

Are you listening?

That is probably something we have all been asked before.

Especially if you have problems with your hearing, or with paying attention I certainly get asked this a lot. I can struggle to listen.

Especially in places with lots of voices all talking at the same time.

Or sometimes I can hear the words being said, but I don't respond.

Whether because I am distracted or because I am too focused elsewhere.

When we don't listen, we can get in trouble.

Our passage this morning is about listening to God's voice.

And what listening to God actually looks like.

I. Listen to God's voice by obeying completely (v. 1-23).

I want you to keep this in mind as we go through this.

Because there is a lot that is here.

There are some really deep theological questions that are gonna come up.

If you are not a believer, there's going to be some things in this passage, that offend you or shock you.

And I will do my best to address them when we get there.

I'm not going to ignore them, but I don't think that they are at the heart of the passage.

So, try and keep the main thing in mind.

Verse 1, **"And Samuel said to Saul, 'The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD.'"**

Samuel comes to Saul with instructions.

Saul is reminded that God is the one who has made him king.

Saul is not king because of his own doing, but because of God's doing.

But also, there's a phrase that Samuel says that doesn't always get translated in English.

See when we want to emphasize something, every language handles that differently.

In Hebrew would they often do is repeat words.

I might use the same word twice in a row

And often we don't translate that into English because it can sound awkward or it can sound like stuttering.

This is one of those places.

What Samuel says that's it Saul needs to listen to the words from the voice of the Lord.

That usually doesn't get added.

It might sound extra and awkward to us, but it is the heart of what Samuel was calling for

Because we repeatedly hear other voices.

They are going to be other voices yelling in Saul's ear, but he needs to listen to God's voice and obey.

Verse 2-3, **"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. 3 Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"**

Here we get the instructions of what Saul needs to listen to.

He has called to go and attack the Amalekites

And we know that these are very harsh instructions.

They are to destroy everything and everyone.

You can see where we might immediately have questions or objections.

Now I could spend all of our time this morning and only get through v. 3.

I'm not going to do that this morning because I want us to get through the book 1 Samuel before Christmas.

I'm gonna try and briefly give you some answers to how we are supposed to understand this.

If this is something that has bothered you about the Bible and you wanna talk more about it or you want to study more about it and you wanna read more in-depth about it I would love to talk to you for much longer about it. So please feel free to grab me afterwards and we can talk more

But first I want you to see is that what God is doing is an act of justice

We immediately object and say this is wrong.
But God is doing this now because they are mean because they are smelly
or because he wants to land they live on.
This is an act of God's justice.
It is divine punishment for the nation sins.
It's particularly for the sins from way back in Exodus 17.
When Israel was leaving Egypt.
When they were faint and weak and did not have much of an army.
Instead of helping the refugees and allowing them to pass through their
land, they tried to kill and rob Israel instead

It was wrong, and God promised that he would bring justice.
And well, we are very individualistic in our American culture. The Bible is
often very focused on corporate sins.
On the sins of nations and national guilt.
The whole nation must pay for this sin.
We also see God's grace, and that many generations go by
God gives them plenty of time to repent from their sin, but now the time is
up and so justice will come

The main thing I want us to see is that it as an act of justice
It also God calls for them to be devoted to destruction or under a ban.
These things in these people are to be cursed.
They are not to be in the sight or the presence of God.
And so they all are to be taken out

This is not for Saul or Israel to get rich.
That this is meant to very clearly be an act of divine judgment in which
Saul in Israel are just in instruments.
They are not to conquer and kill to get rich before God's righteousness.

And finally, we see this is the last time this happens in the Scriptures.
There are a few particular times in particular places in history when God
acted this way.

And now the kingdom of God has shifted.

Or it is more fully revealed.

The kingdom of God is no longer found just in the nation of Israel, but in all peoples.

Our king no longer sits on a throne in earth, but is Jesus Christ who is king of kings.

And Jesus now teaches and commands us to love our enemies, and when we are hit on one cheek to turn and offer the other.

So we have to be clear that this is not an ongoing thing.

Now as Christians we can, and we should object and resist and call out genocide all over the globe as against the will of God in his command commands

There's much more I can say there I don't ignore it. I wanna give you something you have to hold onto. I don't encourage you to study and look at it more and feel free to grab me. I can give you resources or we can talk at length if you want.

