

1 Samuel 28:3-25 | “A Sad and Sorry State”
Preached on May 22, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 28, and we will be starting in verse 3 and finishing out the chapter. *[pause]*

Many of you may know about the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Due to the catastrophic nuclear explosion, Chernobyl and the nearby town of Pripyat have been abandoned, as they have been deemed unsafe to live in. *[pause]*

Well I came upon this video of drone footage of the region, which was filmed between 2013 and 2016.¹

And in the video, there is footage of various places around the area and it just shows the disrepair that everything is in.

There are bumper cars sitting in puddles of water, and looking grim.

There are trees and foliage growing in places that you would have never thought.

There's a classroom shown with peeling paint, chairs strewn around, and debris everywhere.

Everything is broken, dirty, and in ruin. *[pause]*

What was once a thriving area full of life is now empty, abandoned, and deteriorating.

Chernobyl and the nearby city of Pripyat are truly in a sad and sorry state because of the absence of people. *[pause]*

Well as we look at 1 Samuel 28, we find not a city, but a *person* in a sad and sorry state.

While it may not be peeling paint, dirt, or debris everywhere - Saul's life is in shambles, and this story shows us truly how bad it gets for him.

And unlike Chernobyl, his sad and sorry state doesn't arrive because of a lack of the presence of people, but a lack of the presence of God.

Let's READ THE STORY for ourselves to see this. *[read 3-25]*

Now I know that you probably have a lot of questions about this story.

But I don't want to get sidetracked this morning, for you could easily get caught up in all of those secondary items. *[pause]*

¹ “Chernobyl: Drone Footage Reveals an Abandoned City”, posted on April 28, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeZtIFeEcNg>.

The Bible gives us this story here for a reason, and it's not to give Christians an exhaustive explanation of mediums and necromancers.

So I want to focus on what the author wants us to know, and not delve into speculation.

If you come tonight at 6pm, maybe we will answer some of those questions that you might have, but this morning, let's devote our attention to the main points. *[pause]*

So then what's one of the main points of this story?...

I. God turning away from you is a sad and sorry state.

Saul is totally unraveling.

He's overcome by fear and he's desperate as he looks out at the massive Philistine army.

He asks God what to do, but there's only silence.

No dream to reveal what to do, no Urim to tell him "yes" or "no", no prophet to give direction, and even Samuel is gone.

He's at a loss as to what to do - and when the enemy draws near, and God is quiet, he knows it's not a good situation to be in. *[pauseeee]*

Saul is so desperate that he chooses to go to a medium to find answers. *[pause]*

What's ironic is that Saul is the very one who expelled mediums from Israel, yet here he is looking for one. *[pause]*

Now a medium was a person who claimed to be able to communicate with the spirit of a person who had died.

So they acted as sort of an inbetween, so that people could hear from those who were deceased because the pagan nations thought that the dead had some knowledge that they didn't possess.

And this type of thing was strictly forbidden by God. [pause]

The Lord doesn't muddy the waters about mediums and necromancers and people who deal with them.

There is no misunderstanding God's position towards them - it is an abomination in His sight. *[pause]*

In Deuteronomy 18, God says that whoever does the things of a medium or necromancer is an abomination, and so Israel must not do those things.² *[pause]*

² See Deuteronomy 18:9-14.

Then in Leviticus it is especially direct, as it says things like, “Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.”³

Or, “If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.”⁴

And finally, God says, “A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them.”⁵ *[pause]*

Pretty clear how God views this kind of stuff, isn't it?

Necromancy is such a big deal because it's rebellion against God.

It's trying to circumvent God in order to get something, therefore it's a turning *away* from God.

And that's what Saul does here. [pause]

He knew the utter sinfulness of mediums and necromancers, for he even expelled them from the land, yet he goes to one. *[pause]*

This shows how bad Saul has gotten.

He's in a sad and sorry state.

And why is he in such a condition?

Because God has turned away from Saul. *[pause]*

God doesn't answer his inquiries, and then later on, when Samuel asks Saul why he has disturbed him, Saul tells him that it's because God has turned away from him.

