

1 Samuel 13:1-15 | “Fear Can Make Us Foolish”  
*Preached on January 9, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Turn in your Bibles this morning to 1 Samuel 13, and we get to continue through the book of 1 Samuel. *[pause]*

I don't know if you have ever seen it, but I saw this one GEICO commercial, which was making fun of the poor decisions that characters in horror movies make.

In it, there's four young people running in fear, and they come upon this house, and one of them says, “Let's hide in the attic.”

The other one responds with, “No, in the basement.”

And then a third says, “Why can't we just get in the running car?!” as a car is sitting there ready for them to jump in and leave.

But they don't because the fourth person says, “Are you crazy?! Let's hide behind the chainsaws.”

And they all agree to do that. *[pauseee]*

Fear can make us do some foolish things.

I'm sure we could all testify to times in our lives that we did something foolish when we were afraid.

You get nervous, things get tense, and sometimes our brains and wisdom go right out the window.

In the urgency and fear, you do something that you look back on and think, “Why did I do that?!” *[pauseee]*

Well this morning we will find someone who was faced with an urgent, fearful situation and his response was likewise foolish.

And in his story, we will learn that trusting God is not always easy, but it's worth it. *[pauseee]*

The person I'm talking about is King Saul.

Saul has been made the first king of Israel, and he seemed to have great potential.

He was a tall and handsome man.

He listened to Samuel's every word back around the time of his anointing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tall and handsome is found in 1 Samuel 9:1-2. His obedience to Samuel's words is found in 1 Samuel 10:1-13.

He had the Spirit rush upon him, and he courageously led Israel to victory over the Ammonites just back in chapter 11.

And Samuel had just told the people and the king that if they would simply obey and follow the Lord's words, then all would be well. *[pause]*

Saul had so much potential and things seemed bright for him and the nation as you enter chapter 13.

Yet sadly, all of that bright future and potential is suddenly squandered, as Saul makes a disastrous choice.

LET'S READ THE STORY to see what happens. (1-12) *[pauseee]*

It's early in Saul's kingship, and he decides to create a standing army of 3,000 men.

2,000 stay with him and 1,000 are stationed with his son, Jonathan.

Since the Philistines are very close by, and have garrisons at different places, Jonathan takes advantage of his men and defeats a nearby garrison.

Saul sends the news throughout the land, gets the credit for it, but this small defeat also makes the Philistines angry.

We are told that "Israel had become a stench to the Philistines." *[pause]*

You know how when you can't stand the smell of something, you detest and hate it, and you will do *anything* to get rid of it?

That's the idea here: the Philistines were angry. *[pause]*

So Israel had a small victory, but it "poked the bear," so to say, and the Philistines mustered up a huge army in response.

They gather "thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude," and they move to close by Michmash. *[pause]*

That was a massive army for that day.

Remember that all Saul had among him were 3,000 men at that point. *[pause]*

So this makes the people tremble.

We are told that they are so scared that some people hide in caves, holes, rocks, tombs, and cisterns.

I mean, just think about this - grown men in the military are hiding in anything they can find.

Yet that's not all, some others are so scared that they cross over the Jordan.

Those guys are like, "We aren't hiding, even that's too scary - we're out of here!"

The people are utterly terrified. *[pauseeeee]*

After this, we find that Saul is at Gilgal, and he's waiting.

Waiting for what?

Well Samuel had told him to wait 7 days until he would come to Saul, make a sacrifice, and then presumably instruct him in the battle, according to the Word of the Lord.

So Saul is waiting...and it's hard, for the enemy could attack at any moment.

Day 1 goes by, and Samuel isn't there.

Saul might be thinking, "It's OK, Samuel said 7 days, so one day isn't bad. I just need to wait longer."

Days 3 through 6 go by, and as each day goes by, the pressure intensifies - "but hey, Samuel said 7 days, right?" *[pause]*

Now day 7 comes, and the pressure is *really* on.

As the day goes on, his troops are starting to desert him, as they think that Samuel will never show up.

They are like, "Saul, you said we would be fine and that Samuel would come in 7 days. It's been 7 days, and he's not here. I'm not waiting any longer to get slaughtered by the Philistines."  
*[pause]*

This makes it even harder on Saul, as he knows that each man will be needed to fight, since they were already extremely outnumbered. *[pause]*

But that's not all the pressure that he feels, for the pressure of the enemy's possible imminent attack is just too much to take.

