

# NOTES FROM TONY BENNETT'S SERMON 7<sup>th</sup> May pm

## New Series "Kingship"

### Pt 1 Saul: the disobedient King"

**Text: 1 Samuel 15 verses 1-31** Scripture references from the ESV

**1 Samuel 15:1-31** 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction<sup>[a]</sup> all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah. <sup>5</sup> And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. <sup>6</sup> Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. <sup>7</sup> And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. <sup>8</sup> And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. <sup>9</sup> But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves<sup>[b]</sup> and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

<sup>10</sup> The word of the LORD came to Samuel: <sup>11</sup> "I regret<sup>[c]</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." <sup>14</sup> And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?"

<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak."

<sup>17</sup> And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. <sup>18</sup> And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' <sup>19</sup> Why then did you not obey the voice of

the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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." <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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." <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD." <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. <sup>28</sup> And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbour of yours, who is better than you. <sup>29</sup> And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret." <sup>30</sup> Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honour me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God." <sup>31</sup> So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD.

As we come to the first in this series on Kingship, it is important to have some context. After the death of Joshua, God established a line of Judges to be his representatives to his people. There were 15, over a period of 3-400 years. The last one was Samuel. It was when he appointed two of his wayward sons to succeed him that the people came to Samuel and said: 'Now appoint us a king like all the nations.' (1 Samuel 8:5).

Human kingship was not God's original intention for his people. God was already their King, and it was his people's faithlessness and worldliness - their wish to be like everyone else - that led to their making this request for a human

king. Through Samuel, God responded to their request:

1. God made it clear that the people were rejecting him, rather than Samuel.
2. God agreed to the people's sinful request. How dangerous it is for us when God grants our sinful requests, not as a sign of blessing, but of chastisement.
3. God warned them what kind of king they would end up with – a warning that was truly prophetic.

Saul was appointed as king, and began well, but soon there were problems. When Saul went out to fight the Philistines, he became impatient with Samuel's delayed arrival and offered burnt offerings himself, thus intruding into the sacred priestly office. Because of this, God told him that although he, Saul, would continue as king, his family would not succeed him. (Read this in **1 Samuel 13: 5-15** in your Bible). God gave Saul a second opportunity to prove his obedience, beginning with the words: "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; **now therefore listen to the words of the LORD.** (15:1) Literally, what Samuel said to Saul was: 'Listen to the **voice** of the words of the Lord'. Which voice Saul listened to and obeyed is the key theme of this chapter. There are three points to help us hear the truths in these verses.

1. **Divine vengeance (vv1-3):** Through Samuel, God instructs Saul to go and destroy the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they opposed them as they came out of Egypt (v2). 300 years earlier, God had said to his people: **Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.**(Deuteronomy 25:19). The time had come for God to make good on that promise. To us it sounds appalling, but how should we view it?
  - This is not a holy war, nor is it people going out to fight in the name of God.
  - It is God going out to fight on behalf of his people and it is a war of God's justice, not of conquest.

That is why God was so insistent that Saul and Israelites should not enrich themselves as a result. We can learn that:

a) **God always keeps his promises.** That is a terrifying truth if you are Agag or Saul, but a wonderfully comforting truth if you are truly a Christian believer. You can read any promise in the Bible and then follow it

with: **Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?** (Numbers 23:19).

b) **God still notes attacks on his people and slates those who perpetuate them for future judgement.** That is a solace for his suffering people and a reminder that God has said **'Vengeance is mine, I will repay'** (Ro 12:19)

c) **The only battle we are called to fight is spiritual not military.** Our holy warfare is against sin and our weapons are spiritual, principally the Word of God and prayer. Killing sin in our lives is as great a battle as that of the Israelites against Amalek.

