

## OBEDIENCE IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

I Samuel 15:22

"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." I Samuel 15:22.

This text takes us back to the time when Saul was king over Israel. You will recall that the Amalekites were age-old enemies of God's people. When the Israelites were coming up out of Egypt, the first crowd that opposed them was the Amalekites. They came out with their armies in a deliberate attempt to destroy the people of God, knowing that they were not a war-like people and were not prepared for battle. The Amalekites carried on a sort of guerilla warfare against the children of Israel. They had sniped at the feeble and those who could not keep up with the main body of the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings through the land. Because of what the Amalekites did when the children of Israel were passing through the land, God swore vengeance against them.

In all probability the generation of the Israelites which came through the land of the Amalekites knew little or nothing about the way in which the Amalekites had treated their ancestors. Although the Israelites forgot, God never forgot. God remembered the way in which the Amalekites had treated His people although four hundred years had passed by without anything being done to them by way of retaliation. God never forgot their sin.

Eventually when Saul became king over Israel, God said unto him, "I swore vengeance against the Amalekites and now you are to be their executioner. I want you to carry out my orders concerning them. Get all the armies of Israel together and go down to the country of Amalek and utterly destroy everybody and their animals in that country. In other words, you do to them exactly what they had planned to do to you." It was simply another case of "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." God doesn't get in a hurry, and it may be a long time before it comes back home, but sooner or later whatever a man sows is coming home to him, somewhere down the line. So the time came when God sent Saul on a mission for Him, and that mission was to destroy completely the nation of Amalek -- every man, woman and child, all of their property, including their flocks and herds.

Saul got his army of 210,000 men together and went down to fight with Amalek and his forces. The Amalekites were a trained and war-like people, experienced in warfare and well equipped for battle. They thought it would not be any trouble at all to destroy the Israelites. But God intervened and gave victory to Israel and brought defeat to the Amalekites.

Instead of doing the thing just like God had commanded, Saul conceived the idea of taking the king back home to show him off and have a big victory celebration. Not only did Saul spare King Agag, but he also spared the best of the sheep and the best of the cattle that he might bring them home for sacrificial purposes.

God revealed to Samuel the prophet the terrible sin of King Saul in disobeying Him by sparing Agag and the best of the sheep and the cattle. After making that revelation to Samuel, God told him to go and meet Saul and preach to him the message which He would give him. God instructed

Samuel to tell Saul that because of his failure to obey, He was through with him and his family as a kingly line, and He was going to set up another in his stead. All night long Samuel, one of the greatest men of God who ever lived, was on his face praying to God to spare Saul. But not even the intercession of Samuel prevailed. God told him what to do. Saul knew exactly what God wanted done, but he refused to do as God had commanded. Saul obeyed God only insofar as it suited his whims to do so. Through all these centuries that has been man's trouble. Man has thought that he has known better than God, therefore, he has been unwilling to obey God's commandments. Saul discovered that it never pays to disregard God's commands.

When Samuel came face to face with Saul, the king put on a long face and with a sanctimonious whine he said, "I have performed all the commandments of the Lord." Seemingly he felt that he had done a fine job for the Lord. In his own heart he was proud of himself. He reasoned along this line, "This is even a better way than God said. We will give God all the glory and present the best and finest of the sheep, and the fattest of the cattle, and we will make a great sacrifice unto the Lord. We will call the people together for a great celebration and sacrifice -- what a big impression it will make on the people."

Just as soon as Saul declared that he had done as God had commanded, those inconsiderate sheep began to bleat and the best cattle began to low. Samuel said to the king, "If you have done all that the Lord has commanded, then what is the meaning of the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep that comes to my ears?" Saul replied, "The people----the people brought these back for sacrificial purposes." Isn't it nice to have somebody else on whom to blame your sins? Saul tried to justify his disobedience by putting the blame upon those over whom he exercised authority. After his disobedience, lying and deceit were exposed, Saul reasoned that if his action was wrong the motive was excellent, as they meant to sacrifice the best unto the Lord.

Samuel took his sword and hacked old Agag into pieces and then destroyed all the spoil that was brought home for sacrificial purposes. Then Samuel said unto Saul, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." There is no substitute for obedience to the commands of God. Nothing short of absolute obedience will satisfy the Lord. You cannot substitute anything for obedience. I do not care how good your intentions; I do not care if you do it for the glory of God; I do not care if it is for a sacrifice to God; if you are not doing the thing as God said to do it, then all your sacrifices and fat of rams burned on the altars and the spoils offered to God are not acceptable to Him, because they are not in accordance with His commands. Without obedience nothing else will do. When will people realize that? How many of us, like Saul, feel that if we are doing a fair job of living up to the requirements of the Lord, doing a fair job of keeping God's commandments, coming up to the average of the rest of Christian people, that is enough. And, if we happen to be a little above the average of the rest of the Christian people, we feel we are doing a wonderful job for the Lord, when maybe we are falling far short of the commandments and requirements of the Lord.

