

What is Worship?

a sermon in the series
Life in the Son

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I Samuel 15:1-24

Samuel also said to Saul, “The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. ² Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. ³ Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

⁴ So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. ⁵ And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley.

⁶ Then Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. ⁷ And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. ⁸ He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. ⁹ 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 unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

¹⁰ Now the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹ “I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.” And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night. ¹² So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, “Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal.” ¹³ Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord.”

¹⁴ But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

¹⁵ And Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, “Be quiet! And I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night.”

And he said to him, “Speak on.”

¹⁷ So Samuel said, “When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? ¹⁸ Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ ¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?”

²⁰ And Saul said to Samuel, “But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹ But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.”

²² So Samuel said:

**“Has 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 heed than the fat of rams.**

**²³ For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,
And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
He also has rejected you from being king.”**

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.

I want to speak today on how the Bible defines worship. This is a most unlikely story to begin that discussion with you but it is most appropriate, for in it we see how God defines worship.

First, let me acknowledge to you that worship is not something done in a “worship service.” I

pray we have worshipped this morning and I believe many, if not all, of us have. We've truly lifted up our hearts to the Lord and have blessed His name. But unless you be deceived in thinking you have fulfilled the command to worship God, let me be quick to tell you what we did today is biblically more defined as praise. Is praise an act or an expression of worship? No doubt it is. But worship transcends praise. It's something much more radical, drastic and pervasive.

In our text, God gives specific orders to the king. He is supposed to go down to a specific place and destroy all the people there. Nothing is to survive, not even livestock. I can't explain that order or satisfy you with an answer of how a loving God can give such a directive. But let's not get hung up on that and miss what the real import of this text is.

The command was given and Saul and his army went and did what they were told with little exception. Little exception. We don't know how many people resided in this city—an enemy to Israel—all we know is that they destroyed every living thing except that which was good. Look again at the text, verse nine,

“But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good,”

I ask you to pay attention to this because it's central to this text and to understanding worship. So often worship is hindered when we do what we think is good. Here, Saul and the people of Israel—in the name of worship—spared what they deemed to be acceptable and good to God.

According to the Law of Moses, any animal to be offered was to be without spot or blemish. It had to be the best. You don't give God secondhand goods. No, you offer Him the first fruits; you give God the best. Why? Because He's worthy and deserving of better than the best, but since that's all we have, that's what we offer.

So in the name of worship to God they spared the best sheep and oxen to take back and sacrifice, an act of worship unto the Lord God. In the name of worship, they spared the best because they deemed it good.

All I can do is confess firsthand experience of having done the same. When I read this story I think, *but for the grace of God, there go I*. Because there I did go, several times. Have I determined what I thought would be acceptable to the Lord and offered Him, in His name service, ministry, that which was best and deemed good to me? *Surely the Lord will be pleased with this*, I thought, but God was nowhere to be found in it. One of the things that hinders true spirit-filled ministry is our determination, wisdom and judgment on what God finds acceptable. Good intentions do not equal worship. In fact, many times our good intentions hinders worship and the work and power of God, as it did in Saul's case.

For some reason my mind wants to challenge those of you who have unsaved loved ones in your home. Listen closely, because what I'm going to say might not sound reasonable at first hearing

nor like something I would say, but I do believe it is the word of the Lord.

So often we have good intentions wanting to see our lost loved ones saved that we take it upon ourselves the responsibility to see them saved. We take it upon ourselves to do what we can to lead that person to the saving fountain of Jesus' redeeming blood. Those are great intentions, I don't fault anyone in doing so, but listen to the text—God is not often in what you and I often think is good.

At the beginning of the service I mentioned there is one text of Scripture God is using to both convict and encourage me. Matthew 4:4,

“Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

This is how God is applying that to my life: I need food to live and God has commanded me to work in order that I might be able to earn the ability to purchase food for my family and me. Work is honorable. In fact, the Bible says in I Thessalonians, “Let every man do his work quietly.” Why? “So that he can have bread and bread to spare that he might be able to give,” Paul exhorts the Thessalonians.

Work is admirable so that we can purchase bread—daily substance—and live and survive. But God says man shall not live by that alone. So what then shall he live by? Every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Watch this. When Jesus is tempted in Matthew 4 in the wilderness, after 40 days of fasting, He gets hungry, and wouldn't you? It was a supernatural thing to go 40 days without food and not be hungry. But now God is lifting the fast off of His Son and now Jesus is hungry and Satan comes and says, “Listen, if You are the Son of God, if You are the Messiah, if You are the Christ, do something now that will without question answer it for your own conscience. Turn these stones into bread.”

