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1 Samuel 28 "The Beginning of the End for Saul" September 25, 2019

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Samuel 28. They're pouring the concrete foundation on Friday out here, so if you want to come carve your name on something, come by on Friday. (Laughing)

We mentioned to you, if you've been with us going through our study through 1 Samuel, that 1 Samuel 27-31 is the final story of this book that God sets before us. It leads to a couple of things: the tragic death of Saul and the life that he really wasted; it brings us to the end of David's seven-and-a-half years of running and his slow ascension to the throne. It brings us, obviously, to 2 Samuel. But it also gives to us some pretty sad reports. First of all, last week David had probably hit his low point, and so we started with him. In fact, if you were with us last week, we looked at chapter 27 down through verse 2 of this chapter. David had been running for his life from Saul five years now. He's a twenty-something young man. He is a fugitive ruling from exile. He has hit rock bottom in his faith, in his trust to the LORD. If you read the first couple of verses of chapter 27, David believed that his time and his luck had run out. "He's gonna catch me eventually. I'm gonna be wiped out. There's no way - no matter who I am or who I believe in - that this is gonna sustain itself. He's gotten way too close, way too often. I can't continue to live this way." In his solution - emotional, unspiritual, fleshed out, not faith - David decides to move himself and his family, the six hundred men that he has under him and their families, all of their possessions, and move them to the city of Gath, one of the Philistine cities (the place that, years earlier, you remember David had tried to hide in 1 Samuel 21). The king of Gath had run into David, saw how crazy he was acting, had let him go. This time David doesn't show up as a fugitive in the sense of having nowhere to turn. He shows up with a pretty strong army and with a history, if you will, and so he is received by the king who sees it as a benefit. "If I can get David away from the children of Israel, Saul's easy." And he saw it as a plus in his direction, a benefit to him. He gave to David and his group of people a city named Ziklag. It means "winding" or "crooked." And from there, David, for the next sixteen months, began to raid those nations that were a threat to Israel. However, they weren't a great threat; the Philistines were the great threat. So he was wiping out farming communities and nomadic tribes, and, oh, he was killing everyone in the camp so that no one could come back and say to the king that David hadn't been attacking the Jews, which is what he was

communicating to the king. So he was totally out of the will of God (verse 7 of the last chapter). He was there for a year and four months, just living this lie. This is our hero, the man after God's own heart.

We ended last week in verses 1 and 2 of this chapter, where after the winter came and went and the spring set in, the fighting always resumed. And so this time the Philistines were determined to go directly to battle with Israel. Achish the king demands David and his six hundred men join him in battle; in fact, assigning David the responsibility of being his personal bodyguard. And David is in a huge pickle. He's away from his family. All of his possessions and the men's families are thirty miles away. And now the king goes, "You gotta go with us to battle." And what does he do? He is stuck. We talked last week about the fact that when you succeed in your plans, it is no guarantee God was in them. And certainly God was not in these plans. And David and his men are now defiant - sixteen months of deception and murder and running in the flesh and living by the seat of your pants - and it was all about to change. But not tonight.

Because tonight the LORD says, "Let's leave David in the pickle. Let Me tell you what happened to Saul." And so it's like one of those soap operas. Here's them. Now we're gonna go over here, and we'll go back to them later. Poor David's gonna be in the hot seat at least for another few weeks. So, we're gonna turn to the other side - to Israel's side, to Saul's side - and especially to Saul who now watches this buildup of troops on the other side of the border (in the Philistine territories). And he is just worried as can be. He doesn't know what to do. This is the end for Saul. This will lead, like I said, to the end of the book and to his death. The LORD oftentimes covers years of time in very short chapters. These final four chapters all play out in fairly rapid order once we get past those sixteen months of verse 7 of chapter 27.

