

Lesson 8 - 1 Samuel 15-16

Before I get started on the lesson, if you haven't noticed, we're about to have a national election. By any account, this campaign has been one unlike any other in history. The rhetoric, name-calling, and accusations are at a minimum sophomoric – but more than likely pretty depressing – maybe it's even struck some fear in you. Please let me offer some perspective – regardless if Trump, Clinton, or none of the above becomes President, God is on His throne, He is alive, and He is in complete control. As it is with any act of free will, which is what an election is, there are consequences to our choices as individuals and as a nation. God already knows the results of the election, so whatever agendas are ultimately put in place, God already has a plan to respond to them for His glory as our Deliverer and King. Remember, perfect love casts out all fear, and God is perfect love. With Him in control, there is nothing to fear.

This truth, however, does not exempt us from doing what is one of the greatest privileges we have as United States citizens – exercising our right to vote. I completely understand and sympathize with your frustrations over the tenor of this campaign and the qualifications, or lack thereof, of the candidates for the offices they are seeking, but to not vote is surrendering your voice to the enemy's choice – believe me – he has his favorites. Regardless of the flaws of the candidates, you have an obligation to step up and vote for the individuals who most closely represent, as Frank Sontag said, God's conscience which is found in His Word. I'm not encouraging you to vote one way or the other – just get out there and vote. Please.

Ok – let's get on with the study. We pick up our story of Samuel and Saul in chapter 15 with Samuel delivering a download from the Lord to Saul beginning in verse 2. *“I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid*

them as they came up from Egypt.” The Amalekites began with a man named Amalek. We first learned of him in Genesis 36, and he was the grandson of Esau. Esau was the twin brother of Jacob, and their father was Isaac, who was the son of Abraham. A key moment in the lives of Esau and Jacob was when Esau was hungry, Jacob tempted him with some stew in exchange for his birthright as the older son. Esau took the bait and the stew, and this established him – and his descendants – as representatives of the flesh in the Bible.

Later on in Exodus we read about how the Amalekites would attack the back of the pack of the Nation of Israel while they were journeying through the wilderness. They would pick off the weak – that’s what the enemy does – he picks on our weaknesses and tempts us in those places to destroy us. We must take ownership for our failures to resist temptation – our sins. However, God is paying attention to what is happening to us. Listen to Moses exhorted the Nation of Israel regarding the Amalekites in Deuteronomy chapter 25, *“Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. 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 name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!”* (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

Well, we saw in verse 2 God did not forget, and we learn in verse 3 His determination to fulfill His vengeance against those who tortured His children. *“Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”* This kind of total destruction of a people may be unsettling to some of you – maybe even cruel. We must remember that God has the ability to do something we cannot do – see the future. Clearly, the judgment He was seeking

to exact was not just for the sins they committed against the Nation of Israel in the past, but He could foresee the future carnage these people were going to cause. Therefore, He was actually being merciful - at least to the young before they reached the age of accountability. We'll see in a few minutes how right God was in His commandment to wipe them *all* out.

We shouldn't lose sight of the patience of God at this point. Saul has already failed many times, but God is giving him one more chance to get his act together as king. We then see what will be a final glimpse of what Saul could have been where he shows some mercy to the Kenites who were housed next to the Amalekites. He mentions they showed kindness to the Nation of Israel, and he may be connecting the fact that Jethro— uh, no not *that* Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was a Kenite. In any event the Kenites wisely get out of the way, and Saul leads the attack on the Amalekites.

Upon conclusion of the attacks, Saul kept Agag alive – the king of the Amalekites - and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs— everything that was good. The immediacy of the timing of verse 11 should provide us some insight as to the attention God has on His people and their obedience to His specific instructions. He tells Samuel, *“I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.”* God is watching us all the time, my friends. What is gloriously different for those of us who are followers of Jesus, God is looking at us not in impatient anger but in love and encouragement. We know this because by our faith in Christ's sacrificial act on the Cross, we are permanently covered, spiritually, by the holy and righteous blood of the Lamb of God – Jesus. He no longer looks at us in judgment – Jesus took our judgment.

Agag literally means “I will overcome”, so with the Amalekites being a symbol of the flesh, his name is interesting as it is a statement that the flesh will

overcome. That's the attitude of the flesh, but, thankfully, it's a lie. He Who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. That being said, sin that is not dealt with – utterly destroyed – it will eventually catch up and hurt you. Notably, the sparing of Agag led to an opportunity for him to continue his bloodline. We can say this because, interestingly, it would be an Amalekite that will ultimately run a sword through the wounded Saul and kill him.

