

What Truly Delights the Lord?

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much, Drew and Margo and Gary for leading us thus far. Friends, if you've got your Bibles, then please turn back to 1 Samuel 15.

This is where we're going to be this evening. Continuing in our series, looking at the life of, well, I guess Saul and Samuel have been the two big players in what we've seen so far in this book. And God has so much to teach us tonight about what a life of obedience, loving obedience to him looks like. So why don't we pray and then we'll get to work in this passage together. Father, we pray that you would help us now as we turn to your precious word.

We ask that we would know the leading of your spirit, that he would help us see something more of your greatness. And of the greatness of your son, Jesus Christ, whom we just sang about there, who is at the right hand of the father interceding for us.

What a wonderful, amazing thought that is. And so we pray tonight would be for his glory and it would be for our upbuilding as your people here. Father, thank you that you hear us because we pray confidently in Jesus's name.

[1 : 06] Amen. Well, let me begin by asking you a question, a question I want you to keep in your minds as we travel through this chapter tonight. And here's the question. What truly delights the God of the universe?

What truly delights the Lord? Can I suggest at the outset that whoever you are this evening, whatever is going on in your life, whatever is going on in your heart, whatever you think about this God, that if there is an answer to that question, and what I'm going to suggest is there is an answer to that question embedded in this chapter.

If there is an answer to that question, then it is worthwhile our every thought trying to get to grips with it. What truly delights the Lord? Second question.

What did 162,000 people in the UK pay to go and watch last year? Any takers? 162,000 people go, paid to go and watch last year.

Anybody? 162,000 people paid to go and watch the biggest dog show and competition apparently on earth, which happens annually down in Birmingham, that we know as Crufts.

[2 : 20] Anyone's going to see Crufts? Nope, nobody's paid to go and see that one. Nope, I haven't either. Maybe watch a little bit of it in Channel 4. Watched a little dog jump over a thing. That's about as far as I got.

But Crufts, now if you're up in your Crufts, you'll know that one of the most sought after titles at Crufts is the Obedience Championship. That is the one that everybody wants to win, apart from best in show.

That is the one that everybody wants to win. Indeed, and I googled it this week, okay, I loved googling about Crufts. One dog lover's website called the Kennel Club. It said this, to become the Crufts Obedience Champion is the ultimate accolade in obedience.

This is the one that you want to win. And if you're interested, it was won this year by Dot Watt and her sheepdog Zigdan. And there they are, looking very happy, and there indeed is proof that every dog has his day.

Now why do I tell you that? Confession time, I don't even like dogs. Why do I tell you that? Because obedience is right at the heart of this chapter tonight. We've watched this man Saul, the king of Israel, in action over the past few weeks.

[3 : 25] And tonight, if you like, we're going to see how he gets on at this whole being obedient to God thing. Obedience is right at the heart of this chapter tonight.

Remember, this is the whole very thing that God had said in Deuteronomy 17, that his king was to be marked by. And so to anchor us in tonight, let me just show you how this theme of obedience, it

weaves its way all the way through this chapter.

Here's a few of them tonight. Verse 1, Samuel says to Saul, follow with me. Listen. See the words? Listen now to the message of the Lord.

Verse 11, God says to Samuel, Saul has not carried out my instructions. In other words, he didn't listen. Verse 19, Samuel asks Saul, Why did you not obey the Lord?

Verse 26, Samuel says to Saul, You have rejected the word of the Lord. And finally, verse 22, which I think is the key verse for us tonight to see, that gets us right to the heart of this chapter.

[4 : 31] 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.

So, what truly delights the God of the universe? What truly delights this covenant God? Answer, wholehearted obedience to his word.

You see, the heart is the heart of the challenge that's going to come to us tonight. The heart is what God is going to go after in each of us this evening as we look at Saul in this chapter. This God that we're dealing with here, this God is a jealous God.

He's jealous not of, he's jealous for his people. The Lord is a jealous God, meaning that he wants the whole hearts of his people. He wants their total devotion.

He wants all of their eyes. He wants all of their minds. He wants all of them. He wants their undivided loyalty. Because as our creator, not only is he the only one who can satisfy our souls, but he loves us too much to see our wayward hearts try and satisfy themselves with pretenders that won't satisfy.

