

1 Sam. 28:3-25

“Why Then Do You Ask Me?”

Sunday Night Sermon: 3/5/23

I. Opening Questions?

- A. What does it mean for God to be faithful? What does it look like for God to fulfill all His promises? To whom is God ultimately being faithful—only to you, or also to Himself?
- B. There are two sides to the coin of faithfulness, and tonight we’re going to look at the side we don’t always want to consider.

Read text

II. Inquiring Minds Want to Know

A. Crises create seekers

- 1. A lack of spokespeople for the supernatural + a Philistine horde = a troubled king
 - a. Samuel, the chief prophet is gone and the occultists have been driven from the land.
- 2. Bergen: “Shunem was located on a hill next to the Via Maris, the major trade route passing through the Promised Land. The Philistines desired to control this region which included the valley of Jezreel since it would provide them with considerable revenue from caravans using the highway.”
 - a. Don’t know the size of the force, but 29:2 tells us “*the lords of the Philistines were proceeding on by hundreds and by thousands*”
 - 1a. We can tell it’s serious by Saul’s emotional reaction: “*When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly.*” (28:5)
- 3. What does it take in your life before you say, “I need answers?”
 - a. Crisis of subsistence? Where’s the next paycheck coming from?
 - b. Crisis of relationship? I don’t know what to do about my spouse, kids, parents, friend, church?
 - c. Crisis of faith? Why is God hiding? What does He want for/from me?
 - d. Crisis of meaning? I thought my life would have turned out differently?

B. “By any means necessary”

- 1. Saul exhausts the legitimate channels:
 - a. Dreams (an established method of communication between God and His people—we were talking about Joseph this morning)
 - b. Urim (a divinely instituted method for priestly inquiry of the Lord)
 - c. prophets (the spokesmen and representatives of the Lord to His people)
- 2. In desperation, he turns to forbidden sources:
 - a. Seek for me a woman who is a medium
 - 1a. Tsumura calls her a “female necromancer” suggests that the Hebrew phrase here, *eset ba’alat ob* means ‘a woman who serves the Lady of the dead spirits’, ‘the Lady’ referring to the sun goddess as ruler or guide of the spirits in the nether world
 - 2a. In direct violation of the law:
 - i. *Lev. 19:31: Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.*

ii. *Lev. 20:6: 'As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.*

- b. In this action, Saul is undoing one of the positive contributions he made to the spiritual life of Israel, and, in Bergen's opinion, commits a deliberate violation of one of the gravest prohibitions in the Torah
- c. His desperation is also seen in the fact that he has to skirt the Philistine camp to reach Endor, 6 miles to the north.

C. Religious rebels reveal they haven't surrendered agendas

- 1. This latest attempt to seek the will of the Lord through means that the Lord has forbidden is yet another example of Saul's attempt at piety in the midst of his sinful self-seeking ways
 - a. 13:8-12: In the face of Samuel's delay, he offers the burnt offering in Gilgal to seek the favor of the Lord in disobedience to the Lord's regulations for sacrifice.
 - b. 15:1-31: Saul disobeys God's command to destroy all of the Amalekites and the spoil they took from them, and claims that choicest of the spoil was spared to offer a sacrifice to God. When informed that the kingdom has been taken from him, he urges Samuel to worship with him nonetheless. This is clearly done to keep up appearances (15:30), but Saul includes the phrase "that I may worship the LORD your God."
 - c. 17:37: He blesses David before his battle with Goliath with the words, "Go, and may the LORD be with you."
 - d. 19:1-6: When Jonathan successfully intercedes for David, Saul vows, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death."
 - e. 19:18-24: Though not of his own volition, Saul prophesies when he attempts to capture David in Ramah (in violation of his previous vow).
 - f. 22:14-23:7: After ordering the priests of the Lord slain at nob, Saul sees David's relocation to Keilah as a gift from the Lord: "'God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars."
 - g. 23:19-23: Saul blesses the Ziphites when they betray David's location to him with the words, "May you be blessed of the LORD, for you had compassion on me."
 - h. During a brief moment of seeming repentance, Saul blesses David with the words, "May the Lord therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day" after recognizing that the Lord has delivered him into David's hands. He also asks David to enter into covenant with him, swearing by the Lord.
 - i. Saul, having been explicitly told that his dynasty will not endure and that the kingdom has been taken from him, continues to imagine that God is working on his behalf, bless others in God's name, swears by God, and here, seeks God's guidance.
 - j. In securing the services of the medium at Endor, he will even swear to her by the Lord that no harm will befall her.
 - 1j. Notice that only his authority as king, which should be used to

maintain and enforce Torah regulations, can ensure that they do not touch one who deserves punishment. Saul has abused his authority throughout his time “in office” and reminds us of his character by doing it here again.