Scripture tells us the wages of sin is death. Make no mistake about it – sin that is not completely dealt with will ALWAYS catch up to you. To give you an idea of the lasting impact of sin, a couple of hundred years later in the story of Esther, we learn of an evil man named Haman who was determined to destroy the Jews. In Esther 3:1, we learn Haman was a descendant of guess who? – Agag. Two hundred years later, and there are still ramifications for sin.

Samuel is extremely upset at Saul's disobedience. He no-doubt was heartbroken over his protégé's failure. He goes to meet Saul coming back from battle, but Saul had gone to Gilgal to make a memorial to himself. Let me ask you what characteristic of Saul do you think is driving him at this point? – **Pride**. C.S. Lewis calls pride "*the great sin*". I would go as far to say that the vast majority of sinful conduct is rooted in pride. Pride is defined in Dictionary.com as, "*a high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as displayed in bearing, conduct, etc.*"

Saul had forgotten how he became king. More importantly, he had forgotten **Who** made him king. He had taken the power that he received by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, used it, and ultimately attributed the benefits of that power to his own capabilities. The glory that was due to God for his victories he was now taking. What characteristic do you think is missing in Saul? – **Humility**. Dictionary.com defines humility as, "*the quality or condition of being humble; a modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance, rank, etc.*"

Look at the comparison of these two definitions of character. Pride is what drives the flesh; humility is what opens the door to allow the Holy Spirit to overwhelm our flesh and live and obey in the guidance of the Spirit. When Jesus told us to take up our cross daily and follow Him, what He meant was we are to begin each day in a position of *humility* – understanding that on our own we are weak. When we surrender our prideful overestimation of our abilities, the power struggle between our flesh and the Spirit is ended. We then find peace when we allow God to take control of our lives. His wisdom and strength is far greater than ours.

So Samuel finally reaches Saul, and Saul greets him, “*The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.*” ‘*Praise the Lord! – Oh and by the way I’m not going to pay that bill*’. ‘*Hallelujah! – I’m not happy, so I’m going to walk away from my family.*’ ‘*Glory to God – Now look at all I have done.*’ People, Christian talk means nothing when the Christian walk doesn’t back it up. Moreover, God is not mocked. People can attempt to paint a picture of them in a manner that makes other people think the best of them, but God sees what is the truth. Remember our memory verse?

To prove how foolish Saul has become, the holy words he is offering to Samuel are drowned out by the sounds of the Amalekite livestock he kept but should have destroyed. Saul then goes from being a king to a game show contestant. What’s the game he’s playing? The Blame Game. Here’s your first question, king:

- “*So King Saul, if you obeyed the orders given you, what’s that noise I hear in the background?*”

- “The **soldiers** brought them from the Amalekites; **they** spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD **your** God, but **we** totally destroyed the rest.”
- “That’s three points for you, King Saul, two for blaming your disobedience on the soldiers and one for taking credit for partial obedience in destroying the rest. Plus you get an extra point for denying the God who put you in power by identifying Him as **Samuel’s** God – not yours.”

Samuel clearly does not appreciate Saul’s role as a Blame Game contestant and reminds him of how he reached the position he’s in, “*Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.*” (1 Samuel 15:17) He goes on to remind him what his mission was from the Lord, calls him on the fact that he didn’t do it, and then asks him in verse 19, “*Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?*”

Saul goes from game show contestant to Disney character and lies about his complete obedience – but then he immediately contradicts his lie by saying he brought back Agag – the Amalekite king. We can see the truth in that old Scottish poem, “*Oh, what a tangled web we weave. When first we practice to deceive!*” A true test of one’s character is when he/she is caught in a lie with irrefutable truth, how will they respond? The repentant heart will fall down under the conviction of the truth and confess the lie. The prideful heart will keep building on the lies. Why? Because they can’t face the idea of the humiliation of being caught.

