

Date: 05.07.2020

Time: 11am

Service taken by: Rev Gavino Fioretti

Psalm: Psalm 119:57-60

Reading: 1 Samuel 15

Outline: Saul and the Amalekites

a) Introduction

1. Hard command

2. Partial obedience

3. Biblical principle

4. Strong contrast

5. Divine regret

Saul and the Amalekites

- **Introduction**

We see in this section the final straw in Saul's decisions that brings his kingdom to an end. Saul again acts differently from what God commands.

1) Hard command

God gives a hard command. It challenges us and our understanding of life. God tells Saul, through Samuel, that he must kill all the Amalekites; men, women and children. This affects us. Cruelty seems to here come from God Himself. It's not up to us to justify God – He is holy and we are not.

Cruel enemies: The Amalekites were cruel enemies. They didn't just come from a different place, with different gods. They were Israel's enemies. They opposed Israel all the time and were against the people of God, trying to destroy them.

God's enemies: The Amalekites were the enemies of God. The Amalekites' battle was against Israel, but it was also a spiritual battle – the devil knew that the Messiah would come from Israel and so often they were under attack. The devil fights against the kingdom of God. The Amalekites were guilty before God – they fought against God's people and against His kingdom.

We might think, "This is just the Old Testament". But in Revelation, we've been learning that there will be no mercy for those who keep resisting God's will, for people who are His enemies. Where are we? Are we God's people or are we His enemies? At the end of time Jesus will come not as Saviour,

but as Judge and King. What is your relationship with God? Is He your God, or is He your enemy? If you refuse God as your God, you'll deal with Him as your enemy and you won't win – this is said that you might know God as your Saviour, provider and the One who cares for you. God's message to sinners is "be reconciled to God". God doesn't want us to be consumed, but to be saved – will you be?

2) Partial obedience

God required all of the Amalekite people and their cattle to be killed. This was not a battle between Israel and the Amalekites – this was divine judgement. Israel wouldn't benefit from the victory.

The wisdom of man: Saul keeps the good things for the people and for offering sacrifices to God. He obeys God's law, but only in part. Behind Saul's actions, Saul shows he thought he knew better than God. He felt God was asking too much. He thought there was a different way that would benefit the people more. He puts his understanding above God's.

The fear of man: The fear of man guides Saul to do what he did. Instead of fearing and obeying God, he obeyed the people – he feared man more than God.

The honour of man: The honour of man interests Saul. His concern was not to honour or glorify or to please God; Saul wanted the honour and glory for himself. What drives Saul to do what he did is man. Saul didn't have a spiritual understanding. He wasn't spiritually-minded. He was pragmatic and practical. He obeyed God's will if it aligned with his, not otherwise. He thought it better and safer to obey man more than God.

We are like Saul and so imperfect in our obedience. We think we know better than God. Some think women should be preachers when the Bible tells us "no". We disobey God and compromise because we're afraid what man might say about us or in case we upset people or make them angry. We don't want to lose our friends or our status. We compromise. We sin. We are more concerned with man than with God. We're concerned about pleasing ourselves.

3) Biblical principle

The priority of obedience: vs 22. God required obedience. Sometimes we think it doesn't matter how we behave as long as we read our Bibles, pray and go to church. We're not careful in our obedience. But what God requires is obedience. Obedience to God's will is better than sacrifice. If our form of worship isn't accompanied with obedience, what good does it do? We're bound to obey God as His people who belong to Him.

The consequences of disobedience: When we disobey God, there are consequences. Saul loses the kingdom, the guidance of God and the presence of God. Saul loses everything. Our sins will find us out; it might not be in a public way, but there will be consequences – broken relationships, guilt, shame, church discipline, divine discipline. There are consequences for sin – this is true for believers and unbelievers. We can't take God lightly, though the devil wants us to. Sin brings misery in our lives and the lives of others.

4) Strong contrast

Obedience: Saul disobeys. Samuel obeys. What God asks Samuel to do, he does. He's a faithful servant of God.

Leadership: Saul does what the people say because he's afraid of them. Samuel is a leader, who the people respect and admire – Samuel didn't fear them. He didn't look for their consensus or approval. The approval of God was Samuel's motive. Saul was selfish, Samuel was selfless. Saul sought honour for himself whilst Samuel sought nothing in return for serving and leading the people. Samuel sacrificially led the people.

Passion: Saul's heart was not according to God's heart. Samuel's heart was according to God's heart; his passions aligned with God's. God was angry and so was Samuel with Saul's sin. Saul's priorities, concerns and interests were different. Samuel's passion, interest and desire were for God – his actions and priorities followed. When we're sanctified by the Spirit of God, we're made more like Christ – our desires and priorities are changed according to God's character – our character is changed. Samuel is becoming more and more like God in his reactions, desires and feelings. We need that work of God in us, making us more like Him. We need God, in His grace, to change us and to make us according to His own heart.

5) Divine regret

An apparent contrast: vs 11 and vs 35/ vs 29. Here we see what seems like a contradiction – God has no regrets, but regrets making Saul king. In situations, like this one, where there seems to be a contradiction, we give priority to those texts that are teaching, or proclaiming something, rather than describing something. A text that proclaims is foundational, above narrative text.

A possible explanation: God describes Himself as being without regret – this is a theological statement. God does not change. God is using language we can understand – there's divine condescension in scripture. Jesus is described as the Son of God, though Jesus has no mother and has always existed – God uses language we can understand. When God says He regrets choosing Saul as king, He uses language we can understand. Before the foundation of the world, God knew Saul would fail and that David would follow. We read here that God was displeased and so the kingdom would be given to a better king. God was not wrong in calling Saul – He knew what He was doing. God's plan had not failed. David was not God's Plan B. God is never wrong. God was not wrong in calling Saul – the people were wrong. The change is not in God – the change is in man. A change in the life and experience of people leads to God's response. God is beyond our understanding. God doesn't change, but we do. We faint and fail. God fails us never.