Verse 4, **"So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah,"**

Saul counts the army and now they've got a nice big one.

Honestly, I think Saul should not be counting the army. I think it's an act of doubt instead of faith.

Verse 5-6, **"And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. 6 Then Saul said to the Kenites, 'Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.' So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites."**

Again, we see other people who are spared.

Because this is not about slaughter, but about justice and these people acted rightly.

Their nation was kind to Israel and is spared.

Verse 7-8, **"And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword."**

Saul kills every single person except for one.

He leaves the king alive

He is not obey God.

And he has kept the king alive for selfish reasons I think.

When kings conquered other kings, they loved to keep them alive to parade as trophies in their courts.

Seems like that what all wants to do for himself to build up his own honor instead of obeying God.

Verse 9, **"But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction."**

We also see that they keep the best things

All that is good and desirable so in the people keep for themselves.

But anything that's bad or they don't want they're happy to obey God.

This is not obedience.

This would be like if the rich young ruler in response to Jesus saying give and sell all that you have.

Would be if he gave away all the stuff he didn't want and sold all the stuff that was already broken and needed replacing.

That's halfway obedience, but it's not doing what God asked

Verse 10-11, **"The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry and cried to the LORD all night."**

God tell Samuel what has happened.

And God regrets making Saul king.

Now again we could do a whole sermon talking about this

There are those who are open theists which is a heresy we need to avoid. Who would pointed this verse and say, "see God doesn't know everything. Because God gives us free will, and He can't control us and isn't in total control of the universe. He doesn't know what the future will bring, and he does kind of the best that he can.

As if God is pulling out his hair and says, " Whoops, this was a mistake. I wish I had not done that.

And we reject that.

Even though we can affirmance we have free will and He is in control.

Part of this is we are trying to describe the incomprehensible God who is not male or female, and who is far beyond us in human language.

And so we are trying to describe his disposition or his attitude or his action in time.

God does not think that He has made a mistake.

But this does describe God's attitude.

He is sorrowful that Saul has gone down this path.

And it would have been better for Saul to not have been king.

Because Saul is disobeyed he's gonna have consequences

God is sad about it.

In a similar way, that Jesus wept over disciples lack of faith.

But I love Samuel's response.

Samuel seems to feel the same way that God does.

And he is angry, and he prays and cries all night

Imagine if that's the way we responded when we heard of national leaders, singing or leader leaders in the church or Christian ministry sinning.

What if we acted like Samuel?

I think we should

Verse 12, **"And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for him self and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal."**

Samuel wakes up early to go confront Saul, and when he gets there, he is building a statue to himself and his greatness

That should already tell us if you haven't heard it before how tall is going to respond.

It's telling that he's not an altar to worship God he's building something to worship himself.

Verse 13, **"And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD."**

Saul speaks first and the first thing he says is, I've obeyed

Says I've done what you asked.

Verse 14, **"And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?"**

This is a key verse is beautiful and poetic

So that's why he hears sheep ox

In the Hebrew, it's literally why do I hear the voices of sheep and the voices of oxen?

Saul was supposed to listen to the voice of God, but he listened to another voice instead

I don't think this is just Samuel noticing the sounds that is happening. The Bible is trying to clue us in that we have to listen to God's voice.

Verse 15, **"Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction."**

Saul fires up the excuse machine

He acknowledges where they are from

But watch the way he deflect

He says that the people have brought them.

He doesn't say that he spared them. He says the people did this.

And then he also says well, we're gonna sacrifice them.

OK, I know we have them here but we're actually we're just getting ready to sacrifice him to God so don't worry about it.

But noticed that he says the Lord your God

This is why we need to read the Bible slowly and carefully.

We went too quick. You may not have caught it.

He does not say it is his God is Samuel's God.

This shows us Saul's heart.

Verse 16, **"Then Samuel said to Saul, 'Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me this night.' And he said to him, 'Speak.'"**

Samuel seems to have to tell him to knock it off

I think that Saul was just continuing to ramble and make excuse after excuse

He is just rambling on and on in a Vince Vaughan like monologue until Samuel tells him to stop

Verse 17, **"And Samuel said, 'Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel.'"**

He reminded again of the way that God had blessed him

The way that God had elevated and chosen Saul and put them in this position

Verse 18, **"And the Lord sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.'"**

And God gave him a mission and a calling

And God knew that this would be difficult.

