

The Lord Has Spoken

1 Samuel 28:1-25

In the book of Numbers from chapters 22-25 you can read the account of a king named Balak and a man named Balaam.

Balak was the king of a place called Moab and the bible says that both he and his people became “filled with dread because of the Israelites”

The stories of Israel coming up out of Egypt and wandering in the wilderness had spread far and wide.

And because the Egyptians and some other nations had sought to harm God’s people they had suffered great disaster Balak is afraid.

Balak sizes up the situation, he sees that the Israelites are too numerous to defeat under normal circumstance so he turns to Balaam for help.

The Bible tells us very little about his background, but it does tell us that somehow Balak had heard that Balaam can bless and curse people.

His plan is to send to ask Balaam to put a curse on the Israelites.

The king sends a delegation to make the request. Balaam asks God and the LORD says, “Don’t go, don’t curse them “because they are blessed.”

Balaam says to the king’s men, “Can’t go.”

Balak doesn’t take no for an answer so he sends another delegation offering a huge sum of money.

Quick question, “Does Balaam need to ask God again?” Nope, but he does anyway setting himself up for destruction.

God tells him to go, but strictly warns him to only say what the LORD tells him to.

Off Balaam goes riding his donkey and we are told God is angry with Balaam and the angel of the LORD stands in the road with his sword drawn ready to kill the man.

Balaam doesn’t see it, but the donkey does and she goes off the road to avoid the danger.

Balaam is totally ticked off with the donkey and beats her.

That happens three times and then God does something amazing. He opens the donkey’s mouth and she says, “What have I done to make you beat me these three times?”

Balaam says, “You have made me a fool and if I had a sword I’d kill you right now!”

Don’t you think the first question should be, “How is it that you a talking?”

I think it is safe to say that if your donkey is smarter than you, then you are having a pretty bad day.

God then opens Balaam's eyes to see the angel and you would think that would make you wise up, but it doesn't.

When he gets to Balak he makes three attempts to curse the Israelites which all fail as God proclaims a blessing instead.

Why did he persist in such foolishness? 2Peter tells us because he loved money he was willing to persist in trying to get God to change His mind even though He had clearly spoken.

[You know that is a trait fairly common to human beings. When we don't like what God says and we sometimes try all sorts of ways to change it or to have things work out differently. As we have journeyed through the book of 1 Samuel together that has been a bit of the theme in Saul's life. God made him king and asked him to obey and Saul decided to do things differently and when God pronounced judgement on him he refused to accept it and fought against it for years. All of those years come to a climax here at the end of the book. Here in chapter 28 we find Saul desperately seeking to hear from the LORD even though the LORD had already spoken. It is a very sad and strange situation, but it is one which we would be wise to learn from. This chapter has four important lessons for us. The first is this...]

Point #1 – Crisis can move people to seek the LORD. (Verses 1-6)

When people are faced with trouble beyond their control, especially life threatening situations, they sometimes try searching for God.

Verses 1-3 set the scene for us with some important background information.

We are reminded that David, one of Saul's best warriors, is living in exile among the enemies of Israel.

The Philistine king Achish believes David will join in the fight against Israel, but David I believe David hints in verse 2 that he will be fighting on Israel's side when the battle begins.

Even so, Saul certainly is not going to be counting on David to help because he is the one who ran him out of the country.

Verse three reminds us that Samuel, the prophet of the LORD, who was tested and proved to speak God's word over the course of many decades, has died.

That means Saul has no ability to speak to Samuel.

It also says in verse 3 that Saul has “expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.”

That is almost like a footnote to the situation. It is important because that was a good thing, it is a decision made out of obedience to the written word of God (Deuteronomy 18, Lev 19).

With those things in mind listen to **verses 4-6.**

This is a scene that Saul has witnessed many times as king, but on this occasion he is gripped to the very fibre of his being with fear.

Could be he was starting to feel his age. He is probably about 72 years old.

How many 72 year olds ride into battle?

It may just be the numbers. Could be the Philistines brought more men than he was used to.

Whatever the case may be, he sees the situation as really desperate and so he seeks God.

He looks for the LORD in dreams, he tries the Urim (implement kept in the garment of the high priest used for determining God's will), and he inquires of the prophets.

He tries all the usual means at his disposal to hear from the LORD.

That is what being in a crisis will do for many people, they will look to God for help.

[You have probably heard the saying, "There are no atheists in a fox hole." A fox hole is a military term for a place to take cover when a soldier is under enemy fire. More often than not as bullet are passing by a soldier might say in his head or even out loud, "God help me please!" Before that when there was no danger he may not have given God a second thought, but when faced with such a life threatening situation he cries out.]

