

## The Folly of the King

### 1. Intro

- An fool decided to start a chicken farm, so he bought a hundred chickens to start
  - A month later, he returned to the dealer for another hundred chickens because the first lot had died
  - A month later he was back at the dealers for another hundred chickens for the second lot had also died
- The dealer asked him
  - What's going on? How come your chickens keep dying?"
- To which he answered
  - "I think I know where I'm going wrong .... I think I am planting them too deep."
  
- The reason I tell you that is because in these chapters this morning we come across a fool ... and this fool happens to be Israel's king
- It's one thing to be called a fool in a joke, or at school or in the home
  - But when God calls you a fool is much more serious
  
- And this morning friends, we're going to see
  - What it takes to be a fool in the eyes of God
  - How do you avoid it
  - What to do when you are a fool

### 2. Context

- Ch 8-10 Israel demanded a king like the other nations
- Which was basically them
  - rejecting God as their king; and
  - rejecting their calling to be different from the other nations
- Several times Samuel warned them ... but they insisted ... *"No! We want a king so we can be like the other nations"*
- So God gave them a king
  - When Israel assembled for the public announcement ... he was nowhere to be found ... he was hiding amongst the baggage
- Given the sinfulness of their demand and the inauspicious start to Saul's reign ... we suspect this is not going to go well for Saul and the Israelites
- And in Ch 13-15 our suspicions are confirmed as we see the foolishness of this king

- Because Israel's experiment to have a king like the other nations will turn out to be a disaster

### 3. The foolishness of failing to obey God

- The Philistines have been a perennial thorn in the side of Israel and so Saul and his son Jonathan gather 3,000 men for battle
- The problem is ...
  - Philistines army is HUGE and massively outnumber them
    - three thousand chariots
    - six thousand charioteers
    - soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore
- Understandably ... the Israelites are quaking in their boots
  
- Second problem was Saul had been given specific instructions by the prophet Samuel to wait for him before he did anything
- 1 Samuel 10:7-8
  - *<sup>8</sup>"Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do."*
- But Samuel hadn't turned up and the troops were going AWOL
  - *v8 He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter.*
- You can imagine Saul anxiety here
  - Facing off against a massive army
  - His army is starting to panic
- It was a moment of crisis for Saul and things were getting more desperate by the minute
  - If he didn't do something ... he might not have an army to command at all!
  
- So Saul decides to take action
  - *v9 – He said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering.*
  
- While Saul **had** waited until the seventh day ... it seems he hadn't waited the **whole-day** ... because no sooner had he made the sacrifices ... Samuel turns up as promised
  
- Saul goes out to greet him
- But there was no high-fives or fist pumps or man-hugs

- Samuel says bluntly "*What have you done?*"
- And like all of us when we are confronted with our sin ... Saul goes into defence mode
  - "*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 Micmash*
    - *and I needed to secure God's favour*
      - *I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.*"
- For Saul, the ritual of sacrifice was more important than trusting God and obeying his word
  
- If Saul was expecting a sympathetic answer ... he didn't get it from Samuel
- Because Samuel's reply is just as blunt as his initial question
  - "*You acted foolishly*"
  
- What was so foolish about Saul's actions?
  - Wouldn't it have been more foolish to have done nothing and let the troops scatter?
- Samuel tells him, his foolishness is because
  - "*You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you*"
  
- In other words, ...
  - You didn't trust God, Saul
  - You didn't obey his word
  
- **Application**
- You can empathise with Saul here can't you?
- He was in a difficult situation where it was hard to trust God and obey his word
- You might even say it was close to impossible to obey God's word
- Why?
  - Because to obey God in those circumstances would've required Saul to trust God against every instinct, against every evidence, against every experience he's had
  - The Philistines were coming in massive numbers and the Israelites were abandoning ship and everyone was terrified
  - You couldn't expect him to do anything else, could you?
  