So we're gonna start at verse 3 because we ended in verse 2, and David said to the king, "Well, you know what I can do," and the king said, "Yeah, I'm gonna make you my guardian." Poor David. We'll get back to him later. Verse 3, "Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land. Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa." Verses 3 and 4 kind of set the stage, historically, for what follows. Samuel the prophet - you remember him, the only really godly man in leadership for a long time, the first national

prophet Israel had - had been dead for about four years (back in chapter 25). As a gesture of honor to him, King Saul - who thought it was very politically expedient, though not spiritually-driven - had purged the land of all of the familiar spirits and wizards and fortune tellers and soothsayers and tarot card readers and astrologers, all the stuff that the law said, "Don't have this at all in your land." It wasn't that Saul was moved by them at all because they had been there for years, but he now moves them out and, it seems, because it's on the heels of Samuel's death, that now Saul had issued this order and had put into law in Israel that they were not allowed to practice; those who moved by the devil, if you will, but not because he loved God but because he wanted to look like a good leader to Israel. We will learn in a moment, as we continue on, that Saul had ordered or proclaimed that anyone that was still practicing those kinds of evil arts was guilty of a death-penalty punishment. I don't know how often Samuel might have said to Saul, "We should get them out of the land so God can begin to bless." There's no mention of it in the Scriptures to tell us. It was certainly God's will. Leviticus 19:31, the LORD had said through Moses to the people, "Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God." In other words, "Seek Me. Don't go to them." And so it was very clear in the Scriptures. In fact, it's in the next chapter, in Leviticus 20:27, that it says, "A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them." "Not upon us. It's their own fault. That's the way they decided to go."

So, we know that Samuel's dead. We know the issue of the decree that Saul had made in honor, I think, of his death (as they're mentioned together), and we read about this buildup of the troops there in the upper end of what we would call today the Jezreel Valley or the upper area of the Valley of Armageddon. The Philistines were pushing north, if you will, trying to divide the land. This push had, by the way, brought them into about the center of the country as we would know it today. In fact, if you know anything at all about the topography of Israel, this was about the same place where Gideon and his three hundred men had routed the Midianites, and so they had gathered at the well of Harod. You might remember reading Judges 7: God had devised a plan only God could, where three hundred men could wipe out thousands of enemy troops. But the Philistines were now gathered on one side of the valley and Israel, led by Saul, on the foothills of Mt. Gilboa, which is where Saul lived.

We read, in verse 5, "When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly." I want you to stop and think about that for a minute. Saul had been so obsessed with making sure that David was caught over these last few years. He had all but neglected national security. He hadn't protected the people. He hadn't any kind of a military campaign against the Philistines who were, by far, the strongest and most threatening group of people on the planet at the time. He was a veteran - Saul was - of many wars. What you never read of Saul in battle is being afraid. Not once. He's a tough guy. He took jawbones, and he beat people up with them. He was just a other than that conflict with Goliath, you don't really read of him trembling much. But notice what it says here, in verse 5, that he sees the army build up, and his heart trembles, and he is greatly afraid. He has like an internal earthquake.

The question is - why did that happen? Or what had seemed to cause that? It appears, just because of the way that the LORD presents us the narrative (from especially verse 3 and all), that Saul found himself - maybe for the first time in his life - completely by himself. No one to turn to. No one to get advice from. No one even to blame. He was just as isolated as he had ever been. And this particular encounter, I think, highlighted that fact. He has overwhelming odds. They were not in his favor. He didn't have many options, and he wasn't a man of God, and he was afraid. While chasing David, he always felt like he was the master of his own fate. He'd say to people, "Oh, the LORD's so good. I'll bless you for blessing me." But here is a powerful army, and I think, for the first time in his life, Saul might realize his smallness. This time he didn't have Samuel to advise him, who had been there for five or six decades; and certainly as long as Saul's been around, Samuel had been there. A priest of God was with him, as we're going to see, but the LORD wasn't about to answer a man who wasn't repentant, and Saul was not a repentant guy. If anything he needed from God was deliverance, but that was about it, and Saul had never been keen to turn towards God's counsel anyway. And now he didn't have David who, at least for years, led the charge for his armies, took care of the oversight of the people. No. He was alone. No one to prop him up, no one to rely upon, no one to help him though he'd been a tough army guy. But notice what fear does - he faces the battle of his life, and it looks like that, and he doesn't know what to do. A lot of people end up at the end of their life like that. Tough guys in life; not so tough facing death. Fear grips his heart. It gnaws at him. It's the kind of fear (that we read about, here in this chapter) that incapacitates Saul completely. Not able to move, not able to think, not able to act. He needs to be fed by someone else and carried along by someone else, and this is the day before