That is true of much more than warfare situations.

An impossible financial situation might do this for some people.

A marriage at a breaking point.

A health scare.

A wayward child or grandchild and the list could go on.

There is something about crisis situations that can have the effect of pushing people towards the LORD.

[I wish I could say that those types of things bring many people to God in a real and lasting way. To be sure that does happen sometimes, but it is also a common thing for people to put the LORD back on the sidelines if the crisis passes, or become embittered towards God if things don't work out the way they want, or they feel like God is ignoring them. That happens here with Saul. It says in verse six that "the LORD did not answer him." He is seeking God in a crisis but he is running into a brick wall getting nowhere. Why is that? I think most of us can likely relate to that and so we all need this second lesson which is that...]

Point #2 – God will seem silent if we don't listen to what He has already said. (Verses 7-12)

If we are dissatisfied with what God has already clearly revealed then pining away for Him to say something else will not help us to understand Who He is or what He desires any better at all.

Remember the little side note from verse three about Saul having expelled all the spiritists and mediums from the land?

That was the right thing to do. That was based on what God has clearly said in the past through Moses.

As king Saul would have written out his own copy of the law. He had read it, he had written it, and he had obeyed it in this instance.

All of that is good. Though he has many faults he did do some good and godly things at times.

Unfortunately, he had also failed to obey God's clear command through Samuel.

Because of that God's had clearly spoken through Samuel that Saul lose the kingship to another person and by this time Saul even knew that it was David who would replace him.

So if we ask the question, "Why is God silent when Saul seeks Him in this crisis?" The answer is because the LORD has already spoken and Saul refused to listen.

Because of that he is willing to go even further and break God's Word again (**Verse 7-11**).

He knew better. He made the law based on God's law and now he is going back on what is right because he is in a tough situation.

Even worse, he swears an oath in God's Name saying he will protect the woman from any consequence for doing what God has forbidden.

He is clearly desperate to hear from God, but does he really want to hear what the LORD has to say?

It would seem not since he is willing to go against what God has already said.

[It is sort of like cooking a meal for someone you know and love. How many people have done that before? Good for you. Now, imagine cooking a meal for them that you know they hate. Let's say it is fish, coleslaw, and broccoli and they hate all three. You put the plate in front of them and they eat it because they don't want to go hungry but then you ask the question, "How was it?" At that point do you really want to hear the truth? They have already told you many times they hate fish, coleslaw, and broccoli, do they need to say it again?]

While most of us would never do that to other people, we can very easily end up doing that with the LORD.

We live in a time where we have the complete written word of the living God, it bears the marks of divine inspiration, it is the only word to which our Risen Saviour Jesus Christ bore witness to as holy scripture, it has been miraculously preserved and translated in our own language according to the merciful work of God the Holy Spirit, and yet many who call themselves Christians leave it on the shelf.

Many so called pastors and theologians dismiss it in favour of their own ideology.

Many look to the wisdom of the culture or their own experience instead of the Bible.

[You may say, “I feel like God is distant and silent in my life.” I say to you that you can hear from Him at any time. The real question is, “Do you want to hear what He has to say?” The level of affection you have for His word will tell you the answer to that question. If you don’t have any then you shouldn’t be surprised if you feel like you are not hearing for Him. That brings us to a third lesson this morning. Here is the lesson...]

Point #3 – Spirituality contrary to God’s word cannot change God’s word. (Verses 13-19)

The true and living God who reigns over all creation cannot be manipulated by any superstition or ceremony that originates from the idolatry of the human heart.

A great deal of ink has been spilt over these few verses.

The big question most commentators wrestle with is, “Is this really Samuel?”

Some say it is a demon who impersonates Samuel because how can the spiritual practices of the devil command the presence of a prophet of God.

I empathize with that, but that seems to go against the plain reading of the text.

In verse 15 it says, “Samuel said”, in verse 16 it says the same, and in verse 20 it says “Samuel’s words”.

If that was simply Saul or the woman making assumptions then it could be explained away, but the narration portion of the text is saying that it is Samuel speaking.

It seems impossible to explain it another way without going against what the Bible clearly says.

So how do we deal with the problem of the power of the devil having command over the soul of the dead prophet?

The only way to square that is to remember that it is the LORD who has ultimate power over everything including sorcery and witchcraft.

God has the ability to permit or restrict absolutely everything including evil.

The fact that He permits this does not give the devil ultimate power over Samuel.

That seems to be consistent with the woman’s reaction in **verse 12**.

