**Samuel Rebukes Saul**

**1 Samuel 13:1-22**

**Key verse: 1 Samuel 13:13**

“You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.

In 1 Samuel chapter 11, Saul was officially made king in the presence of God and in chapter 12, Samuel gave his farewell speech to the Israelites. However, Samuel promised his people that he would keep working as a prayer servant and a Bible teacher. Look at chapter 13 verse 1. Saul became king when he was 30 years old and he reigned over Israel 42 years.

1. **What have you done?**

Saul’s first project as king was to build a strong army for Israel. This was indeed why the people of Israel demanded a king. They said to Samuel in chapter 8, “We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.” When the Israelites saw other countries around them, they found those countries had powerful armies. Prior to King Saul, Israel had only a temporary army that was formed only during a national crisis. So King Saul’s priority was to build up a regular army like other nations. Look at verse 2. Saul chose 3000 men from Israel. 2000 were with King Saul at Mikmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and the other 1000 were with Jonathan, his son at Gibeah in Benjamin.

In verse 3, Jonathan bravely attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. It was a declaration of war against the Philistines, whom the Israelites had been subjected to. Although it was Jonathan who attacked the Philistine outpost, King Saul took the credit for his son’s bold military operation and spread news as if he did it without giving any honorable mention to his son, Jonathan. “Breaking News! The great King Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become obnoxious to the Philistines.” This news urged the people of Israel to join Saul at Gilgal.

The Philistines were also preparing to retaliate against the Israelites. The army of the Philistines were much more powerful and better prepared than the Israelites. They assembled to fight Israel, with 3000 chariots, 6000 charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand of the seashore. When the Israelites saw the critical situation, they realized they were in a big trouble. The Israelites were overwhelmed by the outmatching army of the Philistines. Out of fear, the Israelites ran away and hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. They were just like mice running away from cats. Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan River to the land of Gad and Gilead. The Israelites seemed to be already defeated even before the battle started.

What was Saul doing at the moment? King Saul still remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were trembling with fear. Saul was powerless and helpless when he faced the powerful army of the Philistines. Somehow, Saul contacted Samuel and asked for his help. He waited for Samuel seven days, which was the time set by Samuel. Although Saul waited for Samuel anxiously for 7 days, he did not show up. Saul must have felt 7 days like 7 months. There was no way to get in touch with Samuel at the time. There was no cell phone, no email, no social network, and no Zoom. When Samuel did not show up, Saul’s men began to scatter. King Saul felt that his followers were turning against him and his approval rating was dropping quickly. The Israelites thought their nation could be as powerful as other nations as soon as they had a king, but the reality was totally different. Saul must have felt ashamed and demoralized when his men began to leave him. King Saul still remembered the moment of his first successful military campaign that defeated the Ammonites and rescued the City of Jabesh in chapter 11. When he defeated the Ammonites, the Israelites finally approved Saul as their king and he was greatly honored and praised by many people. The sound of applause and cheering from his supporters was still echoing in his ear. “King Saul! King Saul!”. However, now Saul was at the brink of a complete failure. His only hope was God’s help through Samuel, but Samuel was nowhere to be seen.

Saul desperately needed a game changer. So he decided to do the job that Samuel was supposed to do. Look at verse 9. So he said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Perhaps, it was because Saul remembered that God helped the Israelites defeat the Philistines with loud thunder after Samuel sacrificed the burnt offering in chapter 7. However, Saul was not allowed to give the burnt offering even though he was the king who ruled over the whole Israelites. God permitted only priests to offer sacrifices. In 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah tried to do the work of priest and God struck him with leprosy. Like King Uzziah, King Saul committed a great sin before God by invading the priestly office himself. God anointed Saul as king but not as priest.

Look at verse 10. “Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.” When Samuel found out that King Saul offered the burnt offering, Samuel asked Saul, “What have you done?”. I think this question was similar to God’s question to Adam and Eve after they had committed sin by disobeying God’s command. God said to Adam, “Where are you?”. Also God asked Cain a question after he had murdered his brother Abel, “Where is your brother Abel?”. Did God ask these questions because he did not know the answers? He knew but he still asked the question, so that they could have a chance to repent. Unfortunately, they all responded to God with excuses or denial. We humans are not perfect. Every day, we make mistakes and make wrong decisions against God’s will. When God asks us a question, “What have you done?”, we must immediately repent of our sins instead of making excuses. God asks this question not to condemn us but to forgive us. Then how did King Saul respond to the question of Samuel?

Look at verses 11 and 12. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.”. “Samuel, you don’t really understand the situation. You came too late. My gut was telling me to offer the burnt offering! Remember, I am the king, not you.” Saul tried to justify his sin against God with many excuses instead of repenting. We are not much different from Saul. When we commit sin against God, we tend to blame the situation and others, and defend ourselves with various excuses. However, we must know that sins can never be justified before God. Galatians 6:7 states, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” Many people in this world today try hard to justify and rationalize their sins and even invite others to participate in their sins. However, no one can escape from God’s righteous judgement that is based on his truth. After death, we will all appear before the judgement seat of Christ and will receive what is due each of us for the things done while living in this word, whether good or bad.