**2. Partial obedience (vv 4-23)** There is no opportunity to misunderstand the command that God give to

Saul in **v3** (). Saul began well and showed obedience (**vv4-7**) but this quickly degenerated into partial obedience (**v9**). Partial obedience is really no obedience at all. We read of three responses to this.

a) **God's response to Saul's partial obedience (vv10-11):** God **'regrets'** making Saul King. God's regret is not a sign of lack of foresight or that he is fickle. Rather, it was God's grief over Saul's sin of disobedience. God is grieved at our sin and we should never forget how utterly revolting and grievous our sin is to God.

b) **Samuel's response to Saul's partial obedience (v11b)** Samuel is broken-hearted by Saul's sin. Do you grieve over sin in the lives of those dear to you? We should all do this.

c) **Saul's own response to his partial obedience (v12).** Saul set up a monument to himself and captured and kept alive a royal prisoner to return home with, a thing much admired in Eastern society. Saul had a low view of sin, a low view of God and a very high view of himself. That is very like us! God is grieved by our sin. There is more to come (**v13**). Saul's words seem preposterous in view

of what he had actually done, until we consider how often we pat ourselves on the back for our own partial obedience!

- Ask yourself which words come more easily to your lips: 'I have performed the commandment of the Lord' or 'God be merciful to me a sinner'?

Samuel challenged Saul (v14). The literal meaning of this verse is 'What is the **voice** of the flock and the **voice** of the herd which I hear?' What Saul had been listening to was not the voice of the Lord, not the voice of obedience but the voice of disobedience.

Saul then did two things that we often do to excuse our partial obedience.

- **He shifted the blame (v15)** Essentially, he said 'it wasn't me; it was them'. This is a response deeply ingrained in human nature, and we can see it as far back as Genesis 3, when Adam blames Eve and then Eve blames the serpent. We too attempt to pass the blame on to anyone but ourselves as we try to excuse our partial obedience.
- **He tried to argue that wrong was right (vv15,20,21)**. In getting some of it right, Saul tried to say that he had obeyed (listened to) the voice of the Lord, and that the livestock had been kept alive to be used as a sacrifice to Samuel's God. Suddenly God was no longer Saul's God, but your (Samuel's) God.

**What is the Holy Spirit saying to us from this passage when we try to shift the blame or argue that wrong is right?**

These are signs of partial obedience and they fall in front of God's words to Saul and to us: **"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. (v22)**

- God is **not** saying that he does not like our singing, our prayers and our tithing.
- God is saying: You sing and pray well, but when are you going to obey what I have been telling you about that sin in your life? When are you going to deal with your besetting sin?

**Is there something in your life that God is putting his finger on right now?**

**Is he asking you when you are going to listen and be obedient to his voice?**

**Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams**

- 3. Superficial repentance (vv24-31)** Three characteristics of Saul's repentance show that it was superficial.
- a. It had to be wrung out of him by Samuel.** By this point, Samuel had spoken to Saul three times on the matter of his sin. We should pray earnestly to God for a tender conscience that is quick to feel the awfulness of our sin.
  - b. Saul seems more concerned about the consequences of his sin than about the sin itself.** It was only when the throne was going to be taken from him that Saul appeared contrite. Neither Samuel nor God give any indication that Saul's apparent repentance is acceptable.
  - c. He was more concerned about what the people thought of him than what God thought of him.** That was part of his sin – he listened to the voice of the people rather than the voice of the words of the Lord. He begged Samuel to return with him (v25), because it would not look good if he returned without Samuel. Saul was more concerned with his own reputation than with God's reputation. (v30) The man who was building a monument in his own honour (v12) still wanted to be honoured before 'his' people. Saul had not really changed.

**True repentance necessitates a change of heart.**

**What can we take from this?**

- Beware of becoming a King Saul and hardening your heart against the voice of the Lord. Saul had learnt that Israel's God is the true God, but he never surrendered himself to the Lord. There was no living relationship between Saul and God.
- It would be easy to be discouraged by this narrative of a king who fails. The same will be true of David in the next part of this series. We need a better King – King David's greater Son.

**Our standing before God and our cleansing from sin depends on the One who humbled himself by becoming *obedient* to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8),**

the One who could truly say to his Father 'I glorified you on earth. I *have accomplished* the work  
that you have given me to do (John 17:4)

Let us remember with great thankfulness the full obedience of Christ,  
the King who truly came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a  
ransom for many.