



Looking for a Leader Behold Our God Series

1 Samuel 9, 10 & 15

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I want to be one of the first to welcome you to the future. It's only ten-and-a-half hours into the future that we've been looking for. Right now we can say it's not much different than yesterday, right? It seems like the future is a lot like the past, but we know that's going to change. We know that in the coming year people, events and issues are going to rise to the surface, and this year will be remembered because of those events and those people.

One of the events we already know of—in fact, there are parts of our country that are already involved in the process—is the presidential election. It began in the fall with the Republicans and they're now getting close to the Iowa caucuses. We were out in Iowa with our daughter this past week. She gets a mailbox full of information from the candidates every day. It's on the TV, in the newspapers, on the radio and on billboards. Everything everywhere is focused on the presidential election. Pretty soon it's going to be the same for all of us. We're going to be inundated, overwhelmed and flooded with election information. I don't know about you, but a lot of times in these presidential elections I'd like to say, "Stop. Just stop. Let me think about this." We receive all kinds of information telling us who is qualified to be a leader, why he ought to be the leader of our country and what we should do about it. We all know what we should do. We should vote for them. That's what they want.

But all this information comes to us and it seems that in the providence of God we are in 1 Samuel in our reading. We are dealing with leadership in this book of 1 Samuel. So our purpose is to get a biblical perspective on leadership before we're overwhelmed by all these issues and all these matters that come to us. We want this biblical perspective to shape us in our approach to and support of leaders.

Now right away I want to tell you we can't cover everything that the Bible says about leadership this morning. We would be here a lot longer than an hour-or-so or the five hours

that I'm planning on preaching this morning. Oh, I let the cat out of the bag. Sorry about that.

Under the guidance of God, we're going to leave today with two rules to guide us in this matter of leadership: how we should think about leaders, what we should do in response to and support of our leaders. How are we going to do that? We're going to look at Saul, the first king of Israel. We'll be looking primarily at 1 Samuel 9, 10 and 15.

First Samuel 7 and 8 are foundational to the understanding here but we are not going to look at that text now. I encourage you to take some time to read 1 Samuel 7 and 8 in order to understand the foundation behind why Israel is calling for a king at this time. We're going to look at King Saul himself. As I studied this portion of Scripture, it seemed to me that chapters 9, 10 and 15 are the key chapters so that's what we're going to focus on this morning. The first thing that I'm going to do is make a broad statement about Saul's life which, if you think about it, you will find it can not only be said about Saul, but it can be said of other leaders too. A good start does not necessarily guarantee a good finish. Keep this in mind as we study the life of Saul—a good start does not necessarily guarantee a good finish.

1. Saul's Good Beginning

We want to look first of all at Saul's good beginning, and then we're going to look at his sad ending. In the area of politics, we could probably think of a lot of people like this. The first person I thought about was Richard Nixon who won his first term by over 500,000 votes and accomplished a lot of good things—things that when I looked them up I didn't even remember that he had done at the time. I was a young man pursuing my wife at that time, so I wasn't even thinking about politics back in the 60's. But yet he accomplished a lot of things. One of them was the Environmental Protection Agency. I didn't know that it started under him but he was essential in getting it established. Our companies in manufacturing hate to see those people come in because they always find something we're doing wrong, and then it's a matter of negotiation as to what the fine will be.

Another thing that Nixon did as one of the primary leaders was getting the first big school integration to take place in the South. I didn't realize that. And he was instrumental in beginning a relationship with China in 1972 which continues to grow today.

But what happened to him after all of this? For a second term, he won every state except Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. He carried a majority—a huge majority!

And a couple years later what happened? All I need to do is mention one word—Watergate. He resigned. The power went to his head and he had to resign.

As we look at Saul, we'll see that something similar happened to him. He had his own Watergate, which was Saul himself. Now let's start by looking at Saul's good beginning in 1 Samuel 9:1. *"There was a man of Benjamin [a man of standing] whose name was Kish."* (Kish, you'll find in verse 2, is the father of Saul). He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others.

A. Saul's Physical Ability

So the first thing that stands out about Saul is his physical ability. He was an impressive young man. He was impressive to look at. He was a sharp guy to be around. He didn't have an equal when it came to his physical ability. He was taller than any of the others. And now look at what God is saying to Samuel in 1 Samuel 9:16: *"Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines."*

So you might be wondering, "What's so important about him being taller than any of the others?" Well, he's going to deliver. "How do you put all this together?" you ask. 1 Samuel 10:23-24 brings this matter to the surface again. This is where he's going to be publicly anointed. *"Then they ran and took him [Saul] from there. And when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward."*

"So, everybody was shorter than him. What's the big deal?" Well he's quite a bit different than a ruler today—a president in our country today for example. He was to be a warrior King. So what does it mean that he was a head taller? Think of his reach and the sight he had—the advantage he had in a battle. Not with guns, but with swords and spears. He had a definite advantage. He was their champion.

