

[heart and whole]

:: 1 samuel 9-14 ::

We're very excited about our next chapter by chapter, verse by verse study, which is going to be through the life of King David.

Last week we got a look at the background of when the Israelites asked for a king to rule over them, rather than God. We saw how great a compromise that was and how it effected their lives for not only 500 years under the kings, but really changed the entire course of their history.

Today we have one more piece of groundwork to lay. A look at Israel's first king, king Saul. We know him, of course, but we should be careful to not write him off as a simple villain. He did some terribly shameful things, but for us he is more **example** than he is **villain**.

Because, though we know him as a failure, he was not set up to fail.

God, speaking to Samuel said this about Saul:

1 Samuel 9.16a - Tomorrow, about this time, I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin and you shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines.

God intended to use this man. He intended to establish him.

1 Samuel 12.14 - If you fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice and do not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the Lord your God.

1 Samuel 13.13b - For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

So what happened? Why do we remember him in failure? That's what we want to discover this morning, and more importantly, we want to see the example of Saul and search out if any of his short-comings, any of his rebellion, any of his failure is found in our own spiritual lives. Because the heart of Saul leads a person to defeat, but God's plan for you is victory, consistency and a life established in His will.

Bible commentator Herbert Lockyer had this to say about our man, he said:

"No man among Bible men had so many chances thrust upon him to make a success of life, and no man ever so missed them. Saul not only missed great opportunities, he deliberately abused them. His sun rose in splendor, but set in tragic night."

One fact that we need to get straight is the fact that Saul was a converted believer. We know this to be true.

After being chosen king and anointed by Samuel the prophet, we read:

1 Samuel 10.9-10 - So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs [which Samuel had spoken] came to pass that day. When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.

Saul was most definitely saved. But after the initial glory he fell into what we call carnality. A life lived, not in God's plan or provision, but lived in the power of the flesh, in that spiritual netherworld where we try to serve sin and God at the same time. Jesus explained to us that, in this life, we cannot serve 2 masters. Our lives must be governed either by God or by something else, but when we live carnally as Christians, when we live using that old nature that God has saved us from, *THAT* is where the tragedy begins.

So Saul is our example. He is our warning. And today he is a litmus test we can use to detect carnality in our lives.

There are 3 snapshots of his character we want to take. 3 specific areas to identify and evaluate.

The first is this: in Saul we find contention with God.

In 1 Samuel chapter 9 we are introduced to this Benjamite. He was a choice and handsome man. His father was a man of wealth and power. Saul stood head and shoulders taller than any other man in Israel. He was the most Clark Kent of all the Jews. When he and Samuel first met, the prophet pointed out that he was the desire of all Israel. A wonderful specimen.

There in chapter 9, Samuel explains to Saul that God has chosen him to be king. Then in chapter 10 Saul is anointed king. Halfway through that chapter he is then proclaimed king before all the people. Yet we find him in chapter 11 and he still isn't the king. He's just at home.

1 Samuel 10.25 - Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house.

Now, you'd think that since Saul had been chosen and then anointed and then proclaimed king, then given a book which explains the behavior of royalty, that he would have began living like a king. Instead, in verse 26 we read this:

1 Samuel 10.26a - And Saul also went home to Gibeah.

He heard what God wanted to do in his life. The Spirit of the Lord had come upon him. He had been given a book which detailed what his new life was to include, but he wouldn't do it. He was unwilling to become the man God desired him to be. He contended with God's plan. He ignored the issue. He went home to plow his fields.

Throughout his life we see him living on his own terms. Always holding back. Always waiting. Always letting others do what God wanted him to do.

His son Jonathan won some mighty victories for the nation, but those were victories Saul could have won if he was walking by faith. Walking in the power of the Spirit. Walking in the behavior of a king, detailed for him in the book that Samuel laid up before the Lord.

Where we find contention in Saul, we should find submission in ourselves.

As a believer, your victory and fruitfulness, your spiritual success in this life is going to be determined by the level of your submission to God.

God is gracious, He can work and move in spite of our imperfection and contention. Even in Saul's life, God granted a measure of success. In chapter 11, while Saul is at home not doing his job as the king, God uses him to win a victory over the Ammonites for the sake of the people of Jabesh Gilead.

In chapter 15, there seems to be some success, some victory as well. And while there was a measure of outward success, the entire chapter is the explanation of how God was giving Saul one more chance to live his life in submission to the Lord. And in that test, Saul failed. God spared His people from defeat and death, but inwardly Saul failed. He contended with God. He contended with His commands. He contended with the Lord's will. There was *some* deliverance, there was *some* effectiveness, but in whole he was a man who did not live by God and therefore did not enjoy the life that God wanted for him.

