

Saul and Witch of En-dor

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[0 : 00] Well, could you please turn with me to the passage we did in 1 Samuel 28, 1 Samuel chapter 28. And we're going to be focusing this evening on verses 3 down to the end of the chapter.

But if you look with me especially at verse 25, 1 Samuel 28 and verse 25, we read these words, Then they rose and went away that night. Then they rose and went away that night.

This evening I want us to focus on this most tragic event in scripture, King Saul's last night on earth. Saul is a king who is very much like Shakespeare's Macbeth. He is a tragic king who meets with a tragic end.

And as we focus on Saul's last night on earth, I don't really want us to leave the building this evening despairing, but rather seeing some gospel glimmers and glorious foreshadowings of the last night that another king, the greatest king of all, the Lord Jesus, spent on this earth.

Because as we embark on this communion season, I want our eyes to be directed to him. And I want our ears to be directed to him. And I want our minds to understand more of him.

[1 : 20] And I want our hearts to rest on him and rejoice in him. And I want our lips to praise and proclaim him. And so there's three key points that I want to draw out from this passage with you.

First, the king seeks a witch, verses 3 to 7. Then the king hears from the dead, verses 8 to 19. And finally, the king goes into the night, verses 20 to 25.

First, then the king seeks a witch, verses 3 to 7. And we see in these verses that Saul no longer hears from the Lord, and so he desperately seeks help and hope from a witch.

Saul no longer hears from the Lord, and so he desperately seeks help and hope from a witch. The scene is set in verses 3 and 4. Samuel has been dead, and he has been dead long enough for him to be buried, and all is real to mourn for him.

Verse 3. And we're told in verse 3 that Saul has expelled all the mediums, necromancers, and witches from the land. God's word clearly and categorically stated that mediums and spiritists were to have no place among the Lord's people.

[2 : 30] Guidance in life, direction in life, was to come from the Lord and his word alone. And Saul's expelling them demonstrates that he had both once known and wished to obey the voice and word of God.

Saul had started out well. And Jesus himself speaks about people who seem to start out their Christian journey well, but eventually make a shipwreck of their faith.

Biblical Christianity, friends, is not simply a matter of starting the race, it is a matter of finishing the race, it is about perseverance, it is about endurance, and that is what Saul was lacking.

And so in verse 4 we're told that the Philistines have assembled to fight Saul. They're camped at Shunem, which means they were blocking Israel's main trade routes. Now what's going on in verse 4 is no mere border skirmish.

We're told in verse 1 that all the Philistines gathered, and we're told in verse 4 that all Israel have gathered. Throughout the books of Judges and Samuel, there have been these two people groups, the Israelites and the Philistines, warring with one another.

[3 : 41] And the battle that's going to take place here is the culmination of it all. This is the battle to end all battles, the war to end all wars.

And in verse 5 we're told that Saul is afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. Fear is the defining characteristic of Saul's reign. And it's going to be the defining characteristic of Saul's last day on earth.

And you know, friends, fear is the defining characteristic of anyone who is living without God. It is to live not recognising that God is in control and working all things together for the glory of his name and the good of his people.

I say this very regularly. There are theoretical atheists who say that God does not exist, and there are practical atheists who live as though God doesn't exist.

Do you see the difference? There are people who simply say God doesn't exist, but there are also people who live as though God doesn't exist.

[4 : 47] And even as Christians, we can forget or we can neglect to take God into parts of our lives. And we become consumed by fear. Fear about the future.

Fear about death. Fear about our finances. Fear about unexpected problems. Fear about what people think of us or say about us or may do to us. I'll be the very first to admit that there are times I wake at 3am and the first thought that enters my head is not God is sovereign, but how am I going to deal with this person, this problem, this providence going on in my life right now.

And so in verse 6, we're told that Saul inquires of the Lord. Now he seems to be doing the right thing here. We'll see presently that he's not. But the Lord doesn't answer Saul through any of the channels by which he had guided his people before.