Saul's thinking, "Where is Samuel?! He said he would come in 7 days!"

It's like he's checking his watch every 10 minutes, and looking down the road for any sign of the prophet, but nothing.

Every look down the road only brings disappointment. *[pause]*

And as the day goes on, Saul makes a choice.

He's thinking, "I've got no other choice. I'm the king, everyone is looking to me. I need to protect this army, and I need God's favor to do that..."

...I need to be ready to fight, Samuel isn't coming, so let's do the sacrifice."

But just as he finishes the sacrifice, here comes Samuel down the road. *[pause]*

Saul goes to greet him, and Samuel is shocked at what he finds, for he finds that Saul went ahead with the sacrifice, instead of waiting.

And so Saul has to explain himself, and he explains his reasoning...

The men were deserting, you didn't arrive yet, and the Philistines were nearby.

Saul is like, "What could I do? I had no other choice. I felt compelled to do it, and I did it."

But Samuel's response shows us that Saul didn't trust and obey God's Word, for he didn't keep the command of the Lord. *[pause]*

So stopping there in the story for now, let's think deeper here...

*What truth arises out of the text?...It's this...*

### **I. Trusting and obeying God's Word is hard to do in dire situations. (1-12)**

The *Houston Chronicle* tells this story...

"On January 12, 2010, a powerful earthquake devastated Haiti and left the country in shambles.

Few people were fortunate enough to leave, but the Desarmes [De-Sar-Mes] family was able to evacuate two weeks after the mass chaos began.

They had family in South America so...[they]...arrived in Chile and encountered one of the worst earthquakes in history just a month later."<sup>2</sup> *[pause]*

The truth is, no matter where you go, how long you live, or what you do - you will face dire circumstances.

That is, you will encounter circumstances that are fearful and urgent, and these situations are hard and make it hard to trust God. *[pause]*

Saul was in a dire situation, that's a matter of fact.

His army was deserting, the massive Philistine army was frighteningly too close for comfort, and Samuel didn't seem like he would ever show up.

That situation was hard, and it made it hard to trust God's Word to come through. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/earthquakes>.

The truth is, trusting God is not always easy and simple.

Waiting on the Lord's timing is difficult! *[pause]*

There are hard circumstances that we face.

We *aren't* people disconnected with reality, who say, "Trusting God in every situation is just so easy, isn't it?"

We *don't* say, "Obeying God's Word is just so effortless and unchallenging."

For imagine the consequences of consistently telling a Christian that trusting and obeying will be easy and simple all the time.

What will happen when they end up facing a really hard trial that tests their faith?

They see that it's hard and they think, "What is this? I must have done something wrong."

And they aren't prepared to handle hardship, and this could really hurt their faith. *[pauseeee]*

No, the Bible makes it clear that the life of faith is hard, it's a marathon, it's a battle, and we will face the temptation to give up, fear, and distrust God.

We live in a world full of hardships and difficult circumstances that make it hard to trust and obey God's Word.

Just read the book of Hebrews, as all over the place it's telling Christians to keep persevering and not give up. *[pauseeee]*

You have faced and will face these sorts of things in your life, and it will be hard to trust and obey God...

Let's say a student really needs a good grade or they won't pass the class - that's a dire situation, which can be frightening.

In that moment, it's hard to trust God with the outcome and obey God's Word by not cheating, for the dire situation makes it so tempting to take matters into your own hands and cheat. *[pause]*

Let's say that someone has been messing up a lot at their job recently, and now they have *really* messed up.

They believe that if their boss found out, they would be fired.

That's a dire situation, and it's hard to obey God's Word and be honest about what happened, isn't it? *[pauseeee]*

Trusting God and obeying Him is hard when you fear that failure, rejection, or disaster are looming.

But just because it's hard doesn't mean it's impossible.

Just because it's hard doesn't mean it's bad.

Just because it's hard doesn't mean it's not worth it.

Instead, it's *totally* worth it to trust and obey God, even when it's hard, for our story will show us the complete folly and sinfulness of not doing so. *[pauseeee]*

*Though it's hard to trust and obey God's Word....*

## **II. Trusting and following your own wisdom is foolish.**

Let's READ VERSE 11 AGAIN AND FINISH OUT THIS SECTION. (11-15) *[pause]*

**Saul was faced with a dire situation, we just saw that.**

And that dire situation led him to fear.

