

## LIFE LESSONS – 1 SAMUEL: The Rise and Fall of Saul 1 Samuel 11-15

### INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you here this morning. If you are a guest with us, thanks for joining us on this Lord's Day. We would love the opportunity to get to know you more. You can help us connect with you by texting the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mount Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword, a link will be sent back to you and that will take you to a short form. When you submit that form, it notifies me, and I look forward to following up with you.

Or feel free to swing by our information center located in the fellowship area. There we have a gift we would love to put in your hands as a way of saying thank you for being our guest today. We are thrilled you have chosen to worship with us today.

### EASTER 2023:

Before we jump into our study in 1 Samuel, I want to let you know how excited I am getting for Easter here at Trinity. Easter is just 3 weeks away! I am looking forward to being a part of what promises to be a great day. I want to tell you about a couple opportunities for you to get involved in Easter this year.

We thought we would continue to invite college students to get plugged into our church by intentionally inviting them to be a part of Easter services. We have purchased gifts that we are going to pass out on the campus of NTCC. But we also want to give awesome homemade cookies to college students as a gift from our church. If you are a good baker, would you stop by the table in the fellowship area today and register to bake a couple dozen cookies for us to pass out? That would be amazing.

Also, our staff has worked to put together a 10-day devotional guide for your family leading up to Easter. Those devotionals will be made available to you next Sunday. This is our way of wanting to come alongside you as parents and grandparents and invest in the next generation. So, look forward to that coming out next week.

We are going to have 4 services for Easter this year. Saturday, April 8 at 5pm, which will be for the entire family. Then on Sunday, April 9, we will gather at 8,

9:30 and 11am. At each of those services we will have Kids Ministry for birth through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I promise you that your kids will not want to miss out on that! But we need volunteers. You can sign up to volunteer by visiting [trinitytx.org/easter](http://trinitytx.org/easter). We will have Easter volunteer training on Sunday, April 2 at 5:30pm.

I want to encourage you to invite your friends, neighbors, and family to attend Easter with you. Research says that people are most open to an invitation to church around Christmas and Easter. We have had some invite cards made up for you to use in inviting people to a service. Grab a set on your way out today.

But, most importantly, I want to ask you to be praying for our Easter services. It is my prayer that people experience the hope and joy that comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ. Pray that as we hold high the gospel on that day, that people would come to faith and experience the abundant life that Jesus brings. Can you help us with that?! Thanks so much, Church Family. You're the best.

### SERIES OVERVIEW:

Well, we are in the middle of a teaching series we have called "Life Lessons." We are studying the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. I am grateful to Pastor Jeff for his message last week. Today we are going to cover a lot of ground. Chapters 11 through 15. Some of you just looked at your watch. I saw you! But I promise to get through it today and get on our way on time.

Today's message is entitled, "The Rise and Fall of Saul." We are going to look at the climb, the compromise, and the collapse of a leader, the first appointed king of Israel. Then we will look at a couple life lessons we learn.

### **OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Christmas Decorations**

I want to begin this morning by conducting a little survey. I know Christmas has long since passed, but I've noticed a few different approaches to Christmas decorations. For example, how many of you, by a show of hands, this is all skate, how many of you take down your Christmas decorations shortly after Christmas. Like by January 1, you want it all down and packed away. How many of those do we have with us today? Okay.

The next group of people is like, "Nah, it's going to take a little bit. As long as it is down by the end of January, I'm good." How many of you are in that camp?

Now, the third group of people. You know who you are. This group gets to a point to where it's the end of February and they're thinking, "You know, Christmas will be here before you know it. I'm just going to keep it up year-round." How many of you are those kinds of people?

Now we know who's who around here. How many of you are artificial tree people? Any live tree people? What happens to a real tree about two weeks into it being displayed? It starts to deteriorate. Needles fall off and it no longer produces cones.<sup>ii</sup> It is cut off from the source that gives the tree life.

What we are going to discover in our study this morning is that describes king Saul. While things start off great and things seem to be rocking along, we quickly learn that Saul was not planted in The Lord and that is what will lead to his demise.

