

JUST A LITTLE SACRIFICE
I Samuel 13:1-14

INTRODUCTION:

13 *Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.*

² *Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Micmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. The rest of the men he sent back to their homes.*

³ *Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. Then Saul had the trumpet blown throughout the land and said, "Let the Hebrews hear!"* ⁴ *So all Israel heard the news: "Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become a stench to the Philistines." And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.*

⁵ *The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Micmash, east of Beth Aven.* ⁶ *When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns.* ⁷ *Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.*

Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. ⁸ *He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter.* ⁹ *So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering.* ¹⁰ *Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.*

¹¹ *"What have you done?" asked Samuel.*

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 Micmash, ¹² *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."*

¹³ *"You acted foolishly," 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.* ¹⁴ *But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."*

At the first reading of I Samuel 13:1-14, you can get the impression that God overreacted when He became angry with King Saul for offering a sacrifice to Him. After all, what Saul wanted to do was to seek the Lord's favor before going into battle. But in doing so, Saul made a little mistake...and it cost all of his descendants the chance to reign as kings over Israel. Never would a descendant of King Saul reign over Israel. Not one. Not ever.

It was just a little mistake – but it had huge consequences. It was just a little mistake but it resulted from a series of missteps that caused him to stumble and then fall from God's favor.

From Saul's sad situation, we can learn how important it is to:

I. WAIT PATIENTLY

As you will recall from the text, Saul's son, Jonathan, had been placed in charge of one-third of the army of Israel and was instructed to station his men at Gibeah. Saul took two-thirds of the army and garrisoned his troops at Micmash. Gibeah is about two miles north of Jerusalem on the west side of the mountain pass that led into the city. Micmash is about two miles northeast of Jerusalem on the east side of the mountain pass that led into the city. Apparently King Saul intended for his army to be a defensive force guarding the main approach to the capital city.

But for some reason, Jonathan was not in a defensive mode. I don't know if he didn't get the memo about merely protecting the city. Or if he disagreed with his father and disregarded his assignment. Or if he was provoked into going on the offensive. But for some reason, Jonathan led his men on an incursion into enemy territory and attacked the Philistines.

In so doing, Jonathan awakened a sleeping giant! The text says:

⁵The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Micmash, east of Beth Aven.

The total army of Israel numbered three thousand men. The Philistines assembled three thousand chariots...with two soldiers in each chariot. Plus that had more additional foot soldiers than anyone could count. And the Philistines mustered these men to Micmash, the place where the king and two thousand Israelite soldiers were encamped.

Saul slipped out and went to Gilgal to recruit more men to fight the Philistines.

Gilgal was a significant place to King Saul. It was at Gilgal that Saul was reaffirmed as King. It was at Gilgal that Saul received Samuel's blessing.

It was at Gilgal that Samuel often resided. So it makes sense that Saul would go there to gather more forces to fight the Philistines and it makes sense that he would wait there for Samuel to come and bless his army.

Samuel must not have been at Gilgal when Saul got there and the king must have sent word to the prophet to come to Gilgal. So Saul and his new recruits waited for Samuel. And they waited. And they waited. For seven days they waited.

While they waited, they talked. And, of course, they talked about the battle that was ahead. And, of course, they talked about the enemy that was at hand. And as they talked, the soldiers became frightened because they were grossly outnumbered. So over that week's time, the men began to desert. And Saul began to panic.

- By my standards, Saul had waited a long time. A week in the crosshairs of a superior army seems like a long time.
- By Israel's standards, Saul had waited a long time. Seven days to sit and ponder the battle was enough to quell their courage.
- By his own standards, Saul had waited a long time. Hour after hour, day after day, he had bided his time and waited for Samuel.

Then, a week after having summoned Samuel, on the very day he was to arrive, Saul watched in vain for the prophet's arrival. His men were deserting him. Samuel was late. It was time to fight. So Saul took matters into his own hands and offered the sacrifices to God.

But Samuel was only late by man's calculation. Saul and his new recruits thought Samuel was late but God knew he was right on time. Saul's impatience led him into sin when God's blessing was just on the horizon; when God's provision was just at hand; when God's deliverance was drawing nigh.

Oh, how many times have you and I done the same. We have prayed. We have asked God to intervene...to intercede. But in our waiting, we grow weary, give up on God and take matters into our own hands.

When God says wait, the only proper thing to do is to wait. From Saul's sad story, we can learn the importance of waiting patiently.

II. **WALK PERSISTENTLY**

From Saul's sad story, we can learn the importance of walking persistently.

Saul was a man who loved God and who obeyed him often. But not always. Physically, Saul stood head and shoulders above the rest of

Israel's men. And there were moments when he stood head and shoulders above them spiritually, too.

Sadly, that was not always the case. All too often, Saul showed himself to be a physical giant and a spiritual pygmy. Perhaps because of his physical attributes, Saul tended to trust the flesh instead of the Lord.

