February 6/7, 2016

The Sad Story of a Self-deluded Leader

Courage to Lead Series

1 Samuel 15:1-35

Pastor Bryan Clark

I would say this week I spent a lot of time with King Saul via the text. And I would honestly say the emotion that I have in my heart this morning is I'm just sad. It's a sad, sad story. Maybe one of the reasons why it stirs emotion in me is because I have seen over thirty plus years of ministry so many people who have lived out the Saul story, and it's very difficult to watch. We talk often here about the danger of a performance-based value system. When you get your significance, you get your value, you get your identity out of your performance, there are all kinds of dangers with that. Saul is the classic example of what happens.

Because my significance, my value, my identity is based on my performance, more and more I create this external person that has to succeed. So I can't really admit when I make mistakes. I can't really admit when I fail, can't really admit when I hurt people or I sin. I more and more blame others and speak in half-truths and more and more try to project this image of super-Christian on the outside. But the whole time, what's being neglected is the internal me. My soul begins to dry up and becomes more and more lifeless, and I become a sad, self-deluded leader. The reality is as long as I have a performance-based value system, by necessity, I am going to deceive myself, delude myself, and the longer I stay in that pattern, the more serious it becomes. If in a marriage, in a family, out in the market place, in a church, in a friendship, if you've ever uttered these words: "He/She just doesn't get it," Saul is the poster child for that statement. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 15.

If you are visiting with us, we are working our way through 1 Samuel. We find ourselves in Chapter 15. It's really hard to date a lot of these events. I took a position last week that Chapter 14 was fairly early in Saul's reign. Most scholars would say the events in Chapter 15 are maybe halfway through Saul's reign. So it's helpful to realize there's probably at least a decade between what happened in Chapter 14 and what happens in Chapter 15. So this is not just the next thing. In between there are lots of wars; there's lots of activity; there's lots of things that happen that we really know nothing about. It's also helpful then to realize that what is recorded in Chapter 15 isn't just the next story, but rather it's meant to be a snapshot of Saul. In other words, it illustrates what Saul has become, which is then what justifies why it's necessary for God to reject him as king and begin a transition to a new king. So Chapter 15 is considered to be the last chapter of the Saul story. Even though Saul will remain in the story to the end of the book, next week begins what's considered the long painful transition to a new king. So this is kind of the last glimpse; this is Saul in a nutshell. That's the best way to think of it. Verse 1:

> **Then Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD.** (*NASB, 1 Samuel 15:1)

So Samuel is reinserted into the story. There's no way to know how much contact Samuel and Saul had over these many years but from the text, Samuel is now inserted back into the story. Literally what he says to Saul is: *Me, the LORD has sent*. So Samuel puts himself in the front of the sentence, which we would say is the emphatic. The point of that is we have no idea who Saul has been turning

to for wisdom and advice and direction. We saw some of that last week. But what Samuel is saying is, "I am God's prophet. I was the one who anointed you as king. I am the one that speaks for God, and I have something to say to you and you better listen." That's kind of the tone of verse 1. As a matter of fact, the language is kind of odd at the end of the verse. Literally it says, "Listen to the *voice* of the words of the LORD." That word *voice* is going to show up again and again in this text, and it really is kind of a play on this word. So just make a little bit of a mental note of that. Verse 2:

> **Thus says the LORD of the hosts, "I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.** (Vs. 2-3)

So this story goes way back to when the nation of Israel was coming out of Egypt enroute to the land of promise. The Amalekites were an evil, blood-thirsty people. Probably in today's language, we'd refer to them as terrorists. They preyed on the weak—on women, on children. Again, it's very difficult to assess what happened in an ancient culture thousands of years ago. It's very easy to sit in a very comfortable living room and cast judgment on things that happened in a culture long ago that we know nothing about. But by and large, the ancient cultures were violent; they were bloody; it was the law of the jungle. That was just a reality. This seems extreme to us but part of this is what's referred to as a *holy war*. Again, in the ancient cultures they had to deal with this kind of violence and blood-shedding. If you go back and read the story, the Amalekites on several occasions attacked and did great damage to the nation of Israel. As a matter of fact, one of the classic stories is when Israel was fighting in a battle and Moses goes up on the hill. When Moses is holding his staff up, the army is winning; when the staff comes down, the army loses—so they end up propping his arm up. Well, that was a battle against the Amalekites. In those battles, God declared that one day He would judge the Amalekites. Because they were terrorists—violent, blood-shedding people—then He would eliminate them from the face of the earth.

