

1 Samuel 16:14-23 - David and the Spirit

Well, after a little bit of a detour to look at the doctrine of evil spirits, we return now to the passage that began the discussion on Satan and demons.

Let me just say that if you're new to thinking through what the Bible has to say on these issues, there is no reason to fear or be weirded out. The Bible is not shy about demonic activity. It deals with the issue plainly everywhere the subject comes up. And let me encourage you that those who follow the Lord Jesus have absolutely nothing to fear at all.

1 John 4:3-4: This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

If you are a believer then you are filled with God the Holy Spirit and he is greater than any evil spirit that could ever come against us. And not only that, as we'll see in a bit, those who are filled with the Holy Spirit can often be a means of grace to those who are afflicted with evil spirits.

Now, what I want to do is look at this passage from different angles. When you watch football and there's a crucial play often times they'll show the same play over and over from different camera angles. I'm don't really watch all that much football, but I watch the news enough to know that there was a play at the end of last Sunday's Rams/Saints game that was played at different angles repeatedly because there was a missed call. The referee was only looking from one angle.

So what I want to do is look at this passage from several different angles to tease out more of what happening here. There is so much going on that we might miss something if we're just going at it line by line.

1) The first angle, as it were, is to be reminded that life is full of tension. And I want to get at that by just being reminded of the background. See, because we know the story so well, we might miss the fact that there's huge soap opera level tension going on here. If we were watching this in the movie theatre or on a weekly show this is where the plot has just thickened and we'd all be feeling weird and awkward wondering what's going to happen next.

Remember, Saul has been told he is no longer king. His dynasty is done, God has removed his Spirit from Saul and as a parting gift, God has given him an evil spirit to torment him the rest of his life. That's going on over at Saul's palace or house or whatever he lives in.

At the same time, in secret, Samuel has gone to anoint David to be the next king of Israel. He went secretly because Saul - crazy king guy - might find out and kill him for doing anointing David. And God even gave him something of a cover story just in case he got caught. But he doesn't, he goes and anoints David to be the next king.

Then it turns out Saul's demon situation is so bad his own people are like, "Hey, you need to get someone to play a lyre - a stringed instrument like a harp - for you to calm that demon down." Saul says fine, get me someone. And out of all the people in Israel who could have possibly filled that position, who comes up in conversation? David! The future king, secretly anointed by Samuel so Saul wouldn't find out. Awkward.

Saul doesn't know David has been anointed. And David doesn't tell Saul he's been anointed. But as the readers here we are watching this whole train wreck about to explode in slow motion and neither David nor Saul know the full significance of what's happening.

Now there are a few things we don't know about the situation. First of all, we don't know if David and his family know the full significance of David being anointed. They all saw it, but how much did Samuel explain to them? We're not sure from the text. We also don't know how much time has passed from when David was anointed to when he is called into Saul's service. The text makes it seem like it was the next day - and it could have been - but it could have been a couple years as well.

But what we're to walk away with here is this huge tension. Saul has unwittingly selected his replacement to come into his own house. David becomes a trusted ally of Saul: he ministers to him spiritually through music, he becomes his armor bearer in battle, and Saul loves him like his own child. If this were a TV show the end of chapter 16 would be a season finale where we're watching Saul and David and everyone eating merrily at the dinner as the camera slowly zooms out and we know this whole thing is going to explode in the next season.

What does that have to do with us? What we need to remember is that God is not afraid of tension in our lives. Not that we should be drama queens or making tension. But that there just are going to be times in our lives where things happen, people happen, situations happen that cause pressure and difficulty.

And we don't get a pass in those seasons. That God calls us to be faithful even in those season.

Matt. 5:9: Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.

David is walking into a massively difficult situation. One where he probably doesn't want to go because he knows at least to some degree the situation. But instead of complain or make it worse, he is the means of giving grace. Maybe you live with someone, work with someone, or are in a particular family situation where things are tense. We're all going to have that. God's not afraid of that, and he's called all of us to show his grace in those seasons.

