

A Time to Do Nothing

by David Wilkerson

David Wilkerson's sermon highlights the dangers of acting out of fear instead of waiting on God's direction, as illustrated by Saul's tragic downfall.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 10:1, 1 Samuel 13:5-14, 1 Samuel 15:23, 1 Samuel 16:14, Psalm 62:8, Psalm 115:11, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 41:21, Hebrews 11:6, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Faith"

Description

David Wilkerson emphasizes the importance of waiting on God through the story of Saul, who, despite being anointed and blessed by God, fell into disobedience and despair when faced with overwhelming circumstances. Saul's pivotal moment came when he chose to act out of fear rather than faith, leading to his downfall and loss of God's favor. Wilkerson warns that impatience and unbelief can lead to legalism, loss of discernment, and ultimately, spiritual destruction. The sermon encourages believers to trust in God's timing and to do nothing but pray in times of crisis, as true victory comes from reliance on God. Wilkerson concludes with the reminder that Jesus offers deliverance from the chains of unbelief and legalism.

Transcript

For years the Israelites had longed to be ruled by a human king. And, finally, God allowed it. He told the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul to be ruler over Israel. So the prophet met with Saul, poured a vial of oil over his head, and kissed him. Then he told Saul, "The Lord hath appointed thee to be captain over his inheritance" (1 Samuel 10:1).

No human could be given a greater compliment. Samuel was saying, in essence, "The Lord is with you, Saul. You're a chosen vessel, hand-picked by God." Moreover, God immediately blessed Saul with a heart to fulfill his calling: "God gave (Saul) another heart...and the Spirit of God came upon (Saul), and he prophesied" (verses 9-10).

Now, Saul was no braggart. He didn't flaunt his anointing or position. In fact, the Bible says he saw himself as small (see 15:17). We see an example of Saul's reserve when he returned home from his meeting with Samuel. His uncle stopped him, curious about what had happened. This uncle was aware that Samuel had a reputation for speaking only with a powerful purpose in mind. So he begged his nephew, "Please, tell me, Saul - what did Samuel say to you?"

But, scripture says, "Of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, (Saul) told him not" (10:16). Saul was sitting on incredible news - yet he didn't breathe a word of it. I ask you - how many people you know would keep such a thing to themselves?

Soon afterward, Samuel gathered the nation at Mizpah. The prophet had two purposes in mind: First, he wanted to chasten the people for forsaking the Lord and desiring a human king. Then he wanted to present Saul to them as God's chosen ruler. Yet, when the time came for Saul to be introduced, he was nowhere to be found. Samuel sent a delegation to find him - and they finally located Saul hiding among some baggage.

When Saul was brought before the crowd, he was everything they could have wanted in a king. He was tall and handsome, "higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward" (10:23). Samuel said of him, "There is none like him among all the people" (verse 24). And Israel shouted its approval, "God save the king" (same verse).

In his first two years as king, Saul proved himself a strong, godly leader. When he heard the Ammonites had invaded Jabesh-Gilead, "the Spirit of God came upon Saul" (11:6). Saul quickly conscripted a militia of 330,000 men - and the motley, ill-equipped army routed the Ammonites. Afterward, Saul gave all glory to God (see verse 15). And soon the godly king led Israel to victory over every nation that had plundered them - Moab, Ammon, Edom, Amalek, even the mighty Philistines (see 14:47-48).

Who wouldn't want such a man to be their king? Saul was humble, valiant, impressive in appearance, favored by God, moving mightily in the Spirit, attentive to the direction of a holy prophet. Saul was the model of a godly leader.

Yet, incredibly, this same anointed man would die in utter rebellion. Shortly after his amazing victories, Saul lost his anointing and was stripped of his kingdom. He was forsaken by God, no longer able to hear the Spirit's voice, and eventually possessed by an evil spirit. He ended up killing innocents. He ordered the deaths of God's appointed priests. And on the eve of his death, he sought direction from a witch. The king who once had led Israel to triumph over its enemies finished his days as a raging madman.

What a sad end to a once-anointed servant of God. What happened to Saul? What sent this humble man spiraling downward into madness and destruction? Was there a particular turning point in Saul's life, when he began to disintegrate?

Saul's Pivotal Moment

Occurred in 1 Samuel 13.

Saul faced a pivotal moment that every believer must eventually confront. It is a crucial time of crisis, when we're forced to decide whether we'll wait on God by faith, or get impatient and take matters into our own hands.

Saul's pivotal moment came when ominous clouds of war were gathering over Israel. The Philistines had amassed a huge army of 6,000 horsemen, 30,000 iron chariots, and legions of soldiers brandishing the latest weapons. Their sheer numbers appeared to Israel "as the sand which is on the sea shore" (1 Samuel 13:5). By contrast, the Israelites had only two swords in their entire army - one for Saul and one for his son, Jonathan. Everyone else had to use makeshift weapons, such as wooden spears or crude farm tools.

