

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

April 24, 2016

“King Saul: Obedience or Excuses?”

Bad Dudes of the Bible, part 4

1st Samuel 13:5-14

I invite you to take a look around you this morning. You are not alone. God’s presence is in this room. God’s people are in this room. I believe every Sunday that God has something new to say to us, and He means us to hear it together. Thank you for making the sacrifice of your time and energy to be here. Thank you for worshiping Jesus Christ in this place, on this day. God sees you, God knows you, and God will bless you for coming with open ears and open hearts.

Would you pray with me? If you are comfortable, I invite you to hold out your hands, palms up, as we prepare to receive God’s Word today.

Holy Spirit, come and fill us this morning. We desire to you know you more, to hear you speak in our lives, and tell us of Christ’s love for us. Teach us this morning, challenge us, shape and change us. This is your house. This is your time. And we are your people. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

I know a lot of teachers and retired teachers attend our church, so I want to ask you a question: what’s the strangest excuse a child has ever given you for not doing their homework? (*Allow for a few answers.*) Have you ever heard any of these? (*Slides*)

- *“I didn’t have time because we had a new dishwasher installed.”*
- *“My dad forgot to do it for me.”*
- *“It slipped out of my hands and blew away. That’s also why I am late to school – I was chasing it.”*

- *“I came down with a terrible case of “having trouble holding onto a pencil.”*
- *“My teeth itch.”*
- *“My mom did it wrong, so I threw it out the bus window.”*
- *“I left my homework in the back of a pickup truck and went through a carwash.”*
- *“I made a cake for my cell structure project, but my parents ate it.”*

Funny, aren't they? But in real life, excuses aren't funny. When someone gives us an excuse for doing something wrong or forgetting to do something, it ticks us off.

Yet the truth is, we all make excuses. To each other, and especially to God. Have you ever said or thought one of these things?

- *“I don't have time to pray right now; I'm late.”*
- *“I can't read the Bible right now, God; I'm too busy.”*
- *“I'd like to go to church, but the weather's too nice.”*
- *“I don't think that person really wants me to help them, God.”*
- *“God, you can't expect me to share my faith! I don't even know what to say.”*
- *“But it's my money, God! Why should I give it away?”*

I will be honest with you: I have said or thought those things in my life, and I'll bet you have, as well. And if we just took a micro-second to stop and reflect, we'd all admit those excuses don't hold up any better than “The dog ate my homework.”

It comes down to our priorities. When God asks us to do something, what is our response? Obedience or excuses?

In the last few weeks, we've covered the stories of some “Bad Dudes in the Bible.” Remember how your mom used to say, “If everyone was jumping off a

cliff, would you jump, too?”? Well, these people would say, “Of course!” We are trying to understand their motivation and decisions, so that we can learn by their examples what not to do.

King Saul was one of those people who made excuses about everything. He exemplifies a choice we all have, between obedience and excuses.

Go ahead get your bibles out or open the bible app on your phone. We are going to jump around a bit between 1 Samuel chapter 13 and 15. Now first I want to say, King Saul started out as a good guy. God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. Up until that point, Israel had been ruled by judges, and the judges’ track record was rather poor. So when the people asked for a king, God gave them Saul. He was young, tall, and, at least at the beginning, humble, even shy. (See 1 Samuel 9:21 and 10:22.) He was a good warrior, and one of his first exploits was to rescue a whole city. (1 Samuel 11). Not a bad start for a new king.

But then something happened. Saul started down the slippery slope of excuses. Look at 1 Samuel 13:5-14 again. The prophet Samuel had given King Saul explicit directions to wait for seven days before going into battle. (1 Samuel 10:8)

Have you ever had to wait a week for something important? Say, an upcoming test, a surgery, or a big game. Day One goes by normally. Day Two you get a little edgy. By Day Five, you start to get really anxious. Well, the Israelite army was ready to go into battle against their bitter enemies, the Philistines, and they were looking to their king for the green light. And their king was just waiting. So the army panicked. Look at verse 6. The men of Israel hid in caves, thickets, rocks, pits, and cisterns (empty wells). This was not “Army Strong.” This was not “The Few, the Proud, the Marines.” This was “Chicken Little.”

The Bible says Saul waited seven days. He did what Samuel asked. But after initially obeying, he waived. Seeing his army starting to desert, he took matters in his own hands and offered the sacrifice that Samuel, the priest, was supposed to make.

The Bible tells us that this sacrifice was a fellowship offering, also called a peace offering. It differed from a sin offering, which is probably more recognizable to us. A sin offering is like saying, "I'm sorry, God." We compare Jesus' death on a cross to a sin offering. But a fellowship offering expressed the good relations between the worshiper, the priest, and God. It was a voluntary act of praise, meant to be eaten together with someone.

