

When Half-Hearted Misses Completely

1 Samuel 13

"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."

Introduction: Sports have always fascinated, especially those that I have never had to privilege or audacity to try (see: climbing Everest). One of the most intriguing is **rowing** (or "Crew" if you are hip), one of the original sports of the modern Olympic games. According to Daniel James Brown, rowing is one of the toughest sports, since once it starts there are no timeout or substitutions. It calls upon the limits of human endurance that comes from mind, heart, and body. In fact, physiologists have calculated that rowing a 2000-meter race --- the Olympic standard --- takes the physical toll as playing two basketball games back-to-back --- but it takes place in a six-minute race.

In 1936 a rowing team did the unthinkable --- they came out of nowhere --- college students from the University of Washington and sons of farmers and loggers shocked the world and won gold in Berlin against the vaunted German home team, smashing the world record at the time. Rowing had been dominated by the University of Cal Berkley, East Coast schools, and the elite from Oxford and Cambridge, filled mainly by sons of bankers, lawyers, and corporate titans. Captured in his book *"The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics"*, Daniel Brown paints a compelling picture of what it took for these 9 men to move from good to great, from winners to heroes: **TOTAL COMMITMENT**. Each member of the team had to demonstrate determination, optimism, and grit, striving together, pulling together and one, and giving everything they had for one another, bound together forever by pride and respect and love.

*"The trick would be to find which few of them had the potential for raw power, the nearly superhuman stamina, the indomitable willpower, and the intellectual capacity necessary to master the details of technique. And which of them, coupled improbably with all those other qualities, had the most important one: **the ability to disregard his own ambitions, to throw his ego over the gunwales, to leave it swirling in the wake of his shell, and to pull, not just for himself, not just for glory, but for the other boys in the boat.**"*

Now, notice that **total commitment** is different than **hard work**. Each man certainly had to work hard, but working hard during a race was not enough. I'm pretty competitive by nature, so if I crawled into a boat and tried to beat a seasoned rower in a race, I'd put in max effort and fall miserably short, since there has NOT been an overall commitment to train, eat, and prepare for a race (though you may think I look like a seasoned rower, you'd be mistaken). **Half-hearted commitment would not cut it.** *Almost dedication* would not only fall short, but would leave the whole team in the position of loss.

This morning we will look at the necessity of **total commitment** when it comes to our obedience and pursuit of God in Christ, knowing that half hearted commitment falls completely short.

God desires and demands whole-hearted obedience, and anything less falls short of His glory

Effort is not wrong when it comes to our relationship with Christ, but *earning is*. Grace frees us from having to try to **earn** our standing with God, but does not absolve us from working out our salvation. In fact, Paul the apostle said that it was by God's grace that he was not only saved, but also **worked harder**

than those without (1 Cor. 15:10-11). But working hard by grace *COMES OUT OF a total commitment to Christ, who calls us to love Him with our whole heart, soul, and mind* (Matt. 22:38), and requires the kind of commitment that **denies self, takes up his cross daily, and follows Him** (Luke 9:23).

Why is whole-hearted commitment more important than full effort? Why is it so difficult to fully commit to something (or anything)?

We will answer these questions from the lens of the life of King Saul, God's chosen leader who struggled perpetually with whole hearted devotion to God, demonstrating an inability to commit fully, and showing us how to avoid these pitfalls, looking ultimately to the ONE who succeeded in faithful obedience, our True and Only King.

1. Half-Hearted obedience trades on others faith (v.1-4)

It's helpful to get caught up to speed on where we are in the Kingdom of Israel and the kingship of Saul. After the terrible leadership of Eli and his charlatan priest sons, Israel was finally led by a competent and faithful leader in **Samuel**, who for 40 years brought clarity and consistency to the nation, something they had been sorely lacking for decades. But unwilling to trust God at His Word, the people of Israel made the fateful, disobedient, and dishonoring request: ***we want a king, a REAL king, so we can be like all the other nations!*** The irony: God WAS their king, but clearly He was not enough for them. Tragically, this is the same request of people today, who want what God can give them, but they do not trust Him in all things or seek to honor & glorify Him in all ways.

God gave them what they asked for (as we remember, getting what we want is NOT always a blessing!), and gave them a king who *looked the part* – tall, handsome, and looked good in suit of armor! The problem was, this was NOT a man of character or someone after God's own heart, and he continually did just enough to hold on, but rarely enough to lead the people to the joy they ultimately craved. There are two quick passages that you need to know to give context to chapter 13: 1) **1 Sam. 10:7-8** – Saul was promised that when he became king, the Spirit of God would go with him, and he could “do what his had finds to do, for God is with him”. This was a direct command to begin to push back against their arch enemy, the Philistines, and once it started, he'd go to Gilgal and wait 7 days for Samuel to join him; 2) **1 Samuel 12:19-25** – Even though the people did wickedly is asking for a king, God STILL promised that He would NOT forsake them, but because of His great name, He would make them a people for Himself. The condition: ***Only fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with ALL your HEART!***