So that's one angle.

2) The second angle is that God often uses his Spirit through believers to bless those suffering spiritually. This is the whole showdown between the Holy Spirit and the demon - the harmful spirit. We took a couple of weeks to look at harmful spirits so I won't rehash all of that, but we have to ask ourselves: why in the world is God sending a harmful spirit to torment Saul? Who do we normally think of when it comes to sending demons? Satan. So why is God doing this?

We need to keep a few things in mind. First of all in a world where there is evil, there will always be tension with how God deals with that evil in his sovereignty. Let me encourage you that there are no easy answers; and don't avoid wrestling with this tension. We have to be honest with what the passage says: God sent the harmful spirit. That's just what the text says. It wasn't Satan who sent the harmful spirit, and God didn't simply allow the spirit. He sent it. I think he sent the spirit not only as a judgement against Saul but also as the means by which David would come into the king's house.

Second, we dare not blame God for evil actions. God does not sin, he does not tempt anyone with sin. And in no way is God evil simply because he sent an evil spirit to torment Saul. Actually what Saul really deserves is to be tormented in hell forever for his sin. God sending a spirit is less that what he deserves.

Turn over to 1 Kings 22 for a minute. **1 Kings 22** does 2 things. First, it shows the same kind of spiritual reality of God's sovereignty over evil spirits that 1 Samuel and Job do, but with more clarity. Second, it reminds us that if you're not on some kind of Bible reading program that takes you through the whole of the Bible you're missing out on all kinds of amazing stuff in the Bible.

Here we have Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah in the south and Ahab, the wicked king of Israel in the north and they're making an alliance to battle against Syria in the north. It's an unusual alliance because after Solomon, Israel and Judah are often enemies. But here they're allies. And as they're talking about going to battle they decide that maybe they should inquire of God - will God give them success? Read 5-8

So they ask the prophets how the battle is going to go and they all say "You'll have great success!" But Jehoshaphat isn't convinced. Ahab mentions this guy Macaiah, but he doesn't like Macaiah because he never says anything good about Ahab. **Read 9-16**

So Macaiah is in a tough spot. All the other prophets have said there will be success. So the guy who went to get him says that that's what he should say - just be a yes-man. The irony is that when he is a yes-man, that's

when Ahab accuses him of lying. He wants to put him under oath because he knows better. Then the truth comes out. Watch the spiritual realities here. **Read 17-23**

Did you catch that? God asks for a spirit to somehow get Ahab to go out to battle so he'll be killed. And there's like this group of demons who raise their hand to go get it done. God calls on one of them and says, what's your plan? "I'll put a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets." And God says: Go, I'll give you success in deceiving.

Again, God is not deceiving anyone. He is not causing the prophets to lie or the evil spirit to act. But he is using an evil spirit to accomplish his purposes. And it's not just allow. God is not hands off here. He calls on the evil spirits to accomplish this somehow and grants success to the one who lies.

This is where we have to humbly step back in humility because our finite brains don't know how to put all these truths together. Again, God does not sin, he doesn't tempt anyone to sin. But he does use evil agents for his purpose and for his glory.

We saw a couple weeks ago that he sent an angel of Satan to torment the apostle Paul. And that Satan often tempts believers in various ways. That's not outside of God's sovereignty, somehow it is within God's sovereignty.

Isa. 45:7: God says: I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord who does all these things.

Amos 3:3-6:

Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?

Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?

Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken nothing?

Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it?

Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?

Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?

God takes full responsibility for calamity and disaster. He is sovereign, ultimately all things happen on his watch according to his decree. It's not just that he **knows** it will happen, it's that on some level he has purposed all things to happen in the way that they do.

And yet he still holds people and demons to account for their actions. His sovereignty is no excuse for sin. The devil didn't make you do it and neither did God.

