

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to our Summertime Scripture Stories series. Each weekend, we are opening our hearts to God's message from his Word. We are particularly looking at some famous and some not so famous stories in his Word.
- B. Today, I picked a story with a message particularly important for our day and our age. It challenges both ends of the secular spectrum today.
 - 1. One one end, there are those who draw a map of reality too small to accommodate anything beyond the material realm. They see matter, they see energy, and they can't see, or won't see, anything else. No spirit. No soul. No choice. No free will. No human dignity and no love... all these things are illusions to the secular materialist.
 - 2. On the other end of the secular spectrum are those who draw a map with no fixed boundaries because everything is so fluid there is no right and wrong. There are no facts, they say, only interpretations — which is self defeating because that would also not be a fact, but just an interpretation.
 - a) On one side, Modernism, which is rapidly becoming a dinosaur. On the other side, Post-modernism, which is fracturing not only our society, but even our very souls.
- C. Will you think with me today about the story of *The Sovereign and the Sorceress*?
 - 1. This is the famously dark story of the day the King of Israel consulted the witch of Endor and they both got the surprise of their lives. The story confronts modernists, by saying that any worldview map so small it cannot accommodate the spiritual realm is not only illogical but dehumanizing. And the story confronts post-modernists by saying there are boundaries, even in the spiritual realm, that we simply can't cross, and these boundaries exist because reality is a not up for either a vote or social construct.
- D. Let's get into this very bad day for a king named Saul, a thousand years before Christ.

II. *Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, "You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men." And David said to Achish, "Surely you know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever." Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land. Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. (1 Samuel 28:1-4)*

- A. There is a lot of stuff going on here, and it's really big. Here are the major players:
- B. The Philistines.
 - 1. The Philistines are a large band of related tribes in the land of Israel. They are enemies of the Jews. This is a major incursion. Achish is a Philistine king whose nation is part of this army.
- C. David is a young man...
 - 1. ...who is not yet king of Israel. But he is famous already for defeating another really big Philistine named Goliath.
 - 2. Why is David hanging out with the Philistine army about to destroy his people?
 - 3. Because the king of his people, the Jews, is Saul. And Saul is now a crazy man who keeps trying to kill David. Saul wants to kill David mainly because of jealousy. So David ran and hid out. He became a kind of outlaw and a mercenary. David attracted a band of merry men, more like a street gang, and often hid out among the Philistines.
 - 4. The Philistines are happy to have David and his merry men, because they are good warriors. In the end, however, David does not fight in this battle.
- D. Then it says Samuel had died.
 - 1. Samuel was the prophet of God. The greatest spiritual giant of his day. He was chief counselor to King Saul, but King Saul was horrible at listening to him. Samuel is dead and gone... but not out, as we shall see.
- E. Then you meet King Saul.
 - 1. Saul was the very first King of Israel ever. He started out well, but went downhill fast.
 - 2. One of the good things Saul did was get rid of all the mediums and spiritists from the land. These would be fortune tellers and psychics and necromancers and all that. Everything occult, and everything related to witchcraft, sorcery, and necromancy was against the law, and totally against God's will. Saul drove them all out.
 - 3. Other than that, as King, Saul is pretty horrible. He is like an old junker of a car, putting along on 3 cylinders, blowing blue smoke. By this time, he has completely lost God's favor. Because of his rebellion, he was already rejected as king.
 - 4. And here now are the Philistines to make sure Saul is finished.
 - a) *Lesson 1: The story of your life told in this world depends on the story of your life being told in a bigger, deeper spiritual world.*
- F. Every person, place, and thing has two parallel stories being told.
 - 1. One is the secular story—everything we can see, experience, and feel in this world.

2. The deeper story is the spiritual history—this would be the story of your life and world you would tell if you could see everything from the perspective of the throne of God.

a) You can't outrun your spiritual life. You can't pack your bags, move and leave it behind. Spiritual realities become secular stories, and you simply can't break them apart.

G. One the secular level, King Saul has a very big military problem. That's obvious.

H. On the spiritual level, King Saul's very big military problem is the natural result of a lifetime of rebellion against God. That's going to become more obvious.

I. You can't neglect God's laws. You can't break God's laws. You can only break yourself against God's laws.

J. So Saul who has spent a lifetime pushing God right off the map of his life, now goes to God in an emergency.

K. Ever meet anybody like that?

III. *When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets. (1 Samuel 28:5, 6)*

A. You might read this and feel sorry for the guy. He goes to God, but God doesn't answer. I think we've all been there.

B. Why didn't God answer Saul? Had he crossed a point of no return? Could there be no grace for him? If he's outside the reach of grace, maybe someday I might be outside the reach of God's grace too. Where's the hope?

