

Hearing the Voice of God

The Most Important Thing - Pastor Roger Ridley

Gretna Baptist Church, Gretna, NE, December 4, 2005

Have you ever looked to others as examples, good or bad, for your life? The Bible actually encourages us to do that very thing.

After making a reference to several examples from the Old Testament, the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:11 then wrote, “*All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*” Paul was teaching that the people of the Old Testament are to be view by us as examples in our relationship with God: some are positive examples, and some are negative examples.

In returning to our theme on Hearing The Voice Of God, I want to bring your attention to a negative example from the Old Testament: King Saul in 1 Samuel 15. He was given a great opportunity to hear God’s voice and to serve Him effectively, but King Saul fell short of the opportunity. Many of God’s people today still do the same thing and that’s what we want to avoid.

There are **five parts** to Saul’s example that will help us understand what the most important thing is in our response to the voice of God. Please open your Bibles to 1 Samuel 15.

I. The Expectation Of Obedience.

As always, when referring to the voice of God, we start with the expectation of obedience. Look at verses 1-3...

In verse 1 Saul is admonished to hear *the words of the voice of the Lord*. That is a very interesting equation. It teaches that whenever we read the Bible, or hear it in some fashion, that we are in fact hearing God’s voice.

Do you want to hear the voice of God? Then read the Word of God. Have you ever cried out, “*God, just tell me what I need to do!*”, but at the same time failed to open and read His Word? That is the same as saying you want to hear Him but then, refusing to hear.

Today, if we are going to hear the voice of God, then we must pay attention to the written words of God.

Be patient with me as I remind you of some very familiar passages of Scripture:

2 Timothy 2:15, “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*”

2 Timothy 3:16-17, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*”

Hebrews 4:12, “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*”

If you and I want to hear the voice of God, then we need to open the Word of God.

When Samuel approached Saul he had one word of advice, *hearken*, which can also be translated *listen and obey*. As we have been repeating over and over through this study, it is not enough to hear the Word of God, we must also heed it.

James 1:22 provides this important instruction, “*Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*”

The word that God had for Saul was clear. Look again at verse 3...

This command was based on a promise that God gave to Moses back in Exodus 17:14 to destroy all of Amalek because of their opposition to Israel during their wilderness journey. It reminds us that God keeps His promises. And, that He often uses His people to do so. He uses you and me to carry out many of the promises that He has made. How important it is then that we hearken to the voice of the words of the Lord.

II. The Appearance Of Obedience.

As Saul went into action, we notice the appearance of obedience. Look at verses 4-8...

In verse 7, Saul *smote* the Amalekites. In verse 8, he *utterly destroyed* all the people.

Appearances rate pretty high with us. Appearances however can be very deceptive both to others and to ourselves. It is easy to put on a show, to give the appearance of obedience. As you read through the Bible you find that God’s people have done so repeatedly. If you and I are honest, we’d have to admit that we too have a constant battle with the temptation to make people think that we are doing better in our walk with God than we really are.

But just as we can find examples of this in the Bible, we also find stiff warnings against it. Listen to just one, which comes from Jesus in Matthew 23:27-28, “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*”

While you and I may fool others, and even ourselves, we do not fool God in this regard.

1 Samuel 16:7 teaches, *“The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”*

When God looks at my heart, when He looks at your heart, what does He see? Does He find a heart that is honestly seeking to be right with Him?

2 Chronicles 16:9 informs us, *“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.”*

III. The Shortcoming Of Disobedience.

Beginning at verse 9, and through much of the remaining verses of the chapter, the incompleteness of Saul’s obedience is put on display. It is signaled by the little three letter word *“but”*. Look at verses 9-11...

Saul appeared to be obedient **BUT** Saul and the people *spared* Agag the king of the Amalekites, and they *spared* the best of the livestock. The word *spared* is normally thought of as a good thing. But, in this case, it is a very ugly word, because it is the opposite of what God told Saul to do.

Saul’s job was to *utterly destroy* **all**, every man, woman, child, animal, everything.

That’s a difficult task for us to comprehend. It doesn’t fit well with our *“God is love”* mentality. But we need to keep in mind that God punishes not only sin, but also sinners.

God’s command against the Amalekites was a pronouncement of divine judgement. Saul’s job was to carry it out.

But Saul did what you and I do sometimes, he second-guessed God’s Word. He thought, *“Surely God and God’s people could be better served by sparing Agag and the best of the livestock.”* So, he and the people began to pick and to choose what was good and what was not. What could be utterly destroyed and what would not.

Whenever we do that, we push God aside and put ourselves in His place.

Whenever God’s Word clearly says one thing and we come up with what we think is better for the situation, then we are guilty of doing the same thing that Saul did.

