

Message #4

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Life of David

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SAUL AND FITNESS FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

1 SAMUEL 13-15

INTRO

I suspect that future historians will look at 2019 and note that the political landscape was marked by bitter partisanship. Democrats tried to impeach and remove the president. They called him “unfit for office.” Republicans called Democratic leaders liars and violators of a promise not to proceed with impeachment without some bipartisanship. Both sides can marshal evidence to support their case.

We Christians should certainly desire virtuous behavior in our leaders. We should also seek to develop it in ourselves. Most of us hold some kind of leadership position, whether in the family, at school, at work, at church, or in the broader community.

We have embarked on a study of King David, who has many lessons to provide for us about leadership. But first we need to deal with his predecessor, King Saul. Last week we looked at Christmas through the eyes of David. The Sunday before that we looked at Saul. We saw that he showed up on the scene about a thousand years before the time of Christ. The Israelites had been without a traditional king. In the preceding 400 years God had provided judges to lead them in time of need. God Himself was seeking to serve as their king.

But the people wanted to have a king like everyone else. So God through the prophet Samuel provided them with Saul. He was the kind of king that they wanted. He was the all-Israel kind of guy--- big, good-looking, handsome, and having leadership qualities. We saw initially that the Lord worked through him to bring victories over their enemies. But now we will learn about his shortcomings. Hopefully through his negative example we can learn lessons that will have application to us.

I.

First, from 1 Samuel #13 we will find that SAUL DISPLAYS UNHEALTHY PRESUMPTION. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. SAUL DISPLAYS UNHEALTHY PRESUMPTION) We are going to skim through Chapters 13-15 of 1 Samuel this morning. If you don't have a Bible or a cell phone or a tablet to use, you might want to pick up one of the Bibles under many of the chairs. The story starts on p. 234.

The primary foreign policy challenge facing Saul was the Philistines. (PHILISTINES MAP) The territory along the coast had been allotted to the Israelites when Joshua led them in entering the Promised Land 400 years earlier. But it was occupied by the Philistines, whom many scholars think came from Crete and the Aegean Sea area. They were more technologically advanced than the Hebrews and seemed to have control over them.

In the first few verses of #13 we are told that King Saul's son Jonathan attacked a unit of the Philistine army that was garrisoned in Hebrew territory. This provoked a larger response from the Philistines. Thus we read in vv. 5 & 6, **"And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven."**

(MICHMASH) The Hebrews were greatly outnumbered. The battle lines were being drawn north of Jerusalem and north of Gibeah, the home town of Saul. In vv. 8 & 9 of #13 we are told about Saul: **"He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, 'Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.' And he offered the burnt offering."**

(MICHMASH 2) The Hebrews are preparing for battle at Gilgal. Apparently Samuel the prophet had told Saul to wait there seven days until he arrived. It is the seventh day, and the troops are restless. Some are beginning to drift off. In an earlier incident described in #7 Samuel made an offering before the battle. There followed loud thunder and a storm. The Philistines were rattled and confused. The Hebrews won a victory. Saul surely remembers that incident. Since Samuel has not arrived, he decides that he will offer the sacrifice. Perhaps God will respond in a way similar to the earlier incident.

The problem was that God's prophet told Saul to wait until he showed up. The seventh day was not over. Furthermore, offering a burnt offering was the job of a priest. Samuel was a priest as well as a

prophet. He was a descendant of Aaron. Saul was a king and not a priest. He was taking on a role not given to him by God. This was an unhealthy presumption on his part.

According to vv. 10-12, **“As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. Samuel said, ‘What have you done?’ And Saul said, ‘When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, “Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.” So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.”**” Saul is rationalizing. He is giving excuses for his wrong conduct. He acted because of forces beyond his control. He really did not want to do it. He only did what he did to please God. We humans can be good at doing wrong things and claiming that we are doing it for God.

Samuel’s response comes in vv. 13 & 14: **“And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”**” This is a matter of disobedience to God. The prophet had made God’s directions clear. The consequence is that Saul will not be part of a royal line that will endure long after he is gone. Saul has not been rejected as king. His descendants have been rejected.