### **MESSAGE:**

So, with that, let's take a look at the rise and fall of king Saul. First, ...

#### **1) The Climb**

We see in chapters 11, 12 and the first part of 13, the climb, or the rise of king Saul. Last week we learned that the people accepted Saul as king because of what appeared to be the perfect fit. He was handsome, tall, strong, and capable. And so Samuel installs Saul as king.

In chapter 11, Saul has a great victory. He fights the Ammonites and defeats them. The king of the Ammonites shamed the Israelites. Saul, now king, wanted to make a peace treaty with them. The king of the Ammonites wasn't having that so they went to war. Saul demonstrated great military might as he led the Israelite army to victory.<sup>iii</sup>

Look at what happens in verses 12 and 13 of 1 Samuel 11. This is following the great victory. ***12Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' [in other words, who is it that doubted Saul's ability to be our king?] Bring the men, that we may put them to death."*** ***13But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel."***

Where the people want to give credit and accolades to Saul, Saul, instead, leads the people to praise The Lord. This is a good start to Saul's success.

From this point, the kingdom of Israel is renewed and things are really looking up. That's chapter 11.

Then is chapter 12 is Samuel's farewell speech. He's grown old, the people have demanded a king, things are looking good, now's the time to exit. In his speech, Samuel reminds the people of how God had worked in their midst. And he challenges the people to never forget that again. I want to look at a couple of Samuel's charges.

Verses 14 and 15. ***14If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well. 15But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.*** So, stay strong. Be obedient.

And then skip down to verse 24. ***24Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. Verse 25, "25But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."*** So, there's the warning from Samuel to remain faithful. That's chapter 12.

Chapter 13 opens with another military victory over the Philistines. Saul and his son Jonathan, and really just Jonathan, won the victory for the Israelites. So, we see the climb, the rise, the early success of Saul's kingship. But it is at this point that we see our second point come into view.

#### **2) The Compromise**

Throughout the course of chapters 13, 14 and 15, king Saul makes a series of compromises. When we began this teaching series back in January, I mentioned that 1 Samuel reveals to us how little compromises lead to major departures. And this is exactly what happens to Saul. In fact, I see 5 areas of compromise Saul made. Let's examine those.

##### **A) He chooses fear-based leadership over servant leadership.**

Look at verses 3 and 4 of 1 Samuel 13. ***3Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear."*** ***4And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were***

*called out to join Saul at Gilgal. Skip down to verse 7. <sup>7</sup>and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.*

At first glance this looks like Saul is celebrating Jonathan's victory. But what is really happening here is that he is leveraging it to make himself look like the hero. He wants everyone to know it so he blows the trumpet to get their attention. That all resulted in exactly what Saul wanted, the people to fear him because of his great ability.

This is the exact opposite of godly leadership presented to us in the Scriptures. The biblical model of leadership is that of servant leadership. Jesus was the epitome of servant leadership. Mark 10:45 says, *"<sup>45</sup>For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* But Saul wanted to be served, and more than that, he wanted to be feared and revered.

That's compromise number 1. Secondly, ...

### **B) He chooses to not wait on God.**

Instead of being obedient in following God's Word, Saul rushes out ahead of God.

In chapter 13, Samuel had apparently told Saul to wait to go into battle for seven days until he was able to get to Gilgal and offer a sacrifice. Samuel did not arrive on schedule and so Saul takes matters into his own hands and runs ahead of God.

Verses 8 and 9 of 1 Samuel 13. *<sup>8</sup>He [being Saul] waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. <sup>9</sup>So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering.*

Now, this may not seem like a big deal, but it reveals something about Saul. It demonstrates that Saul cares more about his agenda than following God's Word.<sup>iv</sup>

Have you ever run out ahead of The Lord in a situation? Can I tell you, from experience, it never goes well when we do that. God's timing is perfect. God is

faithful to His Word. It is always best to wait on The Lord and his timing in all matters.

But Saul compromised and chooses not to wait on God. Thirdly, ...

