

Title: When the King Forgets He is a Subject  
Text: 1 Samuel 13:1-15a  
Theme: No one is above God's Word  
Series: 1 Samuel  
Prop Stmtnt: You cannot lead well, unless you know how to follow well.

The King James Version of the Bible was translated in 1611. The king it was named after was King James VI of Scotland who around the age of 40 also became king of England where he was known as King James I. King James believed in the divine right of kings, which was the idea that God made certain people kings and that they were just inherently better than anyone else. Therefore, the king should have absolute authority over everything and everyone, including the church. I doubt that James paid much attention to the Bible named after him. Andrew Melville did. Melville was a bold Presbyterian in Scotland who told James that "there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland" – king James and King Jesus. Andrew ended up being imprisoned and banished for that and a few other things, an act that king James instantly regretted when he died and discovered that he was not a king, but a subject to the real King.

Melville was certainly not the only Protestant leader to have to deal with King James. The king was notoriously rude when attending worship services. On one occasion, he was seated in his gallery, along with his courtiers while Robert Bruce was preaching. Per usual, James began talking during the sermon. Bruce stopped. The king became silent. When Bruce resumed the sermon, James resumed his talking, so Bruce stopped again. The king stopped again. When it happened a third time, the preacher looked at the king and famously and fearlessly said, "*It is said to have been an expression of the wisest of kings, 'When the lion roars, all the beasts of the field are quiet': the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is now roaring in the voice of His Gospel, and it becomes all the petty kings of the earth to be silent.*"<sup>1</sup> Robert Bruce ended up being exiled too. But the truth stands. All kings are subjects. They are subject to the King and to his Word, no exceptions. Therefore, when a king forgets that he is a subject, it not only goes poorly for him, but it will go poorly for his people.

Read Text:

1. **The test.** (1-4) (How do we handle power or success?)

Verses 1-4 present Saul with a test. He enjoyed success in his battle with the Ammonites and now he is established as the king as Israel and is settling into this role. But, how would this affect him? What does a person do when they believe that they have supreme power? How does success affect you? I think that God is gracious to not answer all of our prayers or all of our wants because we would become jerks. If success leads us to relying upon ourselves and making much of ourselves, we are better off being failures. Can you think of a time when you enjoyed success and you didn't handle it well?

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<sup>1</sup> D.C. MacNichol, *Robert Bruce: Minister in the Kirk of Edinburgh (1907; reprint ed., n.p.: Banner of Truth, 1961), 38.* Cited in Dale Ralph Davis, commentary on 1 Samuel, p.136. Christian Focus, 2000.

In verse 2 we are introduced to a guy named Jonathan. At this point, we have no idea who Jonathan is. It is not until verse 16 that we find out that Jonathan is Saul's son. Saul has a son? We didn't even know that Saul was married. Are there other kids? More on that later. But, in the aftermath of Saul's victory over the Ammonites, it is decided that Saul needed a contingent of soldiers (standing army) available at all times with most of them assigned to him. It is not a particularly good look for the nation to have your king out plowing the field with a couple of oxen has his not-so-secret service detail. Saul chose 3,000 guys to hang around and the rest he sent home. 2,000 stayed with Saul and 1,000 were given to Jonathan.

1 and 2 Samuel is a literary work of art. It is not only inspired in the theological sense of the word; it is storytelling at its finest. Everything that is said matters and everything that isn't said matters too. Jonathan, with fewer soldiers, is farther away from Geba than Saul was. There was a garrison of Philistine soldiers in Geba. Jonathan attacks them. Saul doesn't attack them. Jonathan attacks them and defeats them. Well, this upsets the status quo in more ways than one. The Philistines still have quite the influence in the land (as we see in the end of the chapter) "*and the Philistines heard of it*" (v.3) and they were obviously not very happy about it. Saul had an immediate problem with the Philistines that he had to deal with. Jonathan's bravery set into motion a chain of events that Saul has to respond to. So, in verse 3 we read that Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land of Israel and recalled the army. Notice the use of the word "hear". The Philistines heard about the garrison being defeated. The Hebrews heard the call to arms and they "*heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines....*" But Saul did not defeat the garrison, Jonathan did. Hmmm

Now, at this point, we don't know anything more than this. Did Saul tell Jonathan to do this? Did Jonathan act on his own? Did he ask his dad? Did Jonathan have a Levitical priest in his group who prayed for guidance? All that we know is that Jonathan, with a smaller force and at a greater distance took the initiative and was victorious. In fact, every time Jonathan is depicted from here to the end of the book, he is brave, noble, faithful, and selfless. The writer depicts him as a true hero and one that we would assume would rise to the occasion of the throne if he ever gets the chance. I think that right here, the author is delicately throwing some shade on Saul. Saul has a military problem with the Philistines, and he has an image problem with his own son. His own son looks like and acts like a king more than he does. How do you respond when you enjoy success? How do you respond when someone under you, or around you enjoys more success than you, or looks better than you? Both of those are occasions for what is in your heart to be put on display. In Saul's case, it ain't pretty.

