

Title: The Last Supper pt.2  
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.

My 3-year-old grandson will watch NASCAR with me for about 2 minutes unless he can see the car with the M&M decals on it. He loves that car. I just don't have the heart to tell him that the driver of that car is probably the most despised driver in the sport. But the other thing that will keep my grandson's attention is a wreck. Multiple cameras with digital technology give officials, commentators and viewers the opportunity to watch why and how a wreck takes place frame by frame by frame. You can see the right front tire burst, pieces of rubber explode out the side, the car lunges toward the outside wall tagging another vehicle in the rear quarter panel sending this unsuspecting driver into a spin that collects up other vehicles in a cloud of smoke and car parts that results in 14 seconds of chaos. But in replay, those 14 seconds feel like an hour. This is what 1 Samuel 28 is like. Saul's life is spinning out of control. At the beginning of the chapter, he is barking dark and confusing commands revealing just how desperate he is. In the end, this hulk of a man is now a shell, lying limp, beaten, spent and almost completely silent. It is hard to watch, yet we turn away at our own peril. There is much to see that we might take to heart and avoid. Saul's life is a preview of hell. He is alone, tormented, fearful and trapped. He built the prison, locked the door and threw away the key. He now has regret, but there is an eternity's worth of distance between regret and repentance.

Read Text:

Saul is on death row and the time of his end is at hand. By the end of the chapter, he has no voice because there is nothing else for him to say. He has come to the end in the same way he lived his life. As we began to see last week, this text summarizes his life. 1) He pretended to be something that he wasn't. 2) He contradicted his own stated beliefs with the orders that he gave and the oaths he promised. 3) He faced questions that he could not answer because his entire life was a contradiction that tried to hide behind a robe and crown. Now, there is no hiding. And this morning we will see 3 more things: 1) Facing a judgement he could not bear. 2) Realizing that there is no way out. 3) Being reminded that it did not have to be this way. This is a preview of what he is going to face after death. It is despair and is marked by:

**1. Facing a judgment that you cannot bear. (16-19)**

Pride is so damning because it is so delusional and so powerful. Saul is facing a judgment that he cannot bear. He is facing the silence of God. He is facing his own guilt. And he is facing his death and accounting before God. Those are judgements that neither he nor anyone can bear.

**A. The Silence of God.**

Back in v.6 we are told that the LORD did not answer Saul. There is a sense in which God's silence is both a mercy and a judgment. It is a judgment on Saul because he consistently refused to obey God when God did tell him what to do. How many times do you see a defensive back in football throw his hands up in disbelief at the ref who just flagged him claiming that he is completely innocent, only to have the replay show that he really is guilty? This is Saul. After all this time, he is still throwing his hands up in the air and acting like he is the victim. God is not being fair. God will not answer me. I don't know what to do. Samuel appears to Saul from the dead and tells him the same thing that he told him when he was alive. Saul, you are acting like you are confused. You are acting like you are the victim of God's deliberate meanness. But I told you this long ago. The LORD has turned from you and has become your enemy. The LORD has turned from you. Saul, it wasn't always like this, was it? There was a wonderful time when the LORD was not against you. The LORD was on your side. What happened? You did not obey the voice of the LORD and carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek. Amalek was exceedingly sinful and rebellious and not only deserved judgment, but left unaddressed would have wreaked havoc for Israel. Your job was to represent the righteousness of God and you did not obey. Saul, this is on you. You deserve this. You brought this on yourself.

If you won't listen to God, he will stop talking. I think this is exactly what Christ is talking about in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 when he tells the story of the farmer and the 4 different types of ground that the farmer cast his seed on. You can hear God's Word with your ears. You can have a copy of it in your hands. You can read it with your eyes. You can memorize it, know the stories and even be able to tell others about its content. But, if you don't really believe it, then God's Word won't speak to your heart. It will mean nothing to you except perhaps some sentimental feeling or ornamental trapping. You being unmoved and unfazed by God's Word does not reveal a deficiency in God's Word but a lack of obedience and surrender in you. What does the Bible mean when it says in Hebrews 4.12 that the word of God is living and active? It means that God's Word in written form is the very product of God's breath. The Spirit of God blows on the coals of the Word of God and ignites our hearts. But, if the Spirit of God does not act, we will treat God's Word with indifference. Saul either plugged his ears or he selectively obeyed God's Word, which means he selectively disobeyed God's Word and then acted shocked when God called him out on it.

What about you? Do you listen to God's Word with your heart? When you listen to someone teaching or preaching do you do more evaluating of them or being evaluated by God's Word? When was the last time you really paid attention to God's Word and let it, like a cat scan reveal your heart? If you regularly ignore God's Word, I want you to be concerned. If you are unmoved by what you read or hear, I want you to be concerned.

