

BENJI SWINBURNSON

Devotional Meditations on 1
Samuel

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Preface

These meditations are part of an ongoing project. My goal is to provide reflections or meditations on the whole Bible. They are not “devotionals” in the common sense of that term. Typically this word is used to describe a very brief practical or spiritual “thought” as a quick reminder for how to grow in one’s Christian faith. That is not what I intend to provide here. They are “devotional” in the sense that they grew out of my personal Bible reading as opposed to a properly academic or professional study of the Scripture. They are not sermons or essays for instruction in the classroom. They are thoughts on the Scriptures that grew out of my interaction with the text for my own personal growth and nourishment. In sharing them with the church my goal is to edify and instruct, not demonstrate my academic abilities. I did not directly consult with commentaries or other study helps, although I am obviously dependent on others who have taught me general principles of Biblical interpretation and have provided insights into the narrative of Samuel. The term “devotion” is used in the full sense of that term, namely, that act in which we devote our minds and hearts to the study of God’s word to equip us to worship and serve him more faithfully.

True devotion to God embraces the Scriptures the way God has given them to us. The Bible is the inspired word of God. In it we hear the voice of the Triune God and the unfolding revelation of his eternal plan. This plan comes to its culmination in Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. As we shall see in our reading of Samuel, this king and

his kingdom is promised to and typified in the figure of David. This approach to the Bible has gone by the name “redemptive-historical,” but it is simply a way to approach the Bible that consistently integrates what the Bible says about itself: it is unified story with a single Divine author that finds its center and focus in Jesus Christ, the savior of sinners.

From beginning to end, the Bible reveals Jesus Christ. It also calls us to faith in him and repentance towards God. It objectively reveals our salvation by his gracious word, but also calls us to subjectively embrace him by faith. The Bible is inherently sufficient to address us in all our needs as fallen sinners. It reveals what God has done for us and also what we are to do in God and for his glory. Both Christian “doctrine” and Christian “living” are centered on Christ. The redemptive-historical approach is sometimes wrongly understood as rejecting the idea of “practical application.” To be sure, it does reject a moralistic or disconnected approach to the Christian life which reduces the Bible to an ethical principle. Such an approach functionally adopts an Arminian or Pelagian view of human ability. This does not mean that those who utilize the method are themselves Pelagian or Arminian. It means that in the moment of moral instruction, they functionally address the Christian as if they had inherent ability to enact the commandments of God in their lives. The right approach to the Christian life continually roots and grounds our Christian duty in Christ himself and his work for us. The “imperative” or commands of Scripture flow out of the “indicative” of what Christ has done for us. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We love because he first loved us. We walk in sexual purity because of the Spirit of purity dwells in our hearts. We are called to be Holy because the Triune God is holy. Proper “application” roots and grounds the imperatives of Scripture in these underlying realities which we receive by grace through faith in the Gospel.

Moreover, rightly applying the Bible means that we view “application” not merely as the moral or instructional aspects of Scripture. Both the “indicative” and the “imperative” imply the application of salvation to us. Indeed, we should not hesitate to say that biblical revelation is inherently “application.” It is given that we might be drawn savingly into Jesus Christ. This is the first step of “application.” The redemption won for us by Jesus Christ is applied to us by the Holy Spirit. United to him by faith we receive the fullness of redemption (justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification) as a free gift. Christ is applied to us even as we are applied to Christ. He applies his righteousness and life to us while he vicariously assumes our sin and death.

This first step of “application” comes to us in our justification and regeneration. The second step works itself out in our progressive sanctification and ultimately our final glorification. Here the Scripture utilizes all kinds of “exhortative” statements, from sweet encouragements to the weak, probing interrogatives to the hard-hearted, and cutting rebukes to those blindly caught in sin. It also involves instruction in the fundamental duties of the Christian, all of which must be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.

By viewing “application” more holistically, the redemptive-historical method avoids the common bifurcation between “doctrine” and “life” that often causes us to separate these things. With this approach, Christian doctrine becomes dull and boring while instruction in Christian practice becomes an impotent moralism. Christians sometimes wonder why the latter might seem attractive to sinners in need of grace. However, it can produce powerful feelings of conviction and guilt that seem to be effective motivators for greater faithfulness. This is not the teaching of the Bible. In fact, guilt and conviction by themselves only lead to despair. While they do have their clear place in our response

to God's word, it is only the apprehension of God's love and mercy in Christ that can truly provided a solid and lasting foundation of internal motivation to live for God. The Bible does not say: "He who feels great guilt loves much." Instead it declares: "He who is forgiven much loves much" (Luke 7:47).

The redemptive-historical approach to "application" allows to view the Christian life in an integrated fashion. We do not separate Christian faith from Christian duty any more than we can separate justification and sanctification or Christ himself from the believer. Likewise, we cannot separate the Christian's mind from his heart, nor his intellect from his will. This is seen no more clearly than in the command to love, which is the core of true Christian "application." We are to love God will our whole mind, heart, soul, and strength. Christian instruction and Christian exhortation both express love to God. When we read of what Christ has done for us, we also implicitly see what we are called to be and do in Christ. When we read of what we are to do for Christ we must also trace these things back to their foundation in the grace of Christ.

It is my hope that these devotional will assist believers in being drawn in faith to the love of Christ and encourage them in faithfully loving Christ and the people he gave himself to save.

1

Chapter 1

#1A - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 1:1-20

The book of Judges left Israel on the precipice of death and destruction. Their history after Joshua was a gradual downward spiral into rebellion and depravity. Yet God had not abandoned his people. At that time there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. But a promised king would soon be coming. And on the throne of his kingdom, he would execute righteousness and justice. Rebellion would give way to faithfulness. Famine would be replaced with feasting. Out of death, God would bring life.

The story of Ruth provided a lifeline for Israel in the ongoing fulfillment of God's plan. Through her, the line of kings would be preserved. But Israel not only needed a king. They needed a faithful prophet and priest as well. These aspects of God's promise are reintroduced at the beginning of the book of Samuel. This narrative will ultimately lead us to the establishment of God's kingdom in Israel under David. To prepare the way for the kingdom, God will first raise up a prophet in the figure of Samuel. You may recognize a parallel between what happens

in these days and during the coming of the Lord Jesus. Just as Samuel prepared the way for David, so John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord.

Samuel begins with a birth narrative. The scene anticipates the birth narratives of John and Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, even as it recalls some of the birth narratives in the patriarchal period. The following elements stand out.

First, we are reminded that God's plan is worked out in the quite ordinary affairs of human life, including human sinfulness. The story introduces us to the family of Elkanah from the tribe of Ephraim. He is a faithful worshipper of the Lord, going up year by year to Shiloh where the tabernacle resided. The Tabernacle provided an access point on earth to fellowship with God in heaven. But like all other fallen sinners, his family was not yet perfect. While the sin of polygamy was overlooked in the era, its presence is a reminder that the purity of God's original creation ordinance for marriage had been compromised. This is seen concretely in the bitter jealousy and rivalry between his two wives, and in particular in the barrenness of Hannah. Elkanah expresses the all too common sense of frustration fathers and husbands feel when seeking to address these things. While the manifestation of these things will obviously differ in a Christian family in the NT era, the basic realities are all too common: bitterness, jealousy, fighting, and even the pain of barrenness. Even the "holy" families of old were not immune from such things. Yet God's grace is present and working for our redemption.

Second, we also are reminded how God is pleased to use the weak things of the world to manifest his power. Hannah is a barren woman, despised by her own family. The fact that Eli mistakenly identifies her as a drunkard adds to our sense of her reproach among the people.

Humbled in God's providence, she is exalted in due time. We also see this principle in the means through which the womb is opened: silent prayer before the LORD. She does nothing to be seen by men, but sets her hope upon God alone. Prayer is the cessation of activity and the simple expression of our hopes and desires to God. More than any other act it manifests the basic essence of faith: abandonment of all hope in our inherent abilities and a total trust in the power of God.

Third, we are also reminded that God's ultimate work is not simply a restoration of Israel to the blessedness of the land, nor is it the establishment of the greatest earthly kingdom. God's promise to Israel and to the world is to bring righteousness out of sin and life out of death. Like Sarah before her, Hannah's womb is as good as dead. She had been barren her whole life long. This reality is the fruit of God's judgment. A spiritually barren nation brings a barren land and barren wombs. Where sin, barrenness, and death abound God will bring righteousness, life, and abundance. This is the core problem that we face in our fallen condition: not the miserable circumstances in our nation, family, or churches. It is the ultimate root and source of them all: sin. God is often pleased to allow us to experience the misery of empty barrenness so that we might more fully trust in him. Through Christ Jesus, we have eternal fullness, peace, and righteousness in his kingdom which will know no end.

#1B - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 1:21-28

A key theme of the book of the story of Samuel is the exaltation of the lowly and the humiliation of the exalted. In fact, this theme is evidenced throughout the Bible. It will be fully recapitulated in the Lord Jesus Christ through his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Here in the

OT we see shadows of this coming light and hear its reverse echoes.

The pattern has already been seen in the exaltation of Hannah in the conception of Samuel. Her rival, Peninnah, had taunted and provoked her for her barrenness. In humble circumstances, Hannah further humbled herself in silent prayer before the Lord. God exalted her by opening her womb and giving her a son.

The pattern will later manifest itself in the transition from old Eli to young Samuel. Eli is old and ineffective. The unfaithfulness of his sons will mean the end of his family's priestly service. We shall later learn of how the exalted, old leader is unceremoniously humiliated in his death. In his place shall arise young Samuel to be a prophet of the Lord.

This passage outlines the humble estate of Samuel in his birth. As the narrative will later reveal, God will exalt the humble and humiliate the exalted.

We first see Samuel's humble estate at a young age. He is only a weaned infant when he is brought to Eli and dedicated to the Lord. There is nothing weaker on earth than an infant child. While some creatures are able to walk and feed themselves at birth, human beings are dependent on their parents throughout most of their childhood. It is quite ironic that the Lord God Almighty would bring his redemptive grace to his people in such a lowly person. One might argue that every person must come into this world as an infant child, and thus Samuel has no special significance in this regard. But his special calling was evident from his infancy in his mother's dedication. Likewise, the revelation of God came to him as a young boy, at which time he also ministered before the Lord.

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Secondly, we also see Samuel's humble estate in the offerings and sacrifices offered at his dedication. Chief among these was the bloody offering of a three-year-old bull. The shedding of blood was a reminder that even the faithful servants of the Lord are not without sin and the need for redemption. God is pleased to work through weak and sinful men as agents of his redemptive grace. This ensures that all the glory goes to God and none to man.

Thirdly, we also see the humble estate of Samuel in the fact that his being offered to the Lord is itself a sacrifice of thanksgiving on the part of his mother. Hannah had prayed for a child in her emptiness and grief. When she had conceived her heart was filled with thanksgiving, and in to with God gave back to him what he had given to her. In this, we see a beautiful picture of the call of the Christian to live in sacrificial dedication to God. Her heart had longed for a son. Now that she has one she gives him up to the service of God. So we are, in Christ, to present our bodies (indeed, all that we are and have) to the service of his kingdom.

Ultimately in Samuel, we see a picture of the coming redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the humble servant of the Lord. Although he was God over all, he became a man by taking on human flesh. Although he was the Son of God, he became a submissive son to his earthly father and mother. Like Samuel, blood sacrifice was offered at his dedication at the Temple. He who had no sin had the reminder of sin set before him in worship. For Samuel this indicated the promise of God's redeeming blood applied to him, for Jesus it was a sign and portent of his future bloody death upon the cross. In his crucifixion, he would experience the ultimate humiliation. Having been made low, God would exalt him with the name that is above all names.

As it was with Jesus, so it must be with his followers. Humility and service is one of the chief marks of the Christian. A believer makes it his earnest to love and serve the one who loved us and gave himself for us. This spiritual sign of grace is not measured by the number of outward activities in which we are engaged. It is quite possible to do more acts of service than anyone else in our immediate community but in a way that makes us a servant of self rather than a servant of God. Service to prop up our sense of self-importance neither glorifies nor pleases God.

2

Chapter 2

#2A - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 2:1-11

1 Samuel 2 begins with the Song of Hannah. Hannah has been characterized in the narrative as a woman of God devoted to worship. In OT times the most visible form of worship was offering and sacrifice. With her husband she certainly devoted herself to this sacramental means of grace. But God's desire is not for the sacrifice or offerings themselves. These are but external manifestations of an underlying spiritual reality where the true worship of God is grounded. The chief part of any worship service is the word of God to the people. There is perhaps no act of worship on the part of God's people more important to him than the act of prayer. The altar of incense (representing the prayers of the saints) is closer to the Ark of God than the altar of sacrifice.

Hannah revealed herself to be a woman of prayer in chapter 1 when she plead silently before the Lord for the conception of a child. What was silently hidden in her heart is now audibly revealed in 2:1-10 in the

Song of Hannah.

And of what does this prayer speak? We noted in a previous devotional that a key theme of Samuel is the exaltation of the lowly and the humiliation of the exalted. Lowly Samuel is raised up while the corrupt house of Eli is brought down. Peninnah is exalted in a fruitful womb while Hannah is barren. God raises up the lowly by granting her conception and the greater favor of her husband. Later lowly David will be exalted as a boy in his victory over Goliath when the mighty warriors of Israel shake in fear. [As an aside, note the parallel between the boyhoods of Samuel and David. God is pleased to choose them in the lowly position Of their youth]. Later exalted Saul (a head taller than everyone else) will be removed as king and lowly David will take his place.

It should therefore be no surprise to learn that this humiliation-exaltation pattern also finds expression in the song of Hannah. It is perhaps most succinctly expressed in verse 7 ([The LORD brings low and he exalts), but obviously permeates the entire poem.

The prayer begins (as every prayer should) with a focus on God himself. He is the source of this power that exalts the lowly and humbles the exalted. The power by which he accomplishes this work is incomparable: there is no one like God! His power is most perfectly manifested in human weakness. This power of God is demonstrated in a variety of actions by which weak are strengthened and the exalted brought low (4-8). He breaks the bows of the strong, empties the full, brings death to the proud, and impoverishes the rich. But he also strengthens the weak, gives food to the hungry, makes the barren woman happy with children, raises up the poor and seats the lowly on his throne. Interestingly the latter part of this expose of God's

work anticipates what will happen later in the book: the exaltation of God's king through his divine power. Hannah's personal life contains a microcosm of his redemptive historical work in the salvation of his people.

The very last part of the song brings us even further into the future, setting before us the final judgment and salvation he will work for the wicked and the righteous. By linking God's various temporal workings to this culminating even, Hannah reveals her understanding that every work of the eternal God is an anticipation of eternity. It is there that she places her ultimate hope.

Although she is surrounded by a whole host of temporary types and shadows in the priesthood, tabernacle, in her we see the permanent expression of sincere faith in the Lord and the core of the true worship of God: trust in God's power and the thankful offering of prayer and praise to his name. This is the heart of faith in God's saving power—whether in the Old Testament or New. Let us then draw near to God with a heart of humble faith, trusting in his wisdom and power to exalt us in due time.

#2B - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 2:12-36

The book of Samuel introduced us to a believing family in Israel. Although the era of the Judges had resulted in the downward spiral of the nation into unfaithfulness and rebellion, the seed of faith remained among a remnant. This principle is embodied in the family of Elkanah, from which Samuel was born. This family was far from perfect. The miseries common to sinful man were evident in their family life: barrenness, conflict, and anxiety. God is pleased to use that which

is weak and imperfect to manifest his perfect power in redeeming fallen man.

By contrast, the narrator now introduces us to a second family: the house of Eli. Eli was the priest of the Lord during this era. Although Eli shows signs of a heart that desires the honor of God, this seed of life was not present in his sons. The text states that they are “worthless men” who “did not know the Lord” (2:12). This is evident in two heinous sins. First, they used threats and force to take the entire offering of the people for themselves. In this way, they treated the offering of the Lord with contempt. Second, they would often lie with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Although they were holy priests set apart to serve the Lord, they were indulging in the service of their own sinful desires. The equivalent of this in the NT would be to have a church officer who embezzled church funds and slept with multiple women in his congregation. Such incidents are sadly still heard of today.

The evil one is hard at work to bring the corruption of his kingdom in the holy temple of God. We saw this in the time of the Reformation in Europe. Corruption was rampant in the church through gross incidents of sexual immorality amongst the “celibate” priesthood, not to mention the selling of salvation in the trade of indulgences. God sometimes allows his church to fall into darkness. But after darkness, God’s light will come.

In this the family of Eli carried forward the principle of the downward spiral of corruption and rebellion expressed through the book of Judges. The old testimony of God’s law warning against God’s judgment for sin is still present in the rebuke of Eli, but the letter proves powerless

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in working a change in his sons. They had been handed over to their sinful desires and their hearts had been hardened. The time allotted for their repentance had passed, and it was the will of the Lord to put them to death. Note carefully the sovereign judgment of God. He has mercy on whom he will have mercy, but he hardens whom he wants to harden. In this, there is no unfairness with God. Eli's sons happily acquiesced in pursuing the gratification of the lusts of their flesh. There is perfect concurrence between the eternal plan of God and the "free will" of man.

The contrast between the house of Eli and the house of Elkanah develops a theme previously introduced in the narrative. The house of Eli is exalted in that they bear the honor of the priesthood. But God will bring low the exalted. The house of Elkanah is humble, but through boy Samuel the humble will be exalted.

The house of Eli is clearly coming to an end. Instead of reflecting the purity and holiness of the eternal kingdom of God, they embody the corruption of the kingdom of this world. The house of Eli anticipates the eventual demise of the entire Old Testament priesthood which comes to fulfillment in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Recall that it was before the priests Annas and Caiaphas (who was high priest that year) that Jesus was found guilty and handed over to be crucified.

In the place of Eli and his family a faithful priest would be raised up. This is reflected in the figure of Samuel. He is small (but a boy) and Eli's sons are grown men. His family's faithfulness to God is evident not only in their initial "lending" him to the Lord but also in their yearly visits to offer sacrifice to God. His mother would even make for him a little robe that he might be properly attired when ministering before the Lord. The text reveals to us that God will often work his grace and faithfulness in the hearts of our children even at young ages. His

promise to be God to us and to our children comes to fruition in his good time.

While Eli's sons devolved further and further in the indulgence of their depravity, Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.

Samuel would one day grow into a man, and would serve as a judge of Israel. He would inaugurate a new era of blessedness in the coming of the Davidic kingdom. Through his word, God would raise up David as a man after God's own heart. Each of these figures in their own way would anticipate the final king and judge, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He would come into this world as an infant child. From his boyhood he would be filled with the wisdom and love of God even as Samuel, growing in stature and favor with God and man (see Luke 2:40, 52). While Samuel was dedicated to the Lord and set apart to the Lord for service in the Tabernacle, Jesus would be set apart from birth to be the final sacrifice for our sins. In his coming kingdom, he will sweep away all the filth and corruption of the flesh, but preserve his holy ones and assure them a place in the kingdom of God.

3

Chapter 3

#3 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 3:1-21

Good storytellers will often include scenes in which the plan or plot is laid out ahead of time. This is usually done when the protagonists face great odds against their success. The plan is less of a prediction of what will happen and more of an exposition of what must be done to gain victory in the face of defeat. The viewer or reader knows what the heroes will attempt but has no guarantee of their eventual success.