In verse 21, Saul returns to being the Blame Game contestant by once again blaming the soldiers (who, by the way, were under his command) and then attempts to put a spin on his disobedience by religiously rationalizing keeping the animals for sacrificing to, once again, the Lord **Samuel’s** God at Gilgal. Samuel’s

response in verse 22 is one we should all take note, *“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”*

The perceived benefit we may think we receive because of the money we put in the collection plate means absolutely nothing to God if we are not living in obedience to God’s will and ways. Now before you think I’m trying to condemn and shame you at this point, let me remind you what our commandments are as followers of Jesus. *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”* (Matthew 22:37-39)

Obedience to the Lord is to love Him and love others. That’s it. Peter beautifully summed up Jesus’s commandments and provides why they’re so important, *“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”* (1 Peter 4:8) To not love God and others is rebellion. So what does it mean to love? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”* If you want to know if you’re being obedient to God or not, read this verse every day and ask Him, *‘Am I loving You and others like this?’* If His answer is “no” it is not out of condemnation – it is out of His desire for you to surrender your understanding of love to His and allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you how to love as God loves.

Samuel hammers home the seriousness of rebellion – it is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. What is the root cause of rebellion? - Our old nemesis, pride. Samuel delivers the final message Saul will hear as king – *“Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected*

you as king.” The grace of God has its limits in the Old Testament, and Saul has, sadly, just crossed the line.

The darkening of Saul’s heart continues – yes, he confesses that he has sinned. Had he just stopped with “I have sinned”, that would have been a sign that he’s truly coming to grips with owning his responsibility of his sin – the first step to true repentance. But that’s not what he did, he rationalized his behavior by saying he gave in to his fears of the soldiers. For Saul...once a Blame Game contestant, always a Blame Game contestant. He then asks Samuel to forgive him and go with him to worship the Lord. Samuel, acknowledging the consequences of his ongoing disobedience and likely recognizing the insincerity of Saul’s desire to worship the Lord, refuses to go with him.

Samuel informs Saul, after he tore his robe, that the Lord has given the title of king to someone else – someone who is better than him. Ouch – that had to hurt. Samuel continues in verse 29 with an important character trait of God’s, “*He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.*” Other versions of the Bible use the word “repent” in place of “change his mind”. God doesn’t need to repent or change His mind because He is perfect – He doesn’t make mistakes.

Saul still isn’t getting the message – he’s scrambling to save what has already been taken from him. He again confesses his sin, but then he asks Samuel to honor him before “the elders of *my* people and before Israel”. He also, again, notes that the Lord God he is asking Samuel to join him in worship is Samuel’s God – not his. Who do you think *Saul’s* god is? – Himself. For some reason that isn’t explained, Samuel ultimately agrees to go with Saul to worship the Lord.

In verse 32, Samuel deals with the unfinished component of the commandment the Lord gave to Saul. He orders Agag king of the Amalekites to be brought to him. Agag, no doubt realizing his fate, makes a final plea by basically

saying, “*No offense for the thousands of Jews I killed, ok? Can’t you just forgive and forget?*” Samuel’s response was clearly “no” as he turned Agag into deli meat.

The second half of verse 35 says, “*And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.*” Now some of you might be thinking didn’t I just say that God doesn’t need to repent because He is perfect and doesn’t make mistakes? This verse sounds like an admission from God that He made a mistake in making Saul king. What God is regretting is that the people chose a human king over Him, and they wanted one now! God already knew this was coming, and He had a plan in place – for it to be David. But because the people refused to wait on God’s plan, they forced the situation and ended up with Saul. What’s the message here? – To wait on the Lord. If we will allow Him to do what He has in mind on ***His*** timing, we will be blessed. If we don’t, we’ll likely be stressed.

Heading into Chapter 16, the Lord slaps Samuel upside the head and tells him to quit his mourning over Saul. This may sound a little rough, but we aren’t given a time context at this point. God knows we need to grieve loss – He is merciful and compassionate. However, there comes a time when we need to pick up and get moving forward. God is a God of action, so if we get too caught up in the pain of our circumstances, He will move forward, and we run the risk of missing out on blessings.

Saul has now gotten so bad, Samuel – his former mentor, is in fear of his life for going to meet with Jesse’s family. I find the Lord’s response to Samuel’s fear of Saul fascinating. He could have rebuked Samuel and told him something like, “*You don’t trust Me to take care of you? You don’t think I can handle a meatball like Saul?*” The Lord didn’t do that, did he? He gives Samuel a way He knows will be acceptable to potential Saul supporters – to bring a sacrifice.

