

Obedience, motives (1 Sam. 15)

Part 1

Speaker	Jeff Brett
Duration	00:45:13
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/jb038/obedience-motives-1-sam-15

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[00:00:00] I wish to read several scriptures, all very brief. First one in the first book of Samuel, chapter 15, verse 22.

And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Chapter 16, verse 7.

And the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him.

[00:01:03] For the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

Now in Psalm 40, verse 6.

Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire, mine ears hast thou opened.

Burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come.

In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart.

Now in Matthew 12, verse 1.

At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn, and his disciples were unhungered, [00:02:08] and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did when he was unhungered, and they that were with him? How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests. Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? But I say

unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple. [00:03:05] But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would have not condemned the guiltless.

For the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath day. Mark chapter 12, Mark 12 verse 41, And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury, and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury. [00:04:04] For all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

First of Corinthians 12, the last verse of the chapter, verse 31, But covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or as a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I [00:05:03] am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Finally, Revelations chapter 2, verse 1.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil.

And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars, and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast [00:06:01] not fainted.

Nevertheless, I have against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

I believe the very first thing that God looks for in our hearts, and in our lives, is obedience.

I want to bring before you the thought of the motives that we have for whatever we may do, whatever we may say, whatever we may hold, and I would that the blessed God would [00:07:10] search our hearts as to whether the motive is true.

You may have seen from the scriptures that one have read, that behind all the services, the ordinances of the Old Testament, sacrifices, offerings, keeping the Sabbath day, or coming to our present day, gifts, material gifts, labors, service, preaching, name what you will, they all count as nothing if the motive is wrong.

[00:08:09] Why do we hold what we do hold?

What is the motive?

What is the governing principle in our lives?

One was very much arrested, several years ago, by the severity of the Lord's words to the church of Ephesus.

All that he could take account of, that was creditable, he does so, works, labors, patience, endurance, brethren we fall very far short of it. But he says, I have against thee, thou hast left thy first love, and despite all that [00:09:03] he could take account of, that was marking that assembly, he says, unless thou repent, I will come and remove the candlestick.

Was the service not valuable?

Was the labor not profitable?

Would the Lord cast it all aside and remove the testimony of the candlestick? Unless they repented, a serious consideration, thou hast left thy first love.

What was the motive behind the labor, the service, the endurance?

How do we stand in the light of such scripture?

[00:10:02] I went to the Old Testament. The book of Samuel is a wonderful outlining or developing for our learning of the ways of God.

Divine principles are there, enacted before us.

Very early on in scripture, despite the fact that God instituted a service of sacrifice, that we know were shadows and pictures, nonetheless it was a divinely ordered service. And yet there was something behind it that was of greater value than all the sacrifices, all the gifts, and all the service. It is the heart that responds to God.

You remember in regard to the offering up of Isaac, you remember that when Abraham stretched [00:11:07] forth his hand to slay his son, in an explicit obedience to a direct request of God, God stayed his hand.

He said, now I know that thou fearest God. There was something more valuable to the heart of God in what Abraham did, when he would go so far as to slay his son, than the very act of killing his son as a sacrifice.

The heart that trembled at God's word, and would take his word and obey, cost what it might.

God secured the obedience of Abraham, and the sacrifice was passed over, so to speak. [00:12:04] We come on to the portion that I read in 1 Samuel, where the prophet there admonishes Saul for his disobedience.

And there is laid out for us this statement of Scripture, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

With men, because we cannot look into one another's minds, and because we cannot see into one another's hearts, of necessity we judge on outward appearance.

And Samuel is told this as he looked upon that fine man that stood before him in chapter [00:13:01] 16. He surveyed his stature, his appearance, and the Spirit of God says to him, look not upon his stature, man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart.

You know in one of the Psalms, David says, try my reins, know my heart, and prove me.

I believe we might say that the rather peculiar references to this thought of reins in the Psalms, may one suggest that it could be the motives that govern me, in everything that I say or do.

David sought that he might be searched of Jehovah, in order that there might be an assurance within him that his motives were true, were pure, according to the will of God.

[00:14:11] How wonderfully, you know, this principle is demonstrated for us perfectly in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I read those few verses in Psalm 40.

You know, everything for us, and for God, has been secured by the obedience of Christ. As by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners. So by the obedience of one, one act of explicit obedience to the will of God.

