

To Obey is Better than Sacrifice

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[0 : 0 0] 15. It's a long chapter we read, but the central verse is in verse 22, on page 238, where we read Samuel saying to Saul, Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. We come to this place of worship to engage in an act of service. We come to worship God for who he is and what God has done for us through the gift of his son, the Lord Jesus. We come to offer up to him our praise, our thanksgiving. We come to commit to him, to serve him. We come through the privilege of this worship. We come to worship God. And we all come, each and every one of us comes as broken sinners. We come to call upon the God of grace and mercy and that God would be pleased to accept our worship through Jesus. And of course we come to learn of the

Lord Jesus through his word. But what if his word causes us difficulties? What if we find when we read his word, when we read God's word, we find something that's difficult to comprehend, difficult to understand, a difficult passage even to accept? Do we stop worshipping? Do we somehow close our ears and our hearts and rewrite scripture to what we perceive should be the correct rules of justice and right? Well, surely not. Remember what Paul wrote to Timothy? All scripture, all scripture is breathed out by God. All scripture, including the parts that, well, at times we find difficult to comprehend, such as this chapter here. Because as we read, I'm sure, when we were reading, you'd notice that this chapter contains content which certainly is that our sensitive 21st century mind seems very different and distant to the reality of a loving God.

And there are apparent difficulties. Because this command to utterly destroy a group of people and everything that they had, their livestock, their animals, every human being. And then in consequence, Saul not obeying the command fully, then he's rejected by God. You know, this does cause difficulty.

It seems unfair. But if that's how we're going to approach this passage and other passages that we come to, we're doing so from the wrong angle. Because we have to come to this passage and other, yes, difficult passages from God's perspective, we have to see, you have to see the bigger picture.

And at the same time, as we see that bigger picture, to be encouraged. And I pray that as we go through this passage, we'll actually be encouraged when we see the bigger picture, when we see the main points that this passage that this passage brings out. There are challenges, there are lessons, but there are wonderful encouragements. If you know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, you are going to be encouraged this morning when you see, as this passage will show us, when you see the Lord Jesus as the one who bore your sins fully and completely on the cross. And knowing that you're now free from the wrath of God against sin. Now, that's maybe by way of introduction. So, let's look at the passage more closely. Three things, you've got them in your notes, three things to look at today. God's justice, God's judgment, and God's grief. God's justice. I mean, here's Samuel, here's God's prophet.

[4 : 1 0] And he's been given God's work to give to King Saul. And notice the word that Samuel's given from God. Samuel doesn't hesitate to give that word to Saul. There's no questioning the morality of the command. Samuel gives to Saul what God has given him instruction. Saul's got to utterly destroy the Amalekites. He's got to destroy all their animals, their livelihood, utter destruction. Why? Well, we're given the reason because of what that tribe had done to Israel. Remember when the Israelites had wandered through the desert and the Exodus and the Amalekites had caused so much trouble and violence against them. And then when the people entered the promised land, the Amalekites still hassling them.

And God commanding Saul as king over Israel, deal once for all with these Amalekites. These are enemies of God, enemies of God's people. Total destruction that concerned us. We said this matter of devotion to God.

Devotion in obedience to total destruction. And you go back to the time of the Exodus. God has established that particular practice. Deuteronomy 7, 1-2. When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you're entering to take possession of it and clears away many nations before you, when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. So the reason was clear.

These pagan peoples, they worship false gods. They had barbaric practices in their worship. And if the Israelites didn't clear away the people completely, then of course the danger was that the Israelites would be lured to these false practices and turn away from following the one true God. And so in keeping with that principle of total destruction to protect the Israelites, to protect them from the dangers of these people, the command for total destruction is given for their sakes.