Now fast forward to when David, who was going to be the next king, comes to hear Goliath, the champion of the enemy, challenge the Israelites. They're all in their tents, quaking. No one will go out and respond to him. Where's Saul? Where did he find Saul? He found him in the tent too. But who was the champion of Israel who should have been out there? It's Saul, the King. He was physically equipped to do the job. He was a head taller. He was a good physical specimen and he was a warrior who could lead the people. His task was to deliver the Israelites but he failed though he had the ability to succeed. When something is repeated in Scripture like, "He's taller. He's bigger. He's a great physical

specimen,” there’s a purpose there. God wants us to see that he was equipped to be the champion. That’s the first feature of his good start.

B. Saul’s Humble Attitude

But along with this he had another feature and that was his humble attitude. You see that in a number of places in these verses. Look at 1 Samuel 9:19-20. Verse 19 says that they’re looking for the seer, Saul and his servant, and they find him. He says,

“I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s house?”

Now look at his response in verse 21.

“Saul answered, ‘Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?’”

Saul says this to Samuel who had just told him, “You are the desire of all the people. They’re longing for you—someone like you to be king.” And his response is, “Do you realize who you’re talking to? I’m from the smallest tribe, the smallest clan, the smallest family. We’re nothing. How can that be true of me?” So he has a humble attitude of himself.

Look at 1 Samuel 10:15-16:

“And Saul’s uncle said, ‘Please tell me what Samuel said to you.’ And Saul said to his uncle, ‘He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found.’ But about the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything.”

Notice that Saul did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship. He didn’t say a word about that.

Leon Wood, who I had the privilege of sitting under as one of my professors in Old Testament, says that Saul had a natural timidity. So he’s not drawing attention to himself. He has all this ability to be the leader and he could be drawing attention to the fact that “I should be the champion and I should be king.” But he didn’t say a word about that to his uncle.

Look now in 1 Samuel 10:21. When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin clan by clan. The Matrites clan was chosen. Finally, Saul—the son of Kish—was chosen but when they

looked for him they couldn't find him. So they inquired further of the Lord. "God, are You sure he's here? The man you want us to anoint, is he here?" *"And the Lord said, 'Behold, he's hidden himself among the baggage.'" They ran and brought him out. As he stood among the people he was a head taller than the others. "And Samuel said to all the people, 'Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? There is none like him among all the people.' And all the people shouted, 'Long live the king!'"*

Three places here it seems to me he shows this humility. He's not throwing himself forward. He's not like the World Wrestling Federation wrestlers who have all this ability and they go just a tad overboard about how good they are, don't you think? Or some of the pro football players or basketball players who can talk such a great game and sometimes they go out and fall flat on their faces. I must say at this point, with some of them in particular, I get kind of happy that they can't produce like they say they can.

But Saul isn't like that. He's different than that at this point in time. He has this great foundation for a strong beginning. When you read chapters 9 and 10, you get the impression that he's going to be a good king but as you start reading from chapter 11 through chapter 15, you see cracks start to appear in his kingship. When you get to chapter 15, the wheels fall off of his bandwagon and everything falls apart. God shows us in two verses the true heart of the king; He's an arrogant, rebellious man who refuses to obey God. So God rejects him.

2. Saul's Sad Ending

I believe some of the most powerful words in all of Scripture are Samuel's response in 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

"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. 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.'"

If we go back in chapter 15, beginning with verse 1, we will find that Saul was given a task. He was to go and destroy everything that belonged to or had anything to do with the Amalekites—every man, woman, child, every beast they had, every house they had. It was a scorched earth policy. Why? You find in those beginning verses of chapter 15 that it was because of what they had done to God's people earlier. So the Israelites were to be an instrument of God's judgment at that time.

Jump down to verse 10 and we read these words. *“The word of the LORD came to Samuel: ‘I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.’”* Notice how God makes the connection here. “He’s turned away from Me. He didn’t do what I told him to do.” Notice Samuel’s response. *“And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night”*—something you don’t see Saul doing, but you see Samuel, the prophet of God, the Seer call out to God all night.

