

1 Samuel CH16/17

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Date: 12 January 2013

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back then to that chapter we're going through, for the benefit of those who are visiting with us this evening, we're going through a step-by-step, week-by-week study in the life of Saul. We've kind of seen his reign, we've looked at his reign and the tragedy that there was in him failing to keep what God commanded him to do. And for that reason, of course, God said to him that he was going to take the kingdom out of his hand and give it into the responsibility of someone else. And we know, of course, who that was. It was David who God was preparing at the same time. And last week, of course, we looked at chapter 17 and we looked at the faith, particularly in terms of the nature of David's faith. And we saw how inspiring it was, what a tremendous example it was as to how we need to see things from God's perspective.

If God is for us, then who can be against us? That's a timeless message. It doesn't just apply to God's people in the Old Testament or the New Testament, it applies to the church and to God's people in every age. If God is for us, then who can be against us? And that needs to be our driving force, our inspiration every day as we face the challenges and the difficulties that there are in living for the Lord. Verse 55, 17 verse 55, as soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistines, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, as your soul lives, O king, I do not know. And so on. Now, what I want to do this evening is just three things. I hope I don't confuse anybody. I want to ask, first of all, what was the evil spirit from the Lord? And so the first passage that we read, of course, which is in the previous chapter, and perhaps you imagined that I was avoiding this very difficult passage in jumping from the main part of chapter 16 to the main part of chapter 17. Well, I don't want to avoid it because I think it's fascinating. And I want to ask, what do we make of this passage in chapter 16 at the end of, from verse 14 to verse 23? I think it's important also because it tells us something about Saul. Then I want, secondly, how can we account, to ask, how can we account for the apparent discrepancy that there is in chapter 17 and chapter 16, in which Saul appears not to know who David was? Now, that's a much simpler question. But then I want, thirdly, to go back into the body of chapter 17 and to revisit David and Goliath. So there's two questions, and then we're going to revisit David and Goliath and see it from a different perspective altogether. But now, first of all, then, I want to go back to chapter 16 and ask this fascinating question. Well, one that fascinates me anyway. What do we make of chapter 16 and verse 14? Now, the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, Behold, now an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our Lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who's skillful in playing the harp. So obviously the servants reckoned in some way that his condition, where this evil spirit from the Lord was tormenting him, would be alleviated by the playing of a harp. Very intriguing passage, isn't it? Very, very intriguing story. I don't want to spend too much time on it, but I do think it deserves our attention. What is an evil spirit, then? First of all, that's got to be the first question.

What is an evil spirit? Well, it could mean either of two things in the Old Testament. It could mean an actual evil spirit, i.e. a demon. I guess that's what we, that's, when you read that passage, that's what you first think of, isn't it? When you read the words, an evil spirit, you think, well, a demon, an evil spirit, one of Satan's angels. But then, how can an evil spirit be from the Lord? Well, I suppose you could try to work it out in the sense of God allowing the evil spirit to come and torment Saul. But then the second question would have to be, then, how in the world can an evil spirit be sent away by the playing of a harp? That doesn't make sense. That's superstition. So I'm going to say to you tonight that it's not an evil spirit in the sense of it being a demon. Now, you might disagree with this, and by all means do. There's quite a few questions after last week. That's fine. I'm going to suggest to you tonight that it's not an evil spirit in the sense of it being a demon. I'm going to say

that the word for spirit in the Old Testament in the Hebrew language can be something else. It can either be an actual spirit, like in a demon, but it can also mean simply an attitude, a mood, an influence, a wind.