Doesn't speak to Saul, we're told, through dreams or through Urim or through the prophets. And so in verse 7, Saul seeks a witch. You see, when facing ruin, some people will turn in desperation to any resource they think will give them help and comfort and hope and encouragement.

It's a well-known fact that during World War II, when the Germans were losing the war, Joseph Goebbels, one of the main Nazi leaders, turned to horoscopes and astrologers for direction and how to fight the war.

[6 : 13] And here we have Saul asking for a necromancer, a witch, whom he may consult and look at how quickly his men find one. They don't turn down saying, well Saul, you've expelled all the necromancers.

We don't know where there's a necromancer. Not at all. You very, very quickly find him one. And this really gives us an insight into Saul's spiritual condition. Saul's not really interested in the Lord and his will and his word.

Saul just wants help. He just wants to know the future. He just wants to be successful and safe and secure. And if he can manipulate and use God to achieve this, very well and good.

Saul wants guidance from God, not out of a love for God and a desire to worship Him, but out of fear of making potentially fatal mistakes. You see, the Lord graciously promises to listen to and answer all who call on Him.

But Saul's not really calling on the Lord. And his immediate desire to consult with a witch proves this. Saul is an apostate. He is cut off from the Lord and His people.

[7 : 25] So we see that Saul no longer hears from the Lord and so desperately seeks help and hope from a witch. Now you know, I think some believers, some Christians, can become convinced that they are in Saul's shoes.

And I think this is a problem that many people wrestle with, especially at communion seasons. People think that they are cut off from God's presence. They think that they are doomed to God's silence forever.

They think that they are always going to be under the throne of God. Some of the godliest Christians who have ever lived have become so depressed it has resulted in them feeling this way.

Some of the most gospel-centered preachers have become convinced that they have committed the unpardonable sin and now God has washed His hands off them once and for all. And if that is you, if that is me, we can be encouraged as we look at Saul.

Because when a true believer feels God's absence, when a true believer feels God's distance, they instinctively cry out to God. When David felt that God was far from him, what did he say?

[8 : 36] How long, O Lord, will you forget me? How long will you hide your face from me? When the writer of Psalm 88 felt that darkness was his closest friend, he cried out, O Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night to you.

Let my prayer come before you. Listen to my cry. Unlike Saul, the primary concern of these men wasn't their latest problem and how to get over it.

Their primary concern was they wanted to know the presence of God, the closeness of God, the smile of God. And I want to say this to you tonight.

Sometimes the clearest indication that you will ever have that God hasn't turned away from you is that when you feel that he has turned away from you, you still keep turning to him and you still keep saying with Jacob, I will not let you go until you bless me.

I will not let you go until I know your face turned toward me. And that is what Saul lacked. That cry, that heart desire to know God.

[9 : 52] The second thing we see in this passage is the king hears from the dead. The king hears from the dead, verses 8 to 19. And we see that Saul is given a prophetic message from the dead about his dead.

Saul is given a prophetic message from the dead about his dead. In verse 8, Saul goes to the witch. He disguises himself and he goes into the night with two companions and as soon as he meets the witch, he says to her in verse 8, divine for me by his spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you.

And then in verses 9 and 10, Saul makes a blasphemous pronouncement. The witch thinks this is a sting operation. It's a trap. She's convinced the moment she starts her hocus pocus ritual, government troops will burst in on her.

It must be a set up. And so she says in verse 9, surely you know that the king has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?

And Saul swears to her by the Lord, verse 10, as the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing. You know friends, this is so significant.

[11 : 03] Don't let those words simply wash over you. There is a horror, there is a terror in Saul's words. Saul is saying to this woman, don't worry what the Lord thinks.

I'm king. I know better. I know best. And I will make sure you are protected from the judgment of God. Saul swears in the Lord's name that he will not obey the Lord's word.

