

The Cloud of Witnesses

King Saul

Lesson 1: King Saul – Forgot His Roots

Reading

1 Samuel 9:1-10:1.

Forgot His Roots

Saul's day began with lost donkeys and ended with being anointed as Israel's first king. The Bible tells us that Saul was a terrific guy. He was head and shoulders above everyone else in stature – someone you really had to look up to...

Yet he started out shy and humble. Maybe that was how God was able to choose him to lead His people, Israel. Like David after him, we are introduced to Saul within the environment of livestock. Saul's father's donkeys were lost and Saul was sent on the mission to find them. He had a servant heart and so that role was perfectly acceptable to him.

In fact, he is also shown to have a sensitive heart. Not finding the donkeys within a reasonable time, he became concerned that the family would begin to become more worried about him than the donkeys. Had his servant not spoken up and suggested consulting a prophet, Saul would undoubtedly have returned home empty-handed and borne the consequences of a fruitless search.

However, God intervened by making the servant speak up and thus introduce Saul to Samuel. God had already forewarned Samuel that Saul would be approaching him and that he was the one Samuel would anoint as the first king over Israel.

We need to remember that Samuel was not happy about anointing anyone as king. This was because it was Israel's deliberate rejection of God as their Leader and Protector that they demanded having a king *'like all the other nations around them'*.

They were rejecting their exclusive privilege of being God's chosen people and choosing to be *like everyone else* even though that would mean no longer thriving under the blessing and protection of God. Samuel was God's appointed delegated leader and representative so the people were rejecting him as well.

When Saul met Samuel, Samuel spoke out in welcome and blessing. However, he went on to suggest that Saul's family was the most favoured in Israel – undoubtedly a foretaste of the anointing to come.

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Lesson 1 continued: King Saul – Forgot His Roots

Saul replied that he didn't understand Samuel's effusiveness as *"am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of the clans of the tribe of Benjamin?"*

Even when the time came for him to be proclaimed king he was missing. God had to tell the people where he was – *hidden among the baggage!*

King Saul would say to us today...

Never forget that it is God who raises us up and not we ourselves. Any position of power or prestige is God-given – it is not something we own or deserve.

Prayer

Father, please help me remember that I am where I am today through Your grace and Your grace alone. I don't deserve Your love, mercy and grace or all the blessings You shower upon me. Please keep me ever humble before You and all the people so that You can complete the work You have for me to do. Amen.

Additional readings

Deuteronomy 9:1-6; Daniel 5:1-28; Matthew 23:1-12.

Questions

How can we avoid the trap of arrogance?

How did Jesus show us how to handle true power?

Where has God taken you? Where did you start?

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Lesson 2: King Saul – Compromised The Principles of God

Reading

1 Samuel 15:1-8.

Compromised The Principles of God

If God is such a good God, why does He allow people to suffer? If God is a merciful God, why do we read so many instances in the Old Testament where He deals with people in such violent ways? Why would you want to follow a God who is like that?

God told Saul to completely and utterly annihilate the Amalekites. That was the mission He gave Saul. Well, who were the Amalekites? The enemies of God and the enemies of Israel. They attacked the weak, powerless and unprotected people of Israel on their wanderings in the wilderness. They symbolised everything that stands against God.

We read about them in Exodus 17. After the incident of God providing water from the rock, we read Joshua had to fight off the Amalekites. It was the time Moses stood on the mountain and held his hands up to God in prayer for victory. When Moses got tired, Aaron and Hur stood beside him, and each lifted one of Moses' hands. With Moses' hands raised, Joshua started winning but when Moses' hands drooped, the enemy prevailed.

The Amalekites also represent everything that will destroy the people of God – including Christians. Paul tells us that today we don't wrestle and fight against people but against spiritual powers. So what are these powers we must 'fight' and conquer?

Bad habits, selfishness, pride, and our depraved humanity. Yes, each one of us is tempted by evil. We have thoughts, which we have to conquer. We see or hear things, which cause us unease, shame and embarrassment. We have to fight the lure of pornography and prostitution. We have to resist the desire for pride and selfish ambition. We need to conquer our tongues and self-centred anger.

We cannot do it in our own strength – that is why addictions are so difficult to overcome. We can only do so by drawing on a superior higher power – and the only Higher Power with All Authority is Jesus Christ. If we submit to Him and ask for His help, He will give us the Power of His Holy Spirit to conquer every addiction and temptation.