Now, as the Israelites saw the mighty Philistines approaching, they panicked. "Then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits" (13:6). Some sneaked across borders into other countries, to avoid being conscripted into Saul's army. Others deserted in open cowardice. Suddenly, the army of 330,000 who had defeated Ammon had dwindled to 600. And even those who remained trembled in fear (see 13:7). Israel's situation seemed hopeless.

A week earlier, Samuel had warned Saul to wait for him at Gilgal before going into battle. The prophet had said he would arrive after seven days to make the proper sacrifices to the Lord. We aren't told the significance of this seven-day period; maybe Samuel knew he would be coming from a distant place where his presence was needed. Yet it's more likely that this week-long wait was meant as a test of Saul's faith.

When the seventh day came and Samuel hadn't arrived, Saul's soldiers began to scatter. Worse, the king didn't have God's direction for battle. Now, put yourself in Saul's position for a moment. You see the awesome Philistine army marching toward you. You feel their chariots' mighty rumbling. And as you turn to look at your few remaining troops, you see them trembling with their pitiful weapons. Everything is spinning out of control. What are you going to do?

You may wonder, "Was Saul expected to just sit there and wait, doing nothing?" Yes - that is exactly what he was supposed to do, wait and pray. In fact, this was implied when Samuel first presented Saul as king. The prophet told Israel, "If he [Saul] will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king...continue following the Lord your God: but if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you" (12:14-15).

Samuel explained, "The Lord wants to receive all glory for what he does through our king. He wants the world to know that victory comes not through strategies, weapons or numbers - but by sacrificing to God through believing prayer and confidence in him."

So, what approach did Saul take? Did he stand firm, declaring, "I don't care if it takes Samuel eight days to arrive. I'm going to stand on God's word to me. Live or die, I will obey his command"? No - Saul panicked. He allowed himself to be overwhelmed by his circumstances. And he ended up manipulating his way around God's word. He ordered the priest who was present, Abijah, to make the sacrifices without Samuel.

When Samuel finally arrived, he was aghast. He smelled burning flesh coming from the sacrificial altar. So he asked Saul, "What hast thou done?" (13:11). The prophet's question suggests Saul had no idea of the magnitude of his sin. Samuel was asking, "Do you realize what you've done? I gave you a clear, simple command. You were to do nothing until I arrived. You were in no danger, but you took matters into your own hands. You acted in fear, not in faith. You've committed a grievous sin against the Lord."

Here was Saul's explanation: "I saw that the people scattereth from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash" (13:11). Note the accusation in Saul's words: "You didn't come on time, Samuel." He was speaking to the prophet, but his accusation was actually leveled at God. Saul was saying, "I had to do something - everyone was deserting me. Surely the Lord didn't expect me to hold out any longer."

No - God is never too late. All along, the Lord knew each step Samuel was taking toward Gilgal. He had set the prophet on a heavenly navigation system, pinpointing his arrival to the very second. Samuel would be there by day seven, even if it was one minute before midnight. We can know God didn't deceive Saul on this matter, so we know Samuel was on time.

At first glance, God's reaction to Saul's disobedience seems harsh. Samuel said: "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee" (verses 13-14).

You might wonder, "Why didn't God cut Saul a little slack here? This man was in an impossible situation. Besides, all he wanted was to gain a victory for the Lord. Why was Saul's compliance so important here?" God wanted all the powers of hell to know the battle is the Lord's - and it is won by appointed people of faith who trust and wait on him.

What Does This

Teach Us Today?

God has not changed throughout the ages. And he is still concerned with whether his people obey his command: "Obey his voice, and [do] not rebel against the commandment of the Lord" (1 Samuel 12:15). It doesn't matter if our life is spinning out of control - we are to walk in total confidence in the Lord. Even if things look hopeless, we are not to act in fear. Rather, we are to wait patiently on him to deliver us, as his word promises.

The fact is, God stood right beside Saul as the massive Philistine army pressed in. The Lord saw those chariots rumbling, and he saw the sharp weapons flashing. He knew the crisis Saul was in, with his soldiers scattering. And his eye was on every detail.

Likewise, our God sees every detail of your crisis. He sees all the life-problems pressing in on you. And he's fully aware your situation is getting worse daily. Those who pray and wait on him with calm faith are never in any real danger. Moreover, he knows all your panicky thoughts: "I don't see how I can ever repay this debt...I don't have any hope for my marriage...I don't know how I can keep my job." Yet his command to you still holds true: "Don't panic or get ahead of me. You are to do nothing but pray - and rely on me. I honor everyone who puts his trust in me."