God is the best storyteller. What he declares is not simply a fictional narrative to entertain us. His word is a historical record of the unfolding of his eternal decree. In chapter 2 he laid out a revelation of this sovereign plan for the era of Samuel. Eli's faithless house will be brought low, while lowly Samuel will be exalted. This was revealed directly to Levi through the prophetic word of a man of God. It was also foreshadowed in the Song of Hannah and embodied in God's own work in her life. The faithless priests will be removed and a faithful priest will be raised up. The exalted will be brought low and the humble

will be exalted. The outcome of this story is certain. It is not the plan of a man with slim hopes of success. It is the revealed plan of God. What he ordains will most certainly come to pass.

These things had been revealed personally to Eli, but to this point have not been revealed more broadly. In chapter 3 this future plot of God's plan is made known to Samuel as a young boy ministering in the Tabernacle.

The LORD himself calls directly to Samuel, addressing him by his first name three times. The third time he calls to him he speaks his name twice: "Samuel, Samuel!" This recalls the way God came to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses (Gen. 22:11-13, 46:1-4; Ex. 3:1-10). These kinds of personal, revelations are unique and relatively rare in Old Testament history, as the text itself indicates (3:1b). In New Testament times, we recognize that these forms of dreams and visions have ceased with the coming of Jesus Christ and the completion of the New Testament Scriptures (Heb. 1:1-2). Taken together, these points reinforce the fact that we should not expect God to speak audibly to us as many often claim. The number of people who have received such revelation is relatively small. Claiming to have received such a message from God is to unduly exalt ourselves into the company of figures like Abraham, Jacob, Samuel, and others. Besides, the New Testament would point us to the superiority of the unchanging and permanent written word of God. He contrasts the audible word of the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration with the written prophetic word (2 Peter 1:18-20). The prophetic word has been made more sure through its written inscripturation. These completed Scriptures are sufficient for all that we need to serve and love the Lord. We look for no special dream or vision. If we wish to hear God speak we simply open the Bible sitting on our tables or resting on our bookshelves.

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Although Samuel at first thinks it is Eli that is calling him, Eli soon realizes that it is the Lord himself. The revelation is not good news for the house of Eli. What the LORD had previously revealed to him regarding the downfall of his house is now confirmed in the revelation to Samuel. The content of the message confirms their fate in God's judgment. But the manner of God's revelation to Samuel begins to establish him as a prophet of the Lord. As he grew, the LORD revealed himself to him more and more, and it became known to all Israel that the word of God was in him and came through him.

Through him we see a picture of the faithful prophet and faithful priest. When the word of the Lord comes to him he responds with the only appropriate words of faith and obedience: "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears" (3:9-10). This heart of faithfulness will also be seen in the faithful king God will raise up through Samuel: David, the man after God's own heart.

In each, we see a prefiguration of the heart of Jesus, the final faithful prophet, priest, and king. All his life long he gave himself faithfully to the call of his Heavenly Father. Although he committed no sin, he would endure the judgment due to sinners. But God raised him from the dead. Humble for our salvation, God exalted him in due time. Those who are in Christ have the same heart formed in them, offering themselves as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble whom he will exalt in due time.

4

Chapter 4

#4A - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 4:1-11

With the birth and growth of Samuel, the word of the Lord has returned to Israel. With their decline in the era of the Judges, the word of the Lord had become rare in Israel (3:1). With the arrival of Samuel, the light of God's heavenly kingdom would shine once again. This involved the reminder of the promise of God's salvation by grace through faith. But it also included a revelation of judgment against the unrepentant. Before the "good news" of God's promise is proclaimed, the "bad news" of God's just judgment is declared.

The text contains two scenes that embody this principle of judgment, both of which constitute the fall of the house of Eli. Today we meditate on the first scene in 4:1-11. What God declared years before now infallibly comes to pass. Note the justice of God in the implementation of his judgment. He patiently allots an extended period of time for the repentance and restoration of those who have offended him. His patient kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. The delay of judgment

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reveals their hardness of heart and makes it clear to all that God is neither rash nor unjust and that the punishment fits the crime.

The text first details the deaths of Hophni and Phineas. The Philistines encamp at Aphek, which is the hill country of Ephraim, while the Israelites encamp in nearby Ebenezer. Both the cities are within the borders of Israel, so the Philistines are clearly the aggressors. Recall how in Judges the Danites were unable to drive the people out of the land originally allotted to them by Moses, leaving a “vacuum” happily filled by the Philistines. This left Ephraim directly on the border with the Philistines and vulnerable to their attacks. Ironically, an ancient act of unfaithfulness on the part of the people becomes the occasion for God’s judgment against a later unfaithfulness. Sin piles upon sin working destruction and death.

However, the people believe that they have a special power on their side. They are, after all, the people of Yahweh.

Although initially defeated they decide to bring the Ark of God with them and go to war a second time. The Ark had been carried into battle before, perhaps most famously at the battle of Jericho (Joshua 6). It sacramentally represented the power and presence of God among the people. But by itself it had no inherent magic powers. It did not work *ex opera operata* (“by the deed done”) but was a sign and seal of the faith of God’s people by which his spiritual power was manifested for their salvation. This passage is therefore key for the right understanding of the sacramental means of grace. Although the types and shadows of the OT have passed away in Jesus Christ, two sacraments (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) remain for us in Christ. These are effectual in God’s time by the power of the Holy Spirit and through faith. It is mere superstition to believe that the sacrament itself will bring us salvation.

Paul warns us that if we eat and drink in such a way, we are eating and drinking judgment to ourselves (1 Cor. 11:29).

Although the Ark is physically present with Israel, the spiritual reality of God's presence is absent. The power of the armies of Israel is only on the surface. They have reminders of the past glory in the presence of the Ark, the rattling of sabers, and shouts of intimidation. But this only serves to stir up the Philistines to fight harder and win the victory over Israel. This includes their capturing of the Ark of God.

And who is present with the Ark? The sons of Eli: Hophni and Phineas. These "holy" priests were typical mediators for the people of God. Through them sacrifice and offering are presented to God, making way for forgiveness. This, in turn, would assure them of God's abiding presence with them. The Holy One would dwell amongst unholy sinners as they trust in the sacrifice he provides. But these things had become empty forms with no spiritual life. They kept the husks but had no kernels. They had the "shells," but when cracked open God found nothing. Underneath the skin of the apple was a worm-infested fruit that was good for nothing and was to be discarded.

The end result was not pretty. Adding up the totals of the two battles, 34,000 Israelites perished, including Hophni and Phineas. The Ark that had superstitiously been carried into battle now lay in the hands of the Philistines. The true spiritual reality of the nation was revealed in the judgment of God: the glory had departed and God's theocratic presence was gone.

As we will later learn, this would not be the final end for Israel. Out of judgment, God would bring salvation. Unbelief would again give way to faith. Out of death God would bring life. A message of judgment

comes first, but God's grace proves to be greater than all our sin. So in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, he first must suffer and die. Old Israel must be swept away in their unbelief. But the judgment on Israel means salvation for the nations.

Similarly in our own Christian lives we must follow the pattern of our Savior. Suffering comes first and only afterwards the glory. Individually in the process of sanctification we must first die to sin through the cross of Christ. Only then can we live in the power of his resurrection in the newness of life. It is only in Christ that we can be free from the guilt and power of sin and safely pass through God's just judgment. In Jesus, we have a high priest who is faithful in his service to God. Through him, we have already passed through the heavens and have a place of permanent fellowship in the presence of God. Let us then draw near to him in faith, looking to these unseen realities. Sobered by God's just judgment against the sinful and unbelieving, let us strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Without Christ, we are nothing and doomed to certain destruction. In him, there is no enemy or army that can stand against us.

#4B - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 4:12-22

Eli is a truly tragic figure in the book of Samuel. On the one hand, we do see traces of the fear and honor of God in his life and in his speech. At the beginning of the book of Samuel, it is Eli who rebukes Hannah, thinking that she has come before the Tabernacle of the Lord in a state of drunkenness. In this, we see the traces of the fear of God in the heart of Eli. He is faithfully guarding and keeping the temple of the Lord as a priest to God most high. His motive is good, but his judgment is mistaken. This dynamic will be developed in other scenes in the

narrative.

Back in chapter 2:22–25, we read of his direct rebuke to his sons for all their evil dealings. Theologically his words are directly on point: “If someone sins against A man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?” But his word is impotent and ineffective. He speaks the right words of warning, but does not appear to implement a consequence to discipline them (see 3:13). It produces no repentance or obedience. In God’s plan, it simply becomes a portent of their future judgment. Like the law of God without the Spirit to apply it, it is a letter that kills.

Eli was part of the house of Levi, and thus a member of the priestly family. This was an exalted office in Israel. He had special privileges that no other Israelite would enjoy. His sons were also the special beneficiaries of growing up in the immediate presence of all the typological signs of Christ and his kingdom to come. Through their sin and unbelief, the exalted would be humbled.

Eli’s word of warning to them would prove weak and ineffective. But God’s promise of judgment was sure and steadfast. What he decreed most certainly came to pass. Now in the second part of the chapter, the “bad news” of their demise comes to Eli.

Consistent with his characterization earlier in the narrative, Eli is described in a way that highlights the mixture of faith and weakness within him. He is 98 years old. He had clearly been granted a long life in the land according to the good promise of God. On the one hand, Eli is described as sitting by the road watching carefully for the Ark of God, his heart trembling regarding its fate in the hands of the armies of Israel. Interestingly no mention is made regarding his concern for

his two sons. Although the love of a parent never wanes even for their wayward children, the heart of his concern is God-centered. Later in the paragraph, we are specifically told that it is only when Eli learns that the Ark of God has been captured that he falls over and dies—even though the death of his two sons is also revealed to him.

At the same time, Eli is also described in a way that underscores his weakness and ineffectiveness. Although the seed of faith is in his heart, it has not borne fruit beyond himself. We see evidence of this even in the descriptive details about his appearance and physical condition. The fact that he is “heavy“ recalls the description of Eglon in Judges 3, who was so heavy that the sword of Ehud was entirely covered by his belly when he was put to death in God’s judgment. His dim eyes also remind us of the spiritual dimness of Israel at this time. Recall that at the end of the book of Judges, there are many bizarre stories of the Israelites showing concern for aspects of the moral law of God while at the same time openly engaging in idolatry. Eli’s personal and physical condition is reflective of the spiritual condition of Israel at this point in history. The glory of God’s old covenant is proving weak and ineffective. It is already fading away (cf. Heb. 8:13).

This fading glory and increasing weakness culminates in Eli’s death at the mere news of the capturing of the Ark. He is so weak that the physical shock of the news causes him to lose balance. He simply falls over, breaks his neck, and dies.

With the fall of Eli’s house and the capturing of the Ark of God, the glory of Israel has departed. This reality was symbolized in the naming of Eli’s grandson “Ichabod,” which means “without glory.” In the Ark and in the Priesthood God’s people had a visible type and picture of God’s abiding presence with them. The Ark had left because God had

left. God had abandoned Israel because Israel had abandoned him. God had said: “Those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (2:30). He is a God of his word. In this, we see a preview of the future downfall of the entire nation in exile. In fact, the Hebrew words in 4:21-22 literally mean that the Ark has been “exiled” from Israel.

But God would not leave his glory and his name defiled. In grace, the Ark would be restored. In favor, a faithful priest and prophet would be raised up to rescue his people. Shame would give way to glory, sin to righteousness, and death to life. God’s people would return to the Lord with all their hearts, put away their false gods, and cling to him in faith.

The fullness of these things has come upon us in Jesus Christ. Through him, we have a faithful prophet and king. He judges Israel not for a mere 40 years, but for eternity. In him, the old covenant has faded and passed away, but the abiding glory of heaven remains among us permanently. His word is powerful and effective, warning us against God’s judgment to work repentance in us and encouraging us by his Spirit in our faith. Let us then continue to trust him and keep our eyes fixed on him in whom God’s glory will never depart.

5

Chapter 5

#5 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 5:1-12

Eli's house has come to ruins. Israel has been defeated at the hands of the Philistines. The Ark of God has been captured. God's glory has departed the nation. O how the mighty have fallen! The cause of their humiliation has not been hidden from our eyes: unbelief, sin, and rebellion. God will not be mocked. He will not allow his glory to be put to shame.

The resultant situation raises a natural question, especially in light of this book's teaching regarding the infallible plan and purpose of God. If God was going to bring them to judgment, why did he raise them up as his people in the first place? Put differently, why did God allow sin? Why create the world in perfection only to allow it to fall into ruin? By all appearances, one might claim that God is weak. A foreign nation with a foreign God defeated his people. The Ark of God's presence now resides in the temple of Dagon. Add to this the fact that in their victory over Israel, the Philistines succeeded by mustering their human

strength (1 Sam. 4:9). All the glory appears to be with the Philistine army and Dagon their God.

But God stood behind it all. He is pleased to use a pagan country as an instrument of his perfect justice. God is sovereign over all, even using human sin for his holy purposes. But his purpose to glorify himself does not end there. Even as he manifests his glorious justice in judgment, he will manifest his mercy in their restoration. God consigns them over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them. His grace is greater than all our sins.

God will not dwell among a corrupt and unclean people. This is true for Israel but also for the Philistines. In less than a day, their joy of victory is transformed into terror under the just power of God. The Ark is brought into the Temple of Dagon, but after one night Dagon's image falls to the ground. The fact that Dagon needs the help of humans to stand upright is quite humorous. The absurdity of idolatry is clearly seen in man worshipping the things it has made (see Isaiah 44:9-20). The creature is to worship his Creator, not vice versa. Dagon then falls a second time more dramatically with his head and hands severed from his body.

What God did to Dagon he also does to the people of Philistia. He afflicts them with "tumors." The phrase recalls the judgments threatened against the Israelites for idolatry and rebellion against God's covenant (Deut. 28:27). As Israel was judged in covenant disobedience, so now the Philistines come under God's covenant curse. As God judged their Egyptian oppressors, so now he shows his power over the Philistines.

The lords of the Philistines then decide to move the Ark from Ashdod to Gath. Like before, curse and judgment come upon the city. They

move it again and send it to Ekron, but history only repeats itself, and the people there are also afflicted. They finally determined to send it back to Israel.

Let God be true and every man a liar. Although God's people are unholy, he remains holy. The Ark was made for the tabernacle of God's people in his Holy Land. Although it may depart for a season in judgment, it will not remain absent forever.

This passage embodies a principle of God's work of redemptive that we see manifested at other times. It even comes to expression in the personal life of the saints. God raises us up for a purpose and gives us a task, but if it fails we are left to ask: have you only raised me up to tear me down?

Although we feel a sense of futility in these moments, God has a deeper purpose. He may raise us up and then deeply humble us, but he does so that we may trust more fully in his power and not in our own. He may consign us to the consequences of our sin for a time, but only that he may use us as a canvas in which to display his perfect patience and grace. Although times are difficult and painful for the believer, we must also remember that they are temporary. His anger lasts for a moment, but his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning. Our sense of his glorious presence may wax and wane. Our feelings might change, but God's abiding presence remains.

This principle is also expressed in the vicarious work of Jesus. He was the Word made flesh who dwelt among us. In his incarnation, we have an expression of the permanent expression of God's abiding presence with man symbolized in the Ark. Although he never sinned, he endured the judgment of God for our sake. In death, it seemed that God's glory

had departed from him. But on the third day, he was raised, and in his ascension, he was bodily glorified. All who trust in him permanently possess that glory in their inner man through the Holy Spirit. This glorious presence of God is no longer confined to one city or nation. Christ reigns in heaven and has sent his Spirit to the nations. The glory will never depart from that place. Our citizenship in heaven is secure and steadfast. From it we eagerly await our Savior and long for his glorious appearing.

6

Chapter 6

#6 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 6:1-7:2

So far the book of Samuel has followed the narrative pattern of the book of Judges. When Israel rebels against God, a local foreign power rises up to oppress them. In this case, it is the Philistines. Only this time the fall is very great. The Ark of God is captured, symbolizing the removal of God's spiritual presence with his people. But God's judgment is not the final word to his covenant people. When they are oppressed by their enemies, God returns to bring them deliverance through a divinely appointed judge like Samuel.

Note that there is nothing in the Philistines or the Israelites that would commend to them a victory or a restoration. God has consigned Israel over to disobedience. They have become just like the nations they once conquered. God's motivation in returning the Ark and restoring his people is ultimately tied back to demonstrating his own power and glory. The defeat of the Israelites made clear to the world that he is a just God who will by no means clear the guilt. But the victory of the Philistines

creates another dilemma in the eyes of men: he appears weaker than Dagon, the God of the Philistines. The God who manifested his justice in the chastisement of Israel now demonstrates his greater power over the nations in the return of the Ark.

God has bound himself to his covenant people and placed his name upon them. God certainly manifests his grace, love, and compassion in his work of redemption. But God's deepest motivation in all his work is to glorify himself in the fullness of his attributes: wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

We see this purpose come to fruition in the return of the Ark to Israel. This is evident in the somewhat strange circumstances surrounding the event. First, the Philistines do not send the Ark back to Israel empty but include a guilt offering. The fact that this offering consists of five golden tumors and five golden mice seems strange to us and does not correspond to anything in God's perfect law. But its intention is to signify an acknowledgment on the Philistine's part that the judgment came from God as a punishment for them. Even the pagans know that sin must be atoned for even if they are ignorant of the only way this can be accomplished.

Secondly, note their self-conscious acknowledgment of the parallel between the plagues of Egypt in the days of the Exodus and the plagues of the present. Recall that the word of Pharaoh's defeat had made it around the region (see Rahab's words in Joshua 2:10). They recognize that this pattern of judgment and deliverance is now coming upon them. Although God's people had forgotten the wonders of God, the Philistines had not. They remember Pharaoh's destruction due to his hardness of heart and decide to "repent" by returning the ark of God.

Third, note how the Ark is not returned by human hands. It is placed on a cart and pulled by two milk cows. This shows that they want nothing to do with the Ark as it is rightly believed to be the reason for the cursed estate into which their cities have fallen. The idols of the pagans often took the form of calves and bulls, so it may be that this is also symbolic of the fact that the LORD is the King of kings and God of gods. The text also draws attention to the fact that these non-human drivers will give final confirmation that none of this was a coincidence but part of the sovereign judgment of the God of Israel (6:9).

When the Ark finally arrives another purpose of the cow-drawn cart is revealed. When the Levites see the Ark returning on the cart, they use the wood to make fire and present the vows as an offering to the LORD. Even though the Ark is now back in Israel, it is not yet fully at its proper place. It belongs in the Tabernacle in the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest can enter into that room once a year to make a comprehensive offering for sin. Some of the men of Beth-Shemesh look upon the Ark and are struck down by God. Recall that God's glorious presence is such that no man can ever gaze at his glory. Even Moses could only behold its afterglow. The Ark that caused trouble for the impious Philistines also afflicts irreverent Israelites. There is no favoritism with God.

The passage is a reminder that although God's redemptive grace is revealed to Israel, its fullness has not yet come. The Ark will reside for some twenty years in Kiriath-jearim awaiting its return to its final resting place.

