

# God's ways are not our ways

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[ 0 : 00 ] God's ways are not our ways. And there's a number of different angles or levels that you can see that working on.

! One of them is simply that the things that we think are right to do, the things that we would plan, the things that we think are wise and good, aren't necessarily the things that God would say are right and wise and good.

And on another level, God's ways are not our ways, simply because we choose our own ways over God's ways. And knowing what is right and what he calls us to, we so often say, actually, I'm going to do this my way instead.

We talk ourselves into it that we know better or we know enough to pick and choose from what God has told us. On the one hand, Scripture tells us there's a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

We think we know what we're on about, but God's ways are not our ways. And the ways that we choose would lead us to death. On the other, the light shone in the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

[ 1 : 10 ] And we choose, in a pattern, to go against God's ways, whose ways are not ours. What we're naturally inclined to do is turn away from him, to turn away from righteousness, to turn away from what God made us to live like, from what he explicitly calls us to do.

And in this, I want us to hear both a warning and a call. And the warning is a reminder today that your ways are not God's ways, which means you're being drawn away from God's ways by yourself. We are all bent away from righteousness and away from obedience and away from light. And so hear this this morning as a warning to recognize that there is a pull in your life that never ceases to pull us away from God's ways.

And on the other hand, I want us to hear in this a call to pursue his ways, that his ways are light and life and joy. Let me just remind us where we are in the big story of the Bible, as we're coming into the sort of toward the middle part of 1 Samuel.

Adam's been walking us through 1 Samuel from the beginning for the past month, but let's remember where this all fits. In the beginning, God creates the world. He sets aside a paradise for humans, for Adam and Eve, and yet they turn away from him and are turned out of the garden.

[ 2 : 38 ] That sin that they chose then spreads across humanity, seeps into the soil of the world, but God gives the world and the people on it a new start through the flood.

After the flood, God chooses Abraham, who will become a family, who will become a nation, who will become a blessing to the whole world. And the promises that God made to Abraham wind their way through the lives of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

And Jacob has his 12 sons, and they as a big family group end up in Egypt to survive a famine. But eventually, staying there for several hundred years, they become enslaved.

God hears their cry for deliverance and brings them out through Moses and Aaron and Joshua, and brings them out and into the land that God had originally promised to Abraham, now possessing the law.

On the way in the wilderness, God had given them his law so they would know how to live. And as they settle in the land, they follow it some, and they don't follow it some as well.

[ 3 : 43 ] And that's where we are now. The people are settled in the land, and the stories that we're following now happen between when they settle in the land and before they become a proper kingdom with David and Solomon, and all of that is coming.

This is the period sometimes called the period of the Judges. There's a whole book called Judges, which tells this story. Israel was in the land as a group of tribes, and they would disobey God.

They would be defeated by their enemies. They would cry out to God. God would send someone to deliver them. And then again, they would disobey God, and it would go on like that. That's what Samuel is. Samuel is one of these.

He's sort of a prophet, sort of a priest. He's this judge figure who hears from God and then helps to bring about deliverance and leadership for Israel. And that's where we are here in 1 Samuel chapter 8.

Remember Samuel's story. God calls him as a very young boy. And so he's part of this tradition as things are shifting. For the next three weeks, we'll be in 1 Samuel 8 to 15.

[ 4 : 44 ] And all three messages will pick parts from across those chapters. So again, we'd recommend that you have a look and read across those seven chapters over the next few weeks so you can get a sense of the full story.

The focus of these chapters is on Saul. And the story of Saul is mostly not good. Saul is the first king of Israel, the king who comes before David.

And with Saul, things mostly go bad. And one of the crucial things we see through Saul and God's interactions with him is that God's ways are not our ways.

And we can see it in three distinct stories here. First of all, in chapter 8, which we've already read together, where Israel asks their true king for a new king.

The people of Israel come to Samuel and they say to him, Samuel, you are old and we do not want your sons to rule over us. So please give us a king before you die.

