

INTRO: Is God arbitrary, unpredictable, volatile? And if not, then what's most important to God? And how do we know? Thankfully, he's told us. Let's turn to 1Sam 13:1-15, page 234 in your pew Bible.

To understand 1Sam 13, you have to remember the context. From the end of Judges, there was no king in Israel and so everyone's been doing what they thought was right in their own eyes. It was so bad that in Judges 19, a traveling Levite staying in an Israelite town, Gibeah of Benjamin, had his concubine sexually abused and left for dead by the men in the town. That happened one time before...in Gomorrah. Gibeah in Israel was as bad as Gomorrah. Fast forward to Samuel's early days, and the priesthood is corrupt. The Philistines steal the ark of the covenant, and God's glory had left the building. The people repent for a time in chapter 7, putting away their idols, confessing their sins. As a result, God saves them from an attack by the Philistines, without any need for a king. The Lord thundered, threw them into confusion, and they were defeated. By the time Samuel is old in chapter 8, though, things are bad again. Samuel's own sons were too corrupt to form the basis of a prophetic dynasty. So in chapter 8, Israel asks for a king like all the other nations have, to make them like all the other nations. God takes that as rejection of the whole Sinai covenant. God had taken Israel out of Egypt to be a holy nation and a royal priesthood, a special people among all peoples. Now, Israel wants out of that. That's God's interpretation of Israel's heart, "*They have rejected me from being king over them*" (8:7). Yet in an ominous move, God gives them what they ask for in chapters 9-10. He gives them Saul the Tall—handsome and rich, but he's not much of a shepherd because he loses his dad's donkeys. And he's not much of a leader—he's hiding behind the baggage at the members' meeting where they're appointing him king. Does he even want this job?¹

What's worse, Saul has a dark backstory. He himself is a Benjamite from Gibeah, the New Gomorrah now inside Israel. And he evokes that passage from Judges 19 by his reaction to the Ammonite threat in chapter 11. He dismembers his own ox and mails out the limbs with an intimidating note that any man who dodges the draft will end up like his ox. That's what the Levite did with his dead concubine in Judges 19. Dark stuff. Is this really the kind of backstory we want in our next king? The crucial context comes in chapter 10, where Samuel told Saul God would be with him, and that he should go to Gilgal. "*And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.*" Clear as day, right? Gilgal...seven days...wait until I come.² And just as important for context is the last sentence we read at the end of chapter 12. "*Only fear the Lord with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.*"³ What'll it be? Here we go.

1S 13:1-2 "*Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel, Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent.*" Most scholars are not sure when these time marks are measuring from,

¹ "The disparity between physical heft and courage is an irony extended later in the story, when God advises Samuel that how God sees things is missing from how humans assess matters" (Paul Borgman, *David, Saul, & God: Rediscovering an Ancient Story* [New York: Oxford, 2008], p.21).

² So also Bergen (NAC 146), Borgman, Firth (AOTC 152, 155). *Contra* Tsumura, who says "the command can hardly have been the one in 10:8, 'to wait seven days at Gilgal.' That was probably over ten years earlier, and Saul had presumably kept the command, for after that Samuel officially made him king before the Lord at Gilgal (11:15)" (NICOT, 348). Tsumura thus sees in this seven-days wait only a ritual and therefore regular "cultic significance...for consecration" but not obedience to the specific command of 10:8 (NICOT, 343, 345; cf. 290); *pace* Baldwin, who confidently asserts "the reference can hardly be to 1Sam 10:8, but presupposes a similar instruction given for this occasion also" (TOTC, 112). But how exactly do we know that chapter 13 is happening "probably over ten years" later than 10:8? Isn't the chronology here, especially of 13:1-2, so opaque as to be an unreliable basis for such a confident conclusion, when a clear contextual referent is already at hand? Firth seems better: "The seven days of 10:8 thus relate to the time from which Saul attacks the Philistines rather than an absolute date of Saul's initial empowerment through the Spirit" (AOTC, 153). Dale Ralph Davis seems almost conclusive when he mentions that Saul himself is the one who "harks back to Samuel's original instructions in 10:8" when he says in v.11 "you did not come within the days appointed" (FOTB, 135). How could that refer to anything else in context *but* 10:8?