Now in popular opinion, there's just no way God wins. People criticize God: "There can't be a good God because of all the evil in the world." So God is criticized because He does nothing in their opinion. But then when God steps in and passes out judgment on these violent, evil people, then people criticize God for His judgment. So, in popular opinion, God can't win no matter what He does. But the reality is God is a God of judgment and justice, and He was mediating out justice on these people. So this would be referred to as a *holy war*. The idea was that this was not to gain land; it was not to capture a king; it was not to gain wealth. As a matter of fact, the nation did not gain in any way. It was solely for the purpose of mediating out judgment for God. So the details are very important because God's very reputation is at stake. Verse 4:

> **Then Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 men of Judah. Saul came to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the valley. Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, so that I do not destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the sons of Israel when they came up from Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. So Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.** (Vs. 4-9)

So Saul musters the troops. They go into battle. He tells the Kenites to get out of there. They have no beef with them. They get out of the way, and then he conquers the Amalekites. But in verses 8 and 9, we are told that **Saul** spared Agag the king, and **Saul** kept the best of the livestock. Now it's a really important detail to notice because the text is very clear. **Saul** spared the king. **Saul** kept the best of the livestock. There's also a detail when it says the **people were not willing**. All through this text, **the people** is a reference to *the army*. That word **not willing**, or that phrase, is actually a phrase that means *rebellion*. So, for example, when the nation of Israel got to the land of promise, they sent in twelve spies. When the spies came back out, ten of them said, "We can't do it; the giants are too big." The text says the people *were not willing* to go in. It's the exact same phrase, and God considered that an act of rebellion. They did not trust God; they were not willing to obey God. The consequence for that is they wandered forty years in the wilderness. Well, this in verse 9 is the exact same phrase. This is a very important detail because it tells us that the people intentionally rebelled against God and His commands. They were unwilling to kill Agag and to destroy the best of the livestock. That will be an important detail that comes up later in the story. Verse 10:

> **Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night.** (Vs. 10-11)

So verse 10 is God's version of what happened. God's version is Saul disobeyed. We have talked about what happens when a spiritual leader no longer wants to follow. So it's interesting that verse 10 uses that exact language. Saul did not want to follow God. So the text says that the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king. Now because God is mysterious and God is infinite, there's no way to exhaust the wonder of that which is God. From time to time the text puts human attributes onto God, simply to make a point. In other words, if the text only talked in the abstract—of the mystery and the wonder of God—sometimes we couldn't even make sense of that. So there's always this mystery: If God is sovereign and God knows the beginning from the end, and God is all-knowing, then how does that work with human beings made in the image of God who exercise a will and make choices? We refer to this the coterminous actions between a sovereign God and people with a will made in the image of God.

So what does it mean that God *regretted*? We could spend the rest of the morning talking about the mystery of how does all this work, and we still would figure nothing out. Rather than being sidetracked on all of that, the point of the text in attaching this attribute to God is to say that Saul had a legitimate opportunity to succeed as king. God did not set Saul up to fail. It was not some sort of fatalistic thing where Saul had no chance. The idea is that Saul had every chance to succeed. We know that. God promised that through the power of His Spirit, He would give Saul what he needed to succeed. He was told several times, "If you just trust and obey the LORD, then God will bless you and you will succeed." But Saul made a choice. He didn't want to follow God; he didn't have a heart for God. Therefore, he disobeyed God and God grieves over that. And we are also told that Samuel grieved over that. Verse 12:

> **Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul; and it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself, then turned and proceeded on down to Gilgal." Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the**

> **people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed." Then Samuel said to Saul, "Wait, and let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak!"** (Vs. 12-16)

So Samuel goes to find Saul. He has a little bit of trouble finding Saul because Saul is off setting up a monument to himself. This is helpful for getting inside of Saul's head. He's just come off a holy war, yet in Saul's mind he's setting up a monument to himself. Finally Samuel and Saul meet. Saul comes out, blesses Samuel, and then states, "*I have obeyed the commandment of the LORD*." If you go back to Chapter 13 when Saul waited seven days for Samuel, when he thought Samuel wasn't going to show up, he offered the sacrifice himself. About that time Samuel comes on the scene, and the way the text reads is Saul kind of sheepishly goes out to meet Samuel. You get the impression he knows he did something wrong, and he's trying to smooth it over. It's interesting now, a decade or so later, that is not the way Chapter 15 reads. As a matter of fact, this is a very emphatic statement. In Saul's mind, he believes this is true. He believes he has obeyed the commandment of the LORD, so Samuel calls him on it: "If that's true, then what is this sound?" Literally the text is the sound of the *voice* of the sheep, the sound of the *voice* of the oxen, again, playing on this word *voice*. In other words, it is obvious to everyone in the room you did not obey because the sheep and oxen are right there. And yet Saul responds in typical Saul fashion: He blames the people. This is his army and he's throwing them under the bus. "Well, the people spared the best of the livestock, but the reason they did this was of such noble motivation, in order to sacrifice, Samuel, **to the LORD your God**."

It's interesting that Saul does not refer to Yahweh as *his* God. Whatever has transpired over these years, he refers to Yahweh as Samuel's Lord. Now we know from the text, this is a lie. We know from verses 8 and 9, it was not the people; it was Saul. Saul spared Agag. Saul spared the best of the livestock. We know that the motivation was not noble, in order to offer the best to God. We know that they were not willing. It was an act of rebellion. They intentionally disobeyed God's order in order to keep the best for themselves. But this is now Saul, trying to save face and trying to maneuver his way through this. So verse 16 is rather formal language. Basically what Samuel is saying is, "I am now going to speak as the prophet of God, and you'd better listen to what I have to say." That's verse 16.

> **Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you king over Israel, and the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?"** (Vs. 16-19)

So this is the second time we have God's version of the story. It's interesting that Samuel says, "You know, Saul, you were little in your own eyes when God came along and chose you." We remember that. Remember, when Saul and Samuel were first dialoguing and Saul was put at the head table with all of the best of the meat and Saul was asking, "Why are you treating me this way? Why am I at the head table? Why are these people saying these things to me? I am of the smallest tribe and I am of the smallest family in the smallest tribe." You remember that glorious moment when Saul was to be introduced, unveiled as the first king of Israel, where did we find him? Hiding in the baggage. I spoke at length about the difference between insecurity and fear versus true humility. Saul was not characterized by true humility. He was characterized by his insecurities and his fear. In his own mind, he was a little man but God came along and put him in a position of

authority and power. Now he thinks he's a big man. He doesn't need God. He doesn't need to obey God. He's in charge. But the big man is actually still a little man inside. His life is defined by his insecurities, by his fear, now by his arrogance. The little man is trying to be a big man, but he's still actually a little man.

When we think of pride and arrogance, we tend to see that as one end of the scale, and at the other end of the scale is insecurity and fear. I would suggest to you that is incorrect. Rather pride and arrogance is the flip side of the same coin as insecurity and fear. Another way of saying this is: show me someone who is arrogant and prideful; I'll show you someone who is insecure and fearful. It is two sides of the same coin. It's a little man, trying to pretend to be a big man with all these external performances. But inside, he's still a little man. That becomes painfully obvious as the conversation continues.