C. Here's the hope.

D. The one thing Saul needed to do, he wouldn't do. He wouldn't humble himself before God.

1. *He wouldn't come to God and say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, I am no longer worthy to be called your Son" (as the Prodigal Son said to his Father, Luke 15:21).*

a) He refused to humble himself.

2. He wouldn't come to God and fulfill the conditions of 2 Chronicles 7:14:

a) *"if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)*

E. You say, are there strings attached to grace? The answer is yes, there are always strings attached to grace. The conditions are simple: humble yourself and ask for mercy. Humble yourself and say you've blown it, and ask for the grace of God. God sets himself against the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5, James 4:6).

F. And this is exactly what Saul refused to do. He didn't humble his heart and go to God. He hardened his heart and went to the machinery of religion... in his day, dreams, Urim, and prophets. In our day penance, church attendance, and superficial prayers turning God into a vending machine.

1. *For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)*

a) *Lesson 2: To truly understand the story of a person's life, never forget that we look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.*

G. This always reminds me of couples who have no thought of God in their lives, no church, no Bible, no Jesus, no salvation, but they just have to have a church wedding. Why? If you're not going to have a Christian marriage, why bother with the church wedding? In Christian love... did that sound harsh? It's all just window dressing. What about your heart? Who has your heart?

H. Or of people who make horrible choices, and disobey God at every turn, and then wonder why God isn't listening to their narcissistic prayers.

1. Listen, you cannot pray away the outcomes of your evil choices. Now, God can convert bad to good, but you still have to walk through the process.

I. Saul, if you're not going to have a heart for God, why bother with the machinery of inquiring of the Lord? The next thing he does really shows his heart.

IV. *Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor." (1 Samuel 28:7)*

A. Saul, Saul. One tear of genuine humility, and none of this would have happened.

B. The word translated "medium" has a variety of modern options: medium, necromancer, witch, or wizard. In older books this story is called Saul and the Witch of Endor.

C. Saul says, find me a witch! Wait a minute. This was totally outlawed among the Jews (Leviticus 19:31, 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10,11). The reason it was outlawed was simple. All occult practices are humans appealing to demons. If the devil had a religion, it would be witchcraft with a veneer of Christianity.

D. Oh, wait, that happens. Do not mess with this. Do not mess with Ouija boards. Do not mess with Tarot cards. Do not mess with fortune tellers, crystal balls, seances, horoscopes, familiar spirits, ghosts, channelling, or any of it. In the New Testament, when people came to Christ out of these occult practices, do you know what they did? They burned up all their stuff (Acts 19:19).

1. Lesson 3: Any spirituality or philosophy without Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again, at the core is a journey to the dark side, and an invitation to disappointment and pain.
- E. Whether it's a secular philosophy or a revived Druidism and Shamanism—the power of the devil is the power of his lie.
 1. God never turns his back on a person who hasn't first turned their back against him. And this is his mercy. For God to deal with a hardened rebel face to face is for the rebel to invite destruction.
 2. Saul has turned away from God. He has bought into necromancy, the summoning of the dead.
- F. And the huge irony here is that Saul is the one who drove the witches out of the land. They're basically gone.
- G. But now, he asks for a witch, and his servants already know where one is. Makes you wonder what kind of servants he has.
- V. *So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please conduct a seance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you." Then the woman said to him, "Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me." (1 Samuel 28:8-11)*
 - A. I am picturing a small home. I see King Saul, dressed like a common person. He is armed. He brings two armed men with him. They wait for the cover of night, and they travel ten miles to Endor.
 - B. They find the medium's house, and knock on the door. A dirt floor. The smells of cramped quarters. A small fire burning in the corner. And a hunched over woman answers.
 - C. Saul asks for a seance. He wants her to conjure up dead Samuel. Samuel will know what to do. Samuel has the answers. Samuel is anti-Philistine. Samuel is pro-Israel. Conjure up dead old Samuel, please. Do you take credit cards?
 - D. The witch knows this is outlawed. She is wary, and finally Saul swears an oath to protect her from punishment.
 - E. She still doesn't know who he is.
 1. Lesson 4: Every step you take away from God and his grace makes it easier to take the next one.
 - F. One little break becomes a bigger break, becomes a fracture, and soon the whole dam bursts.
 - G. Do you know anybody who has ever gone down a path they swore they would never go down?
 - H. The devil tempts you by increments. By degrees. Almost imperceptibly. And there is Saul, the one who purged mediums from the land, now consulting with one.
 - I. He is the king of Israel! He is the heir of all the promises of God! He is the anointed one, the guardian of the treasures of God's Word! And here he is in the sewer, in effect, asking demons for help. Small steps add up to great leaps.
 1. Lesson 5: Do everything you can to keep your heart warm and tender toward Christ.
 - J. O Saul, how have you hardened your heart!
 - K. And now, there is nothing left for you.
- VI. *When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!" And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth." So he said to her, "What is his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down. (1 Samuel 28:13, 14)*
 - A. This is horrible and weird and sad and scary all at once.
 - B. There is all kinds of debate over what is happening here. There are three main options.
 1. Option 1: the devil is playing tricks on everybody. This is not the spirit of Samuel, it is a demon pretending to be Samuel.
 - a) This, by the way, has a lot of truth to it. People don't come back from the dead. That is a one way street.
 - b) When a medium channels a being, and somebody actually shows up, it is not the dearly departed. It is either all a fraud, or it is a demon, pretending to be the dead person.
 - c) Do not mess with this stuff, and don't watch those shows on TV where they're talking to people's dead grandmothers and all that.
 - (1) So option 1, the devil is playing tricks on everybody. This is possible.
 2. Option 2: the witch is playing tricks on everybody. She's just making up that she saw Samuel. That's possible too. But it seems from the text that Saul actually heard a voice, as we are going to see.
 3. Option 3: God actually sent Samuel back from the dead to talk to King Saul one more time. This is the view of Norman Geisler. This is the view of Walter Kaiser. This is the view of a lot of really solid Bible teachers. And this is the view I hold myself.

