

THE LORD REJECTS SAUL AS KING

1 Samuel 13:1-16:23

Key Verse: 15:22a

"But Samuel replied: 'Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord?'"

God, in his great mercy, chose Israel as his firstborn son so that he might use them as a priestly nation for world salvation. So God was their Father, and God was their King. But his people did not depend on God; rather they wanted to imitate the countries around them who had kings, because through kings these countries could become world power countries. Their ever-increasing desire to have a king like other world power nations was reasonable and appealing to their sinful minds. They never gave up their demand. God knew his people's unbelief and granted them a king--a most ideal person, a head taller than all others and a humanly humble person. But today's passage tells us that God could not but reject him as king because of his unbelief and stupidity.

I. Samuel rebukes Saul (13:1-15)

Saul had appeared to be obedient to his parents and humanly humble. But after becoming a king, he revealed his original sinful nature. What kind of person was he? Saul was 30 when he became a king. Samuel told him to go to Gilgal (10:8) and wait there for his coming. During the time of waiting for Samuel, how nice it would have been if nothing had happened to Saul. But many things happened to test his faith, to see if he was a man of faith who could lead God's people. At the outset of his rule, Saul did not seek God wholeheartedly. Instead, he had done his best to make his palace secure. So he deployed 2,000 palace guards and 1,000 front-line soldiers under the command of his son Jonathan.

At that time, the army force of the Philistines was a threat to Israel. So no one attempted to offend the Philistines. But fearless was Jonathan who challenged first the Philistine outpost at Geba. At the news of Jonathan, Saul drafted soldiers throughout the country. Compared with that of Israel, the military force of the Philistines was far superior. They had 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the

seashore. Now the Israelites become a stench to the Philistines. When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they began to hide in caves and thickets and in rocks and pits and cisterns. Many of them ran away. And all the troops with Saul were quaking in fear, while King Saul was waiting for Samuel for his instructions and strategy in confronting the Philistines. Samuel had promised that he would come to Gilgal. But he didn't come, though the time set for his coming had passed by. When Saul saw that his men were beginning to scatter, he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. (13:9) Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived. What did Samuel say to him? Samuel rebuked him, saying, "You acted foolishly." In what respect did Saul act foolishly?

First, he committed the sin of cowardice. He was the king of his people. So he needed to show himself to them to be a man. He needed to show them the way to overcome the critical situation and strategy to defeat the enemy. In order to do so, he had to be a brave man. But he was caught by fear and was only looking for expediency to escape the desperate situation. As a result, he offered the burnt offering in order to soothe the fear of his soldiers. He played politics instead of seeking God. Thus he revealed that he was a coward. (Rev21:8)

Second, Saul violated the priestly office. Saul felt desperate because of the besieging army of the Philistines. In addition, Samuel did not appear at an appointed time. So he felt helpless and so fearful that he was compelled to offer the burnt offering. (12) He was shaken by fear and did not know what to do. So he did something his sinful nature had directed. In desperation he offered the burnt offering. He violated the office of the priesthood. A king was not supposed to offer sacrifices to God; only priests were. (2Ch26:16-20) His human fear led him to violate the priestly office. In this way he disobeyed the command of God.

Third, he did not seek God in prayer. Saul was chosen by God as the king and leader of his people. So he should have sought God wholeheartedly until he was inspired by God to know what to do. He should have led his people to seek God until God was sought by them. But he did not seek God, even though he was a king chosen by God. When he found no way, he just despaired at the situation. He said in verse 12b, "and I have not sought the Lord's favor."

It was the time for Saul to come to God for help, acknowledging God as God Almighty. But he had no God nor his words of command in his heart. So he acted according to his feeling. When the situation looked fearsome, he became very fearful. He was useless. So God decided to dismiss him and appoint a new king. Read verses 13, 14. "'You acted foolishly,' Samuel said. 'You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command.'"

II. Jonathan, a warrior of faith (13:16-14:23)

Saul's army of 3,000 (13:2) had diminished to an army of 600 (14:2), and they had no swords or spears because the Philistines controlled the blacksmiths in Israel not to equip themselves with arms. (13:19) So only Saul and Jonathan had swords and spears. Meanwhile, the Philistines camped at Micmash, spreading their detachments, one toward Ophrah, the other toward Beth Horon, and still another toward the borderland ready to annihilate the army of Israel. (13:17,18)

Israel was in a critical situation. It seemed at any moment that a catastrophe would befall the Israelites. They were in a helpless situation. Nothing could be done by them. But God was with Israel, and there was a man among them who had courageous faith in God. He was King Saul's son Jonathan. What kind of faith did he have?

First, he was a man of courageous faith. (14:1-7) One day Jonathan son of Saul said to the young man bearing his armor, "Come, let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side..." (14:1a) As we have studied, the Philistine army was equipped with newly invented weapons and chariots, and its force was mighty. One man's challenge to the Philistines was like throwing a stone at the entire force of the Philistine army. But Jonathan, the prince of Israel, did not despair at the situation. He believed that he was able to annihilate the whole army of the Philistines. He decided to go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side to operate a surprise attack. How could he dare to challenge the mighty Philistine army force all by himself? It was because he was with God, in whom all his trust rested, and he had

one loyal comrade, his armor-bearer. Here we learn the power source of Jonathan--his faith in God. (14:6b) When he had faith in God, God empowered him until he was brave enough to attack the entire Philistine army force.