> **Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal."** (Vs. 20-21)

So now two times God has given His version of the story. Two times Saul has given his version of the story. The frightening thing is, I think at this point in the story Saul actually believes what he's saying. He has now become so deluded, so self-deceived, he has made up his own version of the story. If you repeat it often enough, you begin to believe that's actually what transpired. I believe he's been sincere when he says, "I have obeyed." He's now that deluded and that self-deceived. Again he blames the people; it wasn't his fault, to which Samuel responds:

> **"Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king."** (Vs. 22-23)

This is the classic Samuel rebuke—**to obey is better than sacrifice**. Saul is now all about the externals. We refer to this as *damage control*. He's now trying to project this image of this spiritual king and this noble motivation. Samuel says, "God doesn't want a bunch of external religious activity. What He wants is obedience." But He doesn't get obedience from Saul because Saul doesn't have a heart for God. It's not about the internal for Saul; it's about the external show. It's about the performance. He also says that **rebellion**—which he saw, they are unwilling to obey God—**is as the sin of divination**. Some of your translations say *like the sin of divination;* hopefully *like* is in italics, which tells you it's actually not in the Hebrew. I believe *like* is incorrect. It's not a simile. Rebellion is actually the sin of divination. Divination is witchcraft. It's literally seeking power in someone other than God, and rebellion is seeking power in someone other than God. In this case, Saul is seeking power in himself. It's about himself. It's about *his* performance. It's about *his* image. It's about erecting a statue to himself. So he's guilty of idolatry. He's putting himself forth as the substitute god. So God has rejected him as king.

> **Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned…** (Vs. 24a)

And we all say, "Finally, finally!" And I say, "Not so fast!" In thirty-some years of ministry, I'll tell you this: When people get busted, they know the right thing to say. In that moment, everyone's sorry. It's easy to say, "I have sinned." You might be interested to know that when Moses and Aaron were putting forth the plagues of God on the Pharaoh, part way through that experience, the Pharaoh uttered these exact same words, "I have sinned." But look at what Saul goes on to say:

> **...I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the LORD." But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel."** (Vs. 24b-26)

After Saul says, "**I have sinned**," the next words out of his mouth, "**I have indeed transgressed**…" That Hebrew word is a rather mild word meaning *I have overlooked*. So what he's saying, "Okay, I have sinned. I may have overlooked a couple of the technicalities." Notice the language, how manipulative he is. I may have overlooked the commandment of the LORD and your words, Samuel. In other words, it's kind of a jab that says, "Samuel, I'm not even sure you are the prophet of God, or you are speaking for God. But I know that you said some things and I didn't do exactly what you said, so now you are upset with me, so okay, I sinned; I may have overlooked both God's commandments and your words, Samuel." You just feel the manipulation of that. But now he has said the magic words, therefore, "Pardon me, let's go back and offer sacrifice and save face," again, what we would refer to as damage control. Saul is busted. He knows he's in trouble. Now he's trying to save face. It's all about this public persona, this image as king. So if he says the magic words, then that means Samuel has to pardon him and come back and offer sacrifice and Saul can save face. But Samuel knows what's going on and he absolutely refuses to do this.

> **As Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you. Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind."** (Vs. 27-29)

So Samuel refuses to respond to Saul's pseudo confession. He turns to leave. Now we get what's really in Saul's heart. It's not brokenness and confession. He literally, physically tries to grab Samuel. He gets a hold of his robe; a piece tears. Samuel uses it as an opportunity for a metaphor: *God has torn the kingdom from your hands.* Then he identifies that one of your neighbors is going to be the new king. Then he says **who is better than you**. What he means by that is not a better performer. We know this from earlier text. The difference is going to be that **better** means *a better heart*. Saul does not have a heart for God. What will define the new king is he will be a man after God's own heart—not better performer, but better heart. But here's the deal: a better heart means better performance. It's not a coincidence that the king whose heart was after God would become the greatest king in the history of Israel. Better heart does mean better performance. Interesting, Samuel refers to God as **the Glory of Israel**, and also says that He's not going to change His mind. The statement there is reflecting specifically God's decision to reject Saul in transition to a new king. As of this chapter, God's mind is settled and there's no change in it. Verse 30:

