

Title: The Last Supper pt.1  
Text: 1 Samuel 28:8-25  
Theme: A dissection of despair  
Series: 1 Samuel  
Prop Stmt: Hopelessness drives desperate people to very dark places which only confirms their despair.

This text is weighty and by itself is dark and hopeless. The heaviness of this text is almost unbearable and while we need to see this and feel this, the text is, in a sense, almost too clear. There are a few things that my explaining may help with, but for the most part, we just need to let the Word do its work of clarifying how sad, how serious and how hopeless it is for someone to so be so close to God's Word and who refuses to surrender to it.

Step by step by step, Israel's first king, Saul, illustrates what John explains in his first letter. 1) If we say we have fellowship with God, but we are pursuing a self-centered life, (1 John 1.6) then we are walking in darkness and we are lying. We are not practicing the truth and there is a consequence of that. We lie because we are trying to deceive others when in reality, we deceive ourselves. (1 John 1.8) Being deceived we conclude that we are not the one with the problem, we have not sinned, something is wrong with God and his word. We are the victim here. (1 John 1.10) We are not match for sin. We think we can handle it, but it handles us. The sin that promised joy and life leads to the grave and when you get to the grave, it's too late. Saul has been given much. In rejecting God's Word, Saul squanders his privilege and forfeits the throne. But beyond that, we watch these last hours of a life that is on death row. This is the part of the story that we are all prone to believe will not happen to us because we are the exception. God is real and God is true. Listen with your heart. Consider this text as a kindness of God to stir the nerve endings of your soul.

Read Text: 28:1-25

This is intense. Anytime you deal with the supernatural you are face to face with a reality and power that is way beyond you and that is terrifying. This is no joke and no game. Here, the medium is terrified (v.12) and Saul is terrified (vs. 15, 20, 21). This encounter raises a bunch of questions. Can people really contact the dead? She did. Does that mean that others can? What about Samuel? He appears to have a body, right? He is wrapped in a robe. But he looks like an old man. What do those who die look like in the afterlife? What do they know and feel in the afterlife? Samuel was clearly disturbed by this rude interruption. Does Samuel really need to have another frustrating confrontation with Saul and be reminded of what had to have felt like a failure, even in the afterlife? He grieved over Saul. And yet, here he is knowing what is happening on earth and what is going to happen to Saul, to his sons and to the army of Israel. Does that mean that those who have died know what is going on here on earth? Samuel did. Yet, even in his death, Samuel still was true to his calling as a prophet and spoke the word of God. Those are some really interesting questions, but they are not main point of the text and I

want you to get the main point of the text. Look at how the writer sets this up so we don't miss what is going on.

Did you notice that the text begins and ends in the night (v.8, v.25)? It is night both literally and figuratively. This is very dark. Dealing with mediums is a dark and dangerous business that not even mediums can control. People are drawn into it in order to get information so as to be in control but are used as pawns in a game of power that is way over them. It also begins and ends in the same place. Again, literally and figuratively Saul gets nowhere with his plan. Saul's hopelessness drives him to do a very desperate thing which only confirms his despair. This is so sad to watch because we all know that it did not have to be this way. What else? Saul is giving orders in the beginning of the text and in the end, he is taking orders. In the beginning, his words are many, in the end they are few, then none at all. Without his robe, his crown and symbols of power, Saul is a sad man, laying on the ground, without strength, consumed with fear and without hope. The man, head and shoulders above the nation, is groveling on the ground in the home of a nameless medium. Saul is a dead-man walking. He is inconsolable because he is coming to the end of his life without God and there is no consolation in that.

The rejection of God results in hopelessness. Do not think for a second that there is a party in hell. This is despair and it is marked by:

1. **Pretending to be someone you aren't.** (8)

*"So Saul disguised himself"*

Saul has been pretending for years. He pretended to follow the Lord. He rejected God's Word even as he made oaths in God's name. He pleaded with Samuel to honor him in front of the people so that he would not lose face. He didn't want the people to realize what Samuel knew to be true about Saul. Saul wanted people to think that he believed in God and followed God, but in reality, Saul tried to use God to get what he wanted. Saul treated God, the way the pagan nations around him treated their gods. Give the gods what they want so that the gods will give you what you want. But Saul did not really love God. God was useful to him to help him win battles, stay in power and be in charge. When you read that in v.6 Saul inquired of the LORD and the LORD did not answer him, don't read into that that God is being mean. His life is marked by excusing away his flagrant disobedience to God. And he is doing it here, again. God won't be played. Saul is not repenting of his sin even though he is facing the consequences of it. Once again, he just wants God to get him out of the mess that he has made. This is clear from v.15 when he is having another full-fledged panic attack in front of Samuel and begging him to tell him what he is supposed to do. That's all that he wants, because that's all that he knows.

