1 Samuel 15-16

# I found an article from The Atlantic called, “A Brief History of Applause...” that I found fascinating.

*“Once, people measured their leaders -- and themselves -- one clap at a time.* In the seventh century, as the Roman empire was in the decline period of its decline and fall, the emperor [Heraclius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclius) made plans to meet with a barbarian king. Heraclius wanted to intimidate his opponent. But he knew that the Roman army, in its weakened state, was no longer terribly intimidating, particularly when the intended intimidatee was a barbarian. So the emperor hired a group of men to augment his legions -- but for purposes that were less military than they were musical. He hired the men to applaud.

Heraclius's tactic of intimidation-by-noisemaking… did nothing to stanch the wounds of a bleeding empire. But it made a fitting postscript to that empire's long relationship with one of the earliest and most universal systems people have used to interact with each other: the clapping of hands. Applause, in the ancient world, was acclamation. But it was also communication. It was, in its way, power. It was a way for frail little humans to recreate, through hands made "thunderous," the rumbles and smashes of nature.

Applause, today, is much the same*.* In the studio, in the theater, in places where people become public, we still smack our palms together to show our appreciation -- to create, in cavernous spaces, connection. ("When we applaud a performer," [argues the sociobiologist Desmond Morris](http://books.google.com/books/about/Intimate_behaviour.html?id=JoJkAAAAIAAJ), "we are, in effect, patting him on the back from a distance.") We applaud dutifully. We applaud politely. We applaud, in the best of circumstances, enthusiastically. We applaud, in the worst, ironically. We find ways, in short, to represent ourselves as crowds ...But we're reinventing applause, too, for a world where there are, technically, no hands. We clap for each others' updates on Facebook. We share. We link. We retweet… We friend and follow ... networked audiences -- can be their own kind of thunderous reward. We find new ways to express our enthusiasms, to communicate our desires, to encode our emotions for transmission. Our methods are serendipitous and also driven, always, by the subtle dynamics of the crowd. We clap because we're expected to. We clap because we're compelled to. We clap because something is totally awesome. We clap because we're generous and selfish and compliant and excitable and human.”

# (Megan Garber, March 2013<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2013/03/a-brief-history-of-applause-the-big-data-of-the-ancient-world/274014/> )

And if we are honest with ourselves, we want others to clap for us. We want to hear that roar of applause because of something we did or said or thought. We crave recognition and adoration. And this need for applause, this thirst for recognition and adoration was the downfall of one of the people in our text today.

We are in a series called Legendary 2 and we have been looking at how God is the ultimate hero of the Bible and how He works through ordinary people. Before we dig into our text for today, I want to give you a quick run-through of where this passage fits into the story of the Bible. So, after Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt, they made a covenant with God at Mount Sinai and eventually came into the Promised Land. And there, Israel was supposed to be faithful to God and obey the covenant commands. Before the books of Samuel, Judges showed how Israel failed at that task big time. It was a period of moral chaos and it showed Israel’s need for wise, faithful leaders. And our text today focuses on 3 main characters: Samuel, Saul, and David. And all three transition Israel from a group of tribes ruled by judges into a unified kingdom ruled by King David. And the main theme for the books of Samuel and our story for today is **God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.**

In 1 Samuel chapters 8 through 10, the Israelites come to the Prophet, Samuel and say that they want a king so that they can be just like the other nations. This really bothers Samuel. So, Samuel prays to God. And God tells Samuel, *“****Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt…” (1 Samuel 8:7-8)*** Then God goes on to tell them all the things that a king will demand from them -- things like a king will force them into servitude or force them into the army, a king will demand high taxes, and a king will demand that his personal needs are met before the needs of the people. God then warns that in due time the people would complain about a king and ask God for help, but God wants to make the point clear that He would not answer that request. The people refused to listen to Samuel, the people refused to listen to God, and they demanded a king. They chose the things of this world over the things of God. They were also proud and thought they had the right to demand things of the Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth instead of humbly bowing to His sovereignty.

It is here that we learn that we should be careful for what we wish for. We need to be careful when we look to the world for wisdom instead of going to our God. Because, God eventually gives the people what they want. And what they want looks good on paper, but isn’t good in reality. Saul, was described as a handsome man that was a head taller than any of the others. Saul represented the best of the best to the people. They saw Saul as a military force that could protect them from their enemies and lead them to power and prestige.

Right from the start, Saul is a disaster. When Saul first meets Samuel, it is because he has lost track of his donkeys. He was not a good shepherd. He was not responsible or focused. When Samuel goes to anoint him as king, Saul is cowardly hiding among the baggage. He was afraid of failure, people’s expectations, and the burden of leading. Later, when the Philistines come for war and Goliath taunts the Lord Almighty, Saul does not fight for his God or his people. Instead, he sends a teenager to do what he was supposed to do.