And Samuel confirms this by saying, “Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy?” *[pauseeee]*

But slowing down a little bit, what does it actually mean that God turns away from you?

It's this image of not having the favor of God.

It's this image of enmity, as there's no more fellowship or blessing, but only hostility. [pause]

So when God turns away from you, it is not a good place to be in.

If He turns away, you experience darkness, as you are under judgment, and that's exactly what Saul was experiencing. [pauseeeee]

³ Leviticus 19:31.

⁴ Leviticus 20:6.

⁵ Leviticus 20:27.

But how did Saul get into this position? Rebellion.

Samuel says, “Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day.”

Even 1 Chronicles 10 tells us about the sin of Saul as it says, “So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance.

He did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.”⁶ *[pause]*

So don’t think that God is this mean God who is just picking on little innocent Saul, for it’s because of Saul’s sin. *[pauseeee]*

The Lord in His grace gave Saul many, many chances.

He anointed him king and made him king over Israel, he gave him the Spirit, and he was there available for Saul to turn to at any time.

Yet Saul consistently didn’t heed the Word of the Lord. *[pause]*

Even in this very story, we see that Saul is not this poor, innocent guy, who just wants to do good.

He has turned away from God, he has had time to repent, and yet now when he’s in a pinch and desperate, he wants an answer from God. *[pause]*

That’s not how it works.

When he inquires of God it’s not a trustful dependence on Him, but rather, just wanting information in order to beat the Philistines and preserve his life. *[pause]*

And further proof of his sinfulness is the fact that he *turns to* a medium, which the Law was very clear was a *turning away* from God. *[pause]*

Think more specifically about what Saul does.

He inquires of the Lord, then right after he hears no response, he says, “Seek a medium.”

So it’s like he spends as much, if not more effort seeking a medium than seeking the Lord. *[pause]*

There’s also another detail in this story that shows the rebellion of Saul’s heart, and it’s when he converses with the medium.

⁶ 1 Chronicles 10:13–14.

The medium is worried that this request to bring up Samuel is a trap, and Saul says, “As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.” *[pause]*

Wow, talk about an evil statement!

He uses the Lord in his oath, and declares that she will receive impunity for doing an abomination in God’s sight!

That’s straight up evil. *[pause]*

As you can see, Saul isn’t this genuine, innocent guy just trying to trust God for what to do, but he was trying to use God to get out of his situation of judgment.

He knew that his sin had led to God’s disfavor and that judgment hung over his head. *[pauseeee]*

The fact is that he wasn’t truly turning to God, for he turned to a medium.

His inquiring of God was like an outward form of religion with no inward repentance or strong desire to hear from God.

But a true, healthy relationship with God isn’t one of empty, outward form, but must be from the heart. *[pauseeeee]*

God had graciously spoken to Saul in his life, but Saul disregarded His words.

Now God is silent, giving him over to the consequences of his rebellion. *[pause]*

This is a serious truth.

If you consistently despise God’s Word, you will only face the consequences of your rebellion.

And once the Lord begins judgment, there is no more time for repentance. *[pauseeeee]*

The Bible shows us that we are all sinners.

God is good and holy, but we have sinned against him in rebellion.

We have been like Saul, as we have rejected His Word, and turned away from God.

This rebellion causes hostility between God and us, as God’s face is turned against us.

But that’s where Christ comes in.

Christ bridged the gap between us and God.

By Jesus’ sacrifice, atoning for our sins, we are no longer enemies of God, but we are reconciled to Him.

And all we have to do is trust in Christ's work on our behalf, and we are no longer alienated from the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

This is important for anyone who doesn't trust in Christ's work.

If you have never turned from your sins and turned in faith in Jesus Christ, then that means that God's face is turned away from you.

And you don't know when you will die and face judgment, for once you die, then there's no more chances of repentance, but only the grim reality of judgment. *[pause]*

You don't want to be in the place of Saul, who was an enemy of God.

