

1st Samuel

Lesson 33

(xi) What Saul Requested

From what Saul confessed, we hear what Saul requested. Verse 25.

“Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the LORD.” (15:25)

Yes, Saul asked for a pardon for his sin, but the problem was that he did not own his sin. He blamed some of his sins on the people. He was the king. He had total authority over the people. He had heard the command of the LORD; the people had not. He was guilty; the people were not.

But then, Saul asked Samuel to return with him to participate in the worship process. It is not mentioned here, but we can rightfully assume that Saul wanted Samuel to return with him to participate in the sacrifices of the Amalekite livestock with Samuel presiding. Samuel had every right to preside over the sacrificial offerings, but there was a problem. Saul’s request exacerbated the problem. We have already discussed the problem. The LORD would not honor the sacrifice of the Amalekite animals in worship to Him. It was not the LORD’s command to sacrifice the livestock on an altar. The LORD commanded that the livestock be killed where they stood in the Amalekite city of Havilah. If Saul wanted to worship the LORD, he would have to get other animals to do it in the right way, in the right place, at the right time. But it was too late for all that in the LORD’s eyes.

(xii) What Samuel Replied

Then we hear what Samuel replied.

“But 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.’” (15:26)

The LORD was done with Saul, and so was Samuel. He would not participate in the sin of Saul and his disobedience to the direct word of the LORD. If Samuel had done so, it would have included Samuel in the sin. It would have possibly caused the LORD to reject Samuel if he had joined Saul in the time of sacrifice. Why was Samuel in jeopardy if he had returned with Saul? It was because Saul’s heart was not right with the LORD yet. Note here that it will not be but a moment or two before Saul’s heart will be right. He will be ready to worship the LORD correctly, and Samuel will return with him then. We must learn from this example. When we are engaged with those who want us to worship with them, yet they are clearly in rebellion to the LORD, we must depart from them and not fellowship in worship with them. In doing so, we might condone their rebellious sin by our innocent actions of worship. Many years in the future, Paul will make a statement to the Corinthians that fits well with this conflict between Saul and Samuel and Saul and the LORD. Paul says, *“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?”* 2 Corinthians 6:14–16. What partnership should the righteous Samuel have with the lawless Saul? What fellowship should Samuel, who lives in the light, have with Saul, who lives in darkness? What harmony should Samuel, a Christ (Messiah) follower, have with Belial, whose name means *personified wickedness* and is used as a name for Satan? What does Samuel, a true believer, have in common with Saul, an unbeliever? Now for the zinger. What agreement had the temple of God, represented by Samuel in this case, have with idols, represented by the idolatry of Saul? Samuel has already proclaimed that Saul’s sin against the LORD in disobeying the LORD’s command is the same as idolatry. Saul probably did not understand all of this, but Samuel did. Samuel was able to see the beginning and the end of Saul’s heart in the matter because the LORD had revealed it to Samuel. Forget not that the LORD spoke with Samuel

regularly. Nevertheless, Saul was caught for the last time, and the LORD rejected him as king of Israel. It took Saul into despair.

(a) The Desperation of Saul

We come to the desperation of Saul.

“As Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore.” (15:27)

We wonder. Did Saul grab the edge of Samuel’s robe to pull him back, which is how the robe tore? Or, was Samuel so determined to leave Saul swiftly that his movement away from Saul after the king grabbed his robe caused it to tear? Does it matter? No. Saul probably grabbed the robe and stood still. Samuel’s movement away from Saul probably caused the tear. Be that as it may, the sheer action force of Samuel’s motion and Saul’s stationary position meant that something was either going to stop or tear apart. Samuel’s robe tore.

(b) The Proclamation of Samuel

With Samuel’s robe torn, it became the perfect setup for the proclamation of Samuel to Saul about his kingdom and what the LORD was about to do to Saul. Verse 28.

“So Samuel said to him, ‘The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you.’²⁹ Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.” (15:28-29)

What does it mean when Samuel says the LORD has given Saul’s kingdom to his neighbor, *“who is better than you.”* At this point in the story, the Scripture has not told us who that neighbor will be. But because we have the rest of the story, we know that it will be David. But how is David a neighbor to Saul? It is simple. Saul was a Benjamite living in the tribal area of Benjamin. David is a Judite living in the tribal area of Judah. The tribal area of Judah borders to the south of the tribal area of Benjamin. The two tribes are neighbors. As for Samuel’s statement *“who is better than you,”* that is yet to be seen and proven in the life of David. But, as the Scripture unfolds, we will learn that the statement is accurate and true beyond all imagination.