[5 : 45] The word in Hebrew is very easy to remember. It is the word ruach. So I don't suppose there will be many people tonight who will forget that word. It can mean an evil spirit, as in a demon, but it can also mean wind. It can mean a presence. It can mean an influence or a mood. And that's the way I would like to suggest to you that this passage should be interpreted, especially in the light of the fact that it comes immediately after the words, the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. Now, if God's spirit who put him there, he would have read into that is that the presence of the Lord, the power of the Lord, God's accompaniment in order to fulfill the purpose of his kingship, it was now taken away from him, leaving him with nothing. And so what came in was a horrendous darkness. You could call it a depression, but I don't want to use that word because it's not a clinical depression. It's not the kind of medical depression that many people suffer from. Always careful before using that word. But this was a darkness that came in as a result of God's spirit departing from him. And that does not mean to say that sometimes when we suffer what we think is darkness, that that means that God's spirit has departed from us. The two things don't follow. This was a one-off. It was a unique occasion when God had withdrawn himself from Saul and what came in was a horrendous darkness, a sense of despondency.

A sense in which the whole world was crumbling around him. And so it's no wonder that you see him quaking in fear in chapter 17 because his strength had gone. His reason for being a king was now taken away from him. He knew that he was under the judgment of God and God was no longer going to assist him in the same way as he did before. And so what came in was where there's a vacuum, all kinds of undesirable feelings will come in. And that's, I believe, what happened to his poor Saul.

And so it's easy to see that if that's what the evil spirit means, why the simple playing of a harp gave him some relief from his condition? So that's the way that I would like to suggest to you for this passage here at the end of chapter 14. And that appears to be his first, in the providence of God, that appears to be Saul's first introduction to the young man David. He came into his court and because he was skilled as a harpist, he played the harp whenever this mood, whenever this darkness came on Saul and it helped him in some way. And it appears that Saul in some way became attached to David. And I would imagine that that attachment would be because he felt such a tremendous relief when he played the harp. So that's the first question then. What does the evil spirit from the

Lord mean? In what sense was it from the Lord? In the sense that everything is from the Lord. The Old Testament often describes events as they happen, as coming from the Lord. For example, when we read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart way back in Moses' time. It's not that God was somehow working, wanting Pharaoh to sin. God never wants anyone to sin. It's God is in control of all things. He's governing and he's sovereignly, he's sovereignly arranging and working his own purposes to pass in everything that is. And it's the same here. He had withdrawn himself from Saul and now by his providence, this awful mood of despondency and probably anger and frustration was consuming Saul.

And we see this later on when Saul began to get jealous of David, when he began to dawn on him that this was his successor. And when the women started singing songs about David that inflated him, and that elevated him, Saul hated David. And it's all part and parcel of the same thing. It's a terrible thing to go on a path, to live on a path that is separate from God. That's what Saul chose. He chose to disobey God. He chose to put his own future on the line. Your choices are very, very important.

[11 : 06] They're life-changing. So make sure that tonight your choices are the right ones. Make sure you're listening to God because God is asking the same thing of every single one of us tonight, that we trust and that we follow and that we believe in his son, Jesus, who died at Calvary for us. That's what God is saying to us.

If you choose to disregard his way of life, then who knows what will come in instead. Remember the wise and the foolish builders, the wise man who built his house upon the rock. And when the rains came and the floods came, the house stood still. But when the house, with the house where he had built it on the sand, because he had disregarded, Jesus says, my words, the house collapsed. And that's in Saul. There's a house collapsed when it comes to the wind and the

rain. That's the first question then. And I hope that that's helped in some way. But by all means, come back at me if you have questions or if you disagree with that. The second one is going all the way back, sorry, rather all the way fast forwarding to 1 Samuel chapter 17, just after David slays Goliath. And it appears that Saul, or that's what we read anyway, as soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine. He said to Abner, the commander of the army, Abner, whose son is this youth? Abner said, I don't know. And Saul said, well, inquire who the boy is. And then they inquired, and the answer came back was that he was the son of Jesse. Now the question, of course, is this, is this not a discrepancy? And there are all kinds of people who will say to you tonight, well, and they studied the Bible for this particular purpose, so that they can point out the discrepancies in the Bible and the contradiction. They say the Bible is full of contradictions. Here is one of them. And is it not plain? Well, the first thing that strikes me, if this was so, so much of a contradiction, surely it would have been such to the person who wrote it in the first place. It's not difficult to spot this apparent discrepancy. I want to say to you that it's what appears to be a discrepancy. When you think about it, there are a host of other explanations in which it's probably not a discrepancy at all. In fact, I would say as a believer in God's word and the authority of God's word, it is definitely not a discrepancy because it can be explained in a variety of other ways. Some people might, some people suggest that the chronological order of these events is perhaps not as they are given in these passages could be. But I think a more likely scenario is simply this, that this is a king. He's surrounded by hundreds of people. He's meeting people all the time. He's having to learn their names. He's having to negotiate. He's having to discuss various issues that are arising in the kingdom. He gets up at five in the morning. He's talking to people all the time. And although he knows that there is this young man from Bethlehem who comes in every so often and he loves his harp playing and it does him so much good, yet he's so busy with other things. It's not registered properly who this young man is. It happens to me all the time.

