The Delight of Duty

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang. Thank you for joining us.

If I had to choose in this moment a verse that would go on my tombstone, a life verse, so to speak, it would be Ecclesiastes 12, 13. That's not where we're turning today.
But it says this, the end of the matter, all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.
This is the second to last verse in Ecclesiastes. The author had taken a look at his life and was pondering the meaning of life. What is the purpose? Why are we here? What are we called to do? And this was his conclusion.
Fearing God with obedience is the whole duty of man. Obedience is a word lost on many today, especially in an age where individualism reigns.
[1:30] The only thing that you are called to be accountable for and obedient to are your deepest desires and your longings, often at the expense of any self-sacrificial consideration of others, and most certainly in opposition to God's commanded word that he has given to us.

Of course, we're not talking about a blind obedience or forced submission. This is obedience that is most joyfully lived out when we have a reason to trust the one that we are submitting to.
It is joyfully lived out when we trust that the requests being made of us are actually for our greatest good, difficult as they may be.
The old hymn that some of you may know says it this way, Trust and obey, for there's no other way to what?
Be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. I think the hymn writer got it right. This is joyful obedience.
[2:42] If we expect to live a life that flourishes in the way that God has designed for us to live, we must joyfully submit our lives to the boundaries that he has set for us in his word.

Some view boundaries as something to be scoffed at, or to be crossed, or to be ignored, or to be moved. But boundaries are actually what allow us to thrive.
Take one drive down Mustang Road at 5 p.m. You will be grateful for the boundaries of the law of this people coming south at 55 miles an hour will not cross three feet over that double-striped line to the people that are going 55 miles an hour north on Mustang Road.
There are boundaries that are meant to help things flow and to be kept in order. If you've ever played a pickup game of basketball, Joey, and you are called to follow these unwritten rules of etiquette.
And when those begin to be crossed, everything falls apart, disintegrates. Boundaries and rules are meant to help us flourish. And so when a believer is being disobedient to God's boundaries, it is a matter of grave concern.
[4:04] If you've ever done blood work to check for underlying health concerns, and you scan your blood work, and something is elevated that's not supposed to be, in the same way, the presence of disobedience is like a lab result that should cause us to pause, should cause us to address the fact that something underneath the surface is wrong.

Something is going on internally in the heart of the believer when disobedience is present. I want to say from the get-go, in case I forget to say it again, of course, we are going to always make mistakes.
As believers, we will never be perfect. That's not what I'm preaching about today. But we are called to pursue obedience in our lives. And so we're going to be looking at a moment in the life of Saul where his partial obedience, aka his disobedience, had disastrous effects.

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They were far-reaching, far beyond the life of Saul. So if you haven't turned there already, make sure you find 1 Samuel 15 over the next minute or so, and I will do my best to catch you up where we are in the history of the life of Israel at this point.
Israel had been delivered from the Egyptians by the hand of God, releasing them from Pharaoh into the promised land where they were supposed to be faithful to God and keep his covenant commands.
[5:34] And the book of Judges shows us how Israel just failed at this miserably. It was filled with chaos, and it proved that they needed faithful and wise leaders.

And so God sent them judges to lead them in righteous living and even under the rule of the judges, things descended into chaos. They continued to turn away from the Lord.
In that process, the people of Israel eventually wanted and desired a king to rule over them like the nations that were surrounding them and hopefully in their minds bring stability to this chaotic living situation.
And so we are introduced to Samuel. He's the final judge, the first prophet of Israel, and we are introduced to Saul, the first king of Israel. And so as 1 Samuel begins, Israel was at a low point spiritually.
The priesthood was corrupt. The Ark of the Covenant was not. The tabernacle idolatry was practiced, and the judges were dishonest. And we're soon gonna find out Saul also had deep character flaws.
[6:38] It doesn't take long for Saul to disqualify himself by completely disobeying God's commands. And so we're gonna look at chapter 15. I'm gonna do a little bit of skipping around as we go through it and hopefully give you a full picture of what it says here in chapter 15.

So the first three verses, and Samuel said to Saul, the Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel. Now therefore listen to the words of the Lord.
Thus says the Lord of hosts, I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. So stop right there.
The Amalekites had unrelenting brutality towards the Israelites, and it began with an attack in Rephidim. And this is recounted in Deuteronomy 25, verse 17 to 19, with this admonition.
I'll read it for you. Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came up out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary and cut off from your tail those who were lagging behind you, who were likely the women and the children, and he did not fear God.
[7:54] Therefore, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.

