

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday Worship, July 16, 2023
Title: The Danger of Neglecting God's Word for Pragmatism
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Scripture: 1 SAMUEL 13:1-14 Samuel Rebukes Saul

13 Saul was thirty^[a] years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-^[b]two years. ²Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Mikmash 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. ³Jonathan 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!” ⁴So all Israel heard the news: “Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become obnoxious to the Philistines.” And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal. ⁵The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand^[c] chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Mikmash, east of Beth Aven. ⁶When the Israelites 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. ⁷Some 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. ⁸He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul’s men began to scatter. ⁹So he said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” And Saul offered up the burnt offering. ¹⁰Just 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 Mikmash, ¹²I 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 have done a foolish thing,” 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. ¹⁴But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD’s command.”

Message

As children, we were raised by parents and taught by teachers to always make wise choices in life. We were taught to make wise decisions, good decisions, to be practical rather than be idealistic or overly imaginative. We were taught to be sensible and realistic.

We were taught to be pragmatic.

And being pragmatic is not a bad thing. In fact, in many ways, it is a good thing. God calls us to be shrewd. God calls us to be wise and sensible. But even in this, we need to be careful. For it is

often for pragmatism or in the name of pragmatism that individuals and churches end up neglecting the Word of God. Again, no true church and no Christian wants to be known as someone who is guilty of neglecting God's Word. And yet, for many the many individuals and churches that do end up neglecting God's Word, how did they get there. Many times, it was a slow fade. Many times, it started not with neglecting God's Word for outright or obscene immorality or wickedness. Many times, it actually starts with a Christians neglecting God's Word because they were attempting to be pragmatic.

As Christians, then, we must beware of the danger of neglecting the Word of God for pragmatism, because it is displeasing to the Lord and leads to serious consequences. And we see such a warning in 1 Samuel 13:1-14. In this particular passage, the author describes how Israel's first king - king Saul - fell into disobedience before God in the name of pragmatism. His account of such is recorded in the Scriptures, so that we as Christians may beware of the same temptation and not fall into the same sin.

As Israel's first king, Saul was chosen by God. He was handsome, popular, and powerful - Israel's most prominent figure at the time. He prospered as a military leader, and he also prophesied. He had the power of God fighting for him and he was a bearer of the word of God. But by the time we get to the end of 1 Samuel, David is king. Saul was not. How did this happen? How did such a popular, prominent, and prospering figure decline? Where did it start?

It started in 1 Samuel 13, when Saul neglected the word of God for pragmatism. As Christians, we must beware of the danger of falling into the same sin. That is why we must read this account. As we look at verses 1-14, we need to be aware of the temptation, the deception, and and denunciation in and for neglecting God's Word for what we think is pragmatic.

First, let us beware of the very temptation to neglect God's word for pragmatism. Saul did not just decide one day that he hated God's word and wanted to neglect it. As we see in 1 Samuel 13:1-8, Saul was in a high-pressure, difficult situation. The Philistines had declared war on Israel again. The people of Israel were terrified and scattered before him, realizing that they were in trouble. Samuel had previously told Saul that he would return after a 7-day period to instruct him how to offer a burnt sacrifice, but he wasn't there after the 7-days. And the Philistines were gathered before him. The people were scared. The enemy is pressing forward. Saul felt like he needed to receive the favor of God, which he could do through the offering of a burnt offering and peace offering...but God had previously commanded him (in 1 Samuel 10:8) to wait for Samuel to instruct him to do so, since only priests were supposed to administer these sacrifices. Because of this, Saul felt the temptation to go against the word of God regarding the burnt offering and to offer it without Samuel's instruction and oversight. Many times, when we are in high-pressured and precarious circumstances - whatever circumstances they are - we are tempted to think that obeying the Word of God will only result in further harm, just like Saul thought here. It may not even be that you desire to disobey God's Word. It's just that when we become overwhelmed by our circumstances, we think that the pragmatic solution involves neglecting God's Word.

Second, then, let us beware of the very deception in neglecting God's word for pragmatism as seen in 1 Samuel 13:9-12. Saul actually thought that going against God's instruction and sacrificing the burnt offering without Samuel the priest's leadership would bring God's favor upon him and the people. And so he did. He offered the burnt offering without Samuel's instruction - violating both the Old Testament Law (Leviticus 1:3-7) and also God's direct command to him through Samuel. Saul was deceived into thinking that he could earn God's favor by being pragmatic, even though it was at the expense of obedience. He was very much wrong. And yet, how often are we deceived into thinking that God will still bless us and shine His face upon us even when we deliberately go against what He has commanded in His Word? While offering burnt offerings is good, Saul wasn't the right person to do it. God commanded someone else to do it. Obedience to God doesn't just mean we do things for God and in the name of God. It means that we do what God commands the way He says to do them and through whom He has designated to do them. If we knowingly go against the Scriptures, the very Word of God, it doesn't matter how pragmatic we are; God will be displeased. In other words, just because something "works" does not mean that God was pleased with what was done, how it was done, or the agent through whom it was done.

Third, then, let us beware of the denunciation of neglecting God's word for pragmatism as seen in 1 Samuel 13:13-14. Saul apparently was not aware that he would face any consequence for offering a burnt offering without Samuel. He didn't realize that there would be any consequences for deliberate disobedience, because he was being pragmatic and doing what was good. But Samuel made it clear to Saul that because he did not keep the commandment of God, that his kingdom would not endure, and that it would be given over to another who truly was after God's heart. Saul may have been the most powerful figure in Israel, but God would not let him get away with disobedience to His word, and He pronounced judgement on him and his reign... a judgment that he would execute decades later. Christians need to, through this passage, realize that God will judge those who call themselves Christians who deliberately disobey His Word - even if it is for what seems to work. Neglecting God's commands for pragmatism may earn a person initial blessings, but for as long as they don't repent God's judgment will be in pursuit of them and eventually overtake them. It is a reminder that, when it comes to obedience to His Word, God will honor those who honor Him and bring dishonor to those who dishonor His Word. Even if it is for pragmatism.

Such is a vital concept to meditate on, because obedience to the Word of God without compromise is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. Christians, when they trust in Christ as Lord and Savior, are born again according to the living and abiding Word of God. And as Christians grow, the Word continues to grow in them. Christians were born again for obedience to the Word, not to forsake the Word. Live out your salvation then that Christ granted you by holding fast to the Word of God even if doesn't seem pragmatic. For what the world deems are not pragmatic, at times the Scriptures deem as obedient. And such is the life that you were created by God to live. Christ died for our sins and rose again so that we may live in Him and live in obedience to the Word. Let thus bring honor to our salvation by holding fast to the Word, even if it doesn't make sense to the world. Even when it doesn't seem pragmatic.