Verses 19-22 give us additional information about this battle that is brewing: **“Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, ‘Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears.’ But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle, and the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel---** some manuscripts omit this third of a shekel, implying that it is also two-thirds of a shekel for the following items--- **for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them.”** Thus we find that Israel is at a technological and manufacturing disadvantage. The Philistines are operating in the Iron Age, while the Hebrews are still living in the Bronze Age. The Philistines and the Hebrews were not always fighting with each other. Normally the Hebrews were living in some kind of dependence upon the Philistines.

There is one detail to be noted about v. 21. The Hebrew word for two-thirds of a shekel is *pim*. It is the only time this word appears in the Old Testament. It clearly is a reference to a weight, but for centuries

scholars had no idea about the weight involved. (PIM) Several decades ago this stone was discovered with this word on it. So now they knew its weight. Archaeologists also know that this weight was in use at the time of Saul and for two centuries afterward. But then its use was discontinued. Some liberal scholars claim that 1 Samuel was written as late as the second century BC. The difficulty with that viewpoint is that a word and weight like this had not been in use for several centuries. How would someone writing in the second or third or fourth or fifth century BC even know about this term? Thus this is evidence that Samuel was written at an early date. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The problem with Saul's behavior here is that he was disobedient to the clear direction of the Lord given through Samuel. Underlying that command was the fact that Saul took on a priestly role that had not been assigned to him by God. In our recent study of 1 Peter we found that the death of Christ means that the followers of Jesus no longer need priests. In fact, in #2 Peter called Jesus followers priests. We don't need animal sacrifices any more. We Christians all have direct access to God.

But are there other ways in which Christians, or people in general, can be guilty of unhealthy presumption? Are there ways in which we can take on roles not assigned to us? Perhaps there are applications to be made in the workplace. One thing that comes to my mind is that 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians seem to teach that women should not be elders or teaching pastors. Yet there are women who are taking on those roles today.

In the wider world there are ways in which people are trying to take on the role of God. It seems to be presumptuous in my reading of the Bible for people to think that they can end life in the womb, unless the life of the mom is truly threatened. It seems to me to be presumptuous to kill also at the other end of life. It seems to be presumptuous to think that people can change their gender. The Bible says that God made us male and female. To try to change gender also goes against biology and the DNA that we were given at conception and birth. Perhaps an unhealthy presumption means that we need to be cautious in giving advice to other people about what they should do with their lives. We don't want to take on God's role in doing that.

II.

We come then to #14 where we find that SAUL DISPLAYS PRIDEFUL SELFISHNESS. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. SAUL DISPLAYS...) The military situation for Saul and the Hebrews does not look good. According to v. 2 Saul has only 600 men with him. They seem to be demoralized. Son Jonathan, however, takes the lead in attacking a Philistine outpost.

Down in v. 6 we read, **“Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, ‘Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.’”** Jonathan is the oldest son of Saul. He is next in line to the throne. In #13 we learned that Saul’s line is not to endure. In Jonathan we find qualities that his father seems to lack. He has a mature trust in the Lord. He is willing to take risks for YHWH, the God of Israel.

That faith and courage produces a good result. According to vv. 13 & 14, **“Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him. And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow’s length in an acre of land.”** Such is the result of the courage and faith of Jonathan and his assistant.

The Lord also responds with divine help. We read in v. 15, **“And there was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic.”** This surprise attack combined with an earthquake creates fear and confusion among the Philistines. They panic and begin to flee. Saul and his troops join in. Other Israelites show up and join in attacking the fleeing Philistines.

Down in v. 24 we learn about a vow that King Saul had made earlier in the day: **“And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, ‘Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies.’”**

It appears to be a foolish and rash vow. The enemy is on the run and the troops need their strength. Perhaps Saul did it to keep his men from stopping and eating. Maybe the vow was Saul’s way of trying to make this a holy war. But the clause at the end of v. 24 reveals his motivation. He wants to be avenged on his enemies. It is all about me. It is not about God or His people or claiming promises about God’s people.