[5 : 48] You see, this God tonight in this chapter is going to go after our hearts. He wants the whole hearts of his people. And in particular, he wants the whole heart of the king of his people.

God's king is supposed to be marked by a resolute, all out. You have all of me. You have my whole heart. You have all of my obedience. Covenant commitment to Yahweh.

That's my translation of obedience, by the way. He wants all of him. Obedience is right at the heart of this chapter tonight. Right at the heart of the chapter. So we pick it up at verse 1.

He was Saul. Now, I think it's not stretching it too far to say about him, as we've tracked him over the last few weeks, that he's on the downward slide as king.

He's a gifted politician. We'll give him that. He's an able fighter. We'll give him that. But he's a confused man because his heart is not wholly the Lord's. Now, if you flick back, God has already pronounced, back at verse 14 of chapter 13, that he will take the kingdom from Saul and give it to somebody else.

[7 : 00] Why? Because of Saul's disobedience. And God has his man in mind for this job. And what marks out this man? Well, unlike Saul, he will be a man who will be a man after God's own heart.

And I wonder if you read that. We kind of... If you've been in church long enough, you know how the story goes, right? But if you read that chapter and you hear that, that's thrilling. That God's king, he's going to appoint somebody who's going to follow him with his whole heart.

See, crucially, that's the kind of king that God wants. And crucially, that is the kind of king that God's people truly need. That's the king that we need. And so in this chapter, we see the Lord, he will finally reject Saul as king.

And so of our question tonight is, what truly delights the Lord? The author, as it were, in this chapter, he presents it to us here in the negative, if you like.

So in other words, as he shows us Saul in action, he's saying to us, here is what a life that doesn't please the Lord looks like. The first thing for us to see, verses 1 to 23, is that the Lord loathes partial compliance.

[8 : 20] Pick it up at verse 1. Samuel goes to Saul with a message. In the heart of the message, you'll see it at verse 3. It's right there. And if truth be told, it's quite shocking, is it not?

Saul has to totally destroy the Amalekites and everything that belongs to them. And we have to pause there and admit that that is difficult for our modern minds to process.

In fact, many skeptics of the Bible point to this kind of verse, and they point to it in disgust, as if to say, how could you believe in this God? I mean, Richard Dawkins, I looked him up this week, for example, says, episodes like this only go to show that the God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction.

And if we're honest, these kind of verses can embarrass even the most mature of Christians. So I think it's worth pausing and asking ourselves, so we can train ourselves how to answer that

question, but also so we can get our hearts around it.

What is going on there? What is going on there? Well, the Amalekites are the people who attacked Israel after they'd crossed the Red Sea and they were heading for the Promised Land.

[9 : 35] And God had declared in Exodus 17, and apologies, I haven't got this on the screen, it would have been helpful. Exodus 17, God says, So that's Exodus 17.

And here we are many, many, many years later, God having given these people plenty of time to change their ways, and have they changed their ways? Well, it would appear that they haven't. I mean, if you glance your eye to the end of the chapter and to verse 33, Samuel says to Agag, the king of the Amalekites, who's the figurehead of this people, if you like, as your sword has made woman childless, here's what he's done, as your sword has made woman childless, so will your mother be childless among women.

So these people, as led by this king, are still marked by a hideous savagery. They have not learned their lesson. They have not changed their ways. As the first readers of this, I'm sure, as they read this, and they heard that God finally brought judgment on these people for how they were living, I'm sure that would have been a massive source of comfort to them, not of confusion.

So here is God commanding Saul in this one-off act in history to bring justice to bear upon the Amalekites, the enemies of his people. Of course, friends, any time you read of a judgment of God in history, it's always pointing us to the final judgment of God at the end of history.

[11 : 16] When every wrong will be put to right, when accounts will be settled, and when God will have the final say. And I think that longing thing really struck me this week as I read the news.

I don't know if you felt this when you read about those mothers in Venezuela. It was on the BBC News. Forced to give up their children at birth because so bad is the economic crisis in Venezuela that they've got very little option because they don't think they can keep that child alive.

