May 16, 2015 // Issue 193

It could have been…

Reflection by Japhet De Oliveira, Boulder, CO.

The beauty of the Bible is the multi-layered applications that are fresh; every time I return to it. To see Jesus lifted up in both the 1st and 2nd Testaments, drawing us ever closer to God the Father as brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit, is simply inspiring.

As I continue through 1 Samuel 13-16 this week, preparing for the Reflection I will share at Church this Sabbath, I see the rapid fall of Saul and rise of David. Samuel, when telling us the story, gives us a quick insight into what is about to happen. Just like Luke does in his Gospel, when he explains at the start that Jesus was to be rejected, so Samuel tells us that Saul will fail.

We then enter the story with that hindsight, preparing us for the tragedy ahead. Constantly asking ourselves:

If only Saul had waited for Samuel and not assumed the role of Priest.
If only Saul had celebrated his son's success instead of attempting to kill him.
If only Saul had destroyed the abusers instead of sparing his exceptions.

He could have been King, and Jonathan would have followed too.

All these “if only” moments culminate in one verse, 1 Samuel 15:22:

“...Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”
The parallel and play of the two thoughts is important. To obey and to listen. Samuel only wanted one thing of Saul, and he ties these two ideas together to explain what it means to obey. It is to listen.

To listen to Jesus is to obey.

We struggle with this very simple belief because we reverse the process and obey to try to listen. We decide what it is to obey and then we act like we are listening, since we now look like followers. It is that attitude that makes us judgmental. Ellen White in Prophets and Kings, p. 625 adds this little commentary on these chapters:

"Those who are most ready to excuse or justify themselves in sin are often most severe in judging and condemning others."

When you create the space to listen to Jesus, He breathes the life in you to obey.

That obedience is liberating and inclusive.
That obedience is like fire in your bones.
That obedience generates love for all around us.

It could be this way....when we listen.

Recalibrate

1. What could have been different if you had listened to Jesus?
2. What is Jesus calling you to?
3. Who can you love even more?

Feel free to send any thoughts or comments to Japhet De Oliveira.