

Title: Sin's Hopeless Misery

Scripture: 1 Samuel 28

Series: God, the True King!

1. Introduction:

- a. The first two verses of Chapter 28 should be part of chapter 27. We see David beginning to face the consequences of his sins. But after these two verses, our attention shifts to Saul and what would be his last night on earth.
- b. From this current chapter, we will see the hopeless misery that habitual sin can cause. We will see the spiritual darkness enveloping those who constantly reject God and His Christ. May God give us ears to listen to what the Spirit says.

2. Verses 1 and 2: Sin has a price: In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army." (2) David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."

- a. Chapter 28 begins where our last chapter left off. David is living a duplicitous life, and that choice continues to cost him in unimaginable ways. So far, David has become a liar, raider, and killer, but our passage now informs us that David is also expected to become a traitor to Israel. Achish expects David to

march with the Philistines against Israel. What is David to do?

- i. As we said last week, sin will take you farther than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and make you pay a price greater than you intended to pay.
- ii. David was living in the reality of this truth, and the consequences of his sin will become even more grave in the following chapters.

3. Verses 3-11: Man's Way is not God's Way: Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land. (4) The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. (5) When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. (6) And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. (7) Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a medium at En-dor." (8) So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you." (9) The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he 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?” (10) But Saul swore to her by the LORD, “As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.” (11) Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” He said, “Bring up Samuel for me.”

- a. The note about Samuel’s death is a flashback. The reader needs to know this fact because it will become crucial in the rest of the story.
- b. We are also told that Saul had banished the mediums and the necromancers from Israel. A medium is someone that conjures the dead, and a necromancer is someone who deals with the dead, magic, astrology, and the dark arts. Such practices were incompatible with the worship of the true God and something that God had forbidden long before Saul.
 - i. **Deuteronomy 18:9-14** “When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. (10) There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer (11) or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, (12) for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. (13) You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, (14) for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for

you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.

1. Such practices shift our dependency away from God. It leads to the worship of demons and satanic power.
 2. No Christian should be engaged in such things. We are to be **blameless** in this area.
 3. Interestingly, much of our entertainment industry is based on the same practices God condemns in this passage. Christian, be careful!
- c. Our attention now turns to the Philistines. We are told that they encroach upon Israel but this time, they intend to stay. This is not just a border skirmish but a full-on invasion.
- i. **Commentary:** They planned to fight on the ground where chariots could maneuver to their advantage, to control the trade route through the Plain of Esdraelon, and to cut off Saul from his northernmost tribes.
 1. This is a concerted effort to destroy the kingdom.
- d. Such news was difficult to hear. Saul, the bible tells us, is overcome with fear at the sight of such an enormous army. The Philistines seem to have brought an overwhelming amount of troops and weaponry. What is Saul to do?
- e. Desperate and terrified, Saul asks for God's guidance, something he had not done in a very long time. This would seem a sure sign of repentance, but it is not. As the rest of the passage will make clear, Saul was not

seeking guidance from God because he was repentant for his past disobedience, but because he was desperate, he wanted information. As usual, he wants something from God but is unwilling to obey God. This had been his lifelong pattern. Like many people today, Saul was highly religious but not lovingly obedient. We can learn much from such a statement.

- i. However, God had made it clear that Saul had gone too far in his stubborn refusal to obey God's gospel. He was a spiritually condemned man.
 - ii. Therefore, God does not answer Saul! Saul finds himself rejected by God once again.
- f. Having not received instruction from God, Saul demonstrates to us why God rejected him in the first place. He decides to seek God's counsel but in what he knows to be an illegitimate way. Saul was religious, but he never was careful with true worship.
- i. He disguises himself and, at night, goes to see the medium at Endor. When she is suspicious, Saul swears an oath by God and God's life that she will not incur any penalty from the government.
 - ii. Beloved, pay attention to the irony in our passage. Saul swears by God as he seeks help from a source that God has condemned. Saul is indeed lost!
 - iii. The woman consents and begins her dark art.

4. Verses 12-14: The rising of Samuel: When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are

Saul.” (13) The king said to her, “Do not be afraid. What do you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I see a god coming up out of the earth.” (14) He said to her, “What is his appearance?” And she said, “An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe.” And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

a. At this point, we come to a couple of challenging theological questions. Did the medium at Endor conjure up Samuel, or was it God who sent Samuel on one last errand? Another question for our consideration is, was it Samuel or some sort of demon? Because there are divergent views on this passage, and it is unlike any other, the following is my best attempt to explain what is occurring.

i. First, the medium’s scream is indicative that what she saw was out of the ordinary. In other words, what she usually conjured up were lying demonic beings. We know that no person can, through the satanic arts, remove a soul from the presence of God. They deceive themselves and others with their dark powers but what they put forth is not legitimate.

1. **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10** The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, (10) and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

ii. Second, it appears that the spirit that approached was Samuel. Why God would send Samuel on

one last errand to Saul is a mystery we cannot answer.

