

A Dark Witch on a Dark Night

(1 Samuel 28:3-25)

10/5/15; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

When I was 11, I had a little accident at home on a Sunday morning.

I was putting on my clothes that morning, and I had a shirt that was a little tight but I loved to wear it.

As I was putting it on, somehow I got it stuck over my head and arms...

And I truly could not get it on or even take it off.

My dad was taking a bath at the time and couldn't hear me...

And I panicked.

I am slightly claustrophobic and began to feel helpless with that shirt stuck on my head.

So, I began wrestling with myself to get it off and I fell and cut my mouth on my nightstand..

Well, I am bleeding everywhere..

My dad jumps out of the bathroom, throws on some clothes and takes me to the emergency room.

When I get there, the nurse checks me out and tells me that she has bad news and bad news.

The first bad news is that I need a couple stitches in my lip.

The second bad news is that I also need a updated tetanus shot just in case.

Then she asked me...

Which one do you want first?

And I asked her which one would she do first?

And she she said since the shot would hurt a little worse, let's do it first to get it out of the way.

Because it is always best to do the worst, first.

So I took the shot and got the stitches, and she was right, the shot hurt much worse...

Tonight, we are going to look at 1 Samuel 28, which is the famous chapter about Saul and the witch of Endor..

And what I want to do tonight to begin our look at this interesting chapter is this...

I want to tackle the worst first.

Because chapter 28 of 1 Samuel is going to raise some questions in your mind...

Because it has raised questions in a lot of people's minds for this reason...

In chapter 28, Saul, who is still Israel's king, is going to contact a woman who is a medium, which simply means that she tries to contact the dead.

And in his meeting with her, Saul is going to speak with Samuel, the prophet and judge to Israel who is already dead.

Now, that is going to bring up all sorts of questions in our minds..

Is it possible to contact the dead?

Does this woman have that power?

Should we try to contact the dead today?

Let me try to handle all these questions before we even get into the chapter...

1) This is a unique event in the Bible.

You don't see a repeat of this again anywhere in the Scriptures.

Nothing in the text says, "Go and do likewise."

2) God is the One who allowed this to happen.

Saul was able to talk to Samuel because God used it for His purposes on this one occasion.

The witch was simply an eyewitness.

3) I think you will see in the text that the witch was even surprised that Samuel showed up, even though she did this for a living.

Which suggests to me that she was a fraud all along.

4) Nothing good came out of this contact with the dead.

Samuel rebukes Saul for what he is doing.

And on top of that, Saul dies the next day.

5) There is a spirit world.

The Bible even describes it a world that is unseen to us.

However, the Bible is clear that no one should try to contact that world.

The practice of divination or trying to contact the dead is against God's Law.

You may think that you have contacted the dead, but it may be a demon.

6) We get our comfort in death not from those who have died, but from the God of both the living and the dead.

In other words, what is the purpose of hearing from the dead?

Do they have special wisdom that God hasn't already given us in the Scriptures?

Not a chance.

Our curiosity about death can be satisfied in the Bible.

God has told all we need to know about death in His Word.

There is no need to hear from the dead.

So, that is the worst first...

And that may not answer all your questions as we move through this chapter...

IF you have more, I will be glad to entertain them, but I doubt I can answer all of them because the Bible doesn't answer every question about this chapter either...

God just simply inspired the author of 1 Samuel to record this, but He didn't answer all our questions about it.

And that is okay because the witch is not the focus of the chapter.

Samuel's appearance is not even the focus of the chapter...

The focus of the chapter is Saul's desperation...

He is a king in this chapter who needs direction from the Lord but he can't get it and that makes him a very desperate.

So desperate that he will break God's law and and violate the own rules of his kingdom to go and find a witch in hopes of hearing from God.

What I want to do tonight is to read this chapter all together and then draw out a few principles for us to follow as we consider what we see here...

Now, let me set the stage real quick by reminding us all of what is going on here...

Saul is still the king of Israel, even though David is destined to be the next king of Israel.

For the moment, Saul has given up on his plan to find and kill David...

Because in chapter 27, David escaped to the Philistines..

Along with 600 of his men and their families..

Now while he was in Philisita, David continued to attack and kill Israel's enemies..

But he never told the king of Philistines that he was doing that...

In fact, he told the king that he was wiping out the Israelites in all his battles.

And because of that, the king of the Philistines asked David to go with him to fight the Israelites by his side.