It would only be with the coming of God's appointing King that the Glory of the Lord would return to the Tabernacle. In 2 Samuel 6, we will read the joyous story of King David's triumphant return with the Ark of God to Jerusalem and the covenant God made with him. As

God's covenant oath makes clear, David's fulfillment of God's promises will prove only to be provisional. Another king will come from his body who will sit on his throne forever.

This king is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Son of David and the final prophet, priest, and king of his people. Through him, a final sacrifice is made to make atonement for sin. In Christ, we see the Ark of God. He is the perpetual presence of God. His name is "Immanuel" and "God-with-us." In his incarnation, he has "tabernacled" among us. Through his grace and the power of the Spirit that is in him, we have full access to God through faith. In him, we enter into the holy places once hidden by the curtains of the Tabernacle without fear of death or destruction. Christ has endured that judgment for us and secured for us a place in God's holy presence forever.

Chapter 7

#7 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 7:3-17

The narrative of 1 Samuel has largely focused on the humiliation of Israel. Eli's family has grown corrupt and his priestly office has proven to be weak and ineffective. Death and judgment have come to Eli and his house, even as it has come to Israel. The Philistines have gained the victory over them. The glory of Israel departed as they captured the Ark.

But humiliation now gives way to exaltation. A change is taking place. This change began with God's sovereign grace and power. Although God's people have become impure, God remains holy and pure. The Ark cannot abide among uncleanness whether of the Israelites or the Philistines. For his own name's sake and his own glory, he providentially works to bring the Ark back to Israel. Note well: before Israel repents or does any good work, God brings his glory back to Israel. In the work of redemption, God's grace and power precede all working of man.

But God's power has fruit in the lives of the Israelites. Having mourned and lamented their sin before the LORD, they return to the Lord with all their heart and put away their false gods. They then gather in one place and freely confess: "We have sinned against the Lord" (7:6). Through the grace of a typological mediatory (Samuel) they have an intercessor who can stand before the Lord on their behalf. Recall the words of Eli to his sons: "If someone sins against a man's, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" (1 Sam. 1:25). God here provides a mediator to intercede for his people in their sinfulness.

Israel has been humbled in judgment, and now they are being exalted. The first steps of this exaltation are clear: grief for sin, free confession of wrongdoing, and earnest prayer for forgiveness through God's appointed mediator. Through him comes the promise of deliverance, for which they collectively cry and receive from the hand of God (7:8-11). Deliverance comes by God's direct intervention precisely when the whole burnt offering is presented to the LORD. God thus makes it clear that their sin has been atoned for. The whole incident is memorialized with a memorial stone called "Ebenezer." The name means "stone of help," enshrining forever the fact that salvation from the Philistines came from God's hand and was not the work of man. War gives way to peace, unbelief to faith, and idolatry gives way to the true worship of God.

These are the essentially spiritual principles of the life of the kingdom of God. The pattern to which we are called is one of humiliation unto exaltation. We must first die if we are going to live. We must die to self, die to sin, and die to this world. Only then can we live in the kingdom of God. This means we must begin to hate our sin rather than take delight in it. We must bring our sin out into the open rather than (poorly)

attempt to conceal it. If we remain in the darkness there is only guilt, condemnation, shame, and death. If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all sin.

We have a great High Priest before God that is greater than Samuel. He is also the final prophet who speaks God's last and greatest word: The Lord Jesus Christ. His prayers are powerful and effective to intercede for the sins of his people. His sacrifice is sufficient to fully and finally do away with the guilt and power of sin. These things have also been memorialized for us in the Supper of the Lord, which we eat and drink in remembrance of Jesus Christ.

Let us then renew our trust in this Savior. In him alone is forgiveness and salvation. Let us put away all other idols and pursuits that we place above the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be those who openly acknowledge our sins and shortcomings, humbling ourselves before God's great majesty, for he will exalt us in due time.

8

Chapter 8

#8 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 8:1-22

Through the narrative of 1 Samuel, we have seen multiple types and shadows of Christ and the kingdom of God. The “deep story” of this narrative is a revelation of that coming kingdom through the exaltation of David as God’s appointed king. The eternal kingdom of Christ is being manifested ahead of time in the temporary forms of the priesthood and theocracy. We see his future coming foreshadowed in the birth of Samuel in the barren womb of his mother. We see his greater priesthood in contrast to the weak and ineffective priestly service of Eli. We see his prophetic office in the various figures who bring God’s revelation of judgment and salvation. But we also see a shadow of his eternal kingship in Samuel as the “judge” of Israel.

In some ways, Samuel is the final “judge” of Israel. The book of Judges outlined an entire era characterized by their presence in the nation. They served a kingly function in that they exercised rule and authority

in Israel, but they were not quite the same as kings. Recall that the people attempted to make Gideon king in Judges 8, but he refused. One of the key differences between a judge and a king is the fact that there is a dynastic aspect to a king's authority. In other words, the royal throne is passed from father to son in perpetuity. This is exactly what the Israelites state in Judges 8:22. A Judge's rule was temporary, lasting only as long as the judge was alive. A theocracy was intended to be a situation in which God himself ruled the people. Therefore, at this time the request by Israel for a permanent kingship was tantamount to a rejection of God as the ruler of the people. These points are reiterated in 1 Samuel 8:7 (cf. 10:19, 12:12, 17, 19).

Ironically, the weakness and ineffectiveness of an earthly kingship is already evident at the beginning of the chapter. As great as Samuel was, his greatness was not reflected in his sons whom he had made judges over Israel in his old age. They took bribes, perverted justice, and did not walk in the ways of their father. In this respect, Samuel bears a surprising and striking resemblance to Eli, although he does not fall under God's judgment in the same way. Both Eli and Samuel fail to perpetuate their fear and love of God from father to son. The old order of things is weak and ineffective. It must eventually give way to a new order of things. We will see this same principle reinforced in the gradual decay of the sons of David who do not walk in the ways of their father.

Unhappy with the prospect of Samuel's corrupt sons ruling over them after his death, the elders gather and demand that he appoint them a king. Clearly, the Israelites have not understood the providential message of God. But their hope and concern are focused on the earthly success and well-being of the nation in its temporal life. If judges who have limited authority turn out bad for the nation, how much more a king

with greater authority and a perpetual line of succession? Earthly power breeds corruption. The greater the power, the greater the corruption. They are not to put their trust in princes—in a son of man in whom there is no salvation. They are to put their hope in the LORD alone.

The purpose of the “theocracy” was that Israel would be a nation ruled by God. That is the literal meaning of the term. Israel had previously attempted to give itself a king by appointing Abimelech (Judges 9), which ended in bloodshed, death, and destruction. It is true that God had anticipated an era in which Israel would have earthly kings providing regulations for them in Deuteronomy 17. Some have argued that this creates a contradiction: in some places God allows for an earthly king and in other places he seems to forbid it. But this is only an apparent contradiction. God’s wisdom is shown in his foreknowledge of Israel’s future rebellion, and his mercy is shown in providing regulations to limit the damage an earthly tyrant might bring.

Samuel warns Israel of the fruits of this tyranny in the heart of this chapter. History has ratified the prophetic warning well beyond the borders of Israel. When earthly governments are granted increasing levels of power, this power is used to oppress rather than serve the people of the nation. They engage in unwise and unjust wars, conscripting the people’s sons to be their soldiers. Their earnings will also be taken by the king in heavy taxation. 1 Samuel 8:17 identifies taxation at 10 percent to be tantamount to slavery.

Despite the warning, Israel refused to obey Samuel and demanded a king. They were willing to sacrifice their liberty for the prospect of safety and security. Their hope was that the king would fight their battles and defend them from the surrounding nations. These hopes would prove to be misplaced. Rather than save them from their oppressors, they

would themselves become agents of oppression.

The Bible does not proscribe a specific form of government for mankind's civil life. But it does generally warn against tyranny and commends the principle of limitation of powers and a system of checks and balances. No system of government will solve all of man's earthly ills—that was never its intention. Its purpose is to function as an external restraint upon man's sinfulness to allow human civilization to survive that the Gospel might be propagated.

The next chapter will see the rise of Saul as King of Israel. Like Eli and Samuel, we will ultimately see the failure of him as an earthly leader. Israel's hope must not be in any temporal deliverer but in the eternal God.

In the fullness of time, God would be pleased to bring eternal salvation through Israel's temporal failure. The Lord Jesus Christ would come as the Son of David. He would be David's son born from his flesh but also David's Lord as the eternally begotten Son of God. He would be endowed with all authority in heaven and on earth. But he would not wield it as a tyrant to increase his fame and glory. He would use it as a suffering servant to vanquish the world, sin, and the devil (the true enemies of God's people) and bring in a new, heavenly order of things where God would be all in all.

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Chapter 9

#9 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 9:1-22

The last chapter marked a transition in Israel's history. We have moved from the era of the Judges to that of the Kings. The time of the judges started well and ended badly. The introduction of Israel's first king does not do much to change the situation. In the last chapter, we saw how the inauguration of this era was the result of Israel's sinful request for a king. Despite the warnings of Samuel (illustrated in the failure of his own family to perpetuate a righteous judgeship in Israel), they still demanded a king.

In time God will bring blessed good out of Israel's evil in King David, a man after God's own heart. He will shine the light of God's future coming Kingdom in the Lord Jesus Christ. But even he would have his sins and shortcomings. The Kingdom of God is near, but its fullness is not yet at hand.

Chapter 9 introduces us to King Saul. In it we see a somewhat com-

plicated development of the humiliation-exaltation theme previously introduced in the narrative: God brings low the proud but raises up the humble. In some respects, Saul is among the mighty who is brought low. He was more handsome than other Israelites and a head taller than anyone else (8:2). By human standards, his appearance had a naturally regal character. He projected strength, power, and charisma.

But these only proved to be surface-level features that did not make him truly fit to be God's king. As the book later states:

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7)

On the other hand, the narrative also shows how Saul also is among the humble whom God raises up for his purpose. Saul himself notes that he is from the tribe of Benjamin, the humblest and smallest of the clans of Israel (9:21). But his initial exaltation only creates the dramatic backdrop for his dramatic fall. He raises him up only to bring him down.

Nevertheless, God has a divine purpose in raising up Saul. The narrative confirms that Saul's kingdom was from God's divine appointment in keeping with the revelation of the man of God in the city. God will confirm his warning to the people regarding the evils of a tyrannical king. Likewise, by inaugurating the era of the king with a figure like Saul, he reminds us all from the outset that our hope for redemption will not be found in man. Although the Davidic kingdom will be a foretaste and manifestation of the eternal kingdom of God, in its earthly form it will prove to be weak, ineffective, and temporary.

The weakness of the typological kingdom is a reflection of the weakness and ineffectiveness of all temporal things. This world is cursed and mankind is lost in sin. God has graciously provided for various means of restraining our sin (corporately and individually). This includes the civil government (Rom. 13:3-4). But if the theocratic kingdom of Israel could not bring true redemption, how much less a “common” kingdom! Redemption was reflected in and accessible to believing Israelites through the OT types and shadows. But redemption’s source was in the greater king to come: David’s son and David’s Lord. In him, we trust and place our hope. Crucified in weakness he has been raised by the power of God. By God’s royal decree, he has been installed as the eternal king (Psalm 2:7). We who believe him follow after him, embracing humiliation and suffering to receive his kingdom.

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Chapter 10

#10 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 10:1-27

In some respects, Saul was a man who was born to be a king. He was tall, handsome, and charismatic. His physical appearance projected strength, power, and competence. These things are noted by man who looks at the outward appearance. But the Lord looks at something else: the heart.

Chapter 10 records the anointing of Saul as king of Israel. The anointing is accompanied by prophesied events that come to pass to confirm his kingship for both Saul and the people of Israel. The key event occurs when he meets a group of prophets at Gibeath-elohim when the Spirit of God rushes upon him and enables him to prophecy. The text tells us that at this moment Saul will “turn into another man” and be enabled to deliver God’s people from their enemies (1 Sam. 10:6, cf. 10:1).

Strangely enough, when these things come to pass and his uncle inquires about it, Saul conveniently neglects to mention anything about the

kingdom that had just been bestowed upon him. In this detail, we see a preview of Saul's distinguishing characteristic. He has the appearance of a king, but not the heart of one. He required a special dispensation of God's power to enable him to save God's people, and that would only prove to be temporary.

This is confirmed in the latter part of the narrative where Saul is proclaimed to be king. When the tribe of Benjamin is brought near to be revealed as the tribe of the King, Saul is nowhere to be found. Imagine going to a concert. When the opening act has finished, it is time for the main act to come on. The announcer comes to the microphone and declares: "Ladies and gentlemen, here is the man you have all been waiting for! It's King Saul!" The crowd roars. The curtain is pulled back. But the king is nowhere to be found. He is hiding in the changing room filled with "stage fright." Saul might have the look of a king, but he does not have the heart of one. Saul runs away from the kingship in fear, hiding among the baggage.

Saul's kingship would only have surface-level success. He was raised up only to be taken down as a manifestation of the power of God in justice and judgment. The kingdom would be taken from him and handed over to another. Interestingly, the new king would be called a "man after God's own heart." Although small, youthful, and seemingly insignificant in stature, by God's power he would overthrow the greatest giants. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

In the fullness of times, God's true and final king would come: the Son of David but also David's Lord. The ancient prophecies that foretold his appearing make explicit mention of his unassuming appearance: "For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no

CHAPTER 10

beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:32). Beyond this, his visage would be marred with blood and wounds when he was humiliated and taken to his crucifixion and death (cf. Isaiah 52:14).

Jesus did not look like a king, either in his personal appearance or in his ultimate earthly demise. Yet his incarnation and humiliation paved the way for his glorious exaltation and coronation as king and head over all (Philippians 2:9-11). We must bow our knees to this King and confess our allegiance to him. We must follow in his train, knowing that the one who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Chapter 11

#11 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 11:1-15

The last few chapters have told the story of the anointing and coronation of King Saul over Israel. Ancient kings were not mere figureheads retained for national tradition. They were invested with real power. In calling for a king, the people sacrificed freedom for security. Their request for a king was rooted in their desire for someone to fight for them and win their battles. Because of Israel's special as a theocracy, this request also constituted a rejection of God. Through his special provision to his chosen people, the Lord had already promised to fight for them provided they continued to lean upon him and faith and live in loyalty before him.

Chapter 11 sees these desires come to fruition in the victories of Saul over the enemies of Israel. The Ammonites threaten Jabesh-Gilead, and the people search for a deliverer. Saul hears the bad news, and when he does the Spirit of God rushes upon him. Filled with anger, he threatens God's people with death if they do not join him in battle. The strategy

is brutal and graphic but effective. 330,000 Israelites gather at his lead and defeat the raiding Ammonites.

The picture painted in the narrative has a mixture of shades. It has both good and evil—light and darkness. First, it is clear that God has been pleased to bring some good out of Israel's evil. It has already been made very clear that Israel's request for a king was a rejection of God. It was sinful and wrong as being contrary to God's will. Yet God is still pleased to bring temporal deliverance to Israel through it. Even Saul acknowledges that it is the LORD who worked salvation in their midst (11:13). We saw in the era of the Judges that God was often pleased to use men with increasing levels of weakness and sin to work his grace to his people. Such is the power of God that it can bring good out of evil.

Second, it is also clear that there is something temporary and “surface level” about the power of God in King Saul. Earlier we saw that although he had the appearance of a regal lion, he had the heart of a scared kitten. It required a special motion of the Spirit of God to (temporarily) signify that he would be God's chosen instrument. So also in this scene, Saul requires a rush of the Spirit of God to enable him to deliver God's people. This Spirit that seems to come and go from Saul will ultimately prove to have a temporary presence with him. The Holy Spirit will depart from Saul and an evil spirit will take his place. This is not proof that true believers can lose God's Holy Spirit. Rather, it is an acknowledgment from the Scriptures that all power and ability come from the Triune God (of whom the Holy Spirit is third person). This is not the saving work of the Spirit, but his providential-theocratic presence. Judas will similarly do miraculous works through the same Holy Spirit. He was “externally” granting him special powers and abilities, but not working salvation in his heart. There are many who will say “Lord, Lord” before Jesus, claiming to have preached many true things in his name or to

have performed many mighty miracles. Jesus will say to them: “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matt. 7:23). As the theocracy is temporary, so also is the kingship. We see a preview of the ultimate downfall of the Israelite monarchy in the figure of Saul. Temporal success will come, but will not abide. Earthly things must give way to heavenly ones. The kingdoms of men must give way to the kingdom of God.

Third, we also see the “dark side” of Saul’s temporal kingship in the anger and brutality that characterizes aspects of his deliverance. To be sure, war is a brutal enterprise. Given the sinful world in which we live, there is no avoiding that. But note how the text describes Saul as having his “anger...greatly kindled” (11:6). It is certainly lawful to have righteous indignation at evil threats of violence, but this seems to go beyond the bounds of propriety. This is illustrated in the fact that rather than summoning God’s people to battle based on loyalty and covenant faithfulness, Saul uses threats of violence. He cuts a yoke of oxen to pieces and sends it throughout Israel. The message is clear: come fight in battle or you will end up like these animals! Samuel had warned against the harsh measures of such a king. What he had prophesied will come to pass.

In this passage, we only see a portent of Saul’s future downfall. The rest of the narrative will unfold how he is consumed with anger and threats only to have the Spirit of God depart.

But God would not depart from his people. After Saul would come King David. In him we behold a picture of the greater king to come: the Lord Jesus Christ. He will come as Israel’s gentle Shepherd, gathering his lambs to himself. He did not use threats or violence, but in fact, submitted himself to them when he suffered on the cross. Humbling

himself to the point of crucifixion and death, God highly exalted him and installed him as king over all.

The Spirit of God came upon this king in fullness and without measure. The Spirit not only came upon him but remained upon him (John 1:32). In his resurrection he would not only receive in fullness for himself but pour it out on his people. Through his Spirit we become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Although we are weak in our flesh we are made strong through the power of God. The dominion of sin is more and more broken in our lives and we live more and more in the righteousness of the Spirit. The works of the flesh such as anger and violence are put away from our lives. The old man dies, but the new man comes alive in Jesus Christ.

Christ is our only hope for deliverance from our true enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil. We can put no confidence in princes or any other form of human might. Our trust is in the power of God and in him alone.

12

Chapter 12

#12 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 12:1-25

The time of Samuel is an era characterized by transitions. We move from the era of the Judges to the time of the Monarchy. The house of Eli is brought down, while Samuel is raised up. As we read of the rise of Saul, we will later see a transition to King David. Change is all around us in the narrative. This is nothing new in the history of redemption. However, at key points of transition, major figures will also give “farewell” addresses. We saw this with Moses as well as Joshua. We now read the same with Samuel.

Central to Samuel’s farewell address is the contrast between the righteousness of God and the sinfulness of the people. Samuel aligns himself with the Lord in this respect, noting his innocence during the time of his judgeship. The people bear witness to this. Samuel has served faithfully. This does not mean that Samuel was perfect or sinless (no one is!). But it does show that Samuel reflected the righteous character of the God he served.