However, we need to remember that we can only win if we desire to win and we resist every thought to succumb to the temptation.

You don't look at pornography in order to 'master' it. You don't take drugs in order to find out how to combat them. You don't have a one-night stand so you can help others struggling with adultery. You don't buy a Lotto ticket as an aid to give up the gambling habit.

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Lesson 2 continued: King Saul – Compromised The Principles of God

No. We resist all these things at the source. And where is that source? In our minds. First, we concentrate on God and His Word. Then we resist all the temptations as soon as they come. Dwelling on a temptation is a sure recipe for failure. As the proverb goes – *Run from a bull and strike a snake*. You will never win if you try and compromise with evil and temptation.

King Saul would say to us today...

Don't 'play' with evil or the enemy. They are to be totally avoided or totally destroyed. Compromise with the devil and you will live to seriously regret it.

Prayer

Father, please help me identify my weak spots and help me resist temptations of every kind. Help me treasure Your Word and Your ways so that the things of this earth and this world – those temporary things – become less and less attractive and the things of eternity assume their proper perspective. I ask for Your sake and Your glory. Amen.

Additional readings

Exodus 17:8-16; Matthew 4:1-11; James 4:1-12.

Questions

Why was God so harsh on the Amalekites?

What are the 'Amalekites' in your life?

How are you going to destroy them?

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Lesson 3: King Saul – Misunderstood His Anointing

Reading

1 Samuel 15:9-14.

Misunderstood His Anointing

Partial obedience is disobedience. Jesus told a lovely parable in Matthew 21: 28 – 32. It was about a man with 2 sons. He asked them to go and work out in his vineyard. The first refused but later changed his mind and went. The second agreed but failed to do so. Jesus asked the people, “Which one did what his father wanted?”

Saul knew what he was supposed to do. He agreed to do it but then changed his mind. The spoils of war were too tempting. *Why must the good be destroyed with the weak? Why can't we keep some of the stuff – surely there is nothing wrong with that, is there? The men deserve something for risking their lives. Anyway, God's not looking and Samuel isn't here.*

God told Samuel the situation and he went on his way to see Saul. However, Saul had moved on from the battlefield. There was something far more important for him to be doing. He had a monument set up to himself and he had to go and make sure it was erected properly and rightly reflected his newly won glory.

When Samuel eventually caught up with Saul, Saul was ecstatic. He was so proud of his victory and commenced by claiming to have executed his orders to perfection.

You may have heard the maxim – *never work with animals and children*. Well, Saul may well have coined it first, for even as Saul was extolling his own virtues, the animals started braying and causing such a cacophony of noise to enter the ears of Samuel. *If you have done what God asked, how come I can hear the sound of sheep and cows?*

Hey, don't blame me, Saul replied, it's my men. You know what soldiers are like. They kept the very best – but no, not for themselves, of course, but so we could have a great worship celebration to God. You know how He likes sacrifices – so we determined to give Him the best one He's ever seen or heard! How about that, eh?

Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night...., replied Samuel.

Watch promotion. Watch out for success. You may long for it. You may even live for it but watch out – it has a horrible propensity to expose what is really inside us. Saul had got so used to being king that he had forgotten how he got to be there. He forgot Who put him there and what he was there for. He equated his success with his own prowess. He mistook privilege for power. He had moved out from being under the authority of God and entered the new frail realm of human control.

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Lesson 3 continued: King Saul – Misunderstood His Anointing

Saul's authority had come straight from the Throne of God. Unfortunately, he had surrendered that through his disobedience and was to reap the consequences of that fateful decision. He ignored God's demands and demanded respect and honour from his people. That is a fragile and tenuous pleasure.

Saul had substituted the Kingdom of God for the kingdom of Saul.

King Saul would say to us today...

God anoints a person in order to extend the Kingdom of God – not for personal aggrandisement.

Prayer

Father, please keep me true to You and Your Kingdom. Help me remember that any authority I may enjoy comes directly from You and is for the sole purpose of lifting up Your Son Jesus Christ and extending His Kingdom on earth. Please preserve me from ever thinking I need a kingdom. Amen.

Additional readings

Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:13-21; James 4:13-17.

Questions

What has God anointed you to do?

Why does God invite us to be part of what He is doing on earth?

How are you extending the Kingdom of God on earth?