[ 5 : 42 ] Now, on a lot of levels, this is a good idea. This makes a lot of sense. Leadership matters. Part of the reason things are going well in Israel at this moment is because of Samuel.

Samuel is leading them well. And they have rest from their enemies who are around them. And also, because leadership matters, they don't want Samuel's sons to lead them.

Samuel's sons, as we heard at the beginning of chapter 8, are lousy. And they've done this not that long ago. If you remember, Eli's sons were also lousy and caused problems.

And so the people know this pattern and they do not want the sons of Samuel to lead them. So this makes good sense. Give us a king before you die. But God's ways are not our ways.

And what seemed like good sense was actually dead wrong. Because it isn't just that they wanted a king. They wanted to be like all the other nations.

[ 6 : 41 ] They didn't just want good leadership, which God could have provided in any way he chose. They wanted a king specifically so that they could be like the nations who were around them.

They didn't want to be distinct. When Samuel comes to God and says, they've asked for a king, God says, it's not you they've rejected. It is me they have rejected as their king.

Israel has asked their true king to give them a new king. God had set them apart so that they would be different. He chose Abraham and worked these promises through this family so that he would have a chosen people.

So that the world would see what it looks like when God rules on earth. So that the world could see that it doesn't have to just be sin and darkness and evil.

He wanted to show what does it look like when people live according to good laws that I give them. They were meant to be distinct. And yet they say, we want to be like everyone else.

[ 7 : 41 ] So please give us a king. God even warns them through Samuel. Having a king has costs. The king is going to take your family members to serve him.

He's going to take your produce to enrich his own house. And yet they persist because God's ways are not our ways. They turn away from him and set this pattern.

But we're not done with it yet. If you turn over to 1 Samuel 13, you can see it again. Here in the person of Saul specifically. where Saul is facing a battle and isn't willing to wait for God.

And takes matters into his own hands. This is again a few chapters after 1 Samuel 8. Samuel has done what the people asked. What God told him to do. Yes, give them a king.

Give them this man Saul as their king. Samuel has anointed Saul as king. So now he is king. And they are still fighting now back and forth with their enemies.

[ 8 : 42 ] The Philistines who lived around them. Sort of these skirmishes. And it's important to know this chapter tells us. That the Philistines have a huge tech advantage. Because they have metal workers.

And Israel does not. So those who fight for Israel. Only the sort of top few have swords in their hand. And metal tips at the end of their spears. Whereas the Philistines have all the metal workers. All the blacksmiths. And so their armies are much, much better equipped. I'm going to reach verses 5 to 8 of chapter 13. The Philistines assembled to fight Israel.

With 3,000 chariots. 6,000 charioteers. And soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Michmash east of Beth-Avon.

When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical. And that their army was hard pressed. They hid in caves and thickets. Among the rocks and in pits and cisterns.

[ 9 : 41 ] Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal. And all the troops with him were quaking with fear.

He waited for seven days. The time set by Samuel. Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal. And Saul's men began to scatter. The situation is extremely dire.

The people of Israel are outgunned. They are outmanned. They are outnumbered. And now the army is melting away. Saul can see this Philistine army.

Shiny with all their metal gear. He can see his own army. A few sprinkles of metal throughout. Shrinking. The people are hiding in caves. And now Samuel is supposed to come to make this offering.

To seek the Lord's favor in this battle. And Samuel is late. He doesn't arrive. And so the people start to melt away. This doesn't look good. We're getting out of here before things get any worse.

[ 10 : 40 ] And so here again. It makes sense. That Saul would try to do something. That Saul would try to rectify the situation. Let's look at verses 9 to 14. So he said.

Saul said. Bring me the burnt offerings. And the fellowship offerings. And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Just as he finished making the offering. Samuel arrived. And Saul went out to greet him. What have you done? Asked Samuel. Saul replied. When I saw that the men were scattering. And that you did not come at the set time. And that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash. I thought. Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal. And I have not sought the Lord's favor. So I felt compelled. To offer the burnt offering. You have done a foolish thing.