The next morning he goes to look for Saul and notice they say that Saul has gone to Carmel. When he gets there, he sets up *“a monument for himself.”* Not in honor of how God helped them defeat the Amalekites as the monuments all prior to this had done, but in his own honor—not even including the army or the generals or the people who were sacrificed. In his own honor—quite a distance from the guy hiding in the baggage or not telling his uncle what God was going to do through him.

So when Samuel finally reaches him, Saul wants to be a good old boy. “Praise the Lord! Good to see you Brother Samuel! I’m glad you’re here! Come on in. What’s going on? I carried out everything God told me to do. Praise God! I’m glad you’re here to see that!” But then Samuel says, “What’s that bleating from all the sheep that I hear? What’s that lowing of all the cows that I hear? If you carried out all the instructions, where did all these herds come from?”

“Oh, that was the soldiers. They wanted to do that. It wasn’t my idea but I supported it because they wanted to give an offering to God. These are the best herds and we’re going to offer them to God.”

Samuel finally says, “Stop. That’s enough. Let me tell you what God said.” And Saul says, “Tell me. Speak up.”

“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. 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.’ 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?”

And again Saul says, “Well, it’s the people. It’s the soldiers. I gave in to them. I did what you wanted me to do. But it’s them. They did it.”

Then we have those words—those powerful words—in verses 22 and 23. Words we need to really grasp if we’re going to understand God and what He calls us to be and do, if we’re going to understand leaders and how we should support leaders. Saul said, “I want to give an offering to God. I want to worship God with these sacrifices.” But God says, “No.

Obedience is better than worship in this case.” Now, God is not saying that He doesn’t want us to worship Him. What He’s talking about is acceptable worship. Is it acceptable to go through the entire week disregarding God, living however I want to live, doing whatever I want to do, and then go to church Sunday morning to sing hymns, fellowship with the people, pray, read Scripture, and place a nice check in the offering? Is that acceptable worship to God? No. That’s not acceptable worship. Why? Because it’s not done in an attitude of obedience and devotion to God.

These verses are very close to what Jesus said in John 4:24. We are to worship God *“in spirit and in truth.”* And it’s interesting how he defines obedience here in 1 Samuel. *“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”* So obeying is heeding God. Disobeying is rebellion. He says here, *“For rebellion is like a sin of divination.”* If you disobey God and disregard His commands, it is just as if you went to a witch for instruction on what you should do with your finances or go seek the spirits in some way. He says it’s like arrogance or presumption. It’s like the evil of idolatry. Why is it like the evil of idolatry? Because you’re putting yourself ahead of God. You’re saying you know more than God when you disobey God. “I know more than God. I know much more and I’m better equipped than God in this instance to know what to do.” That is rejecting God. *“Because you have rejected the Word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.”*

So from this moment on in Saul’s life, it’s a downhill spiral. The Spirit of God is taken from him. There were a lot of things that happened in his life but this is the turning point where it all came to a head. We can say it in a negative way. “God does not like disobedience. God hates disobedience.” Or we can say it in a positive way. “God delights in obedience.” He hates disobedience; God delights in obedience. Why? If you look at Deuteronomy 10:12-13, we have a summary statement there: *“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?”*

It’s for our good if we obey God. Obedience is shown by fearing God, loving God, serving God, following God, and doing what He says—that’s obedience. In my preparation for this message, I happened to be looking back at my notebook on recent messages, and on October 30th of last year, Pastor David spoke on Leviticus 26. I wrote down his key summary: “Our response to God’s commands matters.” Our response to God’s commands matters a lot. So if you want a good text to go along with this and see how this appears not

only one time but all throughout Scripture, go back and read that sermon by Pastor David on Leviticus 26 from October 30th. Our response to God's commands matters a lot because it indicates the condition of our hearts. It is a good indication of where we are with God. It's very important how we respond to God and how we think of these matters.

So Saul had this great beginning—the physical ability to deliver the people as their champion and a heart attitude that was right; a humble view of himself! But somewhere along the line in the pressures of leadership, his true character came out. He was a rebellious, arrogant man who did not see any need to obey God. He was the king and he would do what he wanted to do. He even feigns repentance because if you look at verse 24 he says, “I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and Your instructions.”

It would be great repentance if it ended there, but you know it's not true repentance because he then says, “I was afraid of the people so I gave in to them.” A man who was head and shoulders above everyone else was afraid of the people? “Now I beg you, forgive me of my sin and come back with me” (15:25). Why did he want Samuel to come back? Because he wanted the spokesman of God with him to show that God was still with him. He wasn't really repenting. But Samuel said to him, “*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.*”

3. Two Lessons

A. Don't Put All Your Hope in a Human Leader

There are two leadership rules that we can learn from Saul in these chapters. Rule number one: Don't put all your hope in a human leader, whether they're in the church or outside the church. Do not put all your hope in a human leader. I've seen people do that and they end up miserable. Why? “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23).