³ This is Borgman's observation, p.23—"Immediately we find the new king doing wrong, and being 'swept away'" (so also Bergen, NAC 146). Borgman goes on to note from the context of chapter 9 "With no servant boy to prompt or guide him in the present scene of impending danger, Saul is on his own, and does poorly..." (25).

and I'm not sure either.⁴ In any case, Saul keeps two thousand soldiers with himself in Michmash and only sends a thousand with Jonathan in Gibeah, who we later find out is his own son. And this raises more questions about Saul. Saul was supposed to be at Gilgal; what's he doing in Michmash? And why the disparity in troops—twice as many for himself? Is he hiding behind troops like he hid behind the baggage?⁵ It's hard to tell, but it becomes clear that he wants credit for winning a battle he didn't fight.

1S 13:3-4 ***Jonathan** defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was a Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And **Saul** blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, 'Let the Hebrews hear.' And all Israel heard it said that **Saul** had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. So Jonathan is the one who defeated the garrison of the Philistines, but when Saul blows the trumpet, word on the street is that **Saul** had defeated the garrison of the Philistines. Lieutenant does the lifting, but the king takes the credit. Saul wants all the reward with none of the risk. In the meantime, Israel isn't the only nation to hear that "Saul" defeated a Philistine garrison at Geba. The Philistines hear about it too, and they're not going to take that lying down. This makes Israel stink all the more to the Philistines. Remember, Philistia was the regional power. This is the beginning of the iron age, the Philistines were the first to weaponize the new technology—and they monopolized it, to the point that everyone in the region had to go to Philistia just to sharpen their plows. They were the big man on the Middle Eastern campus, and their army was bigger, better, and badder than anybody in the area—and Israel just poked the bear.*

1S 13:5-7 *And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling."*

The Philistines bring the house. This is an all-out blitz—corners, linebackers, safetys—everybody's coming after the quarterback—like the sand on the seashore—countless. And it's quick. Immediately after Saul leaves Michmash for Gilgal, the Philistines heal up his place in Michmash. But it's more than just quick. It's retaliatory intimidation. You knock out Geba, we take out Michmash,⁶ and we're right up on you across from Beth-aven. This is an immediate show of overwhelming force...and it makes grown men in Israel start jumping into caves and tombs, hiding for their lives. Others turn tail east across the Jordan River—they don't want any of this. That left Saul, and whoever could hold their lunch, hunkered down in Gilgal; but his troops were dropping like flies, and the ones who stayed were shaking in their boots. Now remember what Samuel told Saul in 10:8, "God is with you. Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offering sand to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do." He has God's word. "Wait." And of course, God had previously filled Saul with the Spirit to defeat Nahash the Ammonite in battle. So he had

⁴ D.G. Firth, AOTC 151. See the extensive discussion in Tsumura, *NICOT*. However, "Especially in light of Acts 13:21, it is best to regard the extant Hebrew text as corrupted at this point and avoid speculation regarding Saul's age at the time of his ascension to Israel's throne" (Robert Bergen, *NAC* 148). Regarding the number of years Saul reigned, "perhaps the writer purposely used the smaller number to indicate that Saul reigned only two years before the Lord disqualified him from kingship (cf. 15:26); Paul's larger number [Acts 13:21] would then represent the number of years Saul functioned as king, in spite of his rejection by the Lord" (*loc. cit.*).

⁵ Firth notes that "since Jonathan was on the same side as the Philistines, his position was more dangerous" (AOTC, 154), but if so then wouldn't it be better to give Jonathan the 2k troops and leave Saul himself with half that, instead of vice versa? Firth's observation strengthens the suspicion that Saul is still hiding in fear. Though Firth himself does not draw that conclusion from the division of troops, he does conclude that other "evidence pointed more to fear than confidence among those still with him" (154). Perhaps Saul's own faithless fear was contagious.

⁶ "The Philistine occupation of Saul's base appears to have been a tit-for-tat response to the Israelite occupation of their former center of operations at Geba" (Bergen, *NAC*, 149).

some experience trusting the Lord under duress.⁷ But sometimes the hardest thing to do is hold your water and wait. Samuel's on his way. This is the test of Saul's mettle. What's he made of?