This God was righteous towards them: faithful, merciful, compassionate, and loving. He brought them safely out of Egypt through Moses and Aaron, freeing them from their oppressors. Although the people forgot the LORD, God remembered them. He sent them judges like Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel to deliver them and bring them to safety.

The people, on the other hand, have been sinful. They did not heed the words of Moses and later forgot the Lord and served other gods. They suffered for their sins under the hands of oppressive kings. Although God was merciful, they rebelled again and asked for a king to be set over them. Although God was faithful, they were all too often unfaithful.

This brief historical survey of the interaction between God and his people is also reflected in our lives. The macrocosm of redemptive history is reflected in the microcosm of our personal lives. How many of us look back on our lives and see too many times of sluggish faith and forgetfulness of God's greatness and love towards us? It is not that faith is completely absent or that there is no evidence of sanctification. An honest assessment of our spiritual lives reveals that they are simply not what they could have been. Nevertheless, in his mercy, God has not forgotten about us. Along the way, we can see how although we were weak and unfaithful, God was faithful!

Despite Israel's past unfaithfulness, the hope of God's mercy and love for them is still held out. If they trust in the Lord he will still bless them. But if they rebel, they will come to utter destruction. This is confirmed by creation itself when Samuel calls down thunder and rain before them to confirm the veracity of his words from God.

In response, the people ask for prayer. This itself is an act of faith. As a

faithful servant of the Lord Samuel prays for them and instructs them in the good and the right way (12:23).

This passage is a reminder of the lot that we face as redeemed sinners. We are righteous in Christ but remain sinful in ourselves. We long to make progress in Christ, but are in a way limited by the remnants of sin and will be all our lives long. This is the case even among the greatest of the saints of God. Perhaps it is most vividly seen in the Apostle Peter. Recall how Satan desired to have him, and had asked to sift him like wheat. But he was preserved by the prayers of Jesus. Like Samuel, he gave last words of comfort and grace to his disciples. He said to Peter: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Here we see one of the reasons God allows us to fail at times in our Christian lives. When subjected to failure and weakness, we are then in a position to help others when we face the same.

Christ is faithful. God will hear his prayers. He pleads for our forgiveness before the throne of grace and silences the voice of the one who accuses us night and day before the Lord (Rev. 12:10). Christ is our only hope to forgive our sins, whether, past, present or future. One day we will arrive at the final transition in history, when we move from our time of weakness and sinfulness to power and glory through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ.

13

Chapter 13

#13 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 13:1-23

Many Bible readers get tripped up on the first verse of 1 Samuel 13. Here the inspired narrator gives us some time markers for the events we are about to read. This devotional is not the place to analyze the various resolutions that have been proposed to rightly interpret that textual difficulty. It is enough to know that several reasonable proposals have been put forward that are more than sufficient to put into doubt the presence of any vicious contradictions in the Bible. The Bible is God's word and properly received by the church as "inerrant" in the original manuscripts.

Whatever the proposed resolution to 13:1, one thing is clear: Saul's reign is short. That is the basic point of the passage. The seed of its demise is planted right after its beginning. But a few years into his reign he commits a sin that will lead to the downfall of his kingdom.

And what was this sin? Formally speaking, Saul sinned in presenting

burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. In 1 Samuel 10:8, Samuel specifically told Saul to wait seven days, after which Samuel would come and offer burnt offerings and peace offerings and also give him further instructions.

From a deeper point of view, this was also a test of faith and patience on the part of Saul. We have already seen Saul vacillate between cowardly fear and petulant hastiness. As king he has demonstrated a “take charge” attitude, using threats and intimidation even against his own people. The results are a “success,” but the means used manifest trust in man’s strength and not God’s.

Saul waits the proscribed seven days but does not wait for Samuel to arrive. On the one hand, Saul could argue that these were unique circumstances in that it was a time of war. The people have their backs against the wall with a multitude of the Philistines ready to attack. Likewise, he did partially obey in waiting the proscribed seven days. He only fell short in not waiting for Samuel.

But this is precisely where the heart of the test of faith lies. The seven days required Saul to exercise patience, but his required deference to Samuel required him to wait for the help of another: God’s appointed priest and mediator. Faith does not simply require us to wait to do the work in which we will place our trust. Instead, it requires us to abandon all hope of salvation from human strength and trust entirely in the work of another. Saul’s sin contradicted the core essence of saving faith: trust in the mediatorial work of another to atone for sin. This was further exacerbated by the fact that as king Saul was not permitted to offer sacrifices to the LORD, which was reserved only for the priests. Saul thus manifested the predicted tendency of kings to overstep the bounds of their authority into realms reserved to God alone (cf. Mark

12:17).

Saul's sin was a failure of faith. It also was not just one minor slip-up. It revealed something deeper regarding his heart before the Lord. The Lord is good, gracious, and forgiving. All of us have and will continue to sin against God. As a later king will wisely pray: "...there is no one who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46). As the same king says elsewhere: "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Ecc. 7:20). Some kings will have hearts that truly love the Lord and trust in him, but are mixed with weakness and imperfection. One sin or failure on our part does not mean God will completely reject us. God does not judge by outward appearances. Instead, he looks at the heart.

This is the issue with Saul. His heart is not right before the Lord. Therefore he will ultimately be rejected as the king of Israel, and in his place, God will raise up a true king after his own heart (13:14).

How much there is for us to learn from this passage as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ! The full reality of the kingdom of heaven, which was typified in the time of Samuel, has come to us in fullness. This kingdom is not only objectively foreshadowed in the time of the Kings, we also read of the subjective response to which it calls us. When this kingdom came in fullness, Jesus clearly declared that the proper response was faith and repentance. Both of these acts are characterized by their abandonment of trust in self and our pursuit of God alone as the source and power of our salvation.

This means that our mindset in this kingdom cannot be a "pragmatic" one in which we simply seek the most effective way to "get things done." While that has the appearance of effectiveness and vitality, it is essentially trusting in our own works and activities for our salvation.

All too often the church succumbs to this temptation. In the name of being more “effective” in the name of Christ, we abandon the simple means of grace that God has given to us in which he has promised to place his divine power.

Instead, the kingdom of God calls us to faith and patience. Our salvation consists primarily in our trust in God’s priest, who makes atonement for our sins and rescues us from all our enemies. More often than not we are not called to heroic activity, but to patient endurance in calm inactivity. At times we are called to simply wait and pray, not rise and act. Like the Israelites, we simply have to stay put in a bunker while our enemies surround us. We may be trembling in fear at our enemies, but we wait patiently for God himself to come and work a deliverance that is beyond human ability.

To be sure, there are times that call for action. We do not have a dead faith, but one that works by love. Yet how often in God’s kingdom do we face times where there is simply nothing we can do to “fix” a bad situation! Our actions often only make it worse. Here we are called to wait for the Lord to work his will in his way and in his time.

Praise be to God that we have a true King after God’s own heart, who is good and faithful. He himself patiently endured such things, entrusting himself to him who judges justly as he bore our sins in his body on the tree. He calls us to patient endurance in the present time of the tribulation of this world. He may tarry for a time, but one day he will most certainly come to bring salvation to those who long for his appearing.

Chapter 14

#14 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 14:1-52

The Bible tells us that sons are born in the image of their fathers (Genesis 5:3). We see this on the bodily level when sons bear an uncanny physical resemblance to their dads. Spiritually speaking, all mankind born through natural generation inherits the same sinful nature from Adam and Eve.

Although in many ways sons bear the likeness of their fathers, sometimes they stand in stark contrast to one another. This is the case with Saul and his Son Jonathan. 1 Samuel 14 paints a picture of their contrasting character which will be further developed throughout the narrative. Eventually, it will come to a head in the contrasting relationship with King David. Jonathan will become a close friend of David while Saul will make himself his sworn enemy.

The text begins with an exposé of Jonathan's characterization. His father, Saul, had revealed himself to be a man of impulse, driven by anger,

threats, and intimidation. He was effective in his accomplishments, but tyrannical in his methods. By contrast, Jonathan acts in a way characteristic of faith in God. Note especially his confession of faith in 14:6: “It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.” Jonathan has a relatively small army with him (merely 600), demonstrating his faith in the power of God. He also does not act rashly (as Saul did) but waits for a confirmatory sign from God that he will give them success in battle. Although Saul asks that the Ark of God be brought up, the defeat of the Philistines begins before he finishes speaking to the priest. This highlights the need for true faith in the one true God. As the narrative previously established, the Ark of God is not some magic device that works *ex opera operato* (“by the deed done”). It is a sacramental means of grace that requires faith in the people. Jonathan is thus a man of faith through whom God works his divine power for their salvation.

By contrast, Saul is a man who manifests trust in himself. Rather than encouraging the people through trust in God, he imposes a rash and severe oath upon the people not to eat food until he is avenged. Note his characterization: he is motivated by his desire for vengeance and settling a personal score. Things matter for Saul in terms of how they affect him. He puts himself first—not God and not the nation. We all know the saying: “It’s not personal—it’s business!” With Saul, it is clearly the opposite! It should be no surprise that these things characterize the motivations of earthly leaders even down to this day.

Immediately after this rash vow, the inspired narrator shows how Jonathan stands in opposition to Saul. He had done this earlier when he noted that Jonathan did not tell his father about the planned excursion against the Philistines (14:1b). This opposition is further developed in Jonathan’s refusal to follow Saul’s harsh directives. Jonathan’s point is

confirmed later in the narrative. The people were so hungry when the Philistines were defeated that they slaughtered the sheep and oxen and ate them still mixed with blood. This was forbidden in the Levitical codes. Harsh measures are effective in the short term, but eventually become unbearable and produce even bigger troubles.

Saul's first rash vow is followed by a second, pronouncing a death sentence upon them even if it be Jonathan, his son. What we already know as readers is soon revealed to Saul. Jonathan had eaten honey after his father had declared otherwise. Amazingly, Saul is prepared to keep his rash word to save face. Jonathan is saved by the appeal of the people, who note the utter unfittingness of the death of one who rescued the people in battle.

The contrasting spiritual principles of Saul and Jonathan will grow and develop throughout the narrative, putting father and son in conflict with one another. Jonathan will be loyal to David even though it means the loss of the earthly kingdom for his family. Saul will become his sworn enemy, even though David's exaltation is clearly from the will of God.

In the fullness of times, a Son of David would arise in whom we would also see these contrasting principles. The earthy Israel would grow jealous of this Messiah as the people began to follow him. Filled with wrath and vengeance, they would persecute him and crucify him. By contrast, Jesus would entrust himself and his "salvation" from death to God—entrusting himself to him who judges justly with power to save him from death (1 Pet. 2:23; Heb. 5:7). In this Savior is our salvation. He would come in the perfect image of his Father with no conflict or contrast between them. Those who have seen the Son have seen the Father also. In him, God's kingdom comes. Our true enemies are

defeated by his power. Our call is to trust him. It is certainly true that we are also called to obey and perform deeds of love. But these deeds have no power apart from our passive trust in the might of God. Through Christ and his Spirit, the works of the flesh so manifest in Saul are crucified and put to death. The fruits of the Spirit come alive in us. The conflicting spiritual kingdoms revealed in the lives of Saul, Jonathan, and David are still at war today in us. It is by faith that we shall conquer and have the victory through David's son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 15

#15 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 15:1-35

Saul's reign as king was doomed from the start. The seeds of its dissolution were planted early in the narrative. Already in 13:13-14, we heard the prophetic words of Samuel declaring its demise: "You have not kept the command of the LORD your God...now your kingdom will not continue." What was predicted in chapter 13 now comes to fruition in chapter 15: the LORD rejects Saul as king.

One difficulty we confront in this passage involves the language of change and regret as applied to God. Twice in the narrative, we are told that God "regretted" that he made Saul king over Israel (1 Sam. 15:10, 35). This does not mean that God made an alteration to his eternal plan, or that God somehow actually changed. Instead, we understand this language "anthropomorphically." In God's interactions with us in history, he gives the appearance of having changed his mind. There is certainly some mystery involved in the details of how this works. God's

plan is eternal and not subject to our ordinary conceptions of planning. Yet in him, the eternal and the temporal connect. He truly interacts with us in history, yet in such a way that he is subject to no essential change. This fact is also clearly stated in the passage. When directly speaking of God in his eternal and essential being Samuel affirms this point: "...the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret" (15:29). We cannot use the less clear passage to cancel out clearer ones. Instead, we interpret the less clear texts of Scripture in light of the clearer ones. God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being. He only appears to have changed (anthropomorphically) from our perspective as finite and temporal human beings. Nevertheless, the fact remains: the LORD has rejected Saul.

The grounds for this rejection had already been established in his unlawful sacrifice outlined in the earlier chapter. But God is just and patient. In contrast to Saul who is impatient and hasty, God waits for the right time to execute his judgment. By allowing Saul to continue as King and permitting him to sin once again, God makes it clear that there is no injustice with him. Multiple acts of disobedience thus serve as the basis of his decision to take the kingdom from Saul and hand it over to another. These sinful actions fully reveal Saul's deeper problem: a heart that is not right before God.

In addition to the unlawful sacrifice previously detailed, this chapter tells the story of Saul's failure to devote the Amalekites to utter and total destruction. Amalek had opposed Israel when they were brought up out of Egypt. It is somewhat surprising that only now—hundreds of years later—is God's judgment coming upon them. God's patience with Saul is mirrored in his patience with the Amalekites. Although Saul was directly commanded to completely destroy them, he spared

Agag and kept the best of the spoils for himself and the people. In this, they recapitulate a pattern of disobedience seen previously in Israel's history. The motivation for this is clear. Keeping the earthly spoils and the people alive allows them to continue to get some temporal benefit from their war against them. In this, they manifest trust in earthly things rather than faith in God.

Our sinful natures are good at rationalizing and justifying sinful disobedience. When confronted by Samuel regarding his failure to destroy the Amalekites, Saul declares that they kept the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the LORD. But that which is acquired unlawfully is not acceptable in God's sight. Later he blames the people, shifting responsibility to them (15:24). Although Saul does eventually formally confess his transgression, it is only after he makes multiple attempts to dodge the accusations. He admits only what he is forced to admit. Like other aspects of his characterization, Saul's repentance is only "surface-level."

In response, Samuel utters some famous words that get to the heart of true faith and loyalty to God: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (15:22). Ironically, this is exactly the principle that will characterize Saul's replacement. King David will be a man after God's own heart, loving, trusting, and obeying the voice of God.

These words would take on greater significance in David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus will rebuke the Pharisees at the calling of Matthew, referencing this passage to correct their blindness to God's mercy. Elsewhere he will also mention it to correct the Pharisee's exaltation of the external forms of religion over the religion of the heart

in mercy and obedience (Matt. 12:7).

In Christ, we see the one who became both the obedient servant of the LORD as well as the perfect sacrifice. His heart was devoted entirely to God and his body was offered up to him as an atoning sacrifice upon the tree. In him we have a king who humbled himself, dying in our place to save us from the wrath of God. Saul was disobedient in failing to bring judgment on God's enemies. Jesus was obedient in offering himself for the salvation of his enemies. Jesus sends us his Holy Spirit to make us obedient servants. Through him, we present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to him. With hearts filled with thanksgiving, we offer ourselves to him, giving our lives to the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

16

Chapter 16

#16 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 16:1-23

In a previous chapter, we saw the inspired narrator develop a contrast between Saul and his son Jonathan. While Jonathan manifested the principles of faith in God, Saul embodied the fruits of unbelief. Because of his sin, Saul has been rejected as king. In his place, a new king would arise. The mighty will be brought down. The lowly will be raised up. The kingdom will be torn from Saul and given to his neighbor, who is better than him.

Just as Saul stood in contrast to his son Jonathan, so now a contrast is drawn between him and David in chapter 16. Ironically, both David and Jonathan grow closely aligned even as Saul increases in hostility and alienation from them. Note the following ways Saul and David differ from one another.

First, they differ in their stature. Saul was striking in his appearance

and a head taller than all the other Israelites. Externally he looked like a royal figure. He had the appearance of a lion, but the heart of a kitten. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. By contrast, David is the youngest and smallest of his brothers. This point is highlighted in the narrative as each of David's older brothers is examined first. David himself is truly an afterthought in the whole ordeal: they don't even bother bringing him out and leave him watching the sheep. In contrast to Saul, he is "ruddy and handsome" in appearance. The language is intended to highlight his boyish youthfulness (cf. 17:42). While Saul is a man's man with the appearance of a king, David is but a boy.

In this contrast, we see the embodiment of a key spiritual principle articulated in 16:7: "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Even Samuel was slow to remember this fundamental principle. The world looks at size, strength, power, and beauty. God needs none of these things. What he desires is a heart of faith and humility. That is the source of true strength and power. By faith, we draw on God's Divine power which surpasses all the powers of the earth.

But this leads us to a second contrast: the presence of the Holy Spirit upon each. When David is anointed in the midst of his brothers, "the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). Whereas Saul's possession of the Spirit is temporary, coming and going according to the Lord's will, David's possession of the Spirit endures his entire life. Saul is an external agent of God's providential power, but he does not savingly possess it in his heart. We will see a similar manifestation of the Spirit in a figure like Judas, who performs mighty miracles through the power of God but has no true faith in his heart. David, on the other hand, possesses the Spirit in the fullness of

his saving power in a way that abides and remains all his life long.

But note also a final point in the narrative. Not only does God's Holy Spirit depart from Saul, but an evil spirit comes in its place to torment him. It is not clear as to the precise form this "spirit" took when it came upon Saul. What is clear is that it ultimately came from the LORD who is sovereign even over evil. Where does he find relief from this torment? It is from David, his successor. Whenever he would play his lyre before Saul, the music of God would soothe his soul and the harmful spirit would depart from him.

What is the significance of these things? In them, we see a prefiguration of David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came as the Christ. The word means "the anointed one." At his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him as a sign that he was God's true and final king. The Spirit did not just come upon him externally. Nor did it simply abide on him during his earthly life. The Spirit came upon him in fullness and abided with him permanently (John 1:32-33; Isaiah 11:2). In his resurrection he received the fullness of that Spirit which overflowed upon us, his people.

When he came, there was nothing about his appearance that commended him as an earthly king. David was declared to be the King in his boyhood, but Jesus's kingship was proclaimed when he was but a baby. Indeed, the Spirit's presence was with him at the point of conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Although outwardly there was nothing in his appearance (even as an adult) that would commend him as an earthly king (cf. Is. 53:2), he had a perfect and pure heart of faith and obedience before the Lord.

As it was with Jesus, so it is with his servants. Our power and strength

do not come from external things. It is not our beauty or strength that commends us to God, but the inner beauty of a quiet heart of faith before the LORD. Outwardly we are wasting away. But inwardly we are being renewed day by day. The Spirit within is transforming us into the image of our Savior. We patiently await the full coming of his Kingdom when faith will be made sight, and the inner glory at work in us will be manifested externally in the resurrection of the body. In our earthly trials, we take comfort in the music of his heavenly kingdom which we can hear from afar—the voices of angels and saints blend together singing the songs of victory and redemption with Christ as their leader and head.