Verse 11 describes such an action as, *“turning our back on God”*. That is precisely what a lot of people do. No wonder our society has such a hard time determining the difference between right and wrong.

IV. The Confrontation Of Disobedience.

In verses 12-22, Samuel confronts Saul with his disobedience.

Before looking at this, I first want to go back to verse 11. When God told Samuel what Saul did, Samuel did not just rush out and confront. Instead, he *cried unto the Lord all night* in Saul's behalf.

How do you react when you hear about someone else's sin? Do you pick up the phone, call someone else, and pass on the news? Do you rush out to let the person have it? Or, do you cry unto the Lord?

Samuel's example sets the right standard for all of us. When Samuel confronted Saul concerning his sin, it was only after much prayer, and it was with deep felt love.

Galations 6:12 teaches us to do the same, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*"

When Samuel and Saul met however, Saul gave no acknowledgement of wrong doing. In fact, he seemed instead, to expect a pat on the back.

In verse 13, Saul said it was a great day!

In verse 14, Samuel asked about the sound of livestock.

In verse 15, Saul responded that they were for sacrifice. He tried to give an air of spirituality to his disobedience.

In verse 16, Samuel told Saul to be quiet and listen to what really happened.

In verse 19, Samuel said that Saul had actually disobeyed God and done evil in His sight.

In verse 20, Saul protested that he had obeyed.

What we often think of as obedience is far from it.

Perhaps you have heard the story of the long-jumper? He was able to jump further than anyone else. When asked to jump across a very wide ravine, he was sure that he could. On the day of the jump he was mentally and physically prepared. He got back for a good run, and when he jumped it seemed like he soared. But although he came very close to the other side, he still came up short and fell to his death.

When we begin to second-guess God, and begin picking and choosing what's wrong and what's right for ourselves, it doesn't matter how close we get to fulfilling God's Word, if we come up short, then we are still disobedient.

James 2:10 reminds us, "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*"

Saul had a hard time seeing it that way though. To him, God should have been satisfied with his intended sacrifice. Have you ever asked, "*What does God want? Doesn't He know the sacrifice I've made?*" 1 Samuel 15:22 forever provides the answer...

What is the most important thing for us as God's people? It is to obey the voice of God's Word. We equate our personal sacrifices with obedience. God does not.

In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus said, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

God does not place value upon our sacrifices, but upon obedience to the voice of His Word.

1 Samuel 15:23 helps to put things into their proper perspective...

When we second-guess the Word of God, when we pick and choose what's right and wrong, and obey as we see fit, we're guilty of rebelling against God. And, we're guilty of rejecting the Word of God.

V. The Consequence Of Disobedience.

For that, we must always expect consequences.

Galations 6:7 warns us, *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”*

Saul's consequences were pretty severe. Look at verses 23-35...

Because Saul rejected the Word of God, God rejected him as king.

Do not equate this with salvation. Equate it with opportunities of service.

When we sin, we'll never lose our position of salvation, but depending on the sin, we may lose our position of service. And that is no small thing. In 1 Corinthians 9:27 the apostle Paul wrote, *“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”* I know myself, even though I struggled with the idea of going into the ministry, one of the worst things for me would be, to be set aside.

Because these were such serious words, Saul finally confessed his sin, and even gave a reason for it. He feared the people and obeyed their voice rather than God's voice.

That's common among us isn't it. Because we fear what others will think of us, or do to us, we sometimes follow their voice rather than the voice of God. But listen to what Scripture says:

Matthew 10:28, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Romans 8:15, “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

Hebrews 13:6, “That we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

Saul feared people more than God and lost everything because of it. What about you and me? Can we honestly say that we fear God more than people?

The extent of Saul’s problem is seen in that after Samuel had made his pronouncement and had turned to leave, Saul’s only concern was how Samuel’s departure would make him look in front of the others. May God deliver us from caring more about what people think than what He thinks.

Some may wonder about Saul’s confession of sin. Doesn’t 1 John 1:9 say...

Yes it does. True heart-felt confession does always bring cleansing. **BUT** it does not always change our consequences. I think of David after his confession to the prophet Nathan of his sin with Bathsheba. He experienced cleansing, but he also continued to experience the consequences of that sin for the rest of his life. Too often we fail to understand this point. We think of confession as an easy escape from the consequences of our sins, but it is not. Even as God’s people, we need to understand that we do reap what we sow.

Samuel’s last act before leaving Saul was to take a sword and *hew* Agag into pieces. Some might think, “*Oh, how gross!*” But what Samuel did was finish the task that Saul had been called to do. When you and I fall short of obeying God, someone else has to finish the job for us.

To obey the voice of God’s Word is the most important thing you and I have to do. We could add that the worst thing is to just give the appearance of obedience. In relation to the example of Saul, where do you stand? Do you just give the appearance, or do you seek to obey the words of God’s voice?