

The Problem
Faithfulness of God
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Bible Text: 1 Samuel 15:1-27
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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Samuel 15, and if you're a guest or a visitor with us, I want to welcome you to a journey through a book of the Bible known as 1 Samuel, probably most famously known for this great battle that takes place in chapter 17 between David and Goliath. But as we're walking through the book of 1 Samuel, there are these two ideas that are clashing in our midst. The first one is this: what does it look like when a group of people, when a community decides to migrate from the sacred to the secular? At the beginning of 1 Samuel, the people of God are under the leadership of God according to the judges and according to the word of God, but in chapter 8 they make this horrific decision that they want to be just like all the other people, they want to have a king, to be governed like, to be facilitated by, to look, act and sound like the rest of the world. So you see this, shall we say, migration from the sacred to the secular, yet at the same time we see the faithfulness of God to individuals, to families, to the respective believers that stay true in the midst of whatever is happening around them.

By the time we get to chapter 15, whom we know as Saul has been anointed king, and even though the people were excited that he was head and shoulders above everyone else, he had a multitude of deficiencies. Today in chapter 15, we're going to discover when the Lord removes the crown from his head. Now he is physically going to wear it for some time but the Lord has come and said, "I am done with you. It is time to move on." And what we're going to discover today is that this isn't just about Saul, it's not just about the Israelites. In fact, chapter 15 of the book of 1 Samuel is an incredible study for each and every one of us in regards to the problem that humanity has. Now I know collectively we call that problem sin but we're going to kind of peel the layers away today and look at Saul's life, the attitude he had, the perspective that he had. In fact, what we're going to discover is that God gave him some very explicit instructions on what he was to do and how he was to respond. He did not do them as God commanded which led to some very specific implications and so, again, this isn't just Saul's story, this is really all of our story.

We're going to begin in verse 1 and it is a very lengthy passage but I want to read the totality of it because of so much that is there. It says,

1 Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. 2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. 3 Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey. 4 And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. 5 And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley. 6 And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. 7 And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. 8 And he took Agag the 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, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly. 10 Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, 11 It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night. 12 And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. 13 And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. 14 And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? 15 And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. 16 Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. 17 And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? 18 And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. 19 Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? 20 And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. 22 And Samuel said, Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. 24 And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. 25 Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. 26 And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. 27 And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent.

And so here we have this story of a battle that is commenced by God, performed by Saul, and then called out in the end as being dearly insufficient.

So let's begin with what are the instructions? What did God tell Saul to do? It was very simple, he said, "Go unto the Amalekites and defeat them." Now this is a very unique aspect of scripture. In fact, there's a lot of battles in the Old Testament. If you've ever read the Old Testament in its entirety, it seems like every time you turn around the Israelites are fighting somebody, but the overwhelming majority of the time they're fighting somebody who has encroached on their land or who has violated their property. In fact, you get to chapter 17, the famous battle of David and Goliath, it begins by saying that the Philistines came into their territory. Even the famous battle of Jericho, those individuals had taken the land which was rightfully given to the Israelites by God. It is very very rare for God to come to the Israelites and say, "I need you to go to battle." So what is happening here is actually somewhat rare. So how is it that he asked them to perform the duty? Notice what it says in verse, utterly destroy them, and the Lord made it clear, he said, "I don't want a man standing, a woman standing. I don't want anything that has any breath. I want you to 'torch the earth,'" for lack of better terms.

Now this is a very common practice when the Lord commissions his people to act in such manner. In fact, it got the Israelites in trouble earlier in the book of Joshua in chapter 11. Remember the go into to the Promised Land, they've been delivered from Egypt, they've survived the whole wilderness experience, they go in, they win the battle of Jericho, Ai, all these famous battles, and then in chapter 11 it says that there was a remnant that was left in Gath and Ashdod and a few other places. Now what did the Lord tell them to do? Take out everybody. Take out everything. What did the Israelites do in Joshua 11? They left a few people in Gath.

You say, "Why is that important? Because in two chapters we're going to meet a big, old nasty guy by the name of Goliath. I'll give you one guess where he was from: Gath. That's right, the descendants of Goliath, the ancestors should have never existed. In other words, what we see happening here is God has the "how." "I need you to do it in this manner." Here's the big question, the "why." Why would God call Saul to do what seems

like to us in the flesh a very heinous act? Well, there's multiple reasons. The first one is this and he alluded to it in the passage. He says, "Do you not remember what these people did to you years ago?" You see, in the book of Exodus 17, the Israelites have come out of Egypt. For 400 years they've been indentured servants. They get across the Red Sea in a miraculous fashion. Guess who's waiting on them? The Amalekites. What were the Amalekites desiring to do? Take a people who were beaten down, tired and worn out and enslave them again. It's exactly they were taking advantage of the situation. God gave the Israelites the provision to overcome but these are the people who basically came after the Israelites and tried to eliminate them after 400 years in Egypt. But it's not just the past, it's also the future.