What is noticeably absent is anything about the Spirit of God. When Saul heard of the imminent attack of the Ammonites, the Spirit of God came on him and the dread of the Lord came upon the nation, so that they responded as one. The only dread that comes upon Israel here is their fear of the Philistines when they realize that they have become a stench to them (v.4). All of this sets the stage for how Saul is going to lead. As the king of the people of God, his primary responsibility is to obey God's Word. Samuel wrote down "the rights and the duties of the kingship" and put it in a book (10.25). Saul knew what he was supposed to do and what he was

not allowed to do. No king was a law unto himself. The king was a subject to the reign of God. The monarchy was under the Theocracy and that is true of every king, president, and dictator. But it's hard to trust God when circumstances beckon you to take matters into your own hands.

## 2. Trusting God is not easy nor automatic. (5-7)

### A. **When the enemy is bigger than you.**

The Philistines were well known for their wooden chariots that had iron fittings which made them particularly durable and difficult to defend against. 30,000 chariots is a massive array and an additional force of 6,000 cavalymen plus troops would look like the sand on the seashore. Israel is facing an enemy that, humanly speaking, she cannot defeat. In the prelude that led up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and in the early days of the war, I saw a number of reports that compared the size and scope of Russia's military assets to those of Ukraine, which led all of the experts to conclude that there was no way that Ukraine could defend herself against Russia. On paper, there was no debate. But wars are not fought on paper. Saul was not the only one who could see the odds. So could his army. Trusting God is not easy nor automatic especially when the enemy is bigger than you and...

### B. **When you are being deserted.**

Verse 6 is ominous. The army of Israel has no hope. They see the size of the enemy, and this time, there is no compelling vision, no convictional confidence that is being stated on the part of the King, no admonition for them to trust in God, no reminders of what God has done for them over and over when they have been in worse situations. Every one of you who has served in the military knows the importance of morale. It is true for a sports team, a company, and a school. But in the military, it is a matter of life and death.

I concluded the message last week talking about two ways leaders can influence people around them and under them; fear or love. Fear is powerful. If you disappoint the king, you fear that he will demote you, disown you, shame you and destroy you. If the king is someone like Putin, you cannot say anything that disagrees with him because he will kill you. So, when he makes unreasonable demands, you lie and say that you can do that, knowing full well that you cannot. The king is able to stay in power because of the fear that he is able to wield over others. He, like all bullies uses fear, because he is afraid. He is afraid that his insecurities and incompetency's will be revealed. But there is something even more powerful than fear; it is love. And we are witnessing a real-life example of the two being played out in the world stage.

The president of Ukraine was famously offered safe passage out of the country by the United States to which he said: I don't need a rescue, I need ammo. When he delivered a speech to the EU from a bunker, the audience wept and gave him a standing ovation. When a Russian leader gave a speech to the U.N, the audience stood up and walked out. When a Russian warship ordered the surrender of some Ukrainian soldiers on Snake Island or be destroyed, the soldiers told the warship to do something biological that was a rather impolite way of saying, "nyet."

When your president won't leave you, you will not leave him. When your leader loves you and is willing to suffer with you, you will love him and suffer for him.

People desert not only because they have no faith in the mission, they have no faith in their leader. The end of verse 7 is very telling. "Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling." What is Saul going to do? God put Saul into a position where Saul had the opportunity to model what it means to trust God even in the valley, even under pressure, even when the heat on, even when the odds are against you.

### 3. **Unbelief drives disobedience.** (8-15a)

The king of Israel, never had ultimate power. He was subject to the Word of God. As such, God would send prophets to the king, to tell him what to do or not to do. Before every battle, the man of God would be consulted in order to find out how to engage in the battle. The OT occupies about 77% of the entire Bible and a great deal of the OT is the story of prophets and kings. The prophets give the Word of God to the kings and the kings decide whether or not to listen to God. When the kings obey, the results are remarkable. When they don't, the consequences are usually disastrous. 1-2 Samuel are followed by 1-2 Kings which are followed by 1-2 Chronicles all of which deal with the kings of Israel and Judah and how they relate to God's Word. The major prophets of Isaiah and Jeremiah and almost all of the minor prophets deal with the same thing.