You meet somebody and you maybe meet them two or three times and then a few weeks pass, you meet them again. You don't know who they are. Happens to me all the time. Probably happens to some of you as well.

So the fact that it appears that Saul had no idea, that can be explained in other ways. It is not a discrepancy. It's simply the writer telling the story as it happened. It could also be that all Saul wanted to know was to be absolutely sure that Jesse was his father because he had promised relief from taxes to the man who went out against the Philistines. So this had to be done properly and formally. So he needed to know the name and address of the father of the man who had defeated the Philistines. So he had to get it. This was him getting it formally from Abner, the commander of the army. The Bible can be explained. The Bible is trustworthy, but it's honest. It tells the story as it happened. These are eyewitness accounts of God's power and God's might as they took place all those thousands of years ago.

[16:00] Well, the third thing I want us to think about this evening is to go back and to revisit David and Goliath. We saw last week how, again, like I say, we're so inspired by the faith of David as he goes up against Goliath in the strength and in the power of God. And somebody asked me afterwards, well, why did David pick up five stones?

Was his faith defective? Should he not have believed that the first stone, the one stone, would do the job? And there are all kinds of questions. I'm sure that you've asked that question on many, many occasions.

Why would David have five? Is there any meaning? There are some people that try to find meaning in every single verse in the Bible. Some kind of spiritual meaning. Some kind of hidden meaning. I don't believe, I have to say, maybe I'm completely insensitive on this score, but my own position is simply this, that he picked up five stones because he picked up five stones.

He was prepared. And although he went in faith to meet the giant, there was no significance whatsoever in his five stones. It could have been six, it could have been three. He simply picked up the five stones because he wanted to be ready. At the same time as trusting in God, he was putting his own skill into practice. And that's the way God works.

[17:35] It's the same time as trusting in God. We have to put our own skill into practice because it's God that's given us the skill. And God expects us to use the gifts to his glory and for his reasons.

But what I really want to talk about this evening is how this event looks forward to the death of Jesus Christ.

Now let's stop for a moment and try and remind ourselves of something which is so special about the Old Testament. The Old Testament, of course, is a history of God's people and how God called Abraham way back in Genesis chapter 12. And from that point onwards, there's a history of the Israelite people and how God revealed himself to the various people and took them through the difficulties and the sufferings and they took them through the wilderness and into the promised land and so on. But I want us also tonight to remember that the whole of the Old Testament looks forward. It's a sign that points forward in time to the moment when Jesus would come into the world. We absolutely have to read the Old Testament in that light. It doesn't just stand by itself. And every so often in the Old Testament, there are particular glimpses, short, sharp, powerful glimpses. There's a flash that opens up for us what would one day happen in the Old Testament, what would one day happen when Jesus came and when he would die on the cross. Now, the question, of course, to what extent in the Old Testament people understand these glimpses, well, that's another question altogether. But nevertheless, unquestionably, we can look back at the Old Testament and through the eyes of Jesus and through the eyes of the cross, we are able to see these places. Now, there are some people in the Old Testament who God wants us to see Jesus in.

[20 : 01] There are some places in the Old Testament who God wants us to see Jesus in.

There are some events in the Old Testament that God wants us to see Jesus in. For example, Abraham and Isaac.

