

Program 49 Teaser

“Did you hear about Pastor Nice-guy? They just discovered he has been having an affair with another woman!” “You know Evangelist Power-house? He just divorced his wife so he can marry someone he claims is God’s ‘soul mate’ for him!” Scandals in the church. High dives from lofty positions to the swamps of sin. Sex. Pride and power. Lust for money and more of the ‘good life’. Being in leadership is scary. At least it ought to be – with a healthy fear of the Lord that does not disappear with time or the applause of people. Take King Saul. He started out small in his own eyes and became great in God’s eyes. Until...Don’t miss this week: King Saul: Lessons and Warnings for Christians”- on “More than Talk.”

KING SAUL: LESSONS AND WARNINGS FOR CHRISTIANS

PAGE 1 No “Big-Shots” In God’s Kingdom

When people discuss the life of Israel's first monarch, King Saul, they generally consider his life only a negative example to be avoided. No so. King Saul, like most spiritual leaders, started off on the right track. In fact, I discovered ten positive aspects in Saul's life that any Christian would be wise to imitate.

However, the later years of Saul's life also leave us a terrible warning. This lesson will cover both positive and negative aspects in the life of Israel's first king.

SAUL'S PATH TO GREATNESS

1. Tall and handsome Saul started out being open to godly advice and counsel (I Samuel 9:8-10). Needing help to find his animals, Saul sought out the help of Samuel the prophet.
2. Saul radiated the humility of insignificance (I Samuel 9:21). In the beginning, Saul called himself "smallest" and the "least" of Israel. He was not tempted to look at himself as a big shot. If only that humility had been maintained!
3. Saul started out as a “new creation” through the controlling power of the Spirit of God (I Samuel 10:6).
4. Doing God's will came easy when Saul was God's man (I Samuel 10:7). There was no difficulty during Saul's early days in both hearing and obeying the voice of the Lord.
5. Saul didn't brag about honors done him (I Samuel 10: 16). Though Saul had been anointed by Samuel and told he would be Israel's king, the young man discussed with his loved ones only the finding of the animals and not the matter of the kingdom. Such humility in older and wiser people is rare--how much more being the case with such a young man.

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PAGE 2 The Value Of Few Words

6. Saul did not covet chief positions (I Samuel 10:22). How many other young men, knowing they were about to be given preeminent positions, would have launched themselves into the limelight? Instead, tall, handsome, humble Saul hides himself from those who are looking to make him the leader.

7. Saul was granted trustworthy and faithful people with whom to serve (I Samuel 10:26). God honored Saul's beginning in every way by making sure this first king of Israel would be given a right start surrounded by key men.

8. Saul remained deaf to false criticism (I Samuel 10:27). What man anointed as king would have put up with "worthless fellows" despising and criticizing him? Yet Saul did not seek his own vengeance but "held his peace".

9. Saul shared the limelight with others (I Samuel 11:7). Again, Saul's tender humility stands out when he orders a reluctant nation into righteous combat. Rather than doing it in his own name, Saul brings Samuel the prophet also into a place of significance.

10. Saul held no grudges when dishonored (I Samuel 11:13). Though base and worthless men had scorned the new king, a crime punishable by death, Saul gave God credit for bringing deliverance to Israel and refused to execute judgment upon those who had dishonored him.

If only Saul's kingdom and life had been terminated at this point, he could have gone down as a successful king as well as a positive example to those who would follow. But time has a way of testing whether or not one will remain faithful to the Lord's path or move on to the path of rebels. Here begins Saul's downward trend--eighteen steps that would take him from the peak to the pit.

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PAGE 3 The Road To Ruin

1. Saul became arrogant (I Samuel 13:9). Refusing to wait for Samuel to come, Saul panicked and decided that he would offer the burnt offering--which he was forbidden to do--to the Lord.
2. He lost any hunger to cry after God (I Samuel 14:2). The Israelites were facing a tough battle with the Philistines, and Saul's son, Jonathan, was about to do a daring exploit. Yet here is Saul with 600 of his men "under a pomegranate tree"--but with no hint of his praying and seeking the Lord. It appears as if he now believes he can handle most of his problems with mere human wisdom.
3. Saul substituted legalism for obedience (I Samuel 14:24). Saul orders his men not to eat, though they desperately need energy to fight a war. His bitter, jealous heart has now confused legalistic sacrifices for heart-obedience to the Lord.
4. He became more important than God (I Samuel 14:24). Note that Saul is now speaking of having victory over "my" enemies--meaning his own—rather than the enemies of God. He had substituted the importance of the Lord for his own self-importance.
5. Saul trusted in his own leadership (I Samuel 14:36). Saul's false spirituality almost resulted in the death of Jonathan. Now presumptuous King Saul says "Let us go down after the Philistines ... "with no hint of asking whether or not the Lord would sanction the action. Finally, the priest stops him with "Let us draw near... unto God."
6. He chose to control people rather than to serve them as an example (I Samuel 14:39). Jonathan should have been treated like a hero, but instead Saul is ready to put him to death. He has assumed the status of "Final Authority" and is now acting as a despot to his own people.
7. God's will became repugnant to Saul (I Samuel 15:9). The anointed Samuel had ordered Saul to "utterly destroy" Amalek. That certainly took in the evil king Agag and all possessions. Instead, "Saul...spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, etc." This is Saul's final slap in the face of God.

