

Saul 3 - The Appearance of Success

We are progressing in our examination of the period of the Monarchy of Israel. We have looked at what God has taught us in the life of Samuel as the last judge ushering in the Monarchy. We are continuing with Saul whose reign is marked by self-serving carnality. Saul's regard for the presence and power of God was minimal in his *reign*. This is similar to the regard that unbelievers have today for God. We are up to 1 Samuel 14 which contains a record of Saul's early warfare.

1Sam 14:47-48 So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed *them*.

48And he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them.

Genuine success *is* laudable.

Pro 22:29 Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean *men*.

Pro 13:4 The soul of the sluggard desireth, and *hath* nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Pro 11:25 The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

However, not all success is true success. Couched in the narrative of a string of Saul's battle victories is a detail that reveals that there is a problem on a higher plane. One of the great things about the Bible is the sophistication of Its messaging. It is not the product of some fableist writing a set of simple morality

stories. It is not the work of a novelist writing improbable plots. It is not a naive scheme of a wishful philosopher. It is a record of God's work with man set in the dynamics of real life. 1 Samuel 14 provides the historical context of what looks like just another victorious battle for Israel. With just a casual observation, someone might think that Saul has God's approval. After all, you can't argue with success, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and results speak for themselves. Although God's hand of protection was on Israel, not all was well between *God and Saul*. In the course of life, there are going to be naturally occurring victories and failures. Indeed, when unbelievers exercise Biblical principles, they are going to have a degree of success. Apparent victories or failures are not the indicators of God's approval or disapproval.

1. The appearance of success -

Chapter 14 is largely an account of Saul's attack on the Philistines and an attribution of the victory to his edict that no one should eat until they had won.

1Sam 14:20-24 And Saul and all the people that *were* with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle: and, behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, *and there was* a very great discomfiture.

21Moreover the Hebrews *that* were with the Philistines before that time, which went up with them into the camp *from the country* round about, even they also *turned* to be with the Israelites that *were* with Saul and Jonathan.

22Likewise all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, *when* they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle.

23So the LORD saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Bethaven.

24And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed *be* the man that eateth *any* food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted *any* food.

It was certainly of the Lord that Israel should win, but that does not mean that Saul necessarily had God's approval.

1Sam 14:36-37 And Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and spoil them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them. And they said, Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee. Then said the priest, Let us draw near hither unto God.

37And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he answered him not that day.

You will find that in all of this chapter, there is no record of Saul being concerned about God's blessing. Saul was busy about planning the battle and seeking God was not even an afterthought. If the priest hadn't spoken up, Saul wouldn't have thought twice about doing so. It is easy to get caught up in the appearance of circumstances. Saul's successes might *seem* to point to God's approval, but we find out otherwise when God did not respond to his casual request.

Deut 4:29 But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find *him*, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

The appearance of success or lack of success can be deceiving.

- Success is one of the easiest things to criticize.

All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure.

– Mark Twain (1835 - 1910), Letter to Mrs Foote, Dec. 2, 1887

The secret of success is sincerity. Once you can fake that you've got it made.

– Jean Giraudoux (1882 - 1944)

Nothing succeeds like the appearance of success.

– Christopher Lasch

Nothing fails like success.

– Gerald Nachman

We must believe in luck. For how else can we explain the success of those we don't like?

– Jean Cocteau (1889 - 1963)

In Hollywood a marriage is a success if it outlasts milk.

– Rita Rudner

- Failure is not necessarily a judgment from God..

There is an assumption that if bad things happen to a person, then that means God's disapproval in some way.

John 9:1-3 And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth.

2And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

3Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

This was the assumption of the friends of Job, also.

Job 4:7-8 Remember, I pray thee, who *ever* perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?

8Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

- Lack of wealth and fame is not an indicator of failure.

Look at people Jesus dealt with approvingly: the widow with her mites, the centurion with his faith, the publican vs. the pharisee, the faith of a child, the loaves and fishes of a child, the choice of unlearned Galilean fishermen, or the Syro-Phoenician woman begging crumbs from the table.

"Blest Be the Tie That Binds" was written by John Fawcett, a Baptist minister in England, in the 18th century. Fawcett served as the pastor of a small congregation in Wainsgate, Yorkshire. In 1772, he received an offer to become the pastor of a larger and wealthier church in London. Faced with this decision, Fawcett and his wife, Mary, were torn. On the Sunday before they were to leave Wainsgate, the entire congregation gathered tearfully to bid them farewell.

Touched by the love and unity of his congregation, Fawcett and his wife decided to stay. This decision inspired him to write the hymn "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" as a reflection of the strong bonds of Christian fellowship and the unity of believers. In spite of the offers he had to serve other "more successful" ministries, Fawcett served his congregation for 50 years. Would you not call him a success?

Jas 4:13-15 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

14Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

15For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

When I came to North America, I found that most churches, pastors, seminaries, colleges, and parachurch agencies and agents were in the

grip of this secular passion for successful expansion in a way I had not met in England. Church-growth- theorists, evangelists, pastors, missionaries, and others all spoke as if: (1) numerical increase is what matters most, (2) numerical increase must come if our techniques and procedures are right, (3) numerical increase validates ministries as nothing else does, and (4) numerical increase must be everyone's main goal.

