

## “Do not repeat the same mistake”

On Mother’s Day last week, we studied the life of Ruth and Naomi from the Book of Ruth, and learned that God was watching over these women. On Sunday before that, we learned that wicked deeds of two sons of High Priest Eli had prompted God to assign the work to Samuel. Samuel was respected by the people. But, his sons did not follow the way of Samuel, either. For that reason, people came to Samuel and pleaded: **“now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”** (I Samuel 8:5).

Samuel conveyed this voice of people to God. **And the LORD told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.”** (I Samuel 8:7) So, Samuel asked the people if they really wanted a king to rule over them. Then, Samuel warned the people of the consequences of such a change in this way:

**He said, “This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. <sup>12</sup> Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. <sup>13</sup> He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. <sup>14</sup> He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. <sup>15</sup> He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. <sup>16</sup> Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. <sup>17</sup> He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. <sup>18</sup> When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”** (I Samuel 8:11-18)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Samuel tried to explain to the people of Israel what would happen when a king rules the nation, since they never had a king before. Samuel pointed out that the king would create an army, recruit their sons to military duty, and force them to run in front of the chariots. Their daughters would serve the king also. Furthermore, king would demand people’s property. Samuel said the king would rule over people ruthlessly. They would be heavily taxed, and the people

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would become slaves to the king. Samuel also said that even if people call out to God then, God will not answer the voice of the people.

But the people refused to listen to Samuel and said: **“No! We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”** (I Samuel 8:19-21) Then, God told Samuel: **“Listen to them and give them a king.”** (I Samuel 8:22)

So, Samuel poured oil on a 30-year old man by the name of Saul. In those days, pouring oil indicated a ceremony that was commanded by God when kings or priests were appointed. With this ceremony, Saul became the first king of Israel.

Each of us are living the life given to us by God. None of us want to destroy the given life. We naturally want to live according to the will of God. What should we do to make sure to realize that? Learning from past experience of the people would provide us the best insights. We can also learn from mistakes and errors committed by others in the past. We must learn from their mistakes so that we do not repeat the same mistakes. In this way, we can be spared from committing the same mistakes of others. This first king of Israel, Saul, can serve as a good example of negative experience.

The bible says that Saul was: **“as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.”** (I Samuel 9:2). In other words, Saul had an external appearance that was good enough to command the attention of the people. When the Lord told Saul to become a king, Saul responded: **“But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?”** (I Samuel 9:21). Saul humbled himself in the face of this task God was about to grant. He also considered his low social standing and hesitated to accept the challenge. But, Israel would welcome its first king in its history this way.

The first thing Saul did after becoming the king was to fight a battle against the Ammonites, and he won that battle. This victory brought the hearts of the people close to Saul. (I Samuel 11:1-11). The people saw how Saul fought the battle and accepted Saul as their king. But, Saul made a mistake afterwards. The Philistines were threatening to attack next. Saul was waiting for Priest Samuel to offer burnt offering of animals to God. But, when Samuel did not come in time, Saul did not wait and went ahead and offered the animal sacrifice himself. The bible describes this incident: **“<sup>8</sup> He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. <sup>9</sup> So he said, “Bring**

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**me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” And Saul offered up the burnt offering.** (I Samuel 13:8,9) Priests are appointed by God and no one else can do the work of priests. That is why what Saul did violate the rule given by God. It was a major mistake. The story after that is described this way:<sup>10</sup> **Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.** <sup>11</sup> **“What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikdash,** <sup>12</sup> **I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.”** <sup>13</sup> **“You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.** <sup>14</sup> **But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD’s command.”** (I Samuel 13:8-14)

This showed that Saul did not fear and revere God and his laws. He feared people instead. When the Philistines were approaching, Saul said the Philistines were attacking Saul rather than attacking his people. Saul was afraid that his people would desert him and tried to do what he could do without waiting for Samuel’s arrival.

God is the one who wins the battle for people. But, Saul did not trust God but feared his people. This was a big mistake. And chapter 14 of the first Samuel describes the reign of Saul in this way: <sup>52</sup> **All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.** (I Samuel 14:52) Even after Saul was warned by Samuel, Saul did not seek God but tried to rely on people.

There was another incident. When Saul battled the Amalekites, God commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites and their belongings completely. But, Saul did not follow the command. Saul and his army captured the enemy king Agag alive and spared the best of sheep and cattle as well as fat calves and lambs. They only destroyed the worthless.

