

Because Saul did not obey the Lord

1 Samuel 28:3-25; 31:1-13 (Key verse 28:18)

“Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today.”

In today's passage we are going to learn from Saul mistakes, which led to judgement and loss of God's blessing as a king for the people of Israel. The key verse sums up Saul's mistakes as disobedience, we are therefore going to learn in what sense did Saul disobey God and how we today can avoid Saul's mistakes so that we can experience God's blessings and not face judgement like he did. I pray that God may be with us all, grant us spiritual ears so that his word can move our hearts, change us into his suitable sons and daughter filled with obedience.

The passage today begins with Saul who is in a crisis. In **verse 4-5** it says: *“The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart.”* In the past weeks we learnt about how the Philistines prepared themselves to attack the nation, Israel. We learnt about their determination, in such manner that they did not even want David who had joined their people to come along and risking him changing his mind and fighting against them. The Philistines were filled with great determination to take down Israel. And now today, as Saul looked on the other side from where he had assembled at the camp of Gilboa with the Israelites, he saw the Philistines assembled, with a camp setup and ready to attack the people of Israel.

When Saul assessed the army of the Philistines, he was terrified by their magnitude and readiness for battle. It seemed somewhat impossible for him to take on the Philistines and succeed. What terrified Saul even more was that the Lord had departed from him. Saul was terrified wondering whether God will help him and grant him victory against the Philistines. Furthermore, in **verse 3a** it says: *“Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah”* Samuel who was a prophet, a priest and spiritual guide for the people of Israel had died. If Samuel were still alive it would be of great value for Saul, he would consult with him and Samuel would tell him exactly what he should do. But Samuel was dead, this left Saul helpless, in **verse 5b** it says: *“he was afraid; terror filled his heart.”* His heart was hit with a great shock, the feeling that he is going to die and there is nothing he can do. Have you ever experienced such a feeling? Have you ever been confronted by a situation where you have absolutely no idea what to do, to save yourself?

I think one way or the other we all come across such situations; it might seem light when other people see our crisis. But to us, it is a crisis. I for one had a crisis in my life this year, after resigning from Siemens a crisis arose in my life when I realised how difficult it is to even get invited for an interview for a job. The thought of how I will provide for my family scared me so much, it left me afraid. What do you do in this circumstances? What did Saul do when he was confronted by this crisis? In **verse 6** it says: *“He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.”* Saul enquired with the Lord; this was the right thing to do. When we are confronted by challenging circumstances, we need to enquire with the Lord, because he knows all things, he is the creator of the heavens and the earth. Under impossible situations God could rescue the people of Israel out of the land of slavery in Egypt, crossing the red sea on dry land and ultimately led them to the promise land.

When Saul enquired with the Lord, the Lord did not respond. Why did God not respond to Saul? Firstly God does not work according to our timelines, God is not bounded by human boundaries and limitations. So When God does not respond, we need to continuously pray, we need to continuously search ourselves, repent and ask God to reveal to us the meaning and purpose of our crisis. Yes, it is not easy to wait when we are faced with a crisis, when we see our death closing in on us. But even in those circumstances we need to hold on to God, trust him and have faith that God has a purpose in the situation.

When God did not answer Saul, Saul did not wait but pursued his own ways. What did he do? Instead of holding on to God and repenting from his sins and earnestly seeking God's mercy to answer him and lead him to resolve his situation, Saul disobeyed God. In what sense did Saul disobey God? Before we unpack how Saul disobeyed God, let us look at what it means to obey. The definition of obey is: *“submit to the authority of (someone) or comply with (a law), carry out a command or instruction, and to behave in accordance with certain principle or law...”* So to obey God is to submit to his authority, to comply with his law, to carry out his commands and instructions and to behave according to his principles and laws. When God did not answer Saul, Saul disobeyed God. How did Saul do this?

Firstly, Saul disobeyed God by giving up on prayer. In **verse 7** it says: *“Saul then said to his attendants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.” “There is one in Endor,” they said.”* When God did not answer Saul, Saul did not wait but stopped praying and pursued other ways. Saul did not wait on the Lord but sought other alternatives, he sought the help of mediums. This tells us something about Saul, that God was not his sole authority and hope, God was just an alternative to him. This tells us that

when he enquired with the Lord it was not with his whole heart, hence he kept in mind other alternatives. In **Isaiah 40:31** it says: "*But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*" As we encounter crisis in this world we need to hold on to prayer, we need to wait on the Lord who has authority and power over all things. The Bible promises us that when we wait on the Lord, even though nothing is happening, through prayer we become strengthened, we become like eagles, we will run and not become weary, we will walk and not become faint.

When Saul gave up on prayer, he thought his other alternatives will strengthen him and save his life from perishing. However, this was not true, when Saul left prayer, he became even more desperate, he became even more weak, and this led him to further disobedience.

Secondly, Saul disobeyed God by disregarding God and His law. In **verse 8-10** it says: "*So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." /But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?" /Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this."*" According to the law of God given to the people of Israel, consulting mediums and spiritists was forbidden, and those who practice such are cut-off from the line of God. In **Leviticus 20:6** it says: "*I will set my face against anyone who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people.*" Because of this law, Saul expelled all mediums and spiritists in the land of Israel in the past, this was a good thing, the spiritual condition in Israel was moving in the right direction and so was Saul. However today out of desperation, Saul disobeyed God by disregarding his laws. Saul knew the Law of God very well; he knew very well how the practice of mediums and spiritists is forbidden. But Saul went ahead and consulted with the medium woman.