Chapter 17

#17 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 17:1-58

1 Samuel 17 records the famous story of David and Goliath. This is one of the most “popular” and well-known stories in the OT. It’s also perhaps the most commonly misinterpreted and misunderstood. For many it simply teaches a simple moral lesson: if we are just brave and bold enough, we can overcome the many personal Goliaths in our lives. Sometimes this moralistic principle is “baptized” in Christian language. The preacher will tell us that if we were just more heroic and bold like King David we would have greater success in spreading God’s kingdom throughout the world.

It is certainly true that each of us will face many personal challenges in our lives. It is also true that Christianity calls us to a bold faith. What is misleading about these interpretations is how they miss a key spiritual component that is at the heart of the narrative. 1 Samuel is all about the coming of God’s eternal kingdom, albeit in the form of the OT

theocratic kingdom. While the external shell of this kingdom will pass away in the coming of Christ, the spiritual kernel is the same. Central to the coming of that kingdom is God's exaltation of the lowly by his divine power and the humiliation of the exalted. We have seen this pattern in several figures already in the narrative. Barren Hannah was exalted over fruitful Penninah. Her lowly son Samuel was exalted over old and impotent Eli. The boy King David is being exalted over the manly King Saul. Note especially the parallel between the youth of Samuel and David. Both are but boys when God calls them to begin their work as deliverers of his people. It is not by their might or power that they are raised up. Instead, in their weakness they are exalted by the power of God.

The narrative sets up this humiliation-exaltation pattern by highlighting the great strength of the Philistines. The armies of the Philistines and the Israelites are gathered for battle across the Valley of Elah. Illustrative of the great earthly strength of the Philistines is Goliath, their champion. In many ways, Goliath is a mirror of Saul the failed King of Israel. Saul was tall, striking, and intimidating in his appearance. But Goliath far surpasses him. Six cubits in height, he had a helmet of bronze and a coat of mail heavier than what most men could even lift. He had bronze armor on his legs and a javelin of bronze that only the mightiest arm could toss.

This man is the epitome of human strength and is not afraid to boast about it. He taunts the Israelites to send out a man to fight him and is willing to bet the whole farm that he will easily defeat him. He arrogantly defies the LORD and the armies of Israel, certain that their defeat is a *fait accompli*. The mightiest soldiers of Israel are left to tremble in fear, dismayed at the might of Goliath. They are all but certain that what he says will come to pass.

But God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

In contrast to mighty Goliath enters the young boy David. Ironically, mighty Saul is now old and advanced in years. The once mighty deliverer is now impotent and unable to rescue Israel through his earthly strength (17:12). Although David's older brothers followed Saul into battle, David himself was kept back to feed the sheep in Bethlehem. It is only because his father sent him to bring food to his brothers after 40 long days that David even arrives on the scene. When he arrives his brother Eliab thinks ill of him, presuming that he has only come to watch the battle, even though he was sent by his father to bring him help and comfort. These preliminary details highlight David's humble circumstances. He is the last person anyone would think could defeat the giant.

When David presents himself before Saul and offers to fight the Philistine he receives a similar reaction. Saul looks on the outward appearance, seeing only a young boy who in earthly terms stood no chance against a mighty warrior (let alone one of Goliath's size).

But God had prepared David for this very thing. Recall earlier how David had received the Holy Spirit when anointed by Samuel. As with earlier figures in Israel's history, this was the Holy Spirit of power who enabled leaders to perform mighty acts of deliverance. By God's Spirit they were made strong in weakness. We saw this in Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson (Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 13:25). It was not their might, experience, strength, or wisdom that made them mighty servants of God. It was the presence of God's Spirit. By this same Spirit David had been empowered by God to save his father's flock of sheep from

ferocious beasts such as lions or bears. Goliath had been a man of war from his youth, well prepared for a great day of earthly battle. But David also had been prepared by the power of God's Spirit. What a wonderful reminder of how God prepares us step by step to act in faith in great moments of battle and conflict. God had already confirmed to David in these experiences that his abiding power and presence were with him. This serves as the background of his bold declaration of faith: "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (17:37). The Philistine boasts of his great strength while David boasts of the power of God.

David had defeated these ferocious beasts without the help of armor, swords, or spears. He is clothed only with the full armor of God and the spiritual weapons of faith. It is true that he takes a small earthly weapon in his hand: a sling and five smooth stones. But this is equivalent to taking a butter knife into battle against a machine gun. Goliath notes this very thing: "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" But David knows that the source of his power is not in the weapon he wields, but in the name of the one who stands behind him: "You come to me with a sword and a spear...but I come to you in the name of the Lord" (17:45). In this confession of faith, David stands in stark contrast to Goliath. The Giant trusts in his great strength, while David trusts in the strength of God. It is at this very moment that the power of God's heavenly kingdom intersects with Israel's earthly battle bringing a deliverance that only the LORD could work. Remember that Goliath has a helmet of bronze on his head. A small stone (by itself) would never be enough to topple a mighty giant so well protected. Yet by God's power, he defeats the giants with a single toss of a small stone.

By faith in God, David harnesses the power of God's heavenly kingdom.

It intrudes upon the earth. God makes the weak strong and David topples the Giant. Those who humble themselves are exalted, and the one who exalts himself is humbled.

This very pattern will be recapitulated in David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In him, the full power of God's kingdom would arrive. But his victory would come in a way quite different than David. David had a small weapon to wield, and his victory took the form of the earthly defeat of his enemies. The Lord Jesus Christ would be subjected to greater weakness. Although his disciples sought to wield weapons to protect him, Jesus commanded them to put their swords in the sheaths. He could have called upon the armies of heaven to bring earthly defeat upon his enemies, but he did not summon them. He even healed those who had been struck by his disciples, manifesting the grace and mercy of God's kingdom (all this is detailed in Matt. 26:51-54). Jesus knew that the Scripture had to be fulfilled. If he was to work the final deliverance of God's people, he had to suffer the ultimate humiliation and weaknesses in the death of the cross.

But in his death Jesus destroyed death. In his crucifixion he cancels out the record of our transgression, making atonement for sin. On the cross it was not Jesus who suffered ultimate defeat, but the devil himself.

In Jesus, we see the path that each of us must walk as believers. Our earthly expectation should not be that we end up like David, triumphantly holding the head of our enemy in temporal victory. Instead, we must expect to end up like Jesus on the cross: despised, ridiculed, and humiliated. It is at that very moment that God's power will be made known in us. When we are weak we are strong. We will be made nothing so that the all-surpassing power will be shown to be from God and not from us. Only then will we be fully clothed with

divine power through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven and made to triumph by the blood of the lamb.

Chapter 18

#18 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 18:1-58

“Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?” (Proverbs 27:2)

Envy is a powerful emotion. Anger can sometimes stand on its own, but when it flows from jealousy, it is extremely potent. In many ways, jealousy was the source of our first parent’s fall in the Garden of Eden. The serpent deceived Eve, making her jealous of God himself (Gen. 3:5). All of us have experienced this emotion at one time or another. Even in its righteous forms—for there is a godly jealousy—it is truly a power to be reckoned with.

In this chapter, we see the previous revelation of God progressively come to pass. The kingdom has been torn from Saul and is being handed over to David. The victories, glory, honor, and privileges once the sole possession of Saul are being transferred to King David. His downward

spiral of sin and unbelief is advancing. David's exaltation through faith in God's power is advancing.

The first thing That is transferred from Saul to David is the love and affection of his son Jonathan. The friendship of Jonathan and David is key to the development of the narrative. Its presence is a constant reminder that for David the conflict between him and Saul is never personal. David spares Saul's life multiple times. He grieves over the fact that he even gives the appearance of exalting himself over Israel's previous monarch. He grieves his downfall and sings a song of lament over it.

Their friendship also underscores the mercy and grace of God. Although the father transgresses in unbelief, the sin of the father is not imputed to the son. God is kind, merciful, and compassionate. Although Israel will become unfaithful as a nation, rejecting the grace of God, his promise will remain good and true to future generations. He will not totally abandon them, or leave them completely bereft of grace. We will also see this in the story of Mephibosheth later in the narrative.

Jonathan's love for and friendship with David is not a betrayal of Saul. David is now the Lord's anointed. Israel's allegiance is owed to him. In fact, Jonathan's friendship with David is proof of his faith in God's appointed King. Typologically speaking, Jonathan's friendship with David is a manifestation of his trust in the Messiah, who will come from his law. It comes at great risk to himself, given the unstable reactions of his father to the perceived threat to his kingdom.

At this point in the story, Jonathan's friendship with David becomes the backdrop for Saul's increasing jealousy. Even his own son has now aligned himself with his replacement.

The second occasion for Saul's jealousy of David is his increasing success in battle. Saul set David over his men of war to fight on behalf of the nation. At first, he was delighted to achieve victories through his military service. The tipping point came when David began to receive praise and credit for these military accomplishments. To further inflame his incipient envy, the people explicitly contrasted Saul and David in their songs of triumph: "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (18:7). But it was not the victories themselves that made Saul angry. It was the fact that David received exponentially greater praise, honor, glory, and credit from the people. What a good reminder for when these sinful feelings develop in our hearts! Our eyes must be on the praise of God, and not on the praise of men. Our acts of service and sacrifice can be easily corrupted by a jealous spirit. If our hearts are before the Lord, we know that he sees everything and rewards those who diligently seek him.

Ironically, part of Saul's anger and jealousy towards David flows from his understanding that the Lord had departed from him, and was now present with David (18:12). Aware of the inevitable, this only moved Saul to greater rage. In this, we see the pattern of the evil one. The devil himself was dealt a fatal blow in the first coming of Jesus Christ. But rather than cause him to retreat, it only fills him with greater wrath because he knows his time is short (Rev. 12:12).

Saul's jealousy leads to anger, and his feelings of anger lead to murderous actions. Two times he attempts to pin David to the wall with his spear, but two times David evades him. Saul determines to remove David from his presence and make him a commander of 1000. Saul's purpose was to put David in harm's way so that he might perhaps be killed in battle. But Saul's efforts to diminish David only become the occasion for his greater exaltation.

The evil purpose in these things becomes evident in his offering Michal to David as a wife. We all know the old saying: keep your friends close, and your enemies closer. But Saul hatches a shrewd plot. Believing that David selfishly desires the throne, he offers him an avenue to be married into the royal family. To the corrupt and impure nothing is pure. If he can pay the bride price of the foreskins of 200 Philistines, he can become the king's son-in-law. To Saul's surprise, David easily dispatches the Philistines and acquires Michal as his wife, because the Lord was with him.

The jealous spirit often interprets everybody else's motivations in the same way. All is yellow to the jaundiced eye. Saul wrongly interprets David's motivations because he projects his own envy onto him. Thus it is when the human heart becomes blinded and hardened by sin.

In short, we see the continued humiliation of Saul and the exaltation of David. David increases in humble faith and trust in the Lord. Saul moves farther downward in the spiral of unbelief and sin.

In the life of Saul and David, we see the intrusion of the principles of the eternal kingdom of God. In the fullness of time, we will see these principles come to ultimate fruition in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus will come as the new Shepherd of Israel. The old shepherds, filled with unbelief, will reject him. When the people begin to follow him, they will grow jealous and envious of Jesus even plotting his death. Early on in his ministry, these efforts will fail. But eventually, the scriptures will be fulfilled. The hour of darkness will come. Even Pilate will discern that it is out of envy that Jesus will be delivered up to be crucified (Matt. 27:18). But through this earthly "defeat" Jesus will actually win the greatest victory over God's true enemy, the devil.

As it was with Jesus, so it will be with his disciples. In the book of Acts, the apostles suffer many bitter persecutions at the hands of the Jewish leaders who are filled with envy at their success and power (Acts 5:17, 17:5).

In Christ Jesus, we have been delivered from the snaring grip of jealousy and envy. By faith, we have a treasure that surpasses all the treasures of the earth. We have a love that is greater than the love of any other human being. And we have the commendation of the one who has the only opinion that should matter to us. These things are grasped by faith, not by sight. When we are filled with the fullness of God's blessing to us, jealousy and envy are replaced with thanksgiving. We are enabled from the heart to rejoice in the success of others and mourn with them in their failures and defeats. Such was the attitude of David at the downfall of Saul (2 Sam. 2:17-27). Such must be the attitude of all those who belong to David's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 19

#19 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 19:1-24

The story of David in 1 and 2 Samuel is all about the coming of God's kingdom in the types and shadows of the OT monarchy. David is the forbear of Jesus Christ, the Messiah who was to come from his loins. But David is not simply an objective canvas upon which Jesus and the principles of God's kingdom are displayed. He himself trusts in the power of that kingdom as a believer in Jesus Christ. In his life, he experiences the realities of that kingdom in his union with Christ. At the same time, we see David as a type of Christ but also as a believer in Christ. In David, we see both Christ for us (his work he will do on our behalf) as well as Christ in us. In other words, in David, we see the work Christ does on our behalf and also the experiences of the life of faith. He is both a type of Christ as well as an example of Christ.

At this point in the narrative, a clear pattern has emerged that will be recapitulated in the arrival of Christ. The coming of God's kingdom will involve the rejection of the old Israel and the exaltation of the new.

Young Samuel replaces old Eli. Humble David is exalted over King Saul. The old things prove to be but an empty shell. They appear mighty and exalted but prove to be weak, ineffective, and lifeless. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. God desires obedience, not sacrifice.

So in the coming of Christ, this pattern is repeated. The old Israel represented in the scribes, Pharisees, and Sanhedrin reject and murder Jesus. Therefore they are rejected by God. They reveal themselves to be lifeless shells: whitewashed tombs that appear righteous to others, but inwardly are filled with dead people's bones. On the other hand, Jesus has no earthly glory, pomp, and splendor attached to him. But his life is the perfect embodiment of a faithful and obedient heart.

This brings us to a key element of the coming of God's kingdom that is revealed in this passage. The transition between Saul and David embodies the principle of conflict between these two kingdoms. This is not a peaceful transfer of power. Indeed, even when the evil one knows that his defeat is certain he only increases in his fury and rage.

We see this principle of the kingdom of darkness in the rage and jealousy of Saul towards David. Saul's son Jonathan has grown close to David, recognizing in him God's true King. Saul feels that his grip on power is loosening, so he orders Jonathan and his servants to kill David. Although Saul is the king and possesses lawful power to wage war and punish the evildoer, he is still subject to limitations in this regard. A lawful war be just and capital punishment be administered according to God's law. What is more, God has already made clear that David is his servant to whom obedience and loyalty are owed. Saul's order is therefore unlawful. In this instance, Jonathan and his servants must obey God rather than men. No civil authority has absolute power. No earthly

governor is owed blind obedience. He is subject to the limitations placed upon him by God.

Thankfully, Jonathan succeeds in dissuading Saul from killing David. He appeals to David's innocence and his faithfulness in working deliverance for Israel. But Jonathan's restraint of his father proves to be temporary. When war breaks out again, the harmful spirit from the Lord comes upon Saul. David seeks to do him good by playing the lyre and soothing his soul with the music of God. Saul repays David's good with evil by seeking to "pin him to the wall" with his spear such that David must escape by night. Saul's pursuit of David proves to be relentless. He sends messengers to David's house to keep watch over him, hoping to kill him in the morning when he awakes and is unprepared for battle. Even as Saul's own son thwarted his earlier plan to kill David, so now Michal his daughter does the same. Michal helps David escape through a window at night and places a "dummy" body in his bed to give the illusion he is sick and resting. This buys time for David to flee to safety.

And where does he flee? To Samuel the prophet, the man of God. Saul also pursues David and comes to Samuel at Ramah. At this point some strange events take place. When the servants of Saul arrive the Spirit of God comes upon them and they begin prophesying.

This happens multiple times. The same thing happens to Saul when he personally arrives on the scene: the Spirit of God comes upon him and causes him to prophesy. He even is stripped of his clothes and prophesies day and night in the presence of them all.

What is the meaning of this scene? On the one hand, it might at first seem contrary to the previous point in the narrative. Does Saul's prophesying indicate that he is actually now a servant of God and a true possessor of the Spirit? On the contrary, the coming of God's Spirit

of prophecy upon him and his servants reminds us that his presence proved to only be external and temporary. What is more, the presence of God's Spirit seems to take total control of Saul and his servants. This manifestation of God's sovereign power is a reminder that he has been in control of everything up to this point. He has allowed Saul to pursue David but has providentially preserved his life at every step. Finally, the fact that this power is manifested in prophesy reminds us that it is in God's word that it finds its most potent expression. God has been establishing his word. Against all the might of human evil, God's plan and promise remain sure and steadfast.

As it was with David, so it will be with the Lord Jesus Christ. He came as God's final prophet, speaking the last and greatest words of God (Heb. 1:1-2). Through his life, they would plot his death. Yet God would deliver him. The evil one would manifest his rage and jealousy through the leaders of his visible church. They would do Christ evil, yet Christ would do them good. In Jesus, we have one who has taken permanent possession of the Spirit of God and has also poured it out on his church. The Spirit's power is channeled through the preached word of God, which proclaims a message of victory over sin and evil. The devil is a great dragon who seeks to devour the church—a roaring lion who prowls in search of prey among God's people. But God's word stands firm and will be established. On the rock of Jesus Christ God will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world will be in mortal conflict, but God's servants will triumph in the blood of the lamb and the word of the testimony of Jesus (cf. Rev. 12:11).

Chapter 20

#20 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 20:1-42

In the life of David, we see a manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ. In the temporal monarchy of Israel, we see a preview of the eternal kingdom of God. David is a Christian who walks by faith in the Son of God who will come from his kingly line. In union with Christ, he has fellowship with him in his sufferings and glory. We have already seen a preview of his ultimate triumph in his defeat of Goliath. But in this chapter, we see him in the depths of his sufferings.

One problem David faces is the fact that although he is innocent the king seeks to kill him (see 20:1). The King has authority to execute vengeance upon the evildoer. But all too often the agent of God's justice becomes a perpetrator of injustice: punishing the innocent and clearing the name of the guilty.

Jesus faced this very thing in his earthly ministry. His complete

innocence was even acknowledged by the earthly judge before whom he was tried. Christians are clearly told by our Savior that we will experience the same thing. We will seek to do good, but be spoken of as evil.

The internal struggle of God's saints in these situations is severe. We get a small glimpse of it in David's dialogue with Jonathan in 20:1. In several Psalms we get a deeper peek into the heart of David as he wrestles with this experience. On the one hand, the threats against his life remind him that he is a sinner and ultimately deserving of any suffering God might bring into his life. Although he trusts in God's hidden goodness, he is open and honest about his feelings of guilt and anxiety. His sufferings make him "feel" like God either hates him or is being unjust to him. His awareness of his sins and shortcomings pain him deep within his heart. But he knows he is a man of sincere faith, a servant of God, and ultimately loved by him.

For example, in Psalm 143 David cries out to God as his enemies pursue him. Recognizing his sin and the just judgment of God he declares: "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you" (Ps. 143:2). Although Jesus suffered while perfectly innocent, Christians still have the remnants of the flesh within them. God cleanses and purifies us from them through trial and suffering.

Concerning God, we know that there is always some sin in us. We can never look at him and think that his providence is unfair. Yet with respect to men and our faith, we will often suffer while innocent.

