



1 Samuel

Following The Shepherd King In An Age Of Personal Freedom

Life Group Discussion / Week Seven

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

Thus far in the story, the major impressions we are left with regarding Saul as king are mostly good. He is a successful king—he fights valiantly, confronts Israel’s enemies, and carries out God’s punishment on those who had once plundered God’s people. But, in chapter 15 God will reject Saul as king. Saul’s success as king are not described in detail because he accomplishments are not the main interest of the writer of 1 Samuel. The writer of 1 Samuel now wants to show us *why* Saul had the kingdom torn from him.

Samuel brings a message from God to Saul. Here is the message: God will punish the Amalekites for their mistreatment of the Israelites when they first escaped from Egypt. Saul is to attack them and completely destroy all that belongs to them: men, women, children, and animals. To modern ears, this sounds alarmingly like ethnic cleansing. But this is ethical cleansing rather than ethnic cleansing. This is an act of God’s judgement against sin. We may think God is being unfair, but he is actually being very fair. Punishment is carried out not because they are Amalekites, but because they are sinners. Their destruction is a picture of what all humanity deserves, and faces, from God. If we are inclined to minimize God’s judgment, or see it as unfair, it is often because we minimize sin. This was Saul’s problem.

This discussion will help us see common excuses for sin, what true repentance looks like, and a hopeful way forward for us all.

READ

1 Samuel 15

STUDY & APPLY

1. Saul duly defeats the Amalekites. And so when Samuel comes to him after the battle, Saul says: *“The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord’s instructions”*. It looks as if Saul is truly obedient. But, in fact, Saul’s obedience is not for real. He did not destroy everything as commanded. Saul confesses what he has done. It looks as if Saul is truly repentant. “I have sinned. I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions” (vs. 24). Saul says all the right words but his repentance is not for real. **What does Saul say that gives you clues that his repentance is not for real? What is his main concern? (vs. 24-25)**
2. Sincere repentance leads to a changed life—not a perfect life—but a real life of struggle and mourning over our sin. We can say all the right words but if nothing changes then we aren’t truly repentant. Saul’s repentance leads only to excuses. It’s worth looking at these in detail because it is very easy for his words to be ours, too. **For each of Saul’s responses below, describe in your own words why the response falls short of real repentance. Then, discuss which responses you are most prone to give.**

- a) Read vs. 20. What phrase is repeated four times? In effect, what is Saul focusing on and how might this be an excuse for his sin?

- b) Read vs. 21. What excuse is Paul using here?

- c) Read vs. 15. How is Saul justifying his sin here?

- d) Read vs. 21, again. When Saul explains that he did this “for the Lord”, how is he attempting to justify his sin?

- e) Read vs. 24. What is Saul’s underlying reason for disobedience here?

Which excuses for sin are you most prone to give?

- 3. Ultimately, 1 Samuel 15:22-23 takes us to the heart of the story: *“To obey is better than sacrifice”*. We may talk about our excuses and everything becomes grey and unclear. We downplay our sin, go through the motions of spiritual activity, and so on. **But what is truly pleasing to the Lord? What are some characteristics of true repentance?**

- 4. The rejection of Saul does not mean the rejection of God’s plan or God’s people. As tragic as this chapter is, there is still grace and mercy. God will be faithful to his promises. It is clear that our hope is not based in the consistency of our own character and obedience but in something else. **How is this reiterated at the end of this chapter? Where does the writer point us to put our hope?**

PRAY

Close your discussion praying earnestly, empathetically, and boldly for one another.