And God told Abraham to take his son, his only son, whom he loved, and to offer him up on Mount Moriah as a sacrifice to him. And off Abraham went.

And off Abraham went. Just the two of them climbed the mountain. He laid Isaac out and was just about to kill him as a burnt offering.

It is so clear and so obvious in that passage and in that story that God is revealing to us something of what he would one day do to his own son, to bring him to the spot, to the place where God had assigned for him to lay down his life except this time.

[21 : 13] Whereas God had stopped Abraham from plunging the knife into Isaac. He put his hand out and he stopped him. He said, don't do it. And Jesus, when it came to his own son, he went all the way and laid down his life on the cross.

You have something similar in the story of Joseph. Where Joseph was beloved by his father. And yet despised by his own household. Where they sold him for 20 pieces of silver. And where he spent years in darkness and in the very depths of the earth, if you like. He went all the way to prison. And then all of a sudden was elevated from prison to sit at the right hand of the king. Don't tell me that that's not a story that in some way prefigures or foreshadows the coming of Jesus Christ and the life that he would live and the work that he would do one day for our sins.

And there are all kinds of places in the Old Testament where you can see glimpses. Rather like a trailer on TV. It sometimes just gives you a burst. I've seen a sudden scene of what's to come.

[22 : 36] The Old Testament is a trailer of what was to come in the Lord Jesus Christ. Where God every so often gave to his people just that very quick vision.

He didn't tell them everything. But he told them enough for them to grasp in a measure. And to put their faith in that one day God's Messiah would come and remove our sin in his death.

Now I want to suggest to you that this passage where David kills Goliath is one of these places. I want to suggest to you that David himself is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

And what I mean by that is if you look at the life of David you can see glimpses at times. Not all the time David sinned with Bathsheba and the killing of Bathsheba's husband.

There were other times when David fell and when he sinned. I'm not talking about these times but I'm saying once again that in the life of David there are features of his life.

[23 : 41] For example he was a shepherd. He was the shepherd king. He came out of obscurity. We saw that in the last chapter. Nobody knew who he was. All of a sudden he comes into his home and he is anointed king.

God elevates him to a place where he is a man after God's heart and a king of righteousness. All of these are meant to point us in the direction of another shepherd king that was still to come.

The shepherd king that we know as Jesus Christ. And this event once again draws our attention not only to the power of God and the safekeeping of God for his people Israel.

But how God was casting their minds forward to one day when another shepherd king would represent Israel and go and face the enemy, the arch enemy.

And defeat him decisively on the cross at Calvary. Very often we look at the, we understand the cross as being the place, quite rightly, as being the place where Jesus laid down his life as a sacrifice for our sin.

[25 : 05] And where he became sin for us and where he suffered the wrath of God. And because he died for us, we have forgiveness by believing in him.

And that's true, of course, that's what the gospel is all about. But sometimes in the New Testament, it describes the death of Jesus in a slightly different way in terms of him defeating the enemy.

Satan, the devil. Like, for example, in Colossians chapter 2, where it describes Jesus of having spoiled principalities and powers. That's what it means.

It means the power of the devil. He made a show of them openly. When his disciples came back from preaching the word, Jesus said, I saw Satan fall like lightning.

In Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 14, we're told that Jesus took flesh and blood. He became a man. So that through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

[26 : 10] That is, the devil. And deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. And that's exactly what happened with David and Goliath. When you think about it, David was Israel's representative.

There were the two armies. We saw that last week. There was a standoff between the two. There was the valley in between. And Goliath's challenge was, send me out a man to represent all of you. And if he dies, then you become our slaves. So this man, this representative was to take upon himself the responsibility for the whole Israelite army.

And David was willing to do that. So was Jesus. He took the responsibility of bearing the guilt and the sin and the shame of all of his people.

He went as our representative. He took it all on himself. So everything depended. All our salvation completely depended upon what would happen that day at the cross at Calvary.

[27 : 32] One man died for the people. That's what the gospel is all about. And we're told also that as David, he ran in the name of the Lord and he defeated.