Will the King and the people simply obey God's word? The usual answer in the OT is, no. There are some wonderful exceptions, but they are the exception. Even the good kings have famous failures. All of this builds throughout the OT into a crescendo that crashes the weight of this truth on us: We need a TRUE King. In 1 Samuel, there is a lot of history to play out. The question is still on the table, will the king and the people simply obey God? Israel was called by God to be unlike any other nation. Her constitution was given to her by God. Her days of the week, her national holidays were indeed holy days, her worship life, government, judicial system, economic system, morals, home-life, sexual ethics, welfare system, international relations, were all determined by God and therefore, she was not like any other nation. That was the point! Therefore, her military and battle strategies were not like any other nation either. Now, just because Israel had a king and the king had an army, did not mean that he could just use this fighting force willy-nilly. Just because Israel was chosen by God does not automatically mean that Israel can attack other nations and call it a holy war. What happened here happened again in chapter 15. The king could not order his troops to war without appealing to God in a proper ritual and he could not do this without a prophet.

Therefore, before a battle could be fought, an appeal had to be made to God and this appeal involved two things: 1) A sacrifice had to be offered and 2) a true prophet had to be consulted. Here is where it gets a little tricky. The office of the king has just been established. Therefore, this process, while it had some history is now formally and firmly established. In a manner that was reminiscent of his coronation, Samuel told Saul to wait 7 days and he (Samuel) would come to Gilgal. Samuel, who was in the tribe of Levi, who was a priest, could offer the burnt offering.

And Samuel was also a prophet who would hear from God and tell the King what to do. Saul was clearly told by the prophet Samuel to wait and to wait for seven days. Saul waits for almost a full seven days, but decides that circumstances demanded that he take matters into his own hands. Samuel had not shown up yet, the people were continuing to bail out, "So Saul said, 'Bring the burnt offering here to me and the peace offerings.'" (v.9) As soon as he offered the burnt offerings, Samuel shows up. Samuel asks, "What have you done?" And now, the excuses start flying.

Here is why it is okay for me to disobey God:

- The people were scattering from me
- YOU did not come when you said
- The Philistines were in Michmash and were probably going to come here
- I had not sought the Lord (this is true! But Saul did not get the set the terms of what it meant to seek the Lord. You cannot seek the Lord and disobey the Lord at the same time.)
- I didn't want to do it, I had to force myself.

Samuel's response makes it clear that he is not buying anything that Saul is selling. Samuel says, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you." Saul's excuses were excuses, not valid reasons. There is no excuse for disobeying God. It's just that simple. That phrase, "You have done foolishly" is a phrase that is used only a handful of times in the OT and every time it appears, is in the context of a king who fails to trust in God and decides to take matters into his own hands.

As much as we don't want to, we can identify all too well with Saul as we all have similar excuses as to why we can disobey God. Why do you give in to that anger? Why do you turn to food, or porn, or buying stuff, or binge-watching, or whatever your go-to is?

- I was under too much stress
- I had just gone through a tough stretch
- People didn't come through for me
- I felt misunderstood and all alone
- I was afraid of what was going to happen
- I sort of obeyed, at least a little. That has to count for something, right?
- I really didn't want to do it, I knew it was a bad idea, but it was better than the alternative
- It's how I handle my insecurities.

Did it ever dawn on you that our failure to rely on God is why we have insecurity? Saul was given a clear command to follow. The leader of God's people has to lead by believing in God, no matter what. Saul took matters into his own hands because he believed in himself and in what he could do, instead of trusting in God to do what God commanded. The king failed to

remember that he was a subject. It may have seemed like a small sin, but as Wesley once said, "there is no little sin, because there is no little God to sin against."

The storyline of the Bible is the story of the kingdom that God is establishing for King Jesus. Everything in the OT is a preview of Christ or an example of how much we need Christ, or an example of an antichrist; that is one who rejects God's authority and tries to make his own laws. We need a king who will lead us perfectly because he obeys God's Word perfectly and unlike our leaders like Adam and Saul, gives in to his own desires or to the pressure. The good news is we have a perfect King in Christ. When he faced the greatest stress, greatest temptation, greatest sorrow, greatest pain, most severe abandonment, betrayal and denial, he did not fail. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. He drank the cup of wrath, that we might be able to drink the cup of fellowship. He died for our sin, that we might live with him forever. All of these stories point to that story because the story of Christ is THE story. It is what life is about.