

1 Samuel 22:6-23 | “The Massacre of Nob”
Preached on March 20, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 22, and we will be starting in verse 6. *[pause]*

Many of us are intrigued by spies.

Most often we don't think about this, but throughout history, there have been spies among us in our country or in other countries.

They are the types of people that you would never expect to be spies, for they seem so normal.

They live among people, quietly making it seem like they are innocently doing their work, yet all the while they are on a mission of collecting information for the enemy. *[pause]*

They say that during the Cold War, spying became very prevalent.

It was actually through spying that the Russians were able to obtain nuclear secrets from the U.S.

And it was through spying that each side could start to gain advantages here and there in the Cold War. *[pauseeee]*

Now those spies were sent out on a mission of espionage, but in our story this morning we will find a spy, who didn't go out looking to spy.

But he ended up being a spy nonetheless. *[pause]*

I guess we could call him an inadvertent spy, and his name is Doeg. *[pauseeeee]*

If we could pull up Doeg's profile right now, what would it say?

Well he's an Edomite, so he comes from a country often having enmity with Israel.

He's Saul's servant, who was chief of Saul's herdsman.

And we will find that he's a brutal man, willing to kill. *[pause]*

So how does Doeg play a part in our story today?

Well let's do a little flashback to what happened last week, shall we? *[pause]*

Saul wanted to kill David, and David was a man 'on the run', trying to avoid being killed.

And he first goes to the city of Nob, where the priests lived and where apparently the Tabernacle was.

David lies about why he's alone, and asks for food and a weapon.

He receives the holy bread and Goliath's sword from Ahimelech the priest, and he leaves.
[pause]

That's all good, right? But there's a small detail given in that story which was ominous...

Doeg the Edomite, Saul's servant, was there. [pause]

Uh oh, not good.

Now let's flash forward to our story today, and see what happens because of Doeg witnessing this event.

LET'S START READING in verse 6. [read 6-19]

Yikes, talk about a horrendous story - this was a massacre.

What does a story like this show us? Can it teach us *anything*?

One thing it shows us is this...

I. There is real evil in the world.

Sometimes there's that one person who says the obvious, or maybe you're that person.

You'll be talking about something, and then someone will say something that is completely obvious to others and doesn't even need to be said.

And you will say, "Thank you, Captain Obvious." [pause]

Well when I bring up this first point, you might be thinking that of me.

You might be thinking, "OK, Captain Obvious. Thank you for that. I know this."

But though this is known to most people, it's actually very important to reiterate and remember.

"Why?" you might ask.

Because it reminds us that the Bible is *realistic*. [pauseeee]

The Bible does not sugarcoat the world.

Christianity is not this dreamy, head-in-the-clouds thing, but it gets us down into the nitty-grittiness of a sin-cursed world.

It shows us, "This is the world, and there is real evil in the world." [pause]

In fact, the Bible shows us the grim reality of the world even more accurately than we often think of it. [pause]

Sometimes people will say, “There’s good in everyone,” or will say that people are basically good.

And then act like *the Bible* is not relevant to the world around them.

No, the Bible is completely relevant because it comes from the One who created the world itself, and was the One who cursed it for our sin against Him. *[pauseeee]*

So this story reminds us that there is real evil in the world, and it comes from sin. *[pause]*

Don’t let anyone deceive you.

The evil in this world comes from sin. *[pause]*

Saul’s actions didn’t just come out of thin air.

He didn’t just accidentally massacre a priestly town, but he made the call to have them killed because of sin. *[pause]*

You can’t explain the evil in this world without either admitting it’s sin or blurring the lines of good and evil. *[pauseeee]*

So King Saul’s life and actions are an example of how sin brings evil in this world.

He disobeys God and chooses to follow his own path by not following God’s Word.

And then God’s Spirit leaves him, and what you find is a downward spiral of jealousy, anger, and attempted murder.

Which then leads to this massacre of the priestly city of Nob, as Saul will do anything in his pursuit of David. *[pauseeee]*

Foundationally, Saul’s issue was that he had rejected God and God’s authority.

