

The All-Powerful Spirit of God

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- [0 : 0 0] 1 Samuel 19, starting at verse 18. So David fled and escaped, and went to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him.
- And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naoth. Now it was told Saul, saying, Take note, David is at Naoth in Ramah. Then Saul sent messengers to take David.
- When they saw the group of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.
- And when Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. Then Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also.
- Then he also went to Ramah, and came to the great well that is at Seku. So he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David?
- [1 : 0 1] And someone said, Indeed, they are at Naoth in Ramah. So he went there to Naoth in Ramah, and the Spirit of God was upon him also. And he went on and prophesied until he came to Naoth in Ramah.
- And he also stripped off his clothes, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and laid down naked all that day and all that night.
- Therefore, they say, Is Saul also among the prophets? The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Please be seated.
- The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord stands forever. We have a few kids with us, and so let me ask this question, but it could be equally true for some of the toughest men in our group.
- Are you afraid of moths? You know, the moths, it's the bad guys of the insects. They're like the ugly, nocturnal, bad, evil uncle of the butterflies.
- [2 : 1 2] The thing about moths, though, is that they're not very smart. One moth can see another moth fly straight into a campfire and get burned, and then the very next moment, that moth will go and do the exact same thing.
- They're not very smart. A moth doesn't learn the destructive power of fire through observation or warning. A moth has to learn through direct, painful contact.
- It has to go get singed or burned or even consumed entirely by the fire itself to learn the lesson. Brothers and sisters, we need to be wiser than moths.
- That's the application for today. You and I don't need to suffer the misery of resisting the Holy Spirit of God like Saul did.
- Instead, we need to behold in this story the power of God's Spirit and believe. One commentator made a bold claim about this passage we just read, difficult as it is.
- [3 : 1 8] Quote, This passage is the definitive Old Testament testimony to the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit, he, is the unpredictable, irresistible wind of God who subordinates all human malice, political power, and wicked intent to his immediate divine will.

So, that's the end of the quote. That's what we see in this passage. The all-powerful Spirit of God. And that's the title of today's sermon.

The all-powerful Spirit of God. I'd love to study this passage with you by asking three questions. I'll tell you what those are up front.

The first one is, Where is the all-powerful Spirit of God pleased to dwell? Where? The second one is, What response does the all-powerful Spirit of God demand?

[4 : 18] What response? And finally, To what end does the all-powerful Spirit of God act? What is his action all for? Well, let's begin with the first one.

Where is the all-powerful Spirit of God pleased to dwell? Would you please look again with me at verse 18? So, David fled. Remember, he's fleeing from the courts of Saul.

And he escaped. And he went away. So, here's David being exiled from the kingdom. He was promised a courtly life. To be close to the king.

And he's having to go away in exile. And where does he go? Verse 18 says, He went to Samuel. At Ramah. Now, remember, Ramah were those mountaintops.

Those two big mountains where Samuel lived his whole life. That was like the hub of Samuel's ministry. And Samuel's been out of the picture for a long time now. It's all been Saul's foolishness.

[5 : 16] And when David got there, verse 18 says, He told Samuel all that Saul had done to him. That's all that we're given in this verse. But in our minds, we can only empathize with David.

Why was he going back to Samuel? Remember, Samuel is the one through whom God gave David this promise, You will be king. Samuel anointed David. And it seems like this promise of God is not going to be realized.

This is not going well for David. Yes, the Lord made Goliath fall at his feet and slayed the Philistines. But within the house of Saul, it's a mess. How is God going to give him the throne?

Because we've got a mad king that won't let go of it. It makes logical sense that David would flee back to Samuel. I imagine this dialogue as David arrives up these mountains, And there's old Samuel.

Where's your wife, David? She helped me flee in the middle of the night. Why? Well, because King Saul tried to kill me. When did this happen?

[6 : 21] When? Which time? More than once? Three times. But Michal, your wife, is helping you. His daughter, yes. And Jonathan, yes. He's helping too.

Samuel, simply, we're reading the rest of the verse, Says that David stayed with him. And then he and Samuel went and stayed in Naoth.

