



1 Sam 15:1-33

I want to start this morning by showing you a few traffic signs – Give Way, double yellow lines, 30 miles an hour.

Why do people ignore the traffic laws even though they are put there for our safety and the safety of others? Don't think it should apply to us, not concentrating, selfish and want to do it our way, don't think we will get caught because we don't think Police will be looking.

We believe the risks outweigh the benefits. Do you remember this character? Ronnie Barker as criminal Fletcher in Porridge. The judge described him as an habitual criminal. He regarded getting caught casually. He didn't think it important and didn't think it mattered to much that his thieving actually affected others.

Obedience, or submissive compliance, is the act of obeying orders from others.

Obedience. It's not a popular word. It's a dirty word. We're British, we assert ourselves. We live in a society where obedience is somehow passé. I must assert myself, protect my dignity, prove I don't need to be told what to do. Yet at the heart of the Christian faith we find obedience to God is the only way in which we will ever develop as healthy and well-balanced Christians.

A people of obedience. Just as we are a people of power, praise, witness and integrity, we are called to be a people of obedience. I would argue that if we were to desire to be any of the people I just said we should be, then obedience to God is an essential thread. "Build your Church Lord, make us strong Lord, join our hearts Lord etc. How does this happen – by doing what we're told.

But look at so much of modern Christianity, and you'll find no integrity and a people no different from the rest of society. Why? Because Christians aren't living in obedience to Christ. And if we carefully examine our lives, we'll find so many areas of our lives that aren't submitted to God.

Just a moment, we're talking disobedience to the living God! Is that wise? In a moment we'll find not. Yet the Bible is given as our model and guide. Why obedience to God?

I've shown you a picture like this before. In the army the most basic training is square bashing – marching. Then there's all the stupid things they make you do in training and the grief you get for not following orders. Why? Orders in the army aren't there to make life difficult for soldiers – they are there so that whatever they do, they will do it with maximum efficiency and minimum casualties, working as a team and looking after one another.

It's the same with the Christian faith. Law was never given as a burden to hang around our necks but a framework in which we can act freely by showing us where our boundaries are and telling us why it is dangerous to cross those boundaries. It's a question of perspective: is the glass half-full or half-empty.

The law was given to make us free, but people turned it back to front and added bits to it to make sure we didn't break it unwittingly by making loads of silly rules. And Christians are just as good at doing that as anyone else!

The law was there to make people free but it became a burden that kills. And the worse is the one where we assume that just because we come to church on a Sunday and do all the religious observances that God is somehow pleased. Rubbish! *Rubbish?! Yes, rubbish! Why?*

Let's get to our story. Here is Saul commanded to destroy the nation of Amalek. Who were they?

1. Amalek was a sworn enemy of Israel
2. The Amalekites were the descendants of the illegitimate grandson of Esau
3. They were early adversaries of the Israelites after the Exodus. The Israelites were ill-equipped to face the Amalekites who tried to wipe them out. The only reason they managed to beat the Amalekites was due to God's intervention. After that Moses was told to write that Amalek would be blotted out at some time in the future.

Called to wipe out a nation. Phew! There's enough theological conundrums there to keep us occupied for weeks. Why would God command Saul to destroy a nation? If you don't mind I'm going to leave that one on this occasion. For now we have to accept that God in His wisdom determined this particular course of action.

Now wiping out the Amalekites was no problem for Saul. he was pretty bloodthirsty and for him it was simply a case of kill or be killed for the Israelites. So he goes ahead and wages war on Amalek. it's a great victory, but it's fairly obvious from the start that he has not obeyed God.

*7 Saul defeated the Amalekites, fighting all the way from Havilah to Shur, east of Egypt;
8 he captured King Agag of Amalek alive and killed all the people.
9 But Saul and his men spared Agag's life and did not kill the best sheep and cattle, the best calves and lambs, or anything else that was good; they destroyed only what was useless or worthless.
10 The LORD said to Samuel,
11 "I am sorry that I made Saul king; he has turned away from me and disobeyed my commands."
Samuel was angry, and all night long he pleaded with the LORD.
12 Early the following morning he went off to find Saul. He heard that Saul had gone to the town of Carmel, where he had built a monument to himself, and then had gone on to Gilgal.*

What had he done. He killed the people (we, not quite all of them as we find out later in 1 Samuel), he kept all the best things he found in Amalek, like sheep and cattle, which he should have destroyed, he spared Agag the king, presumably to parade victoriously around and we see the reason why at the end. Saul was after self-aggrandisement. he built a monument to himself so people could do a bit of hero worship.

God wasn't just disobeyed – this selfish man was glorying in something that he just shouldn't have been. He'd disobeyed God and sought to promote himself. Bad form. Be sure your sin will find you out.