He was scared of the massive Philistine army, the fact that his own army was abandoning him, and how he didn't have God's favor yet.

But instead of trusting God's Word, he took matters into his own hands.

He should have thought, "Samuel's words don't fall to the ground because the Lord is with him.<sup>3</sup> God speaks through Samuel, so if Samuel said to wait 7 days until he comes, then I need to do that."

But instead he thought, "I just need to do something because obviously Samuel was wrong."

**This demonstrates that Saul didn't actually believe that God would come through.**

In his actions, he was basically saying, "God's not going to come through, so I must do something." *[pause]*

That's what fear can lead us to: it can lead us to trust ourselves.

It can lead us to trust our own wisdom over God's Word, to trust our plan over God's plan, and our own power over God's power. *[pause]*

Saul thought that God wasn't going to come through, so he felt that he had to step up and do something.

That's disbelieving God, and trusting in yourself. *[pause]*

**Isn't this the same type of thing that we often face?**

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<sup>3</sup> This is what we are told in 1 Samuel 3:19.

There's some sort of threat or pressure - fear, doubt, and unbelief set in - and then we take matters into our own hands to try to solve the issue. *[pause]*

Let's say that someone at work keeps saying mean things to you, and treating you badly.

There's pressure from that, for you don't want to keep hearing mean things, and you want out of the situation.

God's Word tells you to love, do good, bless, and pray for your enemies.<sup>4</sup>

It tells you to not avenge yourself, but to overcome evil with good.<sup>5</sup>

But in your mind, you're thinking, "I don't think that's going to work. I don't trust that God's way is best. I need to do something to get back at them. My way is better."

And you foolishly disobey God's Word to try to solve the situation, as you are mean to your co-worker in return. *[pause]*

You see, we aren't too different from Saul.

We trust and follow our own wisdom all the time, and it stems from a distrust in God, which is disobedience. *[pause]*

"But," you might say, "I had no other choice! He kept being mean to me!"

Ahhh, sounds like King Saul, doesn't it?

He said in verse 12, "I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering."

He was saying, "I had no other choice! I was compelled based on the situation."

But that's our own understanding talking, telling us, "You need to take matters in your own hand. God may have said to do this, but just look at your situation."

Our own understanding says, "What else can you do? You have no other choice."

But you do have a choice! You can trust God's Word and obey! *[pauseeee]*

So often we try to make excuses and blame others, and that's what Saul did, too.

He blamed his sin on his troops, Samuel, and the Philistines.

It's like he was saying, "Well if my men didn't desert. If you would have just showed up on time. If the Philistines weren't so close, this wouldn't have happened."

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<sup>4</sup> See Luke 6:27-28.

<sup>5</sup> See Romans 12:19-21.

Instead of owning up to his sin, Saul tried to deflect the blame away and make excuses, but that's exactly what Adam and Eve did in the Garden after they sinned.<sup>6</sup>

But no amount of good-sounding excuses ever justifies disobedience to God. *[pauseeee]*

You will be faced with hard situations that make you feel like you have no other choice but to disobey God - but you do.

No emergency permits God's Word to be set aside even temporarily, but it's always right to obey God, no matter what situation you face. *[pauseeee]*

You will face times that will make you want to make excuses for your sin, and say, "I had no other choice! I was practically forced to do it"...

If you steal a little bit at work, you will be tempted to say, "I had no other choice! I would have not been able to pay my bills on time, and that would have caused so many more issues..."

...And you know my company makes so much money, they won't even notice, and my job has demanded so much from me over the years, I deserve this."

But that's not trusting and obeying God's Word...

You're not trusting that God will take care of you, and you're not obeying His Word by not stealing. *[pause]*

Here's another situation...

If you cross the line with another person sexually, you will be tempted to say, "I had no other choice!"

She is just so good-looking, I can't help myself - I have needs you know, and if she didn't flirt with me so much, I wouldn't be in this position."

But again, that's trying to defend your sin and it shows that you are not trusting and obeying God's Word.

You're not trusting that God's way is best, and being satisfied in Him, and you're disobeying His Word by committing that sin. *[pause]*

The examples could go on and on.

We don't trust God's Word and way, and when the pressure is on, we make excuses for our sin. *[pauseeee]*

What's also interesting about Saul's sin is that he did have *partial* obedience, but *partial* obedience is always disobedience.

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<sup>6</sup> See Genesis 3:12-13.