Now there's this real struggle in the story about King Agag and we're going to talk about him more in just a moment. Saul spared his life and, again, that talks about, we're going to talk about the "why" of that in a moment but I want to call your attention fast forward to a very famous story in the Bible, the story of Esther. Remember the story of Esther? She was that queen who stood for the people of God and her uncle Mordecai that was in the gate because there was a man by the name of Haman who basically tricked the king into making a decree that all the Jewish people should be killed. Haman is mentioned in the book of Esther as having an ancestor by the name of Agag. That's right, Haman. In other words, when God came and said, "I need you to do this," one of the biggest struggles that you and I have as humans is looking God in the face and saying, "I'm not doing it until you tell me why." God didn't tell him why. He didn't tell him the need for the why. In other words, when God gives us a command, this is our problem, this is what humanity did in the garden of Eden, do you know what they struggled with? "Why can't we eat of that tree?" What did Saul? "Why can't I spare Agag? Why can't I take the best of the things?" What we need to understand is when God gives instructions, he is God, we are not. We don't necessarily have the right to the answer of "why" but hindsight, we know the why. These are the people that tried to destroy them again in Exodus. These are the ones who tried to destroy them in Esther. And guess what? They're going to have a continuous practice even here in the book of 1 Samuel.

So the instructions are very clear: go into battle, destroy them all, simply because I told you so. So what's the issue? Where did everything go sideways? I think it's interesting that you look at verse 13, I want you to see what Saul said. "And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed, I have done what God asked me to do." So what's the issue? It's that Saul presumed that he knew the mind of God. Saul presumed that Agag had a lot of resources, a lot of networking, probably a lot of wealth, he would actually be advantageous to his kingdom. He presumed that if the people are going to make a sacrifice unto the Lord, they might as well sacrifice somebody else's sheep, why do our own, that's good for the economy, that's good for everything.

When we presume, we always get ourselves in a mess and this is the issue and we do this issue as humanity on a regular basis. Allow me to use a very trite but a very relevant illustration. If you've ever had the privilege of raising children or grandchildren or somebody's children in your home, you have fought this battle: the cleaning of the room.

You know what I'm talking about. It's really clear in our house. There are certain expectations and there are certain deadlines, and you will clean your room by this certain time. Now here's the irony of the situation: whether it be my wife or myself, we go into the boy's room and we begin to immediately make a list of everything that was not done according to our expectations. So what does the child do? They begin to justify, rationalize, "Well, I left that toy out because I was gonna play with it tonight." Or, "I didn't clean that part because of this or that." In other words, we see this in our house all the time. My wife will give very clear instructions to the boys about their rooms being cleaned by a certain time and then she'll qualify it with this great motherly statement, "My standards, not yours."

But that's the presumption that Saul made. He presumed that having Agag still alive is actually a pretty good idea, having the spoil of the Amalekites, I mean, this could work to our benefit. The problem is and the issue is that's not what God told him to do. So how is it that God gives us instructions, how is it that he articulates his will even if it doesn't "make sense" to us? Notice what it says at the end of verse 21, "to sacrifice unto the LORD your God in Israel. And Samuel said, Hath 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." Do you know what the issue is with the "how" is we always want to know the reason. We always want to know the back-story. We want God to explain himself to us. I've got news for you: God doesn't have to explain himself to you. God doesn't have to give you the "why" behind it. He simply has given instructions and we have been called, we have been commissioned to answer them.

So what's the "why" of the issue? It's interesting when you fast forward to verse 23, there's only one reason given, it's a reason that was good then, it's a reason that's still valid today, "Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD." Do you realize that is the reason, we're going to discuss this in just a moment, for every consequence that God brings in our life is because we have rejected his word. He said to go fight and utterly destroy and what did Saul do? He rationalized. He said, "Oh, Agag will be good. The sheep will make for a great sacrifice. The people want this." In other words, in Saul's mind, listen, it was a win/win but in God's mind it is only a win when we do it his way, it is always a lose when we do it any other way. And the reason this is such an issue is that we have become a people today who can rationalize and justify anything. In fact, we've said, "Well, you know that God desires us to love so I can love whoever I want to because God wants me to love." Not unless you're loving the person God told you to love. You say, "Well, I think God has an open mind." I've got news for you: he doesn't. God does not have an open mind. Do you know what he said in John 14? He said, "I am the way. I'm the truth and I'm the life. Nobody comes to the Father but by me."

