

**1 Samuel 15 sermon : Part 3 – “Saul”**  
**All Saints Anglican Church Waitara**  
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*Bruce Stanley*

Outline available. **KEY THEME: “To obey is better than sacrifice.”**

In the American Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

*[Movie clip: “The Pursuit of Happiness”]*

For many people, life is about the pursuit of happiness, but without the Creator. To have a nice place to live, a family, a good job, freedom, money – for many people life is all about *pursuing* happiness. Even though you may never find complete happiness, you can spend your life *pursuing* happiness.

\* I want to suggest to you from today’s passage that for the person who follows God, life is about the pursuit of **obedience**. **The pursuit of obedience to God**. And I want to further suggest that when we pursue obedience to God, only then will we find **true** and **eternal** happiness. So today we’re looking at “the pursuit of obedience”.

Today’s passage from 1 Samuel focuses on King Saul. The first King of Israel. In this chapter, God orders Saul to attack the Amalekites and “totally destroy” them. And the Word God uses here is “*herem*” which is a Hebrew word which implies a “Holy War”. Verse 3:

*\* 3 Now go, attack the Amalekites and **totally destroy** everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.' "*

In other words, wipe them out completely. Why? Well, to understand that, we need to go back a few centuries. To the time when Israel were coming out of Egypt. Exodus 17. The Amalekites attacked the Israelites from behind. Deuteronomy 25 gives us the details and God’s response. God says to Moses:

*\* “17 Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. 18 When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. 19 When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!”*

Because of what the Amalekites had done to God’s people – because they had crept up behind the Israelites when they were tired and worn out, and killed those who were lagging behind, men, women, children and infants – because of this evil act, God promised to wipe them out completely. Everything was to be destroyed. Nothing was to be left behind.

So when Saul gets this message from Samuel, he prepares his troops. Verses 7-9:

*\* 7 Then Saul attacked the Amalekites ... 8 He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. 9 But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.*

They destroyed the Amalekites completely. Wiped out the whole nation ... almost ... just about. Except for King Agag, and a whole heap of nice animals to eat. And God says: (verse 10):

*\* "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."*

God is grieved because Saul had disobeyed him. And Samuel prays for Saul all night. The next morning, Samuel goes looking for Saul, and finds him at Carmel. And the sight we are given here is not what we expect. Saul has made a monument in his **own honour** and then gone down to Gilgal to have a celebration party. So when Samuel reaches him finally, Saul runs up to him, in the middle of all the celebrations, as all the troops are feasting on the lambs and calves they weren't supposed to have... Saul comes up to Samuel and says, like an excited child (verse 13):

*"The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."*

And Samuel replies:

*14 "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"*

The instructions from God were clear. **Totally destroy the Amalekites!** Every man, woman and child, the cattle, the sheep, the camels and the donkeys. I can hear the sheep! I hear the cattle! How can you stand here and tell me you've carried out the Lord's instructions!

And Saul says:

*"The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites – the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord."*

He says it like it's a good thing – an honourable thing! They've disobeyed God so they can sacrifice to him! And Samuel repeats to him how he has simply been disobedient by ignoring God's instructions to wipe out everything. And Saul tries again (verse 20):

'But I DID. We destroyed them! I just brought back Agag the King and some sheep and cattle to sacrifice to God.'

It's as though Saul just doesn't get the problem here. He's making excuses for his disobedience. And so Samuel replies (verse 22):

*\* "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."*

**God delights MORE in obedience than he does in sacrifice.** You can sacrifice 10,000 lambs and 20,000 calves to God, but he's going to be happier if you're simply obedient to him! You can sacrifice 99% of your income, and 6 days of every week to him, you can give up all your luxuries, and take communion 15 times a week. You can spend three hours in prayer every day and read through your Bible 12 times a year... But God will be more pleased with obedience.