I mean, what was He going to prove? To Satan that He was Messiah? That wasn't necessary. The temptation was to a man. Again, it's so easy to be confused to how Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man, how He's both deity and human, but the man Christ Jesus was being tempted and He had just been baptized 40 days earlier, professed by, not just John the Baptist, a voice from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Surely what Satan is suggesting to the mind of Jesus is, “I'm not so sure, how do you really know you're the Son of God? Just because You heard a voice from the sky proclaiming You to be the Son of God? No! Prove it now and display your power!” Jesus answers from Deuteronomy 8, it's not original with Christ, He's quoting Moses. And He says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

Here's how that's been applying to my life—I don't eat until my Father says, *sit at My table, here is what I have*. I don't do anything except what I hear my Father say and what I see Him do. I'm not here to live these few short years on this earth doing what I think is best or what I think the Father would have me to do—I'm not leaving that up even to my own judgment. I do only what

my Father says—I live by every word that proceeds out of His mouth. What a way to live. I want to live like that. I don't want to be the one who has the responsibility to deem the will of God for my life, or for you or for this church. Too many times in good intentions and trying to build and advance the kingdom of God, we do not wait for the Word of God, we simply do what Saul did—we do what we think is acceptable in order to sacrifice it to God in worship.

I believe the text, I believe Saul here. I don't believe they were going to keep the best sheep and oxen for their own personal gain, I really believe they were going to offer it up as a sacrifice to God. But notice with me, please, Samuel's response in verse 21.

In verse twenty, Saul says to Samuel, *I obeyed the Lord. I did what I was told to do. The problem was the people, and I thought when they gave me that idea there was no problem and God would find it acceptable because really, in the end, we're trying to do it for Him.* Now, I don't know if Saul is lying there or if he's really telling the truth. My opinion is that he's telling the truth. In his mind, he thinks he did what God expected of him because he did almost everything and with little exception, therefore he can go to God with these sheep and oxen and can worship God blamelessly.

Listen to verse 22 what Samuel says,

So Samuel said:

*“Has 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 heed than the fat of rams.”*

Here's what Samuel is saying, *Saul, you said when you greeted me (verse 13), 'I have performed the commandment of the Lord.' I want to ask you a question—if that's the case, why do I hear the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen? Why are these manifestations in your life? You think you've done what God commanded you to do, so why are these manifestations in your life?*

Often we think we're about God's will, doing what He's told us to do, but there are manifestations of disobedience in our life. There are evidences that prove we are not being faithful to God and therefore we are not worshipping God. Then Samuel makes it very clear what worship is—obedience.

However, it's more than just obedience and this is the whole point of this message. Obedience is more than just doing what God tells you to do, because you can obey God and go through the motions and keep the commandments of God outwardly in your behavior, but God is not interested in outward performance. He's interested in the heart—a heart of worship.

It's good that we are here today. It fulfills the commandment of God that says “Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves.” It's good that you're here but that doesn't mean it's worship. It doesn't mean we've worshipped this morning. There is one more thing here. Samuel continues,

*“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,
And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”*

God delights in burnt offering and sacrifices but obeying God is better than sacrifice. What is He telling us? Here it is: Saul was going to sacrifice the best of the livestock as the Law of God commanded. He was going to build an altar and then burn them on it just like the Bible says, but Samuel says to Saul that's not worship!

Here is what worship is: absolute surrender to God. Absolute surrender. God's not after you just to dot your *i* and cross your *t* to make sure you've done what He requires of you so your conscience can be clear, that's not it. What He's looking for is your heart completely, 100 percent yielded so that if He puts His finger on something in your life you say, "Yes, God."

There may be a struggle. There was a struggle with a man named Abraham when God came to teach him what real worship was. God said, "I want you to take your only son Isaac up to a mountain I'm going to show you and I want you to offer him up there to Me." I don't know what transpired after that, the Bible doesn't tell us. I don't know if there was an argument or if Abraham began to doubt if what he heard was really of God. All we know is that on the morrow, he got up and began to obey what God had told him to do. He packed the pack animals, he got his servants and Isaac and they went three days journey until they came to Mount Moriah, which would be the future place of rest for the temple of God. Listen to what he says to the men with him, his servants, before he and Isaac descend up the hill.

And Abraham said to the men, "Wait here while the lad and I go up and worship."

Let me ask you something. Is it the act of tying and binding his hands and feet and laying him on the wood that is the act of worship? We saw here in our fifteenth chapter of I Samuel that you can go through the motions of sacrifice and even taking an animal's life and offering it up to God in the Old Testament and it would have been "according to the Law," and seem to be good, but not be worship. In this case, what made Abraham's act acceptable is that it was based upon absolute surrender to the Word of God. That's what worship is. It's a heart and an attitude that says, *I am not my own. I was purchased by something much more valuable than money, stocks, bonds, gold or silver, I was purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. I was purchased by a man who was also God, one who absolutely surrendered to His Father's will and came and became a sacrifice for me.*

What am I, what are you that Jesus should die for us? We can't even get worship right. Offering God what we think is our best with hearts not totally surrendered to Him. Who are we that He would give His life in absolute surrender to His Father's will? Let me tell you what you are—you are the object of His love, but you're also the test of absolute surrender for Jesus. You are the test.

Would He be willing to do this for people who are not worthy of such devotion and absolute

surrender? Go back to 1 Samuel, as I bring this message to a conclusion and hopefully drive the point to our hearts. May the Holy Spirit do it.