## **B. Guilt**

Saul is guilty. If you are guilty and you feel guilty, that is a gift from God. Guilt is a God-given security system designed to alert you to an intruder. Sin has intruded you and left unaddressed will destroy you. Guilt is letting you know that an enemy of your soul has broken in. Sin is not your friend. Do not excuse it, tolerate it, or give it a place to sit in your family room, much less a

room to get comfortable it. But this is what Saul did and now he cannot handle his guilt. It is crushing him. None of us can handle guilt. We weren't built for this. God designed us to be in sync with him. Guilt drives us to do irrational things, even harm ourselves and others. We noted last week that Saul is doing a very irrational thing by going behind the enemies' lines in order to visit a medium. That is irrational. For example, mass shootings are irrational. When we hear about one, we want to know, what was wrong with that person who did this? We know from the confessions of some, that they feel guilty and therefore, someone is going to pay. Some of you who have struggled with cutting yourself, know this first hand. You feel guilty about something. Sometimes it is false guilt, but you feel it nonetheless and therefore, you feel as if someone as to pay and so, cutting is the attempt to pay. Guilt has to be addressed. We cannot handle it. It drives people to drinking and other life-numbing behaviors. Guilt is a judgment that we cannot bear. Guilt is a gift from God telling you that something is wrong and is designed to drive you to God so that you will humble yourself, confess your sin and be forgiven. Is there guilt that you are deliberately suppressing? What steps can you take to open your life before God and admit your need? You cannot handle your guilt, but Jesus can! Jesus can because God is merciful.

2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33 tell us the story of Manasseh, king of Judah. When you compare the amount of his sin to Saul, Saul looks like a saint. The number of altars and idols that Manasseh built in Jerusalem was staggering. He offered his own son as a burnt offering to a god. He consulted mediums and necromancers, and was so evil that the text says that *"Manasseh led them astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel."* (2 Kings 21.9) God judged Manasseh and the king of Assyria invaded the land, captured him and took him as a prisoner to Babylon. Now, listen to one of the most mind-blowing passages in the entire Bible. 2 Chronicles 33.12-13 *"And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his father. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God."* What does that tell you about God? His mercy really is more. His grace is really greater. What was the difference? Manasseh believed it, Saul didn't. Manasseh's sin was like a mountain and Saul's like a hill. But Manasseh discovered that God's grace will even cover a mountain, while Saul's pride did him in. Guilt is a gift designed to drive you to God. Saul was humiliated, but never humble. So, what happens, when you are guilty and you are facing the end of life? Death is not relief from a life of guilt, it is confirmation of judgment.

### **C. Death**

In v.19 Samuel tells Saul that tomorrow you will die. Tomorrow, you and your sons will be with me. Is Samuel saying that tomorrow Saul will die and will be with Samuel in paradise and that his troubles will be over? I wish it was, but I don't think so because that doesn't fit the text. Samuel's use of "moreover" is not a "but here is the good news" idea, but "in addition to what I have already said" you and your sons are going to die and will be with me, which I take to mean you will join me in the afterlife. Saul, your death will not be the end, but what I am saying to you is not good news. You will continue to exist. What is the point? You will face an accounting.

If you reject God and try to go it on your own, then when you die, you will stand before God, all on your own and will find you have nothing to stand on, no one to stand with, nothing to hide behind and nowhere to run. Reality is setting in for Saul. His time on earth is now less than one day and what is worse, there is no way out.

## **2. Realizing that there is no way out.** (20)

Those who are born big and strong find it so hard to admit that they are weak. Those who are born with talents and gifting find it so hard to admit that they are needy. Those who are raised with wealth or who are wealthy find it so hard to admit that they are poor. Those who are connected and can talk their way out of anything find it so hard to realize that there are some things they cannot get out of.

Power, wealth and influence tend to mask reality. People in power are used to being in charge and telling people what to do. They get their way. People with wealth are used to buying what they want and if needed can buy off people. They are used to getting their way. Steve Jobs was worth over 10 billion dollars when he died. He couldn't buy off God, and buy off death. Saul is facing the end of the ride. He has always been able to find a way out even as we watched the walls closing in, Saul refused to accept it and be humbled by it. Now, this powerful man is revealed to be weak. It sounds as if he was kneeling on the ground as he listened to Samuel confirm his fears. As the impact of Samuel's words are felt, Saul fell at once, full length on the ground, filled with fear. Crying? Shaking? Groaning? His physical condition is no longer held up by the props of his title. He is an empty man, with no excuses, no plan B, and no way out. Yet,

## **3. Even in wrath God remembers mercy.** (21-25)

The medium is nameless, perhaps because no one bothered to get her actual name. Maybe she was just known as the medium of En-dor. Since mediums and necromancers had been banned from the land, we would assume that this lady is isolated, living on the fringe and about as far away as you can imagine from power. People who dive into the dark world of spirits and fortune-telling are themselves dark and almost hopeless. This would be about the last place where Saul would expect to find mercy, and yet, here it is. This lady, far from grace, far from God still reveals the image of her Creator as her heart is moved with compassion for a man, much like her who has no hope. There is no husband mentioned, no children recorded. The house had to be very small as Saul is said to have sat on the bed. Even then, the calf is said to be in the house. Based on what we know it sounds as if this woman, moved with compassion at the pitiful state of her king used up all she had in order to give him a final meal. It was a very strange way to spend your last night alive, but then again, there wasn't anything normal about any of this. Even though Saul is facing the consequences of his rebellion, God still gives mercy and provides a meal and in fact, provides fresh bread, fresh and tender meat (steak?) and two companions all as a picture of what could have been. Saul, I would have been with you. I would have spoken to you. I would have protected you. I would have provided for you. The woman's sacrifice and kindness is touching, but limited. It cannot change what is. How can you enjoy a meal when facing certain death and judgment? *"Then they rose and went away that night."*