### **C) He chooses to build his own kingdom, not God's.**

Not only does Saul want to be feared, he wants things according to his agenda. What this tells us is that Saul is not interested in God's Kingdom. He is interested in building his own kingdom.

Look at verse 52 of 1 Samuel 14. *<sup>52</sup>There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.*

Now, we can look at this and say, what's wrong with this? Saul was a good recruiter and builder of teams. But what this is telling us about Saul is his motivation, his true character. He was enlisting people into his army rather than God's army. Saul is trying to build his name and preventing the people from exalting God's name.<sup>v</sup>

This is a minor compromise that reveals the true heart of this deceived man. And if we are not careful, myself included, we can make the same compromise.

So, we have the compromise of choose fear-based leadership, not waiting on God's timing, and desiring to build his own kingdom. Fourthly, ...

### **D) Saul chooses partial obedience.**

In chapter 15, God orders the Israelites to attack the Amalekites. Furthermore, God specifically ordered Saul to wipe them out, to completely eradicate them, even their animals, everything. Now, for us, this can seem like a strange command. Why would God make such a command?<sup>vi</sup>

Let me quickly mention a couple of things that will put this in perspective for us. First, God's original design in creating the world was harmony between God and people. But sin changed everything. Sin destroyed God's perfect design and that now meant that relationships were forever strained.

Secondly, when it came to the Amalekites, they were a ruthless people. And they tormented the Israelites. The Amalekites would often raid the Israelites

while they were wandering in the wilderness and steal from them. And in chapter 15, here, God had enough of the Amalekites treatment of His people and was enacting justice upon them in this order.

So, Saul goes to battle, and he defeated the Amalekites. But he didn't eradicate everything like God told him to. He was only partially obedient to God. Well, as we are going to see, partial obedience to God is disobedience.

The fifth compromise Saul made was that...

### E) He chooses arrogance over humility.

Verse 12 demonstrates Saul's arrogance. Again, it was The Lord that ordered the attack on the Amalekites and it was The Lord that gave them victory. But Saul was arrogant. Verse 12. ***12And 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."***

Saul had taken what God had given him and made it all about himself. The definition of arrogant according to Oxford Dictionary is, **"having or revealing an exaggerated sense of one's own importance or abilities."**<sup>vi</sup> This is exactly the approach Saul had.

So, we've seen the climb of Saul, his rise in power, and the compromises of Saul. Now, we see...

### 3) The Collapse.

Chapter 15 records Samuel's pronouncement of the collapse of Saul's kingdom. He calls Saul out and delivers a harsh word. Beginning in verse 17 of 1 Samuel 15. ***17And 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. 18And 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.' 19Why 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?" 20And 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. 21But 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." [So now Saul is blaming the people and not taking responsibility.]***

***22And 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. 23For 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."***

What a sad story. And when this news is delivered to Saul, he goes into the fake remorse filled with religious speak. But God knows his heart. And the chapter concludes with God saying that he regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Now, God doesn't regret they way we do. He is sovereign. He has all knowledge of all things. So, what God means by this is He understands the pain of Saul as king. He is feeling the regret of the people in their demand for a king. The climb, the compromise and the collapse.

### LIFE LESSONS:

So much to learn here. I want to mention two things, quickly.

#### 1) **Pride is a Precursor to a Fall.**

It is amazing, although not shocking, to see where Saul began and where he ended up. In chapter 11, Saul is presented as a humble man. Verse 13 he says, ***"today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel."*** Quick to give praise to where it was due, to The Lord.

But by the time we come to chapter 15, Saul has taken credit for Jonathan's victory, erected a statue of himself, and taken matters into his own hands. He is full of pride.

And the pride and arrogance was the cause of his fall. Chapter 15, verse 23, ***"23For 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."*** The book of Proverbs warns us of this. Proverbs 16:18, ***"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."*** Saul's true colors came through. His motive was exposed. His haughty spirit wanted to build a kingdom for himself instead of building God's Kingdom.