he's gonna die. And by the end of the night, he'll know about that as well. So, in this same place that Gideon (Judges 7) trembled before the LORD and found that God, in His counsel, could give him victory, we find Saul, years later, trembling but not before the LORD. Just trembling. Once very defiant, comfortable, he now has his needs exposed, and he sees how lonely and how powerless he is.

The problem is if you wait your whole life to listen to what God has to say, it's hard to find Him at the end of your life. It isn't that God doesn't want you, but the sincerity of your search at that time doesn't become.... "I'm sorry for my sin," or, "I want to be restored to a relationship with God." It's usually, "Help!!!!!!" And that's not really a prayer God can answer because He's looking for a heart that turns to Him. That's what He's interested in - the heart. And Saul, as fearful as he is, cannot find it within himself to humble himself and turn to the LORD. There's no repentance in his heart at all. "The life of the unfaithful man," Proverbs 13:15 says, "is hard." So, he's got no one to lean upon for advice or counsel or encouragement. He's alone. He's powerless. Years of sin, years of disobedience, years of unbelief, years of turning down every offer that God gave Him leaves him now with a harvest coming in, and the fruit is rotten in his life. When the LORD had spoken to Moses, there in Leviticus 26:36-37, and He spoke to the children of Israel as they were going to go into the land, the LORD said, "If you don't follow My direction, those of you that survive it and end up in the land will find faintness in heart because of your enemies. You'll shake like a leaf upon a tree. You will flee from the swords. You will flee and fall. Even when no one pursues, you'll stumble over one another. It'll be as if there was a sword behind you, but no one's chasing you. You'll have no power to stand before your enemies." And that's Saul. He's just weak. He has no hope. And he doesn't see it. But now he's experiencing it. And no relationship with God. And now his life catches up with him.

We read, in verse 6, "And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets." Saul now begins to pray, utilizing every means that God had spoken through: the Urim and the Thummim of the priests, the prophet and his gifts, the dreams that he might have gotten. But, look, this is way too late, now, in the game. And I know you might want to argue, "Well, I thought, at the last minute, if you cry out, 'Remember me,' " "Today you'll be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43), that's true repentance, and God will hear that. This is Saul not wanting a relationship with God; he just wants out of the hole. He wants deliverance. "God, I promise if You'll do this, I'll do

that." But he's done this all of his life. So don't be too bothered by, "He sought the LORD, but the LORD didn't answer" because his seeking of the LORD had nothing to do with wanting that relationship with God. Most people, when they're in trouble, pray. Saul wasn't turning to the LORD in his heart. He was looking to get out of trouble. He wasn't repenting of his sins. He wasn't vowing to be God's servant. He wasn't looking for mercy. He wasn't extending God's grace. Instead, he just wanted out of the jam. It's like.....you know the people that think, "I know the LORD." They want that old insurance policy. They want to live in the world, but they want to pull that out at the end. Get in free? No! He was looking for an immediate way out but on his own terms.