This "innocence" of faith does not require moral perfection, but a sincere heart of trust and obedience before God. It is the work of the devil

to afflict sincere believers in their sufferings with a sense of guilt and shame. He seeks to convince them that their sufferings are proof only of the wrath of God against him, or of God's failure to keep his promises to his children. The devil is very shrewd in this regard. He is the accuser of God's people, tormenting them day and night with reminders of their sins and darkening their sense of God's love and forgiveness.

The internal struggle in these moments is severe and real. It was with David, and it was so with our Savior. Although innocent of all sin, he was persecuted and crucified. Although he was the spotless lamb of God, in his innocence he took our sins upon himself. On the cross, he experience humiliation and anguish of soul. He freely embraced the "unfairness" of suffering for the sins of others.

But this passage also reminds us that in such moments God will be faithful and give us a means of deliverance. Jonathan concocts a shrewd plan to allow David to flee to safety, but also receive communications to protect him in his flee to safety through the shooting of his arrows and a messenger boy who is otherwise ignorant of their secret plan.

But it was ultimately not Jonathan who gave him deliverance. It was the LORD God himself. David did not simply hide in his bunker, he hid by faith in the LORD of Hosts—the mighty fortress of God's people. He also was rescued by the faithful love of Jonathan, who made a covenant with him believing him to be God's true King. Jonathan himself suffered bitterly in his faith, being cursed by his father who also attempted to kill his own son (20:30-31).

David will have his time of triumph. But he currently lives in a season of suffering. Sincerely trusting in God, maintaining his innocence and integrity, loving his enemies, and doing good to those who do him evil.

CHAPTER 20

Such is the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ, previewed in David but also manifested in our lives as well. In such times of anguish and guilt we must go to the cross of Christ and see the one who was truly innocent, but bore our sins in his body on the tree. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The remnants of the flesh remain, but they are being conquered by the reign of the Spirit within us. He who began this work in us will complete it on the day of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 21

#21 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 21:1-15

“Desperate times call for desperate measures.” This phrase is commonly attributed to the Greek Physician Hippocrates. The idea is that when a patient is extremely ill, risky treatments we would ordinarily avoid become acceptable. More generally, the phrase is a recognition that sometimes the “ordinary” rules have exceptions due to extraordinary circumstances.

One such extraordinary circumstance is a time of war. When there is an active invasion of a country, the government may impose a curfew, close down business activity, or order people to relocate from one area to another. Ordinarily, this would be a severe infringement of the people’s rights. Another such situation would be if a civil leader no longer had the mental capacity to fulfill his duties. The US Constitution actually has a built-in provision to deal with this situation in the 25th Amendment. What would ordinarily constitute mutiny and rebellion

becomes reasonable and necessary under extraordinary circumstances.

1 Samuel 21 contains two rather strange stories. At first glance, they can be quite difficult to interpret. But when we keep in mind the extraordinary circumstances that David faces as the next King of Israel, things start to make more sense. David faces a tyrant in King Saul who is not in his right mind. Unlawful war is being waged against him as the king sends soldiers to take his life.

We have already seen many “normal” rules being suspended due to Saul’s rejection by God and subsequent downward spiral. Saul’s pursuit of David’s life is clearly sinful and unlawful. Not only does it constitute an abuse of the power of the kingship to condemn and execute the innocent, but God has clearly revealed his sovereign choice of David as the next king. Jonathan and others have rightly worked to frustrate Saul’s unlawful attempts on David’s life. Ordinarily, the king’s commands must simply be obeyed. But these are not ordinary times.

This isn’t the first time in redemptive history that we have seen this. By faith, Rahab the prostitute hid the spies and misdirected those who would seek to kill them. Under ordinary circumstances, God’s law calls us to tell the truth. But when the truth is spoken in a way that will knowingly enable murder, we are under no obligation to aid and abet the perpetrators. A similar principle applies in the days of Rahab when she “lied” to those who sought to kill the spies of Israel (Joshua 2:1-7; Heb. 11:31).

In this chapter, we also see the suspension of normal rules in Ahimelech’s permitting David and his men to eat the Holy Bread. We first see this in David’s technically untrue words to the priest. David tells him that the king has charged him with a secret matter and that he has come with his men to a previously appointed place. The reality is that

Saul has done nothing of the kind, and is instead seeking to unlawfully take his life. There is no way for the priest to verify the whole story at this point. What is more, David's statements give the priest "plausible deniability" which may help to spare him from punishment (although Saul will later murder him anyway). Ordinarily, we must speak what is true. But in extraordinary times like these, we must recognize that when the truth might be used to an evil end it is not owed or required.

[As a side note, the Larger Catechism recognizes that it is a sin to "speak[] the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end." This recognizes that there are circumstances (i.e. "seasons") where it would be a sin to disclose something technically true.]

Next, there is the suspension of normal rules in the priest allowing David to eat the showbread, which was only lawful for the priests to eat. Two things must be noted here. First, our obligations to the moral law generally supersede obligations to the ceremonial law. We have seen this idea clearly articulated earlier in Samuel in the famous phrase: "Obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Secondly, although David is permitted to eat the bread, the priest assures that they are otherwise ceremonial appropriate to eat the holy things. He inquires as to whether they have been "kept from women" (cf. Exodus 19:15). David's conscience is clear because he is fully aware of the extraordinary circumstances as Saul seeks to take his life. The priest also is innocent, as his obligation to feed the starving supersedes the ceremonial provisions regarding the Holy Bread. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures.

In the next scene, David flees to the Philistine city of Gath where Achish is king. The fact that David has to flee to enemy territory to be kept safe from a domestic threat is truly strange! But David's reputation has

gone before him. The song of victory previously sung by the people at his military victories has been heard by Achish. If David previously enjoyed hearing his name publicly celebrated perhaps he regrets it now!

David then decides to engage in strategic deception in an effort to save his life. He pretends to be instance, frothing at the mouth and making marks on the wall with his hands. The rouse works and David escapes to flee another day.

There is much to teach us here regarding God's protecting care of his servants. We are clearly told in the Bible that we will face enemies who will seek to destroy our peace, livelihood, reputations, sense of safety, and even our very lives. But he also promises to deliver us from every trial and bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom. We have ample evidence of God's faithfulness in the life of David.

In the fullness of times, we will see this story referenced by our Lord Jesus when feeding his disciples from the fields on the Sabbath Day. Even as the ceremonial law does not trump the moral law, the Pharisees were wrong to absolutize and elevate the prohibition of ordinary work on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (see Mark 2:23-27). Ironically, the Pharisees would be enraged at Jesus's response. As Saul sought to kill David in jealousy and rage, so also the Pharisees would take counsel with the Herodians as to how to destroy him (Mark 2:6). Although these efforts would at first fail, eventually the hour of darkness would come.

Jesus could have made many lawful claims regarding the abuse of authority against him. He might even have appealed to David's example for himself, who often appealed to extraordinary circumstances to preserve his life. He had done this previously for his disciples. But he

willingly endures these injustices. He even refuses to take advantage of an opportunity to speak in his own defense allowing the perpetrators to put him to death. When the disciples take up arms to defend him from unjust arrest, Jesus orders them to cease, even healing the man struck with the sword.

As Saul sought David's life, so the heirs of David's earthly kingdom sought the life of Jesus. In sin they crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. He now rules and reigns in heaven sitting on the throne of David and over his kingdom from this time forth and forevermore. The devil failed to destroy the Christ, so in rage, he now seeks to destroy the church. But we have the promise from our risen Savior that the gates of hell shall not prevail against us.

Chapter 22

#22 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 22:1-23

In chapter 23 the inspired narrator draws a sharp contrast between Saul and David. Both share many things in common. They are each king of Israel. Both have faithful friends and bitter betrayals. Both visit the priests at Nob but with very different outcomes. Saul and David represent two kingdoms within Israel. Just as Jacob and Esau were two nations in the womb of Sarah, so these two figures embody two spiritual nations within the one visible people of God. Not all Israel is Israel. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Only those born according to the Spirit are God's true seed. As Samuel famously said, man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. God's true kingdom is a Spiritual one that finds its seat in the heart of man.

But the heart is revealed in the actions. David's heart is filled with love and shows itself in the care and protection he has offered to others. We saw this earlier in his giving plausible deniability to the priest and we

will see it again in the next chapter when he saves the city of Keilah.

Saul's heart is filled with jealousy, anger, suspicion, and paranoia. Like David, he meets Ahimelech the priest. With David, the result was the preservation of life. But with Saul the result is murder. Saul accuses Ahimelech of conspiracy, even though he is innocent of the charge. David had ensured his plausible deniability by withholding the details of Saul's plot against his life. Ahimelech had even taken great care to ensure that the principles of ceremonial purity were honored when he allowed David and his companions to eat the showbread. Like David, he is innocent of any wrongdoing towards the Lord or towards Saul. But none of this matters to lame-duck King Saul. The pure all things are pure, but the the sinful and defiled nothing is pure. Saul interprets efforts to restrain his self-destructive behavior as evidence of a conspiracy against him. The innocent actions of Ahimelech are also seen as worthy of death simply because they ended up helping David.

Saul shockingly orders that the priests of the Lord be killed. Not only had Ahimelech done nothing worthy of death, but the other 85 priests were killed due to guilt by association. The soldiers of Saul refuse to obey his unlawful order. Doeg the Edomite—who was present when David arrived—happily carries out his request. He had also willingly disclosed the information regarding David's visit, likely knowing it would lead to to downfall of the priests of an enemy nation and an enemy God. When Abiathar (Ahimelech's son) flees to David to tell him the news, he is filled with remorse. His suspicions regarding Doeg were confirmed, and he feels guilt for occasioning the death of so many. Saul, on the other hand, feels no remorse whatsoever. What a warning for us that when we feel most justified in our actions we are in the greatest position to do maximal damage to others. Recall that those who killed Jesus and persecuted the prophets believed that they were

doing a service to God!

With Saul, there is the destruction of life, but with David, there is its preservation. Abiathar who fled to him also comes under his protective care. At the cave of Adullam, he also ensures the safety and protection of his father's house. While Doeg the Edomite aligned with Saul to bring death, Mizpeh the king of Moab lends his assistance to God's true king. Some Gentiles remain sworn enemies of God, but some kings of the nations render aid and tribute to the Lord's anointed.

Perhaps most interestingly, David gathers to himself everyone in Israel who is in distress, in debt, and bitter in soul. They are placed under his protective care as they take refuge in his kingdom.

In this, we see a picture of David's greater Son who will bring the fullness of this kingdom. Jesus will suffer death for the sake of those he loves, but from his fullness, he will give them life. He will gather the weary and heavy laden, giving them rest for their souls. The blind, lame, oppressed, hungry, and downtrodden will find life and refuge in him. The kingdoms of this world are filled with jealousy, wrath, war, and death. The kingdom of Jesus is filled with life, grace, love, and God's protective care. Although we will face the raging fury of Satan himself, the Lord remains our mighty fortress. He will deliver us from every evil deed and bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.

23

Chapter 23

#23 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 23:1-29

In the previous chapters, we have noted how the narrator is highlighting a stark contrast between David and Saul. The Spirit rests upon David, but he has departed from Saul. David has the small stature of a young boy, while Saul is a “man’s man” in his regal appearance. David has a heart towards God and a sound mind, but Saul has a heart filled with sin and is out of his mind. The contrast between the two kings illustrates a deeper contrast of spiritual kingdoms. The kingdom of God is one of life, peace, righteousness, and faith. The kingdom of this world is filled with death, destruction, sin, and unbelief.

In this chapter, David and Saul are both on the move. Saul is in hot pursuit and David is like a fugitive on the run. David has fled from the forest of Hereth to the city of Keilah, to the wilderness of Zith, and to Horesh. Everywhere they go they continue to manifest their contrasting character.

Note first how they differ in their approach to God's revelation. David inquires of the LORD for direction. When he receives a word from God he faithfully follows it (23:2-4, 9-11). He also receives indirect encouragement from God through Jonathan, who reassures him of God's continued protective care (23:15-18). The man after God's own heart finds direction and comfort through faith in God's word. Saul, on the other hand, will only listen to what he wants to hear. He interprets God's providential workings in a way that fits his twisted perception of reality. For example, when he sees that David has fled to Keilah, he believes that God has given David into his hand because he is shut in a town with gates and bars (23:7). Still later when the Ziphites come to Saul to assist him in killing David he pronounces them blessed by the LORD and thanks them for their act of compassion towards him (23:21). Finally, God providentially works to redirect Saul through a messenger who warns him of an imminent attack by the Philistines. Saul misinterprets and twists God's words and actions. David is enriched in faith by God's true word. Saul twists and distorts God's revealed and must be providentially restrained by human messengers. Saul's twisted approach to the revelation of God will later come to culmination in his efforts to summon Samuel from the dead through the witch at Endor. While Saul will go from bad to worse, David will increase in the knowledge and truth of God. He will become the Psalmist *par excellence* and an agent of God's own revelation.

Secondly, Saul and David also stand in contrast in terms of the fruits that accompany them in their movements. Everywhere Saul goes, a trail of death and destruction follows. He accuses everyone of conspiracy against him, even while he conspires with the enemies of God's people to kill David.

How different the fruits of David in his travels! David takes care to do everything he can to preserve the life and safety of others. Even while being unjustly persecuted, he does good to others. In obedience to God, he even takes a “side quest” to save the City of Keilah from the Philistines. Previously we had seen how he gathered all those who were distressed and lowly to himself (22:1-2).

Saul repays David’s good with evil. David repays Saul’s evil with good. Saul gives David death while David saves and preserves life.

In this, we see the principles of the Kingdom of God fully revealed in the coming of Jesus. In David’s Son, we see the perfect embodiment of doing good to our enemies and loving those who hate us. The Pharisees and Scribes were the heirs of the earthly Israel. Jesus traveled about giving healing and grace. They traveled about filled with jealousy and wrath seeking to destroy him.

Jesus gave men life, but men gave Jesus death.

This pattern of Christ previewed for David is also true for us in our Savior. Not only we were loved by God when we were his enemies, but we are also called to love others in the same way. Putting aside vengeance and wrath, we are to do good to our enemies. We are not to return evil with evil, but overcome evil with God. We can only do this when we trust in God’s promise and power to save and deliver us from the hot pursuit of our enemies.

The apostles similarly faced the angry pursuit of their persecutors in the book of Acts. Fleeing from town to town, God turned all the efforts of the evil one to thwart the spread of the Gospel into that which only fanned into flame its increase throughout the world.

CHAPTER 23

God's promise to David was sure and steadfast: he would sit on the royal throne. No human efforts could thwart his unchangeable plan. We too have the promise that we will sit with Christ on the throne of David, ruling and reigning with him forever. The victory is already ours. We simply await its full revelation.

Chapter 24

#24 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 24:1-22

Psychologists would have a field day with King Saul. We have seen how his spiritual downward spiral leads him to an unstable mental state and a backward view of reality. He is filled with fear and paranoia over losing the throne, even though these things have already been revealed by God. He is so consumed with anger and jealousy he constantly projects these motives onto others, always seeing a hidden conspiracy against him in every action. Biblically speaking, sin has so gripped his heart that he now perfectly illustrates the saying of the Apostle Paul: “To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled” (Tit. 1:15).

Saul believes David is out to get him. Since his heart is filled with jealousy, fear, and anger, he assumes that David’s heart is filled with the same. This form of malignant projection is all too common in human relationships. Simply stated: we accuse others of what we are guilty of.

Deep down we know that what we are doing is sinful. But instead of taking personal responsibility for our actions and feelings of guilt, we project them onto others.

In regular interpersonal relationships, this kind of sinful behavior can cause untold damage. The destruction becomes even more exponential when the person acting this way is a king! Thus we have seen in the story of Saul. Saul believes that David is out to get him. This is how he internally justifies his attempts to take David's life. He has convinced himself that he is a rebel out to take the throne for himself.

But the facts reveal otherwise. David's innocence and integrity of heart are on full display, especially in this passage. He is not out to kill Saul, nor does he even desire his downfall. He does not view Saul as a personal enemy, but primarily in terms of his public office as the anointed of the Lord (24:4-5, 10). Although God has rejected him and his downfall is inevitable, the LORD has not granted to David the right to strike down his predecessor. David could arguably make the case that such an act would constitute righteous self-defense since Saul has been unrelenting in his attempts on his life. David trusts in the LORD, who is able himself to deal with Saul in his time and his ways.

To prove these things, David spares Saul's life when he has the opportunity to easily take it. When Saul goes into a cave to relieve himself, David and his men are also hiding inside. His men encourage him to take advantage of the opportunity, seeing it as an obvious opportunity from God to end the entire ordeal. Instead, David sneaks closely to Saul and simply cuts off the corner of his robe. Keep in mind that it is likely quite dark in the cave. Saul also is old at this point and likely cannot hear very well (cf. 24:16). While Saul believes David's heart is filled with jealousy and that he desires his downfall, David's sensitive

conscience reveals otherwise. He feels guilty for cutting off the corner of his robe, even though his purpose was to have proof that he did not desire his death.

Consider what a great act of faith and patience this is! David has been on the run for some time now. He has been hiding in caves, often without food and barely able to get rest. The physical and emotional toll has been significant. Many have died as “collateral damage” in the entire ordeal (see the priests at Nob). In one moment David could have ended the entire ordeal. Since Saul was doomed to die and be rejected anyway, this would not have changed the ultimate outcome of the story.

Instead, David entrusts himself and the entire situation to God. He is the just judge who will decide rightly between man and man. Our call as Christians is not to repay others evil for evil but to overcome evil with good.

Note well: good can actually overcome evil. This act of grace on David’s part produces that very thing (albeit temporarily). Saul will tragically return to his twisted heart of paranoia and fear. But for a moment David’s act of grace will bring Saul to his senses—much like his music did earlier when he played in his presence. Saul realizes David’s innocence and the wrongs he has been perpetrating against him. He confesses his sin and the righteousness of David. In this very context, David also promises not to cut off Saul’s offspring after him. Evil is repaid with good. Saul seeks to give David death, but David promises Saul life. For the time being, the war between them ceases. There is peace among brothers.

In this act of faith, we see the fundamental principle of the kingdom of Jesus. This kingdom is a kingdom of grace. We love those who do not

deserve it. Grace is the free, unmerited favor of God. God's enemies are not best overcome by his sovereign power in working their destruction, but in his sovereign grace bringing about their salvation.

This is what Jesus embodies in his life, and ministry culminating in his crucifixion. Although evil men seek his life, he does not take judgment into his own hands even though he has ample opportunities to do so. Even though he was the just judge of all, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly when he bore our sins in his body on the tree. Through the unrighteousness perpetrated against him, the free gift of righteousness spreads to the whole world. Sin is overcome with forgiveness. Hatred is replaced with love. Death is defeated with life.

As we have received Christ Jesus, so we must walk in him. Forgiven by Christ we must forgive others. Loved by him when we were his enemies, so we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. God is most glorified not in the destruction of our enemies but in their salvation. Judgment glorifies God's perfect justice, but salvation glorifies both grace and justice through Jesus. He satisfied God's justice on our behalf as a substitute on the cross and magnified God's grace in freely giving this gift to his people.

To live this life is beyond human strength. Left to ourselves we are overwhelmed by our hurts, fears, and sinful desires. By God's Spirit, we are enabled from the heart to so live with one another.

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

25

Chapter 25

#25 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 25:1-44

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God”
(Rom. 12:19).