He partially obeyed, for he did wait 7 days and a sacrifice was made, but he didn't fully wait for Samuel. *[pause]*

And we can do this sort of thing as well.

We think, "Well I trusted up to this point, but I can't just keep trusting and waiting, I need to take matters into my own hands."

We think, "I obeyed God up to this point, look at all the other times that I did what was right, but now it's just too much." *[pauseeee]*

Saul minimized his sin, and acted like it was a small matter that he went ahead with the sacrifice.

He was thinking that it was just a small detail that he did differently, for he did everything else that was necessary...

He waited 7 days, he did the sacrifice, so all he left out was the waiting for Samuel part - it's not that big of a deal, right? *[pause]*

And we do this, too, when we try to minimize our sin, and treat it as a small matter...

"I have been doing so well lately, I can give in just this once, right?"

"Just look at all the times that I *didn't* say something mean back when I wanted to, so just this one mean thing, isn't all that bad, is it?"

Or even, "I told him most of the truth. I only left out that small little part."

"The ends justify the means, right?"

To Saul they did, but to God they didn't.

We must trust and obey God in even the seemingly small matters of life! *[pauseeee]*

So Saul made excuses, he did only partial obedience, acted like it was a small matter, and also, notice how he tried to make his sin sound godly.

Saul talked about how he needed to seek God's favor, but all of that godly-sounding talk couldn't cover up his ungodliness. *[pause]*

Partial obedience tempts us to use that to try to make sin sound godly.

We make our sin sound so godly, but it's ungodliness, if it's sin.

Saul thought he could obtain the Lord's favor through an act of disobedience? Absurd.

Godly-sounding, partial obedience is always disobedience, no matter how good it sounds. *[pauseeee]*

Saul's sinful act reminds us that trusting in your own wisdom is not trusting God's Word; it's not believing that God will come through.

And Samuel shows us that this is the definition of *folly*. *[pause]*

After Saul tries to explain away his sin, the first thing that Samuel says is, "You have done foolishly."

**Not trusting and obeying God is foolish.**

Disobeying God by taking matters into your own hands is foolish.

What does the book all about wisdom, Proverbs, say? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."<sup>7</sup> *[pause]*

Saul's fear got the best of him, and made him "lean on his own understanding."

He didn't trust God's timing and Word, but ultimately trusted himself - that's foolishness, according to God. *[pauseeee]*

What is it that you think you need to make the right, wise choices in life?

**Some people think that all we need is intellect and/or experience.**

But is it just intellect and experience? Saul seemed to have a good amount of intellect, and he had some experiences in prior battles.

**But is that what he needed? Obviously not, for he made a foolish choice.**

God shows us that it's the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.<sup>8</sup>

And that's why David can say that it's the fool who says there is no God because true wisdom comes from a proper relationship with God.<sup>9</sup> *[pause]*

Wisdom and doing what's right comes from revering God and trusting Him, while folly and sin comes from turning from God and not trusting Him. *[pauseee]*

**In Saul's own wisdom, he thought that doing things differently than what was commanded would bring good results, but it only made matters worse.**

That's the empty promise of sin and trusting your own self - they promise much, but deliver only bad consequences. *[pauseeee]*

**Saul thought that what he did would bring him success and favor, and even went out to greet Samuel like all was well, but look at the results...**

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<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 3:5.

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 9:10.

<sup>9</sup> See Psalms 14:1.

Samuel tells Saul that his kingdom won't endure, and that God has found his replacement.

Those consequences are bad enough, but then Samuel even gets up and leaves.

Why is that bad?

Because instead of receiving direction from God through His prophet, Saul and the nation are left with nothing.

No approval from Samuel, the great spiritual leader of Israel, and no direction from God when it comes to this battle.

And to show how bad their predicament is, the writer states that Saul counts his men and all he has left are 600 men. *[pause]*

He may have started out with 3,000, but he's down to 600.

They were already outnumbered badly, and now they are even more so outmatched in number for this impending war.

The Philistines have a massive army with chariots galore, and Saul has 600 trembling men. *[pauseeee]*

Disobedience often seems sensible, but it's foolish, and foolishness has consequences.

Saul thought that the only sensible thing to do in his situation was to go ahead with the sacrifice, but it resulted in only more headache. *[pauseeee]*

You might look around you at your circumstances and think that the only sensible thing to do is to go against God's Word.