Why does she cry out in such fear?

Is it only because she is afraid of Saul’s edict and thinks he will put her to death or is it seeing Samuel and being confronted with the power of God in the situation.

I believe it is more the latter than the former.

I believe the LORD does this to highlight Saul's turning away from Him, his pattern of disobeying was God has said.

Now let's hear what Samuel says to the king (verses 15-19).

When the LORD seemed silent, he turned to wicked means to hear from Samuel.

Now, here is the critical question of these verses. Does Samuel say anything new?

The only new thing is that Saul is going to die the next day along with his sons and the army is going to be defeated.

Even that is not really new it is simply the means of fulfilling everything that God had said before.

So even though Saul had gone down this road in desperation hoping to find a way out, what he discovers is that God will do what He has said and no sorcery or witchcraft is going to change it.

[How many people have ever seen or read about something called a genie? A genie is an imaginary being that usually lives in a bottle or a lamp. Someone rubs the lamp or bottle and out comes the genie to grant the person three wishes. In other words the genie has to do what the person says because they rubbed the lamp. We know that isn't real, there is no such thing as a genie in a bottle, but I wonder how many people think about God like that?]

Not too long ago there was an old idea that resurfaced and gained some popularity. It was called a prayer circle. The idea was to draw a circle in the dirt and stand inside of it and whatever you prayed for in that circle God would be obligated to do.

That is not a biblical idea that is a pagan idea.

Listen, God cannot be bound by a ceremony or ritual.

He is bound by His own will and responds to His people in accordance with that will.

You can try and change the bible, you can try and twist it to suit your own ideas or be more in keeping with the times, you can try and say that you believe this part and not that part, but no matter what you do the reality is God has spoken and His word will not change.

[Saul's life could have been completely different. It's true his disobedience cost him the throne, but what if he had humbly accepted that? What if he had embraced David and the new king instead of trying to kill him? What if he truly humbled himself before the LORD and sought forgiveness through repentance and faith? He may have lost the throne but he would have gained restored fellowship with God. The exact same thing is true for us! God has made a way to be right with Him through Jesus Christ. Because Jesus has died in our place our sins can be forgiven through repentance and faith in His life, death, and resurrection. Because our debt is

truly paid God restores us without compromising His word or His Holiness in the least degree. This is good news. It is good for all who believe, but as we see in the last few verses of this text refusing to act according to what God says takes people to a bad place. That is the fourth lesson of this text, that...]

Point #4 – Failing to obey when God speaks leads to fear and hopelessness. (Verses 20-25)

When a person finally realizes that they will not have their way before the LORD and yet they still cling to their sinful desires it will eventually bring them to a place of deep despair.

Saul has managed to hang on to power for a number of years, but now he is at the end of the road.

He had many opportunities to turn from his pride and humble himself, but instead he persisted in resisting God's word.

That leads him to this in **verses 20-25**.

He is "filled with fear", why? Because of "Samuel's words."

He knows in this moment that Samuel is right and he is coming face to face with the consequences.

That is a moment that every person who rejects the LORD Jesus as Saviour will face.

The Bible says that everyone who has ever lived will have to stand before God's throne.

In that moment there will be no doubt, there will be no arguing, there will simply be justice.

Hebrews 10:31 says, **"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."**

That is absolutely true, but I fear some of you do not believe it.

If you did you would cling by faith alone to Jesus so that He would plead with the Father on your behalf and you might be adopted as a child of God for His sake.

Without Him there is only condemnation and judgement.

That is what happens here with Saul.

It is a sad scene.

Here is the man who was taller than anyone else in Israel face down on the ground, zapped of strength both physically and spiritually.

His only solace is a meal from a godless woman so that he might have enough energy to go into a hopeless battle and die.

It is a real tragedy and it all happens because he did not listen when the LORD had spoken.

[Take a moment and think back on your life. Can you think of a time when you can say to yourself, "I wish I had listened"? Maybe it was something your mom or dad said to you. Maybe it was a friend, a teacher, a spouse, doctor, or someone else. Someone who gave you

good advice and you didn't take it and had to endure some consequences because of it. Do you know what the words, "I wish I had listened?" mean? It means you have regret.]

No doubt all of us have regrets in life.

No one here this morning is perfect, in fact we are all far from it.

But don't let refusing to listen to what God has said be a continuing regret.

Don't let a time of crisis be the only time you seek after the LORD.

Don't put your hands over your ears and wonder why God seems silent.

Don't think you can make the LORD of all bow to your will.

And don't end up in fear and hopelessness.

The LORD has spoken, listen to what He has said and live.