The next scene is pretty funny – at least to me. Samuel arrives in Bethlehem, and the elders came to him trembling and asking if he came in peace. Why do you

think they were trembling and fearful of this man of God? Chances are they got word of how Samuel turned Agag into steak tartare. News like that kind of gets around, you know? Samuel acknowledges he came in peace and invites them along with Jesse and his sons to consecrate themselves and sacrifice with him.

Samuel begins the process of seeing which of Jesse's sons is the one the Lord is looking to anoint as the new king. After seeing the oldest, Eliab, Samuel figures this is the guy. We now arrive at our memory verse "*The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*" (1 Samuel 16:7b) This verse was well covered by Adele/Dr. Hutain in her/his excellent devotion. I'm going to spend some more time on this important component of how God views us at the conclusion of this lecture, so let's move on with our story.

Samuel runs through each of the rest of Jesse's seven sons that were on site – each time the Lord saying, "Nope – not this one". They appear to run out of brothers, but after asking if there were any others, Jesse says there is one more – the youngest, and he is tending the sheep. This is our first insight to the future king of Israel and a man after God's own heart – he is a shepherd – someone who is used to watching out for his flock. Samuel summons Jesse's youngest son, and we're told David is a looker – glowing in health with a fine appearance and handsome features. Some of you might be thinking why is this an important detail given what we just heard in our memory verse? Is this a contradiction?

No – I have no doubt God chose David because of his heart for the Lord. That was first and foremost what was important for God to have in a leader – one that realized all he had was because of what God had given him. The fact that we learn David is physically appealing, in my humble opinion, is merely a bonus that God knows the shallowness of some people – they want a good-looking leader to be an example of them.

The Lord tells Samuel to rise and anoint David in the presence of his brothers. We're then told the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. At this moment, in God's eyes, David is the King of Israel. However, we're going to learn in the following chapters that it will be roughly 15 years before David takes the throne that is rightfully his at this point of the story. David's bloodline will lead us to Jesus. Jesus is the King in God's eyes, but He has not taken up His throne here on Earth – yet. Why does God allow these gap periods to take place? For David, he would come to learn important lessons of what it means to be a leader of a people – and grow in his knowledge, understanding, and trust in God.

What about Jesus – what is the Father waiting for in putting Jesus on the throne? Well, I'm not God, so I don't know the entire answer. However, I can think of two reasons. First, out of his love and desire to see people come to believe in His Son, He is allowing this season of grace. I'm so thankful he held off for the first 35 years of my life to let me become one of His children. The second reason is the same reason for us that he allowed the gap for David – to help us grow in our knowledge, understanding, and trust in God. Moreover, to give us an opportunity to exhibit His love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace to those who don't yet know Him.

In verse 14, we read, “*Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.*” Some of you might have a problem with the idea that an evil spirit would come “*from the Lord*”. Let's take a look at chapter 1 of the book of Job. Satan shows up at the throne of God, and the Lord asks him where has he come from. Satan's response is, “*From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.*” (Job 1:7b) Now let's jump over to the New Testament and see what Peter has to say about Satan in 1 Peter 5:8b, “*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*”

What is the image that is being presented regarding Satan? He is this ravenous predator, pacing back and forth, relentlessly looking for someone to attack and devour. The scene in chapter 1 of Job tells us Satan wants to hurt us, but he can't do anything unless God allows it. Here's where a *deep* understanding of God's true character is so critical. If God is good and God is love, why would He allow Satan to ever touch us?

We don't learn our lessons in the good times – we learn them in the hard times – the painful times. In the good times we can get forgetful of why, or better said, “Who is allowing” the good times to happen. Our sinful nature tells us, “*Everything is fine – you don't need to read your Bible; or, you don't need to go to church; or, you don't need to pray.*” God knows this, so He is not above allowing Satan and his nasty minions to inflict some limited suffering to reveal Himself in a more powerful way than had he tried when things are going well. We don't know we need a Deliverer until we need to be delivered from something – or someone.

So getting back to this idea that an evil spirit came *from the Lord*, it's quite possible that what happened was there was already an evil spirit who already had his eyes on tormenting Saul, but it was only when the Lord let go of His hold on the spirit, that it came forth. Folks, I understand the topic of spiritual warfare can be frightening and a little freaky. That doesn't make it, though, any less real. One final point on this topic of spiritual warfare – as a follower of Jesus Christ, you are given the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as confirmation – a down payment, if you will, on your redemption. With the Holy Spirit living in you, it is impossible to be possessed by an evil spirit. You can be harassed by one, but he can't take up residence in you. You are the residence - the home of the living God, and He is far greater than some sniveling evil spirit.