The incident when Saul offered an unauthorized sacrifice was merely the first notable act of disobedience by this one who had been chosen to be king. Sometime after the event when Saul offered an unauthorized sacrifice to God, Samuel instructed him to go into battle against the Amalekites and promised that God would defeat their enemies. But Samuel warned Saul not to take any prisoners and not to take any plunder from the Amalekites. But Saul decided to take the Amalekite king as a prisoner whom he could parade in front of the Israelites as a trophy of war. And Saul's soldiers kept the livestock of the Amalekites as plunder. When Samuel appeared, Saul said, "Hey, look! We've done what God told us to do and we've won a great victory!" But Samuel replied, "If you've done what God said to do, what are all these animals doing here?" Saul tried to make excuses but Samuel told him that there is no excuse for disobeying God. Samuel turned to leave without saying another word to Saul but Saul knew that would have been embarrassing to him in front of his army so he reached out and grabbed Samuel's robe to try to detain him. When he did, he tore a piece from Samuel's robe and the prophet turned on his heel, confronted Saul and prophesied that God had similarly torn Saul from the fabric of Israel and that his days as king were numbered.

And, sad to say, these are only a few examples of how Saul was inconsistent in his spiritual journey. He did not learn to walk persistently with the Lord.

But King Saul is not the only one whose walk with God has been in fits and starts, whose spiritual gait is halting. Aren't we all like that? Don't we all know what it is to run with God one day and walk with the devil the next?

Perhaps the most extreme examples are those people who accepted Jesus as their savior years ago, who were buried with him in baptism and had their sins washed away years ago, who burned with holy zeal years ago but who no longer find it a priority to meet the Lord on His day, in His house, among His people at His table. They took a step for the Lord but they have failed to walk persistently with Him.

From King Saul, we can learn that it is vital to wait patiently, to walk persistently and also to worship properly.

III. **WORSHIP PROPERLY**

Saul was the King. That's a big deal. Being the King of Israel is an important and responsible position. It is a serious calling. But it isn't everything.

Saul was the King but he was not a prophet and he was not a priest. Prophets and priests were God's chosen and God's anointed representatives who were authorized to offer sacrifices for the people...any of the people...all of the people...including for the king.

Saul's intentions may have been good but his actions were not. Saul was not authorized of God to offer sacrifices so that made his sacrifice unacceptable to God.

Starting with Cain, extending through Saul and continuing to this day, there is an unbroken thread of false teaching that contends that it doesn't really matter how you worship God so long as you are sincere.

Visit the place of the dead and ask Cain about that theory. As we learned two weeks ago, Cain's sacrifice and Cain's worship was unacceptable to God because it was not offered in the way God demanded.

Visit the place of the dead and ask King Saul if it doesn't really matter how you worship so long as you are sincere. Saul's sacrifice and Saul's worship was unacceptable to God because it was not offered in the way God demanded.

Visit the place of the dead and ask Nadab and Abihu, who used unauthorized fire on the altar of God. Ask them if the manner of worship is really all that important. Ask the prophets of Ba'al if the manner of worship doesn't matter so long as you are sincere. Ask Ananias and Sapphira. Visit the place of the dead and ask any who have passed from this life into the next...ask them if it really makes any difference how you worship so long as you are sincere.

The consistent witness of history and the consistent word from the Lord is that it matters. It is by our attention to the details of worship that we demonstrate our sincerity. Slovenly, sloppy, slack and shoddy worship is evidence that worship isn't really that significant to us. By definition, worship is expressing to God how important God is. If He is not so important that His will becomes our way, then He really isn't very important to us at all.

In a most tragic and painful way, Saul learned that God takes the details of worship very seriously and that we should, too.

CONCLUSION:

From Saul's sad situation, we can learn how important it is to wait patiently, to walk persistently and to worship properly.

From London, according to the Reuters News Agency, "A fox that savaged a sleeping baby two weeks ago has been trapped and killed by pest controllers, a newspaper reported on Monday. The fox attacked three-month-old Louis Day as he slept on a sofa in the sitting room of his home in Dartford, southeast England, according to the child's father Peter Day. On Monday, the Daily Mail reported pest controllers had caught and destroyed the animal. The family sought help after the fox reappeared night after night outside their house. 'It had attacked Louis and it had attacked and killed a Chihuahua in a back garden a couple of streets away,' the child's mother Sue Eastwood was quoted as saying.

If you were the parent of a child who had been savaged by a fox, wouldn't you want the animal to be caught and eliminated? Your Father in heaven feels exactly the same way.

In the Song of Solomon 2:15, Solomon refers to "*the little foxes that ruin the vineyards.*"

⁵ *Catch for us the foxes,
the little foxes
that ruin the vineyards,
our vineyards that are in bloom.*

I am struck with the examples in Scripture of the "little foxes" that have ruined the lives of God's people. They did not turn away from the Lord in one giant leap: they crept away with a series of tiny steps that cost them their place in God's plan. Since that pattern seems to have been recorded so often, it makes me believe that God knew we needed to be warned.

INVITATION: #685 – "*Footsteps of Jesus*"