8. Saul took to himself glory due only to God (I Samuel 15: 12). Even while God is sharing His grief with Samuel over making Saul king, Saul goes to work to "set up for himself a monument or trophy of his victory" (verse 12 Amplified Bible). Saul is now the big man, with God pushed off to the side. Not a wise thing to do!

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PAGE 4 From Peak To Pit

9. King Saul no longer valued personal intimacy with God (I Samuel 15:15; also vv. 21, 30). Samuel begins to question Saul as regards his rebellious behavior. In his lame excuse for sparing the best of the sheep and oxen that should have been destroyed, Saul claims that they were kept "to sacrifice to the Lord your God". Note that his statement is not "The Lord my God" or "our God"--but Samuel's God--as if Saul knows that there is no further intimacy with the God of heaven.

10. Saul forgot the pit from which God dug him (I Samuel 15: 17). If only Saul would have earlier taken heed to what Samuel is now saying in grief, "When you were small in your own sight... "There is no room for superstars in the family of God--only humble people who know that God is their source of light and life. Saul will now have to be cut down to size.

11. He deceived himself through his own compromise (I Samuel 15:20). Though he has disobeyed God's specific instructions as to action against the Amalekites, Saul dares tell Samuel "Yes, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord ..." In failing to be a "doer of the Word" he has succeeded in committing the most dangerous sin of all--deceiving himself (James 1:22).

12. Saul was satisfied with a superficial spirituality (I Samuel 15:22, 23). He thought he could buy God off with outward sacrifices while walking in rebellion which is as "the sin of witchcraft" and stubbornness which is "as idolatry". He is now hearing the awful sentence of God's rejection of him.

13. He feared man more than God (I Samuel 15:24). Rather than fearing the Lord and obeying His voice more than the voices of people, Saul states he has done the very opposite. What a lesson today for facing any temptation to follow the crowd rather than the cross

14. Saul could no longer see the God who alone can forgive (I Samuel 15:25). Saul is now offering a form of repentance, but it is that of Esau (Hebrews 12: 16, 17); only a human repentance for losing out on all of the advantages that were his. He now asks Samuel, "I pray you, pardon my sin" because he is still trying to save face with the people by not having Samuel walk off in the opposite direction.

Would there still have been hope if Saul would have fallen on his face to God alone and dared to bare his soul in repentance? We will never know.

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PAGE 5 The Difference Between Two Sauls

15. In final desperation, Saul grasped for human support, not that of God (I Samuel 15:27). Tormented Saul now seizes the skirt of Samuel's mantle and it is ripped. It becomes prophetic, as Samuel tells Saul that that is what has happened to the kingdom of Israel--it has been tom from Saul and given to another. Poor Saul's panic-stricken hands had reached out horizontally for help--rather than the vertical direction which was his only hope.

16. Saul remained concerned with the wrong kind of honor (I Samuel 15:30). Here's a man who has been judged guilty before God. Here is a king on the way out, with his kingdom about to be taken away. Yet his pride is so evident, that he is begging Samuel to honor him before the elders and the people of Israel.

17. He was satisfied to the end with a shallow, costless worship (I Samuel 15:31). This verse is incredible in recording Saul's almost pitiful chutzpah. His worship is totally external--merely to impress the people whom Saul has called his subjects. It is a "worship" that God will not accept, because Saul has already missed the key ingredient to a true worship of the Lord—a heart repentant over sin.

18 Saul broke the heart of God (I Samuel 15:35). To grieve the Lord is tragic and can be calamitous. Prior to destroying the earth and mankind with the flood, Scripture says that God was grieved that He had made man on the earth (Genesis 6:6). Ephesians 4:30 warns us not to grieve the Spirit of God. Saul had so flaunted God's repeated warnings, that God was left with no recourse but judgment. Here Samuel grieved over Saul, and the Lord "repented"--or regretted--that He had ever made Saul king over Israel.

Here are lessons and warnings for the entire Church today and especially for those of us who have been placed in Christian leadership. The difference between this first Saul and one who came after him some 1000 years later (Saul of Tarsus) is found in priorities. The first lost sight of his own insignificance and centered on Satan's appeal to self. The other never forgot that he was the "chief" of sinners (I Timothy 1: 15) with only one obsession, "That I may know Him ..." (Philippians 3:10). And so the latter Saul ended his life with first love for the Lord, while the

former Saul finished his with no love at all.