

The Sealing of a Testimony- Finish Well!

Call to Worship: Psalm 65:1-4

Hymn Insert (65A)- *Awaiting You in Zion*

1st Scripture: Genesis 47:1-12

Hymn Insert- *In Christ Alone*

2nd Scripture: 1 Samuel 25:1

Hymn# 727- *When the Roll is Called up Yonder*

Introduction:

As we continue on in our study of the life of David, we come this morning to a very brief, and yet important, interjection, before moving on with the drama of David's life. And it is all too easy to merely skip over what we are told here, rather than *ponder* and *benefit from* it, because it is contained within one fraction of a verse, and that, at the beginning of a lengthy chapter, full of intense drama. In fact, it almost seems awkward, kind of like the news line at the bottom of the TV screen, which floats by, virtually unnoticed, as you are too focused on the main event that dominates the rest of the TV screen. We ended chapter 24 with Saul and David parting their ways, after an intense conflict, where David was wrestling with what to do with Saul in the cave, and we are preparing to move into the drama of all that takes place with David, Nabal and Abigail for the next 40+ verses, and sandwiched between these two sections, is one half of a verse, which merely informs us of the fact that the prophet Samuel has died.

"Then Samuel died; and the Israelites gathered together and lamented for him, and buried him at his home in Ramah." That is it! That is the news flash, which vaguely interrupts the program for a few moments, before moving forward. Samuel died, the people mourned, and they buried him at his home. Perhaps, as a result of this, David temporarily leaves his present stronghold and goes down to the Wilderness of Paran, so as to feel out how Saul responds to the death of Samuel, but then David winds up back in the Wilderness of Maon, and our story moves on in verse 2.

And so, the question is, "What do we do with the first portion of verse 1?" Do we mention it in passing, and just quickly move on? "Oh, and by the way, Samuel died, was mourned and buried, but...next." Or do we stop and ponder this statement, recognizing that even these divinely inspired words, have some great benefit to offer us, as we journey to glory? Well, needless to say, you can tell by the title of the message this morning, that I believe we ought not to pass up a golden opportunity to consider the death and passing of a man of God, whenever such an opportunity is

granted to us in the Scriptures! God has given us an opportunity here, to consider the sealing of a testimony; the testimony of a godly man, and He has allowed us to stop in the busyness of our lives, so that we might ponder the end of all flesh, that one unique meeting with death, which awaits us all. And so, we are going to spend our time here this morning.

I. What Samuel Witnessed in the Realm of the Temporal

The aged, weary but wise, Jacob, stood before the much younger Pharaoh, and blessed him. And then the Pharaoh popped the big question, "How old are you?" And Jacob responded, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage" (Gen. 47:9).

Not very encouraging words from the great Patriarch, but very true nonetheless. His life was hard, full of great conflict, sorrow, scandal and pain. Indeed, life under the sun is full of misery; the effects of the fall touch the heart of every soul, among the godly and the ungodly. And who could testify to this reality, better than the "Man of sorrows" Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, who though without any sin of His own, tasted of the worst of sin's effects?

Consider what Samuel had witnessed and endured throughout the course of his pilgrimage:

1) Right from the outset, Samuel's very first prophetic utterance, as a young lad, was against his master and mentor, Eli. Through Samuel, God pronounced a very serious curse against Eli, his sons and his house. [1 Sam. 3]

2) As a young man, Samuel witnessed something beyond grievous, which had never happened before. The Philistines had captured the ark of God, which was held by Hophni and Phinehas, at the battle that had taken place between Israel and the Philistines. Thirty thousand foot soldiers had fallen among the Israelites, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and Eli had fallen backwards off of his seat, breaking his neck and dying. Could Samuel had been too far away from his mentor, when this had happened? What was he thinking through all of this? [1 Sam. 4]

3) Phinehas' wife died, while giving birth to their (now parentless) child, but not before she named him, "Ichabod," meaning "the glory has departed from Israel." This was a clear description of the times, as the ark of God had been taken away from

Israel. And this was a clear description of the times, within which Samuel was called to minister. Not very promising, for a prophet of God, from the standpoint of this life. [1 Sam. 4]

4) Indeed, the ark was returned some seven months later, but it remained in Kirjath Jearim, as the people were greatly terrified of it, after the people of Beth Shemesh had suffered a great slaughter, for looking into it. [1 Sam. 6].