When the Israelites went into the Promised Land he said, "Do according to the word of the Lord and it'll work out. If you don't, it won't." What did he tell Saul here? "The reason I'm taking the crown, the reason I'm removing my favor, the reason I'm doing this is because you didn't do it my way." I can guarantee you it's not written in scripture but I know how Saul responded. "But, but, but, but, but..." Isn't that how we respond when our parents tell us we didn't clean the room properly? "But you don't understand. But I was

saving. But what about this?" And what is the response of a parent? "It doesn't matter what your rationalization is. It doesn't matter what your justification is. I gave you a task and because you did not complete it as asked there are consequences for it."

So what are the implications? What happens in Saul's life? What happens in the Israelites'? What happens in our life? What happened was this: we discover that according to God's economy incomplete obedience is disobedience. In other words, we say, "But God, I mean, according to academic standards, that's a solid A, that's a 95, that should be good enough for you." It's not. That may be good enough for us, it may be according to our measure, it may meet our expectations of whatever the scenario or the situation is, but the thing that we need to understand is that when we partially or incompletely complete the obedience, you might as well chalk it up to complete disobedience. It's not a, "I got a 95, I got an 88, I got an A or a B," we're talking it's either 100 or 0. Why do you think in the book of Revelation he said, "I despise lukewarmness. Either be hot or cold but quit this in the middle stuff." That's exactly what Saul did.

So how did it turn out? Well, we've used this phrase many times before, I'm going to use it again today: you choose your sin, you don't choose your consequences. How many times, and I'll keep it somewhat trite, that child, that grandchild of yours cried big old alligator tears because you didn't let them go to whatever they wanted to go to because their room wasn't cleaned the way you expected it to and they said, "But you don't understand, everybody's gonna be there. But you don't understand, I've got to go. But you don't..." No, the understanding part is you did not do what you were told to do and the consequences, you don't get to determine what the consequences are.

And so the implication for our lives is that we can rationalize, we can justify, we can spin it any way we want to, the problem is when we don't do it God's way there are consequences that we may not like and/or enjoy but they're not ours to choose, which brings up the "why." You see, verse 23, in my opinion, is kind of the key verse. This is the linchpin of the passage. Notice what he says, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Now let me bring this kind of to our context, our culture today. You and I today are walking through, I'm just going to be very...this is my least favorite month of the year. You say, "Why is it your least favorite month?" You do know about this little celebration the world does at the end of this month, right? This is the darkest month. This is the most demonic month. In fact, if you've watched any football lately, the commercials and what they're promoting, what they're advertising.

Now today I'm going to take the high road. You say, "The high road?" Yeah, I'm going to take the high road. I want you to imagine that this afternoon I just casually stop by unannounced to your house. I mean, I just came right on in. I'd be willing to say that most likely I'm not going to find a Ouija board in your house. Probably not. I'm probably not going to find a book of curses and chants and such of that nature. That's probably not what I'm going to discover but here's the question: would I discover rebellion? Would I discover a heart that says, "I don't care what God says, I'm gonna do what I wanna do. I don't care what the Bible says, this is what's popular now. I don't care what the Bible

says, this is what's in style now." You may not have a Ouija board but according to this passage you might as well.

Now let me take it to the second road. It says that stubbornness is as idolatry. If I came by the same time, same place, your house today, I would be willing to say I'm probably not going to find any type of statue made of precious materials that you're going to bow down and burn incense to. Probably not going to but I can tell you one thing, if you're a Baptist I'm going to find some stubbornness. Oh, I'm about to go meddling now. "I don't care who you are, that's the way I do it. I don't care what they say, that's not how I do it." Oh, if there's one thing Baptists are, we are some stubborn people. Why? Because we have our ways of doing things and we can be shown in the Bible that our way is wrong and say, "You don't understand, we've been doing it this way my whole life. This is where I sit. That is where I park." Oh, it's getting personal now.

What does it say? Stubbornness is as the sin of idolatry. You see, here's the problem and here's the takeaway: unfortunately time after time, week after week, we come to services like this, we have experiences like this and we go back home and we kind of puff ourselves up, "No Ouija boards here. No idols here." But what about rebellion? What about stubbornness?