> **Then he said, "I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the LORD your God." So Samuel went back following Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.** (Vs. 30-31)

This is just the classic of "he doesn't get it"! After all this, he says, "I have sinned. Come back and honor me." It's like you are so clueless by this time. You are so self-deceived; you are so self-deluded. You've convinced yourself somehow your made-up narrative is the true narrative. Again, this is just about saving face. Come back; honor me, and I can save face before the people. It does create an interesting question: then why does Samuel go back with him?

Robert Alter is considered to be an expert in Hebrew narratives. On this particular part of the text, he comments that all of the English translations, in his opinion, miss this. There are two words. One is in verse 30; one is in verse 31. They are almost identical, with a slight difference. But that difference in Hebrew actually makes the two words antonyms, not synonyms. So what Saul is asking for in verse 30 is that Samuel will go *with* him. But what Samuel says in verse 31 is that Samuel will go *from* him. If you want to see that exact word that's used in verse 31, it's used in verse 10: He has turned back *from* following me. That's the exact same word there. So actually, what the text is saying is Saul wanted Samuel to come with him. Samuel would not do it. They both end up back in the same place but they do not travel together. Samuel will get there because there is unfinished business that will be a public rebuke of Saul.

> **Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.** (Vs. 32-35)

So Saul and Samuel both end up the same place. Samuel calls for Agag to be brought out. Interesting, the text says he was kind of cheerful. Whatever he was cheerful about, he was wrong because Samuel finishes unfinished business, which was the judgment of God, which would have been a clear rebuke of Saul. Then Samuel goes home; Saul goes home, and they never see each other again. Saul and Samuel lived about ten miles apart but they would never again see one another.

The last line of this story, meant to be a summary of Saul's life, is that **the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.** Again, a human, anthropomorphic term ascribed to God in order to make a point, and the point was that God called Saul and gave him everything he needed to be a successful king. But the little man wanted to be a big man and do it his own way, so he would not follow God. He did not have a heart for God. Therefore, he began to delude himself, to deceive himself, to disobey. His leadership was made up of half-truths; it was made up of blaming others. It was made up of rewriting the story with more noble motives. It was made up of external religious performance and trying to say the right lines, do the right things. But all the while externally he was trying to pull it off, his soul, the inner Saul, was slowly drying up and slowly dying. The sad reality is I believe by this point in the story, it wasn't just that Saul was *unwilling*, but he had gone so far down the path, I believe he was *unable* to see clearly his sin before God.

That is a frightening reality, that because of my insecurities, because of my fear, because of this performance-based value system, I create a context where I can't fail; I can't be wrong; I can't sin; I can't admit it; I can't see the people I'm hurting. It's never my fault; it's everybody else's fault. I speak in half-truths; I rewrite the story. I repeat it enough that I start to believe my own version of the story. Even though everybody around me clearly sees it, I can no longer see it because I have

become so deluded and so self-deceived. Because of my performance-based system, I can't afford to admit it because of my significance and my value and my identity are now at stake.

Here's another way of saying it. I have no doubt there are people in this auditorium this morning and you have no clue that this is your story—you have no clue! Even though everybody around you—whether it's in a marriage, in a family, at work, in a church, among friends—everybody else sees it clearly: there are the sheep; there are the oxen. It is so clear, but you don't see it. You've become so self-deceived; you've become so self-deluded, that this morning you are thinking of other people you know who are like Saul, and you have no idea it's you. Now think about that. That is a frightening reality, that you are now so far down the path you just sincerely don't get it. That is a story that will not end well.

