

“Picking And Choosing”

1 Samuel 11:1-15

October 9, 2016

SI: We’re studying the book of 1 Samuel.

It traces some of the most turbulent years of Israel’s history
as the nation transitioned to a monarchy.

It’s a book that shows the failure of men, the power of God
and what it means to live by faith

INTRO: Has this ever happened to you before?

You're at a fast food place—McDonald's, Burger King, whatever—the person in front of you is ordering.

I'll have the Big Boy Triple Bacon Cheeseburger with extra bacon,
the Mega Grande Chili Cheese Fries & Onion Rings Combo,
and the Double-Decker Hot Fudge Death By Chocolate Sundae.

And the clerk says, Anything else, anything to drink?

And the person says: I'll have a Diet Coke.

Oh, you're on a diet! The doctor told you that you needed to lose weight.

He told you to cut back. You're doing that. You've cut out sugary drinks.

Good for you.

Have you ever seen anybody do that? Have you ever done it?

Obviously your choice of Diet Coke over regular Coke is admirable—

it's a 200 calorie difference. Even your doctor can't argue with that.

But in the bigger context it's not anywhere near what he wants from you
or what he expects you to do.

I said last week that the story of Saul is one of the most perplexing in the Bible.

The Lord chooses him as king but then Saul makes what seems like some small
mistakes and the Lord responds by rejecting him and taking away the kingdom.

One Bible scholar says Saul is a victim of the “dark side” of God.

I don't believe that. God doesn't have a dark side.

God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

But I shared that quote with you just so you can see how some smart people
read 1 Samuel and come to the conclusion that God did Saul wrong.

Because when you look at the good things Saul did, it just doesn't seem right to
make such a big deal of the mistakes he made.

Yes, later on Saul becomes unbalanced and violent and jealous.

But that's after God rejected him and maybe because God rejected him.

Here at the beginning Saul seems to be a decent king who was doing his best.

Just look at this chapter.

Nahash, king of the Ammonites besieged the Israelite city of Jabesh Gilead.

They tried to make a treaty with him but his terms were brutal.

He wanted to gouge out the right eyes of all the men.

The way soldiers fought then, they covered left eye with shield.

So a man with no right eye couldn't fight. He could still farm and pay tribute.

No right eyes meant Nahash wouldn't have to worry they would revolt against him. It was a cruel but crafty demand.

Nahash gave them seven days to decide so they sent out messengers in hopes that someone, anyone would come to their aid.

Saul heard about it while he was plowing in his town of Gibeah.

What happened? It says the Spirit of God rushed on him.

He was greatly angered. He cut up his oxen and sent pieces throughout Israel. What did that mean? Well, up to this point in Israel's history, whenever an army was needed, the judges asked for volunteers. America today. Volunteer. Getting a piece of a cut up ox meant the days of the volunteer army are over.

You're getting drafted. If don't report, penalized, own oxen will cut to pieces. This was a very kingly act. Saul raised an army by the force of his command.

He marched overnight to Jabesh, divided his army into three divisions—and decimated the Ammonites. The city was delivered.

Then some people said, bring out the critics of our new king and kill them.

But Saul said: No, this is the Lord's salvation. Nobody dies today. And Samuel called the people to renew the kingdom—made Saul king.

Was already anointed and chosen by lot, this was the official coronation. Saul comes off looking good in this chapter.

And he did do a good thing, beating the Ammonites. Can't argue with that.

But what Saul did is like the person ordering the Diet Coke and thinking he's following his doctor's orders. Yes, in that specific thing you're right.

But in the big picture you're ignoring the doctor's orders to lose weight. I told you last week that verses 7-8 chapter 10 the key to understanding the reign and rejection of King Saul. The thing God wanted Saul to do was attack the Philistine outpost in his hometown of Gibeah.

Strike the first blow to liberate Israel once and for all from Philistines—and then follow God's instructions through Samuel for winning the war.

That was what Lord wanted, equipped Saul with everything he needed to do it.

But Saul didn't do it. Wouldn't do it. The Lord hands him another battle—against the Ammonites. Saul does it, decisively. Good for him.

But fighting the Ammonites was not nearly as scary as fighting the Philistines.

And even though the people cheer and crown him—he still refuses to strike first blow to liberate Israel from Philistines.

Saul shows a lot of promise in this chapter. He acts decisively.