You win the game of chess when you defeat your opponents' king. The capturing or killing of Saul was the aim of the Philistines. He was the ultimate prize for them. But, in order for Saul to go to En-dor he had to go north (map) where the Philistines had gathered their forces. He had to disguise himself in order that his enemies would not know that the king and just two other men were traveling alone in the darkness in order to visit a medium. Mediums and

necromancers are what the Philistines did. What is the king of Israel doing here? This is stunning. David is aligned with Achish, one of the Philistine kings and Saul is now aligned with the Philistines' belief system. But Saul had to disguise himself from his own men. Can you imagine what would happen if his men knew that on the eve of battle that their king was deserting the camp and going to a medium? Who can we trust? Is David friend or foe? Is Saul friend or foe?

I cannot answer some of the questions that I am raising, but I wonder if Saul stopped for a minute and thought, "What am I doing?" "How did I get to this point?" Even as he and his two men were making their way at night to visit this medium, did he ask himself, "Why am I doing this?" Kings and people of position and stature wear their titles and put on symbols of their power. Over time it can be very confusing because it is easy to believe that this is more than your title or role, this is who you really are. You are powerful. You are in control. You are the final authority. To give that up, even for a moment, is terrifying to someone who leans on that for their ultimate value. It is humbling to be stripped of your robe, crown, scepter, sword and shield. How long has it been since Saul dressed like a normal person? But here he is, the night before he dies laying aside his robe not because he is being humble, but because he is humiliated. He is humiliated by his own pride. The very thing that he has been desperate to hold on to, is the very thing that he gives up in a last gasp effort to hold on to it.

The lives of David and Saul are a fascinating study on power and both lives reveal how power in the hands of mere mortals betrays us. Saul cannot handle power. In order for him to keep it, he has become someone that we no longer recognize from the beginning of his reign.

You and I are tempted to believe that there is something (or someone) that we have to have in order to get our place in this world or keep our perceived place in this world. What is that for you? A school? A title? A job? A role? Having a child? Having a spouse? Getting a home, a car, a retirement? A status? What is it that are tempted to believe that you have to have in order to get your place in this world? Or what is it that you fear losing above all? We are tempted to do the very things that we swore we would never do in order to get it or keep it. But there is a gift, a position, a relationship, a standing, an identity that we can have, or better yet, that can have us, that we can never lose and can never be taken away. And we never have to pretend to be someone that we are not. In fact, in order to receive this gift, we have to be completely honest with who we are.

1 John 1.5 says that God is light and in him is no darkness. What you see is what you get. That is what God demands of us. Be honest with who you are. Who are you? What are we? We are people broken and undone by our sin. We have tried, desperately tried to scheme our way and find things to mask our emptiness and sin. But, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Do you realize the power of that promise? That means that there is nothing to hide from.

Saul refused to believe that. For years he refused to believe that. He didn't want to be king, but once he got a taste of power, it was a drug that was more powerful than any opioid or heroin

we could imagine. But it led him to despair, and yet he still refused to give in. Look at verses 8-14. Look at all of the commands that he issues. These are the orders of a desperate man demanding things in a vain attempt to grab the steering wheel of his life that is spinning out of control and about to go into a ravine.

## 2. Giving desperate orders and making strange promises. (8b-14)

Going to a medium and asking her to make contact with the dead is intense. It is terrifyingly intense. But what adds to the tension is what Saul demands and how he demands it. He is pretending in appearance not to be the king, but he clearly projecting that he is large and in charge. *“Divine for me a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you.”* There is no “ask” in this. This is an order and it is a big one. You do what I say. You give me what I want. You bring up for me whomever I shall name to you. I am going to get what I want. I will not be denied. This medium like everyone else in Saul’s life is someone to be used and then discarded in order to get what he wants.

