

Handouts

Including

Notes & Questions



Samuel & Saul

The importance of listening
to God & how to do it

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What happens when you don't listen?

- When you are asking for directions?
- Or when a parent or spouse is telling you what to do?
- Or more importantly, what happens when you don't listen to what God tells you?
- The results can range from frustrating to tragic and we'll look at the lives of Samuel and Saul to see how one listened to God, the other didn't, and the results of each one in our lesson....

Samuel & Saul

The importance of listening to God & how to do it

How's your hearing these days?

- Have you recently had someone say to you, **"You aren't listening to me?"**
- Most of us have.
- Maybe we weren't paying attention, or maybe we didn't want to hear what we knew someone was going to say.
- Whatever the reason, not listening can get us into a lot of trouble.

The trouble is especially serious if we aren't listening to God

- If we aren't hearing what He has to say to us.
- **Before we go on in this lesson, it is important to establish the fact that God does want us to hear Him.**
- This lesson is primarily about Samuel and Saul, but it has applications for each of us in our walk with God.

First, why listen?

- **Dallas Willard says:**
- **Hearing God? A daring idea, some would say—presumptuous and even dangerous. But what if we were made for it? What if the human system simply will not function properly without it? [without listening to God] There are good reasons to think it will not.** (from *Hearing God*).
- To live for what we were made for, to help us function properly, to help us listen to God, and for some practical tips on how to do it better is what we want to learn in this lesson.
- The lives of Samuel and Saul show us the contrast of a life spent listening to God and one that didn't.
- In our last lesson, we looked at the depressing book of Judges and now we come to the last judge of Israel, Samuel.

Samuel, last and greatest of the judges

- He was born in answer to prayer of his mother Hannah, who promised him to God after he was born.
- He was raised in the Temple by the priest Eli.
- He served God from an early age and was a good, diligent, and obedient child.
- One of my favorite stories was one night when he was a little boy, and he heard his name called. He thought it was Eli, but it wasn't.

Eli knew it was the Lord and told him to go back to bed and say,

- **"Speak Lord, your servant is listening."**
- God spoke to Samuel, and he obeyed God even though it was a very difficult message he was given to deliver.
- He had to tell Eli God was going to judge him for the sins of his sons.
- Listening to God's command to rebuke someone is one of the most difficult messages we can get.

- Samuel proved he could be trusted from that early obedience.

From his initial obedience he grew into a powerful leader

- He judged Israel on a circuit; started a school of prophets, lived a personally holy life...
 - However....
 - *When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.*
 - (Maybe he never learned how from Eli)
 - *So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."*
- 1 Sam. 8:1-5

Asking for a King

- Not a bad thing in itself—God has instituted human government and planned that earthly leaders should reflect His leadership.
- It was prophesied that Israel would have a king back in Jacob's blessing (prophecies) of his sons:
- *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.* Genesis 49:10
- But the people's reason was problematic, they wanted a king: "to lead their armies and to be like other nations"
- God gave them what they asked for after assuring Samuel they were not rejecting him, Samuel, but God's rule over them.

Challenge "Be careful what you ask for because you might get it."

- God sometimes answers prayers that shouldn't be answered or shouldn't be answered in the way we pray for.
- They wanted a king; they got a king and along with him years of war and the rule of an increasingly unstable king.
- A sad warning: *And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.* Psalm 106:15
- **Application: to always pray God's will be done, in His way, in His time. Be clear to ask in line with what you know in the Bible.**
- They didn't ask for wisdom in choosing a king, or for the right timing, or for a godly leader.
- They simply wanted a king to lead their armies and they wanted it NOW.
- Not being willing to wait on God is a sure sign it isn't what He wants.

An alternative to demanding from God what you want

- Listen carefully to what God wants you to do, before and as you pray.
- God does not want to give you anything that goes against His Word. ALWAYS be reading His Word as you pray.
- Learn not only specific commands in the Bible, but the overall character of God, his ways of doing things before you ask.
- As in human relationships, you know it is futile to ask certain things from certain people—God is no different in that.
- Also, God may have an entirely new solution or way of doing something you can't imagine—be open to that.

