

Samuel & Saul

The importance of listening to God & how to do it

Your Notes

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's 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, the High Priest at that time, 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 for messages from God 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—the passage goes on—
- *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

- This was 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 from *Psalm 106:15: And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul. **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 that 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.
- Jabesh is threatened with humiliating destruction; Saul answers, raises an army and rescues them.
- His kingship is confirmed, and Samuel retires from political leadership, but he 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 battles and fails the spiritual ones

- 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*
- That man of course will be David—but we have more of Saul's story before we get to David's.

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 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, that was the job of the priest.
- ***There will always be conflicting voices and opinions. Always people who want to tell you what to do, sometimes with the best of motives (they think).***
- 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.
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Get settled in your life where your ultimate loyalty is—it should be in God

- NEVER waiver from it—then 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 of important decisions.
- You might even consider writing down a personal Code of Conduct ahead of time.

More about a Code of Conduct

- As part of their training, the military teaches soldiers a **Code of Conduct**—part of which includes 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

- You must know your Bible well to survive the battles of life—because THEY WILL COME.
- 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" to fun times or hobbies and 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.
- God has a specific way He wants you to spend your time—spend time with Him to be clear about it.

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—
- For example—*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.
- Most often if you are focused on what God wants you to do, you won't have time to fuss with others.

Discern what you are called to do, your spiritual gift, and focus on that

- In addition, 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 to determine your gift, simply try various things and see what fits, what others affirm, what produces fruit and gives you joy.**
- **And then live your gift—serve where YOU are called to serve.**

Sadly, Saul did not learn this

- He had another opportunity, in 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
- But then Samuel gets up to once again 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 everything in all his battles, but he was supposed to in this one.
- ***We must listen closely for EACH decision at each event in our lives—this keeps us daily listening to God.***

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 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."
- Saul had forgotten what that meant.
- 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—he demands she do it anyway.
- 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. ¹⁸ Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today.¹⁹ The 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. Saul will be there also.
- Suicide is a very sad ending, but it is 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 to listen to God or not, and along with that choice come the consequences of it.

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 for us

- 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 with 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.
- And His timing is always perfect—though it is seldom what we think we want initially.

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.
- But we don't have to wait.
- We can become familiar with His voice now in His Word, listening as we read and mediating 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."

For links to additional materials to help you know, trust, apply, and teach the Bible, go to: www.Bible805.com