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SAUL REJECTED.

– *NOV. 17. – 1 Sam. 15:10-23.* –

Golden Text – "To obey is better than sacrifice." – 1 Sam. 15:22.

THAT the Lord expected of both the nation of Israel and the individuals of the nation strong confiding faith in him and implicit obedience to his commands is very manifest from the fact that the lack of such faith and obedience so often brought upon them severe penalties. As a nation they were punished with wars and captivities and plagues; and as individuals they were often severely chastised, as in the case before us. And God had a perfect right to require implicit faith and obedience of a people upon whom he had bestowed so many of his blessings, and to whom he had manifested himself in such wonderful ways.

The case of Saul was one of those cases where much had been given, and of whom, therefore, much was required. God had chosen him and called him out from a position of obscurity and made him king over his chosen people; he had given him favor with the people, surrounded him with good assistants and co-laborers, and the wise and faithful [R1887 : page 254] counsel of his servant and prophet Samuel; and he had established him in the kingdom and given him victory over his enemies. But notwithstanding all these manifestations of divine favor, Saul was disobedient and slow to trust the Lord. Chap. 13:2-15 records his failure to trust God, and his presumptuous act in assuming the role of the priest and himself offering sacrifices, contrary to God's law and to his agreement with Samuel. He feared the enemy when he should have trusted in God, and he sinned presumptuously when he should have waited patiently for the deliverance which God alone could give.

For this rash, presumptuous and faithless act, which proved Saul unworthy thenceforth of the great honor which God had conferred upon him in making him king over his people, God determined to withdraw that special favor and to appoint another to reign in his stead, and so instructed Samuel. "And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee." – 13:13,14.

Yet God did not take the kingdom from Saul at once. There was time left for repentance and reformation, which might have brought some mitigation of the penalty; and a measure of the divine favor still continued for his encouragement. But the season of grace was not improved, and by and by another test further proved Saul unworthy of his trust. On the southern borders of Palestine dwelt the Amalekites, a nomadic, warlike race, who roamed through the deserts between southern Judea and Egypt. They were a continual menace to the Israelites, often joining themselves to their other enemies and doing much damage. The iniquity of these enemies of the Lord's people now being full, God sent word to Saul by Samuel to destroy them utterly, to leave none of them alive, and also to destroy all their goods.

This last feature of the command was hard for the acquisitive Israelites to obey, and, with Saul's permission, **[R1888 : page 254]** the best of the spoils were preserved, and Agag (their king) he saved alive. Then Saul sought to cover his sin with a lie; but the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen disclosed the truth, and the faithful prophet did not hesitate to inquire of the king, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

They meant that the king had disobeyed the command of the Lord, and the flimsy excuse that they were preserved for sacrifices unto the

Lord was rejected as worthless. "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." (Verses 22,23.) This is God's estimate of human wilfulness. It is like witchcraft in that it trusts to erring human judgment in preference to the infallible divine judgment; and it is like idolatry in that it adores and seeks to please self rather than God, who alone is worthy of supreme reverence, respect and obedience.

Then Samuel delivered the Lord's message to the erring king, saying, "Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night." "And Samuel said, When thou wast *little in thine own sight*, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?" and now, "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king." (Verses 16,17,23.) A few years previous to this a similar warning had been given, but Saul did not heed it nor repent, though the Lord was very slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. (Chap. 13:13,14.) And Samuel mourned for Saul: the young man that seemed so promising on the day of his inauguration had now departed from the right ways of the Lord; and Samuel grieved as a father over a wayward son. – Verse 35.

But the Lord bade him arise and cease to mourn over Saul, seeing that he, the all-wise and holy One, who could not err, had rejected him from reigning over Israel. Then he directed him to David and told him to anoint him to reign in his stead. – Chap. 16:1.

In the selection of both Saul and David we see that the Lord specially sought a meek and quiet spirit. Saul was at first little in his own eyes, and when the proposition was made to make him king, Saul answered, "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" – Chap. 9:21.

That was just the spirit the Lord wanted to exalt, just the spirit that was fitted for his use; and had Saul maintained it throughout his course his reign would have been one of great prosperity; for behind his weakness was the might of Jehovah. The exaltation of Saul, alas! proved too great a temptation for him to pride, self-will and selfishness. He should have remembered ever to keep little in his own sight; for it is only the humble that God can exalt and use.

The lessons of this narrative are important also to us. If much every way – of favor, of divine precept and promise and leading and instruction, and of special providences manifesting the divine favor and presence and blessing – was given to fleshly Israel, how much more is given to the Gospel church – the *exceeding* great and precious promises, the witness of the holy spirit with our spirits that we are sons and heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ if so be that we suffer with him, the leading of the holy spirit, the instructions of the inspired Apostles, and the wonderful manifestations of divine favor and providence to the Church both collectively and individually!

And if implicit faith and reliance upon God were expected of fleshly Israel in view of their knowledge of God, how much stronger is the ground for such expectation on the part of the Gospel Church! The Lord does, and has a right to, expect much – a large return of faith and confidence and love and obedience – from those to whom he has given so much of the wealth of his favor; and if we are doubting and disobedient and wayward still, notwithstanding all his grace, we surely will not be counted worthy to be entrusted with the crown and the Kingdom which the Lord has prepared for them that love him. But as the Lord appointed another to take the place of Saul, so he will appoint others to take the crown and the Kingdom from those of the Gospel Church who prove themselves unworthy of it.

Beloved, "Be not faithless, but believing," and "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

The lesson of meekness is also an important one. "When thou wast little in thine own sight," God could exalt thee and use thee. But beware that his goodness to thee harden not thy heart and incline thee to pride, ambition, self-righteousness or presumption. Mark the effects of these upon Saul, and beware; and by watchfulness and **[R1888 : page 255]** prayer strive to maintain a lowly mind, to think soberly, and to act wisely and prudently. Mark also the contrast of the effects of God's favor upon Samuel – the meek and quiet spirit, the beautiful self-forgetfulness and self-abandonment to the will of God, the noble heart that could even rejoice in the prosperity of a prominent rival, and that could lovingly and tenderly minister to the ungrateful and unappreciative. Such a character is one of the choicest flowers of earth. Such God appreciates and loves and seeks to cultivate by all the testings and trials of the present time (1 Pet. 5:10); and such he will exalt in due time ("after that ye have suffered a while"). "Humble yourselves, therefore," beloved, "under the mighty hand of God."