But they wouldn't wait, and Saul is anointed king

- God called a group of men to follow him.
- Not much happens until the challenge to city of Jabesh.
- They are threatened; Saul answers, raises an army and rescues them.
- His kingship is confirmed, and Samuel retires from political leadership, but is still the spiritual leader and warns the people—
- *For ...the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own. As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish.” 1 Sam. 12:22-25*

War follows with the Philistines—Saul wins the earthly battle and fails the spiritual one

- The army assembles at Gilgal; where they are told **to wait** for Samuel to come to offer sacrifices.
- Saul gets impatient—he offers the sacrifice and Samuel shows up.
- Saul doesn't repent—he makes the excuse, *“I felt compelled to offer the sacrifice.”*
- Samuel's response:
- *“You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command.” 1 Sam. 13:13-14*

What was so wrong

- Saul was told to wait by God's prophet—and the prophet speaks for God. To not listen to Samuel was to not listen to God.
- Saul gave in to the fears of the people, his army, and his enemies.
- He acted as a priest—which was forbidden.
- He did not confess he sinned or repent of his actions; he offered excuses instead.
- Three important applications from this:

Application #1 Always play to an audience of ONE

- Saul didn't—his actions were determined by the feared reactions of the people and his enemies.
- He had clear guidance from God; he knew he shouldn't offer sacrifices, which was the job of the priest.
- There will always be conflicting voices and opinions. Always people who want to tell you what to do.
- Even more so today with the flood of social media and people feeling compelled to comment on everything.
- But only ONE opinion matters—God's.

Get settled in your life where your ultimate loyalty is—it should be in God

- NEVER waiver from it—you won't have to decide each time which way you will go, what you will do.
- Determine to seek His will first in decisions.
- Study a topic, pray, journal about the implications.
- You might even consider writing down a personal Code of Conduct ahead of time.

The advantages of a Code of Conduct

- As part of their training, the military teaches soldiers a Code of Conduct—How to act in battle, how to act if captured and tortured.
- They know that the Code of Conduct must be ingrained in a soldier if he or she is to survive the worst that can happen.
- In the review of POW behavior after the Vietnam War, it was clear that those who knew the Code of Conduct and followed it fared far better than those who did not.
- Those who didn't follow the Code of Conduct in some cases betrayed fellow POWs—how sad it was for them after the war was over.
- When some were receiving medals and honors, they were disgraced.

Our Code of Conduct is in the Bible

- Many things the Bible teaches apply to everyone, and you must know it well to survive the battles of life.
- In the midst of challenges and temptation is not the time to decide how you ought to live.
- ***In addition to overall guidelines, you may want to think through specific applications to your life, your calling.***
- In my calling, I must maintain an extremely strict schedule, and I don't do many things, even very good things, to have the time to create the content I know God has called me to create.
- I have to say "no" often to time with people I care for because I simply can't be with them and do all God wants me to do.
- Many things I say "no" to are not bad things or wrong at all for others, but I must guard my time rather than doing them.

Someday the battles we fight will be over

- And we will be evaluated as to whether we stood true to our calling even when it was difficult.
- Please listen to the lesson, *Tetelestai, if the battle is finished, why is life so hard?* For advice on how to fight well.
- We want our commanding officer, our Lord Jesus to be proud of us when He welcomes us home.

Application #2—Don't try to manipulate God through religious actions

- Saul also used the sacrifices as a sort of magic action to keep the army from leaving.
- This was similar to Israel bringing the Ark into battle and fictional depictions of it in popular culture to this day--
- *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—was a fun movie, lousy theology.
- That is not what God gave them the religious system for—these items and actions associated with them were part of worship, not magic talismans they could manipulate.
- We can't use religion for our own purposes.
- Showy religious actions without a proper heart response are not pleasing to God.

Application #3: know YOUR calling and focus on it

- Saul was a soldier and king.
- Samuel was a prophet and priest.
- The duties of a priest and prophet very carefully detailed in God's Word and NO ONE else was to do what each was called to do.
- God's punishments were severe if disobeyed, as Saul did.
- ALSO, remember others are "God's servants, not ours" be very careful to not criticize how another is serving God, pray, talk to the person if you are truly concerned.

For us—know what you are called to do, your spiritual gift, and focus on that

- To emphasize, pray for others, don't try to take over their work or tell them how to do it. **DO NOT gossip, criticize, backstab—ever.**
- Be satisfied and thankful that the Lord has given you the job he has given you.
- Look at the New Testament (1 Cor. 12 & others) and the teaching of Spiritual Gifts where each person has a job to do in the body of Christ.
- Beyond all tests or whatever, simply try various things and see what fits, what others affirm, what produces fruit and gives you joy.