- Sometimes it will be a hard thing to obey God and his word

- There will be many times in the life of a disciple of Jesus when it won't be easy to obey ... because it means trusting him against every instinct and every evidence and every experience around you
- There'll be times when, because of the circumstances, it even seems foolish to obey God's word
- Examples
  - I've met this great guy, he's not a Christian, but he's really into me ... and all my girlfriends have a boyfriend ...
  - The person whose marriage is struggling, meets someone who's so understanding and such a great support ... and then chooses to leave their spouse for them
  - The family who are faced with the choice of Sunday sport or birthday parties or family gatherings > what can you do?
  - What else are you meant to say when your friends and the media are all crying out for same-sex marriage?
- Often ... following Jesus and obeying God's word is hard
- Jesus never promises that following him will be easy
- But when we ignore God's word and offer excuses and justify our actions like Saul did ... what we're saying is
  - there are certain circumstances where it's okay not to obey God
  - there are times when it's reasonable to doubt God will come good
  - there are situations where it's not possible to follow his word
- But what does Samuel say?
  - It's foolishness
- Why? Because as we go on we see there are consequences for ignoring God's word
- Have a listen to what Samuel tells Saul in v13
  - *"If you had obeyed the word of the Lord God would have established your kingdom forever. But because you have failed to trust God and failed to obey him ... your kingdom will be torn away from you and given to another"*
- And with that verdict ringing in the ears of Saul, Samuel turns on his heels and heads home ... leaving Saul to face the Philistines without him alone!
- Saul's foolishness in disobeying God's word is only seen when we look at the bigger picture

- And the bigger picture is that had Saul trusted God and obeyed his word ... God would have blessed him in abundance
- But because of his failure to trust and obey ... he's forsaken all of it
- In the circumstances ... Saul's action might've seemed wise and understandable
  - But in light of God's promise to him and what he's forsaken ... it was the most foolish thing he could have done
- Jesus makes similar promises us today
  - *Mark 8:34-37 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*
- Only in the light of losing your life or saving your life for all eternity ... does it makes sense to trust and obey Jesus and his words ... for that's what it means to follow Jesus and be his disciple
  - Without this perspective, then to deny yourself and follow Jesus looks utterly foolish
  - But when you understand that your eternal destiny depends on whether or not you are willing to trust and obey Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour ... then to **not** do that is the foolish thing

#### 4. The foolishness of failing to repent to God

- Despite the promise that God will replace Saul with a man after God's own heart ... Saul remains king for some years
- Yet what unfolds in this incident with the Amalekites in Ch 15 is the final nail in the coffin of Saul's leadership
- 15:1 Samuel brings a message from the Lord to Saul to go and attack the Amalekites
- And God says ... don't just attack them, but totally destroy everything that belongs to them
  - *Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."* (v3)
- **ASIDE: Holy War**
- This is pretty confronting, isn't it?
- If you're here today and you're not a Christian ... you're probably thinking...

- "How can you Christians worship a God who says this?"
- Probably some Christians here going...
  - "How can God, who is meant to be '*compassionate and gracious ... , slow to anger, abounding in love*'<sup>1</sup> command such a thing?
- Its real issue isn't it?
  - How many times do you hear people say ... and you may have thought it yourself ...
    - "I just can't take Christianity seriously when I read of God commanding the destruction of men, women and children"
    - "How can I trust or believe in a God who commands such vengeance?"
- I can only address this briefly, but there are a few things that need to be said to help us make sense of this
- Firstly, we need to understand that because every human is sinful and by nature rebellious towards God ... every person deserves to die
  - We all know we're sinners ... and we all believe in justice
  - Therefore because we're sinners it makes sense that justice will one day fall on us
  - The Bible makes it clear that everyone will one day have to face the judge of all the earth
- But the Bible also makes clear that part of God's judgment on us is that we will all one day die
  - That applies to the 4 week old baby to the 94yo grandparent
- Because God is a God of justice ... there are times when he brings his justice to bear now on individuals, families and nations
- And that's what we are seeing here
- Because this was a just decision on Amalekites for their sin
  - God was punishing the Amalekites for attacking Israel when they came up out of Egypt on the way to Mt Sinai (Ex 17)
- And Moses remembered it was a dirty attack too
- Listen to how he described in Deuteronomy 25:17-19
  - <sup>17</sup> Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. <sup>18</sup> When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 34:6