How's all that work? We don't know. This is a great mystery that we'll never fully grasp. We're like grasshoppers trying to do linear algebra. We've all got all this information but we have no idea how to put it all together. But we can't deny any of it and still be faithful to the Bible.

And this is exactly the tension we see in **1 Samuel 16**. This harmful spirit is a demon of some kind that God is using to torment Saul. Interestingly, although Saul has been disobedient before this time, it's only after this that Saul goes from being disobedient to basically crazy. He'll try multiple times to kill David, in his raving jealousy he will slaughter a bunch of priests of the Lord. He becomes certifiably crazy.

This demon torments Saul. What's interesting here is that the Hebrew word that is used is also used to mean terrify. This was spiritual oppression.

Now, before we move on to the next angle, as it were, I just want to point something out. Although God sends this harmful spirit to torment Saul, there is common grace. And that is common grace through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works through David to calm Saul down.

Notice how playing music is sort of a commonly accepted way to combat demonic activity. **Read 15-17**

This is just an unusual exchange. “Uh, your majesty, you’ve got a demon and we think you should get a guy to play music for you.” Saul: “Oh, of course, that’s a great idea.” Nobody is disputing the evil spirit, everyone just kind of gets that this is happening. And no one disputes that the solution is music. Whatever else we might say about music, I think it’s safe to say that it can have a powerful - and spiritual - affect on us. And here’s what happens when David plays. **Read 23**

So basically David casts out the harmful spirit by playing music. The lyre was a stringed instrument. It was often the shape of a giant horseshoe about the size of the body of a guitar with 6-12 strings that went from the base to a crossbar. And it sounds a lot like a harp - very calming and peaceful. And as David played, the spirit would leave, Saul would be refreshed and in good spirits.

What do we take away from that? That we should all learn to play the harp for crazy people? No. The take away is that God often uses his Spirit in his people for the common good of unbelievers. You are going to come into contact with people in your life - maybe you know them now - where you are the vehicle that the Holy Spirit uses to give this person grace. Maybe they’ll never become a follower of Jesus, maybe they will. But don’t underestimate the value of simply being the vehicle of common grace in peoples’ lives.

See, in the NC everyone has the blessing of being filled with the Spirit like David. And part of our being salt and light on the earth is to show grace to people who may never come to faith in Jesus. And you say: why would God just use me to show grace to someone who will never follow Jesus? You what the answer is? He loves them. God loves unrighteous people who will never repent from their sins and trust in Christ.

Matt 5:43-45:“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Listen, God’s love is so great that not only does he show love to the unrighteous, but he expects that we - his children - will do the same thing. It’s been said that for believers, this life is the closest thing to hell we will ever experience. And for unbelievers, this life is the closest thing to heaven they will ever experience. God’s wrath and justice and holiness is not threatened when he shows common grace to unbelievers.

Can I tell you something? God loves unbelievers and blesses unbelievers far more than we can ever imagine and far more than we ever can. One of the ways we show the world that we are his children is to love them unconditionally and show them grace any way we can.

3) God uses various gifts and excellence for his glory. Read 18

I think we have an amazing insight here into David’s life. Who he was as a person and how God used him and equipped him for his role in life as king.

We could simply chalk up David getting into Saul’s household to God’s sovereignty. God planned it and brought it to pass. And obviously that’s true. But why was it that David’s name was even mentioned to Saul? Because he was such an absolutely stand up guy and he was skilled at what he did.

There are 6 descriptions of David here. We’ll work through them fairly quickly. But remember that David was a young shepherd boy. He spent a lot of time out by himself in the weather away from most activity and people. And he did so before the Spirit of God came upon him. But none of that was a reason for him to be unrefined or a bumpkin. He was an outstanding young man despite difficult conditions.

1) He was skillful at playing. This was really all Saul was looking for: someone who could play the lyre when the spirit came upon him to calm him down. There are other places in the Bible where people seem to make the connection between music and spiritual activity. But David didn’t waste time in the wilderness, he learned to play the lyre and the harp and was a great singer as well.