God knew that the voices the people would rise up and try to convince him and tell him why there's another way maybe they don't need to do this.

But God chose all as the king because he knew he could do it.

Verse 19, **"Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?"**

He asked why did nobody listen to God's voice

Why was he not listening?

And Samuel names it's all actually did

That he bounced like a cat on a mouse

Like a child after candy from a piñata

He bounced on this spoil.

Verse 20, **"And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction."**

So continues to refuse to admit a sin

And he says he's obeyed

He says I have listened to God's voice look at all I've done

Verse 21, **"But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."**

He blames the people they're the ones who did it not me

And also rationalizes it well we're in a sacrifice it.

Verse 22, **"And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams."**

There was a beautiful poetic rebuke

Or Samuel saying I wanted you to listen

He didn't want him to go through sacrifices. He wanted them to destroy everything.

God is after obedience he doesn't need any sacrifices anyway, but he doesn't need a long force for us to obey
There's important things that we have to see here.

Verse 23, **"For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king."**

We see Samuel name the seriousness of Sin
He says that rebelling against God is basically witchcraft
And presuming that you can disobey God and go through the motions and pretend it's OK is idolatry.
The thing Saul is rationalizing God takes very seriously.

And then the consequence is because he will not listen to God God will not listen to him.
Since he has rebelled against God's rightful kingship, God will take Saul's kingship away
It's not just that his dynasty won't continue. It's you're done being king.

But this is what we need to see here is that we have to listen and obey the voice of God.
We cannot listen to the voice of other people who will try to pull us off of the path or pull us into disobedience.
We cannot listen to people who will tell us well you know you really have to do all that stuff that's in the Bible.
Don't just do a couple of those really good things you know, love our neighbor being enemies, but all that sexual stuff we don't have to worry about that.

But God doesn't want the stuff.
He wants all of our hearts, and he wants us to listen to him.
And he wants us to obey him.
Saul's problem is that he thinks he can do the outward stuff mostly and be good with God.

But he can't God wants us to listen to what's all of our obedience.

I also want to say that sometimes I can hear people misuse this verse or misunderstand it.

The heart of it is that Saul needed to listen, and that God wants our obedience, our inward obedience more than just the outward stuff.

That is very true. God also once the outward stuff.

So could not have been fully obeying the voice of God, and having a heart seeking after God and not making sacrifices or observing the festivals are following the law diligently.

He couldn't have said well, Lord, my heart loves you. I'm just now doing all this ritualism stuff.

We see this today because people will say well I love Jesus and I'm following Jesus and I care deeply about Jesus.

I just don't wanna do all that religion stuff so I don't think that I really need to plug into a local body anywhere.

I don't really think I have to read my Bible every day and pray many times a day because that's so legalistic so I'm not gonna worry about that.

I'm just gonna kind of just do me and just me and Jesus.

It's not listening to the voice of God and obey him fully either.

We have to make sure that we are listening to God's voice and being obedient with our hearts and our outward actions.

The heart is the most important we can't miss that.

But our whole life has to be following Jesus

II. Listen to God's voice by repenting publicly (v. 24-35).

Saul says he will repent

He still is concerned about what people think instead of what God thinks

He would rather repent privately and not let anyone know what He has done.

Verse 24, **"Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.'"**

This is a great statement

He says that he has done wrong

He names how he has sinned

He acknowledges that he's not been listening to the voice of God

Verse 25, **"Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the Lord."**

He then wants this overdone with quickly.

This is like a public official who's been caught in who releases a statement and then once everybody to not ask any questions and let's just all move forward now I said I was sorry.

He wants to get back to normal.

Any specifically asked OK Samuel come with me. Let's go out before the people together.

Saul is happy to privately say that he is sorry but he does not want the public to know that he is has sinned greatly.

Verse 26, **"And Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.'"**

Samuel says no.

He tells him that it seems like you were not getting it.

Says I will not walk beside you anymore.