In his impatience, King Saul made this fellowship offering himself, taking on the role of a priest, something he was definitely not allowed to. This is sort of like a husband going out dinner to celebrate his anniversary, and not taking his wife along with him.

Look, I get Saul. I get impatient. We all get impatient. We all make mistakes. *(Show picture of baby with quote, "I never make mistakes. I thought I did once, but I was wrong.)* If you think you've never made a mistake, you're wrong!

But what Saul did after his mistake is what distinguishes him as a Bad Dude. Look at verses 11-12. Samuel showed up right then and accused Saul. "What have you done?"

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 Mikdash, 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."

Do you notice one thing missing in this dialogue? Saul never said, “I’m sorry.” He acted like Samuel would just forgive the insult and pretend it was nothing.

Samuel responded by telling Saul that his kingdom would not last. Saul would be replaced eventually.

The sad thing is, Saul never learned from his mistake. If you flip over to chapter 15, you see more of the same thing. Samuel gave Saul another job, a direct command from God. “Go wage war, conquer this group of evil Amalekites, and destroy everything.” Now read verse 9. “But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs-everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely.”

Once again, Saul thought he knew better than God. He was thinking, “I don’t have to really do what God is asking me to do. I can cut corners a bit, take some extra for myself.”

When Samuel confronted Saul, Saul lied. Look at verse 13. “I have carried out the Lord’s instructions.” When Samuel accused Saul, Saul lied again. Verse 15 – “The soldiers spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.” Saul, the king, blamed his army for disobeying, and he tried to salvage some partial credit for himself. The problem is, obeying God is pass-or-fail. It’s not graded on a curve.

Samuel rebuked Saul again and told him what he did wrong, in no uncertain terms. But still, Saul lied. He made excuses. He whined. He said, “But I did obey the Lord.”

Is it just me, or are kings not supposed to pout? They are not supposed to blame others for their own failures. Saul couldn’t see the error of his ways. He

piled on excuses and lies, rather than admitting his sin. It snowballed until he was hopelessly lost.

In his response to Saul, Samuel summed up obedience beautifully. We really should all have this verse memorized. 1 Samuel 15:22. "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice."

King Saul wasn't really any different from you or me. He didn't intentionally choose to disobey God. He had the best intentions. Remember, Saul was God's chosen, anointed king. But habitual compromise led to Saul's dethronement. When it comes to obeying God, it's not our intentions that count, but our actions. Write that down.

So what? Where does that leave us? I think one of the keys to obeying God is to trust in God's timing. 2nd Peter 3:8 and Psalm 90:4 remind us that God's sense of time is not the same as our own. A thousand years is like one day to God. We get impatient because we demand our own schedule. To obey God, we've got to surrender our own plans, our own schedules, and especially our own priorities. We need to pray for patience to be obedient. We need to learn to wait on the Lord.

Some commands from God seem like great ideas at first, but we lose our enthusiasm as time drags on. Whenever we decide to follow God, we are going to be challenged. We are going to face expectations. The question is, are we going to fear God, or fear people? Saul feared people more than he feared God. That's a problem.

The Bible says multiple times, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, Psalms 111:10). That fear inspires patience, and obedience follows.

Saul was trying to make a fellowship offering to God without obeying God. But what he should instead have done was the one thing that God commanded him. Wait.

(Picture quote: "You can never make the same mistake twice. The second time, it's a choice.")

What will we choose? Are we going to be obedient? Then make it simple. Ask yourself, "What is the one thing that God wants me to do?" And then, do it. Don't make excuses. Here are a few ideas to consider:

Micah 6:8 tells us the simple things that God wants us to do: do justice, love kindness (mercy), and walk humbly with God. Is that your one thing?

In the gospel of John, chapter 15, Jesus says "Abide with me...and you will bear much fruit." Is that your one thing?

In Matthew 28, Jesus says, "Go and make disciples." Is that your one thing?

Is it the greatest commandment? "Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength"? The second greatest commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself"? (Matthew 22:37-39)

Whatever your one thing is, do it. Don't make excuses. I believe my calling in life is to worship God with all my heart. Everything I do will flow out of obedience to that one command.

Don't go over the proverbial cliff like Saul. Confess your fears. Confess your sins. Do that "one thing", and respond to God with obedience, not excuses.

Memory Verse:

Micah 6:8 (ESV) “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Questions for Reflection:

1. When has someone offered you an excuse you didn't like? What was your reaction?
2. Read 1 Samuel 13-15. In what ways was Saul obedient to God? In what ways was he disobedient?
3. How was God patient with King Saul's excuses? How was God impatient?
4. Do you fear God more than people? Defend your answer.
5. What's your one thing that God asks you to do? Will you do it? When?