In fulfilling the surprise attack, the first obstacle to Jonathan were rugged cliffs. On each side of the pass he intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez, the other Seneh. One stood to the north toward Micmash, the other to the south toward Geba. (4,5) The cliffs were insurmountable. But Jonathan did not give up, looking at the dangerous cliffs. He began to climb up the cliff on his hands and knees. Probably his hands and knees were already too bloody to climb anymore.

Furthermore, from a strategic point of view, it was not wise for Jonathan to expose himself to the guards of the outpost of the Philistines. But his courageous faith was matchless. Here we are reminded of General Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon was nothing if not bold. Though his French army was surrounded by the allied Austro-Russian army, which was ten times bigger in number, Napoleon decided to shatter the allied threat by defeating its strongest element, the army concentrated around Olmutz, which was allied headquarters. His boldness enhanced the morale of his army, while the allied army was overconfident, depending on their power. One person Napoleon's boldness caused the allied army to suffer complete defeat. They say that there have been more soldiers who have died by being driven into the sea than by bullets. Likewise, God's people Israel were in a critical situation. But God was pleased by one courageous man of faith, Jonathan.

Second, Jonathan had faith to glorify God's name. (14:6-14) Look at verse 6. "Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, 'Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.'" His armor-bearer said, "Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul." (7b) Jonathan could not forgive those uncircumcised people who blasphemed God with their mouths. As much as he loved God, he hated those uncircumcised people. When we read verse 6, we learn that loyalty to God was burning in his heart. He did not mind even if he would die from the enemy's attack; what mattered was to be loyal to God and to destroy all

who blasphemed the name of God--that was all. He did not tell his father that he was going out to the outpost of the Philistines. He came over to fight, believing God would give him victory. He didn't mind doing anything, if only he loved God.

There are many who are bold but ignorant. But Jonathan was bold and intelligent. When we read verses 8-10 Jonathan carefully followed the guidance of God through signs. When both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost, the men of the Philistine outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson." (12)

God blessed this man of faith. Jonathan's surprise attack threw the entire Philistine army into a panic. The Lord sent what was apparently an earthquake, and the Philistines became so confused that they fought each other. Saul assembled his men and went into battle. The Israelites who had been hiding in holes and caves came out to fight. Israel had the whole Philistine army on the run. (15-23) Here we learn that one man of faith was mightier than the entire army of the Philistines. This is the reason Peter said that one Christian who knows the holiness of God is equivalent to a nation (1Pe2:9), and that one person's courageous faith is very important.

III. Saul's pride aggravated himself (14:24-15:35)

First, Saul's oath. (14:24-52) Saul needed to humble himself before God and repent. Instead, he made a foolish oath that revealed his pride, as if he had won the war. He made a law forbidding the soldiers to eat that day until he had avenged himself on his enemies. He was not fighting for the Lord's honor. The tragedy was that Jonathan was involved in his father's oath. When he was uninformed, he tasted a little honey. In addition to this, Saul's soldiers turned out to be savages. Toward evening, the victorious but exhausted men pounced on the plunder and began eating raw meat with blood, violating the law of Moses. Because of sin, their strength and spirit left them and they could not finish the fight. When Saul investigated to find the cause, he found that Jonathan was guilty. By Saul's own decree, Jonathan should die. But when the people defended Jonathan, Saul capitulated. (14: 31-52) Saul's pride could have destroyed his own son.

Second, Saul, a man of disobedience. (15:1-9) God gave Saul a mission.

The Amalekites had taken advantage of God's people when they were most vulnerable. God called Saul to be his instrument of judgment to punish them. He wanted to give Saul a second chance to be the leader of his people. Saul started well, but when the time came to carry out God's hard commands absolutely, he interpreted God's commands in his own way; he listened to the voice of his sinful nature and his soldiers and compromised. He spared the king of the Amalekites, Agag, and the best of the livestock and everything that was good. (15:8,9) Saul was a man of disobedience.

Third, the Lord was grieved at Saul's disobedience. (15:10-35) The Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king. Samuel cried out all night to the Lord for Saul's future. But Saul went to Carmel to erect a monument for his name's sake. When Samuel confronted Saul, (17) he was full of excuses. He did not repent of not completing his mission. He said he wanted to offer a sacrifice to God. But God does not want such sacrifices--he wants obedience. Disobedience is rebellion; it comes from arrogance. Read verses 22,23. "But Samuel replied: 'Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.'"

IV. Samuel anoints boy David as the future king (16:1-23)

First, the Lord looks at the heart. (1-13) The Lord rejected Saul as king and sought a man after his own heart. He sent Samuel to the home of Jesse to anoint one of Jesse's eight sons as king of Israel. Samuel was impressed by the handsome appearance of Eliab the oldest. But God does not look at the outer appearance; he looks at the heart. He saw the heart of David the shepherd boy, Jesse's youngest son. When Samuel anointed him, the Spirit of the Lord came on David in power.

Second, Saul was possessed by demons. (14-23) When the Spirit of God left Saul, an evil spirit came in to torment him. When the Spirit of God left him, he became a toy of demons. Saul's advisors recommended music therapy, and they told him about David. He was a brave man, a warrior, and he played the harp. He was handsome and spoke well, and the Lord was with him. He entered Saul's service, and his music soothed Saul.

In this passage we learn that the spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. Saul's human greatness achieved nothing at the time of national crisis. Rather, his human greatness aggravated the integrity of his humanity until he became proud and godless. On the other hand, one man's faith and loyalty to God empowered him with the Spirit of God until he defeated the mighty army forces of the Philistines. Who is a truly great man? He is one who has faith in God.