Did you get that? Saul swears in the Lord's name that he will not obey the Lord's word. This is the very last time that Saul will ever mention the name of the Lord in his earthly life and he is blaspheming that glorious name.

He is an apostate. And this brings us to the appearance of Samuel, verses 11 to 14. The witch seems to be happy with Saul's oath and vow and she asks whom she should bring up and Saul tells her to bring up Samuel, verse 11, and so she begins her seance.

And suddenly she is afraid as the spirit comes into the room and she asks in verse 12, why have you deceived me? You are Saul. Now Saul doesn't care that his cover has been blown and he says in verse 13, tell me, what do you see?

[12 : 19] And the witch gives a description in verse 14. An old man is coming up and he is wrapped in a robe. And we are told Saul knows right away that this is Samuel.

You see, Samuel is described as being old even before he anoints Saul in chapter 8. And not only that, the word robe that is used here is the same word that is used in 1 Samuel 15 when Saul tears Samuel's robe and Samuel turns to Saul and says, the Lord has torn the kingdom from you and given it to a man better than you.

And these words haunted Saul throughout the rest of his life. It was a never ending tape reel being played over and over in his head. The Lord has torn the kingdom from you and given it to a better man.

He had torn the robe from Samuel and now the Lord was tearing the kingdom from him. And so when Saul hears about an old man wearing a robe, he knows his wish has been granted.

He knows he's got what he asked for. He's got an audience with Samuel and he bows with his face to the ground in homage. And this brings us to Samuel's words to Saul in verses 15 to 19.

[13 : 37] In verse 15 Samuel says to Saul why is my peace, why is my rest being disturbed? And Saul replies in verse 15 I am in great distress.

I am in great distress. The Philistines have come up against me. I am in great distress. The Lord has turned away from me. I am in great distress and so now I am turning to you. You are the most godly man that I ever knew.

I am in distress. Help me in my hour of need. Saul is telling Samuel and pleading with Samuel about his hopeless and helpless condition. He can hear the shouts of the Philistines but he no longer hears the voice of God.

He is facing the greatest crisis of his life and God has nothing to say to him. Samuel is now his only lasting lingering hope.

And Samuel responds in verses 16 to 19 and he says to Saul Why then do you ask me since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy?

[14 : 40] The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbour David because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek.

Therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines.

Samuel says Saul why do you come to me a prophet of God when God has become your enemy? Saul do you really think I'm going to take your side when God is against you?

Samuel tells Saul that the Lord has given Saul's kingdom to David tells him that he is under the Lord's judgment for refusing to obey the Lord tells him that he and Israel will be handed over to the Philistines they are going to lose the battle there is nothing they can do and he tells him that tomorrow Saul and his sons will be with him they will die and when Saul rejected God's word throughout 1st Samuel he was saying he wanted to be left to his own devices and now God has left Saul to his own devices and the consequences that follow the Christian writer C.S.

Lewis once said that those in hell are those who have said to God my will be done and now hear God say to them thy will be done and that is Saul he has continually and consistently and constantly said to God my will be done leave me alone and now the Lord says to him thy will be done I am leaving you alone Saul is given a prophetic message from the dead about his death now you know friends this is really a harrowing encounter it is pounding home the truth that Saul is in a hopeless and miserable state and is facing a miserable and a hopeless future the Lord has been repeatedly wrestling with Saul and reaching out to Saul throughout 1st Samuel Saul has been given repeated encouragements repeated warnings repeated rebukes through Samuel through Jonathan through Michal through David through Ahimelech to lean only on the Lord but Saul has refused to listen to the voice of the Lord through these people he has refused to throw himself on the mercy and grace of God and said he has hardened himself to the voice of God so that as this passage shows he is more fearful of the Philistines than he is of God he will consult with witches and disobey the word of God if God doesn't work when he wants and how he wants he will seek the voice of the dead if he can no longer hear the voice of the living God he will blaspheme the name of God rather than call on the name of God and now the Lord is silent now the time for grace has passed for Saul now the door of opportunity is closed to Saul now Saul faces a terrifying future without God and without hope in the world and you know as we are faced with this harrowing encounter we tonight every one of us is being reminded of the urgency and the necessity of listening to and responding to God's voice as it is contained in his word and as it is contained in the gospel the prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 55 seek the Lord while he may be found call upon him while he is near let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon

[18 : 42] Isaiah speaks of a banquet of grace where the spiritually hungry are fed where the spiritually thirsty are refreshed where the spiritually weak are strengthened where the spiritually downcast are gladdened where the spiritually guilty are pardoned and it's all free and it's all full and it's all through Jesus the suffering servant of Isaiah 52 and 53 there is a God who is standing and he's not waiting to scold his wayward people but to embrace them with his compassion and his mercy and with his grace but it is conditional on seeking him it is conditional on realigning one's life and world view with Jesus where Jesus is not treated as a bit of religious garnish on the side of our lives where we can take him or leave him depending on how we feel or the circumstances we face but where we see Jesus as our feast he is our everything

I want to say tonight from this passage that we have a Jesus who is near we have a Jesus who is full of compassion we have a Jesus who will abundantly pardon we have a Jesus whom we can call on and we are encouraged in this harrowing passage to turn to him and trust in him and follow him because he is worth it friends and the consequences of refusing him like Saul refused him are too harrowing to imagine the king hears from the dead and finally we see the king walks into the night the king walks into the night verses 20 to 25 and we see that Saul eats his last supper and goes to face the judgment of God Saul eats his last supper and goes to face the judgment of God verse 20

Saul falls to the ground Saul asked Samuel what he was to do and the answer was he could do nothing it is over sentence has been passed Saul is finished he is a dead man walking and so Saul just crumples to the ground in terror in fear in exhaustion and in verses 21 to 25 we see that Saul eats a last supper the witch of all people feels sorry for Saul and she encourages him to eat verses 21 and 22 and Saul initially refuses but you see in verse 23 that his companions urge they force him to eat and so in verse 24 the witch makes a meal fit for a king she kills the fattened calf and provides it for Saul on the last day before their execution American death row prisoners are allowed to choose and eat their very last meal they can have whatever they want and there is something so strange and so harrowing about it all well here the witch kills the fattened calf for Saul meat wasn't usually eaten in Israel apart from an important festive occasions or for important influential people and so you remember how Abram kills the fattened calf when the angels visit him or you remember how Samuel gave Saul the choice meats when he was anointed as king and now this witch is making a meat based dish for Saul the king and in verse 25 we're told that Saul eats this last supper we can barely imagine how hard it must have been for Saul to eat that meal he eats knowing the Philistines are going to kill him and kill his sons and destroy his nation he eats knowing he's under

God's judgment he has no hope for eternity and yet friends it is significant that Saul eats this last supper you see in the Bible having a meal together is a sign of friendship a sign of fellowship a sign of oneness a sign of communion and the last meal that Saul ever eats the last communion Saul ever has is with a necromancer a witch this is his friend whom he has fellowship with and oneness with and identifies with on the last night on earth that Saul ever spends he's dining at the table of demons and in verse 25 at the very end we're told Saul goes into the night and you remember at any time the Bible speaks about night or darkness it's speaking about the judgment of God Saul goes out to face the judgment of God on the battlefield of Gilboa the whole text oozes despair so Saul eats the last supper and goes to face the judgment of God now where have you heard that before do you see parallels with another king and his last supper and his going into the night in these verses you see the gospel tells us that on the night that he was betrayed