So, here he is pretending that he is not the king, but giving orders like he is one. But she is very hesitant to do this. Who are these people? This is a tall order and besides it is against the law. So, we can fully understand and appreciate her response. The medium objects, Saul then swears to her by the LORD. He makes an oath. *“As the LORD lives....”* This is bizarre. The king who is pretending to not be the king demands a medium to break his own law and conjure up a spirit and then promises her, in the name of God, whom both of them are rebelling against that no harm will come to her. Hold the phone! Does this make any sense at all? What authority does this man have to assure her that no harm will come to her? How can he, on the basis of the living God guarantee her safety? Even the king cannot protect someone from the consequences of breaking God’s law because this king is living proof of that. She has no idea of the irony of her response and we will explore that a bit more in a minute, but when you look at all of the things that Saul demands it looks like the desperate flailing of a dying man who refuses to acknowledge the reality of his condition. This is what despair looks like. Grasping at things and demanding things that so clearly contradictory and therefore, confusing.

*“Bring up Samuel for me.”* Bring up Samuel?! Are you kidding me? This medium is in over her head because she does not know that this is Saul and Saul is in over his head because he is diving into a realm that is totally forbidden. She does her thing and it appears that either she did not think it would work for someone with the stature of Samuel, or she is not used to the real person making an appearance. Many have speculated that mediums have no influence in the afterlife, but are able to procure the cooperation of demons who impersonate the dead to give the impression that they can. That is why this medium screams in fear when she actually sees Samuel. She did not expect Samuel. But here he is. The whole thing is bizarre.

What does a prophet do? He gives the Word of God. What does the Word of God do? It exposes. It reveals our hearts. Saul is baffling. Why would he want to hear from God, when he has spent most of his reign as king, rejecting it? Is this some death-wish? Is this the ultimate

victim card that he is playing? Why would he want to face Samuel when he is pretending to be someone that he is not, who will reveal what he really is?

Saul is not rational and we should not expect him to be. This is some of the evidence of the irrationality of sin. I say it over and over that sin causes brain damage. Rejecting God's Word will take you not only to a very dark place it will take you to a delusional one as well. Further evidence of that is seen in...

### 3. **Being asked questions that cannot be answered.** (9, 12)

Go back to the order that Saul issues in verse 8. The king, pretending to be a commoner is ordering this medium to break the king's decree. The medium, ironically says, "Surely you know what Saul has done." Actually, he does know what Saul has done, more than she can realize. Note that she does not refer to Saul as the king, but as Saul. But then she asks this very important question from her perspective which is also a very pointed question to Saul. "Why?" In view of Saul's orders to remove mediums and necromancers from the land and assuming that any that were discovered to have remained would be executed, she asks, "Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?" Why are you doing this? Do you realize what you are asking? I could die over this. Is this really worth my life? Saul is not considering any of this. He waves off her concerns with a meaningless promise and then demands that she brings up Samuel and when Samuel appears this woman realizes what is actually happening. Her question is worth thinking about. Her first question of "why" is not answered. Now she tries again. "Why have you deceived me?"

That's a good question Saul. Why have you deceived her? What is the answer? The answer is that my entire life has been a series of lies that I have done so that I would not have to face the truth because I didn't like the truth and I didn't want to face it. I have lied so much that it means nothing to me to lie. It is as if now, every time I open my mouth a lie comes out. In fact, I can no longer tell the difference between what is the truth and what is a lie.

Conclusion:

In less than 24 hours, Saul will be dead. The end for him is terror, deception, panic, silence, hopelessness, abandonment and complete despair. It's like he dies before he is actually dead. His life is sucked out of him. This is what the end is like for one who spent his life living for himself and rejecting God's mercy. It did not have to be this way. He did not have to live this way nor die like this. Neither do you. In trying to live on the fence, Saul chose the dark side. There is a better way. God's Word is not a threat to you. God's Word and God's ways are our life, our joy, our comfort and our salvation. He is kind and gracious to call us to live under his authority and abandon our claims to autonomy. He has demonstrated his right to be trusted by sending Christ to die on the cross for our sins, and take our wrath, so we would not have to stand and face God's justice on our own. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. If you trust me, I will be with you. I will never leave you because I don't leave my own. Saul was not his own. Saul refused that and faced the

results. What a contrast Saul's last hours are to Enoch. Enoch walked with God. Enoch's trust in God was not a flare that he shot up in a moment of panic. He loved God, listened to God, talked with God, followed God, enjoyed God and trusted in God. That's the entire point of our lives – right there! Enoch figured it out and lived it. The Bible says that one day, Enoch was no more. That is, one day, perhaps late in the afternoon of being in the presence of God and delighting in him, God said, "You know, we're always out from your house, why don't you just come on to my place?" No panic, no fear, just one hand in his hand and a step into glory. Beloved, you may not pick when your end is, but you can pick how the end is.