He says coming into this world, lo I come to do thy will. [00:15:05] Above this he said, sacrifice and offering, thou wouldest not, there was something greater value than that in the sight of God. They were but pictures and shadows.

There was the obedience of Christ.

And what an obedience his was.

He became obedient unto death. I take it that means that, that was the extent to which his obedience would go. It would go as far as death. No man can go further, but scripture adds something further in regard to him, even.

The death of the cross. We cannot measure that.

[00:16:06] Scripture says for a good man, some will dare to die. Faithfulness and full your love to a fellow can lead a man to go as far as giving himself to die for somebody else.

The obedience of Christ to the will of God was this, that it took him to the death of the cross.

He was there to submit himself fully to the will of God. His final act as a man in this world was to bow his head.

How moving is the consideration as we read those scriptures. After having said, it is finished, there was a complete committal in his life to what [00:17:02] was the will of God for him, and he finished it completely. I have glorified thee on the earth. I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do. And it involved for him that he should die.

No man taketh my life from me.

It was a completely voluntary action with him that he lay down his life. He need not have done.

He said in the garden, if it be possible, remove this cup from me, but not my will, thine be done.

There was something that to God was of the highest value, the obedience of Christ.

And he gives himself, and there on the cross, so to speak, one final act, one final exhibition [00:18:10] of the completeness of his submission to the will of God, it says he bowed his head. He need not have done, but he did.

His submission to the will of God was absolute and complete. He bowed his head.

He gave up the ghost.

And upon that one act of complete and final submission to the will of God, the whole glory of God throughout an eternal age of bliss has been secured. God looks for obedience in you and I.

Remember beloved brethren that that oft-repeated second of Philipians is an exhortation. [00:19:04] It's not a doctrine, although doctrine is involved. It's an exhortation. Let this mind, let this motive, should we say, be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

I move on to Matthew 12.

Only by way of illustration, you may not see the connection.

The incident is well known on the Sabbath day. The Lord with his disciples moved through the corn and they plucked the ears and rubbed it in their hands.

An action and a thing that is queried by law keepers, Pharisees, and they approached the [00:20:08] Lord about this.

Why do thy disciples do that which is not lawful upon the Sabbath day? They were those that were concerned with outward appearances.

How often in Matthew's gospel that divine watcher takes account of them.

And with withering voice in condemnation he says to them, woe unto you scribes, hypocrites he called them, men who were concerned with that which was outward, had no concern as to what was inward, that which God counted valuable. Only concerned with that which was outward, that which men count as valuable. [00:21:07] And here they were again, zealous for the Sabbath. Was it not a divine commandment, thou shalt do no servile work on the Sabbath? Ah, but the Lord of the Sabbath was there.

There is behind the commandment something greater than the commandment itself. The one who gave the commandment.

And so the Lord's quotes to them. Two occasions in the Old Testament when it appears the law is broken. He cites David, what he did when he wasn't hungry, how he entered into the house of God and did eat the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor those that were with him, but for the priests only.

[00:22:01] Why was it permissible for David to eat the showbread? Was he right, was he wrong?

Well I cannot go into that, but I see in this.

The ark in the days of Saul was not inquired of.

The Lord's anointed was rejected, he was fleeing for his life. What value then has outward ceremony, when all that is within is wrong according to God?

What value had the showbread, which speaks of God's people sustained here for the glory of God as a company?

What value had that showbread in the sight of God, I'm speaking of it in that day, not of that which it spoke of in its perfection. What value had that table of showbread in the sight of God, when inwardly the people [00:23:05] of God were all wrong?

Then the king was going absolutely adverse to the word of God, and had rejected God, and the true anointed of God was fleeing for his life.

The Lord again, he quotes another incidence, how that the priests on the Sabbath day profaned the Sabbath.

I presume, although I have never heard any other brother comment on this, and if any other brother has any thought, one would value it. I presume that the Lord is referring to the servile work that was required by the priests to carry out the morning and evening sacrifice. It had to be done on the Sabbath day. And yet they were blameless.

[00:24:04] Why? Because behind the commandment that gave the ordinance of those sacrifices was one that was superior, obedience to the will of God.

Service counts as nothing if the motive is wrong.

God looks on the heart.

What value had the keeping of the Sabbath when the Lord was there, when the Lord of the Sabbath was rejected?

The Feast of Jehovah in John's Gospel had become the Feast of the Jews. God was not in them.

When the Sabbath was reintroduced, I believe it was an outward manifestation of God's covenant [00:25:03] with his people.