Here's another way to think about it. If, as you sit there this morning, you are grieved and broken over your sin, you feel the shame, you feel the regret, you feel the disappointment, whatever it was, you biffed it, and you sinned, and you feel that deeply this morning. You are so disappointed with yourself. Thank God you feel it! Thank God you feel it because as long as you feel it, there's still hope! There's still hope you understand this is wrong; this is disappointing, you feel the shame, and the guilt, but there ishope. You seek forgiveness in the blood of Christ, and He stands ready to forgive you. Because of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, you stand righteous in the presence of God; your identity is in Christ. As long as you still feel the misery and the shame and the guilt of your failures and sin, you are still alive. There is every reason for hope.

The frightening reality is you can get so far down the path, you just don't see it anymore. Everybody around you sees it; you don't see it. You don't feel it. You are in such external damage control—present-myself-as-super-Christian mode—that you are just deluding and deceiving yourself more with each passing day. My prayer for all of us would be that we would not so deceive ourselves that our story becomes a story of a sad, self-deluded leader.

Our Father, our hearts are sad this morning for Saul. One can only imagine what could have been. God, we don't want to be Saul. There's not a person in this room this morning that wants to be Saul. God, there are some that they are there; they don't even know it. Apart from a miracle from You, it's not likely he or she is going to see it. God, thank You for the presence of the Holy Spirit that convicts us of sin that we might find forgiveness, that our souls might be alive, that we might travel the path that gives life. Lord, may that be our story. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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I Samuel 15:1-35

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Opening Discussion

1. Define both a grace-based value system and a performance-based value system.

2. Discuss how each creates a foundation from which a leader leads. What are the characteristics of a leader grounded in grace versus a leader defined by performance?

3. Why is a leader defined by a performance-based value system likely to end up deceived and self-deluded? What in that value system creates the self-delusion?

4. Have you ever known people who "just don't get it?" Describe the situation. What created this inability to "get it" in your opinion?

Bible Study

1. Read I Samuel 15:1-9. See Exodus 17:8-16. What does God tell Saul to do and what does Saul actually do? God's intent was to judge Amalek in a "holy war" for the bloody violence and evil they had done. What do you think was Saul's motive? How did Saul's choices effect God's reputation?

2. Read I Samuel 15:10-21. What was God's view of what transpired and what was Saul's view of the story? How does Saul defend his action? How does Saul's version line up with reality (v. 9)? Does Saul's response seem to reflect a pattern we've seen before in Saul?

3. In 15:17 what does Samuel say about Saul's view of himself when God called him? How is that "little" man now evident in Saul's leadership? Why can't Saul admit he disobeyed when it seems so obvious?

4. Have you known people like Saul? What's it like when the evidence is so obvious yet the person simply won't admit he/she has failed in some way? In what ways do they act like Saul in this story? What can be done at this point?

5. Read I Samuel 15:22-31. Saul was introduced to us as tall, dark and handsome. Clearly his externals had defined him. How was that performance-based value system still defining Saul? What does God want from Saul and from us? In what way can religious talk and religious activity become a substitute for true obedience?

6. Saul spoke the words, "I have sinned." What evidence is there that those were empty words for Saul that did not reflect true brokenness and repentance? How could Saul possibly utter the words he utters in 15:30? How deluded or self-deceived is he?

7. How does a person get to the place where Saul ended up where he seems incapable of getting the obvious truth about himself? What do we learn from this? What might be some clues that we are heading that direction now?

8. Read I Samuel 15:32-35. Twice the text tells us that God regretted that He made Saul King (see 15:10). These human terms (anthropomorphic) used to describe an infinite God certainly create a mystery we can't really resolve. However, their function in the text is to make a key point. In this case, that Saul could have succeeded as king but didn't because of the choices he made. Summarize Saul's life as king of Israel and what were the choices that got him to a place of such delusion?

Application

1. The most obvious question would be, am I like Saul? Do I see myself clearly and honestly as God sees me or have I deceived myself? How can you know? What are some practical steps you can take to assess this? Am I like Saul at work? At home? In church? As a leader?

2. What are some practical steps we can take to not end up like Saul? What was the foundational issue in Saul's life that seem to prohibit him from honestly facing his struggles?

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