

Wednesday July 8, 2020 ▫ Read 1Samuel 13

Questions from the Scripture text: How long had Saul been reigning (v1)? Whom did Saul choose for himself (v2)? How had they been split up? What did he do with the rest? What was Jonathan doing in v3a while Saul did what in 3b? What version of the story did Israel hear in v4a? To whom had Israel become odious? What did the Philistines do in v5? How many chariots? Horsemen? Footsoldiers? How did Israel respond in v6–7a? Where was Saul, and what were his people doing (7b)? For whom were they waiting (v8)? What were the people doing? What does Saul do in v9? What immediately happens (v10)? What is Saul's explanation for taking it upon himself to offer the sacrifice (v11–12)? What does Samuel say about Saul's action (v13)? What will the Lord not do for him now (v14)? How many people did Saul have left at this point (v15)? Where were he, they, and Jonathan (v16)? What did the Philistines do (v17–18)? Why didn't the Israelites have swords and spears (v19–22)? Which Israelites did (v22b)? Where were the Philistines (v23, cf. 16b)?

Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart. That's the theme of 1Samuel, and the primary application is that **the only way that "God knows my heart" becomes good news is if what God sees is the character of Christ through faith in Christ, producing obedience to Christ.**

For Saul, it is decidedly not good news. We see the dire straits of the Israelites. There's no second amendment from the Philistines, who currently have the upper hand. The sheer numbers of v5 are much exacerbated by the armament issues of v19–23, which form an *inclusio* (literary "bookends") with that verse to draw our attention to Saul's sin in the middle.

With those bookends, and some emphasis upon the direness of Saul's rapidly (v1-2, 15b) and visibly (v6–7, 11) dwindling numbers in we're a little surprised at how heavily Samuel (and really, Yahweh by the mouth of His prophet) brings down the hammer in vv13–14. Who wouldn't have done the same that Saul did?

God's Word answers, "someone with a heart after Yahweh's own" (v14). The heart of the matter is the heart!

Numbers, after all, don't matter so much to God. John Knox (and many after him, such as Luther and Frederick Douglas) said rightly, "One plus God is a majority." But really, "God plus *no one* is a majority." When Joshua meets Jesus outside of Jericho and wants to know if He is for them or for their enemies, Jesus says, "No, I'm the Captain of My own army, so take you're your shoes." We're always fearing Canaanites from Jericho and Philistines at Michmash, when "the only thing we truly have to fear is God's holiness itself."

There are times when obedience is hard. In those times, we need to remember that God has given us Christ as Priest to offer Himself as sacrifice, because with any other priesthood or sacrifice, rather than incurring Yahweh's favor, our worship to God offends His holiness and incite His wrath.

For Saul, that meant waiting for God's appointed servant to offer God's appointed sacrifice, both of whom God had ordained to point heart and mind forward to the Lord Jesus.

But like Peter looking down at the water, or Gehazi seeing tens of thousands of Assyrians instead of mountains covered by the warriors of heaven, Saul can't see Jesus by faith and only sees innumerable well-armed Philistines, and increasingly numerable and poorly-armed Israelites.

So, 1Samuel 13 points us to the greatness of God's holiness, and the greatness of that sacrifice that He alone provides, NOT by minimizing the difficulties of our circumstances but by embracing them. And embracing the "greatness" of God's holiness and salvation by comparison. If we are going to be undauntedly obedient in daunting circumstances, we need to see God by faith in Jesus Christ, and then what God will see when He looks upon our hearts will be not our disobedience (also innumerable) but the perfect righteousness and sacrifice of His Son (infinitely greater).

A heart thus directed will obey, even with Saul's six hundred (which, after all, was twice what God gave Gideon, and twice what God had just used to humiliate Nahash the Ammonite).

What obstacles to obedience do you face? Where/when/how does God set His holiness and gospel before you as greater? In what manner will you attend upon His means, to embolden your faith and obedience?

Suggested songs: ARP46 "God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength" or TPH244 "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"