After King David had committed sin of murder and adultery, God rebuked King David through the Prophet Nathan. David confessed his sin saying to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” David was forgiven by God although he had to suffer from serious consequences of his sin throughout the rest of his life. Psalm 51 shows David’s tearful repentance before God, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

While Saul and David both committed sin against God, David wholeheartedly repented of his sin before God, but Saul refused to repent.

1. **You have done a foolish thing**

What was Samuel’s response to Saul’s action? Look at verses 13 and 14. “You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command.”

What a shocking message of judgement to King Saul! Samuel threw the message at King Saul without fear. “You have done a foolish thing!” When Samuel delivered the message of God’s judgement, he had to risk his life. Although Samuel was a God’s servant respected by many Israelites, King Saul had authority to execute or harm Samuel if he wanted. People usually like to hear sweet compliment and praise, but not rebuke. We are afraid of offending others by telling the truth. Samuel could have watered down God’s message of judgement for King Saul not to offend him too much and also to secure his own life. “Dear King, I think your kingdom could be in trouble because you didn’t pay attention to God’s command, but I guess God may change his mind if you do a better job later. Well…I think you are not bad.”

What was the main reason for God’s judgement on King Saul? Let’s look at verse 13 again. “You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.”

It was because Saul had not kept the command the Lord God gave him. Saul’s kingdom would not endure due to his disobedience. King Saul disobeyed God’s command to wait for Samuel and violated God’s law by giving burnt offering on his own. Disobedience is the root of all sins. Adam and Eve brought sins into the world by disobeying God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In contrast, Jesus brought salvation into the world through his full obedience to God to the point of death on the cross.

Saul failed as king, then what kind of king was God looking for? Look at verse 14. “But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command.” God wanted to raise up a man after his own heart as the king of Israel. If you wanted to be admitted to a prestigious university like Ivy league schools or if you wanted be hired by a major company such as Apple or Google, you need to have good academic performance and work experiences. However, when God calls us, his calling is not based on our human backgrounds or ability. God looks for a man after his own heart regardless of human conditions. What kind of person is a man after God’s own heart? Acts 13:22 states, “After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.” This verse indicates that a man after God’s own heart does everything that God wants. A man after God’s own heart obeys God’s command. David, a man after God’s own heart loved God’s words and was committed to follow the Lord. David sang a Psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake”.

In order to be a man after God’s own heart, we need to understand God’s heart. God’s heart is full of mercy, grace, compassion and love. Psalm 145: 8 and 9 state, “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made”. However, many people seek after their own sinful human heart, which is full of hatred, greed, lust and anger. Genesis 6:5 described sinful human heart during the Noah’s time. “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” To seek God’s own heart, we must love God sincerely and obey his words faithfully.

Why did King Saul fail to be a man after God’s own heart? We can find the answer from Saul’s response to Samuel in verses 11 and 12. Saul gave Samuel many excuses to defend his foolish action.

First, “I saw that the men were scattering”. Saul feared people more than God. He was afraid of losing people’s approval and recognition. Saul pursued reputation, fame, and honor like many typical politicians today. Saul became obsessive with his kingship. As long as he could regain his men’s support, it did not matter for him to break God’s command. When we fear people more than God, we would ignore God’s words but pay attention to people’s words instead. Proverbs says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” and “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”. When we lose the fear of God, we would do foolish things.

Second, “You did not come at the set time”. Saul was not patient. Saul disobeyed God’s command after waiting for Samuel seven days and refused to wait any longer. Of course, we can understand that seven days under the stressful circumstance in the battle field was really a long and painful time. But we must be still patient and wait for God’s time. We have studied Hebrews chapter 11 over the last 4 weeks and learned that many ancestors of faith patiently waited for God’s promise to fulfill. Noah patiently built an ark by faith for 120 years. Abraham believed God’s promise and patiently waited 25 years until his son Isaac was born. We must believe that God who is faithful will answer our prayers in his time.

Third, “The Philistines were assembling at Mikmash”. Saul did not trust God who is more powerful than the Philistines. Instead of praying for God’s help, his eyes were fixed at the powerful army of the Philistines. We often forget about our almighty God when we are surrounded by our enemies. Our enemies look much more powerful than us and we feel like we are nothing compared to them. Our problems that we face every day look too much for us to handle. It is true that we are weak compared to our enemies but we must remember that the almighty God is with us. When David confronted Goliath who terrified all the Israelites, David had full trust in almighty God, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty.” Nothing is impossible with God and nothing is too hard for him. When we look at the COVID-19 situation, we feel hopeless and powerless. It looks like the most powerful being in this world today is the coronavirus. But let’s not forget that everything including the coronavirus is under God’s control. God has the power to save anyone who trusts him.

Fourth, “So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.” Our decision should not be based on our feeling or instinct. Our decision should be guided by God through our sincere prayer. No human emotion or pressure should lead us to do ungodly things that displease God.

In conclusion, let’s not be a foolish man like King Saul who disobeyed God’s command and refused to repent. May God help each of us to be a man after God’s own heart. When we hear the rebuke from God, may God help us not to make excuses but to repent wholeheartedly. May God give us broken spirit and contrite heart, so that we may humbly pursue God’s own heart and fully obey his words.