5) Samuel becomes Israel's last judge, before the kingdom years arise, and while he did see some times of promise throughout those years (Israel's repentance, and their subsequent success against the Philistines) [1 Sam.7] , toward the latter part of his life, things did not turn out as well as one would have hoped, from the standpoint of hope. When he was old, he made his sons judges over Israel, but they did not share their father's faith, and wound up being full of all manner of corruption. We are told in 1 Samuel 8:2 that they, "did not walk in [Samuel's ways]; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice." And sadly, there is no indication given, that they ever repented.

6) In response to the corruption and wickedness of Samuel's sons, the Israelites, coveting a king *like the nations*, rejected God as their king, and pressed Samuel to give them a king *like the nations*. This greatly grieved Samuel, to say the least. [1 Samuel 8]

7) Nevertheless, giving heed to God's order, Samuel anointed Saul, a tall, young man, to lead and rule over the people. And Samuel not only accepted Saul as king, but he threw all of his weight behind him. Samuel so loved the people of Israel, that he gave all of his support to Saul, and had sincerely desired to see great things happen under his leadership. And he continued to pray fervently to this end. And when Saul was used by God to save Jabesh Gilead; when God had confirmed Saul before the people of Israel, Samuel was excited and hopeful, to say the least. [1 Samuel 9-12]

8) But then, it all went down hill from there, and Samuel felt it much more than even Saul did. Saul makes his unlawful sacrifice, and later fails to fulfill God's curse against the Amalekites (and Agag), revealing his *lack of faith in and rebellion against* God. Saul is rejected as king, and Samuel is greatly grieved over Saul's rebellion. Samuel returns to Ramah for the remainder of his days, committing himself especially toward teaching and training men, at a school of the prophets.

9) But first, Samuel is called to anoint David as a king to replace Saul. And for the remainder of his days, Samuel hears of Saul's increasing madness and determination to kill David, as David is on the run, as a fugitive, fleeing from Saul.

10) Samuel's life concludes in the midst of all of this "cat and mouse" madness. And so, while he had the pleasure of anointing David as king, he never lived to see David ascend the throne. Samuel never found rest under the reign of a man of God. His piece of the puzzle is complete right here at this stage in God's history of redemption and providence.

11) And here we are, at 1 Samuel 25:1, where we are told that Samuel died, was mourned by Israel, and buried at his home in Ramah. End of story...on to the next thing.

Conclusive Thoughts: Brethren, when we consider the lives of even the godliest of men; Jacob, Moses (who never actually entered the Promised Land), David, Elijah...etc, and here Samuel, can we not see how Jacob's words fit so well to describe not only his own life, but life in general, for all people...even, and especially for the godly.

Do we see very clearly, brethren, that this was never meant to be our "best life now" or the way of ease and painlessness for the Christian? Our Lord, in fact, calls it a cross; a digging of the heels into the soil that leads to Mount Golgotha for our crucifixion. This life is often full of deep, deep sorrow, agony, pain and grief, for the people of God. Unbeliever, non-christian, the call of the Gospel of grace, is never a call unto ease of life and painlessness in this life, do you see that? The Christian, in fact, is promised suffering and hardship, both of which are used to painfully shape the Christian for the next life. This world is a world of misery, because sin has infected it, and we continue to contribute to that infection with our own sins, which is why, Christians look forward to a better hope, in a new heavens and a new earth, with Christ! The joy of the Christian, is a heavenly joy, a joy based and built upon the promises of God, given us in Christ. The joy of the Christian is based on fellowship with God, in the soul now, though the outward man is perishing day by day, as the inner man is being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ! The Christian's joy is based upon peace with God now, in the midst of a world of hardship and chaos, looking unto the fruition of that peace in glory! The Christian has received the down payment of the glory to come, in the sealing of the Spirit, in anticipation of the

fullness to come, beyond the gates of this life! In the world, we have tribulation, but we find our peace, even presently, even in the midst of this unstable, miserable sin-laden world...we find our present peace in Christ! Communion with Christ is that which our soul presently latches onto...indeed, Paul refers to us as presently, "seated in heaven with Christ," so that we might endure and persevere through, all of the great hardships, which come upon us in this life.