Notice vv. 25-27: **“Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright.”**

Thus it is that Jonathan unknowingly becomes subject to the curse of his father. The Philistines are sent packing. Saul calls in the priest to ask him to use the Urim and Thummim, the holy dice, to find out from God if they should pursue the Philistines. God does not answer. So Saul suspects that there are some among his troops who have violated his oath not to eat during the preceding day. Lots are cast, and it is revealed that Jonathan is the one who broke the oath, though he did not know about it at the time.

Skip down to vv. 43 & 44 of #14: **“Then Saul said to Jonathan, ‘Tell me what you have done.’ And Jonathan told him, ‘I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die.’ And Saul said, ‘God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan.”** Saul appears quite willing to kill his son, though it was Jonathan who was largely responsible for the victory over the Philistines.

The other troops strongly object to Saul’s proposed action. He relents. According to v. 46, **“Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.”** In the rest of the chapter the author describes the family of Saul and his military commander. He also describes victories that Saul and his army experienced over other enemies in addition to the Philistines. So Saul was not without his successes.

We also learn about a significant problem with Saul’s leadership in this chapter. Saul not only displays an unhealthy presumption, he also displays prideful selfishness. That is especially evident in the revelation of his motivation in v. 24. He is out for personal revenge. This prideful selfishness is confirmed in the next chapter in v. 12. There we are told, **“And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, ‘Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.”** In the midst of a time of military conflict King Saul is building monuments not to honor God or to note the bravery of his own son or to honor the sacrifices of his own troops, but to honor himself.

Pride is a danger to any kind of leaders. Prideful people make the issues about themselves not about the people they lead. Christmas Day marked the thirtieth anniversary for an event in the life of Nicolae Ceausescu. (NICOLAE CEAUSESCU) He was the Communist dictator who ruled Romania for many years. I remember speaking to a Romanian pastor about him in Bethlehem in 1999, close to the tenth anniversary. Ceausescu was a persecutor of Christians and others whom he perceived to be a threat to his dictatorial rule. He referred to himself as “the fairest fir tree of the Carpathians.” A few weeks before his death he said that sooner would apple trees bear pears than socialism be endangered in Romania. His brutal suppression of mass protests was finally too much for his military. Ceausescu and his wife

were forced to flee the country. They were caught, and on Christmas Day in 1989 an entire army unit volunteered for the firing squad. Only three were able to draw the “lucky” lots. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Pride is a danger to all of us. C. S. Lewis once observed, **“In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that--- and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison--- you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”** (*Christian Behavior*, Lewis)

III.

In #15 we find that SAUL DISPLAYS FLAGRANT DISOBEDIENCE. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. SAUL DISPLAYS FLAGRANT DISOBEDIENCE) Having subdued the Philistines the Lord now turns Saul’s attention to the Amalekites. Look at vv. 1-3: **“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. 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. 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.””**”

The Amalekites were descendants of Esau. They were long time enemies of the Israelites. They had attacked the Hebrews when they were wandering in the wilderness after their escape from Egypt. In later years they joined other enemies in picking on Israel. (AMALEKITES) Now in the time of the early kingdom of Israel they continued to harass and attack the Hebrews. In Jewish tradition the Amalekites came to be regarded as the symbol of evil.

So why did God tell His people to wipe them all out, even women and children? How could a good God command such a horrendous thing? To begin with, we need to keep in mind that we are all by nature sinners, separated from a holy God and deserving of His punishment. It is only by God’s grace that we can enjoy a relationship with Him. Beyond that it seems that the Amalekites were especially evil people. Because they were not all wiped out, they continued to attack the Israelites. The Book of Esther tells us that a descendant of the Amalekite king came close to wiping out all of the Jews in the Persian Empire. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So Saul musters his forces. They proceed to attack the “City of Amalek.” We don’t know what city that was. The Israelites are successful in overrunning it. According to vv. 8 & 9, **“And he took Agag the king**

of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. 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.”

Thus Saul disobeys the directions of God through the prophet. He spares no kids or women. But he keeps the best of the animals and the Amalekite king, the leader in doing evil. The divine response is revealed in vv. 10 & 11: **“The word of the Lord came to Samuel: ‘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.”**

The use of the Hebrew word “regret” would be worthy of a separate study. Superficially it could be understood to mean that God realizes that He has made a mistake. But is that possible? Did He not see this coming? If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, then He saw what was going to happen. It is more likely that this is an anthropomorphism. This is a description of God’s reaction in human terms. He was sad about what happened. He experience genuine emotional grief over the decisions of Saul. But ultimately this was all part of His divine plan that laid the groundwork for the coming of David.