- C. Regardless of which view you hold, can I just say again, please stay a thousand miles away from this stuff, and you won't have to worry about it.
1. *Lesson 6: There is more to our lives and our world than what we can see with our eyes, and touch with our hands. There is a spiritual realm that surrounds and upholds this physical realm, and we deal with it all the time.*
 2. *Lesson 7: The Bible is our only sure and certain guide to the spiritual realm, because it is written by the Lord of All Realms.*
- D. The spiritual realm is not fuzzy. It is not a new age shapeless blob. There are boundaries, and realities, and truths — there are unbreakable laws, and undeniable realities. And the Word of God is our guide.
- E. And right now, Saul is doing everything he can to make his life a total contradiction of the Bible.
- F. So up comes Samuel, which freaks out the witch, and is about to freak out Saul.
- VII. *Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do."*
Then Samuel said: "Why then do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy? "And the LORD has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines."
Then immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night. (1 Samuel 28:15-20)
- A. Pure tragedy. He brought it on his own head, and in two short chapters this will all come true.
- B. Samuel is ticked. He's grumpy.
1. Saul, I was having a great time in Paradise, and now, I'm here?
- C. Samuel says nothing new to Saul. I've already told you all you need to know. Why are you bothering me?
1. *Lesson 8: Once God has spoken through the Bible, you need no other "word."*
- D. You know people keep asking a question till they get the answer they want?
1. God doesn't work that way.
 2. The ball has always been in King Saul's court, but he just won't own it. Turn back to God. Turn back to grace. Humble yourself. It's not too late. But he won't. So...
- E. Mighty King Saul, groveling in the dirt of the floor of the house of a witch.
- F. Oh, how the mighty have fallen. This is one of the saddest portraits in all of Scripture.
- G. I like how the authors of Scripture point out that Saul is falling apart, not only because he is spiritually messed up, but because he is physically messed up too, from not eating.
- H. These things go together. The spiritual realm intersects the physical realm in your life every single day.
- I. You can be spiritually strong, but physically broken. You can be physically strong, but spiritually broken. You can be physically strong and spiritually strong. You can be physically broken and spiritually broken. That was King Saul.
- J. I have often told my preaching students that you are not ready to teach or preach a passage of Scripture until you can put your finger on where the grace is. Where's the grace? It's always there.
- K. It's offered, explained, accepted, denied, contradicted, hated, loved, or doubted... something about grace is on every page of Scripture. What is it for Saul? What is it for you today?
- VIII. Where's the Grace?
- A. The downfall of King Saul is the story of Grace Refused. He personifies what Paul talked about in Romans.
1. *But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people." (Romans 10:21)*
- B. Why push grace away?
- C. I am wondering today if there is some corner of someone's heart that is just too close to King Saul today.
- D. You might not be seeking out the dark side directly—no mediums, no fortune tellers, no horoscopes.
- E. But you are fighting God.
- F. To fight God is to fight grace. It is to fight his favor and his love. It is to fight the Saving work of Jesus Christ. It is to fight the present experience of the blessing of Jesus Christ.
1. *Lesson 9: As long as you live, it will never be too late to bring your heart back to God and into the realm of matchless, undeserved grace.*
- G. As we close in prayer today, I'm wondering if you resonate with Saul.
- H. Is there an area of life where you have been stubborn? An attitude? A rejection or doubt of God's love and grace?
- I. Come home to him. And you can do that in prayer right now.