Sadly, Saul did not learn from this

- 1 Sam 15— He was commanded to totally destroy the Amalekites AND all their livestock, everything—similar to command to destroy Jericho and other cities in Canaan.
- Saul wins the victory but kept many of the spoils—the SAME sin as Israel committed earlier and there were consequences:
- Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: *"I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."* Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night. 1 Sam 15:10-11
- Gets up to once again confront to confront Saul...
- Saul meets him.... ***"I carried out the Lord's instructions!"***
- ***"What then is the sound of bleating of sheep in my ears?"***

Saul's response; God's response

- Saul again offers excuses, blames the army, says he did it for God to be able to sacrifice to Him (when he had been commanded specifically NOT to do what he did).
- But Samuel replied:
- *"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?"*
To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king." 1 Samuel 15:22-23

APPLICATION

- We cannot pick and choose our obedience to God.
- Some things are OK at one time in life and not another. For example, early on in the Exodus journey, Moses was told to strike the rock for water, later he was told to speak to it.
- When He disobeyed the consequences were serious and he was not allowed to go into the Promised Land because of it.
- Saul was not told to totally destroy all in every battle, but he was supposed to in this one.
- ***We must listen closely for EACH decision.***

David appears on the scene

- The Lord tells Samuel to anoint David and he does—but David's patience will be tested anywhere from 8 to 15 years (I think the 15 is closest).
- We'll learn lots more about David in the coming lessons.
- David kills Goliath, Saul should have been the champion, but Saul had no spiritual strength.

- David knew the true battle was not that Goliath was a huge and scary giant, but that he had “defied the armies of the living God.”
- It was a great victory, Saul praises him, gives him his daughter as a wife, but Saul and David’s relationship deteriorates.

For the next 10-15 years or so

- Saul is consumed with jealousy and rage.
- Blames his family, his army, David.
- Wastes time and resources chasing David.
- David does not retaliate, spares Saul’s life several times.
- This goes on for a long time, but finally there is a....

Big battle with the Philistines

- Samuel has died and Saul is desperate for guidance.
- He goes to see the Witch of Endor to call up the spirit of Samuel.
- She reminds Saul that he has forbidden what asks.
- Samuel actually shows up, shocking them all and tells Saul:
- *“The Lord has done what he predicted through me. The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. ¹⁸Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today.¹⁹The Lord will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.”* 1 Sam. 28:17-19

The prophecy came true

- Saul and his sons died; Israel was defeated.
- An important note: Saul committed suicide but was told in advance *that “You and your sons will be with me.”*
- Samuel was in paradise, with God.
- Suicide is a very sad ending, but not the unforgiveable sin.
- ***Once a child of God; always His child.***
- ***God gathers his children home in love, no matter how they arrive.***

Summary of two lives, two men, the same God, but such different outcomes

- From childhood on Samuel listened to God; Saul did not.
- Samuel listened and obeyed God, even when it was difficult.
- Saul ignored God’s commands and did what he wanted to do.
- Samuel died an honored prophet, a leader, one of the great men of the Bible.
- Saul died a tragic suicide, and his sons were killed alongside him.
- Like them, we can choose.

We also can pray, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

- When you read your Bible, think of it as a conversation; pray and journal as you read.
- Intentionally look for patterns in how God deals with people, in His character.
- If you have a desire, a need, whatever it is, talk it over with the Lord; ask His will be done. WAIT. BE PATIENT.
- Journal possible solutions but leave it open for God to work in both your circumstances and in changing your desires, because remember....

He sees the BIG PICTURE of our lives and knows what is ultimately best

- Because of that, it makes much more sense to trust Him to work things out than to simply demand what we want.
- ***“It’s easy to trust God when he does what we want; it’s the other times we grow.”*** Bob Goff

- When we accept, without fighting, that His will be done, we often look back at people or situations that He kept us from with relief.
- If God had answered our prayer as we first thought, a situation or a person, we thought we couldn't live without, what a mess we might have been in.
- When we trust Him, He often surprises us with solutions or outcomes we never dreamed possible.

Final applications

- Listening to God and daily adjusting our lives to follow his leading is not only for the super-spiritual.
- Remember Dallas Willard's comment, that *"What if we were made for this?"*
- I believe we are. All of us. Humanity was created to walk with God in the Garden, and we will again at the renewal of all things when the dwelling of God will be with His people.
- We can become familiar with His voice now in His Word, listening as we read and meditating on it. Let His voice drown out the lies of the world.
- This week take time to quiet your heart and to pray,
"Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

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- Podcasts, blogs, and eBooks
- Printables & merch of Bible verses & encouraging sayings
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SAMUEL & SAUL, The importance of listening to God and how to do it

1. What do you think of Dallas Willard's statement that we were made to listen to God? Do you feel that you do in your life? How or why not?
2. Who is Samuel? Where did he come from and what makes him unique in Biblical history?
3. Why did the people want a king? What does this tell us about asking for things that aren't good for us?
4. What does it mean to "play to an audience of ONE?" How can that work out in practical ways in your life?
5. How was David different than Saul? Talk about how the differences mattered in his life and in the lives of those who followed him.
6. APPLICATION—How can you learn to or practice listening to God in your life? Be very practical.