The beginning of 1 Sam 13 finds Saul had waited well over a year to get going. There is a bit of a problem in the translation of verse 1, since The Masoretic Text, generally regarded as the most authoritative Hebrew text of the OT, reads that ‘*Saul was one years old when he began to reign and he reigned for two years over Israel.*’ There are a couple of glaring problems with this, the most obvious is a one year old ruling a kingdom (though we've all experienced some strong willed little ones!). Acts 13:21 says that Saul was a 40 year king, and obviously Jonathan was a grown man, grown enough to lead an army. Most likely, the text means that it had been a **year** since Saul's anointing when the events of chapter 13 took place, and perhaps the *legitimacy* of his kingship lasted only during the period recorded in 1 Samuel 13-15, though he would technically be on the throne another 38 years. We will see that by 1 Samuel 15, the Lord will have moved to another, and the seed of that movement starts here in chapter 13.

When he finally began his assault against the Philistines, it was his son Jonathan who did the fighting. Now, this was NOT unheard of in terms of military tactics and hierarchy, but it would be demonstrated

over and over again that **Jonathan** trusted the Lord boldly, while Saul trusted the Lord conveniently. **Half-hearted obedience and commitment trades on the faith of others, and this was revealed in Saul's choice to have Jonathan fight in his stead.**

No one really likes nepotism, though we often see it happen in business, politics, and even churches. People can trade on others name, reputation, or work instead of doing it for themselves. One hallmark of **half-hearted devotion and obedience** is living vicariously through others experience, or riding the coattails of their understanding of God's Word or service. The reality is stark and clear: we must all stand **alone** before the Lord at some point, and everything around us will be stripped away and only our faith, heart, mind will be evaluated. The question will not be: was your church a place of worship and prayer, but were **YOU!** There is no hiding in the presence of God, and all things will be revealed one day.

It's important to note that Saul had sent the standing army home and only had 3000 active soldiers at his disposal: 2000 stayed with him at Michmash (see map) and 1000 with Jonathan at Gibeah. Jonathan defeated the garrison at Geba with that smaller group, and though the victory was large, the fighting force left was small. After this, they gathered once again at Gilgal, but this time not to confetti and celebration but in the fear of retribution that was sure to come.

2. Half Hearted obedience is exposed in trials (v. 5-7)

Saul did well to send Jonathan and celebrated the victory with all the people, but a strange thing happened after: the **Philistines did not like it**. In fact, they were so upset, they came out in full force. The text says that they were like "the sand on the seashore in multitude", and the people were so upset that they began to flee and hide themselves (much like their king Saul did in 10:22). Fear began to set in among the people, who were trembling, and in Saul himself.

Whole hearted devotion to God in Christ does NOT equal an easy, comfortable life. In fact, it often means the exact opposite. When we determine to live for Christ with ALL of who we are and fear Him alone, we can expect a few things: 1) **Trials**, which are God ordained hard circumstances designed to help us endure, trust, and mature (James 1:2-4); 2) **Persecution** – "*All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus WILL BE PERSECUTED*" (2 Tim. 3:13); 3) **Constant Opposition** – Our enemy will throw everything at us to distract, tempt, and deceive us (Eph. 6:10-18)

Saul had forgotten that following God whole-heartedly will bring these things, and as the soldiers surrounded the city of Gilgal, his faith began to wane and the desire to take matters in his own hands grew.

3. Half-Hearted obedience seeks to appease – rather than trust - the Lord in worship (8-9)

Here is where the story begins to take a hard turn and where half-hearted commitment is truly revealed. Faced with three truly difficult realities: 1) He was surrounded by an overwhelming force 2) the people who professed loyalty and fidelity to God and he began to scatter and hide, 3) after waiting the prescribed seven days, or at least MOST of the seven days, he tried his hand at offering the burnt offering, a job that Samuel was to perform and a **clear command** that had been given over a year earlier.

Now let's step back a bit and consider what really happened here, since it does not seem like such a bad thing that Saul did. Burnt offerings were GOOD, weren't they? When in doubt, offer the LORD an offering?!? Did Saul get a bum rap? What was he supposed to do, given the circumstance?

The issue for Saul is the same issue we face EVERY DAY. Are we going to trust God at His Word and obey Him completely, or are we going to do MOST of what He calls us to but withhold an opportunity to do what WE determine is best? Saul demonstrated **high religious activity but low fear of the LORD**. His disobedience was cloaked in religiosity. In fact, Samuel would remind him in chapter 15 about what God expected of His people: ***“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.*** (1 Sam. 15:22).

