood and guts, but rather zooms in on Saul's moral choices. We see he gathers a large army, v4; how he encouraged the Kenites to leave because of their past kindnesses to Israel. The

battle is give one verse, v7, 'And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt.' But more focus is given to what happened afterwards, v8-9, 'And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.' Saul like all people who are into religion for themselves did not obey all of God's will but picked and chose those parts that suited them. Saul wanted a trophy in Agag, and he allowed the people to pressure him into keeping the booty instead of devoting it to destruction which is the bible's way of saying it is given to God. If something is devoted to destruction it is under the ban and off limits to the people. It is devoted to God or passed through the fire, precious metals would be put in the treasury of the temple. We saw this morning that God expects us to offer our whole selves to Him to fulfil His will not just the parts that don't cost anything, or the parts we don't like, but all. Offering obedience when it is convenient, satisfying, non-sacrificial, for fame, when it goes with popular opinion, but not when it costs is not obedience. James 2:10, 'For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.'

### **Saul's rejection**

While the feasting and the partying is going on in the Israelite camp Samuel receives a word from God and prays all night, 10-11, 'The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night.' There are three verse in this chapter which speak about God's repentance, this is such a large issue in itself that I will set that apart for special consideration next week. Samuel sets out to find Saul but instead finds he has made a monument for himself, v12. Saul is on his way to Gilgal the place where consecration takes place, but he will find that the curse incipient in the action of circumcision is the reality he finds as he is cut off from being king.

Saul sees Samuel and greets him with a blessing, claiming to have done God's will, 13, 'And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD.'" But Samuel doesn't muck around and gets straight to business, v14, 'And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?"' In other words, you have not obeyed God. Listen to Saul's defence carefully and see if you can hear deflection and blame shifting, v15, 'Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.'" They brought them; the people spared them for sacrifice; it was all done for YOUR God; and then Saul includes himself in the part where God's will was partially done. Saul deemphasizes his sin when it suits, highlights his obedience when it suits but most importantly he spiritualizes his disobedience. He claims that he disobeyed God to worship God as if God should be grateful. Spiritualizing your disobedience is the instinct of all moralistic religion. Think of those times you have been charitable to others in their sin, you have excused them, you have pointed out extenuating circumstances, their good motives or good outcomes that have come out of their errors. The moralist is one who sees the sins of others as logs but his own sins as splinters and extends to himself that charitable feeling where sin is minimized and whitewashed. Samuel will rip off the sentimentalism soon. And another sad note is when Saul speaks of God as Samuel's God not his God. It is possible to be in the church and to be worshipping your parents God but He is not your God. It is important that each one of us recognise our personal sin for Jesus as Saviour and personally repent not thinking that going along with the crowd is enough. If He is not your

God when you leave, if you don't praise Him, pray to Him, read His word and serve Him when you leave here He is not your God and you need to seek Him now.

Samuel tells him to stop the excuses, v16 and listen to what God has to say. Samuel points out that Saul started well and was humble, v17. But when God commanded you to do something specific you disobeyed, v18. Samuel exposes Saul's sin as pouncing on the spoil. Saul repeats his excuses in v20-21. V22-23 are famous as they define the difference between obedience and religion,

'And 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 listen than the fat of rams.

23

For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has also rejected you from being king."

This famous statement begins with a rhetorical question. The question is made to make the hearer think. It is not an ultimate rejection of sacrifice, for this was necessary as a type for Christ, but it is a relative rejection of sacrifice if it is not attended by obedience. Likewise the second part which is an assertion that obedience is better than sacrifice is not a rejection of sacrifice. This was the enemy Jesus encountered in first century Judaism, and the enemy James spoke against when he spoke about believing without doing. Luke 6:46, "'Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?' Matt. 7:21-23, "'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" The third part is a comparison to draw out the evil of what Saul has done, rebellion=divination; presumption/arrogance=iniquity and idolatry. What is sin? Sin is idolatry, sin is being in legion with the demonic realm. Every sin the ousting of God from His throne in your hearts, it is to reject His authority and right to rule, it is to presume to raise yourself up and place your will before His as more ultimate and important and worthy of service. Sin is not merely a failure, or a misunderstanding, or a misdemeanour, but idolatry. An outright rejection and replacement of God. The fourth part of this section is a judgement where Saul is rejected as king just as He has rejected God as His King.

### **Saul's repentance**

Saul then repents but it is too little too late. V24, '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.' Here Saul finally comes clean, he finally confesses the truth that he was driven by a fear of man. Saul then moves immediately from repentance to request, v25, 'Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may worship the LORD.'" Here he is asking for a pardon and for things to carry on forward as if the whole thing had never happened. Saul's repentance was the words he thought Samuel wanted to hear but there is no real acknowledgement and sorrow over his sin, no gut conviction that this sin is huge and needs addressing more than a trite confession will do. In v26 we see Samuel repeating Saul's rejection, and in 27 Saul grabs Samuel's hem and tears it as he leaves. Samuel uses this as an object lesson of Saul's rejection and tells him God will not be changing His mind. In v30 we see Saul real heart, 'Then he said, "I have

sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God." 31 So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD.' Saul is asking Samuel to keep up the show. For the sake of the people partake with me in a little religion.

Now it should be said that at this point although the kingdom is lost to Saul his soul need not be lost. He could accept the loss of his kingdom and seek to be a faithful follower of God from here on in, but this does not happen, he is only interested in keeping up appearances. Saul is a vain man who cares more about what people see and think than God. Samuel capitulates for the sake of politics not to show any divine approval. The chapter ends with Samuel finishing the job Saul still did not volunteer to fulfil and the tragic statement that Saul would never see Samuel's face again.

We must have a care for what we see here. The sin in Saul is the sin all we religious people are tempted to. To offer partial obedience, to spiritualize our disobedience, and false repentance is idolatry. God has saved us by Christ, He has served us in Christ, we have the motive and the resources to give our all to Him, let us remember how faithful a husband He has been and seek to be a faithful bride to this wonderful God.