And the reason that that country, one of the reasons that it is in such economic crisis is largely down to the economic policies of their president. And it's trickling all the way down to the poorest of people, so much so that people are having to make that choice between keeping my baby or staying alive.

And you read it and you think, come Lord Jesus. Come Lord Jesus. What a glorious thought to think that one day God will put all wrongs to right.

And the question is, where will we be as we stand before him? So that's the command God gives to Saul. And Saul gathers, if you do the maths here, he gathers a vast army of some 210,000 men.

[12 : 31] That's a big, big army. The Kenites, one of whom was Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, they are spared because, the text tells us, they were kind to Israel on their journey to Canaan.

And here's where we see Saul's partial obedience kick in. Come with me to verse 7. King Agag is kept alive. Now, why?

Why? We don't know. The text is silent. But it may well be that Saul fancies a little political manoeuvre if he's keeping this king alive. He's kept him alive, along with the best of.

The best of. That's the hits we're playing here, right? The best of. The sheep, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs. And just in case we hadn't picked up the hint, the author lets us know that everything that was weak was destroyed.

But everything that was good was kept. Everything that was good was kept. And so we need to ask, where is Saul's heart in all of this? Where's his heart in all of this? What's going on in his mind?

[13 : 31] Answer, it's not set towards being obedient to the Lord. It's set towards delighting himself. And so verse 11, the God who knows all hearts.

Verse 11, God regrets. Feel the force of that word. He regrets that he made Saul king. Not that God is saying that, oh, he realizes he's made a mistake here.

That's not what's going on. More that God's heart breaks, it grieves. As he watches Saul's downward sin slide. He grieves the fact that Saul's sin has hardened Saul's heart towards the Lord.

And it's interesting, isn't it, to read there, Samuel's reaction. What does he do? Does he rejoice? No, what does he do? He cries out. He cries out. Now the text, again, is silent as to why he does that. But is that not interesting as you read that through? Why is Samuel crying out to the Lord?

[14 : 34] Could it be, could it be that something of God's heart, as God grieves over what sin is doing in this man's heart, could it be that something of God's heart is showing itself in Samuel?

How does Samuel feel? Remember Samuel, the man who anointed this king. Heartbroken, distraught, lamenting over what sin has done. The chaos that it is caused in someone else's life.

I think that's what's going on here. And indeed, if you need a proof of where Saul's heart is, look at verse 12. What has he been doing this whole time? Has he been serving?

Has he been sacrificing? What's he been doing? He's been setting up a monument in whose honor? His own. His own. So he's given himself the Grammy Award for Best Actor and that whole piece that's just gone.

How self-obsessed is this man at this point? That he set up a monument in his own honor. And you see, when Samuel eventually gets to him, it's not Samuel that gets in the first word, it's Saul.

[15:43] I carried out the Lord's instructions. He screams in his face like an excited child trying to tell their parent what's happened. I carried out the Lord's instructions. He's clearly expecting a high five and a fist bump here, isn't he, from Samuel?

But did you carry out the Lord's instructions, Saul? Did you carry it out fully? Or is this a bit like the child who's cleaned their room? Only for mum to walk in and it becomes clear that we have very different understandings of what cleaning means.

Because Samuel hears a baba there and a muumuu there. Do you see it in the text? Who do you think you are fooling, Saul? Who do you think you are fooling? And here's the tragedy, I think, of this text.

I think Saul's convinced himself that what he's actually doing is fully obeying the Lord. You get that impression as you read about him here, don't you?

I mean, he offers an excuse, doesn't he, that it was his soldiers that spared those things, not him? That they are the ones responsible, not him? He couldn't help himself. He couldn't do anything about it.

[16:49] Interestingly, Saul's shifting the focus and the blame, just like Adam did in the Garden of Eden, didn't he? He shifted the blame. Didn't take responsibility for it.

He shifted it. And they did so, he says, so that they could sacrifice to the Lord. But I don't think that's the case at all, do you? And verse 16, Samuel quite says, Samuel quite simply says, enough.

Enough. And he reminds Saul of the grace and the favor that God has shown him. And simply asks, why?