Every one of us in this room is tainted by sin. Our leaders are touched and tainted by sin—in the church here, outside the church in the political sphere and at work. So we shouldn't put all our hope, all our confidence and all our trust in them as if they're going to deliver us and bring into the Kingdom. There's only one Person Who can deliver us. There's only one Person Who can bring in the Kingdom and that is Christ.

Revelation 1 says that Christ is the ruler of all the kings of the earth. And then in Revelation 17 it says, “*He is Lord of lords and King of kings.*” So if you're going to put all your hope in someone, put it in Christ, not in human leaders because they will fail. They

can't see everything, know everything, or comprehend everything. Sometimes we act like we can do that, but we can't. We're all sinners in need of a Savior, Jesus Christ. That is where our hope and confidence should be—in Him.

We can support and encourage and work with our leaders, but don't give them everything because what happens? You see in cults where the leader becomes god to the people—it doesn't make any difference what that leader says. In my own lifetime I have seen leaders of cults call people to kill their own children and they did it! They did it! They were so duped and enslaved by this leader. Don't get in that position. Trust in God. Trust in Christ and in Him alone. Do not put all of your hope in any human leader.

B. Support and Follow Leaders Who Obey God

The second rule I have is this: Do support and follow those leaders who call us to obey God and who themselves obey God. Those are the leaders we should follow and support from the example that we have here. As I thought about this, I thought about two leaders whom I have known in my life.

One was a very close friend for a long time. He was a pastor and Reba and I were on the verge of dumping Christianity because we had had so many problems. We were just tired of it. But this pastor would not let us go. He called Reba and talked to her on the phone. He talked to me, encouraged both of us and would not let us go. What a friend he was! So we returned to church and after a while I began teaching a Sunday School class there. I soon found out that almost all of the members of this young adult class were ready to leave the church so I dug further and found out the reason they were ready to leave the church was because a special offering had been taken for a particular issue. But the pastor—this friend of ours—decided he was going to use the money for something else and it was used for something else. After the money was spent, nobody would talk to the pastor.

I had the great task of going to talk to him. If you know me, I can't let stuff lie. If it's wrong, it's wrong. Scripture says you need to talk to somebody. So I went and talked to him. You know, the amazing thing as I reflect back was how his words were very similar to Saul's, who lived thousands of years ago. He said to me, "But Jim, what about her? What about him? They did this. They did that. What about that?" I said, "You're the pastor. No telling what God could do if you would just stand up there on that platform Sunday morning and just say, 'I sinned. I'm sorry. Would you forgive me?'" He said, "Oh boy, that does sound good, doesn't it? But what about her? What about what he said? What about what they did?" I said, "It's not about them. It's about you. You're the leader." But he

never repented and he never talked to me after that day. He never shook my hand again. Nothing. It was hard to confront him but it needed to be done. Eventually over time, the church split and disintegrated. It started right there with that pastor who had a proud, arrogant heart.

The other leader to consider in contrast is Warren Wiersbe. I did not know him personally but read several of his books and sermons plus attended a couple of his conferences. His books are simple compared to others but they're so helpful. He was a leader in the church and I remember him saying, "I may be the leader and others may be the leader, but if you catch me off base and tag me out, I'm out. I'm not safe just because I'm the leader." We need leaders like him. People who realize they're not perfect—who, when they sin, admit it, confess it and move on. We'll learn in the coming months as we study the kings which ones did confess their sins.

So my prayer for you as a congregation is that you as individuals would have a good strong beginning this year. I want to encourage you to determine today to delight in God and evidence that delight by obeying Him—by obeying His commands and following Him. I want you to have a strong year and I want you to have a strong finish this year. I want you to hope in God and support those leaders who obey God and follow God. Put your hope in Him. Maybe this year will be the strongest year you'll ever have in Christ because you delight in God and enjoy God and savor God and pursue Him and follow Him with all your heart, all your soul, all your might—with every part of your being. Finish strong by looking to God and hoping in Him. That's my prayer for us this year. Let's pray.

Lord, we come to You and confess that we ourselves as men and women, young and old, rich and poor, are like Saul. We are sinners in need of Christ. And so I pray that You would grant us grace in Christ and so work in us that we would seek Christ and follow Him and pursue Him with every part of our being—with all that we have. That we would delight in Him and that our joy would be found in You and You alone. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

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