You are the test of absolute surrender. Jesus was tested by the Father—would He be willing to commit Himself, even though He was God, for eternity to submit Himself to the laws of nature, civil society and ultimately to the Father's will to die on behalf of wicked people like me, who even after getting saved still mess this thing up all the time? I mess worship up all the time because I try to worship instead of being absolutely surrendered to God, knowing that only by His Spirit can I offer anything to Him.

That's exactly what Jesus did. If you read in Hebrews, He offered Himself through the Spirit. He offered His life as worship to God, but He didn't do it by Himself, He did it through the Spirit. Listen to me; I can't worship God the way God needs to be worshipped. I can't serve Him the way He needs to be served. I need the Holy Spirit, and He only comes when people are absolutely surrendered and think little of themselves.

Look at verse 17,

“When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel?”

Let me tell you when absolute surrender is the easiest: when you know you can't. If a man walks up right now and puts a gun to your back and says, “I want your money or I'll shoot right now.” If you know he's bigger than you, he has a weapon and you don't have any training in self-defense, absolute surrender becomes easy. Very easy. But God doesn't come with a gun pointed at you saying, “Absolute surrender or else.” He didn't do it that way; He did it the way of love—by sacrificing Himself for you. *Here's what I'll do for you, the only thing I ask in return is that you be absolutely surrendered to Me because I can do wonders through you. But if you think you can serve Me, if you think you can please Me, if you think you can turn over a new leaf and be good enough for Me by your religious efforts, when you are lifted up in your own opinion of yourself you can't worship because worship is not just doing religious things, it's absolute surrender.*

For a naysayer, a person who doesn't think that's the biblical definition, turn in your Bibles to Romans 12:1. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says now in the New Testament.

“I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God,”

See, God doesn't come with a gun stuck in your back, He comes to you with mercy and blesses you and blesses you and blesses you when you don't deserve it. So I say to the person right now who is thinking, *God cannot love me because look at everything I've done.* What do you mean He can't love you? As if this is something in the future? He has been loving you. You're here today, that's an act of the love of God. He's given you life. He's spared you. You have not gotten what you deserve. The Bible says in Psalm 103,

“He does not reward us according to our sins, nor deal with us according to our iniquities,”

You’ve never gotten what you deserve, but if you continue to chagrin the love of God and His mercies, sir, you will come to an appointment with death and then the deserving judgment and punishment will come. But God has constantly been giving you one kind act after another. He’s given you a family and people in your life that love you and stick with you. What do you think that is? It’s the mercies of God.

“I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.”

The word *service* comes from an Old Testament word that means *worship*. What is worship? Offering yourself in absolute surrender to God. Not doing great things for God, but offering yourself to Him that He can do great things through you.

See, Saul’s problem and Michael’s problem is I think I know what will please God and I go out and do it for God and God says, *that’s not absolute surrender, son. That’s not what I asked you, I just asked you to be yielded.* Well how do I do that? That’s the question, and with its answer the conclusion.

Does it mean surrendering to the ministry or coming down and getting on my knees before the church, or making some public commitment? No, none of those things. Here is absolute surrender—it’s called faith in God. Period. How many of you have made that commitment to God to surrender absolutely to Him? How many times have you done that?

A couple of weeks ago many of us came forward in the special meetings we had and we said, “Yes, Lord, absolute surrender. That’s what I’m going to give you.” How’s that gone? Two or three weeks later, how are you doing? Have you crawled off the altar and gone about doing what you thought was good for God and for you? See, God’s not interested in how many of you come up here. A preacher’s ego would like to see everyone up here, but it’s not about that. Will you trust God that He can keep you surrendered to Him? Did you hear what I just said? It’s the most important thing you will have heard said today, not because I’m saying it, but because it is the cherished truth that seems to be hidden from so many of God’s children.

We try and try to trust God and believe God, we try to live absolutely surrendered and God says, *When you’re trying to do it you’re not absolutely surrendered. That’s not yieldedness, that’s not what that looks like. What did My Son tell you was the work I’ve committed to you?* “Here’s the work of the Lord, to believe upon Him who was sent.” *Just trust that I can get you surrendered and maintain your surrender. Keep your eyes on the altar and your eyes upward and look to Me.*

When you think you can become sufficient and dependent on your abilities in your own eyes. You’ve gotten off the altar and are going about doing what you deem is best for God and yourself.

So here is what the Lord is asking me and I leave it with you: *Will you believe that I am the Author*

and the Finisher of your faith and that I will finish it, I will complete it?

I have caught myself not wanting to do it God's way because doing it His way means absolute surrender, no control. I can't brag now that I've got great faith, that I'm doing something for God because there is no self-recognition and no one will acknowledge me if I do it that way. *Lord, I've got to show you that I can believe and trust You, and the Lord asks me mercifully, very mercifully, Why do you want to do that when I never asked that of you, I simply asked you to trust Me, the Author and Finisher of your faith? I have begun a good work in you and I'm going to complete it, but it will only be completed as you absolutely surrender to My craftsmanship.*

The Bible says that you and I are His craftsmanship, created for good works, which were prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. God even prepared the works and He prepares us for them. He can be trusted. Will you absolutely surrender to His control? Amen.