[6:18] And as we saw in the passage, at first Saul complies. Saul gathers that vast army, attacks the Amalekites, he soundly defeats them, even spares the allies of the Amalekites because they hadn't shared in the Amalekites' harsh treatment of the Israelites earlier in their history. But then what do we notice? We notice that Saul spared the king, King Agag. And he spared the best sheep and the best cattle. He didn't utterly destroy them. And for that failure to obey fully the word of God, God will reject Saul as king. Now, before we even move any further on that aspect of God's justice, we do have to pause. We do have to take in what we've read so far, especially concerning God's justice in the immediate case and of course in the wider sense for our own application. I mean, how are we to reconcile this aspect of total devotion to destruction and then put that beside the Lord Jesus when he commanded us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us? So, where's the justice in the command that God gives to Saul? Well, as we said, we've got to get perspective. Firstly, remember that the

Israelites alone were given these laws, these commands for a purpose because all the laws, this law, these laws, these other laws were given to prepare the people for the Messiah to come. I mean, laws and sacrifices, for example, pointed forward to the once for all sacrifice for sin of the Lord Jesus. And the law of total destruction pointed forward to, or pointed to God's just judgment against sin. That sin that Jesus came to deal with once and for all with once and for all when he died on the cross for sinners. Jesus taking upon himself the wrath and curse of God for sin. So, what Israel was to do as God's people in dealing with that sin and total destruction was pointing forward to the full payment for sin that Jesus paid and when Jesus fully cancelled that debt that we owe to God for sin. And we might also say this, God's justice in that practice of total destruction points to his mercy. Because in his mercy, there was no call to the pagan tribes to totally destroy Israel, even though Israel had sinned against God. God spared his people from that law. I mean, surely we're seeing here the mercy of God. Mercy towards his people. And then we think, project that forward to the mercy of God for all for whom Christ came to give his life, for whom Christ paid the price for our salvation.

We're all guilty of sin. I am. You are. And yet God in his mercy has spared his people from his wrath and curse. And you know, the more that we think of the coming of the Lord Jesus, remember he's come in mercy.

He's come in mercy towards you who are his. Because I deserve, you deserve his total destruction. But he spares us in his grace, in his mercy. Remember what God's Word tells us. Jesus came to save his people from every tribe, every language, every nation. Jesus came to face the laws of destruction upon himself. Jesus was crushed on the cross. Jesus received the full measure of God's wrath against sin.

Jesus bore our sins and is dying for us. And surely that's the encouragement that we take from this passage. But the law of total destruction isn't faced by any who are Christ. Any for whom Jesus paid the price for sin.

[10:27] You're not going to face the wrath of God against sin because Jesus has paid that price. The price of our salvation. And so, in obedience to the Lord Jesus, yes we are to love our enemies.

Yes we will do good to those who hate us. Why? Because Jesus has paid the price for our sins. And we're to show forth the love of Jesus to sinners. We're to remember that Jesus took our place in facing the wrath of God against sin.

And therefore we have to remember that you who know him, you who know him as Lord and Saviour, that you have command to obey concerning your total destruction of all that would hinder your true walk with the Lord.

Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Go to Matthew 5, 29 to 30. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out, throw it away. It's better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off, throw it away. But it's better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. Now of course that's a figure of speech.

[11 : 44] Telling of the need for believers to be ruthless against sin. You know, to remove wholly and fully anything that's infecting your heart.

Whether it's sins committed by your eyes or by your hands. That figurative removing of anything that causes you to sin against the Holy God.

Because any compromise, even any half-hearted removing of anything that causes us to sin against God, it only means that a spiritual illness will continue.

And it will impact your growth in grace. It will impact your sanctification. It will impact your holiness. And you see that in Saul's case. You see, his half-hearted compromise that, well, would result in his being rejected by God in that long section, verse 9 to 29, God's judgment.

I think these are some of the saddest verses in the whole Bible. This expression of grief that God had made Saul king. And then Saul himself.

[12 : 52] Saul, you know, shown a catalogue of pride and duplicity and arrogance, lies, half-hearted commitment that results in God rejecting him as king.

I mean, just look at the catalogue of what we've just been saying. And then see God's judgment against Saul. And you see, yes, God is a God of judgment. Why?

Because God isn't mocked. Because God's holiness demands obedience. And it's an obedience that none of us can shirk away from. Because we are to give God all that we are.

Because our central verse tells us to obey is better than sacrifice. We'll look at that more closely in a moment. But let's just see Saul himself here. He hadn't learned. He hadn't learned from his past mistakes.