1S 13:8-12 *“He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, ‘Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.’ And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. Samuel said, ‘What have you done?’ And Saul said, ‘When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, “Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.” So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.’*

Saul looks like he has every reason to get antsy. Samuel hasn't gotten here, and the army isn't staying here! So in Saul's eyes, circumstances are forcing his hand. Samuel is forcing his hand. The Philistines are forcing his hand. His own troops are forcing his hand. It feels like God is forcing his hand. The sun is setting and Samuel is nowhere to be seen.⁸ Saul's done waiting. So he takes matters into his own hands. He offers the burnt offering himself; yet as soon as he offers it, “behold”—would you look at this, as if on cue—up walks Samuel.⁹ Now, what does Saul do at that moment? You'd think he'd at least be a little sheepish, if not flat out ashamed; but of all moments to go bold, Saul chooses this one. He walks right out to Samuel for a meet and greet, like nothing happened, like they're just going to chat a little. Samuel's having none of that. It's like Samuel saw the smoke of the burnt offering on his way in and he can hardly believe it. *“What have you done?”*

Here is Saul gives of the most repeated rationalizations of all time. *“When I saw...”* Stop right there. Trace the logic through verses 11-12. *“When I saw ...I said ...So I did.* He saw, he drew a conclusion from what he saw, and he acted on that conclusion. So what did he see? Three things. The people were scattering from me, you did not come, the Philistines had mustered. It's everybody else's fault. The troops were deserting me. You looked like you were running late on me. And the Philistines are pounding down my door. How often have you, or church leaders you've known, applied just that logic? God's people are jumping ship, God's word doesn't seem on time or on target, and God's enemies are going to kill us. And just to be clear, Saul is not apologizing here, much less repenting. He's defensive and self-justifying.¹⁰ *“What else was I supposed to do? What did you expect? The troops, you, the Philistines...”* You start to hear him echo Adam in the garden. *“It was this woman you gave me.”*

And false inferences lead to false worship. look what he said to himself in v.12 *“Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.”* God's word about waiting appears unreasonable under the circumstances. So watch the move Saul makes. He prioritizes sacrament over word. He substitutes ritual sacrifice for obedience to God's command, assuming that God will treat them interchangeably.¹¹ How do you get the favor of the Lord? Just make the right sacrifice at the right

⁷ So also Baldwin (TOTC 113).

⁸ *“Since sacrifices were normally offered up twice a day, in the early morning and at twilight (cf. Num 28:1-6), Samuel could have arrived at any time on the seventh day and still fulfilled his role in the process...It is ironic—and symptomatic of Saul's spiritual dullness—that the king believed he could obtain the Lord's favor through an act of disobedience”* (Bergen, NAC, 150).

⁹ Borgman says on 13:11 *“The timing of Samuel's appearance seems a bit like entrapment, God's or Samuel's”* (*David, Saul, and God*, 25). But this is as unfair as the conclusions of God's arbitrary judgment that Borgman himself critiques in the treatments of Gunn and Brueggemann (12-14). A test of faith is clearly different than entrapment. Was it entrapment for God to come looking for Adam in Eden in the cool of the day?

¹⁰ *“We are being set up for David. God's second choice does wrong, terrible wrong, but his responses to being confronted...are as different from Saul's as is possible to imagine”* (P. Borgman, 25).

¹¹ *“The verb's semantic range suggests a view of Yahweh open to manipulation: if Saul acts in the right way, Yahweh is bound to bring blessing...The tragedy of Saul's action is that he offered the sacrifice to mollify Yahweh, when it was his willingness to wait in the face of the Philistine threat that would have demonstrated his commitment to Yahweh's way”* (Firth, AOTC 155, 157). Firth also notes, almost sadly, *“Throughout the battle, which runs through to 14:46, it is Jonathan who takes the initiative and expresses faith in Yahweh's provision. Saul does not see Yahweh like this...”* (157).

time, right? Besides, God's word to wait is too hard, too unreasonable under the pressures of the moment. Surely God understands. "I had to. You get it, right Samuel? I did good! I'm not in trouble, am I?" This is leadership by sight and fear and impatience, because he refuses to live or lead by faith in God's word. It is understandable; it may even appear rational. But that does not make it right; and it leads directly to false worship, loss of leadership, and over time, the loss of his whole relationship with God and God's people. **1S 13:13-15** *"And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.'* And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army, they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin."

