

A Rejected King

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. According to the service sheet, my name is the Venerable Dan Gifford. And I just want to say, in my capacity as the Venerable Dan Gifford, despite what you've heard, the new evening service manager is doing a fabulous job. Seriously, Dan is quite unwell. Please pray for him. He has come down with a flu or some dreaded luge, and he would appreciate your prayers. And the concern was that his voice wouldn't actually hold up this morning. I think he had the energy, but his voice might give out. So he asked me to come and preach. Okay, three chapters, three chapters, 13, 14, 15. Let's call them the downfall of Saul. We'll look at the downfall of Saul in three little vignettes, okay? Chapter 13, chapter 14, chapter 15. Let's look at chapter 13 to begin with. So in the first few verses, you'll see that Saul creates a standing army. And we're also introduced to a new kid on the block, Jonathan, who was Saul's son. Now, Jonathan, who is awesome, who I love, attacks the Philistines of his own initiative. Now, you'll know and you'll remember that this whole attacking of the Philistines thing, this was actually supposed to be Saul's job, right? That was like his big thing that he was supposed to do when he was anointed king. But he hasn't done it. So Jonathan takes the initiative, attacks the Philistines. Saul thinks to himself, okay, well, I better get onto this. And so he gets his troops to Gilgal. Now, in chapter 10, Samuel spoke to Saul. And he told him to do this. It was about a year ago. And he said, go to Gilgal, wait seven days.

I will come after seven days and I will do like a sacrifice and then, you know, get stuck into the Philistines. That's how it's supposed to work. So Saul goes to Gilgal and he's faced with this enormous, enormous Philistine army. And as a result, he starts losing troops. They're terrified of this behemoth, you know, this enormous Philistine army that completely dwarfs them.

So he starts losing troops. His troops start taking off, start running away. They start hiding in caves or sort of almost going to the other side, really. Some of them hide in tombs, it says. And you've got to be pretty scared to hide in a tomb. So Saul, he's there. He's looking at this enormous Philistine army. He's looking at his diminishing army. He's looking at the clock.

Seven days are up. No Samuel. So what does he do? Well, he does the sacrifice thing himself. We might be tempted to think, well, good on him. You know, he's having a go, getting on with it, making something happen. But Samuel turns up immediately after the sacrifice is finished.

And Samuel says to Saul, Saul, you are a fool. You're a fool. From verse 13 in chapter 13, You have not kept the command of the Lord your God. Now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.

[3 : 38] You might think Samuel's being a little bit harsh, but Saul was the king. And he failed to keep God's very clear command in a really important situation. Now, I know that circumstances were, you know, very extreme, but here's a little take home for you, okay? To obey God is to do an extraordinary thing. Sometimes it requires us to go beyond our instincts, to go against our experience.

You know, trusting God isn't always straightforward and simple. But Saul allowed these circumstances to overtake him. He was sort of swallowed up by the whole thing. Now, at the time, it may have seemed from the outside to have looked like the smart move on Saul's part. It may have seemed foolish not to have done what he did. But whether it's wise or foolish can only be seen when we take into account something other than the circumstances. And what we take into account is this, that God had spoken to him very clearly. And he disobeyed God. Folks, if you are here tonight and you are not married and you are not sexually active, let me commend you. Right. You may think that's a bit of a diversion in the sermon, but it's actually a really great example of what I'm talking about here. To obey God in this area of your life is an extraordinary thing. Society thinks you're foolish. You know that, right? Society thinks you're foolish. Your own body sort of works against you sometimes. So from the outside, it may seem like a silly thing to do, but of course, we take something else into account, don't we? As we work out this area of our life. And we take into account that God has spoken about our sexuality. And he says that if we are unmarried, we need to remain chaste. Trusting God is a radical thing. Okay. Stop for a moment. All right. So that point about trusting God I just made, it's a good one, right?

Okay. I made it well, I think. But it's actually not the big point of this passage. It's a good point, but it's not the big point. I'll get to the big point later. All right. Let's move on to the next little vignette. Chapter 14, which we didn't read, but you probably know it. And it is probably one of my favorite Bible stories. It's about Jonathan's against the odds attack on the Philistines. All right. So Jonathan saw some. So at this stage, Saul is doing nothing, right? There's a Philistine army. It's huge. There's, you know, the Israelites.

