

Title: No Word = No Life
Text: 1 Samuel 28:1-7
Theme: The tragedy of a life apart from God's Word
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmt: The greatest blessing is the greatest curse when rejected.

Psalm 19 is vein of treasure in the gold-mine of the Bible. David writes of how God has revealed himself to all through creation and then how God has revealed himself specifically and even more personally through his Word. Psalm 19 was written as a song and verses 7-9 tell us what God's Word is and what it does. Notice the things God's Word is: perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true and righteous. Now notice the things that God's Word does: revives the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes and endures forever. Therefore, they are to be desired more than gold, because they are more precious than gold and sweeter than honey that freshly drips out of the honeycomb.

Follow the logic. Since this is what God's Word is (perfect, sure, pure, clean, true and righteous) this is the effect God's Word has on the person who sees it for what it is and accepts it for what it is. The person who believes God will experience their soul being revived, being made wise, having a heart that rejoices, being able to see with discernment and since God's Word endures forever, the person who believes God can continually experience these benefits. But there is another edge to this sword. Psalm 119:130 says that "the unfolding of your words gives light." So, if the revealing of, acceptance of, belief of, love of and trust in God's Word gives light, what would its rejection bring? Darkness. Without light, we are in darkness. The soul would not be revived. The simple would remain as fools. The heart would be heavy and the eyes would not be discerning and therefore, the person would have no idea what to do, nor have anyone to turn to in the face of distress. When the Word of God is rejected, the result is darkness. It is also death.

God's Word is described in 2 Timothy 3 as the breathing out of God. In creation, God spoke and life was born. God breathed into Adam and Adam became a living being. God's Word is life. Therefore, the rejection of that Word is death. It is darkness and death. Spiritual darkness and spiritual death are the ultimate tragedies. It is life's greatest burden to watch someone reject God and then see how over time the wheels come off, the life comes apart, the soul goes dark and you are powerless in the sense that you cannot make someone believe. If someone consistently rejects God's Word, God will stop talking. This is the ultimate darkness of silence. Saul started out as king with such promise. We had high hopes for him, but the power that was given him, became a cancer that grew in his soul until it killed all other life. The closing chapters of 1 Samuel is the closing of the life of Saul. Oh yes, this sets the stage for the rise of David, but don't rush over this because our text doesn't. As hard as it is, watch, listen, feel, experience the demise of this once great man. He dies as a result of his own unbelief. This is darkness. This is death.

Read Text: 1 Samuel 28.1-7

Our study of 1 Samuel is attempting to answer the question of: Who should be king? There are two people set before us and before the nation of Israel; Saul and David. Israel demanded to have a king in order to be like everyone else, and they got one. They got a king who is like the kings of this world. He, foolishly thought that he was king and that he could do whatever he wanted. He did not have to live under God's law, he could make his own laws, he could do as he pleased and now, we are seeing where this leads. Saul has been in a downward spiral of darkness. We've seen the episodes of madness, the evidences of one unhinged from reality, and the loss of moral authority. The walls of life are closing in on him. The end is coming.

As you can tell, there is a lot happening simultaneously. This is why the text focuses on David in chapter 27, Saul in chapter 28, David in 29 and 30 and then Saul in 31. There is a lot militarily, geographically, dynastically, personally, dramatically, but most of all theologically. I will speak to these, but this morning, I want to focus on these first 7 verses because they set the stage for how we are to see this history because this is how we are to see life; yours and all life.

1. **You are going to face a problem that you cannot fix.**

Chapter 28 opens up with David and Saul facing an enormous problem.

"In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel." (1a)

Our text briefly mentions how this affects David and then goes on to elaborate how this affects Saul. David appears to be in deep weeds. David is living in the town of Ziklag. He is close enough to Gath to be viewed as a vassal, but far enough away that Achish, the king of Gath does not actually know what David is doing. For 16 months, David had been living in between two worlds. He was in the land of the Philistines. He appeared to be loyal to the Philistines, but he was all the while, attacking some of Israel's ancient enemies and was acquiring much wealth and provisions for him and his men. For 16 months David and his men were able to have a home. or 16 months, they were able to eat and had a sense of where their next meal was coming from. But God did not call David to live in Ziklag, or to live in the land of the Philistines. For the time being, this arrangement worked out for David, but God won't let his children live on the border of two worlds. And now, the Philistines determined that it was time for them to renew their war against Saul and Israel. The plans were made, the kings agreed and the mobilization of the troops began.

There is no one king of the Philistines. The Philistines were organized by city/states. There were 5 royal cities, each one having a king who worked together with the other kings as needed to protect and promote their people. These kings determined that it was time to go to war again, and each king had to support that mission with men and supplies. Achish was the king of Gath and he viewed David and David's men as being under this authority. After all, that is what David agreed to. He came to Achish in order to be protected from Saul. Now, Achish and the other kings are going to attack Saul. Of course, David is expected to join in. He's a Philistine now. At least that's what Achish and the rest of Israel thinks.