Saul thought he was being wise. Samuel thought...otherwise. *You've done foolishly.* We think like Saul still today. We think we know better than God what the days demand of us. We think it's foolish to tie ourselves down to the commands of God in Scripture. But what's truly foolish is acting as if you can free yourself from God's commands by substituting some other form of sacrifice. Saul thought he'd pass the test with his boldness and creativity under duress, when in fact that's how he failed. If he had just sat tight and waited a little longer for Samuel, he'd have passed the test and his kingdom would have been established. Instead he broke faith and lost the kingdom. Now this may look like an over-reaction. Seriously? Saul loses the kingdom and the shot at a royal dynasty just for offering a sacrifice he wasn't supposed to make? I mean, if you're a coach, aren't you really just looking at a hustle mistake here? Isn't Saul just trying too hard? You don't penalize hustle, do you? He took too much initiative. Can't blame a guy for trying, right? That is not the issue. The issue is obedience to God's word. Saul may have been the captain of the team, but he took a shot that wasn't his to take. He ignored the coach, called his own number, went one-on-one, tried to play hero ball. The issue is, who is the ultimate king in Israel, anyway—God or Saul? Will Saul be a king like all the other nations have—calling all his own shots? Or will Saul obey God's word, even when his back is up against a wall? Will Saul rule under God's word, or apart from God's word?¹²

Samuel leaves, and as Robert Bergen points out, Samuel never makes the sacrifice, and never instructs Saul on the Philistine threat. Saul is on his own now.¹³ He has forfeited prophetic help. He's left with a severely depleted and demoralized army, no prophet, and worst of all, no favor with God. He ruined it. Now what? That's for next week. For now....

POINT: What matters to God is faith to obey His word; that is why God's Son became human.

Twice in vv.13-14 Samuel says to Saul *"You have not kept what the Lord commanded you."* That is Samuel's summary of Saul's failure, and of the reason God rejects Saul as king. Saul believed in God. Saul was a cultural theist. How could he not be? He was a Jew. If you asked Saul, "do you believe in God?" He'd be like, Of course I do...and how dare you insinuate that I don't! Why would you even ask that question?" But belief without obedience is empty. Faith without works is dead. A faith in God that gives way to fear of man is worthless. Knowledge is not faith. Agreement is not faith. Demons agree with perfect theology. Trust in Jesus, that obeys Jesus, is faith—and that is what God wants and expects of us. That is what matters to God. And that is why God's Son became a man—not just to model obedient faith,

¹² "What Samuel is at pains to establish once and for all is the essential difference between Israel's monarchy and that of the nations. In Israel the Lord is king, and obedience to him must be paramount. It follows that any sign of a desire for independence of action becomes a disqualification: it is the equivalent of rebellion against the Lord" (Baldwin, TOTC 113). Borgman astutely notes the ironic play on words from the wider context, "...the *appointment* of Saul as king has been compromised by Saul's failure to keep the *appointment* with God's word-bearer" (P. Borgman, *David, Saul, & God*, p.24, *emph. orig.*).

¹³ Bergen, NAC 151; so also D.R. Davis (FOTB, 137).

but to become the object of our faith. He is the one we trust as prophetic teacher. He is the one we rely on as saving priest who took on human flesh in order to offer his own body and blood for our sins. And therefore He is the one we obey as our King.

Saul's failed like Adam,¹⁴ by usurping a privilege that was not his. Adam did it by stealing the freedom to define right and wrong for himself. Then Adam blamed Eve and even God himself. That's what Saul's doing here. This is the Fall of Saul, and Robert Bergen notices that it is cast in the same categories as the Fall of Adam—a king who stands to inherit an everlasting kingdom, but forfeits it by disobedience to God's word. This is what we all do. We disobey God's word in order to rule our own lives and our own world however we like, usually in ways that justify or excuse our favorite sins and leave us as the king of our little kingdom with no felt oversight from God Himself. The only way that gets put right is by Jesus coming to represent us as the Human King who would always obey the Heavenly King. That is why, at his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus refused to take what was not yet his to have. Satan tempted him to eat what God had not given, then to force God's hand by jumping from the temple top, and finally Satan he offered Jesus all the power of the kingdom minus all the pain of the cross. That was not what God promised to give Jesus. God promised Jesus a crown through a cross, not a crown without a cross. And Jesus obedience—from incarnation to propitiation—is the only power to reconcile us to God and render us obedient to our Creator-King.