And let me read you something, and write it down in your Bible if you're used to taking notes. It's in 1 Chronicles 10. But here's what it said, "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. But he did not inquire of the LORD; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse." Because he would not inquire of the LORD. God's testimony about this prayer was he wasn't seeking God. 1 Chronicles 10:13-14. Pretty clear evidence that before you read into, "Oh, the LORD didn't answer his prayer." No. Because he's not seeking the LORD. And the commentary's very revealing. It's kind of like that Pharisee in the New Testament (Luke 18:9-14) that stood and prayed, and the Lord said of him, "He is praying with himself." In other words, "Father, thank You I'm not like all these sinners around me; that I give tithes of all that I have. I'm not like that publican over there." And the Lord said, "He prayed with himself, and he went out justified in his own eyes." And then there was that sinner, that tax collector, standing in the back, afraid to look up, smiting his breast, so saddened over his sin. The Lord said, "That man went away justified," just as if he'd never sinned, found God's forgiveness. But Saul prayed like the Pharisee.

When Azariah caught up with King Asa, who was returning from a victorious battle (there in 2 Chronicles 15:1-4), he went out to meet him, and he said, "Look, I want you to know something, King Asa, that the LORD will be with you if you're with Him. If you seek Him, you'll find Him. But if you forsake Him, He's going to forsake you." And then it says this, "For a long time, Israel had been without a true God, without a teaching priest, without the law. But in their trouble, they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He was found by them." That's always the case. If you're really seeking God, God is available right now. If you're

tryin' to just get off the hook like Saul, who went through the motions but had no heart for God, God knows the difference.

When Ezra, in that second group of folks that was going to go back (the 1,754 - nearly two thousand folks) to Israel with him in 457 B.C., they were going to go back and restore the city, they had worried about the hundreds of miles of travel through the desert. They had a lot of gold, they had a lot of silver. They had been given a lot by the Jews who had been left behind so that the city of Jerusalem could be built up. But the problem was Ezra had gone to the king and said, "You know, the LORD's with us. We don't need anything but Him." He had bragged about the LORD. But now he thought, "Man, it'd be weird to ask the king for an accompaniment from his armies because it's gonna sound like we really don't trust the LORD." So he said, "Instead of asking the king, we all got together, and we said, 'LORD, please protect us because we've been braggin' about You, and we don't want to pretend like we don't believe that or somehow that we need to do more than that.' " And you'll read there, in that same Scripture, that the LORD went before them, and He watched over them, and they fasted and prayed, and the LORD heard their prayer. It's in Ezra, towards the end of chapter 8 (verses 22-23). So, God listens when we call. Don't think, as you read this verse, "Oh, man, God's so mean to Saul." No, no, no. Saul's not seeking God. Make sure that you saw and see the difference. It's very important, if nothing else.

You remember when Jeremiah, in chapter 2, was sent by the LORD to the people who were not doing good, he said to the people (verse 13), " 'My people have committed two errors. Number one - they've forsaken Me. That's error number one. Then number two is - I'm the fountain of living waters, but they have cut out for themselves cisterns, broken ones that can hold no water.' " In other words, they've left God who gives life. They've substituted for Him something that can never give life. Two errors. That's exactly what Saul did. He set God aside and went his own way. Cisterns were made by man. They are made oftentimes in climates that you need to collect the rainwater because there's not much water to be had. It's a reservoir, it's not a source, and so the water in there, if you don't use it, stagnates. Unless there's a hole in it, then it just disappears. But either way, it's not a long-term solution. From a spiritual standpoint, Jeremiah, speaking to the people, said, "They leave God's ways and His life. They cut out for themselves religious philosophies and rationales. They do it on their own. They think, 'This is gonna help me. This is the way of life. This is what I'm gonna turn to.' " But I can't begin to tell you how many people we've seen planning funerals

that come to us very religious, but now their religion and the god that they've made for themselves is no longer capable of helping them. They've got no hope in that god; there's no promise there; there're no assurances there. It's just, "This is what I believe." Well, that's great until you need him. Then where is he?! Where do you find him now? I think when the LORD spoke to them in Jeremiah, He said, "You might have great confidence in your idols, but see if they'll help you now because I'm not helpin' you." At some point, your god has to be put to the test. Saul's god fails him here, doesn't know where to turn, and God doesn't answer because Saul's not seeking the LORD. Unfortunately, this calamity doesn't wake him up. The sin of his heart he'll carry to the grave. It was his terms or forget it. Pretty sad story.