Four unhappy features marked the situation. First, big and growing churches were viewed as far more significant than others. Second, parachurch specialists (evangelists, college and seminary teachers with platform skills, medicine men with traveling seminars, convention-circuit riders, top people in youth movements, full-time authors and such) were venerated, while hard-working pastors were treated as near-nonentities. Third, lively laymen and clergy were constantly being [skimmed off, or skimming themselves off], from the churches to run parachurch ministries, in which quicker results could be expected and where accountability was less stringent. And fourth, many ministers of not-so-bouncy temperament were returning to secular employment in disillusionment and bitterness, having concluded that the pastoral life is a game not worth playing. Faithfulness, godliness, and loving service are the divine measure of real success in ministry

— J.I. Packer, *Christianity Today*, August 12, 1988

To all appearance, one might say that Saul was successful in his battles. But there is one way in which he was a

failure in 1 Samuel 14.

2. When the Lord is silent -

If you attribute approval to Saul because of success, then you might make the mistake of thinking that the ends justifies the means or that whatever led to your success must have been right.

How shall we *truly* judge Saul? Not by the appearance of success in battle, but by the absence of the Lord. There are so many other battles in the Bible where you hear of God bringing them to victory:

Exo 14:14 The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

Deut 20:4 For the LORD your God *is* he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

Psa 20:7 Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

After all that Saul had set in motion, it was late in the game that it occurred to him that he might seek after the Lord and only then at the priest's prompting.

1Sam 14:37-45 And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he answered him not that day.

38 And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day.

39 For, *as* the LORD liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But *there was* not a man among all the people *that* answered him.

When the Lord didn't answer, he assumed that it must be someone else's

fault. He didn't have any conviction that *he* might be the problem. So many people are in the position that Saul presents. It couldn't be him because he was winning. Jonathan was identified by *lot* and in his integrity he accepts the judgment of Saul. Jonathan had not heard his father's command to not eat (vs. 27) and was actually innocent. This did not deter Saul's judgment. If it hadn't been for the intervention of the people overriding Saul, Jonathan would have been executed.

What is at issue for us is to examine *our* perception of success. We see a battle that, on the balance, is successful. But, tucked inside the narrative is what is really important, that Saul's success does not indicate that he had God's approval.

3. True success -

Can you have successes without the intervention of God? Yes, but you cannot claim to be successful; that is, you cannot claim that you are in *general* a success. Ultimate success in this life is not sustainable. *This* life will ultimately end in failure. Even if you manage to keep your bank account intact until you die, you *will* die.

Eccl 8:6-8 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man *is* great upon him.

7For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?

8*There is* no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither *hath he* power in the day of death: and *there is* no discharge in *that* war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

You are allowed to enjoy the house, the vacations, and your health. But, these things are temporal. Don't enjoy the temporal to the neglect of the eternal.

Luke 12:15-21 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of

covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

16And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry.

20But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

- Don't presume on God.

Exod 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

This verse is so often under-applied. We commonly think of this verse when people use it as part of swearing, or as an expletive: G--D----, or OMG. There are a lot of cussin' Christians who use God's name in vain when they claim that something is God's will. When a Christian says he believes in God, but doesn't go to church, he's taking God's name in vain. When someone says that God wants him to be happy and that's why he is cheating on his wife, he is taking God's name in vain. When something appears to be working out, that doesn't mean that God is behind it. Attributing it to God is taking His name

in vain.

- Pursue *true* wealth.

Paul addressed the problem of the pursuit of wealth.

1Tim 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out.

8And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. **[That is, those who willfully work at making riches their goal.]**

10For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

- The foundation of true success.

The difference between failure and true success is succinctly stated in the Bible:

1John 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Ps 49:6-9 They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches;

7None *of them* can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him:

8(For the redemption of their soul *is* precious, and it ceaseth for ever:)

9That he should still live for ever,

and not see corruption.

Mark 8:34-38 And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.
35For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

36For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

37Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

38Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. **[You might achieve fame among men, but you will be brought to shame before God.]**

- Building on true success

Josh 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Be faithful.

1Cor 4:1-5 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

3But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

4For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

5Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

- Eternal success

Today is the day you can have eternal success because Christ is the one Who has secured your salvation forever.

1Cor 15:51-58 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

54So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?

56The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.

57But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Have you been coasting in your spiritual life? Have you assumed that because you are getting by that you *sort of* have God's approval? Have you taken

stock of your life and determined that you *actually* are a child of God and are *truly* following Him?

1Sam 14:47-48, Pro 22:29, Pro 13:4, Pro 11:25,

1. The appearance of success - 1Sam 14:20-37, Deut 4:29, John 9:1-3, Job 4:7-8, Jas 4:13-15
2. When the Lord is silent - Exo 14:14, Deut 20:4, Josh 10:42, 2Chr 20:17, Psa 20:7, 1Sam 14:37-45
3. True success - Eccl 8:6-8, Luke 12:15-21, Exod 20:7, 1Tim 6:6-10, 1John 5:12, John 3:36, Ps 49:6-9, Mark 8:34-38, Josh 1:8, 1Cor 4:1-5

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