I don't know if Samuel had many words at this point yet. But what Samuel is providing David is refuge. He's providing him a safe place to retreat.

And he's not alone. He's not in isolation. He's safest when he's with God's people. Because that's what Naoth tells us. Naoth means dwelling or habitation or a commune.

It was a residential theological boarding school. We could even say almost like a seminary. Students would learn God's law. They would learn the history of God's faithfulness to his people.

[7 : 24] They would pray, sing, and listen to God's word. And they would prophesy, which means they would declare God's truth to God's people. What would this have looked like as David watched?

So he gets up to the mountaintops with Samuel up at Ramah. Then he follows him to the dwelling where all these men are gathered to study God's law and declare God's word. Well, look at verse 20.

Samuel stood as leader over the group of prophets, prophesying. And the spirit of God was upon them. Can you imagine that sight?

Now, verse 20 says there was a group of them. The group. We're not told how many or how few. It doesn't matter. The power of God does not depend on numbers.

Amen? It depends on whether or not the almighty spirit of God is upon a people. And the spirit of God was upon this group. Now, this word, the group of prophets, in verse 20, is that how yours is translated in English?

[8 : 38] A group? The term in Hebrew specifically refers to an assembly. One commentator pointed out, its use here emphasizes that the prophets were functioning as a corporate, organized body under the leadership of Samuel.

Here's a gathered, organized assembly with Samuel leading them. It's a structured community dedicated to spiritual instruction. This is where God is pleased to dwell.

A site where the spirit of God is now demonstrably active among them. And wouldn't you love to be there? Like David, taking all this in.

You just go from almost being killed in your own bed, under your own roof, to now being on the mountains with Samuel, and seeing the spirit of God move as his word and his truth is being declared.

It would be amazing. God had driven David to a place where his spirit was pleased to dwell. This is the safest place for David or for any soul.

[9 : 46] It's where the presence of God is. Yes, David was exiled out of his own home, but God was already accomplishing his redeeming purposes in David right here at this place.

God never forgets his promise. David would still become the king. And this exile was an intentional part of how God would prepare David for the great office of king, especially pointing to Jesus Christ.

This school of prophets at Ramah, it existed for the purpose that pleased God, to declare God's truth, to speak God's word.

It's an assembly gathered under the word of God. And he taught David the history of Israel. Most likely, here's where he got spiritual and theological instruction. From schools like this is also how the Lord raised up other psalmists and others who the Lord would inspire to breathe out portions of scripture.

This is work that God was superintending and using to preserve a remnant of his people, even in the darkest time in Israel. Wherever you and I can see the purpose that pleases the Lord, there we can see a place where the Spirit of God is pleased to dwell.

[11 : 07] To put it another way, if a church loses sight of what is pleasing to God, we should not be so arrogant as expect the Spirit of God to dwell with us. Every true church is like the school at Ramah.

God is pleased to dwell in local churches. In the New Testament, the church is called the household of God. What do you do in a household? You live there.

You rest there. You dwell. And you commune there. Ephesians 2.22 also calls the church the temple of God. This is the place where he fills with his glory.

We need to make sure that our purpose as a local church is always pleasing to God. That this is a place where he will dwell. Our Constitution has a beautiful statement of purpose.

And it's five-fold. What is our purpose? It's under God's Word. He's given us our purpose. Here it is. Number one, to glorify and enjoy God by providing a place for corporate worship of God in praise, prayer, and in proclaiming his law and gospel.

[12 : 16] Number two, to glorify and enjoy God by proclaiming the holy triune God of the Bible as eternal, immutable, infinite, all-powerful, all-present, all-knowing creator, and sovereign Lord.

Number three, our purpose is to glorify and enjoy God by building up, strengthening, confirming, and equipping in the faith all those who are saved, that God has brought to us at this church.

Number four, it's to glorify and enjoy God by earnestly endeavoring to win others to Christ through biblical evangelism, mission, and church planting, bidding, come, ye sinner, come and welcome to Jesus Christ.