**God delights MORE in obedience than he does in sacrifice.**

To hear God's word and do what it says, to listen to God's instructions and to act on them in your life – that is what God desires from us above all. But what Saul had chosen, was to listen to **people** over **God**. Saul finally says in verse 24:

*"I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them."*

Saul was more afraid of the people than he was of God. And that is absolutely **outrageous!** Imagine hearing God say one thing, and people say another thing, and deciding to listen to the people, because you fear them more! That's an outrageous way to live! Samuel spells out the problem in verse 23:

*\* 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."*

The original Hebrew is much more direct with this statement. It says:

\* Rebellion **is** the sin of divination. Arrogance **is** evil and idolatry.

Rebelling against God **is** divination! What's divination? And why is it so bad? Divination is when you turn to someone or something other than God for wisdom and direction. When you say "I'll get my wisdom from a deck of cards, or from the stars in the sky, or from someone on the phone who

charges me \$5 a minute, or a magic ball” or even saying “I’ll listen to my OWN wisdom, rather than consult God.” What an insult to God’s sovereignty! For Saul to listen to his own soldiers, and his own reasoning rather than obey the Lord God was divination. Rebellion. A rejection of God and his wisdom.

And then there’s the arrogance, which is evil and idolatry. Rather than bow before the Lord God, Saul builds a monument in his *own honour* for the victory over the Amalekites. What a great act of idolatry and evil when we bow before ourselves or others rather than recognise **God’s** sovereignty. When we bow to their will. When we worship their opinion. When we praise their wisdom over God’s. It’s ridiculous, outrageous, and offensive to God’s name! It’s a rejection of his will and his sovereignty.

But that’s where disobedience leads us. The rejection of God. It’s about bowing down to and fearing the *world* more than we fear **God**. Saul was more afraid of the consequences of not listening to his soldiers, than he was of the consequences of not following God. It’s madness! To fear people more than God himself!

Obedience to God **often** puts us up *against* what the world says. Following God’s way is often *opposed* to the direction of the world. But when we make the choice to FEAR the world and it’s consequences more than we fear God, that’s madness!

So what did Samuel do? He feared God. He had King Agag brought out straight away. And he took a sword and put him to death. He carried out God’s instructions right then on the spot and put an end to the Amalekites. Samuel feared God. He obeyed God. Because he knew the consequences of disobedience to God were FAR greater than the consequences of disagreeing with people.

\* **God calls for obedience above sacrifice.** And he will not *tolerate* disobedience. He doesn’t tolerate it from the Amalekites, and he won’t tolerate it from his own people. And it’s a *good* thing that God doesn’t tolerate disobedience. Why?

\* Because it means that God is just. God deals seriously with all sin, including yours and mine, because he is just. Sin will not go unpunished! What glory would there be for God in heaven if sinful disobedience continues to be tolerated in his presence for all eternity? What sort of a God says “sin is a problem” but refuses to do anything about it? Like a policeman who says “Don’t speed” but never books you when you do.

And what would it say about my sin? If God tolerates disobedience then God doesn’t care if I stay in my sin forever! I don’t *want* to be left in my sin. Do you? I don’t know about you, but I’m waiting for that day when God gives me a clean heart to worship him in eternity! When God deals with my sin and removes it completely! If God doesn’t care about disobedience, if he doesn’t care about my sin, Jesus’ death is pointless and God is a liar. If God can tolerate sin, then he sent Jesus to die for nothing and He doesn’t care about justice.

Obedience to God will bring us true happiness in eternity. Not happiness the way the world understands. Not prosperity in the world’s terms. But on God’s terms. Joy in suffering. Peace in persecution. Happiness even in the face of death. Fulfilment and peace not in the comforts of this world, but in the knowledge of his character.

God calls us to obey him because obedience reflects his glory. The pursuit of obedience is the desire to reflect God’s glory in our lives. The desire to honour God. The desire to pursue his will. While the world pursues happiness, we pursue obedience, because obedience will bring God glory and will bring us closer to His glory. Amen.