

Selfish Saul – 1 Samuel 15

Purpose Driven Life Chapter 1, page 1. *"It's not about you."*

You're dismissed. Thank you for coming. But come back tonight at 6pm because I will have an hour's worth of questions for you based just on that one sentence.

Seriously, I remember when this book first came out several years ago I heard a woman say that somebody had given her a book for Christmas. She couldn't remember the name of it but she wasn't going to read it because the first sentence of the book was, *"It's not about you."* She said, *"But it is about me. It's all about me so I quit reading after the first sentence!"*

That's a shame because this is a wonderful book and it can be life-changing if you read it but you have to be able to accept as truth the very first sentence. If you can't you might as well put it down and just accept the fact that you are going to live a difficult life filled with disappointment. **D.L. Moody** said, *"God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves."*

Now, don't raise your hands but how many of you know somebody that is full of themselves? How many of you know somebody that is self-centered? How many of you know somebody that is selfish? How many of you would describe yourself as full of yourself, self-centered or selfish? Probably none of us here would describe ourselves that way. Very few people in the world would describe themselves that way and yet selfishness is a huge and growing problem in our world, in our community and maybe even in our churches.

So, the question is, how do I convince someone they are selfish and how do I get them to change? Well, those are difficult questions. I guess you could just come right out and tell them. There's that option. Good luck with that. But perhaps a better question would be, am I selfish? If so, what can I do to change? If we, as disciples, are going to attract people to Jesus then it is going to be pretty hard to do if we call them names especially when we might be described the same way.

Romans 15:4 says, *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."* Scripture gives us hope as it teaches us about selfishness and it is easy to find examples of selfishness all through the Bible. Examples are not hard to find. In fact, selfishness is at the root of all sin.

Selfishness is a sin that leads to other sins and is easy to find in scripture. The challenge is to see ourselves in scripture; to see ourselves as selfish and then to root that selfishness out so that we can be the people that God wants us to be. You know how hard it is to be around somebody that is selfish or self-centered. They make it really hard to be friends with them. But do you know who likes a selfish person? Satan. If you want to be the kind of person Satan wants you to be then selfishness is a great place to start.

Let's look at **1 Samuel chapter 15** to see a person who was doing a great job of being the kind of person Satan wanted him to be. Now, if you want to read scripture that is full of romance and love and gentleness and sweetness then maybe you should go back to the book of Ruth or maybe Song of Solomon. But if you're like me and you like action and swords flashing and blood spurting and heads rolling then 1 Samuel is for you. 1 Samuel chapters 14 and 17 are two of my absolute favorites in the whole Bible but they are not for the squeamish.

Likewise, this chapter is very violent. This was a violent time to live. There were no rules of engagement in war. There was no Geneva Convention that would protect captives and make sure they had care packages and proper hygiene. Enemy combatants were either killed or made slaves and if they killed you, they would probably kill your wife and kids, your dog, your mama and then destroy your home and everything you had would be destroyed. As we will see in this passage, sometimes this was exactly what God wanted.

1 Samuel 15 says, *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. ² 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. 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.'"* ⁴ So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah. ⁵ Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. ⁶ Then he said to the Kenites, "Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites. ⁷ Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. ⁸ He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. ⁹ But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves^[b] and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. ¹⁰ Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night. 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." ¹³ When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions." ¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" 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." ¹⁶ "Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied. ¹⁷ Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' ¹⁹ Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?" ²⁰ "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. ²¹ 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." ²² But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king." ²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. ²⁵ Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD." ²⁶ But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!" ²⁷ As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. ²⁹ He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind." ³⁰ Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God." ³¹ So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD. ³² Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites." Agag came to him in chains. And he thought, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." ³³ But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women." And Samuel put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal. ³⁴ Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeath of Saul. ³⁵ Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Now, it is because of passages like this that we meet together on Sunday nights as well as Sunday mornings. There is just too much to get to; too much to talk about to fit it all in in the 3 hours that we have left. ☺ What I want us to see today is simply **how Saul was selfish, the consequences of his selfishness and how we can avoid being like him.**

Now, are there any Amalekites with us today? Just raise your hand. No? Does anybody know any Amalekites? Have you ever heard of any Amalekites outside of the Bible? No, you have not because every last one of them was killed in this story and that is exactly what God wanted. The Amalekites were so evil that God didn't want any trace of them left. He didn't want anyone to ever reference them again.

When it comes to goats there are Alpine goats, Australian goats, Corsican goats, Danish, Nigerian, Philippine and hundreds of other breeds of goats but nobody can say they own an Amalekite breed of goat. That's how bad these people were. God wanted them totally destroyed and all Saul had to do was be obedient. God did all the work. Saul's army was completely victorious. The only problem was they got selfish.

Most of the time it was perfectly acceptable for the conquering army to take all of the defeated country's possessions as their own. Winner take all. But God was plain in His instructions to Saul about this. He says in **verse 3** that they are to totally destroy everything. In **verses 13-14** Samuel and Saul have what I think is a funny conversation.