And number five, our purpose is to glorify and enjoy God by upholding both sound doctrine and holy living by God's help. That's a purpose that pleases God.

How do we know that? Because God is the one who has told us that in his word. We need to be a church under the word of God, and we can count on that blessing. He will be pleased to dwell with his church.

[13 : 25] God was teaching David to rely not what on his eyes could see, but on the invisible Holy Spirit, whose presence was powerfully known and experienced.

We have that same call from God. In Romans 8, 31, we don't need to fear man, what we can see in this world. What then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? And church, God is for us. He is pleased to dwell with us, and he has more interest than anyone else in seeing his purposes go forth in this congregation.

So as a church, let's remember this same lesson. We must rely on the invisible spirit of God. We must not rely on our own defenses. We don't flee behind fortified walls or human plans.

In our greatest conflicts, we learn, like David, to rely entirely on the Holy Spirit. He alone can silently and sovereignly restrain our strongest foes.

[14 : 35] We are being hunted down, each one of us. We need to retreat to church. Just as David fled to the presence of God, we need to retreat as often as the church doors are open, so to speak, out of love for your soul, come to the presence of God with his people.

This is where the all-powerful Spirit of God is pleased to dwell. Second question, what response does the all-powerful Spirit of God demand?

What response does the all-powerful Spirit of God demand? As you enter his presence, you know he is real and active and working, and he doesn't let you remain neutral.

He demands a response. Look at verse 19. Now it was told Saul, saying, Take note, David is at Naioth in Ramah. Verse 20, Then Saul sent messengers to take David.

And when they saw the group of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

[15 : 41] Now they're called messengers here, but their mission was to take David. And these are the same servants most likely who do all of Saul's bidding.

These are the same servants most likely who had been ordered to stand outside of the house of David and slay him in the morning. These are messengers on a mission to prove to their king now, King Saul, they are not failures because their own heads could be on the chopping block for failing to kill him the first time.

I believe these are the same assassins coming now to either bring him back dead or alive so that Saul's misery can be over, or so he thinks. And what happens as they approach the presence of the Holy God?

The Spirit came upon them, and they also prophesied. The term for prophesy signifies that they were being moved or being caused to prophesy, rather than simply uttering a calculating message of their own.

It was God stirring them and overriding their own faculties, making them say these things. God doing that to them against their will.

[17 : 00] God powerfully confirming his presence. You see how God comes to defend David. And in this case, the way God defends David is completely supernatural.

The Spirit acts as an invisible, impenetrable barrier, neutralizing human evil simply by seizing these messengers.

What we have here are these assassins coming to kill God's man, and instead they become worshipers of the one true God. Now here, after this powerful report comes back to King Saul, you would expect him to be caught off guard, be amazed, and possibly even learn his lesson.

You know, don't be like that stupid moth that keeps flying into the fire. But it seems like Saul's logic says, okay, that could have been a coincidence. Maybe those were the weakest among all of my messengers.

Let me send some more. He's basically doing a scientific experiment. Let's test and see if it will reproduce now. Look at verse 21. When Saul was told what happened, he sent other messengers and they prophesied likewise.

[18 : 19] Then Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also. These messengers were sent to seize David, to grab him, but instead they were seized by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit turned their hostile intent into a public display of divine power. Matthew Henry commented, God's servants are sometimes protected by the spirit of prophecy coming upon their enemies, and they are struck with an awe that restrains their violence and makes them unable to prosecute their malicious designs.

That's the end of his quote. Now, Paul does this once, twice. I'm sorry, Saul. Once, twice, three times he keeps doing this. And every time he gets the same supernatural intervention.

This repetition, though, in the narrative, it creates a rhythmic structure that builds up the tension, and it really exposes the irony of this whole situation.

Saul could not be more stubborn, and he's trying to use his might, using all the forces of the army to accomplish his will, and yet he's exposed as incredibly weak and powerless.

[19 : 41] His stubborn denial, it reveals he's truly unsubmitive to God. And here's where the irony comes to the climax. He says, I'll have to just go do it myself.

