

MESSAGE - Part 14 - Trusting God with the Unthinkable - 3.1.26

What you just heard was not 1 Samuel 15 — and that’s on purpose.

I had Butch read some of the core Scriptures that we’ll be talking about today to help ground us in God’s character — because chapter 15 opens with a command from God that feels... *unthinkable*.

Look at the first few verses:

[SLIDE 1] 1 Samuel 15:1-2 - Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt...’

[SLIDE 2] 1 Samuel 15:3 - Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”

Centuries before this, God announced judgment on the Amalekites for ruthlessly attacking the Israelites during the Exodus.¹ And now that judgment is about to be unleashed.

As believers, we’re used to thinking about God as the Ultimate Judge.

But ... What about the elephant in the room?

God just commanded Saul to kill men, women, children *and* infants.

On the surface, this doesn’t sound like a compassionate and gracious God — slow to anger and abounding in love.

I mean... ordering the death of children and infants doesn’t *feel* like something God would do... does it?

¹ Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19

So what's going on here?

Well, bible scholars have several theories.
And those arguments are helpful—but for me,
they don't feel like enough when we're talking about something this heavy.

Because the reality is, this isn't the first time God's judgment involved the deaths of children and infants. Just to name a few:

Genesis 6 — God flooded the earth.

Genesis 19 — God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire.

Exodus 12 — God struck down all the Egyptian firstborn sons.

If you think about it, those events are unsettling.
But 1 Samuel 15 might hit us a little harder.
Because this isn't God acting on His own—
This is God commanding Saul and his army to do the *unthinkable*.

Now, it's important to remember that this was a unique moment in Israel's history.
At this point in time, Israel functioned as God's covenant nation — and at times,
they were the instrument of His judgment.

That is not the role of the Church today.
God doesn't use us to exercise His judgment.
Still, the weight of this command is heavy.
Even now, we feel the tension in the text...

1 Samuel 15 is asking *us*:

[SLIDE 3] Will we trust God... even in the most awful circumstances?

Before we answer that, let's look at someone who did trust God in this situation:

[SLIDE 3.1] Samuel

In this series, we've seen that Samuel is a faithful man of God.

No doubt about it—He lives by the ways of the LORD.

And yet, when God gives this command, there's no hint of hesitation. As far as we know, he doesn't question God or speak up in protest. It seems like he's just not wrestling with it in the way that we are.

Why?

Is this blind obedience?

Did he just choose to shut off his emotions and go along with it?

Well, there's no evidence of that.

Instead, what we *do* see is that...

[SLIDE 4] In moments like these, Samuel trusted the LORD because he knew His character.

So where did he learn about God's character?

Well, long before he led a nation with the Word of God, he was shaped by the faith of his mother — Hannah.

This is why I had Butch read part of Hannah's prayer.

You might remember Hannah from the first couple sermons in this series.

She was among the faithful few in her day.

She trusted the LORD even through so much heartache.

In fact, she rejoiced in the LORD, saying:

[SLIDE 5] 1 Samuel 2:2-3 - There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God ... the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.

Hannah knew deep down that there's no god like Yahweh God...

Yahweh is a God who knows — nothing escapes Him.

And when He weighs our actions, Hannah's saying that the LORD's judgments

aren't just pure — she's saying that He's *unmatched* in His goodness and wisdom.

Again, this is coming from someone who knew hardship. She didn't just learn these truths from the priests— She *experienced* them.

And because of her experience with the LORD, she's absolutely convinced that He can be trusted— **even with life and death itself.**

That's why she proclaims:

[SLIDE 6] 1 Samuel 2:6 - The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.

She trusted the LORD's authority and character. And that same trust was instilled in Samuel. Because this is the God that was with him as he grew up.

In fact, chapter 3 says that the LORD continued to reveal Himself to Samuel through His Word. Samuel was intimately connected to the LORD.

And so, verses that talk about God's character — His compassion, His grace, His love and faithfulness — These are more than just words on a page for Samuel.

Like his mother, he *knows* the LORD. He's *experienced* the LORD's goodness. That's why he trusts the LORD's judgments.

But not everyone shares that same posture.

We've been seeing a growing fear in Saul over the past few weeks, and how his fear affects his trust in the LORD.

We've talked about how...

[SLIDE 7] From the Garden of Eden until now, the enemy's strategy with fear has been the same: distort reality, magnify the threat, and slowly erode our trust in God.

That's the strategy.

But what's the goal?

The goal has always been:

[SLIDE 8] Replace trust with deception.

Saul didn't wake up one morning and decide to rebel against the LORD.

It started small.

Fear kept him quiet.

Fear had him hiding behind the boxes.

Fear made the Philistines seem stronger than they were.

The more Saul believed his fears, the less he trusted the LORD.

And when trust weakens, deception takes root.

That's what we're about to see in 1 Samuel 15...

Saul got a direct command from the LORD:

*Attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them—the people and all their livestock—**Do not spare them.***

Watch what Saul does:

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 15:7-8 - Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword.

[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 15:9 - But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

There's a nuance with the Hebrew.

“Totally destroyed” doesn’t just mean wipe out—

It means “to devote to the LORD.”