He went out like a hero, risking his life for the sake of his people. But Jesus didn't risk his life. He gave his life. He knew that he would have to die.

He knew, whereas David went into an incredibly dangerous situation, towards a man who was much stronger than he was and all the odds were against him.

And yet he survived. Where Jesus, on the other hand, went into death for us.

Because it had to be that way. He couldn't stop. It had to be. It is finished. Where he gave up his spirit.

[28 : 40] There couldn't have been a stopping short. There were no half measures with Jesus. It had to go all the way to the end. That's why I know tonight that my sins are forgiven.

Because the Son of God stopped at nothing and gave himself and defeated the power of the evil one. And so the decisive victory was won on the battlefield here in chapter 17.

But supremely on the battlefield at Calvary, where Jesus, by his death, he defeated the power of the evil one decisively once and for all.

But he also did so in order to give us the victory over sin as well. Look what happens. When David killed the giant, it opened the floodgates for the army of Israel.

David's defeat of the giant was the signal.

[30 : 05] It was the decisive moment when the confidence and the power of God came upon the people. They were transformed. They realized that God was on their side.

That God was with them. Who could be against them? And so they gave chase. And they didn't stop. That's a picture of the result of the death of Jesus.

And the confidence that it gives us as new people. God's transformed people to live lives which rest on what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

And tonight, I know that we face a Christian life.

If you're a believer this evening, your life is full of difficulties. Struggles, temptations, difficult choices to make.

[31 : 09] Things that you don't know how to cope with. And sometimes you come to the point where you wonder, where is God in all of this?

Well, this passage reminds us that God was with his people. And that through the decisive victory in which the enemy had been defeated, there was victory for the people of God.

To go in strength and in the power of God. If I was to describe the Christian life tonight, I would simply say this.

The Christian life is a battle. Never, ever forget that. Every day, if you're a believer in Jesus, wake up in the morning and remember that the Christian life is a battle.

And when you remember that, then you won't be surprised when things get difficult. And when you have to face things which are really excruciating. When you have to face temptation that you feel that you can never overcome.

[32 : 20] Yes, you can. By the strength that God gives you. Yes, we can. Why? Because Christ has won the victory over the evil one.

He will not defeat God's people ultimately because he has been ultimately defeated himself. That doesn't mean he's not active. He's very active.

And he doesn't mean that he doesn't go about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

That's what the Bible says. That's the battle we're engaged in. It's not a battle in which we're using swords and shields and knives.

It's a battle in which we're living by faith in the Lord. And we're standing firm. And we're fighting the unseen enemy that continues to look for ways in which to trip us up and to destroy us.

So don't be surprised when he appears in various forms to try and distract us. To take our focus away from what we should be doing and how we should be living.

[33 : 24] Remember that the battle is the Lord's. And it's a battle which is ultimately won through the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Lord who spoiled the principalities and powers as we read in Colossians.

It's the same Lord who accompanies me and you every day as our shepherd king. As the one who has ultimate authority and has promised to be with his people giving them everything that they need.

So put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to take our stand in the evil day and having done everything to stand. Let's pray together.

We're going to bow our heads. Our Father in heaven we give thanks tonight for the certainty that we have. That Goliath has been defeated. And that his head has been taken away.

Removed by his own sword. We give thanks O Lord that we belong to the people of God who are ultimately victorious. Give us to see with the eyes of faith that one day that great victory will be made clear to everyone.

[34 : 41] Everyone in the world. When the whole world is able to see Jesus in his glory. And where every knee will bow. And every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Father in heaven meanwhile we pray for your strength.

Pray for your strength to meet the struggles that we are going to be meeting. We ask Lord that you will give us wisdom.

Give us thoughtfulness. Give us prayerfulness O Lord. Give us to know that you are involved in every element of our lives. Give us never to leave you out of anything but to pray about everything.

But Lord give us to rejoice in the Lord. To rejoice that we belong to the victor. Forgive our sin we pray in Jesus name. Amen.