Jesus ate a last supper and ate unleavened bread bread without yeast because it was the night of Passover and the gospel tells us that after he ate this last supper Jesus walked into the night into the garden of Gethsemane where he fell in terror at the prospect of facing the judgment of God and cried out Abba Father if there be any other way by which your forgiveness may be poured out on the nations then let this cup of judgment pass me by and heaven is silent because there is no other way and the gospel tells us that Jesus went even further into the darkness into the darkness of Golgotha the darkness of Calvary the darkness where he like Saul who cried God has turned away from me Jesus cried Eloi Eloi Lama Sabatani my God my God why have you forsaken me and the gospel tells us that

[25 : 11] Jesus went through all of this not because of his sin you see he was the only completely righteous man who ever lived he was the only man who constantly said thy will be done to his heavenly father he was the only man who ever perfectly obeyed the will and word of God at every moment of his existence he was the true son of David who was more unlike Saul than even David was but the gospel tells us he became our sin bearer he became our sin offering and as he became our sin bearer he took the penalty of God he took the judgment of God in the place of his people he took the consequences we deserve he was my sacrificial substitute he was your sacrificial substitute and that is the great comfort that is the great hope that is the great promise of the gospel that is the great hope and that is the great promise that this passage shouts to us that communion celebrates that at the battle of

Golgotha Jesus walked into the outer darkness that we sinful people may walk in the light of life at the battle of Golgotha Jesus walked under the judgment of God the wrath of God that we may walk under the smile of God the blessing of God the benediction of God and if your confidence is in this Jesus you can know with certainty God will never leave you he will never forsake you he will never abandon you because this Jesus has removed all the barriers between you and God and you are now as beloved as the very son of God the living and true God looks at you if you are a Christian if you are holding on to Jesus tonight the living and true God looks at you and he says this is my son this is my daughter with whom

I am well pleased not on account of what we have done for God but on account of what Jesus has done for us and so what we see in this passage is that Saul is a tragic figure and as we survey the tragedy of his life and the tragedy within this passage we see afresh the beauty of Jesus and we see afresh the glory of Jesus and we see afresh the need for Jesus and we are left saying with the apostles Maranatha come Lord come we are left looking at this failed king Saul and say Lord we want a faithful king we want a savior king we want a servant king we want a king in whom we will be blessed and the king has come and the question

I want to leave you with tonight is have you come to the king amen we will close this time of worship by singing to God's praise in words of Psalm 105 Psalm 105 the Scottish Psalter version that celebrates God's grace found in the gospel Psalm 105 on page 374 give thanks to God call on his name to men his deeds make known sing ye to him sing psalms proclaim his wondrous works each one see that in his holy name to glory do accord and let the heart of everyone rejoice that seeks the Lord we'll sing Psalm 105 verses 1 to 7 God's praise if I could not call his name to men his name his name sing he to him sing songs proclaim his wondrous works each one see that he in his holy name his holy name to glory to whom are for and let the heart of every one rejoice as seeks the

Lord the Lord the Lord the Lord Almighty and his strength with his heart he is heart he is blessed and his gracious face seek ye continually he continue he make all the works that he has done which and the nation bleed his wonder shall be his wonders and the judgment so which from his mouth proceed

[31 : 40] O ye that are of Abram's race his wonders and the judgment so his servant well the prune and ye that shake of children are whom he chose for his own he chose for his own he he and he only is the mighty lord our god and his most righteous judgments are in all the earth abroad the earth our father in heaven we want to make known your deeds we thank you so much this evening that we have a king who walked into the himself and his people and that those clinging on to him in faith and we pray that however faltering our faith that we would be holding on to that we are saved we are brought into your family not on account of the quality of our faith or the intensity of our faith or the intensity of our faith or even the strength of our faith and that when we were loveless he reached down and loved his people in grace so may this time of communion over the next few days be a time of blessing and refreshment for each of us where we wouldn't spend the next few days kicking ourselves and saying how wretched we are but we would spend the next few days beholding our gracious redeeming God and saying to him how great thou art into your hands we commit these things as we pray in

Jesus name Amen