Remember, we were back in chapter 13 last week. Remember, we saw his foolishness in disobeying the command of God and his offering sacrifices that he had no right to do.

[13 : 57] Saul had taken upon himself the role of priest. That wasn't his role to perform. And now, some years later, he's still harboring that spirit of disobedience in his heart.

He's still doing it his way. He's not giving God the glory. He's not obeying God's will. You see all these sins that are recorded here.

Verse 9. He spares Agag's life. He keeps the best of the livestock for himself. And it's disobedience. It's half-hearted. It's actually half-hearted obedience.

He's carried out one part of the command of total destruction. He's not carried out everything. Isn't that a warning to ourselves? Half-hearted obedience to God isn't really obedience at all.

I mean, I might fulfill many commands that God gives me. But if my heart isn't wholly devoted to God, if I'm keeping back some part of my life from full service, I'm guilty of compromise.

[15 : 03] And, you know, sins of half-hearted disobedience. You know, half-hearted obedience. Well, as God's Word tells us, our sins will find us out.

And Saul is found out. You see that in verse 14. You know, after Saul tells Samuel that he's performed the commands that the Lord gave him, Samuel says, What then is this bleating? Of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear. Saul couldn't hide the sin of disobedience. And neither can we.

Now, I don't say that with any kind of scare factor. This is a reality. God knows my heart. He knows your heart. He knows when I'm kept back from Him. You know, from wholly serving Him as I ought to.

And so I must confess. We all must confess our sins before God. Because when there's half-hearted devotion to God, then there will be that duplicity and there'll be these lies.

[16 : 03] There'll be the covering up. As you see here in Saul's case. You see in verse 20 to 21. You know, if you just read these verses, he's blaming the people, not himself, for his half-hearted obedience.

And, you know, sin, covering up, blaming others. He even gives a sort of sanctimonious reason for their supposed actions.

You know, they're going to offer the best animals and sacrifice to God. It's at that point that Samuel rebukes Saul and that well-known saying of Scripture to be is better than sacrifice.

Now, of course, we need to apply this to ourselves, but let's just get the immediate context of these words. Because Saul had chosen for himself the best parts that had been assigned for total destruction.

He'd selected what seemed useful to the Israelites, even the king of Amalek. But Saul was in denial of God's specific commands. He was choosing what to obey and what not to obey.

[17:07] And then in his pride and his self-satisfaction, his self-righteousness, he even built a monument to himself. Here's the arrogance of an individual whose self-righteous heart knows no boundaries, even in seeking glory for self and not for God.

And then in his pride and in his arrogance, even when he's confronted by Samuel, he doesn't deny any wrongdoing. He's giving excuses again and again. He's giving himself a pat on his back because he thinks he's done what's right.

Even bringing the best of the animals for sacrifice. But the verdict of God is condemning.

To obey is better than sacrifice. All the sacrifices in the world offered by a heart that's far from God couldn't put right what Saul had done and disobedience.

Now, Samuel wasn't saying that sacrifices were wrong. You know, the sacrifices of the Old Testament is not saying that at all. He's telling Saul that sacrifices offered with a wrong motive were utterly abhorrent to God.

[18:17] Better to obey God's word than offer sacrifices with a heart far from him. And that principle still applies. You know, let's take our worship services.

We might even mention the name of Jesus in our preaching. We might even speak of salvation. But if I'm not mentioning the cross of the Lord Jesus, if I'm not telling you that salvation is through the finished work of the Lord Jesus, I'm not glorifying God.

I mean, if there's even no mention of Jesus at all, even when the cross is never, ever mentioned, when God's saving grace is ignored, and all that we hear is good works somehow meriting salvation, that is disobedience.

That's an abhorrence to God. Because there's no obedience to God's word. There's nothing of the gospel. I'm sure we've all attended services, maybe weddings, maybe funerals, and anything but the gospel's highlighted.

And the theme is just, is morality. And everyone is whisked into heaven, except, of course, the really bad people. You know, let's not start pointing fingers.

[19:29] Let's look to ourselves. Be on our own guard. And let's not start compromising where God's word is explicit as to how we should approach him. Because we're to obey God's voice, not man's voice.