Jonathan turns to his armor bearer. He says to his armor bearer, he goes, he's like, come on, mate. Come on. Let's have a go. Let's attack. Just you and me. Let's you and me. I've got a cunning plan. Let's you and me by ourselves attack the Philistines. And let me read what he says, his line in verse 6, chapter 14. It's great. He says this, come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. I love it how he calls them uncircumcised. He just says these uncircumcised. They're nothing. They're nothing, right? Let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few. In other words, let's have a crack at it. Let's have a go. Maybe God will do something. Here's what's really cool about this. He has great faith in God's power. Incredible faith in God's power. Nothing can hinder the Lord. But he doesn't presume on God's power either. I mean, David talked about this a few weeks ago.

He doesn't presume on God's power. The second part of verse 14 here, verse 6, sorry. It may be that the Lord will act. He doesn't think he can force God's hand. He just has this humble confidence in God. And it's the faith of Christ, isn't it? It's in the Garden of Gethsemane Gethsemane that Christ prays a kind of similar prayer, reading from Mark 14. And Jesus said, Abba Father, all things are possible for you, all things. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

[8 : 25] So they get on with it. Jonathan, the armor bearer, they climb this kind of cliff and ram this crevice and do this kind of, you know, two-person surprise attack on this garrison.

And they defeat this garrison. They win. I mean, it's clearly the hidden hand of God here. But they defeat them. And it throws the Philistine army into utter chaos. They start attacking each other. I love this. I love this story so much. Folks, would you pray that God would give you this kind of humble faith, a faith that takes risks but does not presume? Would you pray for that faith? I was on a plane about a year ago, flying back from Texas. It was a big conference that I was at. And I present as extrovert, but I'm actually very introverted. And so I was completely peopled out. So I'm on this plane. It was going to be a long plane ride. And I thought, this is great. I can just be by myself, you know, for a number of hours. This woman sits down beside me. And she's sitting there. She's sitting there. And I just thought to myself, mate, Roberts, tell this woman about Jesus. Just tell her about Jesus. Just have a go. Maybe God will do something. Maybe God will give you some words. Maybe this will be an incredibly meaningful moment for her. So I just start chatting to this lady, right?

And she tells me this amazing story about her life. She had a very troubled background. As a young person, she lived on the streets for a long time. And then she managed to get out of it somehow. And her life was completely turned around. And she was just finishing off her PhD in forensic pathology. She studied decomposing bodies, right? To age them. That was like CSI.

That was going to be her job. She was very, very smart. I did notice in the conversation that she kept mentioning finances, though. And I thought that was interesting. And I thought, okay, okay, Aaron, have a go, mate. Maybe God will do something with your words. So I just said to her, and these are pretty much my exact words. I said, you know, God rescued you from the streets. God rescued you from the streets for himself. And you have given your heart to another God. You have given your heart to money. You know I'm right. And Jesus wants you back. No, don't turn your back on Jesus. And her eyes well up in tears. And we had this wonderful conversation about faith in God. Folks, trusting that God will sometimes act means just having a go and seeing what happens. Okay, back to the story. Okay, Saul, he sees that the Philistine army is going crazy, right? They're killing each other. And he thinks, okay, well, I'll get in there as well and take advantage of the situation, which he does. But the passage makes it very clear that it was God who rescued them. It says in verse 23, so the Lord saved

Israel that day. Now, as I've said, Jonathan is a great example for us to follow in terms of faith, and we should pray for that kind of faith. But like the first vignette, that's actually not the big point of that story. It's not the grand idea. We'll get to that shortly.

[11 : 52] Okay, chapter 15. This is a fairly brutal tale. The Amalekites had been like the historic sort of enemies of God and his people for a long, long time. They were the guys that attacked the Hebrew people as they were escaping out of Egypt, you know, without provocation. They just attacked. And God, through Samuel, tells Saul that, okay, it's time to deal with these guys once and for all. And he says, he says to Saul, you are to wipe them out, completely destroy them. Everything is to be destroyed. Everything. You might think that's harsh, but it really is just a small sort of taste of the judgment to come for everything that opposes God. You know, think of it like this. It's a picture of what judgment looks like. Judgment is the complete expulsion of evil. That's why judgment is a good thing. So Saul attacks the Amalekites, but he doesn't destroy everything. You heard the passage read, but Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and the oxen and of the fatted calves and the lambs. This is from verse 9 of chapter 15. The bottom line is that Saul didn't do what God asks. So Samuel goes to speak to Saul. And that's a funny interaction. Saul begins it in verse 13 by saying to Samuel, blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord. He's like, yep, yep. Hey, how's it going? Nothing to see here. It's all fine.