Saul greets Samuel like nothing is wrong and he's waiting on slap on the back for being such a great commander and Samuel says he can hardly hear him because of all the noise the sheep and cattle are making and unless these are military-spec attack sheep that you used to defeat the enemy, you are in trouble. Not only that but Samuel actually had a hard time even finding Saul because evidently, he was going on a world tour setting up monuments to himself.

G. Gordon Liddy once said, *"I have found within myself all I need and all I ever shall need. I am a man of great faith, but my faith is in George Gordon Liddy. I have never failed me."* Not long afterward he was convicted in the Watergate scandal of President Nixon and served 51 months in prison.

It's rumored that Saul's wife once said, *"My husband and I have managed to be happy together for 20 years. I guess this is because we're both in love with the same man."* Maybe you know somebody like that. I hope it's not the person you see in the mirror every day because selfishness, like I said, is easy to find in others but difficult to spot in your own life.

Saul was probably pretty popular with his troops because obviously he had not told them to destroy everything as God had told him. He didn't want to tell them that. It might have made him look bad. I bet it was even their idea that he should put up a monument to himself. Who was he to argue, right?

We think of selfishness as just not wanting to give what you have or not wanting to share but wanting to look good in front of others is also selfishness. It is certainly not *selflessness*. The characteristic of being selfless is one of the most important traits any Christian can have. It's so significant that Jesus said it is the second most important of all God's commandments: *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Mark 12:31, Galatians 5:14). <http://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-selflessness.html>

You can break down **the consequences** of selfishness in all kinds of ways but ultimately what selfishness does is it ruins relationships. We have been talking a lot lately about *attracting* people to God and to the church and the best way to do that is by being selfless and the best way to ruin any relationship is by being selfish. You have heard it said that being selfless is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less. That's true.

I love the story of the Good Samaritan because it is such a great illustration of what selflessness is. The Samaritan didn't put himself down. That wasn't it at all. He just helped someone he didn't know, knowing he would never be paid back and didn't tell anybody else about it. I love that story.

On April 18, 2010, Guatemalan immigrant Hugo Alfredo Tale-Yax came to the aid of a woman being threatened by a man wielding a knife. Tale-Yax struggled with the attacker, but was eventually stabbed and left to die on a Jamaica, Queens (NY) street. The woman and the attacker fled in different directions while he lay bleeding. Video surveillance filmed portions of the attack and its disgusting aftermath.

Cameras showed that one man photographed Tale-Yax with a cell phone. Eighteen others saw or walked right past him. All refused to render aid or contact authorities. The closest anyone came to helping was a man who shook the body vigorously, but walked away after seeing the pool of blood. Firefighters arrived fifteen minutes later, but by then it was too late. Not a parable.

In this day and age we are rightfully afraid of trying to do something good and it coming back to bite us. The world is upside down and crazy and that is a real possibility but honestly most of us will never be put in that kind of a position to have to find out. But we will all be in the position of having our neighbor need our help in some way or another.

In **Luke chapter 10** it says, *"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*²⁶ *"What is written in the Law?"* he replied. *"How do you read it?"*²⁷ He answered, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*²⁸ *"You have answered correctly,"* Jesus replied. *"Do this and you will live."*²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, *"And who is my neighbor?"*

This is when Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. *"Who is my neighbor?"* is a great question. It is the person next door to you that needs somebody to listen to them tell about their problems knowing nobody else will ever know you had talked to them. Your neighbor is the family in the community who, even though they are where they are because of bad choices, still needs something to eat. They still need a ride to church or a ride to town. Your neighbor is the man in jail in Decatur who would be overcome with emotion and gratitude at receiving a letter in the mail from you, a stranger.

Your neighbor is one of those ladies that Unchained Prison Ministries saw come to have a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ last weekend because of your generous gift to that ministry that got them there. Your neighbor is the person in the pew next to you who needs you to be at church every time you can so you can be there for them when they need a neighbor.

The consequence of Saul's selfishness was that he lost the kingdom. He could no longer be king because of his sin of selfishness and that sounds harsh. That's a big deal. But sin is always a big deal. Sin always has consequences. **Numbers 32:23** says, *"you may be sure that your sin will find you out"*. And just like Saul's sin of selfishness ruined his relationship with God, so too will it ruin your relationship with God. Isaiah 59:2 says *"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear"*

If today, you feel like your world is upside down and all your problems would just go away if you had more of this or that or if somebody would just do this certain thing for you then maybe your problem is not that somebody else is being selfish. Maybe you are the one that is being selfish and you need to **give** this or that and see if God doesn't reward you. Maybe you need to give something away or give up some habit and see if God will then reward you.

Maybe that reward is monetary but more likely that reward will be the peace and joy of knowing that your relationship with the Creator of the universe is what it is supposed to be and that your destiny is in the hands of the Omnipotent God Who is the very embodiment of love. At the very least it will result in more and better friends and more successful ministry.

Music

Or maybe your life seems out of control because you don't have that relationship to begin with. You can do that right now. Believe that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life and that no man comes to the Father but through Him. (John 14:6) Repent – turn away - from your sins and ask God to forgive you of your sins and to cleanse you of everything that displeases Him. (1 John 1:9) Do that today.