

When Leaders Don't Follow

Courage to Lead Series

1 Samuel 13:1-23

Pastor Bryan Clark

If you were here last week and you dropped a card on the steps and you find there's something that you continue to struggle with, I just want to remind you we would count it a privilege to walk with you and help you in any way that we can. There's just no reason why you should struggle alone. We have lots of resources. We have lots of ways we can help and we would count it a privilege to do so. You can contact me directly, talk to any of our staff; there's a Care Center on the 200 level up there; you could talk to someone after the service. I just want you to know you don't need to carry that burden alone.

Last fall in the early part of the Samuel story, we learned that a distinctive of being a Christian leader—and we've defined leadership in pretty general terms—but if you're serious about being a Christ-follower and you want to influence others for Christ, then that's kind of how we're defining leadership in this series. And what we've learned is: if you're going to be serious as a spiritual leader then you also have to learn to be a faithful *follower*. There is never a time as a Christian leader when you are really in charge. The very essence of what it means to be a Christ-follower is to be a *Christ follower*, and you are influencing others to also *follow* Christ. So to be an effective spiritual leader, you have to learn to be a good *follower*, which raises a question: What happens when a spiritual leader no longer wants to be a follower?

Well, that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 13. If you are new with us, we've been working our way through the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel; we find ourselves in chapter 13 this morning. This is really the official beginning of the Saul story. We've had several chapters that were a transition from Samuel to Saul—from the judges to the monarchy—but it's very evident by verse 1 of chapter 13 that this is the official beginning of the Saul story. Samuel will still come and go, but this is now about Saul and about the monarchy. Verse 1:

Saul was *thirty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned *forty two* years over Israel. (*NASB, 1 Sam. 13:1)

So that's a clear indication, kind of the beginning of the Saul story—*thirty* years old...reigned for *forty two* years.

Now Saul chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel, of which 2,000 were with Saul in Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, while 1,000 were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. But he sent away the rest of the people, each to his tent. (Vs. 2)

So this is kind of laying out the beginning of the story. You remember Israel didn't really have an official army because they didn't have a king. But now Saul is king and he is recruiting kind of professional soldiers. We might think of them as Special Forces...3000 men—2000 with Saul and 1000 with Jonathan. Also, as we go through this story and there's reference to these towns, it's just a good reminder that all of these stories happen in a very small geographical area. When Israel came into the Land of Promise, they never fully inherited the land that God offered them. They just

didn't trust God to give them the land, and literally to this day in history, they've never occupied the fullness of the land. The Philistines had the coastal plains which was a huge area. The Moabites, the Ammonites, Israel actually had a very small geographical area up around Jerusalem. But again, at this part in the story Jerusalem is not Jerusalem as we think about it. It wasn't even controlled by Israel at this time. That doesn't happen until David. If you go just north a little ways—10 to 15 miles—you start to bump into all these little towns in the hills and the mountains and that's where all of this activity takes place. Verse 3:

Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." All Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. The people were then summoned to Saul at Gilgal. (Vs. 3-4)

Not a lot of detail is given. This is our introduction to Jonathan; Jonathan attacks this Philistine garrison and basically initiates war. When we read through previous chapters in Samuel, you had kind of a hint that these Philistine garrisons (these little outposts) were kind of dotted here and there in the landscape even among the people of Israel. Because they had never really inherited the land, they hadn't possessed it. Really the Philistines were in charge and they would set up these little outposts (these garrisons) here and there in the hills just to watch the people of Israel, make sure they weren't up to something. So we've bumped into these along the way and now what happens is Jonathan, with a thousand soldiers, basically initiates a fight which is to initiate a war. So Saul sends word to all of Israel; the people gather at Gilgal. Remember Gilgal was a little bit to the east toward the Jordan River. It's a high, flat area; from that vantage point you could literally see in all directions, and you could easily see down to Michmash which was about 10 to 12 miles away, and you could clearly see the Philistines and what they were doing. So Saul gathers the people and the Philistines clearly are gathering for war.

Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits. Also some of the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. (Vs. 5-7)

The Philistines were a fighting machine. They were on the cutting edge of weaponry. They were on the cutting edge of metal work. They were just a massive fighting machine to be feared. They had chariots; they had horsemen, and now they are gathering for war. From Gilgal the Hebrew people could have seen this and for the most part it was time *to get out of Dodge*. So the people are scattering. They are hiding in caves; they are hiding in the bushes; they are running; they are crossing the Jordan to the eastern side of the Jordan. Most of them are getting out of there and the nation is dwindling down to a very small number of fearful soldiers that will remain with Saul.