And when chapter 27 ended, we weren't exactly sure how David was going to get out of his jam.

If he goes and fights with the Philistines, his hopes of being king will be gone...

If he refuses to fight with the Philistines, then they may realize that he isn't on their side after all and may kill him.

And while that is going on, we are going to flash forward in chapter 28 to the battle that the Philistines are going to fight against Israel...

In chapter 28, it is the night before the big battle...

We are quite sure what David is doing to get out of having to fight against Israel...

Will he have to fight against Saul and Israel?

Or has he gotten out of that?

We will have to find out next week what happens there, but tonight we are going to see what Saul is doing to prepare for the battle..

So, let me just read this chapter beginning in verse 3 all the way to the end...

And then we will try to apply some of this to our lives today...

3 Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists. 4 So the Philistines gathered together and came and camped in Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel together and they camped in Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly. 6 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 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 woman who is a medium at En-dor." 8 Then Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night; and he said, "Conjure up for me, please, and bring up for me whom I shall [b]name to you." 9 But the woman said to him, "Behold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those who are mediums and spiritists from the land. Why are you then laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?" 10 Saul vowed to her by the Lord, saying,

“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?” And he said, “Bring up Samuel for me.” 12 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.” 13 The king said to her, “Do not be afraid; but what do you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I see a [c]divine being coming up out of the earth.” 14 He said to her, “What is his form?” And she said, “An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe.” And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did homage. 15 Then Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” And Saul answered, “I am greatly distressed; for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and no longer answers me, either through prophets or by dreams; therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me what I should do.” 16 Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has departed from you and has become your adversary? 17 The Lord has done [d]accordingly as He spoke through me; for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David. 18 As you did not [e]obey the Lord and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the Lord has done this thing to you this day. 19 Moreover the Lord will also give over Israel along with you into the hands

of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the Lord will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!”

20 Then Saul immediately fell full length upon the ground and was very afraid because of the words of Samuel; also there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no [f]food all day and all night.

21 The woman came to Saul and saw that he was terrified, and said to him, “Behold, your maidservant has [g]obeyed you, and I have [h]taken my life in my hand and have listened to your words which you spoke to me. 22 So now also, please listen to the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you that you may eat and have strength when you go on your way.” 23 But he refused and said, “I will not eat.” However, his servants together with the woman urged him, and he listened to [i]them. So he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. 24 The woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly slaughtered it; and she took flour, kneaded it and baked unleavened bread from it. 25 She brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they arose and went away that night.

Now, let's try to apply this to our lives today by seeing the value of God's Word in the Bible...

In some ways, we can't relate to Saul and to many other OT people who weren't blessed with a Bible that they could look to for guidance in life...

Instead, they relied on God's prophets to communicate God's Word to them..

They relied on God's priests to communicate God's word to them...

They relied upon visions and dreams that God used to communicate with them.

They were a very dependent people...

We, on the other hand, don't look to a priest or a prophet or a dream to hear from the Lord.

We have access to God's Word 24/7 through the Scriptures..

In that way, we are different from men like Saul and David and others in the OT who needed to hear from God but needed a prophet or a priest..

However, let me suggest this to you...

We may have God's Word today, but very few people, even Christians appreciate the gift of the Bible...

And far too many, including people who call themselves Christians, look to other sources than the Scriptures when they need answers in life.

In a lot of ways, the world today, and even Christians, have also become desperate for God's Word but they don't even know it...

And some in the world become modern day Saul's who look everywhere hoping to hear from God but never consider the Scriptures..

So, let me offer a few principles tonight from what we just read to prevent us from being desperate people like Saul...

So, that we don't find ourselves doing the same things and reaping the same consequences that he did.

The first principle is this...

I. Desperation for God's Word Is the Worst Desperation of All (3-7)

When we get to verse 3 of chapter 28, we are again reminded of Samuel's death...

Samuel was a prophet and judge in Israel.

In fact, he was the last official judge before Israel asked to be ruled by a king like the other nations around them...

Samuel was the one who anointed Saul as the 1st king of Israel...

And Samuel was the one who God used to communicate with Saul in the beginning of his reign over the nation.

However, God also removed Samuel from Saul's life when Saul disobeyed God..

And that led to a number of problems for Saul, but not that Samuel is dead, Saul must be really despairing...

And on top of that, Saul really needs direction from God in chapter 28...

The Philistines are gathering in northern Israel and they are looking for a fight.

And Saul really has no idea what to do.

He needs to hear from the Lord.