(xiii) Who Saul Worshiped

In despair, Saul realized that he was the only one he could blame for his sin. It was a little too late. The verdict had already been set. If only Saul had admitted it just a few moments before instead of shifting the blame away from himself and onto his people. But now, Saul acknowledged that it was all his fault. We see who Saul worshiped. Verse 30.

“Then he said, ‘I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.’³¹ So Samuel went back following Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.” (15:30-31)

Saul finally said the right words, *“I have sinned.”* Why are these words so hard to say? Why, when people are caught in their sin, and they know they have sinned, do they make all sorts of excuses to try to make themselves look righteous in the eyes of others. *“... for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.” (15:15)* *“But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.” (15:21)* It was not Saul’s fault; it was the people. The people. *“... for the people spared ... for the people took....”* No. The sin was Saul’s for letting the people spare and take, just as it was Eli’s fault for allowing his worthless sons to continue to sin at the door of the Tabernacle. Eli’s sin will bring the honor of the High Priesthood in his family to an end, just as Saul’s sin will bring the honor of the kingship of Israel in his family to an end.

But I want you to notice something else even more important in this verse and the two verses we have just read concerning Saul’s excuse. Saul asked Samuel to return with him so Saul could *“worship the LORD your God.”* Notice that Saul used the same words in the excuse about the people. Both times he used the words *“to sacrifice to the LORD your God.”* Why in the world did Saul not use

the words “*the LORD my God.*” May I suggest a reason? Saul did not use the words “*the LORD my God*” because Saul did not have a personal relationship with Samuel’s LORD God or the LORD God of the people of the nation of Israel. Saul was disobedient to the LORD. Saul was rebellious to the LORD. Saul was insubordinate to the LORD. Saul was wicked to the LORD. Saul was an idolator to the LORD. You might say that is a lot piled up on Saul, but the fact is, Saul was all that. It is hard to have a relationship with someone whose god is different from your God. If you look back on all that the LORD accused Saul of being, for which I have just summarized, Saul had committed all those sins against the LORD, but also against Samuel. Point blank, we might look at all Saul did in his response to Samuel and add a different word to Saul’s character. Because Saul blamed the people for the sin, Saul was a liar. That is what Saul did. He lied to Samuel and, in extension, to the LORD, and he was caught in his lie. In all my ministry of the last thirty years, I have basically dealt with liars as they came begging for tangible help from the Church. Their problem was never the real problem. Their reason was never the real reason. It was always someone else’s fault. Someone did something that caused them to be in the situation they were in, and they would not tell me the truth. It would take hours of conversations to finally get to the truth if I ever got to the truth. The most common lie was when I asked the people to tell me who they were related to so I could reach out and see if the family would help them. “I have no family” was so often the response. Then over time, within the ministry to the person, a name would come out. With that one name, many family members would suddenly show up in the line. “I have no family” was a lie. The truth was, this person I was dealing with had lied so much, and taken advantage of so many family members, that the family had stopped helping the person because that person was not going to change. Still, I was the minister, and it was my duty to show the love of the LORD to the person in hopes that the life would be changed and the LORD my God would become that person’s LORD God too. I cannot change a person from being a liar, but the LORD can. But in these last days, I have been so shocked at how many of my ministry peers are liars too. Over the last thirty years at one Church, I began early on to see discrepancies in some of the words of my peers. What was said in the office was not what was said from the pulpit. What was said in the car was not what was said in the staff meeting. What was said in a committee setting was not what was said to the deacons or the congregation. It wasn’t all of my peers; please don’t think that because some of my peers were the godliest people I have ever known. But with just a few at the top, not the main pastor by any means, but some just under him, two and two just did not add up with them. Early on, reports began to come to me about the actions and words of these few ministers who were in great positions of power. I never will forget the story of one of the ministers getting out of his car after church one Sunday and catching a couple to tell them about the horrible actions of the senior pastor. It was all a scripted lie intent on turning those people against the senior pastor. I made a few phone calls and found out that the minister’s words were, in fact, blatant lies, but I did not know what to do with that information. Another minister told the staff of the “final decisions of a committee” as fact. But when I asked some of the committee members about the thinking process in making the final decision, all of them, in separate conversations, confirmed that the decision had not been made yet and the minister had misspoken. But when I asked the minister, he was miffed and doubled down that he had spoken right and the committee members had lied. Then with both of these ministers, people began to question their words. Both began to say things like, “trust me because I am your minister.” “Trust me and trust the process.” When I was eight years old, my father took me with him one day to check the books of a lumberyard of which he oversaw for the Cameron Lumber Corporation. I remember that one of the last things the store manager said to my father as we left, after checking the books, was, “Trust me, Mr. Hastings, I have the whole process under control.” His words bothered my father so much that when we were in the car, my father used it as a learning opportunity and said to me, “Son, if in your life you ever hear someone tell you