Why? Why did you not obey? But Saul disputes Samuel's claim and he says, I did obey. Again, do you see the deceitfulness of sin that work in this man's heart is totally clouded his judgment.

He thinks that he's done a good thing. But notice Samuel's stinging lesson, not just for Saul, but for anyone who would pick this up in the years to come and read about Saul's life.

[17:52] What is it that truly delights the Lord? Well, here's what doesn't truly delight the Lord. Verse 22 and 23. Here's the question. Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?

Here's the lesson. To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams. Here's the comparison. For rebellion is like the sin of divination and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.

And here's the summation. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king. Now what's going on there is that the Lord is saying that he doesn't want Samuel's stuff.

He doesn't want Saul's stuff as much as he wants Saul's heart. There's a difference, isn't there, between a cold, robotic, distant kind of obedience and a loving one.

Husbands will know there's a difference between giving your wife a card on Valentine's Day because you feel like it's what you should do, because you think it's what everyone else in the world is doing.

[19:06] There's a difference between that and giving a Valentine's Day card that says this is just a piece of paper, but behind it is a heart that says, I have eyes for you and you alone.

There's a difference. What truly delights the Lord is a wholehearted, loving obedience that wants to say, Father, I love you.

Here is all of me. Obedience to his word. Old Testament commentator Dale Ralph Davis puts it simply like this, external devotion is no substitute for internal submission.

It's not a difference. You see, God is going after the hearts of his people. He's going after the heart of his king and he's going after our hearts tonight as well. Saul is being partially obedient to God's word and the Lord loathes it.

And the second thing for us to see, verses 24 to 35, is that the Lord loathes superficial repentance. So, this case for the prosecution has been made and it would appear on the surface as we read about it here that Saul offers a hands up, you've got me, I'm guilty, here's the white flag kind of plea,

doesn't it?

[20 : 29] Verse 24, he declares, I have sinned. I have sinned. This is what he says. I gave in to the men, he says. And right there we see, don't we, that Saul has a real fear of man problem.

He lives for the pleasure, for the well-dones of man rather than the well-dones of God. He's concerned with his reputation.

In his mind, God is small and man is big. And that's where his people pleasing comes from. That's where all of our people pleasing comes from.

And we have a small view of God and a high view of man. Forgive my sin, he says. Isn't it interesting that he asked Samuel to forgive him rather than realizing that his sin is first and foremost against the Lord?

But again, Samuel reiterates that it's Saul's rejection of the Lord that's led to the Lord's rejection of Saul. And the game's up at this point, isn't it?

[21 : 33] And as if things couldn't get any worse for him, in this act of desperation, as he grabs and rips Samuel's robe, Samuel says, that is but a visible parable for you about what will happen to you and your kingdom.

I mean, when it's not going for you, it's really not going for you, isn't it? And see verse 28. The Lord, who never changes, his cast iron promise, guarantee, that he will now move to install this man, the man after his own heart, the better man as king.

And you have to say, Saul's reaction to that is very telling. Really worth noticing this in the text and we'll maybe slow down just a little bit here. There appears to be a little hint of repentance, doesn't there, in Saul's actions?

But if you look closely at what the text is telling us, Saul seems to be more concerned with his standing in the eyes of the elders of his people than he does on being right with God.

That's really what seems to be going on in the depths of his heart. That's really what he seems to be after. And it shows by what he says to Samuel at the end of verse 30. And look at it if you've got it there because I think it's so important to what's going on in the text here.

[22 : 56] He says to Samuel, come back with me so that I may worship my God? No. Our God?

No. Your God. That is so revealing, isn't it, of the true state of this man's heart. Your God. It's often the case I find in not just pastoral ministry but in just life in general, it's often the case that the comments that people make when their guard is down, the comments that people make in their everyday conversations with me is those that give me a little glimpse into what is really going on in their heart.

And I think this is the real tragedy in this chapter. The passion in Saul's heart, the fire in his belly, the love for, the adoration for, the relationship with and devotion to Yahweh seems to have well and truly gone out.