They were his peculiar treasure. What value had the outward keeping of the Sabbath when the Lord

of the Sabbath was there in his own person and he was rejected, cast out, soon to be crucified? The whole ordinance in the sight of God lost its value because the hearts that kept the Sabbath were away from God.

The motive was wrong. The motive was wrong.

If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. There is something greater than sacrifice. There is something greater than ordinances. There is something greater than services. There is something greater than brethrenism, faithfulness, and obedience to the word of [00:26:06] God and his will.

You know, I believe it was Mr. McIntosh who said something like these words, Affection for Jesus is the only motive for Christian service.

Why do we meet as we do, brethren? Why do we hold scripture as we do? Why do we seek to maintain what we know to be right? Is it because the brethren did it of old?

Is it because we have a name to maintain? It won't last.

It has little value Godward.

Is it out of obedience to the will of God and affection for the Lord?

[00:27:05] If it is, the Lord will sustain us to the end. He will.

But he will only sustain that which is prompted and carried out by true motive.

God give us grace to weigh these things in his presence. Are we what we are because of faithfulness to Christ and of devotion to his will?

And if it is, beloved brethren, it has to go the whole way, there's no half measures. All the wealth of divine truth that we have, all the men of God that have ministered to us the truth of God, all the legacy of divine ministry that's available to us on our bookshelves, [00:28:01] do we hold it in relation to the will of God that has seen fit to leave these things with us, to maintain them?

Are they valuable? What is the will of God concerning us in this, the end of the church's history? Is it tradition?

Is it obedience to the word of God, faithfulness to the name of Christ? If it is, have no fear brethren, the Lord will sustain us to the end.

The son of man is Lord, even of the Sabbath.

What a mistake they made. Now everything that those pharisaical minds counted as valuable fell to pieces. Soon it was to come under the judgment of God, behold these stones, the disciples said. [00:29:03] The vial of that temple was soon to be split down the middle, and that did away with everything. There was one there that was greater than it all, and they didn't know him. They cast him out and crucified him. Is the Lord in our midst?

Is everything that we do and say and hold governed by faithfulness to him?

I move on to Mark chapter 12.

You probably see the connection.

Jesus sat over against the treasury and beheld, how, how?

[00:30:01] Not what. Oh yes, he could see what went into the box. He knew.

They that were rich cast in much, he gave them credit for that. He knew how much went in the box, yes he knew the widow cast in two mites. But he was not concerned with the amount, no.

He looked into the heart that gave it, and he looked into the heart of a woman that put in two mites.

And he said, she's put in more than they all. Now how do you work that out?

Well you can't if you work things according to man's mind, it's not possible that a woman that cast in two mites cast in more than the rich that cast in much. [00:31:01] But that's man's way of reckoning, who only takes account of what is outward. I no doubt the one who was in control of the treasury that day, when he emptied that treasury would take account of the gold and the silver, he probably threw away those two mites. Perhaps we shouldn't put into scripture suppositions, but in the sight of God those two mites were more valuable than all the rest.

You know, beloved brethren, the feeblest, simplest service done in faithfulness to Christ is of tremendous value in the sight of God.

You know, and thank God for it, because some of us don't do much, you know. But how thankful we are to God that the simplest act done in obedience and faithfulness and [00:32:01] devotion to Christ is of great value in his sight. Some may give millions, and the motive may be wrong. I'm not saying that it doesn't do good, but in the sight of God, little can be very much. I believe the Romans had a word for it, multum in parvo, or something or other, much in little. He beheld how they cast into the treasury a divine watcher that sat down and looked and weighed motives, and he's with us today.

He moves with us.

He takes account of every movement of our hearts, everything that we say, everything [00:33:03] that we do.

And in his sight, he weighs, weighs the motive that prompts the action of the service.

I'm nearly finished, I haven't much else to say. We can see how this works out in the individual life. This is why I read 1 Corinthians 12 and part of 13.

You may see that one is trying to centralize the point and bringing it right down to ourselves. Here we have the individual, a Christian, you, me.

The apostle says, covered earnestly, the best gifts. Yes, there are things that God takes account of

as being superlative in regard to gift [00:34:06] in the assembly, but he says, there is something greater than gift, there's a more excellent way, way.

And that to me again is this little thought of motive.

What's the good of the gift, beloved brethren, if it's not submitted to the will of God?

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, you know that which is outward, that which is sensational, in Christianity round about us at this moment, is full of [00:35:07] what is sensational, tongues.