So turn to Christ alone to save you, who will cause your relationship with God to be restored. *[pauseeeee]*

You see, Saul's state was truly a sad and sorry state, and anyone who is an enemy of God is in a sad and sorry state because of their sin.

It means that God has turned away from you, and that means abandonment and silence. *[pause]*

Saul tried to hear from God, but there was only silence.

But why?

Because God had already spoken and Saul rejected what was already spoken. *[pause]*

That's what Samuel brings out.

He basically says, "Why are you asking me? You have already heard what God has said. You have rejected God's prior words, so why are you trying to hear more?" *[pause]*

If you disregard what God has already told you, you can't expect to be given more and more.

Like an unbeliever who totally rejects the good news of Jesus Christ, but in crisis says, "God help me."

You have all the help you need in the Gospel, but you keep rejecting it.

If you truly want help, you turn to Christ.

By rejecting the good news, you have already shown that you do not want to heed God's Word, and the prior words of the Gospel still stand. *[pauseeeeeee]*

People are looking for some new knowledge, some new vision, when they have disregarded what God has already told them in His Word.

There's no more to be said. *[pause]*

So respond to the truth that you have heard!

The light of Jesus shines, but will you ignore it and try to find a different light? *[pauseeee]*

So there's abandonment and silence for those who God turns away from, but also, there's fear.

Saul was trembling and fearful.

Especially when he hears God's judgment through Samuel, he falls full length onto the ground in fear. *[pause]*

When you do not have the hope of the Gospel, there is only fear of death.

You become a slave to fear because what hope is there without Christ? *[pause]*

Saul knew that he was under judgment, so fear overtook him.

When you face the Judge, all you can do is fear, and this fear leads to desperation. *[pauseeee]*

Saul was grasping at straws, looking for something that would help him out of his hopeless plight.

He's so desperate he goes to a medium, which was forbidden by God.

In fact, he even has to go near enemy lines to get to the medium.

Let's look at the map. *[show map in PPT]*

The Philistines are in Shunem, Saul is encamped at Gilboa, and then he has to go all the way up to En-dor to meet this medium.

That's how desperate he was that he took the risk of being caught by the Philistines to go to her.

He was truly a desperate man. *[pause]*

This is the sad reality of life without God.

It's a desperate attempt to find anything to fill the void of truth and hope.

People will turn to drugs, alcohol, work, status, entertainment, or even weird new age religions in order to find relief.

They are like Saul, desperately trying to find something to get them out of their predicament, but they are looking everywhere but the true source of truth and hope. *[pauseeee]*

I know of this one popular person who has completely turned away from the faith, but now he feels like he still needs to be spiritual, so he searches out to be satisfied in some vague, mystical spirituality.

This is desperation and hopelessness revealed, and deep down they are seeking something to help, but in all the wrong places. *[pauseeee]*

If that is you this morning, I pray that you will turn to Christ, as your only hope.

He came to this world, suffered and died, so that “whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”⁷

You can know the truth, have hope, and no longer be under judgment. *[pauseeeee]*

Saul was in a sad and sorry state.

Because of his rebellion, God had turned His face away from Saul, and Saul was a desperate, fearful, and hopeless person.

This is the picture of someone without Christ, and it should cause us to have great compassion on them.

This should motivate us to be out there sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others, so that they can have the hope that only Christ can bring. *[pauseeee]*

Truly, God turning away from you is a sad and sorry state, but we also notice that...

II. God turning towards you comes because of grace!

What’s the difference between David and Saul? How they respond to God’s free grace. *[pause]*

If you remember, last week we learned about David’s inconsistent faith and how he was in a dilemma, as he had to potentially fight Israel.

Then all of a sudden the writer stopped the story abruptly and told us this story of Saul in an even worse dilemma.

Why would the author do that?

I believe it was to show us a clear contrast between David and Saul.

David is in a dilemma because of his inconsistent faith, but God is still with him in grace.