It’s a command to give the Amalekites over to God’s judgment.

The LORD had weighed their actions and the time for judgment had come.

Israel was simply the instrument of that judgment.

But what does Saul do?

Saul was specifically told *not* to spare any of them.

Yet he spared their king and the best of the livestock.

Why?

Check out this next part...

[SLIDE 11] 1 Samuel 15:12 - Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, “Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.”

Okay wait a second...

Let’s pause here so we don’t miss this.

God told Saul to devote the Amalekites to destruction.

They were to be given over into the LORD’s hand.

And what does Saul do after the battle?

He sets up a monument in his own honor.

He’s memorializing *himself!*

He’s acting as if it’s *his* victory, not the LORD’s.

That’s a HUGE clue that his heart had shifted from the LORD to himself.

In fact, that’s what the LORD told Samuel.

At this point, Samuel’s not with him, but he already knew what happened.

In verse 11, the LORD told Samuel that Saul had turned away from Him—

That’s “rejection” language.

But here’s something to think about:

Did Saul know he turned away from the LORD?

Let's keep reading:

[SLIDE 12] 1 Samuel 15:13-14 - When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

[SLIDE 13] 1 Samuel 15:15 - Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

Okay...

Saul's thinking: *I've done what the LORD asked me to do.*

Samuel's thinking: *You did exactly what the LORD told you not to do.*

And so Samuel says in verse 19:

Why did you not obey the LORD?

Why did you do evil in the eyes of the LORD?

Saul said:

[SLIDE 14] 1 Samuel 15:20-21 - "But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal."

Notice that Saul's **fear matured into deception.**

Saul essentially took God's command, and edited it.
He obeyed the parts he agreed with.

God said: *Do not spare them.*

Saul took that to mean: *Destroy the Amalekites, but take what benefits you, and sacrifice some of it to the LORD.*

That's how deception works.

For Saul, it didn't start with rebellion.
It started with fear.
And it grew to the point that disobedience felt like the right thing to do.

Notice the plan was to sacrifice the livestock to "your God" ...
That's the tragedy.

**With or without realizing it...
Saul turned away from the LORD.**

Samuel knew this.
That's why he said:

[SLIDE 15] 1 Samuel 15:22-23 - "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice ... Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

Saul will continue on as king for a while, but the LORD has moved on.
He's chosen another king — and we'll see that next week.

But for now, I hope we're seeing how fear erodes our trust in the LORD.

James speaks directly into this:

[SLIDE 16] James 1:22 - Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Saul listened, but he didn't obey.
He fell into his own self-deception.

And in doing so...
He rejected the word of the LORD.

**So when we go back to that hard command in 1 Samuel 15:3,
we have to remember something:**

**Saul's role was not to edit God's command.
It was to trust it.**

The same is true for us:

[SLIDE 17] Obedience isn't simply about understanding God's commands. It's about trusting Him.

But that doesn't exactly ease the weight of 1 Samuel 15:3.

When we read about the deaths of children and infants,
That *should* make us uncomfortable.

But the real question isn't whether this makes us uncomfortable.
The real question is whether we trust the LORD who spoke it.

This is why I had Butch read from John 11.

John 11 is about the death of Lazarus. He was a good friend of Jesus, and the brother of Mary and Martha.

And as the sisters were grieving, Martha said to Jesus:
If you had been here, my brother would not have died.

She goes on to say that she believes he will rise again in the resurrection.
But what Jesus said to her next is really important.

He said:

[SLIDE 18] John 11:25-26 - "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

In other words — **Jesus has authority over life and death.**

As Hannah put it: *The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.*

When I think about that in light of the children who lost their lives in 1 Samuel 15, I have to remember this:

As horrible as that moment was... their story did not end there.

The afterlife is exactly that — it's **life after life.**

The LORD who judged the Amalekites is the LORD who raises the dead.
In His hands, death is never the final word.

And the same is true today.

Those who believe in Jesus — He tells us straight up:
Whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Never. Die.

Do we believe that?

Think about those who have passed away and knew Jesus—
Do we live as though they're still alive?

Because they are.

Very much so.

In a way, they're more alive than us.

That's a truth that doesn't completely fill the hole in our hearts.
But it's a truth that helps.

It's one that helps me echo the words David spoke after losing his son.
David said: "I will go to him, but he will not return to me."²

That's the kind of heart that's anchored in Hannah's prayer:
"The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and
raises up."³

**And so, in light of that — when I think about 1 Samuel 15:3,
I have to ask myself:**

*In the grand scheme of eternity—
Do I trust the LORD to do what's right for those kids?*

But even more than that:

[SLIDE 19] Do I trust God's character?

Do I trust that He's holy and good—even in my moments of fear?

² 2 Samuel 12:23

³ 1 Samuel 2:6

Do I trust that He's abounding in love—even in my darkest hours?

Do I trust that He's faithful and just—even in my uncertainty?

Do I trust our God who did not spare His own Son, Jesus?

So that through faith in Him we would be saved from sin and death,

Forever adopted into His family.

May our trust in Him stand firm, even as fears rise around us.

May our hearts rejoice in the LORD with those who crossed over before us.

And may we be strengthened by the love of the LORD that never fails.

Let's Pray