David’s life was characterized by a principle of self-restraint. When Saul did evil to him, he sought to do him good. When he had an opportunity to kill him, he spared his life and only clipped off the corner of his robe. In faith and patience, he lived as a fugitive. Slandered by Saul he sinfully sought his life, David waited patiently for God to bring him deliverance. He waited for the LORD to work, passively trusted in God, and never took justice into his own hands. Saul on the other hand petulantly and impulsively acted out in anger but was restrained under the providential hand of God.

David’s godly restraint was the fruit of his faith. Faith is living and active. It bears fruit in good works. But its most essential characteristic

is a passive trust in God's power and wisdom. By faith, we must often simply wait for the LORD. Faith thus embraces the exhortation of the Psalmist: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10).

The chapter begins with a note regarding the death of Samuel. At first, it might seem curious as to why the narrator includes this note at this point in the narrative. We have not seen Samuel since chapter 19 and apart from the fact of his death not much is said. However, when we recall that one function of the prophet was to bring God's word to the nation—and that this would act as a principle of restraint upon Israel's sinfulness—the mentioning of Samuel's death makes more sense. With the death of the prophet, God's word is no longer coming to the people. That which offered light and restraint is now (for the time being) absent).

What is the effect of this? The story of David and Nabal places David in a situation where he is tempted to compromise his previously consistent faith. Previously he was characterized by patience and self-restraint. He trusted in God to deliver him. He desired that in any victory over Saul, all the glory would go to the LORD. Saul on the other hand cared nothing for God's honor. In fear and paranoia, he simply sought to take vengeance on David, unconcerned with any collateral damage he would produce along the way (see his murder of the priests at Nob). David sought to wisely preserve life as he fled, and Saul recklessly destroyed life as he pursued him.

In this chapter, the tables are turned. Here we see David tempted to adopt the methods of Saul, taking vengeance and justice into his own hands. David flees to the wilderness of Paran near a wealthy man named Nabal and his wife Abigail. His name is a clue to his character: Nabal means "fool" in Hebrew. Abigail, on the other hand, is described as being both wise and beautiful.

Nabal foolishly refuses to welcome David and his men and offer them aid and comfort. Even though he is extremely wealthy, he holds back his abundance. Even though David is the Lord's anointed, instead of an invitation he offers him an insult. He likens David to any other servant who has broken away from his master. The implication is that David is an ordinary fugitive rather than God's rightful king.

David is understandably insulted and angry over his response. Not only is he God's rightful king to whom allegiance and obedience are due he has also patiently maintained his innocence and integrity. But it appears his patience is wearing thin. We all know what it is like to bear up under injustice over a long period of time. Eventually, our willpower wears thin and the temptation to give in to frustration and anger overwhelms us. We patiently deal with the sins and shortcomings of others in our family and in our church. Often they are blind to the ways that they are hurting others and sinning against them. Sometimes they actually accuse us of the very things they are doing, refusing to take personal responsibility for their unhealthy contributions to important relationships. We try to bear with them in love, but eventually, the hurts begin to sting, and we may lash out in frustration.

So it is with David. He has returned others evil with good. Now the good he did to Nabal is being returned with evil (25:21). This is the straw that (almost) broke that camel's back.

He straps his sword to his side and calls his men to do the same. The man after God's own heart is about to become like his enemies: rash like Saul and foolish like Nabal. The problem is not only his frustration and anger (an emotional state that rarely produces good fruit). As Abigail will later point out, if David inflicts vengeance upon Nabal he would be working salvation by his own hand. The glory would not be given to

God, but to David. Blood guilt would have been on his hands. David is correct that Nabal has wronged him. But he would be wrong to take vengeance into his own hands.

Abigail points out what David should already know from God's revelation to him and that providential experience has confirmed: the LORD is able to deal with the enemies of his anointed. And this is exactly what happens. Nabal holds a feast in his house and becomes drunk with wine. Upon hearing the news from his wife of all that she told to David his heart dies within him. Ten days later God himself strikes Nabal and he dies (25:38).

The faithless fool who rejects God's anointed comes to death. The wise woman who embraces him and God's coming kingdom to come through him is welcomed into his presence—not just as a friend, but as his new bride.

We also see these things in the life of Jesus, David's greater son. He too would be mocked and insulted. He would bless others, but they would pronounce him cursed. He would do good to others, and they would return it with evil. At every point he could have called down twelve legions of angels who would vanquish his foes in an instant (Matt. 26:53). By the power of his mere word he caused a crowd of soldiers to fall down and shrink back before him (John 18:6). When his disciples took out their swords to defend them, he healed those who had been hurt and commanded that their swords be put in their place.

Jesus had every right to pursue vengeance on his enemies. He will in fact do so in his second coming. But the time for judgment had not yet come. Jesus returned evil with good and did not take vengeance into his own hands. He entrusted himself to God who judges justly, who would

bring vindication for him in resurrection. The result is not simply the salvation of a few hundred (as in David's time), but the salvation of all his people throughout the world.

God will take care of the enemies of his people. We may have to patiently endure injustice, harassment, and oppression. Those who reject Jesus are true fools and will meet a fool's end in destruction. It is ours to wait patiently for the Lord. Although he may tarry for a time, he will most certainly come in his good time.

Chapter 26

#26 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 26:1-25

Just a short while ago it seemed as if David had finally put an end to Saul's relentless pursuit of his life. In chapter 24 we witnessed David return Saul's evil with good. Although he had the opportunity to kill him, David spared his life. Just as David's music earlier restrained Saul's madness, so now his Christ-like love for his enemy restrains his murder.

But just as the Spirit's presence proved to be temporary in him, so Saul's cease-fire agreement with David is short-lived. In chapter 26 Saul has resumed his pursuit. taking three thousand men he heads towards the wilderness of Ziph. Hidden and out of sight, David sends out spies who covertly find Saul and his men when they arrive in the region. When night arrives, they go down to Saul and his men. Both Saul and Abner are asleep on the ground. Saul's spear is even stuck in the ground near his head. It is a perfect setup. David could have approached entirely unarmed and silently pierced his opponent in his sleep. Just as Jael

pierced Sisera in the dead of night, so David has the opportunity to repeat history and put an end to his misery (cf. Judges 4). Abishai eggs David on, even offering to do the dirty deed for him. “Technically” David could keep his hands clean, maintaining his personal innocence and vanquishing his foe. The best of both worlds!

But David’s sense of the honor of God remains strong in him. His inner conscience on this point was reinforced by his near failure with Nabal in the previous chapter. Abigail’s wise words restrained him then and their memory sticks with him now. He will not stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed. Although Saul is going mad in a downward spiral of sin, he objectively remains God’s anointed king. The time has not come for him to take the throne. That decision is in the hands of God, not David’s.

Once again David spares Saul’s life, only taking that which is necessary to prove his innocence. David then calls Abner, publicly calling him out for neglecting his duties to protect the King. Abner’s guilt stands in stark contrast to and highlights David’s innocence. Saul’s closest “friend” proves to be faithless while his “enemy” is faithful. When Saul awakes, he realizes that lightning has struck twice. Two times David had the opportunity to take his life, and two times he spared him. As before, Saul (temporarily) realizes his folly and sin. But this is not true repentance. Nor does he receive saving forgiveness. It is simply a providential restraint against his continued machinations against David.

Saul would not die by the hand of David. It is during a battle with the Philistines that he would meet his demise (1 Sam. 31). David would grieve over the death of Israel’s king, even though he made himself his sworn enemy.

The themes of this chapter are ones we have seen before: patience under suffering, faithful endurance while being persecuted, loving one's enemies, and returning evil with good. The fact that these themes appear so often in Sameul and in the NT reinforces how centrally important they are in our Christian lives, and also how difficult they can be to faithfully manifest.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus's famous "Sermon on the Plain" is filled with several exhortations that essentially can be read as a hortatory commentary on the life of David in 1 Samuel. Jesus calls us to measure our spiritual lives in a way quite different from the Pharisees and the Scribes. As men, they look simply at the outward appearance. They measure their faith by how much they do and boast about their successes. They always speak of how often they fast, how often and how long they pray, and how much they give to God.

Jesus tells us that we will not be heard for our many words, that true fasting is to grieve our sins, and that our prayer is measured by its sincerity rather than its frequency or length. Yet how often we measure our own spiritual lives by these external standards! Even spiritual leaders easily fall into this trap, inquiring of church members' spiritual conditions with questions like: "How often do you read your Bible?" "How often do you pray?" We will also do this to ourselves, negatively condemning ourselves internally saying: "You are a bad Christian! You don't pray enough. You don't read your Bible enough! You don't give enough time to God!" Prayer and Bible reading are important and essential. But their spiritual value is not measured simply by their frequency. This is to examine spiritual exercises only by their outward appearances. But the Lord looks at the heart. Recall that the prayer of the publican was brief and to the point: "God have mercy on me, a sinner!" Likewise, the thief on the cross made this simple supplication:

“Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” The Lord’s Prayer also is marked by its brevity, which Jesus explicitly contrasts with the lengthy prayers of the externally pious (Matthew 6:5-15). Ironically, that prayer is a simple summation of all that David manifested in his life, from seeking the glory of God’s kingdom above all to seeking God’s forgiveness even as he forgives the sins of others.

True faith in God’s kingdom is measured in a different way. The questions Jesus asks in this regard reflect what we see in David. Do we rejoice and persevere in persecution and trial, knowing that in God we have a heavenly treasure beyond anything the earth has to offer? Do we only love those who love us? Even the world does the same. But we love our enemies we show that we have truly received the love of Christ for sinners. Just as David loved his enemy and did good to him, so Jesus loved us when we were his enemies (Rom. 4:10). As disciples we must do the same.

This is the true test of our faith because it is precisely in these acts that we are required to die to what will make our lives in this world sinfully easier and trust solely in what God alone will provide for us in the kingdom of heaven. That kingdom was coming in typological form through the ascent of King David, and he manifested saving hope in it. This kingdom has come to us in fullness through Jesus, the Son of David. May the treasure of our hearts always be focused on this coming kingdom, that we may manifest these good fruits. In this hostile world let us remember that the triumph of our faith is not found in our ability to defeat our earthly foes. We will triumph not by might or power, but by the blood of the lamb. This is a call to patient self-sacrifice embodied in the cross. Through it God will work to restrain our enemies even as he restrained Saul. And in many instances, it will work more than providential restraint, but their transformation into servants of Christ.

CHAPTER 26

He is pleased to make friends out of enemies and saints out of sinners that all the power and glory may be given to him.

Chapter 27

#27 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 27:1-12

David has been living as a wandering fugitive. Saul unjustly seeks his life. He has patiently borne up under unjust suffering and has continually repaid evil with good. In these things he has not only been set forward as an example for us as believers, but also a living type of the Lord Jesus Christ. David's son is also David's Lord. As a believer, David is united to the Lord Jesus Christ and has fellowship with him in his sufferings and glory. The story of David should be read as a prefiguration and anticipation of God's coming kingdom which arrived in fullness in the coming of Jesus Christ.

This is precisely why the life of David is practically useful to us in our spiritual and moral lives. Although the Old and New Testament administrations differ in their outward form, the spiritual substance of each is fundamentally the same. Our life is David's life, even as David's life is the life of Christ.

When we come to 1 Samuel 27, we come to a passage that is a bit

of a head-scratcher in this regard. This isn't the first time David's extraordinary circumstances led to some odd incidences. Recall how David ate the showbread which was only lawful for the priests to eat. He also concealed certain aspects of the "truth" from Ahimelech in the interest of giving him plausible deniability if Saul sought to take his life. By withholding the full truth he was attempting to save his life. Under ordinary circumstances, these would be violations of God's moral and ceremonial laws. But this would be to judge by outward appearances. Just as we can lawfully take another's life in self-defense, we can conceal the truth if the circumstances warrant it. We do not owe it to murderers to reveal the whereabouts of those whom they seek to destroy. To do so would be to sin.

In this passage, we see a similar set of odd stories that reflect the odd circumstances that David faces. In the first story, we read of David fleeing to the Philistines to take refuge among them from King Saul. In the second story, we read of David being shrewd in his communications with Achish king of Gath during his sojourn among the Philistines.

The first story is odd because it seems to be inconsistent with God's prohibitions against Israel aligning with foreign nations. Generally speaking, they were to remain separate from the nations and trust in God's special provision to them as his chosen people. Today we are told to accept no help from the Gentiles and to not be preoccupied with the praise of the world. We trust in the Lord and the things he has given his church to minister the Gospel. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, and we do not wage war with earthly weapons or tactics. Is David compromising God's commandments by fleeing to Gath? Is he not walking by faith by taking refuge among the Philistines?

When we remember David's special function as a type and forerunner of

the Lord Jesus Christ, his actions begin to make more sense. Messianic prophecy had long foretold a day in which a Savior would come that would be of saving benefit not only to the Jews but also to the nations. God promised Abraham that kings would come from his descendants and that through them a blessing would come to the world (Gen. 12:3, 17:6). In Genesis 49 Jacob prophesied that a Messiah would come from the royal tribe of Judah. When “Shiloh” finally arrived the “obedience of the people’s would be his” (Gen. 49:8-12). Similar statements are sprinkled through the OT historical and prophetic books foretelling the day in which not only Israel but the remnant of all mankind will seek the Lord and find refuge in the Messiah.

As the anointed of the Lord, David foretells these things in his person, life, and circumstances. He is a type of the coming Messiah. In his fleeing to the Philistines and finding refuge in Gath we see a preview of the day in which the Gentiles will be enfolded into the blessing of the Messiah’s coming.

To be sure, Achish neither knows nor understands these things. As the text indicates, he believes he has found a way to peacefully make David his permanent servant. David also does some more strategic concealment of the full truth with Achish just as he did with Ahimelech. David regularly makes raids against the old enemies of God’s people such as the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites. In so doing he completes the work left undone by previous faithless generations. David carefully limits his descriptions of these raids whenever Achish inquires about his activities. The reason is pretty straightforward: if Achish realizes David is “cleaning house” in removing God’s enemies, he may begin to suspect that the Philistines are next in line.

Ahimelech is ignorant of the full purpose of David in his raids even as

he is ignorant of the typology of God's kingdom. But his subjective ignorance of the spiritual reality typified here is no obstacle to his objective function as an indicator of the fullness of God's future blessing. The latter days are anticipated in this incident, but it is also clear that they have not fully arrived. David's survival continues to take paramount importance, not only personally but also redemptive-historically. If he does not survive, God's plan fails to come to fruition. The Messianic line will be broken and the Savior will not come.

Practically speaking this passage is also a wonderful reminder of our need to trust in God's wisdom. He can provide protection and deliverance for his people in strange places and in ways we do not expect. Joseph found favor with Potiphar the Egyptian. Cyrus King of Persia decreed the return of the exiles to the land of Israel. Roman officials thwarted the plots of the Jews against the apostles. A Philistine king provides refuge for King David. In these moments we must remember Jesus's exhortation to be shrewd as a serpent and innocent as a Dove. So Paul strategically divides the Pharisees and Sadducees in appealing to his hope in the resurrection. As with David, Paul's life was clearly on the line. He does that which is necessary for his survival without compromising the spiritual principle of faith in God. Such is our life in this sinful world. We must navigate the storms of life wisely even as we maintain the purity of our integrity. We can only do so when like the saints of old we keep our hearts and our hopes firmly fixed on the eternal kingdom of Christ.

Chapter 28

#28 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 28:1-25

This chapter contains the famous story of Saul and the medium or “witch” at Endor. This is one of the most puzzling passages in the Bible. It provokes a ton of questions on the part of its readers. Many gifted pastors are often stumped with this passage. I remember how during my college days one minister actually skipped the passage the Sunday it was scheduled because he couldn’t figure out an interpretation with which he was comfortable. Thankfully, he returned to it later! I admired him for waiting until he was certain in his sermon to preach it to the people.

Keep in mind that this is not the first time we have read of very strange incidences and puzzling passages in the book of Samuel. These are strange and unprecedented times. We are moving from one era to another, from the epoch of the Judges to the age of the Kings. We shouldn’t be surprised to read of extraordinary events in extraordinary times. We are also dealing with the oddity of having two anointed Kings

simultaneously. God has rejected the first and is raising up the second. The people owe their hearts and allegiance to David but must leave it to the Lord to complete the transition from one king to the other. One major dilemma is how to sort out the ethics of owing allegiance to both kings in different ways at the same time. On one level, it should be no surprise that we would come across an odd story like this.

Recognizing this, we must be careful in using this passage as our starting point for crafting our theology of the “afterlife.” One key principle of Biblical interpretation is that “Scripture interprets Scripture.” The unclear or difficult passages must be read in light of clearer ones. The Bible clearly teaches that we are made in God’s image in both body and soul. At the time of death, the soul is translated either into heaven or hell. The bodies of the dead remain in the grave until the final resurrection. The bodies of the righteous rest in their graves as in their beds awaiting the day Christ will awaken them with his holy voice to eternal life. The bodies of the unjust rest in their graves as in their prisons awaiting the reunion of soul and body only to suffer eternal torment in hell. We also know that the souls of believers are conscious after death and are capable of communication with God. For example, in Revelation 6:9-11 we see a vision in which John sees the souls of believers have died crying out for God to bring the final consummation. However, we do not read of them communicating with living believers. As Scripture elsewhere teaches, a great chasm is fixed between the living and the dead. Those who are in heaven cannot pass to those who are in hell and vice versa (see the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16). In the same context, the rich man in Jesus’s parable asks if he can send someone from the dead to warn his brothers lest they come into his place of torment. That also is not allowed. Ironically, they are directed to Scripture—to Moses and the Prophets—which sufficiently warn of such things. Indeed, if they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither

will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31). This seems to be a significantly helpful passage to consider when sorting out how to interpret the story before us.

However we make sense of what’s going on in this passage, we cannot conclude from it things that would contradict these other passages of Scripture. Indeed, although Samuel’s spirit does appear to speak to Saul in this passage, the significant abnormality of such an event is indicated by Samuel himself (1 Sam. 28:15). Necromancy is explicitly forbidden in the holy Scriptures. My suspicion is that 99% of attempts at communicating with the dead are simply superstitious hoaxes. He only permits it to occur here by his almighty power as an example of its uselessness and its great evil.

At the same time, we recognize that God is omnipotent. As “abnormal” as it might be, it is certainly not beyond his almighty power to allow the dead to communicate with the living. But this does not mean that we should expect it to occur again. Much less should we use this as the basis for superstitious nonsense such as prayers to the Saints, visions from God in which are past ancestors speak to us, or the Roman delusion regarding what they call “purgatory.” Indeed, the very fact that Saul does this reinforces that he has not reached the bottom of his downward spiral into madness and depravity. He is absolutely desperate. God has begun to completely sever his presence from him. But having been rejected by God there is nothing he can do. God has consigned him over to judgment for his disobedience. The final sign of its coming to completion is the fact that he is entirely cut off from divine revelation.

Note also that the message we hear from Samuel is nothing new. Saul wants a new message from God. He wants to hear something different than he has already been told. He is blind to God’s previous revelation,

which has already confirmed his rejection. Samuel simply condemns his necromancy and then repeats almost verbatim what has already been revealed. Samuel simply redirects him to the divinely approved channels of revelation. This is the OT kings-era version of God saying: “Just go back and read what I already told you in the Bible!”