That’s what sin is: it’s rebellion against God. *[pause]*

Saul had no fear of God or love for others, but a driving desire for self alone.

I mean think about it - he didn’t even hesitate to kill the priests of God.

He heard them out, didn’t ask any more questions or consider their defense, but called for their death straight away.

Even his own Israelite servants couldn’t carry out the massacre, for they had more regard for God and others! *[pause]*

Here was Saul who didn't carry out the command of God to kill all of the enemies of God, the Amalekites,¹ yet he will slaughter a whole Israelite town of priests with a command. *[pauseeee]*

There are a lot of horrendous situations in the world, but just think here about the king of Israel massacring a whole Israelite city of priests and their families.

That's close to being on par with some of the most evil men that you can think of. [pauseeee]

So Saul's massacre reminds us that there is evil in this world, that evil comes from sin, and sin comes from wanting your own way above God's.

And as you look closer at Saul's actions and words, you see the ways that sin was manifest. [pause]

He started to have self-pity, as Saul says to his servants, "None of you is sorry for me." *[pause]*

In his self-pity, he acted like the victim, who everyone should feel sorry for.

But that wasn't the truth, for he was not the victim, but the aggressor.

He acted like he deserved so much more and that everyone should feel bad for him, as he solely focused on himself. [pauseeee]

How often we can be found wallowing in self-pity, too, throwing pity party after pity party in our own name!

We start thinking, "Woe is me! No one cares."

But like Saul, self-pity just makes things worse because when we are consumed with our own struggles, we don't look up to what others are going through.

Instead of being concerned for David, who was running for his life, he could only think about no one being sorry for him. [pauseeee]

Did you also notice how paranoid that Saul was in this story?

He accuses all of his servants of conspiring against him.

Not only was he paranoid, but in his irrationality, he twisted situations in his mind. *[pauseeee]*

Even though he was the one attempting to kill David, yet he acts like David is the one lying in wait to kill him. [pauseeee]

I've said this before because of Saul's example, but sin makes us irrational.

We start thinking through situations, and we become paranoid about everyone else.

¹ See 1 Samuel 15.

We start twisting situations in our minds.

Someone else makes an innocent comment to you, and then you start thinking about it, and think, “They said that to get back at me. They really meant it in a mean way.” *[pauseeee]*

Sin can really mess us up.

It doesn’t give people the benefit of the doubt, but assumes the worst of them. *[pause]*

Did you see how accusatory that Saul was?

He accused all of his servants of conspiring against him, and then when Ahimelech the priest stood before him, he accused him of conspiring against him as well. *[pause]*

Instead of just trying to find out the facts, Saul had already made up his mind about what the priest did. *[pause]*

Have you ever done that?

Have you assumed motives on a person, even before asking them why they did something? *[pause]*

This can happen in our lives...

Our spouse says something, and we assume that their motives were bad, when they were just asking a question.

Our co-worker does something that we don’t like, and instead of wanting to hear why they did it, we jump down their throats, claiming that they did it to make us mad. *[pause]*

We so easily jump to conclusions without hearing and thinking through the truth.

And Saul didn’t really want the truth, for even after Ahimelech defends himself well, Saul has them all killed nonetheless. *[pauseeee]*

It’s interesting how many people think that Christianity makes you close-minded, but it’s actually sin that makes you close-minded as you start to become not open to the truth.

In our sin, we get something set in our minds, and we become immovable.

But humility and grace says, “I’m open to the truth because I may be wrong here.” *[pauseeeee]*

Basically, sin is destructive the more you give into it.

Saul started out with a little disobedience to God, which led to more disobedience, which led to a little jealousy, and this was let go to attempted murders, and now a massacre of innocent people. *[pauseeeeeee]*

There is real evil in this world, and it comes from the sin in our hearts.

The truth is that Saul is not just a bad egg amidst a swath of good eggs in the world.

His sin took him very far in evil, and was manifest in a violent way, but what about our own sin?

We may not murder a city of priests, but what does Jesus say?...

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.”² *[pause]*

Our sin of anger is deserving of judgment just as much as Saul’s.

There’s real evil in this world, and it’s just not from those people out there, but from all of us as sinners.