And Samuel, of course, hears the bleating of sheep. And he says, what's this bleating of sheep that I hear? And Saul says in verse 15, the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God. Do you notice that? Your God, not my, your God.

Do you see the deceitfulness of sin here? A couple of things, right? Saul is saying, you know, what I did is not that bad. We did it so that we can have this really nice offering.

So it's not so bad that I disobeyed God. We did it so we have a good offering. It's like I mugged that old lady so that I could steal her money to put in the offering pot on Sunday. And then he kind of denies that he played any part in it. Now, it wasn't me.

The people spared, it says. It says it a number of times. The people did this. It wasn't me. This is Adam in the garden, isn't it? Now, it wasn't me. She did it. She made me eat the apple. Now, later in the passage, it kind of sounds like Paul repents. I don't quite know how to read this, but it sounds like there's some repentance here in verse 30.

[14 : 38] Then he said, I have sinned. But look at the next part. He's talking to Samuel and he says, yet honor me now before the elders of my people. Come back. We'll do some stuff. But you just honor me before the people. Is that cool if you do that? Like I've sinned. Would you honor me? Well, there's the heart of Saul revealed, I think, that it is more important to him that he'd be honored in front of people than it is that he would honor God. Now, the passage ends with Samuel doing what Saul should have done by killing the king there. And then they never speak again. It's a very chilling line, the last one. The Lord regretted that it had made Saul king over Israel. It doesn't mean that God made a mistake. It means that he just, he grieved over the disobedience of Saul. In summary here, and let me get to the big point of these three chapters here. Okay. We've talked about the radical nature of trusting God, the awesome sort of have-a-go faith of Jonathan, the deceitfulness of sin. Yet they're not the main concern. The big story is this. Here it is. These last two minutes. The big story is this. Saul's reign is over in God's eyes. It's over because of his disobedience. On two really important occasions, he disobeyed God. The whole story of Jonathan there, it's cool that he had this great faith. We should follow him in that. But the big story there is that

Saul's son acted like the king Saul should have been. He was the guy that Saul should have been and he wasn't. That's why that story is in there. So the big story is Saul's reign is over and we're about to be introduced to David. See, Saul was the people's choice.

The king they chose. But David would be the king God chose. So we see that here in chapter 13 verse 14. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart. That doesn't mean that God has found somebody that really likes God. It's actually talking about God's heart in this passage. It's more literally, God has sought out a man according to his own heart. Because it's always been God's intention that the people of God be led by a king of his choosing, which was not Saul. A king who would lead them into a relationship with God. And this sets up David who will meet next week. So the big lesson, Saul is a failure as a king. And that points us to a king who will be what Saul was not.

Leads us to King David. And that monarchy paves the way for Jesus who will establish the eternal kingdom. If you have a king who rules your heart, who is not Jesus, who is like a Saul, you are in trouble. Perhaps that king is, I mean it's the cliché stuff isn't it? It's money or financial security or career or your bodies, your own pleasure. If that stuff rules your heart, if you have a Saul king, you're in trouble. Because they're not the real king. And they can't do what the real king, what God's chosen king can do for you. That money king cannot forgive you. That pleasure king cannot renew your heart. You know the passage makes it very clear, there's this little section in here where it talks about Saul's whole life. And it makes it very clear that Saul fought the Philistines his whole life. He died in battle. He never did do the job he was supposed to do. He never defeated the big enemy. And if you have a Saul in your heart, you'll be fighting battles you can't ever win. If money, pleasure, whatever it is, if that's the king of your heart, you'll be fighting the battles of guilt and insecurity your whole life. You know, only the true king can defeat those things. Only the true king can defeat death. That's King Jesus. And only if he's the king of your heart. I think that's the big point of this passage. Amen.