You shall not forget. That was the word of warning from the Lord. Okay? So we see that. I've noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them.
The Amalekites later joined with the Canaanites and attacked the Israelites and Horma and Judges. They banded with the Moabites and the Midianites to wage war on the Israelites.
They were responsible for repeated destruction of the Israelites, their land and their food. And in the timing of the Lord, the day has come for Amalek's long-awaited judgment at the hand of King Saul. This is King Saul's responsibility. The verse goes on. It says, now go, in verse three, and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have.
[9:02] Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey. So I'm gonna pause right there. In God's perfect and holy judgment, the God of the universe who does no wrong, he always does what is right, has said that everything belonging to the Amalekites must perish.

It's a form of judgment, difficult as it may be to read. So Saul gathers his troops. He makes a plan. Let's skip down to verse seven.
And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. He took Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive, and he devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword, but Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs and all that was good and would not utterly destroy them.
All that was despised and worthless, they devoted to destruction. Follow down with me in verse 13.
Samuel comes to Saul and he said to him, blessed be you to the Lord.

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This is Saul speaking. I have performed the commandment of the Lord. The reader is like, no, you didn't. Verse 14, I love this response.
[10:37] Samuel said, what then is the bleeding of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear? As a reminder, those were supposed to be destroyed and Saul said, they have brought them from the Amalekites for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God.

See, I'm doing this great thing and the rest we have devoted to destruction. So today, I want us to take a few lessons on obedience from the life of Saul.
Okay? A few lessons on obedience from the life of Saul. The first one that I want us to make note of is take heed when the Lord speaks. Take heed when the Lord speaks.
The chapter starts with listen to the words of the Lord. That sets the tone. This idea of listen is to hear intelligently, often with the implication of attention for obedience.
If you've ever been a parent and you've looked in the eyes of your child and says, I want you to listen to me very carefully. You know what I'm talking about.
[11:46] That's God speaking in this moment. Listen to the words of the Lord. It wasn't that the Lord's instructions were unclear. They were very clear. It wasn't that Saul wasn't listening and only heard partial instructions as my kids sometimes claim.

He heard those instructions. Saul simply did not take the word of the Lord seriously. And hasn't this been the problem with man since the very beginning in the garden, Eve?
Even in the garden it wasn't that God's instructions were unclear. It wasn't that Adam and Eve were unaware of the command. Rather, they did not heed the word of the Lord. And how possible it is for us to have the word of God at our disposal but not take heed of its warnings.
God warns us what will happen when we'd rather do anything else than invest in the spiritual disciplines in our life and we're surprised when our spiritual lives start to unravel and fall apart because of apathy and idolatry.
God warns us what will happen when we allow the sin of anger to go unconfessed and it taints our hearts with bitterness and destroys friendships in the process. God warns us what will happen if men don't cherish their wives as Christ loves and cherishes the church and their marriages suffer in the process.
[13:05] God warns us what will happen if we don't guard our tongues and we let harsh words fly out of our mouths. God warns us what will happen if we don't protect our eyes from lust.

He warns us he warns us and he warns us time and time again. It's not that his word is unclear. It's not that we don't see and hear these warnings.
It's that we too often don't take seriously the word of God as it should be applied in the life of the believer. And if we don't take the word of the Lord seriously perhaps it's because we think our way is better than his.
It's something we repeatedly say to our children when we're disciplining them. We're saying you thought that your way was better than ours. Our instruction to you was very clear. You chose something else.
You thought your way was better than ours. And that is exactly what we do to the Lord when we disobey. Perhaps it's because we have too light of a view of sin and its consequences.
[14:11] We don't take sin seriously enough. We don't think that that sin that we're engaging in is that big of a deal. We don't think that when we let our tongues be a little loose around our friends that it dishonors the Lord all that much.

Perhaps it's because we have too low of a view of God. and his holiness. We don't take God seriously enough.
We've made him too much like us. We've made him too much of a buddy, a bro, a friend, a homeboy, whatever you want to put on the t-shirt. That's probably not who God has described himself as being in the Bible.
God is holy, righteous, and above anything that is on this earth. We don't take the word of God seriously.
Psalm 81, verse 10 through 13 says this, I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.
[15:15] Listen to this. It says, my people did not listen to my voice. Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, very reminiscent of Romans 1, to follow their own

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counsels.

Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways. Oh, that they would listen to me. God giving us over to our stubborn hearts to follow our own counsels is a very terrible condition for us to be placed in.
It's a form of judgment, and we've seen what happens when we follow our own counsels. Scripture tells it for us. We go astray, everyone to his own way. We go the way that seems right to us, but in the end it leads to death.
This is why we just sang, your words are wonderful. A wellspring and the rock we rest upon, we trust your promises that keep our hope alive.
They steady us through life's weary climb. Where else can we go? You have the words of life, the words of life, and we would do well to listen when the Lord speaks.
[16:28] So we take heed when the Lord speaks. Second lesson we can learn in obedience from the life of Saul is to obey him without compromise.

Obey him without compromise. Saul's failure to carry out the Lord's orders, signals something deeper than just mere failure.
It says in verse 10 of chapter 15, I'm looking at verse 10 and it doesn't say that. It's verse 11.
I regret that I've made Saul king for he has turned back from following me. He has not performed my commandments. He has turned back from following me.
It's more than just a failure to execute God's wishes. It reveals deliberate disobedience. And Samuel first points out that obedience to God involves keeping his actual commands.
[17:35] The first thing that the Lord says after this event, I regret that I've made Saul king, meaning I'm grieved over his sinful actions, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.

And the first thing that Saul says when Samuel arrives is in verse 13, blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord.
And Samuel replies, then why do I hear sheep and oxen? Just the mere presence of those sounds has shown me that you have not obeyed the commandment of the Lord.
And he goes on to say in verse 18, and verse 19, the Lord sent you on a mission and said, go devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed. Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord? Samuel makes it very clear here, this partial, half-baked obedience is no obedience at all.
[18:43] partial obedience is disobedience. And in fact, Samuel says it was evil in the sight of the Lord. Saul was trying to justify himself and say, I did what you asked me to do.

I didn't do it all, but I did what you asked me to do. And Samuel says, no, you did not do it to its fullest extent. And that in and of itself is disobedience and that in and of itself is evil.
Saul's fundamental error is extremely common today. Christians will declare themselves obedient to God in the number of matters which, when in fact their conduct does not line up with the teachings of the Bible.
To use the fruit of the Spirit as an example, you will find people who claim the name of Christ but are not loving to the lost world around them. They have no joy. They are not peaceful in their interactions online.
They are not patient with their spouse and kids. They are not kind to their coworkers. They are not good in their private life. They are not faithful to attend worship regularly nor serve the body of Christ and are not gentle with those on the opposite side of the political aisle and they exhibit zero self-control.
[20:01] And I recognize that many of us are here, like, John, I'm trying to do my best. Trying to be obedient and I just want to remind us, for all of us, a word of warning. We can't pick and choose what parts of God's Word we want to obey.

It doesn't take long for you to look around and see how that plays itself out in our world today. It doesn't take long to see that we often do this ourselves. Some commandments of the Lord are easier for us to obey than others and that can sometimes just be made up on your temperament as a person.
You may find it easy to confront somebody in their sin and you may find it difficult to extend grace when they show repentance and ask for forgiveness. Profanity may be repulsive to you.

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You may never speak a profane word, but gossiping about your co-worker might be hard to control. Infidelity in marriage may not be something that ever crosses your mind, but you disrespect your husband with your words on a daily basis.
We can't pick and choose based off of which ones are easy or difficult for us to follow. So we've got to take heed when the Lord speaks. We have to listen.
[21:18] We have to obey without compromise. We can't compromise at all. Number three, third lesson. Any sacrifice without obedience misses the mark.