I think we all understand these are the moments that define leadership. Leadership is relatively easy when everything's working; everything's prosperous; everybody's happy. These are the moments that separate leaders—and this will be the critical moment for Saul that in many ways will define the path that he will travel as king. Verse 8:

Now he waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, "Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him *and* to greet him (literally to bless him). But Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering." (Vs. 8-12)

Now in fairness to Saul, it's hard to imagine how absolutely terrifying this would have been. They are up on this kind of high, flat area. He's got a very small remnant of people that have remained with him. The Philistines are gathering for war; they are a fighting machine, and the command is to wait seven days. That would have been seven anxious days.

Now we've bumped into this before and I've highlighted it along the way. This seems to be somewhat of a protocol where: Saul would wait seven days; Samuel would arrive, would offer the sacrifice, and they would gain God's favor. In this case Saul waits seven days but on the seventh day, Samuel is not showing up. Saul sees the people leaving, kind of goes into panic mode, and decides to offer the sacrifice himself. Basically as king, he *chooses* to operate as priest. Now the text becomes very clear that God had clearly commanded Saul to wait for Samuel and Samuel, as the priest, would offer the sacrifice. But Saul offers the sacrifice and about the time he finishes, then Samuel arrives on the scene.

Some scholars take the position that Samuel was playing kind of a "cat and mouse game" with Saul because he didn't like Saul and he didn't like the arrangement. So he's kind of hiding in the bushes waiting for Saul to make a mistake, and then shows up on the scene. There's virtually no textual evidence for that view. As a matter of fact, I would contend that that would be the opposite of everything we've learned to be true of Samuel. I would see it much more, in God's sovereign timing Samuel shows up when he shows up.

Saul responds like a kid that just got caught with his hand in the cookie jar. He runs out to meet Samuel and offer him a blessing. But Samuel immediately confronts him, "**What have you done?**" This is really the moment of truth in Saul's life. As a matter of fact, I would say that this is the moment that defines Saul's life for the next 42 years. Saul, rather than responding with brokenness, with confession and repentance that he had clearly violated the command of God, responds with defensiveness. He immediately gets defensive and begins to give his excuses or his rationalizations. He says, "You know, this wasn't really my fault. The people were starting to leave. Samuel, it's kind of your fault. You were late, and if you hadn't been late, none of this would have happened." And, "It's the Philistines fault because they were attacking." And then he tries to spiritualize it, "As a matter of fact, Samuel, you weren't here and the Philistines were gathering to fight and no had offered a sacrifice seeking God's favor. So because you weren't here, Samuel, I had to take it upon myself to do your job and I **forced myself** to offer the sacrifice." Clearly presenting himself as somewhat of a victim—you know *if* Samuel would have been on time, *if* Samuel would have done his job, none of this was necessary. And he had to do it because of the circumstances.

Well, Samuel will have none of it.

Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly (literally you have played the fool); you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." (Vs. 13-14)

Three times in that short little paragraph Samuel refers to the **...LORD commanded you...the ...LORD commanded you**. There's no question that God had been very clear to Saul, "Wait seven days and wait for Samuel," but Saul disobeyed the commandment of the Lord. We don't have to guess as to why that was. Samuel is very clear. It's because Saul didn't have a heart for God. Saul didn't want to keep following God. He wanted to do this himself. The text tells us that because God could look into Saul's heart and He saw what was in Saul's heart, his kingdom would not endure. Saul would reign his time—42 years—but at the end of that, his son would not succeed him. That would be the end of Saul's family reigning, and God would usher in a new dynasty with a new family. Of course we know that will be David. The distinctive of David is that David had a *heart for God, a heart to follow God, a heart to obey God*. As a matter of fact, when Samuel is referring to the next king—to David—it refers to him as a **ruler**. This is the Hebrew word for a prince. We saw this earlier in the story. When Samuel talked about Saul as a human king, he referred to him as a prince or a ruler. That was clear language that whether the Israelites liked it or not, God would still be King because He is King, and that the human king would be a sub-king. He would be a prince under God as King.

Last week we learned that as long as the human king and the people would walk in obedience to God, God would still bless them. This is the moment of truth in Saul's life. Whether it was fear, whether it was anxiety, whether it was pride—whatever it was—Saul, rather than responding in brokenness and humility, got defensive, made excuses, tried to spiritualize and Samuel identifies it is because he ultimately didn't have a heart for God. Saul, for the most part, will be a failure as a king. David, the king that would succeed him, would be Israel's greatest king.