Because of this action, **the word of the LORD came to Samuel:** <sup>11</sup> **“I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the**

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**LORD all that night. <sup>12</sup> Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, “Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.”**

**<sup>13</sup> When Samuel reached him, Saul said, “The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.” (I Samuel 15:10-13)**

When Samuel came to Saul, Saul who had erected a monument in his own honor, told Samuel that he had carried out the Lord’s instructions. But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?” (I Samuel 15:14) Saul answered, **“The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.”** (I Samuel 15:15)

Saul said that this was done by the soldiers and those spared were for sacrifice to be offered to God. Saul boasted his power; he told a lie; he blamed his people; and he justified his action. Samuel says to Saul: **“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”** (I Samuel 15:22)

Samuel declares that since Saul rejected the word of God, God would reject Saul as king. Hearing this, Saul pleaded to Samuel: **“I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. <sup>25</sup> Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD.”** (I Samuel 15:24, 25) But, Samuel would not hear Saul. As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught the robe and it tore. Then, Saul says: **“I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God.”** (I Samuel 15:30)

Saul’s last plea to Samuel was to preserve his face in front of the people. He wanted to look good to his people. After that, God no longer blessed Saul. Although he stayed at the throne for a while, his days were filled with hatred toward David who was anointed by God to be his successor.(I Samuel 18:6-9) Saul was afraid of David.(I Samuel 18:12) Evil spirit from God came on Saul.(I Samuel 19:9) And Saul died with his son Jonathan in Mount Gilboa.

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This tragic life of Saul teaches an urgent and important message to us. Even if one is chosen by God, and even if one accepts his blessing humbly, and even if God blesses us, our life after that is determined by how we choose to live. God granted us our life. Each of us has a brand new life ahead of us. God expects us to make right decisions. Although God watches over us, we were not created as robots. We make decisions, we have our minds, and we take our own actions. But, we must walk with God to shape our own life. (But we tend to blame God when the life does not turn out to be what we want.)

The problem with Saul was his refusal to listen to God. Namely, he feared people more than God and yet blamed God for his actions. But, we could learn from the life of Saul and should examine our own life in its light.

Saul looked at people rather than God. When Samuel did not come to offer burned offering, Saul was disturbed. He was upset that people started to leave him. He felt uneasy that the Philistine was approaching closer. And Saul gave up on God.

Saul shifted the blame on his people. In the battle against the Amalekites, Saul had been commanded by God to destroy everything totally. But everything was not destroyed and many were spared. \Saul did not want to take responsibility on this action and tried to blame the people for sparing some sheep and cattle. Saul had been charged by God to destroy everything that belonged to the Amalekites. The ultimate responsibility was with Saul. Saul failed to carry out God's order.

We might think this way. Yes, Saul failed to follow God's order. But, it was not a big deal. He was trying to prevent people from scattering. The enemy was approaching. The cattle would turn out to be of value later. Etc. We might agree also. But, that is what we think and God's thinking is different. And that was evident in what Samuel said to Saul. **“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”** (I Samuel 15:22)

God wants us to obey God. And sometimes, we feel that we are forced to obey God blindly so that we can make God happy. God's commands feel very one-sided and unreasonable.

But we must think about it carefully. We are afraid of so many things. We are most afraid of people around us. What is human? When we read the Bible, we realized that we human are far from perfect and complete. We are not talking about others. We must admit that the most imperfect is us. We are imperfect and we are afraid of other imperfect people. This is the source of our difficulties in life. This binds us and prevents our freedom. But, we should fear not people but God. When we live our life

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fearing God, we can become truly free and independent. When we stop fearing people and turn to God, God will bless us with victories in life.

We can understand why people wanted to spare the possession of the Amalekites. We use the expression “Mottainai”. It means that we should not easily discard things. But such feeling of Mottainai is blinding our thoughts. Some scholars suggest that not only the cattle of the Amalekites, but also many of expensive furniture and clothing items must have been spared also. Such expensive furnishings must have included the statues of idol gods. This is possible. God knows. “Only little bit.” “This much should be permitted” “It is not that a big deal.” All of these could impact us greatly later. We also know that many problems start small and look innocuous at the beginning. Many critical changes in our life tend to start not with a dramatic change but from small changes.

God’s commands were meant not only to teach the people of Israel to obey God. Such commands were given to protect people out of love towards the people. God knows what would happen when we go astray, rejecting God. God knows the consequences more than any of us.

As I said earlier, this experience did not give Saul a good outcome. But, Saul provides us with important lesson. Rather than condemning Saul, we must admit that we could make the same mistake easily. And, we must firmly make our mind not to repeat the same mistake.

Are you afraid of something now? If so, what are you afraid of? If you are afraid of people, consider why you are afraid of them. And compare that fear against God. When we fear God, our fear of other people seems insignificant. We should not fear people and lose sight of God. We must fear nothing else but God and God alone.

If you think that your small mistake can be overlooked, think again. We must learn from Saul’s experience. If we find blaming others for consequences, we must honestly admit our own fault and seek God’s help. We are supported by prayers of many people and blessings from God. We must bow our head in front of God and show gratitude to our family and friends. Let God be glorified.

Thinking this way, we begin to see clearly. Obeying God is the most important key and the secret for living a happy life. God commanded Saul in order to bless him and to protect him. God wanted him to listen to God. We must not repeat the same mistake as Saul. We must listen to God.

Let us pray.

Translated by Dr. Yasuhisa Hosomatsu