We read this and rightfully think, “Oh no. This is really bad! What is David going to do?” He can’t fight against his own people, can he? David would not kill Saul in the cave and would not kill Saul when Saul was sleeping on the hill of Hachilah. Would David actually go to battle against Saul now? Achish certainly makes it clear what he expects David to do.

“Understand that you and your men are to go out with in the army.” (1b) You and your men. David is forced to take side. What is David going to do? His response is confident, even as it could be cryptic. There does not appear to be any hesitation, any gulping or deer in the headlights look, but this: *“Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.”* What does that mean? Achish thinks that he knows what it means. *“Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.”* You will be my servant for life. You will spend the rest of your life under my authority. And here is your title. You are the bodyguard of the king of Gath. The phrase that is translated bodyguard literally means, “the guard of my head.” Hmm, that is interesting in view of what David did to the head of another famous Philistine. But, Achish really believes that David is going to be loyal to him. What is David going to do? We don’t know. It doesn’t look good, does it? David is facing a problem that he cannot fix and he is only getting himself deeper and deeper into the mess. But we’re left hanging. The author now takes us to Saul.

Now don’t forget (3a), Samuel was dead. Everyone knew it. We had his funeral; we mourned his passing and he was buried in his home in Ramathaim. That may seem like a strange thing to say at this point in the story until you remember that this was now the first battle that Saul has with the Philistines since Samuel died. Samuel was the guy who would tell Saul what to do because God will tell Samuel what to do. The problem was, Saul wouldn’t do it. He treated the word of God, and even the prophet of God, like a good luck charm. But, when it came right down to it, Saul did what Saul wanted to do. He always tried to find a way out. He always tried to come up with some excuse or rationalization that would save him for another day.

But, verse 3 says something else that sounds a bit odd. *“Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land.”* Why are we told this now? Mediums and necromancers are like fortune tellers, psychics and seance leaders who try to contact the dead in order to find out what to do. We don’t know when Saul did this, but it was probably early on in his reign. This was a good thing that he did. Three times in Leviticus and once in Deuteronomy God prohibits his people from going to mediums and necromancers because it was a means of unbelief. The sin of divination was a serious offense that carried the death penalty in OT Israel. The fact that this is mentioned here is obviously going to factor into the story in some way.

Now we come to verses 4 and 5. The Philistines gathered all of their forces together for battle at Shunem and Saul gathered all of Israel’s forces at Gilboa. *“And when Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.”* Saul, like David was facing a problem that he could not handle. So much of Saul’s success against the Philistines was not because of Saul, but because of David. Saul was afraid of David (18.12). He knew that the LORD was with David. And now, David has joined himself to the Philistines and Saul knows this (27.4). In his mind, he not only has to fight the Philistines, he has to fight David. Saul is terrified and

has good reason for it. This was way beyond the limits of his leadership, what is worse, it was way beyond the boundaries of his faith in God.

You and I face and will continue to face situations that are way beyond our abilities to fix. In some cases, like it is with David, we contributed to them. But, in others, we did not cause this, yet we are in the middle of it.

I've been in contact with a friend of mine who is the faithful pastor of a church on Sanibel Island. Everything that he and his wife own now fit in his pick-up truck. His congregation is scattered, many of their homes are destroyed, his church has no place to meet, their building is a mess, the community is devastated and there is no path forward at this point. Jeramie did not cause this or ask for this, yet here he is in the middle of it. There are a lot of things in this life that are beyond us and that we can't manage on our own and we don't have the answers or the resources to come up with the plan that will make it all right. We all live in the shadowlands. We all live east of Eden. We are not home yet. There is no paradise on earth - yet.

2. That problem will reveal who you really are and what you really believe.

Many of you grew up hearing the stories of David and most of those stories were heroic-like to the point where this guy was someone you thought was really worth emulating. There is certainly some truth to that. But, one of the evidences of the truthfulness of God's Word, is how God tells us the whole truth and the truth is, David is not a hero who rescues others. He is often a failure who has to be rescued. David is in a dark place. He has, at least for a season, given up on God to keep his promise to David and now, David is acting so much like Saul, it is really unnerving. In fact, it is disgusting. David goes to the dark side. He aligns himself with a king of the Philistines. He is so convincing that (27.12) "Achish trusted David." Achish trusted David so much that he expected David to fight alongside of him and for him against David's own people. David was a good liar. He was so good, even the king, who had many reasons to be suspicious, believed him. David was also brutal. He was wiping out villages and the villagers, leaving no one alive to witness against him. I don't like reading this. I don't like thinking about this. I don't like preaching on this. I warned you several weeks ago, not to love David too much because he will break your heart. This is David. A liar, a butcher, and a manipulator. For about 16 months, it seemed to work. But the consequences of a double-life have caught up to him. Who is David? The answer does not come for another chapter and does not come until David goes through another crisis and perhaps then we will begin to see it. David is not a man after God's heart because he is good, he is a man after God's heart because he is willing to face the fact that he isn't good. All of this throws a wet blanket on some of our enthusiasm for David, doesn't it? This kid who captured our hearts in chapter 17 is breaking them. How could God pick a guy like this? There are a few things that are so needful for our souls. 1) David is not the Savior. David needs to be saved. Like Saul, David is capable of using the gifts of God for evil as well as for good. 2) David did not have the OT like we do. David did not get to study the life of David. Our understanding, sensitivities, consciences and accountability are greater. This is not a tribute to us, but a result of God's additional revelation and in particular, the coming of Christ whom David points to. 3) God really is merciful. We will come back to this in chapter 29, but

even though David ends up in a dark place, he is never without hope. Whenever David faces a crisis (and he faces many of them) he eventually ends up falling on the Lord. The process is hard to watch and painful to consider, but fundamentally David believes God and time after time, he returns to that. That is why, David always has hope.