If you come to worship God on a Sunday but have no desire or follow through of obedience the rest of the week, it is the definition of half-hearted worship. God is not pleased with our platitudes or singing if our hearts are far from him, and our hearts are revealed by our **faith driven, grace empowered, joy-filled, God’s glory seeking obedience ---- especially in the hardest of circumstances.**

4. Half-Hearted obedience continually shifts the blame (10-12)

That’s when it happened. Like sitting at a red light on a country road for minutes, deciding to just go through since no cars were around, only to see the police car waiting for you and watching the light turn JUST as you pull through the intersection, Saul had no sooner finished his sacrifice than Samuel came riding in, asking the expected but heart-dropping question: ***‘What have you done?’*** Instead of taking responsibility and owning up to his sin, Saul did what all of our Father Adam did thousands of years ago: **he shifted the blame away from himself.** Adam was quick to blame God and his wife for the sin of eating the forbidden fruit, tossing both under the on-coming bus. Saul kept the family culture going. Notice that he blamed: 1) the people for scattering, 2) the army around, 3) Samuel himself for failing to show up on time, and then uttered the line that we’d expect from a modern day politician rather than a godly king, ***“So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering”***. This is called “sorry not sorry” in modern vernacular. This demonstrated that Saul was more about *self-preservation than God-glorification, and revealed his half-heartedness.*

Folks, whole hearted followers of Jesus take responsibility for their sin and sinful actions. The best news we have at our disposal is that Christ died for sinners, covering and washing away our sin. Any attempt to self-preserve keeps us from full obedience and thus full joy. In order to taste the sweetness of restoration and reconciliation, we must take full responsibility for the totality of our sin, rather than trying to justify ourselves and trying to save face before men and people

5. Half-Hearted obedience is ultimately rejected (13-15)

“So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” And Samuel said to Saul, ‘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 12b-14

It’s with a sizable ‘gulp’ that we read the consequences levied to Saul as a result of this disobedience. It was not “you will lose this battle” or “you will get a slap on the wrist”, but **“you will lose your kingdom”!** **Yikes!** At first blush, this seems overly harsh. Again, what Saul did wrong in offering a sacrifice was not equivalent to murder or adultery, as will be demonstrated later in David’s reign. Did the punishment

truly fit the crime?!? To answer that question, we must understand the nature of God and what He demands.

1. **God will always uphold His glory – and share it with no one** – Glory is not only what defines God and describes what He upholds (*“For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will NOT give to another”*), since He is a jealous God whose name is Jealous (Exodus 34:14), but also defines the nature and problem of sin itself (*“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* – Romans 3:23). This is why God will not compromise, because HE CANNOT! When He says it, He means it. When He requires it, He relentlessly demands it. He never does anything in a token way or goofs around with what He means.
2. **God demands people “after His own heart” – who love Him with all of who they are – complete commitment** – In chapter 12 we saw His standard of fearing and obeying Him was *“with all your heart”* (12:20, 24). We see an example of this after Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the 5000 and walking on water, many were following Him and seeking to learn. When Jesus ramped up the cost and meaning of following (*“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...when many of the disciples heard it, they said, ‘this is a hard saying, who can listen to it?...after this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him”* – John 6:55, 60, 66), many began to leave. They liked what Jesus had to offer, but not what it would cost. This is where Peter said, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”* (John 6:67-69). This is the basis of complete commitment: we follow the ONLY One who has the words of life and life itself, even when we cannot fully comprehend or have the answers to every question.
3. **Anything less falls short of His glory and thus His standard** – This is why the **gospel is so glorious!** God requires us to be wholly reliant on His grace to believe that the work of Jesus on the cross overcomes our sin and falling short of His glory. We fell and fall short, and yet God receives us through the work of Jesus alone who reconciles sinful mankind to a glorious God WITHOUT compromising His glory.

In the short run of the story, this meant that God was no longer going to continue the kingly line through Saul, and there would be nothing but conflict in his rule in the days/years ahead. It also meant that God was going to replace Saul with a man after His own heart in David – *“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him (Eliab – David’s brother). For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”* (1 Sam. 16:7). David was the one who would be “prince over the people”, who would demonstrate full devotion and trust in the LORD, and lead the people by obedience. But this solution leaves two nagging questions for us to conclude with: 1) David was great, but definitely not perfect or 100% obedient; 2) What do we do knowing that we fall short of the standard/demand of total commitment?

What is the solution for our half-heartedness?

We find hope and grace in a fully obedient, wholly satisfying King!

The True King, the only perfectly obedient, fully committed fulfillment of God's demands came in the form of Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, descendent of King David. Jesus not only lived in perfect obedience, but died a perfect death, Him offering up His body once for all (Heb. 10:10). This not only satisfied God's wrath over sin, but gave His righteousness to those who would believe. God promised Israel that He would put His laws into their hearts, will be their God, and they His people, and would forgive their sin (Jer. 31:33-34), and promises the same thing to us according to Hebrews 8:10-12. This means that when we believe by faith that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, turning from our sin, trusting in Him alone, we can live and pursue Him freely, with our whole heart, and when we fall short, we have an Advocate and one who made propitiation (1 John 2:1-2), so we can take responsibility of our sin, confess it, be forgiven, and move forward in obedience.

God demands whole hearted devotion and obedience, and Jesus Christ fulfilled that perfectly. The question for us: do we believe that is true, and have we committed to live life fully for Him, in faith, turning from all other competitors to the only one who can satisfy our souls.