There is evil in this world, and we have been victims of it, but we have also been the perpetrators of it.

But thanks be to God for Christ Jesus!

He’s the hope for sinners like us, as we can be forgiven and not face judgment because Christ took it, but also he helps us to start to become changed from the inside out. *[pause]*

As you think about it, what’s the difference between Saul’s callousness and violence compared with David’s godliness?

It’s their relationship with God.

Saul was in rebellion, while David looked to God.

For let's CONTINUE READING to see what David does. [read 20-23]

What a contrast between David and Saul when it comes to the priests!

Saul tries to kill them all, but David seeks to defend the last remaining one. *[pause]*

What a contrast!

This is a clear difference between the person who is rebelling against God, and the person dependent upon God’s grace.

When someone is consumed with self, destruction ensues.

When sin is let go in your life, it will cause great wreckage.

² Matthew 5:21-22a.

But when you seek to follow God's way, it's a blessing to others.

David's desire to follow God led him to defend this lonely priest out of love and care. *[pause]*

Just look at the track record of sin verses living for Christ.

Sin has caused heaps of ruin upon heaps of ruin, while someone changed by Christ isn't perfect, but there are good, godly results of reconciliation and love when they obey Him. *[pauseeee]*

Think also of the contrast between Saul and David when it comes to their sin.

Saul wouldn't admit his guilt in anything, but acted like a victim, yet what did David do?

He was the one being chased down, yet he was still willing to take responsibility for his part in the priests' death. *[pause]*

David could have just said, "Wow, that Saul is really bad," and left it there.

But he admits that he played a part in their death. *[pauseeee]*

So here's a challenging question to think about: do you readily admit when you are wrong?

I think many of us would answer, 'No.'

Yet humility says, "I have sinned," because we remember that we are simply sinners saved by grace. *[pauseeeee]*

Let's recap what we have learned so far...

Pursuing self interests above all leads to sin and destruction (as is seen in Saul), but pursuing God leads to humility and blessing (as seen in David).

Through Saul's evil, we are reminded that there is real evil in this world, and it comes from sin.

Sin that displays itself in callousness, self-pity, accusations, irrationality, twisting the truth, and paranoia.

Then this sin let go ends up in destruction. *[pause]*

Really that should be humbling to us because we may not commit a massacre, but what sin do we let go in our lives?

In what ways are you seeing how your sin can cause ruin in your relationships?

This should lead us to our knees, remembering that we need Christ's help to live for Him.

And though we have sinned and done so much evil, yet Christ has forgiven us through taking our deserved penalty upon himself on the Cross.

Truly, “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.”³ *[pauseeee]*

Now maybe this morning as you heard the story of the massacre of Nob, it was hard for you to take.

Real evil can be like that as we see it in the world, but also, as we see it in our own lives.

But though there’s real evil in the world, and it’s hard to take...

II. Yet God is always in control.

No one likes it when a story ends on a bad note.

No one likes it when the bad guy wins, and the story concludes.

There’s something in us that longs for hope and for something more meaningful than seeing evil seemingly winning.

And if we just left it at ‘there’s real evil in the world’, how comforting would that be?

Not very, for where’s the hope in that? *[pause]*

But I would like you to see something about this passage that is very comforting.

And you may be thinking, “How is a story of a massacre comforting?!”

Well, there’s actually a deeper reality going on in this story that can be missed at first reading. *[pause]*

You see, at a cursory glance, this is just a horrendous atrocity and that’s it.

But with a little remembering of a promise given in 1 Samuel and some genealogy connections, we find something profound. *[pause]*

Remember at the beginning of our study in 1 Samuel, we met a priest named Eli?

Eli let his sons do evil in the sight of God, and what did God promise Eli?

He promised Eli that there wouldn’t be an old man in his household, but his household would die by the sword.

And God even said that there would be one person left, who would survive, and who would grieve.⁴

³ Titus 2:11-12.

⁴ See 1 Samuel 2:30-33.