In fact, some commentators, if you read them, would go as far as to say if there was ever a fire in Saul's belly in the first place. Do you see? He's just lost his love for the Lord. Let me ask you in passing, can you see yourself in Saul's revealing words here?

Are you here tonight and you sense that fire in your heart, not getting stronger, but growing weaker? And I've shared this before, but I think it's so telling and so insightful to something like this.

[24 : 30] The late Anglican minister and lecturer John Stott was once asked what his biggest fear was for the students who came to study under him. And he always said that his biggest fear was that in the eyes of many, God would move from being a source of delight to be enjoyed, to be being a thing, to be simply studied.

Friends, I wonder if that's you tonight. Can I urge you to speak to somebody, to pray to somebody if it is? Maybe you can think of somebody in your own life who you know this might be the case for.

Can I urge you maybe to speak to them and to pray for them and to ask how you can help them and to pray that tonight might be the night when something changes in your life.

Think about it. I mean, what a waste of time this is on a Sunday. What a waste of time this is if we can't really be honest with one another about the thing that matters most in life and about what's really going on in our hearts.

Because otherwise, we're just playing at this. Just like Saul, we're just playing at this. But what a call this is from our God to get serious with him and to come home.

[25 : 43] to come home. We love because he first loved us. I remember growing up in church there was that song that we used to sing written by a man, I think his name was Brian Dorkskin.

And the chorus, it was really just a prayer and it simply went, don't let my love grow cold. I'm calling out, light the fire again. Don't let my vision die. I'm calling out, light the fire again.

It was a prayer that said, God, help, ignite by your spirit the fire in my heart, the love for you that exists in me.

It was interesting, I was sitting around, sitting in class this week and one guy piped up that he was a non-Christian for years and he sat in church a lot of his life and it was one song that did it for him and the Holy Spirit just moved into his life and it was a song, oh, I've totally forgotten, I should have written it down.

It was a song, I'm giving you my all and I surrender all to you. That's the one, I surrender all to you and he said at that moment, years of just not understanding anything and God just moved in and broke his heart.

[26 : 52] I'm giving you my all, all that is within. I lay it all down for the sake of you, my king. I've got it now, right? That's the one. Do you need to stop and make that your prayer tonight?

Do you need to pray that God by his spirit would rekindle that love that you once had for him? Do you see Saul's fire in his belly for the Lord would appear to have well and truly gone out and I'm sure that that is the core reason behind his lackadaisical approach to both his obedience and his repentance because it's not real to him and if Saul won't do it, Samuel will.

You see at the end of the chapter and King Agag who clearly thinks verse 32 that he's played an absolute blinder here and persuading Saul to keep him alive while his luck's just run out and Samuel puts him to death and again notice the bookend thoughts that drive this little section repeating the sentiments of verse 11.

Samuel mourns for Saul and God regrets that he made Saul king because the Lord loathes partial compliance and the Lord loathes superficial repentance.

Obedience, loving obedience is right at the heart of this chapter tonight. So what truly delights the Lord? What truly delights him according to this chapter? What does he say? Loving, wholehearted obedience to his word.

[28 : 17] This God is after the whole hearts of his people. He's after the whole hearts of his king. And as we read about Saul here you have to see it's a kind of tragic final nail in the coffin kind of chapter isn't it?

And this is the point at which we're going to leave the book of 1 Samuel for now and we're going to have a little break for Christmas and New Year and we're going to return to it early next year because this is quite a transitional point in the book.

Because if you glance your eye to 1 Samuel 16 you'll see God reveals David as his new choice for king. David who will be unlike Saul a man after God's own heart and a king marked by covenant loyalty to Yahweh.

That's David. But although David will be better to use the word of this chapter he will be better. He won't be perfect. We'll see him make mistakes.

We'll see him make huge mistakes even bigger than Saul made. But it seems to me that David knew the God he was praying to and David knew what real repentance looks like where Saul didn't. But this book points us well beyond this king.

[29 : 28] It points us to the king who would come and it points us to the king friends that we so desperately need. Hebrews chapter 5 chapter 5 chapter 5 During the days of Jesus' life on earth he, Jesus, offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and he was heard.