Look at verse 22. Then he, Saul, also went to Ramah and came to the great well that is at Seku. And he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David?

And someone said, Indeed, they are at Naioth in Ramah. So he went there to Naioth in Ramah. The Spirit directs and restricts movement according to his will.

Even if you're the king of a nation, you don't have the power to bend God to your will. The Spirit of God in this case is an uncontrollable, powerful wind, we could say.

It's invisible, but it's undeniable. And what happens in Saul's case we see is a man that's truly in bondage. His rage escalates to the point where he's going to go there himself.

[20 : 58] And the Spirit's power proves relentless. It matches him and overcomes him. Saul's stubbornness and the failures of his messengers repeated three times.

It demonstrates the Holy Spirit's consistent and firm restraint against the king's stubborn will. Saul thought he was acting by his own free will, but his unrepentance proved that his will was not free at all.

It was completely bound, like a prisoner of war wrapped in chains under the curse of sin. The Holy Spirit has given us, all who would read this passage of 1 Samuel 19, a wonderful glimpse, a wonderful foretaste of the power of God.

Just like Sinclair Ferguson on the Holy Spirit calls it like a thimble full of the power of the Spirit in this one small episode. Just a foretaste of the power of God that will be unleashed in the New Testament after the finished work of the true anointed one, Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

His power is efficacious. You know, sometimes over church history, it's become a point of debate. And the question is, is it too strong of a term to describe the work of the Holy Spirit as irresistible?

[22 : 26] Well, ask Saul's messengers, is it too strong of a term? The Holy Spirit moves in an irresistible way, and God does not change.

He was pleased to work that way in this Old Testament passage, and he's pleased to work that way still today. Amen. I think of the contrast in response.

What response does this powerful Holy Spirit demand? Remember how Jonathan, having the grace of God liberate his will, he took off his royal garments and gave them to David, conceding the throne.

Jonathan didn't resist the will of God. He humbly surrendered to it and was blessed. Now Saul, even though he could not keep the throne, he's trying to, with all the resources he has.

These assassins were sent to kill those who were being used by God to carry out the plan of redemption, and they became worshipers.

[23 : 40] And Saul's stubbornness, he was opposing the Messiah, the coming Redeemer of God's people. And those assassins turned into worshipers.

Who does this remind you of in the New Testament? Someone going around killing Christians, killing the followers of Jesus. By the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit, he's caused to behold Jesus and become a worshiper.

It reminds you of Saul turned Paul, doesn't it? And Paul wrote in Romans 5.10, For if we were enemies of God, and we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

That's how powerfully the Holy Spirit is still at work today. Our confession of faith describes the powerful work of the Spirit this way. Second London Confession, chapter 7.

The Lord has ordained it that those who are saved should be brought out of the state of sin and death to the state of grace and salvation through Jesus Christ.

[24 : 54] How? By the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. It's a work of God to save sinners like Saul and like you and me. The canons of Dort reinforce this, and I love the language used here.

All those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are, listen to this, certainly, unfaithfully, and effectively born again.

Actually believing, which is not something brought about by the will of man, but is the work of God's marvelous grace. As the Scripture states in Romans 9.16, so then it is not of him who wills or runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Amen. Praise God for the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit. Any one of us has repented and stopped being stubborn like Saul.

It's because of the effectual, marvelous, certain, unfailing, and effective work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So how can you and I respond?

[26 : 09] We don't want to resist the Holy Spirit, even if we could, like King Saul did. Instead, we want to repent. If you feel the Holy Spirit's conviction, yield to him.

Pray that the Spirit would come upon you with a saving, transforming power that renews your will. And if you and I repent, it's because this all-powerful Spirit of God has blown life into our souls.

And it's a gracious mercy of God. The missionary Jim Elliott, who moved to work with the tribe off the coast of Ecuador, I believe it was, he was martyred.

His life was taken. But he had this written down that got published by his wife years later. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Don't resist God in the weakness of your pride. Repent by the power of God for his glory. This is the response that the all-powerful Spirit of God demands.