- 2j. Bergen states: “In fact, Saul’s oath invoked the Lord to grant immunity to one who broke the Lord’s command and turned God against himself. Such an oath was not only foolish but actually blasphemous.”
2. Saul is still trying to use piety to pull God into his agenda, instead of surrendering to God’s.
 - a. We are so prone to this as human beings. We are called to a God of infinite power and love, and the temptation is to try to get His power working for us (the heart of witchcraft) instead of yielding to His will and purposes.
 - b. Where do you need to lay down your agenda? If God is failing your expectations, maybe your expectations need to be examined.

III. God’s Infallible Fidelity to His Own Word

A. Samuel is called.

1. Questions abound with this forbidden practice actually being used to summon one of Israel’s most renowned prophets.
 - a. It is notable that God does not strip Satanic practices of their efficacy, but instead forbids them to His people. Whether in His granting Satan freedom to afflict Job, or the accuracy of Balaam, or the power of Pharaoh’s magicians to imitate some of the miracles performed by Moses, we see that in accomplishing his purposes, God allows His enemy to exercise power in the world. This does not mean that every spell cast by a witch will have the intended effect, but it does mean that practices aligned with the “prince of the power of the air” can be efficacious by God’s allowance.
 1. Davis quotes Yehezkel Kauffman in his footnotes: “The laws ban divination on the ground that it is an abomination. They nowhere intimate that it is vain.”
 2. Tsumura states: “The author certainly intends us to believe it is really Samuel. Only he would have been able to give that message. And we have to assume that God permitted the witch to call Samuel up in this case even though he might not normally have allowed it.”

B. Picking up where we left off

1. In amazing scriptural symmetry, Samuel announces to Saul that the judgment pronounced on him by God at Gilgal is now coming upon him.
 - a. 1 Sam. 15:10-29
2. His question: “Why then do you ask me?” is so pregnant! God, the Glory of Israel, has not changed His mind. He is utterly opposed to Saul. He has become his enemy. Samuel spells it out in no uncertain terms that God is not coming to rescue Saul (not even through the instrument of prophetic counsel). God is coming to judge. He has withdrawn his guiding, shepherding presence from Saul and has fully adopted the stance of opposition. Samuel, having grieved over Saul and having died before the day his words at Gilgal came to pass, has come back

from the grave in fantastic fashion to tell Saul that they have now come home to him.

3. What God said he would do before David's anointing, before David's appearance at court, before David's fame became a threat, before Saul's wrath led him to pursue David and seek him out among the thousands of Judah, before all the misdeeds that Saul did in an effort to hold the shreds of his tattered kingdom together He is now bringing to pass.

- a. Samuel seems to be saying, in essence, "I am God's spokesman. My life on earth was spent communicating His will and commands to His people. You have refused to listen to His commands and to heed His will. He has no other words for you—no words of guidance, no words of hope. He has already made it clear to you that he is tearing the kingdom away from you and giving it to your neighbor. I have no message from God for your predicament because God has already spoken and you refuse to hear. There is nothing that you "should" do about the Philistines because there is nothing that you can do about them. They are an inexorable instrument of God designed and destined to bring about your final judgment. You can't do anything about them; you can only fall before them."

C. Saul is hoping for a second opinion.

1. Baldwin states: "Despite the finality of Saul's last confrontation with Samuel (1 Sam 15:10-35), Saul still longed for the word of the Lord which he had received through the prophet who had first anointed him and proclaimed him king. He must have hoped that Samuel would somehow reverse the judgment which he had pronounced in much the same way as some of our contemporaries refuse to take seriously the dark side of the word of God."

2. Saul keeps turning the magic 8 ball over again, hoping for a different response.

- a. *Jer. 37:15-17: Then the officials were angry at Jeremiah and beat him, and they put him in jail in the house of Jonathan the scribe, which they had made into the prison. 16 For Jeremiah had come into the dungeon, that is, the vaulted cell; and Jeremiah stayed there many days. 17 Now King Zedekiah sent and took him out; and in his palace the king secretly asked him and said, "Is there a word from the Lord?" And Jeremiah said, "There is!" Then he said, "You will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon!"*

3. "The gods of the Copybook Headings" –Rudyard Kipling

As I pass through my incarnations in every age and race,
I make my proper prostrations to the Gods of the Market Place.
Peering through reverent fingers I watch them flourish and fall,
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings, I notice, outlast them all.