We're to follow his word. And not the word of some kind of contemporary reason. Just because others, for example, are engaged in worship where God's word is reduced to just a wee sideline. That doesn't mean to say that we follow the same way. No, we're to obey as God has directed us in his word. And not to grieve him by our disobedience. Even in holy things, Saul was disobeying God and grieving God.

In fact, grieving Samuel and God. As we see in the final part of this chapter. God's grief. In the failure of Saul. Well, let's look at Samuel first.

Samuel was grieved. He was grieved in his heart. And God was grieved. I mean, Samuel, yeah, it was truly heartbroken that Saul had failed in his kingship.

[20:36] I mean, remember, this was the same Saul whom Samuel had anointed as king. And now Saul's forfeited the blessings of kingship by his own sin and disobedience. And Samuel's heart was just moved to grief.

And, you know, surely that should be the way that we respond in a genuineness of grief. You know, of somebody who shows so much promise in coming to God's house, in sitting under the sound of the gospel, even showing an interest, showing promise, and then drifting away and seeing no more. It should grieve your heart as it certainly grieves my heart. I mean, we've all seen it. We've all seen it. Maybe in our families, my family, my wider family anyway. The pain of heart that that brings is real.

That should never stop you praying for anyone who, maybe who's left a fellowship, who's turned their back in God. And, yes, we are to continue to come before the throne of grace and to continue to pray for a loved one, a friend, a family member who's turned her back, his back on the Lord and done so even defiantly.

So Samuel was grieved about Saul turning his back on God. What about God and his grief? I mean, we're told in verse 35 that God was grieved that he'd made Saul king, that he'd regretted making Saul king.

[22 : 07] Now, whatever else this verse is saying, we've got to see the response of God to the sin of the one who had grieved him by his sinful actions.

I mean, God responds to our sinful actions. God expresses grief. You go elsewhere in Scripture, you see that response of God to sin. Go to the New Testament, Ephesians 4.30.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Christian believers, you can grieve God. I grieve God.

How do we do it? We do it by unholy hearts. We do it by disobedience. We do it by failing to give him our whole heart and service. God sees into the heart and he's grieved when he sees sin within us.

Think of Jesus. Think of Jesus and his ministry. And think of the grief in Jesus' sinless heart.

Remember when Jesus was rejected by those who had come to preach the Gospel.

[23 : 12] Matthew 23.37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings?

And you would not. And you would not. God grieves over our sins. And so it's for you and me to grieve over our sins.

To show God-like grief when we do fall short of his glory. When we are half-hearted even in our worship. When we compromise in the things of truth.

When we disobey his word. When we set ourselves up to be praised when God has to have the glory. But thanks be to God that God is a God who forgives the sins of his people.

Thanks be to God that God hears the cries of his repentant people. That God shows mercy to you and to me when we do call upon him and repent. And it's for you and it's for me to come to him in that repentant spirit and to know the joy of forgiveness.

[24 : 24] To know the joy of salvation in the one who bore your sins on the cross. Who took the punishment you deserve so that you're not under that curse of God.

So rejoice if you know him as Lord and Saviour. Rejoice that he's shown his great love to you. That you're his and his forever. But if you've not yet given your life to the Lord Jesus will you remember the word of God that tells of the consequence of rejecting God.

Because if you reject him well he says he'll reject you. God tells us in his word. All who reject him God's word tells us will know that place of eternal separation.

That place of total destruction of life. That misery of hell. And I pray that none here will be lost. That you'll all know the grace of God in saving sinners.

That grace that saved me. That grace that saves all who come to him in faith. And I pray that you will know that great salvation that you'll be found in him in his love forever.

[25 : 44] Amen. Let us pray. Lord help us to see the Lord Jesus Christ. To see him who came from heaven to earth to die for sinners.

Lord we know that we talk of sin much because we are sinners. We know Lord that Jesus came to save to the uttermost. And we pray then Lord that as we hear his name proclaimed once more that we will put our trust and faith in him and in him alone for he has done all things well.

hear us Lord as we continue to worship you now in song. Bless us in this worship service still. Bless us in our fellowship afterwards.

Be before us for the remainder of this day we pray in Jesus name. Amen.