Furthermore, when the woman insisted that such practice is forbidden, Saul went further disregarding God. When the woman was concerned about being punished, Saul used the word of the Lord in vain saying: "*As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this.*" Here Saul truly became the enemy of the Lord and did not care about God whatsoever. To Saul it was about getting what he wants, it was about winning at the end of the day, it was about finding a means for him to escape Philistines. We need to be careful about what our goals are, we need to have clear discernment that our goals and ambitions do not disregard the God and his commands. As children of God we must not be moved by the circular ways of living in this world, valuing worldly success above all everything. In all we do we need to put God first, we need to check ourselves if God will be pleased with our decisions and actions.

Lastly, Saul disobeyed God by hardening his heart. After Saul persuaded the woman to go ahead with a ritual of consulting the dead spirit, Saul asked the woman to bring up Samuel. When Samuel came up the woman cried out to the top of her voice and said to Saul, "*Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!*" The woman reacted in this way because what had happened was something that she never expected, what had happened was something beyond her. And so she thought this could only have been established by a higher power. And indeed what had just happened was the work of God, it was not the work of medium. Why did God do this? God wanted to help Saul repent, to turn from his ways and obey God. When Samuel came up wearing a robe, Saul bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. In **verse 15a** it says: "*Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"*" Here Samuel was urging Saul to rather go to God, he said why do you disturb me, pray to God, repent from your sins. But even with this plea, Saul still did not repent but rather he was concerned about himself, he was concerned about winning against the Philistine armies, he was concerned about his name, Saul the king of the Israelites.

He said to Samuel: "*I am in great distress, The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.*" Saul hardened his heart, instead of coming clean to Samuel and confessing his sins Samuel, he put himself as a victim before Samuel, that the Philistine are about to attack him, and God is not answering. Saul blamed God for his crisis, instead of repenting, instead of coming clean with his sins, the sin of causing unrest in David's life, chasing him throughout the land, the sin of disobedience.

When Saul hardened his hard, God gave him yet another chance to repent. In **verse 16** it says: "*Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy?"*" Here Samuel urged Saul to realize his sins and to repent. God gave Saul another chance, but Saul continued to harden his heart. Just as before throughout his whole life, Saul continued to disobey God and refused to repent. Saul hardened his heart because he did not want to look at God in his life, but rather he was concerned about himself, he did not want to acknowledge that it was God who made him king of Israel, to depend on him. Because of self-centeredness, Saul could not acknowledge God and could not repent before God.

Today many people disobey God also by hardening their hearts, they do this through ideologies of self-love and the notion of putting themselves first. Putting oneself first before God results in disobedience, it hardens our hearts. As children of God we need to put God first, we need to listen to the God's word, and repent when it convicts us. We need to follow the leading of the word of God.

When Saul continued to disobey God, God exercised his judgement upon him. In **verse 18-19** it says Samuel said to Saul: *"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. The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines."* Because of disobedience Saul lost God's blessing in his life and faced God's judgement. Saul, though he was handsome and a head taller than all men in Israel, deep down he was just an ordinary man, he was not a spiritual man. But God chose him as Israel's king, he blessed him with a mission to lead the people of Israel according to God's commands. But because of disobedience Saul lost all these blessings, God handed over this blessing to David a man after his own heart. Furthermore when Saul disobeyed God, he faced judgement, Saul and his 3 sons died in battle against the Philistines. In **verse 31:6** it says: *"So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day"*.

I joined Wits UBF in the year 2009 officially, like Saul I too was very handsome but not tall and I was not a spiritual man. I had not clue what the Bible is about. But through Bible studies and testimony sharing, Sh. Jacob's family raised me as a disciple of Jesus and encouraged me to serve other students with Bible studies. God blessed me with privilege to be his disciple and servant, it changed my life, God even blessed me with a wonderful wife who loves the Lord. Though God had blessed me with these wonderful blessings, I remained with an unresolved sin problem like Saul's. This dawned to me when I went through my sent emails this past week, all the way from 2009. Those emails were just filled with job applications, month after month, year after year. When I saw this, I realised that I have been an unhappy man always looking for a job, God had blessed me so much, but I was not satisfied. Like Saul I kept seeking other things, a job, according to my own means even. When Saul continued in this way he disobeyed God greatly, he indulged in very dark practices, and God judged him, he lost his blessings from God. I therefore pray that I may repent from this toxic sin of self-centredness and prioritise obeying God and living according to his wonderful mission.

Conclusion

Disobeying God is not something to be taken lightly, it is a serious matter. Therefore let us take the events of Saul's life as a warning to sincerely repent from our sins, to be sincere in prayer, to wait on the Lord even when things do not seem to be coming right. When we wait on the Lord, we will be strengthened, we will be empowered to overcome even the challenges of our crisis. Furthermore let us not disregard God in our lives, let us not allow our desperate situations lead us to dark places making us disobey God's laws. In South Africa, the practice of worshipping ancestors is quite common and accepted practice, a very viable option when one's things are not going well. The Bible is clear that such practices are forbidden by God. Therefore as we go through challenges in our lives, let us not give into disobeying God. Let us pray that God may help us to not surrender when our families and elders make us believe that ancestral worship is an option. Finally, let us not harden our hearts, let us repent when the word of God convicts us, let us listen to the word of God and live by it.