Now remember all that when Samuel starts to catch him out. What does Saul do? Admit his mistakes. Not on your life – he starts to act like a slimy politician.

Following Jesus is about obedience. Disobedience is sin. Obedience is about following Jesus, doing His will. Yet most of us live and worship knowing there are areas of our life and worship that are just not under the authority of Christ. And we deceive ourselves quite happily in that knowledge.

Sometimes we try to make out that disobedience is only in relation to the 10 commandments. But we are the people of God. We are called to be people of integrity, people of prayer and all the rest. How can we be obedient people only when following Jesus suits us? How can we be obedient when we won't spend time in the presence of God to listen to His voice? And that applies to us as much as a church as it does to us as individuals.

Saul does this and digs himself a deeper hole each time he tries to explain his actions to Samuel who he knew understood what had happened. But it didn't stop him trying.

◆ He lies

13 Samuel went up to Saul, who greeted him, saying, "The LORD bless you, Samuel! I have obeyed the Lord's command."

He lied. He knew he lied. Why did he do it? Because he thought it wasn't important? That the

outcome was more important than the means? He put himself and his needs before God and thought he could get away with it. Be sure your sin will find you out. You may fool people, but you can never fool God.

◆ He blames someone else

13 Samuel went up to Saul, who greeted him, saying, "The LORD bless you, Samuel! I have obeyed the Lord's command."

14 Samuel asked, "Why, then, do I hear cattle mooing and sheep bleating?"

15 Saul answered, "My men took them from the Amalekites. They kept the best sheep and cattle to offer as a sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have destroyed completely."

Realising that Samuel has got him, he then puts the blame on his men. But it was fine because they did it out of the best motive – they wanted to worship God. Sounds good, but it was still disobedience.

◆ He bends the truth

20 "I did obey the LORD," Saul replied. "I went out as he told me to, brought back King Agag, and killed all the Amalekites.

21 But my men did not kill the best sheep and cattle that they captured; instead, they brought them here to Gilgal to offer as a sacrifice to the LORD your God."

So his next bit was one of saying that it is Samuel who got things wrong. Surely obedience meant that they would bring animals back for sacrifice and display the captured king in public. That wasn't what he was commanded however virtuous his motives may have seemed to him. One of the best self justifying motives for believers for not obeying God is "the Lord knows why I didn't do this or that". Be sure if you use these words that the Lord knows – he knows only too well! We can't fool God even if we can convincingly fool ourselves.

◆ He tells to truth but makes excuses

24 "Yes, I have sinned," Saul replied. "I disobeyed the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of my men and did what they wanted.

In the end he has to admit he has sinned, but rather than come clean that it was his fault, he still makes excuses. I know it was wrong but .. there were extenuating circumstances.

◆ He grovels

30 "I have sinned," Saul replied. "But at least show me respect in front of the leaders of my people and all of Israel. Go back with me so that I can worship the LORD your God."

So Samuel went back with him, and Saul worshipped the LORD.

Once he realises that he has effectively destroyed his kingship, he then grovels to Samuel. At last you think, Saul has seen the error of his ways and has repented. Not on your life! He just wants Samuel to come with him to worship so he doesn't look back

★ But he never repented.

In fact, Saul lied, deceived, was false and never repented of his sin.

We all know that there is sin and disobedience in our lives. We know where we fall short. And we don't do anything about it. And we have a Saviour who says, follow me and we don't follow.

And what happens. God isn't like the Police who probably will never catch us if we commit certain crimes – he sees and hears everything. He knows our mind. We can't fool him.

Maybe there is an issue over habitual sin in our lives, maybe we know God is calling us to serve Him more but we are saying no, perhaps He's just calling us to spend more time in His presence and we won't fit Him into our busy schedule. And we say to ourselves -"I come on Sunday, I do this, I do that" Surely God is pleased with me? And the answer to that is "Rubbish!" Let's read these words of Samuel again: *22 "Which does the LORD prefer: obedience or offerings and sacrifices? It is*

better to obey him than to sacrifice the best sheep to him. 23 Rebellion against him is as bad as witchcraft, and arrogance is as sinful as idolatry.

That sounds harsh but if you are doing something that you know God doesn't want you to do or not doing something you know God wants you to do this morning, then that's as bad as witchcraft or idolatry. In Biblical terms, that's terrible.

God just isn't interested in our worship and our religious devotions if we don't obey Him. In fact it's a total abomination to Him because it's done in a spirit of rebellion – sin, disobedience.

Wow! It makes us sit up and think. Saul lost his kingdom through sin. And worse, his failure to destroy Amalek and leave people alive (even though he said he killed them) meant that Amalekites raided towns in Israel later on and that affected even David who certainly played no part in this fiasco.