In contrast, Saul is in an even worse dilemma because God is not with him, as Saul has rejected God’s free grace. *[pause]*

This shows us that neither one of the anointed kings was perfect, but by God’s grace, David was not abandoned, and would be seated on the throne someday.

It wasn’t based on their merit, but based on God’s grace. *[pause]*

⁷ John 3:16.

So also, the only reason that God turns His face towards us is because of His grace in Christ.

God turns towards us because he turned away from Christ on the Cross.

Christ was forsaken, so that we no longer have to be.

Christ was judged for our sin, so that we no longer have to face condemnation.

He went through darkness, so that we could experience life and light. *[pause]*

Praise God that He turns towards us at all, and it's all because of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

We don't deserve anything, yet God in grace provides the way for us to be reconciled to Him.

He provided Jesus, and we just have to trust in what Jesus has done - that's pure grace.

We don't have to work for it, we don't have to do a million steps, we just have to receive the gift in faith. *[pauseeee]*

Oh, what marvelous, matchless grace of God that we are not abandoned in our trials!

That changes your perspective on trials, doesn't it?

As you go through trials, it makes a huge difference whether God is with you or not.

Though David was in a tough situation, God was still with him and working through him.

But to not have God with you, like Saul, is an infinitely worse situation to be in. *[pauseeee]*

God in His grace through Christ's work turns His face towards us, so that we have blessing and favor and life.

And yet I want you to think about the ways that we act like we are in Saul's sad and sorry state... *[pause]*

Sometimes we think that we are abandoned like Saul, don't we?

We feel like He is silent, but what has God told us? "I will never leave you nor forsake you."⁸

Oh, the grace of God's presence through Christ! *[pause]*

Sometimes we live in fear like Saul, trembling when we face intimidating circumstances.

But what has God told us? "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."⁹

Oh, the grace of God's comfort through Christ! *[pause]*

⁸ Hebrews 13:5.

⁹ Isaiah 41:10.

Sometimes we become desperate and hopeless like Saul, and we turn to other places outside of His Word.

But what has God told us to do? “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”¹⁰

Oh, the grace of God’s hope-giving promises through Christ! *[pause]*

Sometimes we act like we are under judgment like Saul and we act like we are still an enemy of God.

But what has God told us? “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”¹¹

Oh, the grace of God’s forgiveness through Christ! *[pauseeeee]*

Praise God for His mercy in turning His face towards us because of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf, but let’s not act like God’s face is turned away, if we have believed in Him.

Instead, lets...

Wait and hope in the Lord, whose grace and Word give life!

This story of Saul shows us that fear and desperation can lead us to look for answers in places that we never would have imagined. *[pause]*

When you face a crisis, where do you turn?

Do you act like God’s face is turned away, and you go searching like Saul in En-dor?

Or do you wait and hope in the Lord, saying like the psalmist, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.”¹² *[pause]*

Don’t seek anything else, for we already have all that we need in Him through His Word.

He has given us everything we need for life and godliness.¹³

Even when we feel like God isn’t present, we trust His Word, wait on Him, and keep seeking His face.¹⁴

It’s totally worth it, for through His Word you find grace and life. *[pauseeeeeee]*

There’s this passage in Isaiah that connects really well with this story in front of us this morning.

¹⁰ Hebrews 10:23.

¹¹ Romans 8:1.

¹² Psalm 130:5.

¹³ A reference to 2 Peter 1:3.

¹⁴ This is what David does in Psalm 13.

It talks about God's Word, mediums, and necromancers, which we heard about today.

Just listen to it - this is from Isaiah 8:19-20...

“When they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony!” *[pause]*

That's what we need to remember when we are tempted to look for answers elsewhere, remember to go, “to the teaching and to the testimony!” *[pause]*

To God's Word we go, as we wait for the Lord, and hope in Him.¹⁵

Why should God's people look elsewhere? For we live “by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”¹⁶

¹⁵ See Isaiah 8:17, which is a couple verses before what I just quoted.

¹⁶ Matthew 4:4b.