Why? Because of his reverent submission. Son though he was he learned what? Obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who would believe in him.

See, Jesus, this king, God's king, he didn't just obey and offer a sacrifice. He obeyed to the point that he became the sacrifice for us. Here is the king whose life would be marked by perfect obedience.

Here is the king who lived the life that we could not live. Do you know that? The depths of sin in your own heart? I find the more I go on as a Christian I'm more aware of the sin in my life than I ever was before but I am more aware of how gracious my God is.

Jesus paid the penalty on the cross for my sin and he takes me into himself and he becomes a source of eternal salvation to use those words for all who would come to him and obey him.

[30 : 53] Crown him Lord of all. The words of John Newton, slave trader turned minister, he's got a wonderful story, wonderful testimony. He wrote this, I didn't realise how many poems John Newton wrote until I discovered them this week.

Hundreds of poems. He writes this about what Jesus Christ meant to him the first time that he understood the gospel. Thus, while his death my sin displays in all its blackest hue, such is the mystery of grace it seals my pardon too.

With pleasing grief and mournful joy my spirit now is filled and get this, that I should such a life destroy yet live by him I killed.

What incredible grace. And as we see in this chapter the Lord pronounce over Saul I regret that I have made you king. I wonder if you thought about the pronouncement that God the Father would make over Jesus.

At his baptism Mark chapter 1 and a voice came from heaven you are my son there's the pronouncement you are my son whom I love with you I am well pleased. Again at the transfiguration Mark 9 then a cloud appeared and covered them and a voice came from the cloud this is my son whom I love.

[32 : 09] This is my son whom I love. And what follows next? Listen to him. Listen to him. Friends we are not made right with God and pray sin that this is not the case because of our listening and obeying.

Right? None of us would stand if that were the case. We are right with God because of Christ and therefore our heart's response out of gratitude and love for him is to listen and to obey him.

Paul writes this in Romans 12. Therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Now as we finish up tonight is that not a wonderful thought that you and I can please we can delight the almighty God in heaven our father through our everyday obedience to him.

Our everyday obedience to him can bring him pleasure. Friends that should change the way that you and I approach our days. That should change the way that you and I approach our jobs.

[33 : 18] That should change the way that you and I use our money. That should change the way you and I have our everyday conversations because what is it that truly delights the Lord? wholehearted loving obedience to him.

Now we started thinking about Crufts as we close let me just tell you a story about another dog that I was reading about this week. I read about them a lot I really don't like them but here's another dog. I didn't realise this until a couple of years ago did you know HMV? It stands for his master's voice. I did not know that until a couple of years ago. Every day is a school day right? I love the story of Nipper the HMV dog.

The story goes that when Nipper's owner Mark died his brother Francis inherited three things Nipper the dog a gramophone and the records of Mark singing and every time Francis used to play the recordings even though his master wasn't physically present what little Nipper would do is that he would listen he would hear and he would just come and sit and listen at the foot of the gramophone and that's what he did that's what he wanted to be and friends as we close up this evening let me ask you simply are you listening to your master's voice?

Do you know his voice? Do you know the leading of his spirit? Do you rejoice that you can call him father? And does the Lord have your whole heart? What is it that truly delights the Lord?

[34 : 51] Whole hearted loving obedience to him teach us Lord full obedience holy reverence true humility test our thoughts and our attitudes in the radiance of your purity cause our faith to rise cause our eyes to see your majestic love and authority words of power that can never fail let their truth prevail over unbelief Amen why don't I pray and then we'll stand to sing our closing song Heavenly Father we would worship you tonight Father we would declare that there is simply none like you Father we would think of the words of the psalmist who would declare who are we that you are mindful of us Oh Heavenly Father we thank you for our time together this evening and we pray that you would help us by your spirit to be those who lovingly and wholeheartedly obey you who are ever attentive to the voice of our saviour Jesus

Christ who are ever responding to the leading of your spirit as he leads us further into knowledge of Jesus Christ but Father we know our own hearts we know our proneness to wander and so Father we pray that you would take and seal our hearts and seal them for your courts above Father we

love you thank you for this evening in Jesus name we pray Amen