[27 : 19] The third question, to what end does the all-powerful Spirit of God act? In this passage, the Spirit of God is acting powerfully for what purpose, to what end?

Let's look at our last two verses. Verse 23, Then the Spirit of God was upon Saul also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth and Ramah.

And he also stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel in like manner. And he laid down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, is Saul also among the prophets?

So there's the king laying naked all day and all night before Samuel. But he's not asleep. He's prophesying. His mouth is still speaking God's word.

What a crazy scene. The Hebrew word for naked here, though, does not always imply total nudity. In biblical context, it frequently describes someone who has been stripped of their outer garments or their armor or royal robes, leaving them only in their under tunic like a linen garment.

[28 : 34] It is highly probable that Saul had his royal regalia stripped off of him. Earlier in 1 Samuel 15, you remember when Saul grabbed Samuel's robe and it tore, God says, this is what's going to happen to you.

The kingdom will be torn out of your hands. Well, most likely that's what's now coming to in full bloom. The spirit painting a picture of the king there laying on the floor all day and all night, unknowingly resigning his office, lying vulnerable and unkinged before the true anointed one.

Saul, the king for Israel is a picture of their national power and God has stripped him of all royal dignity before he can even reach his target. You know, the other one started prophesying once they got there.

He's already, God's already got him and he's prophesying all the way to their place. And then this expression at the end, therefore they say, is Saul also among the prophets?

That's not the first time you heard that. Remember at the very beginning when Saul was hiding in the baskets and, you know, then he went on this roundabout journey and he got caught up with the prophets and they said that even at the beginning before he became king, is Saul even among the prophets?

[30 : 00] Like it was something to laugh about. And here it's repeated again. And these two expressions being used twice now, they serve as as book ends, highlighting the tragic trajectory of Saul's kingship, the sovereign will of God both in his rise and in his fall.

The power of God over the king from start to finish. Charles Spurgeon's comment on this difficult passage was wonderful.

What we see here, brothers and sisters, is that the Holy Spirit can lay a man on his back with a single word. He can cast him down from his high horse of pride and make him prophesy.

The very same power which softens the heart of a saint can bind the hand of a sinner. That's the end of Spurgeon's quote.

David's life was protected because the lineage of David was leading directly to the prophesied Messiah. The Holy Spirit ensures that the prophetic timeline of redemption would remain unbroken.

[31 : 16] So to what end is the Holy Spirit working and acting? It's to the end of preparing a people for God the Son. Jonathan Edwards commented, the work of redemption is the greatest of all God's work.

It is the end of all God's other works. So here God is working for the greater end of redeeming mankind through Jesus Christ. Every sinner who will repent and turn to him.

Galatians 4.4 encourages us when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law. And it's from this line from this line of David that Jesus would come in the fullness of time.

So the Spirit's work in naoth that day was an essential active step in ensuring that the fullness of time would arrive exactly as God ordained it.

The power of the Holy Spirit is absolute and sovereign and it will accomplish the end to which God designed it. Calvin commented, there is not a drop of rain that falls on the ground but by the express direction of God.

[32 : 31] God is the ultimate restraint over human malice, the compelling power over human authority and the purposeful protector of God's redemptive plan.

That's the end to which God acts. So brothers and sisters, let's rest in God's purpose. Know that the Spirit is orchestrating even the most humiliating or confusing events in your life and in mine for his greater purpose which is the advancement of his kingdom and our sanctification.

His work secures our destiny in Christ. May you and I know more and more and more the active, protective, peace-filling presence of the all-powerful Spirit of God today.

Amen. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we praise you for your power, your might, your purpose. It's marvelous, Lord.

We can only grasp you by faith and yet it's undeniable. Your Spirit has blown in our hearts. You've stirred us up to you.

[33 : 48] You've caused us who once hated you to love you. We pray that you will turn our hearts to you, Lord. Grow our faith. Please cause us to believe.

Cause us to rest in you and to know this personally, the power of your Spirit, Lord. We ask this for your glory in our lives, your purpose in your church.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.