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*“A Kingdom Torn Away”*

*1 SAMUEL 15:28-35*

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## AT A GLANCE

King Saul’s story serves as a sobering warning about the danger of hollow religion—rituals without obedience, repentance without contrition, and presumption cloaked in sacrifice. His failure contrasts sharply with Christ, the true and better King, whose perfect obedience and self-sacrifice bring true redemption. This message calls us to examine the motives of our hearts and place our full hope in Christ alone—not in religious performance or pragmatic faith.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE OF DAVID

Today we begin a series called, “The Life of David.” It’s truly an incredible story! This morning we’re going to start at the end, at least principally the end, of Saul’s kingdom and work backwards to see how it is that his kingdom was torn away from him to set the stage for the introduction of an obscure shepherd boy who would become Israel’s most unlikely king.

## CONTEXT AND AUTHORSHIP OF 1 & 2 SAMUEL

A couple of points by way of introduction to the books of 1 & 2 Samuel. First, Samuel is not the author, but we’re not sure who is, nor are we confident when it was written. However, what it covers takes place between 1100 BC and 970 BC. And the main character is not Samuel, Saul, or David. Rather, it is God who sovereignly closed Hannah’s womb, then heard her cry and blessed her with Samuel, who would deliver God’s people. He would set up Saul’s kingdom and then tear from him and give it to one better than him, a little shepherd boy whose own father seems to almost forget about. It is God who establishes kings and deposes them.

As we make our way through this narrative, we seek to understand what happened as this is a historical narrative capturing real events in a particular place and time. But we also seek to uncover what it reveals about God and man.

This is not first and foremost an intellectual endeavor, but a quest to know God’s heart and our own. And we must seek to discover the Christ connection on each page and in each story. In the obedience of David, Christ’s is prefigured. In Saul’s disobedience, Christ is set in contrast. Whether Old Testament or New, the saints of old could read this story and behold by faith the messiah: Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords.

## 1 SAMUEL 15:28-35

<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 neighbor 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 honor 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...<sup>34</sup> Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul.<sup>35</sup> And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

### A SOBERING TRANSITION: FROM PROMISE TO REGRET

Those final words of chapter 15 are tragic and sobering – **the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.** How in the world did we get here? How does the story go from speaking of Saul like this, “*Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people.*” 1 Samuel 9:17 and “*Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies.*” 1 Samuel 10:1 to **the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel?**

### A TALE OF TWO KINGS

As we unpack the life of David in 1 & 2 Samuel, the failed legacy of Saul echoes in the background. From here to the end of chapter 31, Saul and David will be two characters whose lives should never have come together, but they’re in a crazy awkward, and at times deadly, tangle.

So, as we move forward in 1 & 2 Samuel, we do so knowing there was a context leading up to this point that we need to at least familiarize ourselves with. Who was Saul? Who was Samuel? What was the context of Saul’s reign and Samuel’s prophetic ministry? And most importantly, why is it that God would tear the kingdom from King Saul but King David would be promised an everlasting kingdom?

Back to the initial question, how did we get here? In chapter 15 we see God’s final judgment on King Saul – the kingdom is torn from him like the fabric from Samuel’s robe left dangling in Saul’s hand. (15:27) There are two moments in Saul’s life that each received God’s rebuke through his prophet, Samuel. This being one. The other comes two chapters earlier.

### SAUL’S FIRST MAJOR FAILURE – 1 SAMUEL 13

Turn back to chapter 13, verses 8-15. There we read of Saul’s unlawful sacrifice. Saul had just been anointed king. And what do we read? Saul grew impatient waiting for Samuel to come make sacrifices. Fearing that he was losing his people’s commitment to fight the Philistines, he took matters into his own hands and “forced” himself to offer the sacrifice to seek the “Lord’s favor.” (1 Samuel 13:12)

As soon as he had made the sacrifice, Samuel showed up. Clearly, this was a test from God. Would Saul trust the Lord or would he trust his senses? Samuel had already told the people they were in for it just for asking for a king because the very request represented a fundamental shift away from the rule of God over His people. It was a reflection of their contempt towards Him. And sure enough, their first king led them right into disaster.

Listen to the prophet’s response to Saul’s excuses for making the sacrifice, “*You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.*” 1 Samuel 13:11-14

It is so ironic that Saul blamed the people for whom he was responsible, and God by virtue of His prophet Samuel. Sounds just like Adam who blamed his wife and God. Isn’t this illuminating?! Rather than being a man after God’s own heart, Saul followed in the footsteps of his father, Adam.

Saul acted “foolishly” in chapter 13 in offering the unlawful sacrifice. In chapter 15, the Lord reveals to Saul and to the reader that his real issue was not ignorance, but rebellion and presumption in his heart.

## SAUL’S SECOND REBELLION – 1 SAMUEL 15

Returning to chapter 15, *“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. 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.’” 1 Samuel 15:22-23*

What was Saul’s sin this time? Before he led his Army to defeat the Amalekites, Samuel gave specific instructions to him, *“Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” 1 Samuel 15:3*

Saul was God’s anointed, sent to execute divine judgment upon a people who opposed Israel in their Exodus. His instructions were clear: kill everything and everyone. What did Saul do? He kept their best animals and their king. Under Saul’s leadership Israel kept what they wanted and slaughtered what they didn’t.