Samuel said. You have not kept the command of the Lord. The command the Lord your God gave you. If you had. He would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.

[ 11 : 39 ] 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.

Saul. Reasonably. Tries to do something. The army is melting away. This fight is coming on him. He's in all kinds of trouble. So he makes the sacrifice to seek the Lord's favor himself.

Again. It's logical. But it was wrong. Because God's ways are not our ways. It's possible that one of the things going on here. Is like a few chapters earlier.

Which Adam led us through. Where Israel goes out to fight a battle. And gets beat. And they say. Well you know what will make us win? If God comes. So they take the Ark of the Covenant. Which is supposed to be God in the box.

And they take the Ark out to battle. Thinking if we have the Ark. We can't lose. And maybe Saul was thinking something along those lines. Well if I make the sacrifice. Then God has to show up.

[ 12 : 39 ] And then things will be fine. But whatever was the case. This wasn't his place to do. He wasn't meant to make the sacrifice. He's been anointed the king. He's not been anointed the priest.

And he is not to make this offering. What is logical to us. Is not necessarily what God would call us to do. God's ways are not our ways.

And Saul forgot. Apparently. That God does not need a big army. In order to win a fight. If you read through the next chapter. Chapter 14. It's a story about Jonathan. Saul's son.

And it's an account where he wins. A really impressive victory. That's really really unlikely. And before Jonathan sets out to do this. He says nothing can hinder the Lord from saving.

Whether by many or by few. Jonathan knows how this works. God doesn't need a big army. And he doesn't need swords to win a fight. He just needs to be God. But Saul's getting worried.

[ 13 : 37 ] The people are melting away. And so he goes against the Lord's command. And does this rash thing. God had set out a path for Saul to walk. And Saul turns away.

But we're not done seeing the pattern yet. Turn over to chapter 15. Here in this case. Saul decides that his ideas. Are better than God's commands.

We had this battle in chapter 13. And 14 I just said. Where Jonathan wins this really unlikely victory. And in chapter 15. We have this story continuing on.

What's going on here is. If you remember. When Israel is coming out of Egypt. Like I said earlier. With Moses and Aaron. They're essentially a group of vulnerable migrants. And as they wander out of Egypt.

Moving east and to the north. Up toward the land God had promised. They were attacked. By a group called the Amalekites. And God now says in chapter 15.

[ 14 : 35 ] The time for the judgment of the Amalekites has come. Because of what they did to my people. When they were wandering. When they were vulnerable. And so God through Samuel says to Saul.

I've anointed you as king. And the time of judgment is here. Now go and destroy these people. And destroy all of their possessions. Now that's tough to swallow.

For us. It's important that we remember. God gets to decide how judgment works. That's his prerogative. But for Saul. This was tough to swallow as well. Because this is a wasted opportunity. To destroy all of these people. And all of their possessions. When you're having. When you're a politician. It's quite useful to have a captive king. From another nation. That's good for you. You can use that. Plus these people had a huge amount of wealth. It's good for a kingdom to have wealth. This is Saul's southern border. This is an opportunity for him to expand his power.

[ 15 : 32 ] To expand his control. To protect his people. By taking care of the Amalekites. And enriching himself. So again it would make sense. That he takes some of what they have.

And that he keeps their king captive. So let's look. Chapter 15. Starting in verse 7. Saul. Who'd been commanded.

To destroy entirely. Attacked the Amalekites. All the way from Havilah to Shur. Near the eastern border of Egypt. He took Agag. King of the Amalekites alive.

And all his people. He totally destroyed. With the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag. And the best of the sheep and cattle. The fat calves. And the lambs. Everything that was good.

These they were unwilling to destroy completely. But everything that was despised and weak. They totally destroyed. Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel. Samuel. I regret that I've made Saul king.

[ 16 : 30 ] Because he's turned away from me. And he has not carried out my instructions. Samuel was angry. And he cried out to the Lord all that night. Early in the morning. Samuel got up and went to meet Saul.