Are you ready for some good news? This is not the end of the story. There is much to grieve over in this account, but also much to experience so that we can appreciate and treasure something else. Here is what I mean. It is easy to look at the OT stories like an ancient version of Aesop's fables. Here is a story with a moral truth. But these accounts are so much more because the OT points to Christ. In some cases, these accounts give us a preview of Christ in that the hero of the story points to a greater hero. In other cases, the account shows us our need of Christ and how we make a mess of things and need to be rescued. Here is an account that does both. I want you to see what two things in this conclusion. I want you to see what Christ endured so that you can embrace, believe, and delight in what Christ accomplished. We have seen, how Saul, in facing a judgment he could not bear was completely undone by the silence of God, his guilt, his imminent death and the prospect of then facing God. But, have you considered how this is exactly what Christ has done for us so that we would not have to experience what Saul did? Saul's experience is a preview of our experience apart from Christ. Saul had a last supper the night before his death in which he was facing a judgment that he could not bear and his death that would plunge his kingdom into chaos. Christ had a last supper before he died in which he faced a judgment that we could not bear and a death that would rescue his people from sin and death and bring them to his kingdom. He faced a judgment that we could not bear because he was the only one who could and he did, in our place. That means, He experienced the silence of God. On the cross, Christ was God forsaken by God. There is no relationship that is closer than the relationship of the Father and the Son. Never before had Christ experienced his Father turning his face away. Even the sun refused to shine and at the moment of his death, the earth quaked as visible and terrestrial evidences of something so fundamentally out of order. On the cross Christ cried out, My God, my God why have you forsaken me? And in that moment, there was no answer. The Father thundered at his baptism. The Father thundered at his transfiguration. At his death, there was silence.

2 Cor 5.21a says, *"For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin."* Christ was made to be our sin. He was treated as if he had rebelled against God, as if he had rejected the word of the Lord. He was treated as if he had squandered the many gifts of God. He experienced silence. Here was the cry of the son of God who was damned by our sins asking why the Father was silent, why fellowship was broken, why the relationship was under judgment. Christ cried this out because he was actually experiencing what he had never experienced before. Saul experienced silence as a just judgment. Christ experienced silence as our just judgment so that you won't, ever.

Since Christ was made to be sin, therefore, Christ also experienced guilt, my guilt, your guilt, all of my guilt, all of your guilt because sin makes us guilty. Sin makes us liable for punishment, not only in a legal sense, but in an actual sense. Our guilt crushes us. Our guilt drives us to do irrational things like lash out at others, blame them, hurt ourselves, even (the most irrational of all) blame God. Look at Christ. In the garden he took the cup of wrath that by all intents and purposes was for me. I am the guilty one, why should I go free? All we like sheep have gone astray and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Our guilt crushes us and takes our lives. It really is that bad. Look at Christ. Our guilt crushed him and it took his life. He died

because the wages of sin is death. He carried our sin to its destination – death. His death was not only the consequence for our sin, it was at the same time the payment for it. The sin and guilt that would otherwise crush us, crushed Jesus in our place. He paid it all. He paid it all. If you have trusted in Christ and are in Christ, your guilt will never crush you because there is therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Therefore, while Saul looked with terror to what would come after death, Jesus looked with anticipation to the joy that was set before him beyond the cross. He died and, in his death, he secured the pardon for our sin. There is an entire segment of “Christianity” that teaches that the death of Christ brought about the possibility or potential of our salvation, but we and others have to cooperate and do our part, by saying prayers, giving money, lighting candles, observing sacraments and ceremonies. Then, perhaps, when enough of that has balanced the scale, a person can make it in. That is not only wrong, and hopeless, it is offensive and demeaning to Christ. What did Christ mean when he cried out, “It is finished.”? The payment was made and made in full. He offered up his life as the infinite sacrifice that fully atoned for every single sin of every single person who would ever believe in him. It is finished! The offering of his life on the cross was received with joy by the Father who had to turn away from him so that God would never have to turn away from us.

Like Saul, Jesus had a last supper that he ate facing the judgment of God and death. But while both of them knew the certainty of their death, Christ also knew of the certainty of his resurrection and therefore, the promise of more meals with his friends to come. Oh friend, when you trust in Christ, he takes the judgment that you cannot bear and gives you a life that you could never earn, and a future that you can never outlive. Once again, you have before you, two ways to live. One by faith and surrender to Christ, the other, like Saul – go it alone and alone it will be. But it doesn’t have to be.