- Like a pack of hyenas picking off the strays, weak and young as they journeyed to the promised land
- God promised that day they were going to pay for that and he was going to bring justice on them
- And in case you are worrying that their descendants are suffering for the sins of their ancestors, v18 makes it clear nothing has changed ... for they are still a wicked people ... and v33 shows they are led by a wicked king
- For this, Amalek deserved to be wiped out
- And the time had now come for the judgment of God to fall on them
- So this was a just act by God and he used Israel years later as his weapon against them
  
- By the way ... we need realise that God doesn't play favourites when it comes to holy war
  - Because what God did to the Amalekites ... he also did to the Israelites centuries later because of their sin and wickedness and idolatry
  - Only that time he used the Assyrians and the Babylonians as his agents of judgment
  - God doesn't play favourites ... he's totally just and fair
  
- In addition, this side of the cross, Jesus has instituted a new covenant which calls on people from every nation to follow him
  - Therefore there will never be another holy war where God commands one nation to go against another nation in his name
  - There will be just wars that we may need to fight in - like WWII was a just war ... but there will never, ever again be another holy war blessed by God
  
- Finally, we need to remember God is slow to anger
  - The judgment on the Amalekites was issued in Ex 17 > 300 years before God acted upon it here in 1 Samuel
  - God is extremely slow to anger
  - He does not delight in judgment <sup>2</sup>
  - His nature is to have mercy
  - Yet he willingly but reluctantly issues judgment because he is a just judge

---

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 18:23

- And so God deemed Amalekites deserved judgment because of their wickedness and he used Israel to bring about his judgment on them
  - That's holy war ... and no nation will ever again be given the right to wipe out another nation and claim God is on my side
  - That is why God is furious when he sees genocide attempts on people like the Jews in WWII or Bosnians or Cambodians or Sudanese or people of Rwanda or the Aborigines we slaughtered in Tasmania
- In v4-9 we see Saul gathers his troops ... and because the Lord commanded it ... the Israelites defeat the Amalekites in battle
- However we see in v9 that Saul and the army were unwilling to destroy everything as the Lord had commanded, for they spared Agag – king of the Amalekites and the best of their sheep, cattle and lambs
- God gives Samuel the heads up on what has happened ...
  - And like a headmaster going to down to the playground to check up on disobedient students ... Samuel heads down to meet Saul
- Saul however is upbeat
  - *"Check it out Samuel, look how I have carried out the Lord's instructions and how the Lord has blessed us"*
- To which Samuel asks v14 – *"What's all this bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle I hear?"*
- To which Saul once again offers his excuses and tries to shift the blame
  - "It wasn't me Samuel ... the soldiers did it"
- Saul stood in that great tradition of sinners since Adam who deny responsibility for their sin and blame others
- We've all played that game haven't we?
  - We convince ourselves that the blame is not ours
  - It's our parents, our spouse, our kids, our circumstances, the system, the government ... but it's not our fault
- And Saul continues to minimise his sin
  - "Besides we TOTALLY destroyed the rest"
  - We're good at that too aren't we? Minimising our sin?
    - "I only did it once"
    - "It wasn't that bad"
    - "I'm normally pretty good"