Well guess what happened in our story? One man survives Saul's massacre of a priestly family.
[pause]

You do a little connecting of dots in the family line, and you realize that the priest Ahimelech was the great-grandson of Eli!⁵ *[pause]*

So what Saul did was actually fulfilling God's Word about Eli's household.

Even amidst this great and real evil that Saul committed, God was bringing about his promises.
[pauseeee]

Now unquestionably, Saul and Doeg were responsible for their sin of murder, but through them, God was being faithful to his Word.

In the midst of Saul's great evil, God was accomplishing his purposes.

Said another way, God always fulfills His Word, even in dark situations. *[pauseeee]*

Just chew on that truth for a bit and the believer in Christ can't help but walk away encouraged.
[pauseeee]

Let's say that you took God out of the picture.

In dark, evil circumstances what would someone conclude?

They would have to say, "It's all pointless," or even they would have to say, "Evil can win."

That's an awful place to be in!

But now let's look at dark, evil circumstances with God in the picture, and with what God's Word tells us. *[pause]*

In dark, evil circumstances what can we conclude now?

We would say, "Yes, there is great evil in this world because of our sin against God, but even in the midst of that sin, God is in control, fulfilling His promises and moving His purposes forward."

So even though the evil situations bring destruction and pain, we can rest assured that God is working it all for good.⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Let's do some application here.

Right now in our world, there are some evil things going on.

One of the ones on the forefront of our minds is of course the war in Ukraine.

⁵ Ahimelech is the son of Ahitub and in 1 Samuel 14:3 we see that Ahitub is the grandson of Eli.

⁶ See Romans 8:28.

When you think about that war, do you act like God is not in control, or do you remember that God is in control, and will fulfill His promises? *[pause]*

Just read the book of Revelation.

In it, you see the great evil that the Devil, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet do, yet amidst all of that, God fulfills His promises and wins. *[pause]*

So we must always remember this truth, even in the darkest of days.

Evil does not surprise God, but God's purposes will come to be. *[pauseeee]*

But also remember that evil is limited!

Saul was determined to slaughter each and every priest and person in the city of Nob, yet what do we find?

He is unable to accomplish it, for one man survives! *[pause]*

Even with all the worldly power that he had at his fingertips, he couldn't fulfill what he intended to do.

Yet for God, he always fulfills exactly what he intends to do! Nobody stays His hand!

Though Saul could commit great evil with his great power, yet he was powerless against David. *[pauseeee]*

Evil in this world is not unrestrained evil, but God only permits what is in accordance with His purposes.

While Saul thought he was showing off his power, yet through his evil act, God was showing His immensely greater power in fulfilling His Word. *[pauseeee]*

So what this gruesome story shows us is that...

Even in this evil world, God is in control!

We see real evil in this world perpetrated by others and by ourselves, yet remember that it comes from sin.

It comes from mankind's rebellion against God, which causes such destruction and sorrow.

But though we see evil in this world, and it pains us, we have a confident hope in our faithful God, who fulfills every promise.

We trust Him through it all, for we remember the Cross.

On the Cross, there was real evil committed against God as we sinned against Him, leading Jesus to have to go to the Cross, so that we could be forgiven by His willing sacrifice on our behalf.

And there was real evil committed against Christ as he was “killed by the hands of lawless men.”

Yet He was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.”

And “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death.”⁷ *[pause]*

That right there shows us that even through real evil in the world, God was in control, He fulfills His Word, and can do great things - saving, redeeming things.

And so we fling ourselves to God and rely on the sovereignty and mercy of God. *[pauseeee]*

Believer, have confidence in the Lord!

Whatever you are facing, you can trust that all is not lost.

God is still on the throne.

His Word will be fulfilled, it won't return void, but it will accomplish what He purposes, and will succeed in what it was sent to do.⁸

So stand on the promises of God.

Sing boldly that hymn, “Standing on the promises that cannot fail. When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, By the living Word of God I shall prevail, Standing on the promises of God.”⁹

⁷ Acts 2:23-24.

⁸ See Isaiah 55:11.

⁹ Carter, Russell Kelso. “Standing on the Promises.” 1886. Lyrics found at: https://hymnary.org/text/standing_on_the_promises_of_christ_my_ki.