1. **Deuteronomy 29:29** “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
 - iii. Thirdly, the message of Samuel is aligned with the message that had been received before. Namely, God had rejected Saul, the kingdom would be given to David, and God would finally deal with Saul once and for all.
 - iv. Fourth, this passage does not condone the practice of necromancy.
 1. The Scripture describes such practices not as futile but as pagan and deceptive. God forbids the use of these means not because they do not work but because they are wicked.
5. Verses 15-25: The reality of rejection: Then Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” Saul answered, “I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do.” (16) And Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? (17) 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 neighbor, David. (18) 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. (19) 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.” (20) Then Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night. (21) And the woman came to Saul, and when she saw that he was terrified, she said to him, “Behold, your servant has obeyed you. I have taken my life in my hand and have listened to what you have said to me. (22) Now therefore, you also obey your servant. Let me set a morsel of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way.” (23) He refused and said, “I will not eat.” But his servants, together with the woman, urged him, and he listened to their words. So he arose from the earth and sat on the bed. (24) Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly killed it, and she took flour and kneaded it and baked unleavened bread of it, (25) and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

- a. We can find various truths in this portion of scripture.
 - i. *The most hopeless misery in all of life is to be abandoned by God.* We read that Saul said **I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more.**

1. Saul can hear the Philistines' shouts but not God's voice. He faces the crisis of his life, and God has literally nothing to say to him. This verse contains some of the saddest words in all Scripture.
2. Why was God mute? God is carrying out what He swore to Saul when he disobeyed God for the final time.
3. This text is not gentle, but it is very clear. It is a warning to all who would hear! If you despise God's Word, he will take it from you. If you persistently refuse to obey God's speech, you will endure God's silence.
 - a. How crucial is your first response to the gospel, to the initial call to enter the kingdom of God?
 - b. **Isaiah 55:6-7** “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; (7) 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.
4. To know that you need to repent and not be able to do it is the worse of all realities. It will be your reality if you continue disobeying God's command to repent.
 - ii. *We must put our trials in the proper perspective.*

1. **Commentary:** Believer, you may be exhausted from work. You might have lost your health, or your family troubles are now cropping up. The text says there is something far worse. Do you realize what a blessing it is in the face of all our losses, pressures, disappointments, and failures to have access to the throne of grace and the smiling face of God in prayer? Do you realize that what you have suffered is not nearly as tragic as someone moaning like Saul does in our passage, “**God has turned away from me**”? We might weep because of our trouble but must remember that we, unlike the forsaken, still have God.
- iii. *Spiritual desperation will misdirect a person from the needed God.*
 1. Saul, desperate for answer, turns to a medium for information. However, Saul’s need was not for information but communion, not to prepare for battle but to recover God’s presence. It seems that Saul wanted the results of God’s favor more than he wanted God.
 - a. Saul turns to practices that cannot avail.
- iv. Many Christians are convinced that they are in Saul’s shoes—they are cut off from God’s presence and doomed to silence. It is not TRUE! Sometimes God does leave us in affliction for so long that we are tempted to believe that He has abandoned us. *Beloved, we must be confident*

that God will never abandon a believer. There are two ways to know this truth:

1. First, we must be believers in God's Word. Jesus promised to always be with the believer. He says so in **Matthew 28:20B** ...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
 2. Second, the fact that even in what we might describe as His "absence," God the Holy Spirit keeps turning our affection to God and not to something else, is proof of his abiding presence.
 - a. **John 6:67-68** So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" (68) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,
- v. When we look at the end of this chapter, we notice that the narrative ends with a sense of hopelessness but things are not always as they seem. Brothers and sisters, *there is a light that shines in the darkness.*
1. The woman insists and provides to a stunned Saul a meal fit for a king. It would be Saul's last meal. He is very much a man on death row, condemned to die.
 2. Then our narrative closes with Saul and his men getting up and leaving, just like they came, during the **night**.
 - a. What Saul did in coming to a medium was work of darkness. He now leaves

in utter hopelessness and despair, and we are reminded once more that it was **night**. This outer darkness, symbolic of his spiritual condition, swallows him up as he leaves the house's light.

- i. Remember, the Bible has a lot to say about this motif of darkness and light, sun and moon, and day and night.
 - ii. Genesis and Samuel
 - iii. Christ is the light of the world, but men loved darkness.
 - iv. God is light, and in Him, there is no darkness.
 - v. Revelation ends with light overcoming the darkness forever.
- b. **Commentary**: Does the scene not remind you of another last supper? Does it not bring to mind another religious and very talented individual? One who had preached Christ and had done miracles in His name? We shudder every time we read these words about Judas Iscariot in **John 13:30** So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.
- i. Judas, too went into the spiritual darkness after a last meal. He, too, went to die. He, too, stood condemned.

- ii. Both of these men faced the darkness of eternity while separated from God by their sin. They are currently in the darkness of hell and will be there for eternity.
- vi. *However there is someone else who entered the darkness, and was also forsaken by God not because of His sins but because of ours!*
 - 1. We read about the crucifixion of Jesus in **Mark 15:33-34** And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. (34) And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
 - 2. We must not make the mistake of seeing our passage in isolation. We must not look at Saul and Judas and believe we are somehow better than them. We, too, have sinned and disobeyed God just like they did! The difference is that God has chosen to forsake the Son instead of you and me.
 - a. **Commentary**: The glory of the Gospel is that God’s son went through the darkness of God’s absence for us, the darkness and agony of God-forsakenness. Is not the cry of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark very much like the cry of Saul when he states,

“God has turned away from me and answers me no more”?

- b. At Golgotha, Jesus walked out into the outer darkness so that you and I might walk in the light of life.
- c. **1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
- d. **Ephesians 2:2-5** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

6. Benediction:

- a. **1 John 1:5** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Public Reading of Scripture
John 1:5-10