



"CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES" - 1 Samuel 12 & 13

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Jesus Fellowship of Believers
in Menomonie Wisconsin
on Wednesday evening, Nov 25th, 2016

The great French Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre once remarked "*We are our choices.*" Simple, but profound! It is a truth we wish were not factual, but not a one of us has not found such to be a reality. These chapters address this very fact, as we see the after-effects of a couple of guys choices. Decisions and actions and even *lives lived*, that would change nations and alter the course of history. In it, we again see God's divine and primary will, His permissive but secondary will, and His rejected and denied will for some who seek to push past Him and see their own way without Him.

As Samuel approached the end of his ministerial career as judge over Israel, he herein addresses the people one last time as to the history and the current state of their hearts and passions. As always is the case, the people had failed to remember their history. They has forgotten the glory of God's providence and care, and had instead moved to 'shore up' their lives and safety through self effort and human means. Mankind has always had tendencies toward such, because we innately fail to grasp the sovereignty, the magnitude and power of God, as well as the motivation of profound love He has for all us as His creation.

Samuel first moves to establish that he himself could be trusted before the people. He harkens them back to the years of his own ministry, as well as even further back to remember the sovereign care that God had exercised over them as a nation. The people, you see, no longer wanted his leadership and oversight. They had forgotten. We always forget! But Samuel herein caused them to acknowledge that he had been nothing but faithful to them throughout the years of his service. He would now remind them of "all *his* faithfulness and the faithfulness of God for them." (Vs 7)

Samuel it seems made some choices in his life which led to being greatly, even *profoundly* used by God. As with all of us, those choices no doubt changed the direction of his life and excluded some worldly elements from being a reality in his life and added others. He had made decisions. Decisions to serve. Decisions to remain faithful. Decisions to reject his flesh and the worldly entanglements of this life. Decisions of trust and priorities as well as effort and work. He apparently understood 2Timothy 2:4 hundreds of years before it was penned, knowing personally that "*No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*"

Samuel reminded the people of how God had rescued them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt and had brought them into this "new land" of blessing. He pointed out how the people had soon after forgotten this profound rescue and turned away from God and how therefore God 'put the squeeze on them' through other conquering armies. It seemed that pain was the only real successful tool to bring humility and remembrance and thus thankfulness to the hearts and lips of this people. Such is a sad testament on the condition and plight of mankind!

I wish it wasn't true. I wish that over the 2000 years since this speech by Samuel that people had wised up...that they had learned through seeing the history of man. But that is certainly not the case. For even as a church, we

pass through times of reflection in the course of our community life and in that we tend to 'look back' and in doing so we see the field littered with the bodies of those who forgot where they came from...what God and the fellowship of His saints had done to love them and support them. The bodies of those who ceased to give thanks...those who failed to serve God and worship "Him and Him only." (Luke 4:8 "*Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'"*"). Samuel reminded them also how when they were in bondage due to their rebellion they had cried out to the Lord and the Lord redeemed them and restored them once again, but here they were yet again in the same shoes as before. They had forgotten yet again. For once again they were ready to try to make it on their own.

There is an undying battle ensuing in this matter. Man forever wants to be his own God...the 'master of his own domain,' while at the same time he knows that, *in truth*, God is the soul executer of that roll. Yet therein lies the rub! It is the "see-saw" path that most of us spend our lives acting out. In the matter of salvation, God seeks more than sorrow and regret. God seeks from us a repentance...a 'turning away' from the path of sin as well as the surrender of the control of our destiny to Him. He thereafter calls us to faithful service, and actually *expects us* to acquiesce! How strange to think we can reject God's control and live selfishly and in self-empowerment and still receive His blessings!

Israel's history spoke for itself. When they lived under God's control and totally trusted Him to care for them, they not only received such care, but they even lived in the midst of the miraculous! They "walked on the water, they reversed time, they conquered the mighty, they ate manna from the skies!" But when they drifted away from Him, they suffered defeat, pain, poverty, and slavery. They didn't need to overtly *rebel*, they only needed to *drift* to see such come to pass.

In this case, they decided they wanted to be like everyone else..everyone out there in the world that had no God over them. They wanted to look like them and live like them and have the same stuff. This is hauntingly where the greater church is today. We want salvation and eternal life. We even want God's blessings and cares, but we are unwilling to give anything back. We want all of God's stuff, but we want the world...all *their* stuff. Thus we try ...often for a lifetime, to straddle a perceived "middle line" for which there is none. I heard this guy once say that he wanted his young child to go to public school (as opposed to home school or private Christian school) because he wanted his kid to be in sports. Seriously? That's your priority? Not his salvation...not the best education and spiritual maturity as he grew up? He might as well of said "*I like Jesus, but I want what the world has too.*"

We read "Jesus did it all for you" as "Jesus gives everything to you and seeks nothing in return." We want to believe that discipleship and Lordship is not required but only offered as options for the few crazies who want to be pastors, missionaries and martyrs! Salvation is indeed free, but true salvation supernaturally results in transformed priorities and new direction of life and passions! That is a innate fact, and I have said repeatedly that if such is not the case, one should be very worried that real rebirth has not actually occurred in us!