Remember what I told you earlier? The main theme for the books of Samuel and our story for today is God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Instead of lots of little points, I want you to walk away with one main, big idea. **God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.**  And we will look at Samuel, Saul, and David to see how their story illustrates that.

1. **God opposes the proud.**

Turn in your Bibles and look at 1 Samuel 15. This is going to show the end of God’s patience with Saul. Starting at verse 1 **“*Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord. 2 This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. 3 Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”...*** wow, this sounds harsh! What is happening here? Why would the Lord, the creator of life, command this? I am not going to try to explain this away. I believe that God’s ways are not our ways. I believe that there are things about God that are a mystery. This can be difficult for us to understand today, but I think that it goes back to God’s commands for entering the Promised Land. God warned the people way back in Deuteronomy 7 that they would need to defeat and totally destroy the people that lived there. God commanded this because of the sinful ways of these people. They were in violation of God’s holiness and God did not want these nations to be a stumbling block for the Israelites. If they were not totally wiped out, the Israelites would begin to copy the lifestyles and beliefs of these Amalekites. Also, the Amalekites had been an enemy of Israel for years. (Exodus 17, Deuteronomy 25)

So how does Saul respond? Let’s jump down to verse 7.  ***7 Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. 8 He took Agag, king of the Amalekites, alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. 9 But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.”***

Once again, Saul has failed. Saul is not taking the moral high-ground here. It isn’t like Saul thought that the command was unjust. No, Saul tweaked it to benefit himself. He was proud. He thought he knew what was best. Even though God had told him to destroy everyone and everything that belonged to the Amalekites, Saul selfishly wanted to enjoy the spoils of battle. He wanted to line his own pockets. He wanted to keep what he thought was good and beneficial and dispose of the rest that might be an inconvenience. He thought he deserved it. He thought he earned it. He saw other kings of the world living in luxury and he wanted that for himself. And, he was so full of himself and his rights, that he was blinded to his sin.

Look at verses 10-13 ***“10 Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: 11 “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night. 12 Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, “Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.” 13 When Samuel reached him, Saul said, “The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord’s instructions.”***

Ok, I need to stop here a minute. Do you see the arrogance? Do you see the self-righteousness here? Do you see Saul fishing for compliments and applause? Not only does Saul do his own thing, he goes on a rally campaign to have people celebrate his victory from Carmel to Gilgal and he sets up a monument in his own honor. He wants to be applauded for his great victory. He is craving attention and the sound of approval from others. He blatantly advertises his sin. Altars before were used to worship God and give Him glory. Whether he knows it or not, Saul is saying by his actions, “Forget God, come and worship me.” Saul is blind and stupid and proud and Samuel isn’t falling for it. Let’s keep going, verse 14…

***14 But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?”***

***15 Saul answered, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.”***

Saul wanted Samuel to applaud his efforts. Saul was not expecting Samuel to accuse him of anything. Saul was expecting to be congratulated on his victory. Saul wanted to be lavished in compliments. Saul wanted someone to tell him that he was the **BEST KING EVER**. He is like that insecure, needy girlfriend that wants you to say that she can eat as many tacos as she wants and that she is pretty. “No, Karen, those jeans don’t make you look fat.”...

 “No, Saul, those sheep don’t mean insubordination against God.”

And when Saul hears the silence instead of the applause, when Saul gets a sense that Samuel is not pleased, once again Saul refuses to take responsibility. He blame-shifts and tries to divert Samuel’s attention to the soldiers. Instead of being the leader who called the shots, Saul basically hands over his authority and said that it was the soldiers who wanted the sheep and cattle. Then he tries to coddle or misdirect Samuel by pretending that these animals were saved for worshipping to the Lord instead of filling out the national pasturelands and becoming Sunday barbeque at Saul’s home. Yet even his own words trip him up. He says, the cattle were meant for sacrifices for Samuel’s God, but not his own personal God. Saul’s relationship with God is in a dangerous place right now. Samuel can see through the smokescreen and Samuel doesn’t buy it. Look at verses 16-23.

***16 “Enough!” Samuel said to Saul. “Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.”***

***“Tell me,” Saul replied.***

***17 Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. 18 And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.’ 19 Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?”***

***20 “But I did obey the Lord,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. 21 The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.”***

Wow! Saul still doesn’t get it. He argues with Samuel, God’s Prophet. He self-righteously tries to justify his actions. He is so self-absorbed that he is not even hearing the words coming out of his own mouth. Verse 22…

***22 But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.”***

This is one of the saddest portions of Scripture. Our God is gracious, loving, kind, merciful, and forgiving. But, our God is also holy and just and He will not share His glory with another. Saul wanted all the perks of being king, but none of the responsibility. He deceived himself into believing that he was king because he was just such a great guy. He forgot that God was the one who made him king and that he was only a servant of the Lord -- that Jehovah was the One True King of Israel.