We were living in trees when they met us. They showed us each in turn
That Water would certainly wet us, as Fire would certainly burn:
But we found them lacking in Uplift, Vision and Breadth of Mind,
So we left them to teach the Gorillas while we followed the March of Mankind.

We moved as the Spirit listed. They never altered their pace,

Being neither cloud nor wind-borne like the Gods of the Market Place,
But they always caught up with our progress, and presently word would come
That a tribe had been wiped off its icefield, or the lights had gone out in Rome.

With the Hopes that our World is built on they were utterly out of touch,
They denied that the Moon was Stilton; they denied she was even Dutch;
They denied that Wishes were Horses; they denied that a Pig had Wings;
So we worshipped the Gods of the Market Who promised these beautiful things.

When the Cambrian measures were forming, They promised perpetual peace.
They swore, if we gave them our weapons, that the wars of the tribes would
cease.

But when we disarmed They sold us and delivered us bound to our foe,
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "Stick to the Devil you know."

On the first Feminian Sandstones we were promised the Fuller Life
(Which started by loving our neighbour and ended by loving his wife)
Till our women had no more children and the men lost reason and faith,
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "The Wages of Sin is Death."

In the Carboniferous Epoch we were promised abundance for all,
By robbing selected Peter to pay for collective Paul;
But, though we had plenty of money, there was nothing our money could buy,
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "If you don't work you die."

Then the Gods of the Market tumbled, and their smooth-tongued wizards
withdrew
And the hearts of the meanest were humbled and began to believe it was true
That All is not Gold that Glitters, and Two and Two make Four
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings limped up to explain it once more.

As it will be in the future, it was at the birth of Man
There are only four things certain since Social Progress began.
That the Dog returns to his Vomit and the Sow returns to her Mire,
And the burnt Fool's bandaged finger goes wabbling back to the Fire;

And that after this is accomplished, and the brave new world begins
When all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his sins,
As surely as Water will wet us, as surely as Fire will burn,
The Gods of the Copybook Headings with terror and slaughter return!

- D. As a society, as a world, we keep looking for a way around the fact that God is God. We want Him to be something else to us than what He is, and the outcome of this insistence on our part will cost us all we have to give.
- E. This stark and unbearable judgment on Saul is part of what it means for God to be faithful to His word. Just as he keeps his promises to love and rescue His people, He keeps His promises to defend His authority and purposes. They are two sides of the same coin.
- F. The mundane nature of the closing drives home the hopelessness of Saul's case. The

medium and his servants urge him to strengthen himself—to what end? He eats his last meal and turns out into the night.

IV. The Fingerprint of Mercy

A. Where's the hope?

1. We need to get our heads around the truth that we don't need a warm fuzzy every time we come to God's word. His purposes in our lives are served through a text like this just as they're served by a text like Romans 8.
2. However, there is hope here.

B. Hope in the Warning

1. Saul is a monument for us, pointing us in the other direction.
 - a. 1 Cor. 10:1-13
2. Leaflets from WWII
 - a. Used this example before, but I hope you'll indulge me again.
 - b. LeMay leaflets

Read this carefully as it may save your life or the life of a relative or friend. In the next few days, some or all of the cities named on the reverse side will be destroyed by American bombs. These cities contain military installations and workshops or factories which produce military goods. We are determined to destroy all of the tools of the military clique which they are using to prolong this useless war. But, unfortunately, bombs have no eyes. So, in accordance with America's humanitarian policies, the American Air Force, which does not wish to injure innocent people, now gives you warning to evacuate the cities named and save your lives. America is not fighting the Japanese people but is fighting the military clique which has enslaved the Japanese people. The peace which America will bring will free the people from the oppression of the military clique and mean the emergence of a new and better Japan. You can restore peace by demanding new and good leaders who will end the war. We cannot promise that only these cities will be among those attacked but some or all of them will be, so heed this warning and evacuate these cities immediately.

3. God cares about you, and calls you to turn.
 - a. If you're an unbeliever, the gospel.
 - b. If you're a believer, a sober call to keep following the God who saves.
 - 1b. Rom. 11:17-22

C. Saul's destruction brings God's promises home to David, the man after God's own heart.

1. God is about to free David from a difficult situation providentially.
2. Here, David's decisions to honor God's order and wait for Him to bring the promises to pass are about to be fully and finally vindicated.
3. The axe is raised to the rotting stump of Saul, and David will not need to be the one to swing it.

D. Heb. 10:35-39