Oh, it's interesting that everything that Saul did, he did desiring a positive outcome. "Agag will benefit. These sheep and these oxen, they will help us out." It's interesting that everything he did he justified as somehow – listen – helping God out. I've got news for you: you don't need to help God out, he needs to help you out. You don't need to assist him. Here's the irony: for every resource that Agag supposedly had, don't you know the Lord said, "I've got all those. I've got 10 times that." For every sheep and oxen they supposedly were going to sacrifice, don't you know the Lord said, "Oh, I can multiply that times 100-fold." You see, the lesson, the implications for us today is most of us, we don't have the Ouija boards and the incantations and the idols but what about our hearts? Are we rebellious? Are we stubborn? No matter what the reason may be, when the Lord says, "I just need you to do it my way."

Let me close on this. You know, there's a lot of us that because of where we live and the context of where we live, we think that being in the right place at the right time, doing the right thing somehow makes us right with God. If I just go to church. If I just stop doing this. If I just start doing that. We have this, what I call, cultural Christianity but what does the Bible say? The Bible says in Romans 10:9 and 10 we've got to confess we've got a sin problem, repent of our sin and ask him to save us. There's nothing in there about church attendance or tithing. Those are things that happen after we're saved, not so that we can be saved. The rebellious spirit says, "I think I'm good enough." The stubborn spirit says, "I'll tell you what, I've been going to that church so long I ain't about to walk down that aisle. I'll just stay where I am." You see, the problem is you can rationalize and justify just like Saul did but here's the question: do you want the same results in your life? I don't in mine so it's best just to do it God's way.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today as we come to this time in our service you're here in person, maybe you're watching online, maybe you're even listening on the radio and the Spirit of God took the word of God and made it real clear to you that there are areas in your life that you feel good and you feel confident about just because it's what you like, it's what you appreciate, it's what you prefer but it's not necessarily according to how God has orchestrated it. Maybe today you're that individual who thinks somehow, somehow you're going to justify yourself to God because you don't do this and you do do that. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, not whoever becomes a Baptist, whoever joins a church, or whoever gives this amount. It says whoever calls on the name of the Lord and maybe today is your day to call on the Lord. It's not about repeating a certain series of statements or words, it's about just confessing your sin condition and you're acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the only one who can fix it.

Maybe you're that person today, maybe you're online, maybe you're here with us in person, maybe today is the day you cry out, maybe your prayer though it doesn't have to be the same words or the same verbiage, maybe it'll go something like this. "God, today I need to confess what you already know about me, I've got a sin problem and, Lord, I like things my way, not necessarily yours. I've gone against your word, your will and your way. God, I've been places I should have never been. I've done things I should have never done. God, you know I've said things I should have never said and thought thoughts that should have never been between my ears. Lord, your word makes it very clear that the wages of my sin is death and, God, today I want you to know I believe I deserve it. I deserve to blow open the doors of hell when I die. But God, today I believe that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. I believe that Jesus Christ satisfied everything that needs to happen so that one day I enter a place you call heaven. God, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf, he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that when he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross he was bearing the pain and the punishment of my sin. And God, I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, he actually made it possible for my sin to be forgiven, for my soul to be saved. So God, today I don't come in my own merit, in my own ability or in my own rationalization. God, I am literally bowing down at the foot of your cross saying if it were not for Jesus I would have no hope. God, today the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who had that very important conversation and prayer with the Lord. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us, we're going to stand and sing, and I'm just going to invite you just to step out and step forward. We have a whole team of individuals, we have a room set aside, we just want to spend some time hearing your story and praying with you and praying for you. And maybe today you're a believer but you've never followed in believer's baptism like these two young people that came before today, or maybe you say, "Man, I've been a part of the church for a long time but I've never really gotten in with both feet." Whatever the decision is, we'd love the privilege of talking with you. And maybe today you say, "You know, pastor, I've got all those things covered," and maybe today your decision is not

about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe it's about leaving this place in a moment with a completely new perspective on how God operates, that it's not really about what you think or what you prefer, it's about what he has declared. So maybe today is not about stepping forward, maybe it's about stepping out of here with a whole new approach to how God desires you to live your life.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, God, how grateful we are that you give us this privilege. Lord, when we look back at Saul's life, we look back at our own lives, there are so many times that you could have just washed your hands of us and said, "I'm done with them and I'm done with him and I'm done with her," but you're not. And so, God, it is your amazing grace that brings us to this point. May we not take it for granted. May we respond appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.