But he was told Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor. And has turned and gone down. On down to Gilgal. When Samuel reached him.

Saul said. The Lord bless you. I have carried out the Lord's instructions. But Samuel said. What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?

Saul answered. The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites. They spared the best of the sheep and cattle. To sacrifice to the Lord your God. But we totally destroyed the rest. Saul obeys. Mostly. But he does what seems best to himself. Again. To destroy the Amalekites and their possessions entirely. Is a wasted opportunity for any good king.

[ 17 : 30 ] And so he takes from their wealth. And he takes their king captive. Against God's command. And Samuel comes. Saul comes out. Having just set himself a fresh monument.

In memory of this great victory that he's won. And walks out to Samuel boldly. And says. I've done what the Lord commanded. We've won a great victory. And Samuel says. And what is this bleating of sheep?

The Lord's command was to destroy all of their possessions. And yet I can hear the sheep bleating. Saul obeys. Mostly. And he did what seemed best to himself.

And in doing so. Turned from what God had commanded. And notice that again. It makes sense for him to do this. And he even has a righteous sounding reason. Samuel says.

Why can I hear the flocks? You were commanded to destroy these flocks. Why can I hear them?

And Saul says. We kept them. So that we could make a sacrifice to the Lord. I mean this is pious.

[ 18 : 28 ] This is righteous. This is worship that he's setting out to do. But it was directly against the command of God. And God's ways are not our ways.

Saul had turned from the path that God had laid out. And so Samuel will say to him in verse 22.

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. Rebellion is like the sin of divination.

Rebellion and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you've rejected the word of the Lord. He has rejected you as king. That's three times we see this pattern.

That God's ways are not our ways. What looks logical and reasonable and smart and wise.

Because God's ways isn't. When it goes against what God commands and calls.

[ 19 : 26 ] But we're not done with the pattern here. Because this sermon is not God's ways were not their ways. It is God's ways are not our ways. Because we live within this pattern ourselves as well.

Israel asks for a king. So they can be like the other nations. And don't we hate standing out. And being the only ones who believe what we believe. Who hold the positions that we hold.

Who say the things that we are called to say. They already had God as their king. And they say, give us a king. But don't we so often try to gain more than what God offers.

And don't we try to shore up God's promises with our own efforts. Saul is facing a fight and he's worried. Watching his army slip away and he says, I can't afford to lose any more men.

I've got to do something to make sure no more men leave. If my troops leave, we're going to lose this fight. But don't we struggle to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

[ 20 : 30 ] And trust that all other things needful will be added to us. In God's grace and provision and care. Saul obeys God mostly.

And tweaks the commands to better suit himself. And don't we find ourselves doing this. Don't we find ourselves choosing which commands we're going to obey. And pushing down those nagging feelings that there's something we're not dealing with.

Shoring up our confidence with the fact that we've done these other good things. Don't we try to obey God mostly. Don't we, like Saul, get intimidated by others.

Scared of what the people around us will say and think of us. Don't we try to bargain with God. Yes, I left the flocks alive. But I did it so that I could sacrifice to you.

Don't we try to find ways to do this as well. To try to make it up to God. God, I know I've done this. But I'll do this instead. I'll make it up to you.

[ 21 : 33 ] I'll give more. I'll show up more. I'll do better next time. God's ways are not our ways. And the first thing I think we need to hear is hear this as a warning.

Your tendency is to think of things that will call you away from God's commands. Your tendency is to choose the things that take you away from God's commands as well.

We have a strong tendency to turn from our king. Partly because his ways are so different from our own. Imagine being Saul. Having this tiny army with wood.

facing this huge army with metal implements. Your people are hiding in caves. And then even the men who stuck with you ready to fight start getting nervous and fading away.

And how difficult it would be in that moment to wait on the Lord. Right? And also Samuel said, I'm coming on this day and I'll make the sacrifice and the Lord will be with you.