Faith that obeys is what matters to God. There is only one sacrifice that satisfies God, and it is not ours to make. That offering is the body and blood of Jesus. That is the significance of the incarnation. Incarnation minus atonement is mere sentiment. God's Son took a man's body in order to offer that body back to God on behalf of all people who trust in his human blood to atone for their sins. That is the sacrifice that redeems us from the power and penalty of our sin, just like God had redeemed Israel from Egypt. The proper response to redemption is faith that obeys based on God's revelation of Himself.

We worship God on His terms, not ours. Only a prophet-priest was authorized to make this sacrifice. Even a king was not allowed. So when Saul presumes to make the sacrifice because he's afraid, God doesn't accept it. **That sacrifice is not his to make.** False worship offers something to God that we don't have the right to give. We are not allowed to worship God in any way that makes us feel better about ourselves and our circumstances. That's what Saul did. If I just make this sacrifice, God will bless me and my leadership. If I just worship God this way, I'd feel a lot better about my enemies breathing down my neck, and my army disappearing before my eyes, and God's Spirit not showing up when I think he should. Translation: We'd feel a lot better about church if we could just do it our way, the way that makes everyone feel safe and successful and happy. Besides, look at the world around us. Look at what God's enemies are doing. Look how close they're getting. Look how many of them there are. We have to do SOMETHING. We can't just read God's word, and preach God's word, and pray God's word, and sing God's word, and see it in the ordinances, and obey it in our lives. What kind of plan is that for church growth in the 21st century? But friend, that's how Saul thinks. "I can't just trust and obey. I've got Philistines armed to the teeth across the ravine, and my troops are going AWOL. Forget Samuel. I'm making the sacrifice myself. I've got to lead somehow." No. The test of faith is the trust to obey, to wait, to hold the line, the trust in what God says over what we see, so much so that we obey God's word over our intuitive response to visible threats. Saul's leadership model is based on fear of what unbelievers will do to him and his people, if he doesn't do something that he knows will dishonor God. It will make him feel more secure in the short run, but Samuel is coming soon enough; then what?

¹⁴ So also Bergen, NAC 151, who traces the Adamic-Saulide parallels of headship, disobedience to God's word, blame-shifting, and loss of royal dynasty.
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God does not just care who we worship; he cares how we worship. Saul discovered, to his infinite loss, that the “how” of worship mattered to God just as much as the “what” of worship. This is why we are careful in this church only to do in corporate worship what God says, how God says. The way we do that is to do only five things in corporate worship—we read the word, preach the word, pray the word, sing the word, and see the word in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We are not free to do just anything in just any way. I’m sure Saul was sincere in wanting God’s favor for the battle against the Philistines. But he was sincerely wrong to seek that favor in the way he sought it—by offering a sacrifice that was not his to make. The upshot was that Saul ruined the “what” by disobeying the “how”. Saul violated the second commandment here just as badly as Israel did at the golden calf. You don’t worship God in any way that he has not specifically commanded.¹⁵ People balk at this today, but worship is the whole purpose of redemption. “Let my people go” that’s redemption—“that they may serve me”—that’s worship. If the purpose of redemption is worship, then don’t you think God cares how you worship him, and not just that you worship him? He cares so much, in fact, that it’s second among his commands only to “No other gods before me.” God cares about the how, because the how goes back to inform the who. How you worship inevitably shapes your idea of who it is you think you’re worshipping and what your relationship to Him is. Are you king, or is he king? Does he dictate the terms of the relationship, or do you? That is precisely the question at issue in 1Sam 13, and if we neglect it, that’s to our own detriment.