But not Saul. Saul is a tragedy. The last pieces of his life are coming apart and chapter 28 gives us a close look at this. Here is a picture of complete hopelessness. Saul is backed into a corner and he has no hope because there is no word from God. There is no help from God. Saul has repeatedly given lip service to God, but he really doesn't believe God. When it comes to what he actually does, particularly under pressure, Saul does not trust God. His life is marked with trying to take things into his own hands. He started out with so much promise. God provided an incredible victory for Saul early on when Saul rescued the people of JabeshGilead and we and Israel thought, "wow, now that's a king!" But the power that Saul wielded to attack enemies from without, he learned to use to attack perceived enemies from within. Blessings and benefits became a curse and condemn us if we fail to be humbled by them. Saul is so desperate to hold on to power that he is willing to break every law that he was installed to enforce in order to keep that power. Instead of realizing that he was a steward of the office, a king under the King, he was blinded by power and tried to live in the make-believe world of his imagination. His life of self-deceit and then self-destruction paralleled his life of Word-rejection. Saul consistently faced problems and lived his life from a posture of rebellion and unbelief. He wanted to do it on his terms and would only turn to God to get relief of the consequences, but not because he was really repenting.

God rejected Saul from being king, not because God was being unkind, God was being faithful. God left Saul alone because Saul wanted to be left alone. He wanted to use God as a crutch in order to prop up his life and keep him on the throne and in power. But God is not interested in rescuing you from a problem so that you can continue on in your life of ignoring him. God will not be played like that. And now, Saul is getting what he wanted. He is getting what he asked for. He is getting to be king on his own. And now, Saul is facing the music. The Philistines have gathered for war. Saul is terrified. Samuel is dead. Saul inquired of the Lord, but no matter what Saul did, the Lord did not answer. No dreams, no word response from the priest using the Urim and no word from a prophet. The natural fear from seeing the thousands of campfires of the enemy forces in Shunem was stoked by the sense of judgment that Saul had because the LORD did not answer him. That is hopelessness and that hopelessness will bring madness.

Saul now gives an order. Find me a woman who is a medium that I may go and inquire of her. How many times have the men close to Saul had to sin against their own convictions in order to carry out his orders? He was the king. What he said, they had to do, but so many times Saul told them to do the wrong thing. When God's Word means nothing to you, then your word will mean nothing to you and eventually your word will mean nothing to others. How many times did Saul apologize for trying to kill David and promised to do better? How many times did these men look at each other and roll their eyes and set their jaws and do what they were told? Well, they find one. "Behold, there is a medium at En-dor." Saul has now become what he condemned. This is so sad. It is pathetic. But it is so revealing. Saul is still being Saul. He is still

trying to take matters into his own hands and he always has an excuse for his sin. I had to do something; the LORD would not answer.

It was the people, they were frightened. You were late coming to the sacrifice. I forced myself to offer the sacrifice because there was no one else to do it. It was the people who spared Agag and the best of the flocks. There was always a reason why it wasn't his fault. Even when Saul said the words, "I have sinned. I was wrong." He found a reason to change his mind. He was his own law-maker. And what you define, you have to defend. And you don't have what it takes to face this world. I had to do something; the LORD would not answer. Saul, that was your answer. If you won't listen, God will stop speaking.

Man cannot live by bread alone. We have to have God's Word. What did Jesus mean by that? He meant that if we don't eat, our body dies, but if we don't have God's Word, we will die. What food is to the body, God's Word is to our very souls. Just as you get hungry and you eat food and digest it, it is your very act of eating that reveals the fact that you trust in food to nourish you. You must trust in God's Word to nourish your soul. You must realize and accept the fact that you need God. David's love for God and his

3. What is the posture of your life?

Note: How the Word of God speaks so clearly to our hearts and the human condition. Taking it by faith is not a matter of setting aside our ability to reason as much as it is being willing to surrender our stubbornness. Week after week it feels as if our very souls are just laid out on the operating table, while God's Word finely exposes us. There are some things about God's Word that we study in order to understand, but we are drawn to do that because God's Word has studied us and it understands us. It understands us so much, it is almost embarrassing, yet comforting. Your God knows you. Your God knows you completely. So...

There are two paths clearly presented here when facing a crisis.

1) Taking matters into your own hands and refusing to let go and give in to God.

What promises have you made to yourself (and others) that you are tempted to dismiss as if they don't matter?

2) Initially taking matters into your own hands but then letting the crisis drive you back to God.

God wants you to see and own and your need so that you will see and embrace his solution to your need. That is Christ.