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Lesson 4: King Saul – Misunderstood The Meaning Of Worship

Reading

1 Samuel 15:15-35.

Misunderstood The Meaning Of Worship

It is very easy to confuse emotionalism with worship. It is also very easy to replace worship with tradition and religiosity. *Going through the motions* cuts no ice with God. As was once said – *it is amazing what can be done in the Church without the power or Presence of the Holy Spirit.*

Saul ignorantly thought he understood God. It is one of the first fruits of pride. God had given Saul an awesome victory over one of their fiercest, most vitriolic and tenacious enemies. He had undoubtedly been overwhelmed by the spoils they had 'inherited'. So Saul and his men, instead of carrying out God's command to the letter, decided on a trade-off. They would destroy all the weak and poor but keep the best for themselves – or as Saul put it – for a mega sacrifice to God.

Whether the sacrifice Saul spoke of was a knee-jerk reaction to being 'found out' by Samuel or was indeed the intended climax of the disobedience is of little consequence. Let us assume that it was indeed what Saul had in mind – the decision and action were flawed.

Saul knew God liked sacrifices – true. God had established sacrifices under the Law of Moses – true. In the Law there were many different sacrifices for different reasons, however, there was none in support of disobedience. The fact that God likes sacrifices – even demanded sacrifices – should not be confused with the fact that God also demands obedience.

The two are not set off in opposition but rather in harmony. Sacrifices flow out of obedience. The Levitical Sacrifices, as we call them, all pointed forward to the Supreme Sacrifice. That Supreme Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Who, though being God, became Man so that He might die on a Cross and thereby secure our forgiveness. Forgiveness for our selfishness, our sin, our disobedience and our rebellion against God – Our Holy and Righteous Heavenly Father.

The Supreme Sacrifice was offered as and at the zenith of supreme obedience. There, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ asked if God could save the world any other way. The answer was a shout of silence. Knowing there was no other way, Jesus went in total submitted obedience to the Cross, and thereby won for us our forgiveness, freedom and eternal life.

There in the Garden, obedience was fulfilled. Jesus had re-established worship as a way of life, rather than a ritual or tradition. He was the supreme example of Someone who worshipped God *in Spirit and in Truth.*

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Lesson 4 continued: King Saul – Misunderstood The Meaning Of Worship

We cannot worship God by just raising our hands in the air and singing our hearts out. Yes, that is a great and wonderful experience – but if it is not flowing from a life surrendered to the will and purposes of God, it is nothing more than an empty show.

God is still seeking worshippers. He is still seeking those who will worship Him in Spirit and in Truth everyday of their lives through radical unhindered obedience.

King Saul would say to us today...

Obedience is greater than sacrifice. True worship is a lifestyle found in people who follow God whole-heartedly.

Prayer

Father, please make my Christianity authentic Christianity. Make it ever flow from my open, honest and obedient relationship with You. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Additional readings

John 4:1-26; Romans 12:1-8; Psalm 96.

Questions

How can we truly worship God?

Why do we worship God in 'spirit and truth'?

What does a lifestyle of worship look like?

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Lesson 5: King Saul – Was Jealous Of His God-anointed Successor

Reading

1 Samuel 18:1-21.

Was Jealous Of His God-anointed Successor

It's tough getting old. It's tough drawing to the end of your career or ministry. It's tough trying to find your successor and we all want to put it off for as long as possible. *What's to say I haven't got another 20 years in me anyway?*

It is so much harder being asked to move over so someone else can move into your role and take over your responsibilities. And the worst case is when you are asked to do that because you have failed to meet expectations or have been found to have a flawed character.

Saul experienced the worst extreme because God had rejected him as king. The God who chose him, anointed him and appointed him now opposed him and diss-appointed him. Notice, however, that God did not remove His anointing – as David reminded us again and again.

David was anointed by Samuel to be king before he arrived on the scene to defeat Goliath. Incidentally, if Saul was head and shoulders taller than anyone else in Israel, how come he didn't see fit to fight Goliath? He was the most appropriate opponent. Yes, of course, God had rejected him and so he dared not fight his enemies.

So David enters stage left and goes on to defeat the enemy – not through using Saul's man-made power – but through the divine authority and action of a Holy God. Saul was no doubt mercifully relieved at the outcome – who in their right mind wouldn't be?

The problem arose when the women came out on the streets for the home-coming street parade and began to sing their song of deliverance –

Saul has slain his thousands and

David his tens of thousands.