God is done with you as king and I will no longer bless or honor what you do.

Samuel will not pretend that things are fine

Verse 27, **"As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore."**

As Samuel leaves, Saul is begging and grabbing onto him, trying to keep him.

It is a very pathetic picture that we are meant to see.

He is desperately trying to save his image

Verse 28, **"And Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.'"**

And just like Samuel's robe has torn the kingdom has been torn from Saul. His lack of repentance becomes an illustration.

And God says it's gonna be given to somebody else who is closer than you think.

And this king is going to be a better king

There's really a twisting of the knife going on here

Verse 29, **"And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret."**

Again, we get this idea of God regretting.

This is all saying, God's not changing his mind.

God's regret does not like ours.

So can beg all he wants he won't get it back.

Verse 30, **"Then he said, 'I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the Lord your God. So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the Lord.'"**

So still says OK I was wrong but honoring.

Saul wants to be honored above everything.

He is most concerned about his image rather than his actual righteousness.

This I think is the difference that we will see between David and Saul.

Second, Samuel 12

David publicly repents

Saul is always rationalizing and just once everyone to think that it's good.

Verse 32, **"Then Samuel said, "Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal."**

So the king comes and thinks everything's great

And then Samuel kill him like so should have done.

That also if Saul was truly repentant, that is what Saul would have done as an active repentance, but he doesn't.

Verse 34-35, **"Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵ And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel."**

They both go, and Samuel will never see Saul again.

Their homes are only 10 miles from each other

They are so close and so far

And it's because of Saul's sin

We will be followers of Jesus we cannot be like Saul.

Now we're gonna mess up we're gonna listen to the voice of the world instead of God will disobey Will rebel

The one thing we cannot do is we can't not repent.

We have to mean our repentance.

A repentance cannot just be in words get a mean in our hearts.

In a true repentance is willing to be embarrassed and humiliated to be right with God.

This is one of the reasons it's so important for us to confess our sins to one another that we may be healed.

We are protestants we don't believe that we have to have an organized system or that we have to only confess our sin the priest or the ordained.

However, for most of us that practically means is that we don't wanna confess or anybody cause that's embarrassing.

Or we will confess some things as long as other things everybody else is done we don't want to really let people know what we got going on.

And if we examine our own heart and our honest, there's a big part of us that is just like Saul we don't want to confess because I want to be honored before the people.

You cannot get right with God unless you care more about being right with God than you care about people thinking that you're right with God.

The beauty of the gospel is that if we confess our sins, he is faithful, and just to forgive us

There is redemption there is mercy to be found at the cross
But we have to truly repent from our sins

There is no magic words that gain it for us or liturgy that we have to follow exactly or we will miss out.

But our hearts have to be right, and we have to long more than anything else for God and God alone to forgive us.

And the good news of the gospel is that if that's true, he will, and he will forgive us again and again and again.

As long as our hearts are true

As long as we're coming in faith

That's you I want to invite you to come.

We're gonna observe communion in a few moments before we get there I want you to confess your sins now to God.

For some of you, maybe you need to confess your sins to somebody else maybe it's a spouse maybe it's a friend maybe it's a family member. Maybe

you need to confess to an adult or two a pastor will be happy to hear that from you.

But if that's you, you've been fighting and listening to the world's voice and you care more about everybody else things and God will invite you to come and be free.

Stop holding onto your sin bring it to Jesus and let him break the chains that are holding you in bondage.

We are going to practice now confessing our sin publicly.

All together as a church we are going to read aloud a prayer of confession.

It is something that I wrote for us based on this passage.

I'll have it on the screen and I want you to read it aloud with me.

But don't just read it and go through the motions.

Mean it.

Have an attitude of repentance.

And in a few moments I'll give you another moment to repent silently.

Lord, we confess that we are sinners.

We confess that we have not listened to your voice.

We have obeyed half-heartedly.

We have coveted the things of the world more than the treasures of heaven.

We have stolen from you and kept the best for ourselves.

We confess that far too often we rationalize our sin.

We make excuses for our disobedience.

We have rebelled against you and sinned against you and you alone.

Forgive us, Lord. Forgive us for all the ways we have acted like Saul and for all the ways we have acted worse.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.