What was the difference? The difference between Saul and David was not that Saul sinned and David did not. The difference would not be that Saul messed up from time to time and David did not. The difference would be that David had a heart for God and Saul did not, and it would be manifested by David's willingness to face his sin in brokenness and humility and to confess and repent of his sin. When Nathan the prophet stuck his bony finger in David's face and accused him—confronted him—over his sin with Bathsheba, that was the moment of truth with David, and David in that moment responded with brokenness and humility and said, "I am the man!"

As a matter of fact, when most Christians go to the Bible to find a model of confession and repentance, they go to one of two psalms—Psalm 32 or Psalm 51—both psalms of David and both psalms of David's brokenness and confession and repentance. Saul never got there. Saul always had excuses. He always blamed somebody else. Saul always had his rationalizations. The cold, sobering reality is when we are confronted in the moment of truth and we respond with defensiveness, and we start going through our list: it was the Philistines' fault; it was the people's fault; it was Samuel's fault; we may even spiritualize and pull our verses out and somehow create a context where somehow I'm the victim in all of this. Every time we do that we drive ourselves deeper into that behavior, and make it less likely that the next time we will respond correctly. And as that becomes a pattern in our lives, we are setting a trajectory of our lives that will not end well. Verse 15:

Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.

So this is kind of: Samuel has made his confrontation; Saul has responded poorly; and Samuel leaves, which kind of has this feeling of the presence, the blessing of God going with him.

And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. Now Saul and his son Jonathan and the people who were present with them were staying in Geba of Benjamin while the Philistines camped at Michmash. And the raiders came from the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual, and another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the border which overlooks the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness. (15b-18)

Basically Saul and Jonathan count the troops. They have **six hundred men** left that haven't fled against this massive Philistine army. The rest of the paragraph is saying the Philistines divided into three's, moved into three locations, and basically they have Saul and their little army of six hundred surrounded. Obviously the situation looks very dire. Verse 19:

Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears." So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe. The charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the hoes. So it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who *were* with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan. And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash. (Vs. 19-23)

So here's the question: In a narrative like this, where there is so little detail about what transpired, there's so much we would like to know about what is happening, why is it necessary to give us a whole paragraph to tell us, "By the way there's no blacksmith and they didn't have a sharp garden hoe to use." This is part of the charm of the Old Testament narratives. It's full of these moments. This paragraph matters. What is being said is that the Philistines completely controlled this whole region to the degree that they would not allow the Israelites to even have a working blacksmith for fear that the blacksmith might make weapons of war. So when the Israelites needed a hoe or an axe or a shovel, they had to go down to the Philistines and the Philistines would make, repair, or sharpen their tool. And then they would charge them an exorbitant amount of money to do so. So it's simply a reflection that the Philistines were in complete control of the environment. Literally these six hundred soldiers did not have a single weapon of warfare. The only two that had a weapon were Jonathan and King Saul. It seems to me up against this massive fighting machine, the Israelites are in big trouble!

About the time this seems totally hopeless, then I remember, wait a minute, there was a story back in the book of Judges. Samuel reminded the nation of this story in last week's chapter that there was an army that was described the same way. They were as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore—massive. But God raised up a most unlikely hero by the name of Gideon. Gideon was a bit of a coward that became a great warrior for God. God whittled Israel's army down, Gideon's army down to three hundred people fighting a massive army, and yet God delivered Gideon with a great victory.

And then I remember in our Samuel story in chapter 6 when the Philistines stole the ark of the covenant, God defeated the Philistines without one single soldier. God doesn't need one single soldier to win. So now with six hundred soldiers, all they have to do is trust God and God will give them a great victory! Except I just remembered something—Israel didn't want God as king! They wanted a human king to fight their battles. Even with that arrangement, Samuel told them that if you trust God, if you obey God, if you follow God, God will take care of you and He will bless you. But now they have a human king and the human king doesn't want to follow God. The human king doesn't want to obey God. The human king wants to do it his way. So Samuel is gone. It's Saul and six hundred soldiers with no weapons against a massive army. It seems to me Israel is in a really dire situation. So what happens? We will have to look at that next week! *(laughter)*

But I want to move back as we close, to this moment when Samuel confronted Saul because I do think that is the moment of truth in Saul's life. How he responds in that moment is going to set a pattern that will set a trajectory that will define Saul's life. One can only imagine how the Saul story might have been different had Saul responded with brokenness and humility, had he responded with confession and repentance. The next forty-two years could have been dramatically different. For whatever reason, whether it was his insecurities, his fear, his pride—whatever it was—Saul got defensive and then started through the list of excuses: "It wasn't my fault;" "It was the people's fault;" "It was the Philistines fault;" "It was Samuel's fault;" "As a matter of fact, Samuel, if you had been here, then I wouldn't have had to do your job. I forced myself to do it, because you weren't here." Saul played the victim and that set a trajectory that would define a pattern that would ultimately define Saul as king. Saul's decision would affect thousands and thousands and thousands of people's lives. This is an age-old story that goes all the way back to Genesis 3 and the Garden of Eden when God confronted Adam and Eve. What's the first thing Adam did? Adam got defensive, "Well, you know it wasn't my fault." He actually came really close to saying, "God, this is really Your fault because it's the woman's fault and You gave me the woman." The woman said, "You know it really wasn't my fault; it was the serpent's fault."