to ‘trust me and trust the process,’ be assured that you have just been lied to by that person and he is not trustworthy.” Upon hearing those same words from the ministers, my mind quickly returned to that car trip with my dad. I had heard those words many times in my office from needy people, but never from staff members. Something was wrong. Something was going on. Then, at the end of two years of “trust me, trust me, trust the process,” the whole plan of the ministers came to fruition. They got what they wanted, and they boldly told me I was purposefully kept in the dark because I influenced the Church to thwart their plan. Their whole plan was built on lies. It was built on their desires and not the LORD’s. Their plan has brought untold heartache to the Church. Marriages have become divorces because of their plan. Staff members have been terminated because of their plan. Early in the two-year plan, a young staff member was terminated because he had heard things about the senior pastor that were blatant lies being used to discredit the pastor in their plan. The young staff minister was required to sign a non-disclosure agreement that he would never tell anyone what he had heard said in the offices. They dangled a huge financial carrot in front of him. He needed the money, so he signed. He has never told anyone what he heard. He has kept his promise to the agreement. However, other lower staff members have told his story and what he was concerned about, and why he was let go. He would have thwarted the plan, and they had to shut him up. It has been, in my experience, that when a non-disclosure agreement is required, someone is trying to hide some terrible wrongdoing, and it is not the person being asked to sign the agreement. Why did they want him gone? It was because he had heard the beginnings of the plan that would become the grand mutiny. My trust in these ministers crumbled. Moreover, they were blame-shifters just like Saul. When an administrator of the church was released, one of the ministers was his superior. The administrator was left holding the bag, but nothing happened to the minister, who was watching everything he did. Like Eli and Saul, the minister should have been released. Later, when all the church books were audited, many discrepancies were found in all the ministries under that minister; he did not take responsibility for those discrepancies even though he signed off on all the decisions. It was the fault of the people. It was all lies designed as part of a plan. Saul was a liar. Saul was an idolater. Saul was an evildoer, and so were these men.

But Saul repented, even though it was too late for his kingship to stay in his family. We like to say that the LORD can forgive anything. That is true. But, with the LORD, there are consequences for past actions, especially when they involve the LORD. He may forgive, but He never forgets. Saul had repented, and Samuel agreed. *So Samuel went back following Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.*” (15:31) Quite possible, this time of worship was the first time Saul had truly worshiped the LORD. We do not know, but it is possible. One thing is for sure; the passage does not tell us that a sacrifice was made in the worship process. Together, Samuel and Saul simply worshiped the LORD.

(xiv) Who Samuel Killed

The task of Saul, as commanded by the LORD, was not completed by Saul. It was completed by Samuel. We see who Samuel killed next. Verse 32.

“Then Samuel said, ‘Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites.’ And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, ‘Surely the bitterness of death is past.’”³³ But Samuel said, ‘As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.’ And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal.” (15:32-33)

I wonder? When Samuel turned to walk away from Saul, Saul reached and tore Samuel’s robe; where was Samuel going? Was he going to finish the job with Agag? Or was he leaving to return to Ramah? Samuel knew Agag was still alive. Where was he going? We will never know. But, I think Samuel was leaving Saul to complete the job Saul had failed to do.

As we see in the verse, Agag had been afraid that he would die. We see this when he says to Samuel, *“Surely the bitterness of death is past.”* Just before that sentence, we are told that Agag was

cheerful when he saw Samuel. Samuel was a Levitical priest. We do not know what Agag knew about the practice of the work of a priest, but he must have thought that Samuel was going to free him from King Saul.

Agag, as well as all the past Amalekite kings going back to the days of the Exodus, had killed many men and made many women childless by killing their sons. That is all that Samuel meant by his words to Agag. For that, Agag was about to be punished. Samuel "*hewed Agag to pieces.*" The word "*hewed*" is a strange word to many. For those of us over fifty, we know what the word means. Just in case, here is the definition. "*Hewed*" means to *hack or chop*. Samuel did not just run Agag through with a sword; he chopped him up in pieces. The word actually lends a more specific meaning to how Samuel chopped him up. In the older English writings, a person *hewed* with an ax, not a sword. Trees were dropped with an ax and then *hewed* with an ax to flatten into boards or notched for interlocking stacking. More than likely, Samuel picked up an ax to *hew* Agag.