

1 Samuel 17:55

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[0 : 00] 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?

[1 : 09] 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 Philistine, 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? 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.

[2 : 20] 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.

[3 : 39] Let our Lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is 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.

[4 : 52] 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, as in a demon, but it can also mean simply an attitude. A mood, an influence, a wind.

The word in Hebrew is very easy to remember. It is the word ruach.

[5 : 55] 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, and remember that the Old Testament, they didn't know about the Trinity.

So when we read out the spirit of the Lord, we know about the Holy Spirit. They didn't. What they 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.

[7 : 19] It's not the kind of medical depression that many people suffer from. I'm 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.

[8 : 18] 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 soul.

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.

[9 : 30] 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 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.

[10:44] 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. 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.

[11:50] 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 Philistines, 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.

[12:56] 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 contradictions.

They say the Bible is full of contradictions. Here is one of them. Is it not plain? Well, the first thing that strikes me, if this was 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'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, in 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 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.

[14:08] 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 and you don't know who they are.

It happens to me all the time. It 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.

[15 : 23] 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.

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 are so inspired by the faith of David as he goes up against Goliath and the strength and the power of God.

And somebody asked me afterwards, well, why did David pick up five stones? Was his faith defective?

[16 : 31] 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.

[17 : 30] And that's the way God works. At 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 is 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 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.

[19 : 14] 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.

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. When 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.

[20 : 34] 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.

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 the same, 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.

[22 : 23] 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 of scene, a sudden scene of what's to come.

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 : 39] 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 it draws our attention not only to the power of God and the safe keeping 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 where Jesus laid down his life as a sacrifice for our sin 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 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

[26 : 51] 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 our 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 the cross at Calvary 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 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 flood gates for the army of Israel they saw their moment of opportunity had come all the the confidence of the Philistines disappeared and they started fleeing down the road they went chased pursued by the

Israelite army killing them and destroying them all the way back to their home territory of Gath and Ekron David's defeat of the giant was the signal 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 are which rest on what Jesus has done for us on the cross and tonight I know that we face

Christian life if you're a believer this evening your life is full of difficulties struggles temptations difficult choices to make 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 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 goes 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 remember that the battle is the Lord's and it's a battle which is ultimately won through the

[33 : 30] Lord Jesus Christ the same Lord who spoiled the principalities and powers as we read in Colossians is 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 armor 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 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 oh 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 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 our 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 oh 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 us and we pray in Jesus name Amen