It does bring up a question, though. What kind of things get in the way as far as you getting answers to your prayers? Or, if you will, why doesn't God always answer prayers? And one of the greatest things - put it at the top of your list - is if you get sin in the way, and your life is out of fellowship with God, it's a hard place to get answers to prayer. It's usually a place you think you need it the most because you're way out there on your own. But, you know, we have to have hearts that are willing. David wrote, in Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart," (the word "regard" means "to set an altar up for" or "to make room for"), "the Lord will not hear me." Put that at the top of your list. You want answers to prayer, walk the walk. Walk the walk. Do the best you can. We're still gonna fall short, but God sees the difference between want to, seeking, and the Saul approach, which isn't very wise. Willfully allowing sin. Secretly loving sin and then asking for answered prayer is a very difficult request, and God won't respond to it. When Solomon wrote Proverbs 1, the LORD said through him to his son, "You'd better turn at God's rebuke. He's going to pour out His Spirit on you. He's going to make known His Words to you. But if you have been called and you refuse to listen, God's going to stretch out His hand and no one's going to regard it. And because you won't take to heart His counsel, and if you won't want any of His rebuke, then God in heaven will laugh at your calamity." Now that sounds harsh, and you go, "Man, that doesn't sound like the loving God I know!" No, no. He's very good. It's a God who loves you greatly. "When the terror comes upon you like a storm, when destruction comes like a whirlwind, when out of your distress and your anguish you cry out, I'm not going to answer. Even if you seek Me, you're not going to find Me." Because there's no repentance. You can read that. It's the first chapter of the book of Proverbs, beginning in verse 23. It goes on almost to the end of the chapter, but the LORD, through Solomon, warns his son.

So, we need to heed God's Word. We need to deal with sin. Indifference to God's counsel will always be a problem. If you're praying, but you're ignoring what God has to say, then don't think God's answering your prayers. We read, in Proverbs 28:9, "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination" to God. It just means if you're not going to listen to what He has to say, then don't think for one minute that God's going to answer your prayer. If you neglect mercy - it's another one of those keys in the Scriptures - "Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard" (Proverbs 21:13). That's what it says in the Bible. So, be merciful, deal with sin, seek obedience, and you can remove a lot of issues when it comes to God not answering your prayer. Now He may say "wait" anyway, but certainly if you can work on your side of the fence, right? I think when Isaiah wrote in chapter 1 about the people coming and worshipping and all, and the LORD said to them, "I get so tired of that. All your stuff, your burning of the sacrifices and all of that'll never fix anything. It doesn't cover up anything. Come, let's reason together. I can make you white as snow even if you're red like scarlet." It all comes back to that relationship with God. It isn't religious practices that can make up for a wicked heart. It's a wicked heart - in repentance - that can be made up for by the grace of God.

So the problem, when we receive no answer to prayer, is never found at the upper end of the phone. It's always down on this end. Right? We go, "Oh, the LORD!" No, no. Don't blame Him. It's always down where we are. "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened that He can't save. His ear isn't heavy that He can't hear. It's our sins that have separated between us and God. He has hidden His face from you. He cannot hear you." (Isaiah 59:1-2). Saul should know this. He didn't. But we find him having to live that life. The prophet Micah wrote, in chapter 3:4, of that coming day, "They will cry to the LORD. He will not hear them. He'll hide His face from them because they've been evil in their deeds." There's not a walk with God. It's exactly what verse 6 says. So I don't want you to get the wrong impression that somehow the LORD isn't merciful. Saul can find no answer here. He only finds God's silence. But we should know why. Had he honestly repented from the heart, he'd have been forgiven on the spot because that's just the way God is. But what happens? God is silent, so he comes up with Plan B. Not D. We'll go to B.