He needs a battle plan..

Two things I want us to notice about the opening verses here...

First, - isn't it interesting that Saul only needs a word from the Lord when trouble comes?

Saul is like so many who only want to hear from the Lord on their own schedule...

How insulting that must be to God.

“Ummm...God...I'm in trouble today, please help.”

Yet, so many people only turn to God's Word in a time of need...

I have a friend who is very handy with a number of things, but the drawback is that he is also very talkative too...

We are good friends, and we used to talk often.

But it got to the point where I couldn't get off the phone with him, so I begin to call less...

He is fine with that, but he definitely noticed that I stopped calling...

In fact, if we talked, he was the one who usually called...

Unless I needed him to work on something for me, I never called...

It got to the point when I called that he would answer the phone like this when he saw my number pop up....

He would answer...

“Hey Bud, what is broken today?”

Because he knew that I would only call if I needed his help.

How many folks are like this today.

Let us not be people who only turn the Lord and his Word in times of trouble..

Let us read His Word and be people of prayer everyday..

But second, notice in this opening section the sadness of needing to hear from God, but only getting silence.

I entitled this section, “Desperation for God’s Word is the Worst Desperation of All.”

And the reason I say that is this..

Remember the horrible situation that David is in from last week?

He is in a foreign land and the king is asking him to go and fight against David’s own people..

That is certainly a desperate situation...

What will David do?

But let me assure you of this....

As bad as it looks for David, it is much worse for Saul...

David has the hope that God may give guidance...

David has been given God’s Spirit to guide Him.

David has access to prophets who may bring a word of rescue to him..

In a sense, David has hope because David has access to God's Word.

But Saul has no hope because his access to God's guidance has been cut off...

And the lesson for us is this...

You may be in a desperate situation as a believer today, but you don't have it as bad as you think...

Because if you are a Christian, you have access to God's Word...

You have been filled with God's Spirit.

You have the Scriptures to guide you and bring you comfort...

None of that is available for the unbeliever in the world...

Trials do come in our life, but for the believer, it is true that it could be so much worse...

And I don't say that in some cold hearted way...

Because it can get bad for a Christian in this world...

But we find comfort in the fact that it could be much worse..

We could still be lost in the world with God's wrath still hanging over our heads because of our unpaid sin debt.

It can be worse for us because it once was worse for us.

One preacher wrote this about the opening verses of chapter 27...

“Believer, put your trials in context. You may be exhausted from work. You may have lost your health, or family troubles are weighing on you. The first part of chapter 28 says that there is something far worse. Do you realize what a comfort it is in the face of all your exhaustion, all your pressures, all your disappointments and all your trials to know that you have access to the throne of God in prayer and to the Word of God in the Bible? Do you realize that all your suffering is not near as bad as someone who has no relationship to the God of the universe. I am not saying that you should be ashamed of your sorrow. I am not saying that you can't weep. I am simply saying that the Christian must keep all trouble in their life in the right perspective. It could be worse. Much worse. There is nothing worse than needing to hear from God but getting only silence.”

Yet, that is Saul's situation.

How blessed we are today to have God's Word in our hands and hidden in our hearts...

The second principle of the chapter is this....

II. Desperation for God's Word Must Look to God First (8-19)

WE have all been there...

We are a kid and we think we are “in love” with this person, so how do we handle it?

Well, we tell our friend to tell her friend that we like her...

Or, we get our friend to call her for us, and they talk to her while we hide in the corner and listen..

And what usually happens is that she starts liking our friend because he is the one who will talk to her..

The best way to handle that is to go to the person ourself.

But we don't seem to understand that as kids...

It is interesting to note that Saul needs a word from God in this chapter...

Yet, he looks to get a word from God by going to two wrong sources...

The first is the spirit medium at Endor...

You can see that God had forbid Israel from practicing divination or trying to communicate with the dead..

You can even see that Saul had removed all these black magic people from Israel...

Yet, when he needed a word from the Lord, he first turned to a witch and not to the Lord Himself...

I don't know if I can say this word in church or not, but how stupid is that..

Turning to a source that God was not pleased with in order to communicate with God...

I have to be careful here because this can be a soap box issue for me...

But it frustrates me to no end how many Christians turn to sources other than God's Word to get counsel on how to deal with life's problems...

You are telling me that man's wisdom is more valuable than God's wisdom..

Do you know what the truth is?

Christians are too lazy to study the Bible on their own, and though they will tell you that they know what the Bible says...