Consider these words God has given to his church: "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6). "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:8). "Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield" (Psalm 115:11). "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The Lord is very patient with us. He actually invites us, "Bring forth your strong reasons" (Isaiah 41:21). He knows our forefathers experienced seasons of doubt, from Abraham down to the New Testament saints. At times they wanted to die, crying, "I can't handle any more." Even Jesus had a moment of questioning, asking, "Why have you forsaken me?"

Our Lord feels every jolt of pain, fear and panic that strikes us. We might receive some sudden, awful news - a loved one has died, a son or daughter is divorcing, or a mate has had an affair. In such moments, God sends the Holy Spirit to bring us comfort, ease our pain and settle our hearts.

Yet Saul had remained in fear and panic for a full seven days. And that whole time, the Holy Spirit was asking him to make a decision: "Yes, Saul, it looks hopeless. But you were outnumbered before by the Ammonites, and God delivered you then. So, what will you do today? Will you obey God's word, no matter what happens to you or the kingdom? Will you say with Job, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him'?"

We know that God knows every person's heart. And the Lord knew that the decision Saul was making would determine his life's course from that point on. After all, he would have to face many more such crises. We gain some insight into Saul's decision in his words to Samuel: "I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering" (1 Samuel 13:12). The root word for "forced" here means "to restrain oneself." Saul was saying, "I tried to be obedient. I restrained myself as long as possible from disobeying. But I finally had to act on my own."

As a result, God left Saul and revoked his appointment as king. Why? The Lord knew that from that day on, Saul would offer him a dead faith. He knew Saul wouldn't endure another test of obedience. Instead, he would end up scheming and manipulating.

Unbelief is deadly, its consequences tragic. And we face dire consequences if we try to extricate ourselves from our trials instead of trusting God to see us through them. This is clear from Saul's life. From the moment Saul made his pivotal decision to take matters into his own hands, his life went downhill rapidly. His unbelief opened the door to every kind of evil in his heart.

In fact, Saul's life illustrates the steps toward ruin caused by unbelief:

1. Saul Became a Legalist

Of the Worst Kind.

After Saul sinned, his soul grew rigid and legalistic. And this legalistic spirit almost caused the death of his beloved son Jonathan.

Jonathan and his armor bearer had decided to mount a sneak attack on a Philistine garrison. The ambush caused such confusion in the Philistine camp that they began fighting among themselves and killing each other. The upheaval was so loud, "the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling" (1 Samuel 14:15).

When Saul saw the Philistines on the run, he launched an all-out attack. He ordered his troops to fight the whole day without stopping. By day's end, the Israelites were so weary they were ready to collapse. But Saul swore a foolish oath: If anyone stopped to eat before the battle ended, that man would be cursed.

Jonathan didn't know about the oath, because he was fighting in a remote area. So he took a brief rest from the skirmish. And as he did, he ate some honey from a beehive to refresh himself for battle.

That night, Saul's soldiers couldn't take any more. They rushed greedily upon the spoils they'd won and began roasting animals to eat them. Now, Jewish law stated that blood had to be drained from any animal before it could be eaten. So, when Saul saw this, he flew into a rage. He chided, "You people have no regard for God's law." "Ye have transgressed...the people sin against the Lord, in that they eat with blood"

(14:33).

Saul had become a legalist, appointing himself as God's holiness cop. No doubt, the priests on hand applauded him, saying, "Thank God, Saul is taking a stand for holiness." But, in fact, Saul was the biggest sinner on the scene. This man was wholly disobedient, walking in blatant unbelief. Yet he could declare without a second thought, "God help the hungry soldier who breaks one jot of the law by eating unbled meat."

That evening, Saul made another foolish decision: he decided his army would stay up all night to continue fighting. The priests protested, however, insisting they consult the Lord first. Yet when they prayed, God didn't answer. Now Saul was indignant again. He decided, "God isn't speaking because somebody has sinned. Who's guilty?" He stated, "As the Lord liveth...though it be Jonathan my son, he shall surely die" (14:39).

This kind of self-righteousness is found in all legalists. They don't trust God to give them his righteousness, so they try to invent their own. And they end up creating a system that discounts their own sin yet highlights the failures of others.

Saul decided to cast lots to find out who was in sin. The final lot came down to himself and Jonathan. Immediately, Saul turned on his son, saying, "I know I'm not in sin. It must be you." Jonathan admitted he'd eaten the honey but said he hadn't known about the oath. Yet Saul was on a moral crusade now, striving to look holy. If God hadn't intervened through the people, Saul would have killed his own son - all to prove his holy zeal.