Verse 7, "Then Saul said to his servants, 'Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.' And his servants said to him, 'In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor.' So Saul disguised himself and put on other

clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, 'Please conduct a séance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you.' Then the woman said to him, 'Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?' And Saul swore to her by the LORD," (spiritual-talkin' Saul) "saying, 'As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.' Then the woman said, 'Whom shall I bring up for you?' And he said, 'Bring up Samuel for me.' When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, 'Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!' And the king said to her, 'Do not be afraid. What did you see?' And the woman said to Saul, 'I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth.' So he said to her, 'What is his form?' And she said, 'An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle.' And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down." In his extremity, Saul won't come to the LORD, but he wants answers for this upcoming battle, and so he resorts to a witch. Though he had hoped to reach the one person he had known all of his life was speaking for the LORD, he had died four years earlier. And now, when he needed something, Samuel wasn't around. Notice that despite Saul's pretty clear ban on witches, his servants immediately knew where there was one. So, apparently this widespread practice was going on; the ban was not being enforced, though the law was still on the books. In disguise, Saul, with a couple of his men, traveled eight miles behind enemy lines. They had to go into Philistine territory, at least into occupied territory at the time. They went after dark. They went to En Dor. I always read this, and I think you can sneak around at night in the world and think no one sees you, but God knows where you're going even if you're wearing a disguise. "Have a séance for me. I want you to call up someone from the dead." The woman didn't like the request. It almost sounds to me like she smelled a rat. "What're you doin' askin' me? You know what the rules are now. I could die for this! I'm not gonna.....what's wrong with you?! Maybe you're unaware of Saul's rules. But you put me in great danger, man. I could be killed." Saul, like I said, ever with spiritual jargon - boy, could he pile it on thick - says to the witch of En Dor, "In the name of the LORD, you won't be punished for this." I think Saul might be the only guy who would plan a bank robbery and then pray for God's blessing to get away. He's just an amazing guy.

There're a lot of people that, even today, look at fortune tellers and astrologers. Driving here from where I live, we pass two places that are actually fortune-teller places. I'm thinkin' who in their right mind keeps this kind of business alive today?

My wife and I, once in a while in the summer, go down to Venice or down to Santa Monica to walk around, and they always have the fortune tellers sitting on the street or on the walkway. So years ago, we came up with a plan. I'd take \$100 with me, a \$100 bill. And, "Hey, can I tell your fortune?" So I'd do this, "I've got \$100 I want to give you if you can just tell me my name. If you can't, I want five minutes of your time where I get to sit and talk to you about the Jesus that I know." No one's ever taken me up on it. Not one person. "No, no, no. That's a trick." "No. I've got a license. I'll show you my name. Just come up with my name!" I even had my wife call me Frank over here, like, "Hey, Frank, let's go" so they heard me? They go, "Maybe it's Frank." I go, "No it's not. Look." Well she, "Yeah, you're cheating now." See? Spirit people. (Laughing) Don't mess with the devil, I'm tellin' ya. Stay away from all that stuff. I know it seems powerless. Hey, Satan'll use whatever he can to get in your head and get you off the track.

People hunting for answers that only God has. And here Saul is looking for supernatural guidance, unwilling to let God guide. Which is interesting. He just wants to order it up when he can. I think when you read Galatians 5:19-21, the works of the flesh, one of them is idolatry and then sorcery. So it was a prevalent thing in Jesus' day as well. Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians his first letter (10:19-20), said, "What is an idol? Isn't an idol really nothing? But the Gentiles sacrifice to idols, and in so doing they're sacrificing to demons, not to God. I don't want you to have any fellowship with demons." So, know that behind all that - what looks to be a joke and there's really nothing there - Satan can certainly use that to turn you away.