We can often fall into the same trap, can't we? In fact, the very first temptation and the very first sin in the world was pride and arrogance. Remember in the

Garden of Eden when the serpent tempted Eve? The temptation was that God was withholding something from them, knowledge. So, in their desire to become like God, Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Ever since we've deal with the consequence of that sin. Pride goes before destruction.

What about us today? The same principle applies. Are we more interested in building our kingdoms or God's kingdom. Do we have a haughty spirit within us? Does our pride go unchecked? If so, a fall is nearby.

And I have to be honest here. This is hard for me. I bet it is for you, too. We want to be successful. We desire to do great things. And I think that is a pure motivation. But there is a fine line between doing so for God's glory and doing so for our glory.

Again, I think Jesus has to be our guide here. What does He say? The first, the prideful, will become last. But the last, the humble, will become first. God's economy may seem backward to us, but it is actually correct.

Business owner, do you love your employees or do you only love gain at the expense of your employees? Church leader, are you in love with leadership, or are you motivated by love for people and them having a relationship with Jesus? Supervisor, are you more in love with your authority, or in the success of the team despite recognition for yourself? I think these are real life situations where we must concern ourselves and learn from Saul's mistakes.

Pride is a precursor to a fall. Secondly, ...

## 2) Partial Obedience is Disobedience.

In the opening of chapter 15, Saul is given a specific task, to enact God's justice upon the Amalekites. And Saul is given specific instructions on how to do that. So, he gathers the Israelite army and goes to battle. But that is where his obedience stopped.

Verse 9 of 1 Samuel 15. ***9But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.*** Saul decided that he knew better than God and that God must have missed something here.

This is a moment that is a defining one in Saul's life. Instead of recognizing his failure, he justified it. And in addition to justifying, he flat out lied. Saul said, "Oh, we are using the best of their animals to sacrifice to The Lord. Isn't that awesome of me?!"

Beloved, partial obedience is in effect disobedience. And to justify our actions is to assume God was wrong and that we are right. So, not only is partial obedience disobedience, but it is also defiance. Whatever it is that God is calling you to, we must pursue it wholeheartedly.

What Saul should have done is repent. To admit his sin, to own it. It causes his downfall and eventually king David will take his place. You know, both of these men had massive failures. But the difference between the two was repentance. When Saul was confronted, he attempted a cover up. When David was confronted, he repented.

Psalms 51, verses 16 and 17. ***16For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*** Do you see the difference?

## CONCLUSION:

I'm going to invite the band to come back up and lead us in a time of response. As they come, I want to ask you to consider your response to this message.

Saul's mistake was not taking God up on the grace He had bestowed upon Saul. God made him king when he was a nobody. God took Saul from the shadows and made them a victorious warrior. And Saul should have recognized God's gift to him and rested in that. It would have saved him from a great fall.

The same is true for us. At the cross, Jesus served as God's gift to us. He paid the price for our sin and shame. He was despised and rejected on our behalf. And by trusting Jesus by faith, we are moved from sin and shame to life and victory. Have you trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If not, today can be the day of salvation for you.

Perhaps others need to recognize sin in our lives and repent and turn back to God. God is speaking, you respond. [PRAY]

## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation for this message: Robert D. Bergen, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel, Vol. 7*, B&H Publishing: Nashville, 1996; Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel*, Holman: Nashville, 2016; Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2003; Ray Fowler, Various works, published by Ray Fowler Ministries, accessed online: <https://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/1-samuel>; David Guzik, "Enduring Word Commentary," various articles, accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-samuel-1>; Troy Rackliffe, "Life Lessons" messages 8-10, preached at Glade Community Church, Daniels, WV, given to me by Troy; Skip Heitzig, *Expound: 1 Samuel*, various messages taught at Calvary Church, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/compilation/14>.

<sup>ii</sup> Illustration inspired by Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear commentary.

<sup>iii</sup> Much of the summary used in this sermon was taken from the previously mentioned resource.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> For a detailed discussion on justified "divine war," see Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel*, Holman: Nashville, 2016, pages 104-108.

<sup>vii</sup> Oxford Languages, "Arrogant," published by Oxford University Press, accessed online: <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>.