Samuel was herein reminding the people that he had indeed been personally faithful. He had proved he had "the stuff," and not merely talking a good talk! He pointed out that Saul would have to "bring it" the same way if they were to remain in the good graces of Jehovah God. Samuel was able to say that he had "finished well." But would Saul? Will *you*? Will we be faithful and diligent to what God has called us to? Or will our lives in truth be riddled with compromise and rebellion against His will for us? Will we fail to listen to those around us and authorities over us?

God was giving the people of Israel a fairly long leash here. If their new king would love and serve and rule *under the authority of the great King Jehovah*, then He would continue to take care of them and even bless them even though this was not God's best plan for His people. But this was "big boy" stuff, and the people of Israel certainly didn't have the reputation of that kind of spiritual tenacity and back bone. In fact, their M.O. was to take one step back only to tumble down backwards into the grand canyon of demise, eventually finding themselves in full blown spiritual anarchy! All starting with just one small step away! That's the lie we tell ourselves you see. That we can move away from the center of spiritual life and we will be ok...that we will come back...that we are just taking a little spiritual "vacation." It's just a "little off" the primary plan of God! I'll be ok!

God allows a lot of such leash scenarios with us too. Having a beer, having a internet capable computer or phone, having an intensive career, having children on top of the commitment of marriage, etc etc. All of these kinds of things are permissible within the dictates of Christendom, and they can be benign to our faith walk or even a blessing! But they can also be a weight, a stumble, a *train wreck*! We are factually not good examples of steering well clear of the road hazards and life's potholes! We in truth want to walk just as close to the edge as we can. And in that, we wonder why we often fall over that edge!

Having given that "shot across the bow", Samuel would now go on to make an appearance in chapter 13, but alas...only to play judge once again and pass sentence on king and crew. Saul and the people of Israel stiffened their neck against the authority in their lives, and took the attitude of..."*ya, ya...dude, we got this gramps...we don't need you holding our hand.*" But it wasn't even a chapter later that King Saul and the people go down in flames!

Saul would essentially disqualify himself from position because of his pride and self-entitlement. He would do what was not his to do and would embrace a position and power that was not his to act on. We are all called to different things and different positions in the body of believers, and to put your hand in there and take what is not yours is not a small thing with God. We do it by being self-anointed spiritual counselors and directors or arm-chair pastors, and then like children we stand holding the gas can and matches saying "*I didn't do anything*" as the village burns in the background! "*I don't need the School of Ministry!*" ..."*I don't need any training or preparation for service!*" ..."*I got this...I'm the man!*"

Sometimes we make these mistakes in times of panic and fear. How many times I have heard someone offer up the excuse for their sin by saying "*you don't understand Tim...I **had** to! I didn't have any choice! My back was against the wall and there was no other way out!*" Oh...you mean like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego at the fiery furnace? Where they "**had** to bow down" before the emperor or they would die? How did that one play out? "*Oh, king...God will save us, but even if He doesn't, we still aren't going to bow down and worship you....not gonna happen!*"

Instead of turning to God and putting our trust in Him, we will often take matters into our own hands and force the result we believe must occur. And in doing so we have tilted the entire trajectory of our lives. We know that God is indeed the God of the second chance and redemption is more than just a philosophical and spiritual concept but in fact is often a physical reality. But we still must acknowledge that there are some things one simply does not come back from. If this was not true, then why would Saul be so disqualified because of this one act? His life would not so much disintegrate as it would *dissolve*. A slow melt down of pain and desperation, not just for Saul but frankly His personal decision would be anything but personal as it affected everyone around him as our decisions usually do.

What precipitated such a reckless move on his part? The motivators for such in our own lives are many, but often it is exactly what got Saul. It was a fatal combination of pride and impatience. These two things are like baking soda and vinegar. There is going to be a reaction of epic nature. I **want** it...*I have to have it* right now, and I can push it through under my own power and make it happen. *Ahhh!* Let me step back away from you, because there is going to be some hell to pay! There was for Saul and there will be for us. A lot of people just never recover, and while God will still love them and they will receive and live under the common grace of humanity, they may never know their divine purpose and plan for their lives!

How we want to reject this truth today! We want to see God's grace as being a "reboot" in the "space-time-continuum" where everything goes back to the way it was before we messed up ...before we burned down the village. But it just simply is not true, and it is fatal to believe otherwise. Because in such thinking we can tend to be quite lazy, flippant, or arrogant because there is always "next time." *Ahhh...if there was indeed always a 'next time!'*

Saul had begun a slow melt down in his life with this one action. There would be no permanent recovery. Moments of lucid clarity, but nothing that would last. Some things must be heard from God clearly the first time. Adam and Eve never got a second chance. Paradise was gone. I pray that each of us hear clearly the message of this passage. God loves you, and no matter what you have messed up, He will receive you back into the fold again. But we must let God do his wonderful work in us and through us from this moment. May He fill each of us with his transforming Holy Spirit, that we might be only Him and His plan for our lives...