God wants His people to be obedient unto Him. God desires our obedience above our sacrifices. God prefers our obedience to our sacrifices. This text is in keeping with the rest of the Bible. "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Genesis 6:22). God had commanded

Noah to build the ark and had given him instructions as to how to do it. Noah's obedience was an implicit one. To Abraham God said, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:18). Abraham had taken God at His Word and had done exactly as God had said to him. "Thus did Moses: according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he" (Exodus 40:16). God told Moses everything about the building and furnishing of the tabernacle, and he did it exactly as he had been commanded.

God demands obedience on the part of His people. "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). It does not make any difference what man thinks, says or demands, we ought to obey God.

Why does God have the right to demand and to expect that we render absolute obedience to Him? The very fact that He is God means that He has the right to expect implicit obedience on the part of His children. Who am I to presume to know better than God what is best for me? Who am I to have the audacity to question the wisdom and the judgment of God? If God commands, He is right. If God has a plan, it is right. If God gives the orders, He cannot make a mistake. God has a plan for my life, and it is the best plan I could possibly follow. When I take matters in my own hands and disobey God, I am saying to God, "I know better than Thee how it ought to be done." Besides that, every commandment God gives is for my good. God loves me and He knows every step of the way I must take. I wish people would believe that. When God says, "Thou shalt not," it isn't because He is trying to withhold something from us that is good for us. It is because God in His wisdom knows that it is not best for us.

God has a right to expect us to obey Him because we have been saved. He says, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." How I thank God that I am His child! God means for us to do what He says.

God means for us to do what He commands. We suffer loss for every disobedience. God told Moses to speak to the rock and get water for the Israelites, but Moses struck it instead. What difference did it make? He got the water just the same. But you see the difference when God led Moses up on Mount Nebo and showed him the promised land. Moses would have given his life to have led the Israelites into that promised land, but God said, "Moses, you remember your disobedience. You remember that I told you to speak to the rock and you struck it instead. Moses, you can't go." Moses lost by his disobedience. He would rather have had the privilege than all the others in life. Every disobedience on the part of God's people carries with it loss. Disobedience is rebellion against God -- substituting one's own will for God's will. Doing the will of God is far more acceptable to Him than any story one can tell about the enjoyment of his religion. There can be no higher function of the soul than to obey God.

Samuel told Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice." The thing that counts with the Lord is whole-hearted obedience. When Samuel got Saul in a corner he began to squirm and to say that he was sorry. About what was he sorry? It was not about his sin. He was sorry because he was caught. But there was no real repentance about that. Nearly every man in the penitentiary will tell you he is sorry. He is not sorry because he broke the laws of the state, but because he has to suffer for the crime he committed. So it is with sin of every kind.

To obey is better than to sacrifice because it costs more. To purchase doves or a sheep or an ox and surrender that gift at the sacrificial altar is a cheap matter of religious observance compared with the cost of identifying one's life with the redemptive purpose of God.

John the Baptist paid the cost of obeying God. He might have remained "a voice crying in the wilderness," but he struck straight at the palace of Herod and became a voice rebuking an unfaithful ruler. John's courage cost him his life. But it was his life that he lost, and not his soul. The world, however, gained a knowledge of what real religion ought to be and must be.

The history of Christianity is replete with the names and records of men and women who, in obedience to God, have suffered and have put the world forever in their debt, for their suffering has meant our liberty.

When David Livingstone had nearly worked himself to death in Africa, he was found by Henry M. Stanley. Stanley tried his best to persuade the worn Christian hero to retire and to go home. But Livingstone replied, "I must remain and finish my work." "To obey was better than to sacrifice."

When Adoniram Judson was suffering untold indignities in Burma, a Spanish collector of customs advised him to return to his native New England, but he decided to remain and introduce Burma to his Christ. The story of Adoniram Judson and his accomplishments says, "To obey is better than to sacrifice."

The man who obeys the Lord himself becomes the "living sacrifice." Paul broke away from the altar in the temple in order that he might obey God. Thereafter, he could never be contented with a sheep slaughtered and burnt upon an altar of stone. He simply put himself at the disposal of the will of God. A "living sacrifice" is not the burning of the body of a dead sheep, but it is the bringing of all the powers, talents and faculties into harmony with God and putting them at the disposal of His will.

Saul failed miserably because he deliberately set his will against the will of God. He refused to do what God told him to do. Christian friend, ever remember that to obey strictly the commands of the Lord is far better than anything you may desire to lay upon His altar. It is right for every Christian to do what the Lord commands and leave all of the consequences with Him. Unsaved friend, there is a divine command which you should obey promptly, namely, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." You may suppose that your own way of salvation is better than the one which the Lord has devised, but it will never get you anywhere. Accept His will and enter upon His way now.