The ordinances are gifts to bless us, not sacraments to manipulate God. Saul treated this ceremony like the Israelites treated the ark in chapter 4, like a good luck charm, like a mystical crystal hanging from the rear-view mirror. Worse, for Saul this sacrifice was a way to manipulate God into blessing his conflict with the Philistines. Scratch God’s back and he’ll scratch yours. Nice to have God in your back pocket. Now, evangelicals like to criticize Catholics for trusting in sacraments—rituals, rites, ceremonies; and there’s a lot of merit to that criticism. In fact, that’s one reason we preach every week but only do the Lord’s Supper once a month. It’s also why the pulpit is central, not to the side. But evangelicals have their own version of sacramentalism, or ritualism that assumes God blesses merely because we did the ritual. Many evangelicals reason that if I just baptize my child as soon as she says the word Jesus, or when she goes to bed without whining, or when he responds better to discipline, or feels guilty for breaking his brother’s toys, I won’t have to worry about him. Adults think like this about themselves: Baptized at seven so I’m headed to heaven. I prayed this prayer, so I can live without a care. Taking communion makes for heavenly reunion. That’s evangelical sacramentalism—it’s how evangelicals rationalize their own immorality with faithfulness to ceremony. You could do that with thoughtless church attendance and meaningless church membership, too. But the Bible says without faith it is impossible to please God, no matter what ritual you perform, even one ordained by Jesus.

One day, it will be God’s enemies hiding, not God’s people (13:5-7). The Philistines troops were like sand on the seashore in multitude. That was what God had promised to make of Abraham’s offspring in Gen 22:17. “*I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of the heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.*” Here in 1Sam 13, it’s God’s enemies who can’t be numbered. It’s still like that today, and it will be that way until Jesus returns. In Rev 20:8 we are reminded that God’s enemies come out to deceive the nations and “their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city...” That’s happening even today. And the impulse of God’s people is to hide, just like the Israelites did in 1Sam 13, “*the people [of Israel—God’s people!] hid themselves in caves and holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns...*” They hid themselves just like Saul their leader hid himself behind the baggage. But a day is coming when it will not be God’s people hiding; it will be God’s enemies, because God has installed a King worthy of the Name,

¹⁵ For a biblical treatment of this particular application, see Ligon Duncan, *Does God Care How We Worship?* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003, 2020).
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Christ Jesus. He was rejected by the world, died for our sins, and rose from the dead. **Isa 2:10** warns all those who are proud, "Enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the Lord." **Isa 2:19** says that when Jesus returns, "*people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth,*" and "*mankind will cast away their idols of silver and gold..., to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the splendor of his majesty when he rises to terrify the earth. Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?*" As Ligon Duncan has said, this may not be the God we want, but this is the God who is; and this is not just an OT doctrine.

Jesus warns us as well not to fear man who can kill the body but not the soul; rather fear God who can destroy both body and soul in hell. And Jesus warns us in **Rev 6:15-17** "*Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and ricks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'*" Friend, when judgment day arrives, God will find you wherever you are hiding, either in Christ, or in a cave.

Leadership by fear leads to false worship and rejection, accompanied by success without blessing.

Acts 13:21 says Saul reigned for 40 years. In 1Sam 14:47 will say he fought against all his enemies on every side... Wherever he turned he routed them. And he did valiantly. Yet God rejects him as king before he did any of that. Success without blessing. That's a category. Mark it well, friend: success is not the same thing as blessing with God.¹⁶ God gives a lot of people success, and yet withholds his blessing from them. And conversely, God gives lots of people his blessing, who do not succeed in this life. Most people would look at Jesus' earthly life, and the way he died, and say, "he was not successful." His own people betray him to the Romans, his best 12 guys disciples him, one of them sold him out, and his number 1 denied Him. Blessed, but not a success as the world would see it. Jesus' success awaited his resurrection.

Fear rationalizes sin, but never excuses it. presumption/gall/audacity, impudence, insolence, but never excuses it. Saul is a clear example of someone who rationalizes sin by fear. That's what we do, right? Our attitude in our unbelief is much like Saul's. We're incredulous. What was I supposed to do? What did you expect? My enemies are getting closer to me, my friends are abandoning me, and God's word began to feel unreasonable to me. Therefore, I had to sin. Anybody else would have done the same thing in my position." It's all so reasonable, logical, so understandable. You almost sympathize with Saul, don't you? Not Samuel. Samuel doesn't buy Saul's "what-was-I-supposed-to-do" routine. And God doesn't buy ours either. That doesn't fly, not when Saul had a clear word from God; and not when we have a clear word from God in the whole Bible. We live and lead by faith in God's word, not by fearing what we see.