He commands men. He wins a victory. He shows graciousness to critics.

You can't argue with any of that. It's good.
But as the story unfolds, this success becomes an indictment against him for not doing the most important thing God wanted him to do.

I want to make two points from this story, two connected faith lessons.

One point is negative and the other is positive.

Negative is that you can't pick and choose where to obey God.

Positive is that in every Christian life there are specific places where your loyalty to Christ and his Word will be explicitly tested. That's where the fight will be.

MP#1 You can't pick and choose where to obey God

One of the most sobering passages in the Bible is Matthew 7:21-23 in the Sermon on the Mount.

Look at the front of your bulletin—I've printed verse 21. Jesus says: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

This is one of those verses that throws us because this is not the way we usually talk about salvation. We would expect Jesus to say something like: Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who believes in me with all his heart. But Jesus doesn't mention faith explicitly as evidence of salvation—instead he points to obedience. Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven.

Now, the next two verses are the ones that really bring you up short. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'" Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Jesus is saying that there are people who call him Lord, so obviously they are in the church, in the circle of the covenant community—These people prophesy in Jesus' name. To prophesy is to preach. Preachers who led people to Christ and help people grow in Christ. Some of them also drive out demons. They push back the forces of evil in the world in real and significant ways. Perhaps devote energy to fighting sex trafficking or abortion—both demonic. Some of them also perform miracles. They genuinely help and heal people. Maybe they work in a Christian medical clinic in poor African village. These people do good things. They are the Lord's instrument of blessing to his people and judgment on the world—

But, Jesus Christ calls them evildoers. And he says on the last day he will sentence them to judgment. Because, back to verse 21, at some key point, and in some critical ways they did not do the will of his Father in heaven. And for that reason, all the prophesying and miracle-working amounted to nothing. They will be rejected.

Saul isn't the only example of this in the Bible. There are others.

One interesting example is Jehu.

He was the commander of Israel's army many years after Saul.

You can read his story in the book of 2 Kings.

The great prophet Elisha anointed Jehu at the Lord's instruction.

Elisha told him, Jehu, this is what God wants you to do, his command—

Destroy the house of wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel—make sure none

of their evil descendants escape because they have wrecked Israel spiritually.

And then, Jehu, rid the land of idol worship and restore pure worship of Yahweh.

If you do that, the Lord said, He will establish your house and line and your sons will reign over Israel forever.

So Jehu got to work obeying the Lord.

He killed all the descendants of Ahab and Jezebel.

He got rid of all Baal worship in Israel—Baal was the Canaanite gods.

There was one more thing Jehu had to do to restore true worship of the Lord.

That required dealing with two famous shrines in Dan and Bethel—both ends.

These shrines were supposedly dedicated to the Lord, to Yahweh.

But in these shrines were statues of bulls or calves that people used in their worship.

God had expressly forbidden that in second commandment.

We can't worship the Lord with idol images.

Jehu should have said: We're going to worship Lord according to his word—and tossed the idols out.

But he kept them. He had several reasons for doing so which I won't go into.

I'll just say he saw some political advantages for keeping them.

So when it came to obeying the Lord, Jehu decided to pick and choose.

Yes, he destroyed the house and line of Ahab.

Yes, he rid the land of Baal worship.

But when it came to restoring pure worship of Yahweh at the historic shrines of Dan and Bethel, Jehu didn't want to do that—so he didn't.

And that picking and choosing revealed a heart that was not loyal to God, and a heart not formed by faith in the Lord and his promises.

You can imagine Jehu protesting. I obeyed God. I did good things.

Those were good things. They brought about some good in Israel for a time.

But they were not the full obedience God wanted and they ultimately were an indictment against Jehu. Because they show that he could have obeyed.

He had the resources. The Lord had given him success.

Everybody has something to say in his or her defense.

Everybody has obeyed God in some area of life.

I'm a generous person, I'd give you the shirt off my back—that sort of thing. But if you pick and choose—yes, I'll give generously as God commands—but when it comes to God's demands on my language or my sexuality or the way I treat my employees, or that bitterness I cherish—that thing I know God is demanding of me—no—never

Then you the person Jesus describes in Matthew 7.

You are not doing the will of his Father in heaven.

Saul could whip the Ammonites all day long—good for him.

But he had been summoned and commissioned and command and empowered to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

Until he did that by faith, or at least tried by faith, he had not proved his faithfulness to God.