Saul's attendants notice he is being tormented, and they interestingly suggest they find someone who can play the lyre that it may make Saul feel better. One of

the servants mentions he has seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. *“He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him.”* (1 Samuel 16:18) Now that’s a resume! May I suggest you start a journal with today’s reading of the things we learn about David – keep notes of the descriptions of him and his actions. We’ll learn he’s not perfect, but he is an extraordinary man. More importantly, note his passion for the Lord.

David would come to be in Saul’s service, and he developed a deep love for Saul. We’ll read in the upcoming chapters that, despite how Saul is going to turn on him, he never loses his regard for Saul and his position. This is one of the more remarkable aspects of David. The evil spirit knew David was powerfully anointed because upon his playing of the lyre, it would depart from Saul. Some of the most powerful moments I have had with the Lord have been in concert with worship music. I am convinced God created music to be an instrument of His communicating to us. If you’re ever feeling low or far from God, find a hymn or a praise song, play it, and sing it to the Lord. He will refresh you.

As I wrap up this lecture, I would like to put my two cents in on today’s memory verse. I’ll put it up one more time *“The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”* I think it is impossible to overstate the importance of this truth of how God sees us. When we first meet someone, what do we do? We look at their appearance, we see what they wear, and we hear what they have to say. From that initial encounter we begin to form an opinion of them. Is this someone we like or don’t like and do we want to get to know this person some more? We then hear some things about them through others or, nowadays, we go on their Facebook, Instagram, or whatever form of social media they may be using to paint a picture

of themselves, and we add that information to what we've processed and we modify our opinion of them.

What is happening in this process I've just described? We're looking at the outside – the periphery – of a person, and we're evaluating and judging them based on how *we* see them. Our memory verse tells us God does **NOT** look at us that way. He could care less what color my hair is – or if I even have any, whether or not He likes my cheesy gray beard, or the clothes I wear. The only thing He cares about is what is going on in my heart. Why is my heart so important to God? Jesus said in Luke 6:45, *“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”*

I don't like being judged. Do you? Today's memory verse is both convicting and comforting at the same time. It is convicting because I recognize how quickly I have in the past, and, sadly continue to on occasion, judge people. The truth is I don't have a clue what is going on in anyone's heart except mine – and sometimes I'm even surprised what comes from my own heart! The point I'm making is who am I to judge anyone? I know I don't like being judged, so why on Earth would I want to judge someone else? More importantly, what did we learn earlier today regarding the commandments of Jesus? We're to love – that is how we exhibit God to others – by the way we love – not by the way we judge. Who wants to come to faith in a God whose people spend all their time judging those who aren't like them?

The comforting component of this verse is the heart that God now looks at in me is a *new* heart – it's the one He gave me upon my confession in Jesus. In Ezekiel, God is speaking to the Nation of Israel regarding the end times, and He says in verse 26 of chapter 36, *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”* In

the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation, God will do for the Nation of Israel what He has *already done for us* as followers of Jesus – give a new heart to His children by putting His Holy Spirit in them. Now, when God looks at our hearts, He sees it through the regenerating blood of His Son. He no longer sees the heart that was crucified with Christ. He looks at our new hearts as finished products, and He’s helping us get to that finished product by how He speaks to us through His Word, through the Holy Spirit, through prayer, and through His revelation of Himself in our circumstances.

His voice to His children’s heart is not one of condemnation – it is a Voice of love and adoration – it is a Voice of encouragement – it is a Voice of goodness. That Voice is speaking to your new heart right now – He doesn’t see the old heart and the junk that came with it. The new heart doesn’t carry the shackles of shame, unforgiveness, bitterness, and all the other damage that the old heart had. He sees the new heart in you, and He is excited to see you discover His glory as He reveals to you what He’s doing to make your heart everything He intends it to be.

What’s my point in all of this? Stop listening to the prince of this world who keeps attempting to feed those tired old lies about what you should focus on in assessing yourself or anyone else. That’s the voice of judgment, and it was silenced at the Cross of Christ. Set your mind on the heart of Christ because that is the heart that is in you. That’s what God sees. Let’s thank Him for that.