What God wants from us is obedience, not sacrifice (13:13). Samuel told Saul to go to Gilgal and wait there seven days until I get there and tell you what to do. Saul waited seven days, but not until Samuel got there. Saul's sacrifice, without obedience to God's word, was not merely meaningless to God. It was rebellious, counter-productive. Friend, Jesus has made the only sacrifice that pleases God. So what God wants from you is not some impressive thing that you do for someone else or deny yourself. He doesn't want your flawed morality, or your almost perfect family, or your Ned Flanders approach to neighboring. It's not that those things aren't better than some other things. It's that, in God's eyes, nothing compares to

¹⁶ "The religious pretensions of the monarchy were always being weighed in the balance, and it was refused any assurance from a culturally based dogma of the sovereign's divine sonship. And if it failed in respect of religious matters, then even political success could not save it; inexorably it fell from its primacy in the state" (Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1959), 1:440.

Christ's suffering on the cross. Nothing else you sacrifice can make up for your sins. Only what Jesus sacrificed can make up for your sins. What God wants from you, then, is not an aw-shucks I'm doin' best I can. He wants obedience to His gospel call to humble your heart, turn from your sin, your self-reliance, and your self-righteousness, and trust in Jesus to be righteous for you in his living, dying, and rising from the dead. Then worship Him and live before Him on His terms, not yours. That's what Jesus wants in John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." What are his commandments? First to love Him by trusting in Him. And then, to love your neighbor as yourself. You'll obey Jesus in your identity and sexuality; in your time and energy; in your relationships and responsibilities; in your priorities, habits, and hobbies; mind, money, marriage, motives. You will love God's word (both promise and warning), God's Son, God's people. You will love holiness, not sin. You'll love others, not self. You'll love godliness, not worldliness. You'll love humility, not pride; and truth, not lies.

God rejects those who refuse to take Him at His word. *"Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels. Ephraim is stricken; their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death. **My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations**" (Hos 9:15-17). God's judgment is not arbitrary or random. God is not unpredictable or unstable. His standard is clear. It's His word.¹⁷ God expects you and me to listen to His word and obey it even when it's inconvenient, uncomfortable, unpopular, dangerous, and sacrificial. Jesus says to the churches "love not your life even unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

Jesus is the Man after God's own Heart (13:14). King Saul did not keep what the Lord commanded him. And neither have we. Friend, there is Saul lurking in your own heart. We have all broken the Law God has commanded us, time and again. In fact, we have tried to replace God's law with our own. Instead of discovering God's law in Scripture, we've tried to define right and wrong for ourselves, out from under God's authority as our Creator. That's what it meant for us when Adam ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—we were grasping for moral knowledge out from under God's authority, in a way God had clearly forbidden us to do. And ever since, we have ruled our souls only to excuse our sins. And by our sins, we have not only forfeit the right rule ourselves; we have drawn down God's righteous anger at us for our sin against the King of all Creation, the God of Heaven. The penalty is eternal conscious torment in Hell. And that penalty is what Jesus came to pay.

Jesus is the Ultimate Man after God's own heart. Where Saul failed, Jesus prevailed. Jesus feared God rather than man. He told the truth about his divine identity and mission, only to be rejected by God's people. He obeyed God's word even though it made him sweat blood in Gethsemane and shed blood on Golgotha. He gave his life to save us from God's hatred and anger over our sins. He hated us at Gilgal, because we were his enemies. Yet God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever trusts in him will have eternal life. Jesus had committed no sin, yet paid the penalty for all the sins of all his people in his death on the cross. And that is why he rose from the dead, to vindicate his own righteousness and then share it with all who trust in Him. And that is why Jesus is the King of Christmas. His birth is for the purpose of his death. His incarnation is for our redemption. And that is worthy of our adoration, our devotion, and our submission. He is King of every Christian. He is king over all creation,

¹⁷ "The primary sin of the kingship, as demonstrated in Saul, is the self-sufficiency of the holders of political power in the efface of the only real power, that of God (quoting Hos 9:15-17). All later defection was, therefore, already contained in Saul's act of disobedience in Gilgal (1Sam 15); the fruit-tree was at that moment already stricken at its root, and condemned to wither" (W. Eichrodt, *Theology* 1:450). I would argue that the same could be said starting here in 1Sam 13, with the same person, sinning in the same place—Gilgal.

even over all those who mock and reject him. He is King of the Kingdom of God, because he is not just the man after God's own heart. He is God's own heart embodied as a man.

CONCLUSION

Friend are you obeying God's word about the gospel of His Son? Or are you still trying to make sacrifices that were never yours to make?