## SURFACE-LEVEL RELIGION VS. HEART-LEVEL OBEDIENCE

The reader is pressed to consider, is this really such a bad thing? Let’s consider this the way we sometimes consider our own lives. Agag probably could have added value to Saul as a fellow king, perhaps as an advisor. Or maybe influence and political connections. Plus, he was only one man among many. And Saul did offer some of the best animals as sacrifices. Didn’t he make up for any wrong he did?

But what we read is that God judged Saul for having rebellion and presumption in his heart, which God equated to divination and idolatry.

How often do we minimize sin and justify it with ritual?

How often do we fail to understand the heart motive of sin and how grievous it really is?!

## THE FATAL FLAW: PRESUMPTION IN THE HEART

Saul was a man not unlike many churchmen today. He was a pragmatist. Whatever works, must be ok. Surely God will understand. Saul was a man who, like so many throughout history, presumed upon God while rebelling against Him in his heart.

You might think this was a harsh judgment on Saul, but there’s an important lesson for the reader:

There is an outward appearance of godliness that seeks to hide, cover, and disguise a heart of rebellion and presumption toward God. This heart treats God like a genie, its superstitious; it views divine favor as something to be conjured, manipulated, and used.

As the third king of Israel would later say, there is nothing is new under the sun. Man carries rebellion and presumption in his heart; it is our fatal defect. What we need cannot come from within. Mere ritualistic observance and superficial obedience will never pay for our treason. Enter Jesus.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

Saul sacrificed the choicest animals thinking he could curry favor with God and justify his disobedience. Jesus, our high priest & King, sacrificed Himself, the choicest of all sacrifices. Not to justify His disobedience, but to atone for ours. He didn’t blame other people, He took responsibility

for their failures. He didn't do whatever he felt like doing, He fulfilled what was prophesied, coming only to do the Father's will.

This makes Jesus the antithesis of king Saul. Jesus is also the perfection of king David. He is the true man after God's own heart. No earthly king would lead God's people perfectly, as both Saul and David revealed. We need Jesus to be King! And He is!

## PERSONAL APPLICATION AND FINAL PLEA

A few things to consider as we close today:

What does the story of Saul reveal about the nature of repentance and of sin and forgiveness? How does God's equating of Saul's rebellion and presumption to divination and idolatry peel back the carefully crafted veneer over the sin of our hearts? And what does this reveal about outward religion as a covering for inward rebellion?

In **verse 30** Saul replied to Samuel, **"I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God."**

Accused of divination and idolatry, basically witchcraft, Saul uttered only three words – **I have sinned**. Then he immediately implored Samuel to return with him to save face. How frequently the Lord must hear the same things from us and how it must grieve His heart.

How quickly we tend to give lip-service to our sin and focus our attention on reducing the consequence rather than unearthing the heart motive.

So many people don't want God, they just don't want hell more. So if praying a prayer or walking an aisle or being baptized is what is necessary to escape God's judgment, they see that as a very pragmatic thing to do.

But if God was unmoved by Saul's so-called repentance, why would He be moved by our so-called repentance when it is detached from a heart of contrition before Him? When our repentance is concerned more with the consequences or preserving our reputation than it is in rightly understanding the depth of our sin, why would we expect to receive God's forgiveness? Isn't that presumption?

Saul thought he could curry God's favor by offering a sacrifice and he thought he could justify his disobedience with a token ritual. He found out the hard way this does not move God's heart.

So let me ask you, is it possible that you, like Saul, presume upon the Lord and cover your rebellion with superficial ritual? What will it take for you to learn this doesn't work?

What Saul failed to apprehend is that relationship with God was never about cold, ritual sacrifice. It was always about trusting in Him with all our hearts, confessing our sin sincerely, and hoping in Him for redemption.

To the one whose heart pierces you right now, if you're wondering what you must do to make yourself right with God, let me tell you clearly – there is nothing you can do to make yourself right with God. Coming to that realization is the first step. You cannot do anything, but Christ did do everything to make you right.

What Saul should have recognized is what David recognized in his grievous sin with Bathsheba, *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* Psalm 51:17 What God has always required of sinful man is humble and sincere faith. Do you believe that Jesus is your redemption? Do you believe that Jesus paid your sin debt? Do you believe that without Him and His death, burial, and resurrection, you would pay it yourself?

Do you hope in Christ rather than in your own works, be they rituals or sacrifices or strict adherence to certain rules? Do you put all your hope of forgiveness in the work of Christ and none in your own? If so, you are a child of God and Jesus has made you righteous. You can rejoice like David!

Tragically, the world and the Church at large is full of Sauls, men and women who are merely superstitious and pragmatic. They believe God can be appeased and manipulated with trite phrases, empty gestures, and superficial sacrifices. They will learn the hard way. Lord, teach them before it's too late.