Our spiritual success, our spiritual health is determined by our submission to God. When we hear God's word, when we hear the Holy Spirit directing us within, we must choose to either contend or submit. And if we are Christians who contend against God's Spirit and God's commands and God's leading in our lives, then we are going to be inconsistent in victory, inconsistent in wisdom, inconsistent in family, inconsistent in faith, just as Saul was.

Second characteristic we want to focus in on: In Saul, we not only find contention with God, but we find redefinition of God's word.

It's one thing to hear God and ignore it. Saul ignored God a lot. He ignored the opportunities God was giving him. In fact, it becomes almost comical. This week, look through 1 Samuel, the Saul chapters, and start counting how many times you find Saul sitting beneath a tree while the nation is being attacked. Even when he was *PROCLAIMED* king, he was hiding. Ignoring.

1 Samuel 10.21b-23a - And Saul the son of Kish was chosen [to be king]. But when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they inquired of the Lord further, "Has the man come here yet?" And the Lord answered, "There he is, hidden among the equipment." So they ran and brought him from there.

He was always sitting under a tree, hiding with the luggage, ignoring God's plan and call on his life.

But he didn't only ignore God's word, he often *redefined* God's word.

First example. This one isn't as plain as the others, but let's follow this together.

1 Samuel chapter 10, Saul has been chosen, anointed and is proclaimed king. There, before the nation, Samuel delivers the book, the behavior of a king.

At the end of that chapter, Saul just leaves and goes home, but we also read this:

1 Samuel 10.26 - And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and valiant men went with him, whose hearts God had touched.

Israel had requested a king, a man to rule over them and judge them and *protect* them. Therefore, as king, Saul was responsible for these duties. In His grace, God provided these valiant men to go with Saul. In the following chapter, when the Israelites made war with the Ammonites, 330,000 soldiers rallied behind Saul to fight for the kingdom of God. It was a great amount of provision God had given.

Skip forward to chapter 13, verses 1 and 2:

1 Samuel 13.1-2 - Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose for himself three thousand men of Israel...The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent.

Saul redefined what he thought his army needed to be. He looked out and said, "I don't need all this." The enemies of Israel were strong and numerous and motivated, but Saul looked at God's provision and decided he didn't need it. He redefined how a king was to behave. How the army was to be fortified.

We do this sometimes. We look at the disciplines of the Christian faith and we redefine them. We decide they aren't necessary or that they aren't that much of a help. The disciplines of the Christian faith; reading your Bible, praying, coming to Church, giving, fasting, those sorts of things, are given to us for our protection and our provision. We don't do those things to earn salvation, or because God will strike us down in anger if we don't do them enough. We're not legalists. We simply *believe* what God has said about those disciplines, that they will benefit our lives. That our prayers are heard by a living, listening God. That His word, the Scriptures, are given to us for life and Godliness, that they are beneficial for our daily living. That, through these different disciplines God has given us, we discover spiritual truth and guidance, we store up heavenly treasure, we draw nearer to our Savior.

But sometimes, when we are living in carnality, in the old sin nature which still hangs out in our hearts, we start redefining God's provision. We start redefining how we interact with God, what He has given us. This is what Saul did.

Another example. Saul redefined the oaths he made before the Lord.

In 1 Samuel chapter 14, after Jonathan his son wins this great victory over the Philistines who were amassed to destroy God's people, Saul finally gets up from underneath his pomegranate tree and he goes to fight against their enemies.

Here's what he said at the beginning of that day:

1 Samuel 14.24 - 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.

So Saul makes this oath, really for no reason. Every now and then you see him just shout something like this out because he needed to let everyone know that he was the boss of them.

But he makes this oath, pronounces this royal order, attached to it is the penalty of death, but then a problem arises. Because, this was a terrible plan. It was not led by God. It wasn't thought through or even rational.

1 Samuel 14.31-34 - Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. So the people were very faint. 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. 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." 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.

Saul redefined what he said, because he had already redefined what God said.

In the Law of Moses, God spoke specifically about making oaths, like Saul made here.

Numbers 30.2 - If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Saul did not take this idea seriously. He was a man who lived by the flesh, which is fickle and inconsistent. He knew the Law, but he redefined it for himself. To him God was a good luck charm. "Bring the Ark so we can kill the enemy. I'll say what I want, sacrifice how I want, live and rule how I want, but when we're in a jam, then I'll pull out my lucky God charm and things will be great."

The third and most blatant example of Saul's redefinition of God's word comes in chapter 15, which was the final straw in God's mercy for his kingship, the final moment of decision where Saul chose to once again redefine the Lord's word and live in his flesh.

Let me just read excerpts from this chapter to you, as it speaks pretty well for itself.