God opposes the proud. And we must come to terms that in His holiness, God has the right to reject those who will not bend the knee to His perfect sovereignty. He is God. We are not. He gets to choose those He will save.

And, our big powerful God is not wringing His hands wondering what to do next. He has a plan. He is going to make a point in an unexpected way. Remember, God opposes the proud, but

1. **God gives grace to the humble.**

At the beginning of chapter 16, God tells Samuel to stop bemoaning the current situation and get ready to anoint the next king. Samuel is a little fearful at this point. He was afraid that if Saul found out that he, Samuel, helped start a new kingdom that Saul would come in a bloodthirsty rage and kill Samuel for treason. God sees Samuel’s fear and offers a way to save Samuel. God isn’t going to have anything stop His plan.

God sends Samuel to worship. God wants Samuel to take his eyes off of himself and put his eyes on God. God tells Samuel to invite Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice. When Samuel saw Jesse’s oldest son, Eliab, Samuel thought he must be the one God had chosen for the next king. Samuel was still thinking in the worldly way. Samuel was looking for the next big celebrity -- someone with star-power, with an athletic body, and the “look” of someone that people could get behind. People then, just like today, have been and always will be consumed with impressions. God isn’t looking for impressions, God is looking for substance. Samuel was looking for Saul’s replacement. But, God didn’t want just another cookie-cutter version of the disaster from before. God had other ideas. 1st Samuel 16:7 says, ***“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”***

Jesse continues to parade the rest of his sons in front of Samuel and God doesn’t pick any of them either. Verses 10-12, ***“...The Lord has not chosen these” 11 So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.” Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.” 12 So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”***

Remember the big idea for today? **God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.** God is not afraid to reject those who refuse Him. In chapter 16, some version of the word “reject” is used 5 times. Verse 1, God rejects Saul. Verse 7, God rejects Eliab. Verses 8 and 9, God did not choose Abinadab or Shammah or any of the other of Jesse’s sons before them either. God does not settle here. God wants the people of Israel to see that there is something better.

Now most people would think that training for a king would require a huge task force helping the potential king be ready and able. It would make sense that a king would need to know the history of the nation, the ins and outs of how the government is run, have military training and be seasoned in battle, be diplomatic and charismatic, and charming. If you have watched The Crown on Netflix, you saw how Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles had been put through the wringer to hold the mantle of royalty. God’s classroom was quieter, but no less productive.

Although nobody else has seen it, God had all ready been setting up a training ground for the next king. And this training ground was not in some West Point classroom or Basic Training Boot Camp. This training came with time and simplicity in the pastures of Bethlehem. God was going to use the sheep to teach David that David’s role as king would be to take care of the people the way a Good Shepherd takes care of his sheep. God was going to use intruders like bears and lions to prepare David for enemies at war. God was going to use the hardship of being exposed in the elements to wear off the rough edges and help David find his provision in God. God was going to use the times of quiet to teach him truths about the nature of God. This time in the meadow was not a waste. It was training. God does his best training not in the spotlight, but in the solitary.

God chose David. Not because there was something special about David. There wasn’t. David was the youngest in a long line of sons to a small family in one of the smallest areas of a small set of tribes in a small section of the world. God chose David, because David was humble before God. Remember our big idea? God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

So, as I close, I want you to look at your own heart right now. What are some areas where pride might be taking over? Do you overly feel the need for attention, applause, and praise? Do you need people to lavish you with compliments for your day to be ok? When walking past people at the grocery store, are you judging yourself versus them on a comparison scale of looks, money, popularity, or success? Are you running after the things this world says is important or are you running after the things God says is important?

I think for us to do this right, we need to realize that we can’t do this on our own. We must declare our dependence on our Savior, the One who said, ***“Apart from me, you can do nothing.”*** (John 15:5)

Pastor C.J Mahaney writes, “Humility is honestly assessing ourselves in light of God’s holiness and our sinfulness.” (Humility, 22) To be humble, we need to remind ourselves repeatedly in our week, in our day, from moment to moment what Jesus did for us on the cross. I do NOT want the take-away from this morning to be: Be like David, not like Saul. No, what I want you to remember is God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. If you are going to be like anyone, be like Jesus, ***“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!”*** (Philippians 2:6-8). May God give us SUCH a BIG understanding of who He is that we can do nothing but bow down in worship and service to Him!

Benediction: Hear these words from the book of Jude --  ***“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (***[***Jude 24-25***](http://www.christianity.com/bible/bible.php?ver=niv&q=jude+24)***)***