- Samuel can't stand the excuses and self-justification
  - v19 – *Why did you not obey the LORD?*
- And **again** Saul asserts his innocence
  - *"But I did obey the Lord! I destroyed all the Amalek ... Oh I kept Agag the king"*
  - *The **soldiers** took the livestock .. not me ... but they kept it for a good reason ... to sacrifice to the Lord at Gial"* (v20-21)
- And yet again ... he tries to minimise the seriousness of his sin and justify himself by claiming he and the people had noble motive
  - "We did it to sacrifice to the Lord"
  - Which is rubbish ... because v9 tells us they were 'unwilling' to destroy everything as commanded
  - Saul's noble motive was a delusion – as are the noble motives we delude ourselves with when we sin
- In v22, Samuel asks Saul a final question
  - *Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD?*
- You see Samuel's point
  - Sacrifice to God is good
  - Worship of God is good
  - But if it's not accompanied by obedience ... then it's useless
  - Because offerings and sacrifice without obedience is just a ritual
  - There's no trust, no love, no heart for God
- Which is why Samuel concludes
  - v23 - *For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry*
  - Not listening to and obeying the word of the Lord is not just a momentary stuff up or misunderstanding
  - Samuel says it's rebellion and arrogance and is in the same league as idolatry!
- Seems harsh - doesn't it?
  - But to reject God's word, is to reject God himself
  - To reject his authority ... is to reject his kingship
  - And if God has spoken ... then to be unwilling to obey him is to rebel against him

- And so because Saul had rejected God as king over him ... God rejected Saul as king over his people
  - And all the smoke and fat of animal sacrifices on the altar at Gilgal would never replace the pleasure God would have from the living sacrifice of Saul
  
- **Application**
- Samuel's words in v22 go to the heart of Christian faith which is a response to the God who has spoken
  - In his word, God has made known his will ... in the form of promises and commands
  - Biblical faith consists of believing the promises and obeying his commands
  - They're two sides of the one coin
- To think that disobedience to God's word can somehow be compensated for by any amount of religious activity – is utterly foolish
- Samuel's words should expose our folly just as they exposed Saul's
  
- The thing that challenged me as I was preparing this week is that it's no small thing to disobey the word of God
  - I think we find it too easy to not obey the word of God, even though we know what it tells us
  - Because we just don't think it matters that much
  - That it's not that important
  
- But the shocking thing we learn from these scriptures is that to hear the word of God and to disobey it ... is like idolatry
- Jerry Bridges wrote the book Respectable Sins
  - In it he writes how Christians tolerate and accept certain sins in their life as okay ... that somehow its acceptable to disobey God's word in certain areas of your life like
    - Discontentment > Pride > Selfishness > Greed > Impatience and Irritability > Anger > Judgmentalism > Cursing and Swearing > Envy and Jealousy
- This is saying ... our deliberate choice to turn our back on God's word in these areas is the same as worshipping Allah or Krishna!
  
- The other warning we see in this passage is that it's impossible to disobey the word of God and somehow think your sacrifice or ritual makes up for it

- The things you sacrifice like your time, your money and your church attendance are useless without obeying
- The rituals and worship you participate in like singing, confession, Lord's Prayer, Creed, Lord's Supper, Baptism, Bible reading, Prayer, Conferences ... they are good
- But they're useless if they're not accompanied by willingness to listen to and obey God's word
- You see ...
  - Your formal worship can't be substituted for a life of obedience and faith
  - Because external devotions are worthless without internal submission
- The temptation of course when we are confronted with our sinfulness is to do what Saul did and justify ourselves and make excuses
  - To somehow think that it was reasonable to do what we did
  - That there was a legitimate reason for our actions
- The right way to respond of course is with repentance
  - Confessing honestly to God ...
    - God ... I have sinned ...
    - No excuses > no justifying > no compromises > no exceptions
- Because when you and I are fools like Saul and we fail to obey the word of the Lord ... and we will > guarantee that
  - There's only one place we can turn
- And that is to the one who
  - is completely obedient to the word of his Father
  - who when confronted with the cross ... made no excuses
  - when he died for sin ... he made no exceptions
- As Hebrews 5:7-9 reminds us
  - *During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.<sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered<sup>9</sup> and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*
- You see, 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ died so you and I can be forgiven
  - For our ENDLESS compromises and
  - our CONSTANT excuses

- ALL the times we justify our sin and disobedience
- Unlike Saul, Christ is the fully obedient king
  - This king is no fool
  - He is not like Saul nor us
- Therefore ...
  - *Hebrews 4:16 - Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

**PRAY**