Well, the woman seems to have been put at ease enough by Saul's word. So she said, "Who do you want?" and he goes, "I want to talk to Samuel." If you read verses 11 and 12 here, as the woman begins her deception, I think her response reveals that she's used to lying and make believe and trying to pretend to see something because this seemed way too real for her. She cries out with a loud voice. "Aaaaah!!!!" (Laughing) It's the first time I've ever been able to pull that off! And I suspect that's the case, that much of this is just meant to deceive and all. But this woman was as frightened as anybody else, and apparently Samuel appeared to her. And here's Saul, standing in front of her, with a fake beard and the mustache with a funny hairdo from the prop department, and she says, "You're Saul!!!!" So she describes to Saul, verses 13 and 14, what she was seeing. She doesn't understand it, I think because she's phony like all of these witches are phony. And Saul again begins to act like he's the expert. "Well, what is he

wearing?" "Well, he's kind of an old guy, and he's got a mantle." "Yeah, that's the guy I want to talk to. I know stuff. I talk to the dead all the time." Apparently Samuel revealed to her that this was Saul that was talking to her, but he had a robe of distinction on. Now Saul does not see Samuel, at least not what we are told here. But the medium did, and Saul falls on his face in front of this woman, who is now speaking to Saul for Samuel.

The natural question you should ask is - what's goin' on here? I'll give you my two cents. I believe that God intervenes here in the cesspool of Saul's life to declare to him His final judgment and give him one more shout out. I really believe Samuel showed up. I don't think this is the devil. He's telling the truth; everything he says is correct. It certainly.....even his rebuke to Saul about his unwillingness to serve God lines up exactly with the heart of God. So I've no reason to believe this isn't the case just because God, in every place in the Bible, warns against it, says, "Don't get involved with this, stay away from this." But Saul's already there. And God certainly has no restriction to step where He tells us not to stand, and I think this is where the LORD made Himself known. It doesn't mean that God approves or He uses witches or witchcraft. They're explicitly outlawed throughout the Bible, but God wants to speak, and God's gonna speak where God wants to speak. Satan does have power. Lying works are his forte. You might remember that when the wise men of Pharaoh were able to duplicate, for a while, the miracles at the hands of Moses, at some point their power ran out and God's did not (Exodus 7:8-13). But enough for us to understand that. I do believe that God steps in here, sends the prophet with one final message for Saul. It was not a blessing. It was a curse. And what Saul had hoped to get out some kind of information for this battle ahead - news of the impending battle - the news was all bad. "You want more information? All right. But you're not gonna like what I have to tell you." That's my take, and I'm open to hear yours.

Verse 15 says this, "Now Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?' " (I love that. "Quit botherin' me!") "And Saul answered, 'I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do.' " And that's why I said, early on, Saul finds himself alone, and this is why the great distress. Verse 16, "Then Samuel said: 'So why do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy?' " Saul had never obeyed the voice of the LORD after his initial call to be the king. As long as Samuel was alive, he

would always do whatever he wanted and had to be put in his place. Every step was a rebellion against God. Even here - desperation without any driving desire to repent. So here's Samuel's word, "Why do you ask me if God's not talkin' to you?" Now Saul is aware of the fact - pathetically so - that God is not on his side. Samuel said, "Hey, if God's your enemy, I can't be your friend. All my life I sought to convince you to follow God's Word, but you wouldn't do it. Call Him on your own now."