Any sacrifice that you make without obedience misses the mark. Mark. So continue on with me in this account in verse 20.
Saul doesn't relent. He continues, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. Remember Samuel just said, why then do I hear the sheep and the oxen?
Why did you do this? Why did you do what was evil on the side of the Lord? He says, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. And the reader is just face palming at this moment.
He says, I've gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. He proceeds to talk about sparing Agag, the king of Amalek, and then blames it on the people that they are the ones who took the spoil and he held back the best sacrifice to the Lord, posing it as if they did something good.
[22:32] So here are the words of Samuel in verse 22. Samuel said, has 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 listen than the fat of rams for rebellion is as the sin of divination and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king. If you're going into first through fifth grades, I just want you to look up here at me for just a moment.
As you do, you can observe how much I'm struggling with this microphone. I'll do my best to get this thing secured. In less than a month, first through fifth graders, you're going to be starting school. I'm sorry. I know that's bad news for many of you. Most of you will be going back to school and when you do, Awana will start back up. Hooray. We love Awana. Hundreds of you will memorize dozens of verses and while that is a great and good thing, it will not matter unless you are keeping Christ's commandments.
[24:02] Men of the Institute, you're in a summer seminar series right now. You're about to go into your normal rotation of classes in the fall semester. You're going to learn incredibly valuable information, but it will not matter unless you're keeping Christ's commandments.

Ladies in the room, next month, there's Ladies Night of Theology. You will join what is, you'll be one of close to 500 ladies in this room. You'll be taught the deep truths of God's word and it will not matter unless you are keeping Christ's commandments.
Your dGroups, Bible studies, conference attendance, mission trip participation, Spotify podcast listening will not matter. David's famous confession in Psalm 51 includes these two verses, Psalm 51, verse 16 and 17.
For you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it. You will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.
A broken and contrite heart, oh God, you will not despise. Jesus speaking in Matthew 15, verses 6-9 says, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God.
[25:25] Made void meaning deprived of force and authority. You've invalidated it. You hypocrites, he says. Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. These are just reminders that obedience is the only thing that truly pleases the Lord.
One commentator said, all the smoke and fat on Gilgal's altar would never replace the pleasure God would have had from the living sacrifice of Saul's will.
What he desires most is obedience. Sacrifice without obedience completely misses the mark. I'm going to switch Jeff to pulpit. Thank you.
There remains doubt as to the sincerity of Saul's repentance. One clue is that neither Samuel nor the Lord seemed to accept it as genuine.
[26:30] Augustine commented, while to the human ear the words were the same, the divine eye saw a difference in the heart. Saul's confession in scripture receives neither praise nor forgiveness.

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But he does have a very self-aware statement in verse 24. If you look with me there, it says, I feared the people and I obeyed their voice. And this is important.
Because that is precisely the opposite of what God's kings were supposed to do. It says, I feared the people and I obeyed their voice. If you go back just a couple of chapters in 1 Samuel, you can turn to chapter 12, verse 13 to 15.
It says this, Samuel speaking to the people after they requested a king. The era of the judges was coming to a close and he says, and now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked. Behold, the Lord has set a king over you.
If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well.
[27:43] But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.

So here we are three chapters later. Saul was to fear the Lord, chapter 12, verse 14, but he feared the people, chapter 15, verse 24. Saul was to obey his voice, chapter 12, verse 14, but he obeyed their voice, chapter 15.
And in dramatic fashion, Samuel informed Saul that the consequences of his sin would result in the removal of the kingdom from him. You can continue with me in chapter 15, verse 26. Samuel said to Saul, I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.
As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe and it tore, and Samuel said to him, the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has been given to a neighbor of yours who is better than you.
And in dramatic fashion after that, he brings Agag before him and Samuel finishes the job with Agag and a sword to do what Saul was meant and asked to do by the Lord.
[29:03] And this begins the tragic decline of Saul and the rise of David. So it's a dramatic scene, but it had grave consequences.

He didn't do what the Lord asked him to do. He didn't take God's word seriously. He disobeyed. He didn't obey without compromise. And I want us to fourthly see that disobedience has far-reaching consequences.
Disobedience has far-reaching consequences. Disobedience has far-reaching consequences. We learn by the testimony of scripture that it wasn't just Agag that was spared.
We know this to be true that several Amalekites had to escape. He didn't do what he was asked. And those escaped Amalekites continued to harass and plunder the Israelites for the next several hundred years.
First Samuel 30 reports an Amalekite raid on Ziklag, a Judean village where David held property. They burned the village, took captive all the women and children, including two of David's wives.
[30:24] David and his men defeated the Amalekites and rescued all the hostages. However, a few hundred Amalekites escaped. And the last mention of the Amalekites is found in the book of Esther.