And so, like Samuel, our eyes see much to pain us; our hearts are often broken by sin and hardship, and apart from bringing our "one piece of the puzzle" into the grand scheme of God's redemption, it all seems frivolous, senseless and without any hope. Samuel was a great man of God, but from the standpoint of *this life*; from the standpoint of all that takes place beneath the sun...he lived in vain, didn't he? If this is it, and there is nothing more, then as the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians, Christians are most to be pitied. But there is more, is there not? And Samuel's story speaks much louder, when it is considered from a position that lies *above* the sun!

II. What Samuel Witnesses in the Realm of the Eternal

Brethren, from a pragmatic standpoint, at least within the bounds of Samuel's lifetime, Samuel would not have had much to rejoice about, at the end of his short life, would he? What he witnessed in the realm of the "temporal," what he witnessed under the sun, was full of grief, more often than not. And if there be no greater, wider, broader, eternal plan; if there be no divine hand guiding all of life to a great end, then he ought to have been pitied.

But what has Samuel witnessed, and what does he continue to witness from the eternal standpoint? Well, let me answer this in two ways, the first, spilling over into the much larger second.

1) From the standpoint of his own lifetime on earth, Samuel is able to witness the sealing of his own faithful testimony. Samuel "finished well!" Amidst all of the misery, the grief, the tears and sorrows, Samuel stood his ground and faithfully finished the course. There was much that could have easily sent him away from the Lord, if he maintained a view that kept him focusing on life "under the sun." But Samuel saw the bigger picture; the picture that weighs things out, not according to immediate consequences and pragmatics, but according to the revealed will of God. Samuel was faithful to his calling; he wasn't perfect, but he was faithful nonetheless.

-When it would have been very easy to keep quiet and to cave into a "fear of man," he boldly proclaimed the Word of God, be it unto the downfall of his mentor, Eli, or unto the removal and condemnation of the King, Saul.

-When it could have been very easy to walk away from Israel, after facing their rejection, he rather gave them a king, according to the will of God, and sincerely threw his weight and heart behind that king.

-When his own sons rebelled against God and corrupted their own governing offices, rather than blame God, Samuel faithfully served in His prophetic office.

-Unto the great risk of his life, he anointed David unto the throne, and protected him, in so far as he was able.

-On the heels of all manner of national failure, he committed himself to the school of the prophets, training men to carry the torch, so that the ministry would go on, when he was gone. And he succeeded to this end. And now, here in chapter 25, he goes home, having maintained a faithful testimony; having stayed the course; having been willing to leave his etch on the large wall of redemptive history.

2) And then secondly, brethren, Samuel not only witnessed the sealing of his own faithful testimony in the course of his short lifetime, but furthermore, he witnessed the unfolding of the greater picture, in the glorification of the Christ, whom he had proclaimed throughout his lifetime. [Read Acts 3:18-25]

Brethren, Samuel was one who "foretold of those Gospel times," at the beginning of the New Covenant era! And he has witnessed the unfolding of this glorious plan of redemption, which is still yet to culminate, as to its fulness, when Christ returns. But herein lies the key factor, brethren: Samuel's short life, full of all manner of temporary hardship, pain and misery, finds its meaning and value, not in the pragmatic outcomes, which were bound within the time in which he lived and ministered, but rather in the big picture; the whole picture of God's plan of redemption, where Christ is exalted and glorified in and by the individual and summation of every part that remained faithful, throughout all of history.

And so, the question for Samuel; indeed the question for every servant of the living God, and every professing Christian for that matter, is this, not, "What were the pragmatics or immediate consequences of your ministry, but rather, were you faithful to God, regardless of the immediate outcomes? Did you remain faithful to Christ?" For, many will say on that day, "Lord, Lord...we did this and that; we cast out demons and did miracles; we built mega-churches and were great philanthropists; we gave

away millions to the poor...etc; Lord, look at the pragmatics!" And yet, He will say, "Depart from Me *you worker of lawlessness*, I never knew you!" But the faithful and the persevering will prevail! "But Lord, I spent "umteen" years doing this and that and that...I know I fell off the wagon at the end, but look at the past." The Apostle Paul said that he forgot "those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press forward toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." [Philip. 3:13-14].

Brethren, this tiny portion of a text is given us, if for no other reason than to challenge us to, "Finish well!" Life is so short...finish well, brethren! Stay faithful; remain steadfast and immovable, always serving the Lord, in every hardship and tribulation, never slowing down (we are in a race!), so that we might hear those precious, gracious words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" So that we might come to the end of our race, proclaiming these words with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing!" [2 Tim. 4:7-8].

The Gospel

AMEN!!!

Benediction: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58