In my opinion, unbelief is the root cause of all legalism. How? It refuses to accept God's covenant promises - that his Spirit will subdue our sins, empower us to obey, instill his fear in us, cause us to walk uprightly, give us a hatred for sin. When we depart from the truth of God's covenant, no longer trusting and waiting on him to do the work, we turn to legalism. We construct our own set of rigid rules devoid of the Spirit's power.

2. Saul Lost All

Spiritual Discernment.

Saul's unbelief seared his conscience, making him oblivious to sin. Suddenly, sin lost its "exceeding sinfulness" in this once-godly man's eyes.

We see an example of this when Samuel commanded Saul to wipe out the Amalekites. The prophet gave Saul pointed instructions to destroy everything concerning Amalek - their families, their livestock, everything. He was to spare nothing and no one.

Yet when the battle was over, Saul had kept King Agag as a living trophy. He also held back some of the spoils - the best of the Amalekites' livestock, clothing and possessions. Saul even had the audacity to set up a monument to himself, memorializing his victory. Once again, he showed a blatant disregard for God's word.

When Samuel arrived, he couldn't believe what he saw. The battlefield was like a giant flea market. People were trading livestock, trying on new clothes, barbecuing animals. Yet, most astounding of all, there stood King Agag in the midst of the scene.

Samuel marched up to Saul and demanded, "What's that bleating I hear, Saul?" Saul responded with a bald-faced lie: "Oh, the people spared a few livestock so they could make sacrifices to God for the great victory. But I've destroyed all the rest. I was faithful to carry out the Lord's command. What a great revival we're going to have."

Samuel wept aloud. He asked Saul, "Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?" (1 Samuel 15:19). Saul answered, "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites" (verse 20).

How could Saul be so blind? He lied in the face of clear evidence that he had disobeyed. Yet, tragically, Saul believed his own lie. He had lost all discernment.

Some Christians today are just like Saul. They indulge in every conceivable kind of disobedience, then go straight to church and pray, "Lord, I've given you my best. Here - accept my sacrifice of praise." These believers are like the woman described in Proverbs: "Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness" (Proverbs 30:20).

How do Christians fall to such a condition? It begins when they refuse to accept God's righteousness by faith. They try to establish their own righteousness by turning to legalism and judging others. They waver in faith, not waiting on God for direction - and they do things their way. Over time, they lose all discernment, and their consciences are seared completely. Finally, they become cavalier about their own sin.

According to scripture, this is where seeds of the occult take root. In God's eyes, disobedience to trust his word equals witchcraft. As Samuel told Saul in this scene: "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (15:23).

3. When Discernment Is Lost

And the Conscience Is Seared,

There Is No Defense Left

Against a Spirit of Jealousy.

"The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him" (1 Samuel 16:14). Now, God didn't literally send an evil spirit upon Saul. He simply allowed the inevitable to happen. You see, when a person who's run by unbelief gets to this point - turning to legalism, losing discernment and searing his conscience - he has no defense against invading spirits of jealousy and envy. And these twin spirits terrorize every soul they enter.

By this time, Saul was actually having demonic spasms, ranting and raving at everyone. His servants became so frightened, they called on David to play his harp and sing psalms to Saul, to try to soothe his spirit. Of course, David was a man who trusted in the Lord wholly - and his anointed music brought peace to Saul's soul.

The king was so grateful, he made David a captain in his army. But when David showed courage and skill in battle, Saul grew insanely jealous of him. Jealousy turns believers into hideous creatures. Anyone who

doesn't trust God won't trust others, either. And jealous people accuse others of the sins most evident in themselves. Moreover, they perceive themselves as victims. They're convinced others are always jealous of them, constantly talking about them, continually persecuting them. Jealousy isn't simply a stage people go through - it's a spirit from hell. It robs godly people of all heavenly purpose. And it causes them to focus on their own small, fleshly battles.

Do you wonder where your jealous spirit came from? I urge you to look back on your times of testing, and ask yourself how you reacted. Did you commit to trust God, no matter what? Or did you harbor the thought that God didn't show up on time for you?

Consider the tragic end of Saul's unbelieving soul. His last consultation before facing eternity was with a witch. Listen to his sad final words: "God is departed from me, and answereth me no more" (28:15).

Yet there is good news for every believer in this New Covenant age. Christ paid the penalty for our rebellion. (Of course, God's mercy and forgiveness were available to Saul. But his heart remained stubborn - and a stubborn heart never desires mercy.)

Jesus came to break the spell of the witchcraft of unbelief - to break our chains of legalism and deliver us from the shackles of jealousy. But first we must admit our sin. We have to confess our unbelief - and then cast our future, freedom and deliverance wholly into Jesus' care. He will arrive on time. Our part is to do nothing - but trust him.

We have to realize we are being tested. And God assures us that all who hold to faith and believe in him, no matter how hopeless the situation seems, will be honored. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

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