And I'm going to ask that you turn with me there because I think it's important. To find Esther, turn to chapter 3.
Chapter 3, verse 1.
After these things, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the Agagite, the son of Hamadatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him.
Did you catch it? The king promoted Haman, the Agagite. He's a direct descendant of King Agag. The descendants who were supposed to be eradicated from the face of the earth as a divine act of judgment are still around.
[31:46] Here, Haman, a descendant of King Agag, schemes and plots with murderous intent to have all of the Jews in Persia annihilated by order of King Xerxes.

And God saved the Jews in Persia, thankfully, and Haman was destroyed. But it's worth noting that the near annihilation of a people group was all because one man refused to obey the voice of the Lord.
Asaph in Psalm 73 is looking around at unbelievers and he's starting to envy their life. He's starting to envy the fact that they seem to live their lives without any consequence.

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They get what they want. They get to do what they want without any judgment seemingly from the Lord. And he's beginning to doubt if he should even pursue the Lord anymore. Thankfully, he has a change of heart, goes into the temple of the Lord.
Everything is made clear for him. And he comes out with a renewed conviction to pursue the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength. But he says something very interesting. Psalm 73 verse 3, he says, I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
[33:05] But verse 15, he says, If I had said I will speak thus, meaning if I had said I'm going to talk about this, I'm going to pursue this line of thinking that it's just better to live the way of the world.

He says, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. Meaning that if I had walked away from the Lord, my disobedience would have betrayed a future generation who would have followed suit.
And it would have been a direct consequence from my personal disobedience. It's a reminder for us that our disobedience may have consequences that we would never be aware of.
We can never truly imagine. So I want to end where we began this morning. Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verse 13, The end of the matter all has been heard.
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. There's another quote, an extra biblical quote, that I often go back to in life.
[34:16] If you've been around me long enough, you've heard me talk about it. It's a quote from John Newton who wrote the lyrics for Amazing Grace. And he gives us this little anecdote to prove a point.

He says, of two angels to receive at the same moment a commission from God. One to go down and rule earth's greatest empire.
The other to go and sweep the streets of its meanest village. It would be a matter of entire indifference to each which service fell to his lot, the post of ruler or the post of scavenger.
For the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will. It doesn't matter. You asked me to go sweep the streets of its meanest village.
I'm going to do that because my joy is found in obeying the king and not in my assignment. You asked me to go rule the greatest empire.
[35:22] I'm going to do that because my joy is found in obedience to you. And so my encouragement to you today, wherever you may find yourself in this stage of your life, let your joy be found in obedience.

God may be asking you and leading you through a very difficult circumstance. And you say, let my obedience be what marks me in this season.
Let me find joy in obeying the Lord because where else can we go? You've got a diagnosis. Where else do you plan to go but to the Lord? We have to run to the Lord in those moments and we find joy in obeying him in our worst circumstance.
Your marriage is falling apart. Are you going to run away from the Lord? No, you're going to pursue the Lord. You're going to be as obedient as you possibly can in that moment because your joy is found in obeying him.
Joy is found in following his commandments. That's why we read Psalm 119 earlier. It's a delight to follow him because his commandments are for our greatest good.
[36:30] Let me pray for us. Lord, as we sang earlier, help us cling to your commandments, strengthened by your faithful word.

You said in your word that we read together as a congregation that for those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord, who keep your testimonies, who seek you with our whole heart, we'll be blessed.
We will not be put to shame. We will be able to praise you with an upright heart. We will not be forsaken by you. And so, Lord, let us take heed the word of the Lord this morning, the example that has been given to us in Scripture through the life of Saul and his shortcomings and his failures and Samuel's obedience.
Let those be reminders to us that we cannot compromise in our lives. You have called us to pursue holiness. You have called us to be obedient. With the understanding, Lord, that we are still imperfect people, we will make mistakes.
But for those of us who are in Christ, you have promised that you will be faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. You have called us to be holy as you are holy. So let us do that in the

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best of our abilities, relying not on our own strength, but the spirit of God that is within us. [37:54] And let us quickly run to the throne of grace when we fall short. Lord, there may be blind spots in our own lives that we are unaware of where we are being disobedient. Lord, I pray that you would reveal those to us.

There may be areas where we know we're being disobedient and we just haven't released that to you. Convict us of that, Lord. Help us to confess that. Help us to repent, knowing that you will forgive us and let us pursue you with our heart, soul, mind, and strength this morning.
We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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