1 Samuel 15.1-3 - 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. 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. 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.' "

It was a simple and straightforward command, a simple test of Saul's faith and his obedience.

1 Samuel 15.7 - And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt.

So far so good.

1 Samuel 15.8 - He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 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.

He had decided that he could change up the words of God. That God said one thing, yes, but that didn't matter. I'm the king. I can do whatever I want. I don't care what God said specifically, I'll do the things I feel like doing, but the rest is optional.

Saul was so given over to this lifestyle of redefining God and His word, that he couldn't even see what he had done.

1 Samuel 15.13 -Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" 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."

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." 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? 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?"

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."

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.

Saul was disobedient and defiant. And it was because he had set himself up as the supreme authority in his own life and over God's word. He could redefine anything God said to him to fit what he wanted to do.

The result was that the kingdom was taken from him. His life spiraled down and down and down until one day he found himself defeated and oppressed and he fell on his own sword.

We must approach God's word and understand that God speaks to us for our benefit. He has given us commands and directions so that we can enjoy an abundant spiritual life, not so that He can cage us in. Remember, God *WANTS* to establish our lives. He *WANTS* to grant us victory. He *WANTS* to fill us with power and opportunities to glorify His name and to be used for His Kingdom. He *WANTS* heaven for us, but if we choose to redefine our faith and redefine His word and redefine what it is that we do as Christians, then He cannot bless that. He cannot bless carnal decisions. He cannot bless inconsistency. He cannot bless disobedience.

Where we find redefinition in Saul, we should find recognition in ourselves. Recognition of the fact that God *has* delivered to us not only a way of salvation, but a way of living, so that we can receive His gifting and His provision and His plan for our lives. He must have a recognition of God's word, applying it to our own lives actively. A recognition of the fact that along with a new heart God has

given to us a new mind, renewed and washed, set apart to live according to His word by the power of His Spirit. A recognition that our Bibles are not a reference, but a master plan by which everything else should be measured and evaluated and constructed. A recognition that obedience is essential in our lives so that God can move us forward in His will. Submission to God, recognition of His word.

But finally, we see a third characteristic of this first king of Israel. In Saul we find a resentment of others. We will see in great detail his resentment and jealousy of David, but even before the shepherd boy was on the scene we see Saul resenting anyone who might have some notoriety or success around him.

Usually this resentment was focused on his son Jonathan. Two instances this morning.

First, in 1 Samuel 13, after Saul had sent away hundreds of thousands of soldiers, Jonathan goes to Geba with his 1,000 troops and attacks the Philistines there. It was the beginning of a wonderful victory for Israel. But here's how Saul reacted:

1 Samuel 13.3b-4a - Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" Now all Israel heard it said that Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines.

So Saul says, "Let the Hebrews hear!" And what did they hear? Apparently they heard that *HE* was responsible. He stole the credit from his son. He resented it when God used someone else for something great.

It gets worse.

in that famous passage where Jonathan and his armor-bearer by faith attack the garrison of the Philistines, Saul finally gets up from under his tree and it is then that he makes his rash oath, forcing the people to fast.

When it is discovered that Jonathan, who saved Israel in that day, ate a piece of honeycomb before he heard the command his father gave, Saul's plan is to kill him! He would rather his son die than seem like he's not in charge.

1 Samuel 14.43-45 - 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!" Saul answered, "God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan." 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.

This was about ego. It was about letting everyone know how important Saul was. This was about his resentment of the fact that Jonathan was used by the Lord for victory.

Where we find resentment in Saul, **we** should find contentment in our call.

When we're not living a life controlled by the Spirit, when we're giving place to the flesh, to the old sin nature, then a resentment comes in. A discontent comes in. A desire for more glory and more prominence and more recognition and more admiration grows in our hearts. And when we're in that

pattern of ego and discontent, then we start resenting others for the call that God has placed on their life.

God wants good things for you and He has a specific call for your life that is important and significant and meaningful. Put down the flesh, which always seeks more and more glory for itself, and put on the contentment God wants for you. In contentment you will find satisfaction. In contentment you will be faithful. And in faithfulness, we find God's blessing.

Saul. He is our example. He is set before us so that we can recognize when we are allowing our flesh to govern our thoughts and our decisions. God gives this story to us as a warning so that we would *NOT* find failure, but that we *WOULD* find strength and effectiveness in our lives.

God gives us this story as an example of the fact that He desires to be personally involved in every part of our lives and He has provided the tools and the power that we need in order to live a life that matters, a life that glorifies God, a life of victory and wisdom and opportunities to change the world.

Search your heart. Seek for Saul. Look for corners of carnality that are welling up. And remember that if we want the life described to us in the Bible, this wondrous, mind-blowing life with Jesus, then we must live in submission to God, recognition of His word and contentment in our calling.