

Sunday, October 16th sermon: “King Saul Blames His People -- Put Not Your Trust in Princes (Part 6)”

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS, by John Pittman Hey

1 Samuel 15; Isaiah 53

Scripture warns us not to put our trust in princes, yet we continue to try to “institutionalize” solutions to the problem our sins, in order to overcome their tragic consequences without true reformation and obedience.

Samuel warned the people of Israel that if they continued in their sin, God would destroy both them and their king.

Their first king, Saul, started out well – he was humble, prudent, brave, and reasonable.

But very soon Saul began to wobble, and disobey the commandments of God. He committed rash acts which drove his people into sin.

But perhaps the most tragic failure of Saul took place when God commanded him to wipe out the wicked Amalekites.

Saul gathered his army and attacked the Amalekites, and was victorious, but he did not obey God's commandment to destroy all that they had. Instead, the Amalekite king Agag was taken alive, and the sheep and oxen and other things were kept.

In fact, Saul did almost all the hard work necessary to obey God, but he refused to finish up what God had commanded.

When Samuel confronted Saul about his disobedience, Saul first insisted that he had indeed obeyed the commandment of God. But when the noise of the cattle betrayed his lie, Saul blamed the people for not destroying all the animals, claiming that they had done so to offer them as sacrifices to God.

Thus, Saul assigned the disobedience of Israel as being unto the worship of the Lord!

Samuel rebuked Saul for failing to obey God's commandment to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Saul had not learned the bitter lesson of Achan, who had committed the same sin in Joshua's time, which resulted in bitter judgment by God.

The tragedy is that, even if Saul had failed to adequately communicate God's command to the people, he ought to have finished the job once he discovered it. Saul could have acted in obedience to God on behalf of his people, and ordered the final destruction of the Amalekites and the spoils.

But instead, Saul continued to insist that he had indeed obeyed God. He then conceded that he had kept Agag alive, and that the people had kept some of the spoil, which should have been destroyed, to offer sacrifices to God.

Even after being rebuked, Saul seemed not to grasp his wildly inappropriate way of thinking, that disobeying God was to be excused, if done for a worthy reason.

Saul attempted to justify the disobedience by trying to dedicate it to the Lord's worship!

Samuel rebuked this attempt at self-justification head on: to obey is better than sacrifice! God would rather you not sacrifice and obey Him, than to disobey Him so you can perform sacrifices.

Samuel explains that disobedience is rebellion against God, and rebellion is as bad as the horrible sin of witchcraft. Stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Thus, Samuel equates a simple act of disobedience with the most wicked sin imaginable – the worship of false gods and idols.

No matter what noble purpose we use to justify our disobedience, that can in no way cleanse our acts from the filth of sin and defiance against God.

The apostle Paul declared the same truth: if we sin against God and claim it is for His glory, our damnation is completely just.

Samuel then issues God's judgment against Saul: because you have rejected God's command, God has rejected you from being king over Israel.

Saul finally admits he sinned against God, but explains that he only did so out of his fear of the people.

Saul wanted the people to follow him and support him as king, and thought that by going along with the people's disobedience, he could shore up his position with them.

Thus, Saul fulfills Samuel's dire warning: if the people continue in sin, God will destroy the people and their king.

The people sin, and the king sins in response to the people's desires, and the people sin in response to the king's foolishness and sin, resulting in the destruction of them both.

Saul pleads for forgiveness, but Samuel declares that God will not repent of His judgment against Saul.

Saul then begs Samuel to sacrifice and worship with him, to honor him before the people and their leaders, to pretend that everything was right between Saul, Samuel and the Lord.

This is the second time that Saul has used religious ritual as statecraft, to shore up his standing before the people. Saul exploits sacrifices and the worship of God as political theater.

After that, it was all over between Saul and Samuel. Samuel never again saw Saul, but he did mourn the tragic fall of a once-promising king.

At the beginning of his reign, God had given Saul the Holy Ghost, but now, the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and God sent an evil spirit to him to trouble him.

Saul now turns from the Lord completely, to rely upon political machinations and violence to try to stamp out his rival, the shepherd boy David, whom the Lord had anointed to take Saul's place as king.

There would be no more pretenses of the worship of God to strengthen the support of the people. Now, Saul would use violence and thwarted attempts at murder to try to get what he wanted.

How different is our Lord Jesus!

He could never be tempted to sin by His Own right to rule as king, or to satisfy His Own needs, or to vindicate Himself before the people as Messiah.

We see this clearly when the devil tempted Jesus early in His ministry. Jesus rejected Satan's taunt that He use His power to make food from stones to satisfy His hunger. Christ declared that He would rely upon His Father for provision of His wants.

Jesus rejected Satan's offer to give Him the rule of the world in exchange for bowing down to Satan and worshiping him. This was a shortcut to exaltation which Christ utterly rejected. He refused to commit the idolatry that Saul took part in, no matter what supposed "good reason" the devil could provide to justify it.

Jesus rejected Satan's suggestion that He presume upon God's promises to Messiah, to make a big public show to prove He is Messiah and therefore could not be destroyed. Jesus thus teaches His people that behaving recklessly and presumptuously is a wicked exploitation of God's sovereign promises to us.

In short, the devil tempted Jesus with all the opportunities to sin and fail that our leaders so easily fall into, but Christ would not disobey God's commandments, no matter what good reason some would use to justify it.

When Peter tried to dissuade Christ from obeying His Father's will that He suffer and die on the cross, Jesus rebuked Peter to his face. Even the night of His betrayal unto death, Christ still refused to go along with Peter's attempt to resist the acts of wicked men to crucify Him.

Christ could not be browbeaten by His people to break God's commandment, and Christ would not bow to their displeasure to do so.

Isaiah had foretold this very uprightness of Messiah: God would put His Spirit upon Christ, and delight in His obedience in all things. Jesus would not fail nor be discouraged in His ministry and travails, until He had completed His work and won the victory!

Finally, Jesus never tried to shift the blame onto His people like Saul did. We recall that Adam shifted the blame off onto his wife Eve in the garden, when God confronted Adam with his sin.

But our Lord Jesus, rather than blame us for our sin, instead shifted that blame onto Himself!

We had sinned, and disobeyed God's commandments, but the Lord laid on Jesus all our iniquities!

Jesus bore our griefs and carried our sorrows!

God punished Jesus in our place, and for our crimes, just like Isaiah the prophet had foretold!

Even though Christ had done nothing amiss, God was pleased to crush Him in our place, as God's Lamb slain for the forgiveness of our sin. God made Jesus an offering for our sin.

Our Good King Jesus is a king Who makes no excuses for His people, Who leaves no blame upon His people at all! He Himself bore our sins in His Own body on the cross!

Jesus takes away our blame, our sin, by shifting it upon Himself.

Note the stark contrast between king Saul and King Jesus!

Saul tried to spread the blame for his sin onto the people, and in the end God's judgment fell.

But in the end, God is satisfied with His people, and satisfied with our Good King!

Jesus unwinds the curse that Samuel spoke, that the people's sin would ultimately destroy them and their king.

Rather than Jesus being destroyed by our sin, our King is glorified by His obedience and sacrifice, and in turn, His people are sanctified and glorified by their King!