This is kind of a pattern that has defined people down through the years. This kind of behavior we have seen over and over again. It defines marriages. It defines relationships between parents and children. It defines relationships out in the market place. It defines relationships in churches. There is this moment when we are confronted, often by someone who loves and cares about us. But we are confronted for our sin; we are confronted for our behavior that is hurting others around us, and that is the moment of truth! Will we respond like David in brokenness and humility with confession and repentance and continue down a path of life, or will we immediately become defensive and, "It's not my fault." "It's the people's fault." "It's Samuel's fault." "It's the Philistines' fault." And then maybe we start to pull verses and we spiritualize the whole thing and we convince ourselves that somehow we're the victim and it's not my fault. And every time you do that, you are driving yourself deeper into that behavior and you're making it less likely that the next time you will respond rightly. And pretty soon you have established a pattern that will create a trajectory for your life that will not end well.

My prayer for all of us is that we would say with David as he did in Psalm 139:

**"Search me, O God, and know my heart...
See if there be any wicked way in me,
And lead me down the path of life."**

I am absolutely convinced that at the end of your story, when you look back, you will realize that what ultimately will define the trajectory of your life will not be whether or not you sinned, whether or not you failed, whether or not you made messes. We will all be guilty of that. What will define the trajectory of your life is how you responded in those critical moments when you were

confronted with your sin. That is what will ultimately define the pathway of your life. Will you respond with a heart of David, a heart of brokenness and humility, or will you respond with a heart of Saul with all of your excuses, all of your verses, all of your reasons why it's not your fault and you're the victim? My prayer is that we will respond with the heart of David.

Our Father, we celebrate this morning that You are a God of grace and mercy and forgiveness. But, Lord, we are also sobered up when we look at the story of Saul and realize again that in those critical moments when we are confronted with our sin, to experience Your grace and Your mercy and Your forgiveness in a real and practical way, we must respond with brokenness and humility. God, my prayer would be that we would not respond like Saul. God, search our hearts; see if there be any wicked way in us. God, convict us of our sin and lead us on the path of life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. Have you ever been wounded by a spiritual leader? What happened? How did it effect you?
2. Have you ever served under a leader that seemed unable or unwilling to admit it when he/she was wrong? What were the leader's patterns of behavior and how did it effect you?
3. Have you ever been that leader that makes all kinds of excuses to avoid admitting that you were wrong? Are you that leader now? At home? In the marketplace? With friends?

Bible Study

1. Read I Samuel 13:1-7. What are the circumstances that provide the background for Saul's choice and Samuel's rebuke? In what ways do stressful circumstances reveal true character?
2. What do we know about Saul so far from I Samuel? Based on what you know, how would you expect Saul to respond to this situation?
3. Read I Samuel 13:8-14. What does Saul do? Why did he do it? How does he respond when Samuel confronts him? How does Saul's response line up with things we've learned about Saul in previous chapters? What was Saul's real sin in this text? (notice the repetition of the word "commandment" by the writer)
4. The difference between Saul and David is David was a man after God's heart which was manifested in his true confession of sin and willingness to admit he was wrong. Read Psalms 32 and 51. Both are attributed to David. How are these Psalms different than how Saul responded?
5. Discuss this statement: "The story of your life will not be defined as much by whether or not you make mistakes or commit sins but how your choose to respond when these mistakes or sins are revealed to you." Do you think this statement is true or not? Why?

6. You can choose to be like David or Saul in your marriage, your parenting, relationships, at church or in the marketplace. What will likely be the consequences of choosing to be more like Saul than David in these relationships?
7. How do you avoid being like Saul? What if this is a blind spot that everyone sees but you don't seem to see? What practical things can you do?
8. Read I Samuel 13:15-23. What is Saul to do now? What happens to the people when a spiritual leader doesn't lead well? What happens to the people when spiritual leaders stop being good followers?

Application

1. What practical things can you do to make sure you are more like David than Saul? How do you avoid being that person that just can't see his/her own issues?
2. What can you do if you have a person in your life at home, church or work that is like Saul? Are there any practical steps you can take?