And as we will see in coming chapters—Saul never did that.

Saul would have gotten credit for his battle against the Ammonites if he stepped out in faith and attacked Philistines.

But he never did that and he lost the credit of his Ammonite victory.

Because that victory God gave him made his failure against Philistines more inexcusable.

The Old Testament is full of examples of people who picked and choose how and where they would obey God and the tragic outcome of those lives.

But the obedience that comes from true, living faith in Jesus doesn't pick and choose.

Brings us to the second faith lesson.

MP#2 in every Christian life there are specific places where your loyalty to Christ and his Word will be explicitly tested.

That's where the fight will be for you.

That will be your command to attack the Philistine outpost.

So what is that specific command of God where your faith in Christ is tested?

Do you know what it is?

One of the universal experiences of Christians is that we all have besetting sins.

Have you ever heard that term? Your besetting sin?

It comes from Hebrews 12:1 in the old King James Version, which we don't read much any more.

So let me read you that verse in the New International Version.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

The NIV says the sin that so easily entangles.

That's where the KJV says "the sin which doth so easily beset us."

Beset means to trouble or threaten persistently.

Some synonyms are plague, bedevil, assail, beleaguer, afflict, oppress, worry, dog, harass, or entangle. You get the idea. It's an expressive term.

What it means is that in every Christian life there will be that particular area—that particular temptation and sin that dogs you, harasses you, troubles you sometimes for most of your life.

That's where the battle rages for you. That's your Philistine outpost.

Or to use the image in Hebrews 12:1, that's the thing entangling you that you have to throw off if you are going to finish the race.

So what, specifically, is it? It's different for different Christians.

Some struggle to be sober while others are never tempted to drink.

Some Christians are constantly staggered by sexual temptation, others aren't.

Some are entangled their whole lives with love of money, others are not.

For some Christians it's an idol of security.

For other Christians it's an idol of comfort.

Those are two very different sorts of temptations.

For some it's a violent temper and explosive anger.

Other Christians never blow up, but struggle with discontent, bitterness, jealousy.

Some Christians fearful to speak up for Jesus, or embarrassed—other's aren't.

You get the point.

Which is why we shouldn't pat ourselves on the back by saying:

I would never do that.

Of course you wouldn't, that's not your besetting sin.

But you do have one. And that Christian brother whose sin you see— he probably finds it easy to obey God in the area where you often fail. David never had a problem going toe to toe with the Philistines— but he had a weakness for women that he had to fight most of his life.

Another thing to remember is that

some Christians have besetting sins that are visibly destructive and socially humiliating—like a weakness for drinking or sexual immorality.

Others have besetting sins that are virtually invisible or even socially acceptable— like pride, selfishness, or love of money.

Each category has its own challenges and temptations—

and victory over different besetting sins bring different rewards.

What does the Lord expect of you?

He expects you to fight the battle at this point with the weapons he gives you.

With prayer and repentance and fellowship and worship and his Word.

As we move ahead in 1 Samuel, a contrast will be drawn between Saul and David.

Saul's besetting sin was fear, cowardice.

David's besetting sin was sexual immorality.

The both sinned. They both failed. But God rejected Saul and honored David.

Why? What's the difference?

To use Jesus' words in Matthew 7, David did the will of his Father in heaven.

He fought against this besetting sin in his life with true repentance.

We have a record of that fight to obey in Psalm 51, David bears his soul.

In that Psalm are no excuses. David never says—But God, I beat the Philistines.

David said:

Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in sight.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways and they will turn back to you.

He knew God wanted obedience in this particular area of his life.

But Saul didn't do that.

He said to himself he wasn't going to do what God wanted him to do—

he wouldn't even try.

And he would make up the difference by obeying God in other ways.

God, I give faithfully to the church, I attend church whenever doors open—

so the fact that I yell at my wife, or spend myself into debt I can't pay,

or give in to lust, or don't attend to the spiritual development of my children,

or play the coward before unbelieving friends shouldn't count against me.

Those are the people who Jesus will tell on the last day—
Away from me evildoers.

Martin Luther wrote:

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved.

Don't make Saul's mistake and imagine doing something right cancels out the wrong. Nothing cancels that out but repentance and trust in Jesus for grace and the constant effort to obey at precisely the point where you know your obedience will count the most.