You might think, "I know that God shows us as a church that we need to be faithful in proclaiming His Word, and discipling others, but it doesn't work with the people in our context, so we need to think of something more creative than that, which will work better."

But His commands don't change; we are to obey what He has said, and trust Him with the outcome. *[pause]*

What about these examples....

"I know that God said I must submit to my husband, but you know, times change, our culture is different from the Bible times..."

"I know that God said I must love my wife, but if God knew my wife...."

“I know I am supposed to honor and obey my parents, but how can I honor those two when they have so much sin in their lives?”<sup>10</sup>

We end up trying to find a way out of obedience by thinking, “If God knew my situation, He would understand....”

Well guess what? He does! And His command still remains the same. *[pauseeee]*

In hard circumstances, disobedience *seems* like the wisest thing to do, but disobedience is always the most unwise thing to do, and has consequences.

**Not following God’s commands and structure in your marriage and family will have ramifications on your marriage and family.**

On the other hand, trusting and obeying God is wisdom, and brings a healthier marriage and family life. *[pauseeee]*

**Saul trusted and followed his own wisdom.**

He thought he knew better than God, and took matters into his own hands, but this was a disastrous decision that was foolish and sinful, no matter how much he tried to justify it.

His fear led him to folly, and our fear in certain situations can make us foolish as well, if we don’t trust God and His Word. *[pauseeee]*

Is your fear leading you to disbelieve God?

**Are there situations that are tempting you to take matters into your own hands?**

See the folly and sinfulness of not trusting and obeying Him!

**Instead, revere the Lord and His Word - for that is truly the beginning of wisdom.<sup>11</sup>**

He is your Lord and Master, who deserves to be obeyed and followed.

Submit to Him, for He is God, His Word is truth, and that means that obedience to Him is **TOTALLY WORTH IT.** *[pause]*

*You see, after this incident, Saul, Israel, as well as every reader of this story is pushed to this lesson...that we need to...*

**Trust and obey God’s Word, for it’s worth it!**

How do we get that big idea?

**Because we see how it was downright not worth it for Saul to not trust and obey God.**

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<sup>10</sup> See Ephesians 5:22-6:2 for these commands.

<sup>11</sup> See Proverbs 9:10.

His decision (although he tried to make it sound not that bad) was very foolish and sinful, and it brought him misery. *[pause]*

No matter how we try to paint it up, disbelief and disobedience are always ugly, and trust and obedience to God is always good and beautiful. *[pauseeeee]*

You are facing or will face situations in your life that are hard.

You will face situations that will make you want to act like Israel, where everything within you wants to hide in a hole, cross over the Jordan, or scatter in fear.

Your resources will wear thin, God will seem like He won't come through, and the pressure will intensify. *[pause]*

**In that moment, who will you trust?**

Will you foolishly trust your own wisdom, and take matters into your own hands?

Or will you trust the Word of your Almighty God and King, whose way is always best?

He can be trusted, for He is faithful, good, and in control.

Cling to and hold onto His Word, trust Him and obey His commands, for it is *so* worth it. *[pauseeeeeeee]*

I know a man, who likewise faced an intense and hard situation that would make anyone want to run and hide, or take matters into their own hands.

**His name is Jesus, and he's not just a man, but He is God who took on flesh.**

He faced an extremely hard situation, for He faced the suffering and death of the Cross, and the pain of taking the wrath of God for our sin.

And He didn't run in fear, He didn't sinfully disobey God's commands, but He trusted and obeyed the Father to perfection.

And because of *His* trust and obedience, *we* are able to be forgiven of our sin, given eternal life, and empowered to serve God. *[pauseeeeeee]*

You know, Saul thought that he could gain the favor of God by doing the sacrifice himself, but God showed him and us that you only gain God's favor one way: trust in the sacrifice done by someone else.

And that Someone else for us is Jesus Christ, whose substitutionary sacrifice allows us to have favor with God when we trust in Him alone.

**We can't do it ourselves.**

Our obedience and work will never measure up, so we must trust in Christ's perfect obedience and death on our behalf.

Will you believe in Christ alone today for salvation?

Don't trust in anything else, but trust in His perfect life, death, and resurrection for you.

*[pauseeeeeee]*

Trusting and obeying God is worth it, Christian!

But don't do it in your own effort - trust and obey God, motivated and empowered by the love of the One who trusted and obeyed perfectly for you.