Disobedience destroys, it destroys others and it destroys the work of God. Build Your church Lord, make us strong Lord etc. etc. Only if we are prepared to walk in obedience to Him. That is the challenge we have as a people this morning. That is our challenge as a church as we build on what God has already done. We haven't made it – God has only just started. Let's listen for His voice and obey His will.

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
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Scripture Quotes TEV*

1Sam 15:1 (TEV) Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one whom the LORD sent to anoint you king of his people Israel. Now listen to what the LORD Almighty says.

2 He is going to punish the people of Amalek because their ancestors opposed the Israelites when they were coming from Egypt.

3 Go and attack the Amalekites and completely destroy everything they have. Don't leave a thing; kill all the men, women, children, and babies; the cattle, sheep, camels, and donkeys."

4 Saul called his forces together and inspected them at Telem: there were 200,000 soldiers from Israel and 10,000 from Judah.

5 Then he and his men went to the city of Amalek and waited in ambush in a dry riverbed.

6 He sent a warning to the Kenites, a people whose ancestors had been kind to the Israelites when they came from Egypt: "Go away and leave the Amalekites, so that I won't kill you along with them." So the Kenites left.

7 Saul defeated the Amalekites, fighting all the way from Havilah to Shur, east of Egypt;

8 he captured King Agag of Amalek alive and killed all the people.

9 But Saul and his men spared Agag's life and did not kill the best sheep and cattle, the best calves and lambs, or anything else that was good; they destroyed only what was useless or worthless.

10 The LORD said to Samuel,

11 "I am sorry that I made Saul king; he has turned away from me and disobeyed my commands." Samuel was angry, and all night long he pleaded with the LORD.

12 Early the following morning he went off to find Saul. He heard that Saul had gone to the town of Carmel, where he had built a monument to himself, and then had gone on to Gilgal.

13 Samuel went up to Saul, who greeted him, saying, "The LORD bless you, Samuel! I have obeyed the LORD's command."

14 Samuel asked, "Why, then, do I hear cattle mooing and sheep bleating?"

15 Saul answered, "My men took them from the Amalekites. They kept the best sheep and cattle to offer as a sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have destroyed completely."

16 "Stop," Samuel ordered, "and I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night."

"Tell me," Saul said.

17 Samuel answered, "Even though you consider yourself of no importance, you are the leader of the tribes of Israel. The LORD anointed you king of Israel,

18 and he sent you out with orders to destroy those wicked people of Amalek. He told you to fight until you had killed them all.

19 Why, then, did you not obey him? Why did you rush to grab the loot, and so do what displeases the LORD?"

20 "I did obey the LORD," Saul replied. "I went out as he told me to, brought back King Agag, and killed all the Amalekites.

21 But my men did not kill the best sheep and cattle that they captured; instead, they brought them here to Gilgal to offer as a sacrifice to the LORD your God."

22 Samuel said, "Which does the LORD prefer: obedience or offerings and sacrifices? It is better to obey him than to sacrifice the best sheep to him.

23 Rebellion against him is as bad as witchcraft, and arrogance is as sinful as idolatry. Because you rejected the LORD's command, he has rejected you as king."

24 "Yes, I have sinned," Saul replied. "I disobeyed the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of my men and did what they wanted.

25 But now I beg you, forgive my sin and go back with me, so that I can worship the LORD."

26 "I will not go back with you," Samuel answered. "You rejected the LORD's command, and he has rejected you as king of Israel."

27 Then Samuel turned to leave, but Saul caught hold of his cloak, and it tore.

28 Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel away from you today and given it to someone who is a better man than you.

29 Israel's majestic God does not lie or change his mind. He is not a human being--he does not change his mind."

30 "I have sinned," Saul replied. "But at least show me respect in front of the leaders of my people and all of Israel. Go back with me so that I can worship the LORD your God."

So Samuel went back with him, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

32 "Bring King Agag here to me," Samuel ordered. Agag came to him, trembling with fear, thinking to himself, "What a bitter thing it is to die!"

33 Samuel said, "As your sword has made many mothers childless, so now your mother will become childless." And he cut Agag to pieces in front of the altar in Gilgal.

Sunday Morning 18th May 2008 “A People of Obedience”

Opening Words – Mark

Songs

Above all powers (1151) x2

For this purpose (114) x2 - offertory here

Who's the King of the Jungle? (1625)

Birthdays

Children Leave

Notices

I will offer up my life (851)

Prayer

Jesus take me as I am (305)

Reading

Sermon

Trust and Obey (599)

Children Return

May God's blessings surround you