[ 22 : 34 ] And then Samuel doesn't show up. It doesn't make sense in that moment to just keep sitting and waiting. It makes sense to do something. To take action. God's ways are not our ways because his wisdom is so much higher than our wisdom.

And his ways so often look like foolishness to us. It is difficult because God's ways are so different. So much higher than ours. And also because we're simply bent to choose our own ways and to turn away from God.

And even to rationalize it with the appearance of good motives. We can talk our way into doing something. And we can talk our way out of doing something so very easily.

And so very frequently. I think a key question is, when was the last time you consciously turned from your own inclinations to follow God's ways?

Can you think of a moment where you consciously turned from your own wisdom, your own understanding, and followed in God's ways? Because the truth is, if we can't consciously think of something, that's a worrying sign.

[ 23 : 47 ] Because we are always drawn away from God's ways. Recognize the pattern in Saul's life.

And recognize that it's the pattern of our own lives as well. This pattern is so clear with Saul and so clear that we all, like sheep, have gone astray.

And each of us turn to our own ways. Hear the warning, but hear the call as well. Your God this morning says to you, I have set before you life and death.  
I have set before you blessings and curses. Choose life. God's ways are not our ways, but God sets his ways at our feet so that we can walk in them.  
Whatever place you've come in here this morning, God's call is, come and follow me. I have laid out the way of life and blessing and light before you.  
[ 24 : 48 ] Come in my grace and walk in it. For those of you who are following, for those of you who are following Christ, the call is, do so more. Follow on faster and further with him.  
For those of you who have been hesitating or who have been wandering from God's ways, the call is, come back. And for those who have never turned to follow him, the call is, come now.  
God invites all to come into his ways through the grace of Jesus Christ for forgiveness and power so that you can walk in them.  
We must never allow ourselves to knowingly step away from something God has clearly called us to do. And the moment we find ourselves falling off this path, we must turn and repent and come to God as quickly as we possibly can.  
Recognizing that God's ways look foolish to us. Perhaps the most foolish thing God calls us to do is the call of the gospel itself. Because the call is, show yourself as a sinner.  
[ 25 : 58 ] Admit outright, I have turned from God's ways. I have known what he called me to, and I've walked away from it entirely. The call is, openly admit all of this.  
Don't try to hide it. Don't try to bargain with God. Don't say, I'll make it up to you. The call is, openly admit how far you've fallen, how much impurity we've heaped on ourselves.  
Repent, and God will forgive. In Christ, he will cleanse completely. It's so counterintuitive to openly admit all of that.  
To stop putting up the front and the veil to make ourselves look better and feel better. It seems foolish, but it is the wisest thing. And it is the call of God upon us.  
If God is commanded, obey. If God is promised, believe. One of the things we do in our house is we have coloring contests. It's strange because my children are older than most of your children, but it's what we do.  
[ 26 : 59 ] And so the five of us will sit down at the table and color a picture in. And then the fun for us is we then put them on the wall and vote about who's best. And then anyone who's come to visit our house, we make them try to guess who colored which picture.  
Because they're all very, very different. And eventually, it gets pretty easy to figure out who colored which one. Because everyone has their own way of going about these things. And you can usually spot, well, I won't name family members, but there's some you can spot pretty easy.  
Because they have a distinctive aim and character in their coloring. The question is, if someone looks at your life, who does it look like has been coloring in the lines?  
Does your life look like God has been filling it in with righteousness and grace and joy and peace and kindness and forgiveness and sacrifice?  
Or does it look like you're the one who chooses what goes there? What are the parts of your life that you're holding back? That you're saying, I'm going to keep this part to color in my way.  
[ 28 : 03 ] And God has the rest, and that's a pretty good deal, actually. I'm pretty righteous. I mean, God has more of my picture than he has of that person's picture. I know that. God's call is, come.  
Walk in my ways. My ways are higher than your ways and better. I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.  
Listen to his voice. Hold fast to his word.  
Hold fast to his word.