Now that got up Saul's nose. Saul the great King – Israel's first – the king chosen by the people – now had his status usurped by a slip of a boy. It would have been bad enough had it been Jonathan, his son, the prince – but he had been supplanted in the minds of the people by a mere shepherd boy – a sheep-watcher.

Instead of rejoicing in the battle won; instead of rejoicing in David's victory; instead of rejoicing in

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Lesson 5 continued: King Saul – Was Jealous Of His God-anointed Successor

the released joy of the women, Saul indulged in his fear and jealousy. Just like Herod, who would eventually succeed him centuries later, he determined to kill the man *born* to be king.

At first Saul invited David near so Saul could watch him and pick his moment of attack. Then he sent out spies to report on David's every move. Then he sent soldiers to kill him. Then he took soldiers with him in an attempt to kill him, and finally he took the whole of his army out to hound David from valley to rocky crag, determined to exterminate the one who would be his successor.

How sick was that? How much better would it have been if Saul's attitude was like John the Baptist, who said of Jesus – *He must increase, I must decrease*? And you? How are you treating your successor?

King Saul would say to us today...

Rejoice with those whom God is blessing and using in even greater ways than you. Never become jealous or it will eventually destroy you.

Prayer

Father, please help me remember that You are always moving on. Help me find the person/s You have chosen as my successor and help me nurture and mature them so they will do an even greater job than me. Help me celebrate their success and rejoice in Your goodness to them. In Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

Additional readings

1 Samuel 22:6-19; John 3:22-30; Romans 12:9-21.

Questions

Why do we find it easier to 'mourn with those who mourn' rather than 'rejoice with those who rejoice'?

Who should you be rejoicing with right now?

Who are you training up to succeed you?

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Lesson 6: King Saul – Consulted A Medium

Reading

1 Samuel 28:1-20.

Consulted A Medium

If you reject God and turn away from Him, to whom do you turn? By definition, the enemy of God. When people were turning away from Jesus (John 6: 66 – 69), He asked the 12 – *You do not want to leave too, do you?* Peter replied, *Lord, to whom shall we go? You (alone) have the words of eternal life.* He recognised that truth and life have their source in one place only – Jesus. If you turn away from Jesus, you are equally, by definition, turning towards Satan – the devil, the enemy.

However, we need to be more specific here. Saul consulted a medium. He knew they were anti-God. He knew they were an affront, and abhorrent to God – yet he went ahead and consulted one. He gave, as it were, two fingers to God and went ahead with his selfish plan, regardless.

No wonder the witch was scared. She knew that Saul was God's anointed king. He had the mandate from God to destroy her. And here he was visiting her.

However, they were both in for an even bigger shock. Mediums deal, as their father Satan does, in lies and deception. They never 'contact' the real person they proclaim to reach. They just connect to Satan's replica – his phantom. The 'voice' they heard was just a sham and a counterfeit. So you can imagine the shock horror for both the medium and Saul when Samuel appeared right in front of their eyes.

Why God permitted that to happen I don't know. What I do know is that it created fear in both Saul and the medium. You cannot play with God and get away with it, and you cannot play with the occult – in any of its forms – and not get 'burnt'.

People may be drawn to horoscopes, tarot cards, palm-reading and the invitation to séances but please be assured of this – God is against them. They are in direct opposition to the Living God, and any contact with them or indulgence in their ways will reap havoc in your life. It equally applies to occultist books – whether describing occult activity in detail or just from a witchcraft perspective in fiction.

Open the doors of your mind to the enemy in any way and he or his forces will come in – they do not wait for a second invitation. Humanism, Eastern religions and New Age philosophy are equally suspect. Looking for the god within you is tantamount to demon delusion. The Bible is very direct – the heart of mankind is desperately wicked and can only be redeemed by God through Jesus Christ.

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Lesson 6 continued: King Saul – Consulted A Medium

If you have been misled and succumbed to their influence, you need to repent and ask God's forgiveness and cleansing or you will forever experience a barrier between you and God.

Only God can set you free. We will do well to learn from King Saul.

King Saul would say to us today...

Don't mess with mediums or the occult – it opens the door to all the forces of evil and because you have empowered them you will not be able to stand against them.

Prayer

Father, Jesus told us to pray – deliver us from the evil one. Please keep me free from the enemy's schemes, deceit and perversion. For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Additional readings

Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Luke 11:14-26; Acts 19:13-20.

Questions

Why are we tempted to look into the things of the enemy?

How can we get out from underneath his clutches?

Why is there such a fascination with the occult today?