Verse 17, " 'And the LORD has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.' " Samuel once more speaks as a prophet. He uses the word "LORD" seven times in three verses. Far from reversing the judgment of God, he reinforces it, and then he repeats it back from verse 17. That had happened back in chapter 15 when he hadn't obeyed the LORD, and it was that second big stumble in his life where he lost the kingship altogether. So notice what Samuel said. "You've lived a life of open rebellion, of complete disobedience, in your dealings with the Amalekites and all, and here's some bad news - tomorrow you're gonna lose the battle, your nation's gonna be overthrown by your enemy, and you and your sons are gonna die, as the nation will suffer defeat and slaughter." Again, there are those who, writing commentaries, will tell you that the words "and you will be with me" argue Saul's salvation. I think you just have to stop reading. You can probably come to that conclusion if this is the only verse you read. But I think if you read everything that you find in the Scriptures, including the one we quoted out of 1 Chronicles 10, the LORD killed Saul because he was disobedient. Took him out. Never spoke to him. Let him have his own way. God had forsaken him. He was gonna go to Sheol that night, all right, that place of Abraham's bosom; but he's gonna go on the other side. He's gonna go where the judgment of the wicked were. And that's too bad. What a horrible thought.

Verse 20 tells us, "Immediately" (and I think Saul understood it, too) "Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night." It was almost too much for this old man to physically bear. He was weak, ready to collapse, a giant of a man in his life reduced to this, now.

Verse 21, "And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, 'Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me. Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way.' " ("You can't stay here".) Verse 23, "But he refused and said, 'I will not eat.' So his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it. So she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night." His last meal, as it will end up being. Help from the home of a witch, by his soldiers arriving in Gilboa by the break of dawn, as we'll read in the next chapter, on the last day of his life.

What had Saul really gained this night? The answer is nothing. The battle was still gonna be fought. Israel was still gonna lose. Saul and his sons were still gonna be put to death. Only now Saul knew his fate, which might be something he would have preferred not to know. It's a sad picture. On the one hand, we leave David, who's been in that same position Saul is at this point - for sixteen months, who's now in a pickle. And then you've got Saul, whose forty years of rulership is now coming to an end. He's an absolute picture of failure and despair, of self-will to the end, of pride that makes you want to live apart from God. And he has religious words, and he's got a secular life. He has not a relationship with the LORD. He's the master of his own faith. He's so miserable. And he has no more chances. This is it. He's run out of chances. You can run out of chances with God. You might say, "Well, I thought God is so patient." Well, he's patient. He's a lot more patient than you'd be with you. If I treated you like you treat God, you'd have been my friend for about one more minute. It's an interesting picture, isn't it?

The good news is - for most of us, we still have a chance. Still do the right thing. Still change our ways. Still let the LORD be the LORD. You don't have to wait until it's too late to find yourself separated from God. David, on the one hand, is in dire straits, but his dire straits are gonna bring him to his knees, and he's gonna repent. And, as a result of his come-to-Jesus moment, again, he'll come to Jesus again, so to speak, in the Old Testament. Saul, at the end of his rope, no repentance, no sorrow, no willingness to do that. He's going to go to his death, unfortunately, the way that he lived. I fully do not expect to ever see Saul. Ever. I expect to see

Lot, which is weird because, except for one verse by Peter, I'd have written him off, too. But Peter tells me he made it. So, good for Lot. Unfortunate for Saul.

Pretty heavy-duty story, don't you think? And so we've got Saul waitin' to die and David thinkin' he's gonna die. And now I'm goin' on vacation, so we're not even gonna get to these (Laughing) studies for another week or two. But you'll have fun. We're gonna have some other folks here to speak to you. David Rolph's gonna be here in a week or so as well. All right? Can we leave it there? For tonight. And let me just say this to you - don't refuse God's Word. Follow Him. Because eventually you're gonna die, and you're gonna wish you lived this way so you'll be ready to stand before Him. If not, tonight as we're handing out communion to you, repent of your sins, tell the LORD. You don't have to tell me. You can tell Him. "I want to walk with You, God." God will restore. True repentance is never refused, but religious tomfoolery God sees right through. You can fool me. I believe you right away because I'm really dumb. But He's not. He knows the difference. So let's have communion. What do you say? Some of the folks in our outreach ministries - which cover a lot of ministries - will be serving us tonight.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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