The story continues in vv. 13 & 14: **“And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, ‘Blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord.’ And Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?’”** Picture this scene. Saul claims that he has obeyed the command of the Lord, which included instructions to kill all of the animals. But the audio track reveals that there are the sounds of mooing and bleating in the background.

Verse 15: **“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.’”** There are two defenses in this one sentence that Saul offers for his disobedience. First, it was the people’s fault. They spared the animals. Second, they did it for a religious reason. We did it for God. We saved them to make a religious sacrifice. Notice also that Saul refers to the Lord as “your God,” not “my God,” or “our God.”

It is not immediately obvious what this religious sacrifice involved. But probably these animals were offered as peace offerings. According to the directions concerning a peace offering in Leviticus #17 a small part of each animal was placed on the fire and burned up. But most of the animal was eaten by the

worshippers. So from the people's perspective, the use of these animals in this way was a win-win. God got His worship, and the people had a fine steak meal with grain fed beef from the Amalekites. But it was disobedience.

According to v. 20, **“And Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction.”** Agag is the only one that I spared. He is my trophy. Verse 21: **“But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.”**

Again it is the fault of the people. And really they were just improving the plan that was suggested to us by God. Instead of destroying all of these animals, we put some of them to a better use, to a religious use. And Agag was the only person that we saved. ---In #13 Saul was willing to kill his own son to keep his vow. Here he is less concerned about keeping God's vow to kill the one most responsible for the evil actions of his people.

The story continues in vv. 22 & 23: **“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. 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.”**

Religious ritual can be used to cover our disobedience to God. If I go to church, if I make a generous donation to a charitable or religious cause, then God will be OK with that. In college I had a roommate who would go to mass every Saturday afternoon. Then he would come back to campus for an early supper at the cafeteria. Then he would go out and get drunk and smoke a little weed. But it was all good in his mind because he had made his religious offering to God.

Samuel explains here that sin is serious, especially when it comes from the leader of God's people, and especially when it involves direct disobedience to a clear command of God. In #13 Samuel declared that Saul's disobedience and presumption meant his dynasty would not continue. Here he declares that his own kingship will come to an end.

Verse 24: **“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.’”** This sounds like a pretty good confession. This is a correct analysis of what has happened.

Saul continues in v. 25, **“Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the Lord.”** It seems that Saul wants Samuel to appear with him in public and make like everything is OK. He wants to quickly move on from this and get on with his job. The question is whether he truly understands the significance of his disobedience. Does he realize that the negative consequences still stand?

About a year ago there was a pastor of a large church in Chicago who had a radio program and authored a number of books who was forced by his church board to resign as a result of a number of bad things that he had done. A Christian magazine and a national newspaper had done an expose of the questionable things that he had done. His board made him step down from ministry. Then a few weeks later it turned out that he was back to preaching in a Florida church that had been a satellite church of the Chicago megachurch. The question was whether he had really learned anything from what had happened. Was he truly repentant?

Verse 26: **“And Samuel said to Saul, ‘I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.’”** God may forgive Saul’s sin, but Saul has lost his kingship. He has proven to be unfit for the important leadership position that he had.

There are some things that we may wonder about in regard to God’s will. We may wonder why God calls for the complete destruction of the Amalekites. We may wonder why there are bad things that happen in our world. We may be uncertain about what God would have us to do in certain difficult situations. But the most important things in God’s word are clear. We know what the two greatest commandments are. We know what God’s ethical and moral principles are in the Ten Commandments.

In our recent study of John’s Gospel we were reminded about the importance of obedience. In John #14 v. 15 (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 14:15) Jesus was quoted as telling His disciples, **“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”** A few verses later He said (JOHN 14:21), **“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”**

We are all sinners. We all fall short of God's perfect standards. We will always lead imperfectly. But if we aspire to Christian leadership in some way, we need to seek to be consistent with the basic things. With the help of the Holy Spirit we need to strive to follow God's clear commands.