The truth is that they really dont know what it says to address their problem...

They only think they know what it says or have simply been told what it says all their life, and have never studied it on their own...

If you are desperate to know how God wants you to handle a certain situation, go to God first...

To see what he says, and the place to find what he says is His Word...

It is not found in a witch or a fortune teller, or a dream or a vision, or a sign....

How many Christians I see who post pictures of Jesus' face on a burnt waffle or in the shapes of the clouds or in a leaf that fell to the ground...

And then they will write that God gives us these to show us that He is real...

Do you know how I know Jesus is real....

It isn't because I see him in the shape of a stain in my carpet..

It is because God has revealed Jesus to me in His word...

Christians don't need a sign, we have the Scriptures..

Saul is looking for God's Word in all the wrong places...

And then he is looking for it from all the wrong people too...

The witch is no help, but Samuel is also no help as well...

Look at what Samuel says to Saul in verse 16...

16 Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has departed from you and has become your adversary?"

Samuel is telling Saul, don't ask me..

"The Lord is the one who you need to ask.

"He is the one who has departed from you and cut off His Word from you.."

"God is the One who you need to be right with..."

"Why in the world did you disturb me?"

(I think I will start using that one on Tonya when she wakes me up at night and tells me she heard a noise.)

(Why did you wake me up? You need to find out where that came from yourself.)

There is a strange thing that you may notice as a Christian...

You will find people who aren't Christians who simply like to hang around you...

It is like they want to be near you..

There will be people who come to church who aren't saved just because they like to be around other Christians..

It is almost like they find comfort in being near the people of God..

And though we love people like this, we need to remind them that they don't need to be right with God's people...

They first need to be right with the Lord...

Saul needed to be reminded of that as well...

Real help isn't found in a witch or even in a prophet of God, real help comes from the Lord only...

If you need God's Word, don't try to find it anywhere else but in the Scriptures that God inspired Himself...

Last principle I want to offer from chapter 28 may be the saddest of all...

III. Desperation for God's Word Can Lead to Tragic Endings (20-25)

You all see how this chapter ends...

Samuel tells Saul that he will die the next day..

Like anyone who would get that news, Saul loses his appetite even for a witch's brew...

But I want you to notice the last verse of this chapter...

25 She brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they arose and went away that night.

There is a loose connection with another event in Scripture here....

Remember the Passover Supper with Jesus and his disciples...

It was a last supper of sorts...

And there is this chilling verse that is included in the scene of the Last Supper when we read about in the gospels...

John 13:26-30...

So when He had dipped the morsel, He *took and *gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. 27 After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus *said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” 28 Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. 29 For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, “Buy the things we have need of for the feast”; or else, that he should give something to the poor. 30 So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.

John had no need to tell us the time again, we know that it is night from other verses about the Lord's Supper..

And we also know here that it is night when Saul came to the witch...

We already read that in verse 8...

So, why the reminder in both these scenes that it is night?

It is simply the picture that the words paint in our mind...

Judas went out after the Last Supper and it was night...

And Saul leaves his Last Supper and it is night..

Two men who were given so many advantages in life, yet wasted so much opportunity...

It is night...It is dark....

These are much more than just reminders of the time, they are reminders to us all of where continued disobedience leads...

It leads to darkness in our lives...

Without God and His Word, you can't see you hand in front of your face...

And it isn't just the darkness of the night, it is the darkness of your life...

Saul went to a dark lady on a dark night....

And when he left, it was night both outside and inside his soul....

Disobedience to God's Word leads to dark endings in a person's life...

And that is tragic and sad...

Conclusion

If we aren't careful, we could leave this chapter thinking that we are better than Saul or Judas...

But the truth is that we aren't...

Our lives were just as dark before God uncovered our eyes to see the light of His Son...

We may think we were good people before we were saved but we weren't.

We were just like Paul when he described himself as "the worst of sinners."

And it isn't that we were smart enough to finally "get it" and get saved.

It isn't even like we came to our senses...

The truth of our salvation is that God rescued us from the darkness by opening our blind eyes and unclogging our deaf ears...

And awakening our dead hearts...

To the glorious truth of the gospel...

Our lives were just as dark as the night that Saul and Judas departed their last suppers....

But praise be to God that His light broke through
our darkness...

And we saw the pure light of Jesus Christ...

And we believe in it and walk in it..

And testify to it with our lives...

Our lives were dark, but God's Son has become our
light...

Let us pray..