This point has much to teach many modern professing Christians. How often do we hear of people looking for divine signs or messages outside of the Scriptures!? They desire that God would confirm for them some future plan or they wish to take or get specific, special direction from him. This is not how God works today to reveal himself. In the past, God spoke through our forefathers by the prophets in various times in various ways (Heb. 1:1). At that time written Scriptures were still unfinished. God did speak through the written Scriptures that had been set down, but also through dreams and visions along with the Urim and the Thummin. But when the last days arrived, God spoke with finality through his Son and his apostles (Heb. 1:2, 2:3). Through them revelation has been fully completed and deposited in the full canon of the Sacred Scriptures. These are sufficient for all that we must believe and do in Christ for our salvation. Thus the Church is built upon the foundation of Christ himself as the chief cornerstone, as well as the inscripturated revelation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20).

But the passage also has another ironic point to teach us. Samuel is summoned from the dead in a way contrary to God’s law. But we do ironically see in this event the ongoing power of God’s prophetic revelation long after its agents ceased to exist. The words of the Prophets still have power long after they are dead. We see this symbolized in that memorable story regarding the prophet Elisha. When dead bodies are thrown into his tomb and come into contact with him, they are raised to life (2 Kings 13:20-21). This is symbolic

of the life-giving power of God's prophetic word even beyond the lifetime of the prophets. What is true of Abel is especially true of God's appointed prophets: "And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks" (Heb.11:4).

Samuel's prophetic words spoke judgment to Saul in his house. God's word of judgment is irrevocable. This terrible judgment of God should cause us all to shudder. But it is not God's last prophetic word to Israel. He will speak another word regarding a different king. 2 Samuel 28 reveals the seal of God's prophetic judgment against Saul. But in 2 Samuel 7 the prophet Nathan will speak a different word concerning David. Instead of the confirmation of curse, David will receive the promise of blessing. In Saul God revealed the sovereign power of his judgment. But in David, he will reveal his gracious promises of eternal salvation. One day a final and perfect king will come from him who will sit on the throne of his kingdom forever. David is his type and forerunner.

In Saul, we see a preview of God's future rejection of the earthly Israel, who will ultimately reject God's appointed king in the blindness of unbelief. Fulfilling the pattern of Saul in his persecution of David, the Jewish nation will deliver Jesus up to be crucified. He remained dead in the tomb for three days, but he now rules and reigns in heaven. He is the exalted final prophet of God who although he died will always proclaim the revelation of God.

Let us then abandon all superstitious attempts to speculate about God's will and place our focus entirely on the pure and holy revelation in the Scriptures. There we find Jesus, the only one who can bring light and life after death. Outside of Christ and his pure word there is only confusion, darkness, and death.

Chapter 29

#29 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 29:1-11

Back in chapter 27, we read of how David fled to the land of the Philistines. Achish king of Gath gave sanctuary to David. This was not because of any goodwill in his heart towards David, but because of the strategic value of keeping him as a servant to him and his kingdom (27:12). We saw how this was an imperfect type of the fulfillment of David's kingdom in which the Gentile kings would pay tribute to God's Messiah and the nations would be enfolded within the blessing of God's kingdom.

Here in chapter 29, we return to this narrative thread of David's time among the Philistines. The Philistines were a collection of nation-states. In the Bible, we read references to the "five lords of the Philistines" who ruled over their five major cities (including Gath, where Achish is king). When all the lords gather together for battle, they see David with Achish and understandably raise some questions. They have heard of David's victories over the Philistines (29:5). They know that there is no better

way for David to return home than to defeat the Philistines. They also understand the basic dilemma with every traitor or defector: how can you be certain that the man who defected from his home will not also turn and betray you?

Achish has seen the benefit of David's exile among them and has strategically profited from it. Ironically, this Gentile king also testifies to his innocence: "Is this not David...who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day" (29:3). But Achish cannot convince them otherwise, and he tells David the "bad news" even while he reiterates his innocence: "I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God" (29:8).

What does this passage teach us about the kingdom of God prefigured in these days?

First, it is a reminder that although God often gives us seasons of grief, hardship, and toil he will also give us times of peace and refuge. He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. David went through an agonizingly difficult season for many years as Saul sought his life. The Psalms he penned during this season clearly testify to his agony of soul. God will bring times of trial, but he will also temper this with times of rest. So also Jesus in his earthly ministry had seasons of stress and anxiety, but these were punctuated with times of withdrawal where he found rest in prayer alone with God.

Second, we also see a continued emphasis on the innocence of David. This theme has appeared earlier in the narrative. David's integrity is so unimpeachable that even Saul is forced to acknowledge it several times. The theme of David's innocence is further reinforced through the figure of Achish. Achish not only acknowledges David's righteousness but

vigorously defends it before the other lords of the Philistines!

This does not mean that David is sinless or morally perfect. It means he is a faithful man of consistent integrity. Faithfulness is not erased by moments of weakness or even sin. The faithful man acknowledges his sin, grieving for it and repenting before God. Part of his integrity lies in the fact that he is aware of his shortcomings and humbly acknowledges them. This is an integrated part of the life of a godly man and in no way contradicts the idea that he can be regarded as “faithful” before God.

David certainly plays an important role for us as an example of what Christian integrity looks like. Together with figures like Joseph and Daniel, we see how the faithful Christian is to adorn the Gospel such that even non-Christian opponents must be forced to acknowledge our integrity. The apostle Peter thus exhorts Christians to have “...a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Pet. 3:16).

But this reality in our moral lives is only possible through the one prefigured in David: the Lord Jesus Christ. He is an imperfect type of a truly perfect and fully innocent reality. David manifested faithful integrity in his life of sanctified (albeit imperfect) obedience. In so doing he manifested his personal union with Christ, but also prefigured his greater Son. Our imperfect faithfulness is only acceptable to God through the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, Jesus’ integrity and innocence were acknowledged by all. Even his enemies knew he had done nothing wrong. Every time they accused him of sin, they had no answer for Jesus’s defenses. When they accused him of breaking the Sabbath he answered them from Scripture (Matt. 12:12-14). When they sought to trap him in arguments over the

resurrection and taxes to Caesar, his answers put them to shame and silenced them (Matt. 22:15-33, 46). When they put him on trial, they had to actively seek false evidence and false witnesses to accuse him, but they could find nothing (Matt. 26:59).

Like Saul with David, the Jewish leaders who seek to kill Jesus are forced to implicitly acknowledge his innocence. Like Achish the Philistine, the Roman judge Pontus Pilate also declares Jesus's perfect innocence and integrity (Matt. 22:23-24). Even his wife warns him to not have "anything to do with that innocent man..." (Matt. 22:19).

Although innocent of sin and perfectly righteous, Jesus died the death of an ungodly sinner. His path to the throne of the Kingdom was marked by suffering, injustice, agony, and death. The crown could only be attained through the cross. As it was with David, so it was in Christ Jesus. So also it must be with all those who would follow after him. The call of Christ is to embrace this life of suffering and injustice, prefigured in David and also manifest in our lives as servants of Christ. The cross is filled with pain and agony. Jesus first had to wear a crown of thorns before he wore the crown of glory. There will be times when we will feel overwhelmed and on the precipice of defeat. But God will arise at just the right time to rescue his servants. The humble will be exalted, and suffering will give way to glory. The innocent will be vindicated by God himself. We must simply wait patiently for him to act in his appointed time.

Chapter 30

#30 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 30:1-31

After a providential respite with Achish king of Gath, David's life now returns to unrest and difficulty. He was forced to flee his home country due to the unjust persecution of Saul. The same pattern of fear and paranoia characteristic of Israel's fallen king is then replicated in the lords of the Philistines. Although David has been faithful and innocent among the Gentiles, in fear they demand that Achish send him back. He simply cannot catch a break. Everywhere he goes he seeks to go above and beyond to do what is wrong yet is condemned and punished as a wrongdoer.

At Achish's direction, David then returns to Ziklag—the city the Philistine had given him during his sojourn in Gath. Things quickly move from bad to worse as the Amalekites raid the Negeb area, overcoming Ziklag and taking captive the woman and all who were in it. This included David's wives, sons, and daughters. The whole city

was also burned by fire.

David reaches a point of utter destitution. Saul's persecution produced a constant state of emotional upheaval, with great fear, distress, and anxiety. It also forced him to live as a fugitive, without the stability and comfort of a settled "home." But so far both he, his soldiers, and his family had been kept safe from harm. The situation now changes. Having briefly enjoyed the blessing of a place of refuge in Ziklag, the Amalekite raid quickly takes it away. Additionally, his family is in the hands of the enemies of God's people.

In addition to the internal pain of loss, David also suffers public blame and shame for the disaster. David has done nothing wrong. His innocence and righteousness have been reinforced in the narrative. Nevertheless, when bad things happen human beings naturally look for someone to blame. Sometimes this blame can be assigned to other members of the community, but more often than not it is placed on the leaders. Filled with grief over the loss of all that they have and love, they weep until they have no strength left to weep. The people then discuss whether to stone David, which only increases his distress of soul (30:6).

having been stripped of all earthly supports and comforts, David then turns to the Lord. Note the contrast to Saul in the previous In direct contrast to Saul who can find no word from God except the confirmation of judgment, David consults the LORD through the Ephod.

Note the contrast between David and Saul. In chapter 28 Saul faced similar circumstances. Surrounded by the Philistines he seeks the word of the LORD. But he receives no answer by dreams, by Urim, or the prophets. When he seeks out a medium to summon Samuel from the

dead, he receives only a repetition of the word of judgment he had previously declared. From the dead, he receives only a word of death through the just judgment of God.

David's external situation is worse than Saul's. He faces not only the threat of external destitution but a foreign army that has succeeded in plundering all that he has. Like Saul he seeks the word of the Lord but through a divinely appointed channel of revelation: the Ephod.

In case you are unfamiliar with the Ephod and its role as a means of receiving revelation, here is a brief explanation. This piece of priestly attire is significant because it is the resting place of the "Urim and the Thummim" (Ex. 28:30). Through it the people would on certain occasions seek a revelation from God for direction on an important matter (see Num. 27:21, Ezra 2:63). The presence of both "Urim" and "Thummim" provided a means to discern a binary choice between two options. Option 1 could be indicated by Thummim, whereas option 2 would come through the Urim (see 1 Sam. 14:41). In the OT God primarily revealed himself through Scripture. The normal channel of divine guidance was through the "law and the testimony." In special circumstances, God would give new revelation through prophetic communications, dreams, and visions, as well as the Ephod with the Urim and the Thummim.

The bottom line is this: when David has nowhere else to turn he seeks the will of God. He strengthens himself through God and his word. When he is filled with grief, pain, and confusion, he seeks clarity from the word of God. God's revelation brings clear direction: "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue" (30:8).

David obeys the divine command. He leaves with 600, but 200 stay

behind exhausted at the brook Besor. Then they find an Egyptian lost in the open country who had not eaten or drunk for 3 days. He had been left for dead by his Amalekite master, who (surprise, surprise!) had participated in the raid against Ziklag.

We must briefly pause to consider the significance of this providential turn of events. First, in the Egyptian David sees a mirror of his own experience. Both were rejected by their masters. Neither suffered due to any fault of their own. Both find themselves at the end of their rope spiritually and emotionally. Right at the moment when it seems that their ruin is nigh, God specially intervenes to save them from the brink of death.

Moreover, just as David had been betrayed by his Philistine protectors so this servant had been betrayed by his master. What goes around comes around. On one level, there are no two men farther apart than David the king, and this Egyptian servant. One is the heights of royalty and the other is in the depths of slavery. But they share a bond in their mutual experience of unjust oppression. That bond is ratified in a mutual oath: the servant will take them to the Amalekite band, and David will neither kill him nor deliver him into the hands of his master.

When David arrives he finds the Amalekites partying and celebrating the plunder of their raid. Overstuffed and drunken, they are but pigs fattened for the slaughter. David strikes them down for over a day, taking back all that they had taken from him. Only 400 escaped, likely only to tell the tale of their defeat to their countrymen. He rescues his wives, sons, and daughters and recovers everything that was taken—nothing was missing (30:19).

After this, some of David's men want to send away the men who stayed at

Besor. Recall that they only remained because they were too exhausted to continue. They loyally followed David, but their strength and bodies had failed them. David had been on the receiving end of this treatment before. The same kind of thing happened to the Egyptian who had helped them find the Amalekites—he was left for dead because he had fallen ill. This was something beyond the control of his will. David has learned the providential lesson well, both in his own life and mirrored in the lives of others. Unlike Saul who threatened and punished arbitrarily (often condemning the innocent), David is filled with compassion and mercy. He overcomes evil with good. With him, there is compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and love. It was not, after all, their strength, bravery, or power that worked the deliverance, but God's mercy and grace (30:23).

The passage is rich in revelations of patterns of Christ and lessons for his followers. See how God is often pleased to allow us to face impossible circumstances. He allows us to get to the end of our rope emotionally and spiritually so that we might depend only on the promises of his word. Like David, in these moments we must remember to turn directly to God and his word. God has been pleased to make the sacred Scripture the main conduit through which his almighty power is channeled to us through the Spirit. There will be times when the challenges are so great that we might believe that God himself has turned against us. Friends may betray us and abandon us. At that very moment, God will come and bring aid in the most unlikely of ways. I can say with confidence that David did not expect his victory to depend on a half-dead Gentile Egyptian slave! Let us not doubt God's promise or faithfulness even in the most challenging times.

There is a deeper reason we as Christians can peaceably accept such discouraging situations and confidently look for deliverance. This is

not just a matter of our own willpower or our need to “try harder.” We can embrace this pattern of suffering and hardship in our lives because it was embraced by Jesus in his. The people were ready to stone David because of the disaster he had apparently led them into. Like Moses before, the people are overwhelmed by the temporary misery of their circumstances and they begin to doubt God’s promises (Num. 14:10). What was typified in the past was fulfilled in Jesus. He called his people to embrace a cross and endure suffering as they pursued the kingdom of God. Nearly everyone stumbled over this message. The Jewish leaders hated him for it and sought to put him to death. Judas betrayed him by handing over to his persecutors. His disciples feared that they would suffer the same fight and abandoned him while he went to the cross. Like David, at this moment Jesus was filled with anguish of soul and great distress, crying out to his Father on the cross. God heard his cries and answered his prayers. In three days he would raise him up and save his soul from death (Heb. 5:7).

This resurrection power dwells in us through the Spirit. Dying with Jesus we also are vilified with him. We carry around in our bodies the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us. This is not a rare exception in our Christian lives. We should not expect following Christ to be mostly peaceful and pleasing to our flesh—only rarely punctuated with short seasons of suffering. The cross is basic and characteristic of our entire Christian life.

But so also is the resurrection! The Christian’s desire through faith is not to flee the cross, but to embrace it and endure it patiently. We say with Paul:

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may

attain the resurrection of the dead” (Phil. 3:9).

Jesus is faithful and he is powerful. He brings everything under his control, and will one day transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body. It is ours to simply trust and to patiently persevere.

31

Chapter 31

#31 - Devotional Meditations on 1 Samuel 31:1-13

The stories of Saul and David have a complicated relationship in the book of Samuel. Both move in opposite directions on the earthly and spiritual levels of their existence. Saul increases and maintains his earthly power even as he endures a spiritual downward spiral. David endures his own downward spiral of trial after trial. Brief respites bring temporary relief but prove to be but interruptions in increasingly severe trouble that seem to only go from bad to worse. Ironically, both experience agony of soul and emotional upheaval, but for very different reasons. Saul has been abandoned and rejected by God. The light of his presence has departed from him even as the glory of God's Ark had departed Israel early in the narrative. Saul is left to grope in spiritual darkness, tormented by his certain doom and unable to escape God's terrible decree. David, on the other hand, is often deeply distressed. But his emotional turmoil stems from the disconnect between what he knows to be true spiritually and the earthly circumstances that he faces.

He knows he is God's king. He knows that he has put his full trust in God and has walked in integrity. Yet he has experienced nothing trial after painful trial. He is God's friend, yet all the earthly evidence would point to the fact that he is suffering as his enemy.

Although there are complexities in the similarities and differences between the two characters, the bottom line is that each one is moving in the opposite spiritual direction. Saul is being brought down and David is being raised up. The exalted is being humbled and the humble is being exalted. This means that however much their lives may intersect they are moving in fundamentally different directions. One is on the path of life. The other is falling into the pit of death.

In this chapter, we see Saul finally reach this latter end. In the previous chapter, David was on the precipice of defeat. By God's grace, he snatched victory from its jaws. Saul will suffer a quite different fate. His army is defeated by the Philistines—the very nation he previously defeated to confirm his rise to power. What goes around comes around. Jonathan is also killed in the same battle. Saul sees that his defeat is imminent. The only ray of hope he sees is to die before the Philistines capture and torture him. He asks his armor-bearer to thrust him with his sword to end his misery, but the armor-bearer refuses. Saul commits suicide of his own accord, falling upon his own sword to meet his death. The armor bearer does the same, likely fearing something worse than death in the hands of the Philistines.

Their fears in life are validated by the treatment of their bodies after death. The Philistines decapitate him, strip him of his armor, and use it all to celebrate his defeat. Saul had slain his thousands among the Philistines, and now he is slain by his old enemy. They lost the initial battles with Saul but won the final war. Israel had abandoned God

and asked for the king. They got exactly what they asked for. They abandoned God and desired an earthly king. In return, God abandoned them and their king. What remained of their bodies were taken by the valiant men of Jabesh Gilead who burned them, burning their remnants under a Tamarisk tree.

The sobering story clearly reinforces a profound spiritual lesson. Apart from God, there is only darkness and death. Unbelief implies an attempt to depend on human strength. All such efforts will simply become a grand revealing of what lies deep within the human heart: an unspeakable evil, madness, and corruption that is only fanned into flame when combined with royal power and authority. Subsequent biblical and post-biblical history has provided ample confirmation of this point with the rising and falling of brutal empires that have wreaked destruction on the earth.

This is the end of all the kingdoms of man. God has confirmed it with a word of judgment that was prefigured in Saul and will be consummated on the Great Day at the end of all things. The kingdoms of men will come to an end.

But this is not God's last word. Although the kingdoms of man shall fail, the kingdom of God will arise. Its members, like David, will be subject to trial and suffering at the hands of the evil one. The kingdom of darkness will war against the kingdom of light. But the kingdom of God shall overcome through love, grace, faith, and patient endurance. After Saul David will arise as a type and forerunner of this Kingdom. He will not rejoice at the fall of his enemy, but weep that in him the glory of Israel has fallen. He will not forever cut off the line of Saul, but in mercy receive Mephibosheth at his table. David's kingdom will be a kingdom of grace in which even his enemies will be reconciled to

himself.

So it is for us in the kingdom of the son of David. We were his enemies, under the tyranny of the devil. Through his sacrificial work, we are reconciled to God. Jesus received our evil but returned it with his good. Had he desired our downfall he could have easily attained it and we would have certainly deserved it. But God has been pleased to glorify both his grace and justice in our reconciliation with God.

32

Chapter 32