Things that attract the eye and the ears, many are carried away with it.

And I have not love, as keep to the word we understand, love. Is the motive in the using of it love? Love for God, that involves faithfulness, because if I love God, I will be faithful to God.

If any man love me, let him keep my commandments. True love is the core of faithfulness.

If I love God truly with all my heart, with all my mind, and with all my understanding, [00:36:01] I will be true in my motives to men, because everything will be governed in relationship to God.

I am become a sounding brass or tinkling of cymbal. Things that make a lot of noise, things that are all outward, and yet in themselves, when the vibration is gone, there's nothing left at all. Why? The motive was wrong.

So I have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries, brethren, we have much. We have a tremendous accumulation in our meetings of a right and a true understanding of divine truth, but that is not enough to keep us.

There must be a heart that bows to the will of God behind it all. [00:37:05] Outward manifestations of what is right and proper according to the mind of God is of no value, lest the heart be true that prompts the service.

Understand all mysteries and all knowledge, though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I am nothing, and so God takes account of me.

Beloved brethren, this is searching, isn't it?

Am I nothing in the sight of God?

I may be much in the sight of my brethren.

It's what I am in the sight of God that counts, and it's that which will receive its reward in a coming day.

[00:38:05] Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, it might affect something.

Notice there's a change in this verse. The first verse says, I am nothing. The end of verse three says, it profiteth me, nothing.

The giving away of all that I have will benefit some.

The giving of my body to be burned may affect some, but at the judgment seat of Christ it might profit me nothing.

Faithfulness to the word of God, devotion to the will of God, love for Christ, the true [00:39:06] motive and the simplest service, the simplest act, profits a great deal in the sight of God. A cup of cold water given in my name, my name, that's the motive.

It shall receive its reward. Now I come to the last one, the assembly aspect.

I've already touched on this.

This brings it right home to ourselves. I trust as a company, gathered out to the Lord's name, seeking to maintain the truth of God.

[00:40:01] There is one who walks in the midst, one who is competent to sustain everything according to the will of God. He holds the seven stars in his right hand.

Divine competence to sustain you and I as saints of God, called out to the truth of God in this world to the end.

There is in himself all that we need.

But he walks in the midst.

You know, in exactly that same manner that he sat down by the treasury and beheld Howe. Brethren, as we gather together, as we're here tonight, God is taking account of the heart.

The motive says why I am here. When we gather on the morrow, why do we do it?

[00:41:06] Well there's something very simple to that. This do in remembrance of me.

There's only one thing that will lead me to remember the Lord in his death, it's love for himself.

Every other motive goes by the board. Love for himself.

And that I hear say, I believe in the sight of God, is of great value. Love for himself.

But he takes account of much in this assembly. And thanks be unto God, there is much that we can take account of in the midst of our gathered out assemblies that I believe is creditable. There is much that causes us sorrow. And he walks in the midst, a divine watcher.

[00:42:05] And he looks at the heart.

He doesn't overlook all the rest. He didn't at Ephesus. Think how meticulously he went down the list of what he could take account and give credit to that assembly for.

Works, labor, patience.

They wouldn't bear evil. They tried impostors.

They bore things. They had patience.

They labored for his name's sake. And they didn't faint. They didn't give up. Nevertheless, I have against thee. Leave out the somewhat. He had something against that assembly.

And I suggest that all that he took account of lost its value in the sight of God if it [00:43:07] was not prompted by love for himself.

Thou hast left thy first love.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent. I thought that was what we had to do when we were converted. Brethren, do we know what it is to repent, to get before God, take account of the breakdown, the failure? Oh, you say, that's the work of old brethren. No my young brother, it's the work of every one of us. We have our part and our lot. Every one of us that are in fellowship in regard to the breakdown. [00:44:03] God looks at my heart in regard to how I am affected inwardly by that which is not according to the mind of God.

And he looks to me that there might be a turning to him in repentance, a going out to him in devotion and faithfulness to him and his word. If a man love me, he will keep my commandments. And I say again, he will sustain that which is true and that which is the product of a right motive in the sight of God. He will sustain it until the end. He walks in the midst and he holds the seven stars in his hand. Ours is a faithful God. Ours is a holy God.

Ours is a righteous God.

God give us grace to bow in submission to him, that we might prove what is that good [00:45:01] and that acceptable will of God, glorify him in our lives, in our homes, in our gatherings together, until he come for his name's sake.