2) He is also called a mighty man of valor. This is a tough phrase to translate. It usually means someone of wealth or aristocracy, but that’s probably not the case. It most likely has the idea of brave. David is not afraid of

difficult situations. He has poise and confidence and courage. Not arrogance, but he is willing to do what needs to be done.

3) He is a man of war which means he has probably had some kind of formal training with fighting.

And as we will see David is an amazing fighter. I was talking with Tim and Andy this week that David is basically an ancient Navy Seal warrior. He was told to kill 100 Philistines and bring foreskins to Saul to marry his daughter. David killed 200. In the next chapter he doesn't think twice about charging into battle with a man that every other man in Israel is scared of. He'll kill Goliath, then chop his head off, then take his sword and shield. And then he'll go write poetry about it that all of Israel will sing. Those were not at odds and we see that in David's life.

There are many in the church who think that a man who follows Jesus can not also be a warrior. That Christians must be pacifists and I think there is certainly some room for disagreement on the issue. But being skillful in battle is not a contradiction to being a man of God.

In **Exo. 15:3** and **Isaiah 42:13** God is called a man of war - the same phrase.

Psa. 7:12-13: If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.

God uses men for battle to maintain justice and peace. David was one of those men.

4) He is prudent in speech. It means he knows how to speak wisely. He's not sharp-tongued, he's not a bomb-thrower, he doesn't just speak his mind. He knew that death and life were in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat it's fruits (**Prov. 18:21**).

I listen to a managerial podcast called manager tools and one of the things they say is invaluable in anyone who wants to actually grow in an organization is the ability to communicate well. To have prudent speech. Usually those with the best communication skills rise to the top of an organization. And how much more so within our homes and among our fellow believers. I think if we all just read through Proverbs on a regular basis our speech would be considerably more prudent.

5) He is a handsome guy. We saw earlier in Vs. 12 that he was ruddy - or healthy - and handsome. Here is basically the same thing. The NIV says fine-looking, the NASB says handsome. Apparently he was a good looking guy.

6) The Lord is with him. It was obvious to those around David that the Lord was with him. That is, that the Lord gave him success. In the OT the phrase "the Lord was with someone" was an indication of success. The Lord was with Josph in Potipher's house and he was with him when he was put in prison - Josph had success. The Lord was with Joshua and gave him success in conquering the Promised Land. And the Lord was with David.

You know how some people are like king Midas, just everything they touch seems to turn to gold? I know Christians who seems to make all the right moves at all the right times and are wise and humble and they just have a lot of visible success. That's okay - there's nothing wrong with that. That's not me, but that is David. The Lord just blessed him in an unusual way.

What does that have to do with us? Here's what it has to do with us: Just like David, God has equipped you with all you need to serve him. Think about what an odd package David was: He was a good looking, teenager musician, who could fight bravely in battle and yet speak well in the presence of others. What a strange combination of attributes. Unless, of course, God wants you to be a king.

God equips his people to do exactly what he needs them to do exactly when he wants them. Maybe he hasn't equipped you to play the lyre and also to kill people with swords. But he also hasn't called you to play for a crazy king whose job you'll take one day.

Listen, as believers the Bible tells us the Spirit has - by his own will - equipped us to serve one another. Which means we need to be using the gifts God has given us primarily to build up the body of Christ, but also our in home and others around us. And just like the Spirit didn't make mistakes when he equipped David to serve in these various ways he hasn't made a mistake in how he has equipped you and me. The question is whether or not we are going to use the skills and gifts God has given us to the best of our ability for his glory.

When we read this section, yes we are reminded that there are a lot of unusual spiritual things going on. But what we're also reminded is that we are empowered with the Spirit just like David. And just like David we should use what God has equipped us with to be salt and light of the gospel.

Pray