



Studies in the Life of David

Text

First Samuel 28:3-25

Topic

King Saul consults a medium and to everyone's surprise ends up being confronted by Samuel

Title

"Finding a Not-so-happy Medium"

Introduction

I have an important announcement: **The world may not end in 2012 after all!**

According to recent reports,

... the accepted conversions of dates from Mayan to the modern calendar may be off by as much as 50 or 100 years. That would throw the supposed and overhyped 2012 apocalypse off by decades and cast into doubt the dates of historical Mayan events.

While the world may not end on December 21, 2012 there's always plenty to fear as we navigate through our lives. Perhaps that is why the Bible mentions fear as often as it does. Depending on what version of the Bible you read,

- The word "fear" occurs some 441 times.
- "Afraid" occurs 167 times.
- "Tremble" occurs 101 times.
- "Terror" or "terrified" occur 121 times.
- Other words occurring multiple times are "dread," "frighten," and "faint."

Fear is the dominant emotion in our text in First Samuel twenty-eight. Twice King Saul is described in terms that reveal overwhelming, even crippling fear.

1. Verse five says “he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.”
2. Verse twenty says “he was dreadfully afraid.”

Saul even has what we might call a panic attack, falling full length on the ground, and can barely recover.

What is interesting about these two episodes of fear is that the first occurs when Saul is uncertain of his future while the second occurs once he’s absolutely certain of his future!

It got me to thinking about fear in terms of what the future holds and, more importantly, Who holds our future.

Let’s follow Saul through his fears and organize our thoughts around two questions: #1 Are You Afraid Of What The Future Holds?, and #2 Are You Afraid Of Who Holds The Future?

#1 Are You Afraid Of What Your Future Holds? (v3-14)

In the classic Charlie Brown Christmas TV special, Lucy asks Charlie Brown, “Are you afraid of responsibility? If you are, then you have hypengyophobia.”

“I don't think that's quite it,” Charlie Brown replies.

“How about cats? If you're afraid of cats, you have ailurophasia. Are you afraid of staircases? If you are, then you have climacaphobia. Maybe you have thalassophobia. This is fear of the ocean, or gephyrobia, which is the fear of crossing bridges. Or maybe you have pantophobia. Do you think you have pantophobia?”

“What's pantophobia?,” asks Charlie Brown.

When Lucy tells him it means the fear of everything he exclaims, "THAT'S IT!"

You may not be afraid of everything, but fear is a common emotion for us as we journey towards Heaven. There are almost one thousand references to it in the Bible. They are wonderfully countered by God's encouragement, "Fear not" (33 times), "Do not fear" (37 times), and "Do not be afraid" (33 times).

The big question is, how do we go from fear to faith?

Sometimes by debriefing a failure we can plan for success. Let's look, then, at Saul's epic failure to overcome his fear with an eye towards overcoming our fears.

1 Samuel 28:3 Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land.

God's Word instructed Saul to banish the "mediums and spiritists." He did banish them, but in a pinch he had no problem seeking one out. It tells us that Saul had a rather low regard for God's Word.

It might help to recall the incident for which Saul had been rejected by God as king of Israel. It, too, shows his low regard for the Word. He was told to utterly destroy Amalek, to kill men, women, children, infants, nursing babies, ox, sheep, camels and donkeys.

He didn't! He took captive Agag, the enemy king, and kept the best of the rest as spoil.

When Samuel arrived on scene, Saul greeted him by stating, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord." To which Samuel replied, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

Saul approached God's Word as if His commandments were merely suggestions. Now that he was afraid, needing a word from the Lord to

calm his heart, the Lord's oft-repeated command in Scripture, "Fear not," was not meaningful to Saul.

Do you have a high regard for God's Word? Then you can be assured that as you read it in your time of fear you will receive the Lord's encouragement to "Fear not!" It may take a while; it may involve a struggle. But the Word will come to you in power to move you from fear to faith.

1 Samuel 28:4 Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa.

1 Samuel 28:5 When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.

Years earlier when the Philistines encamped against Israel and Goliath was their champion, Saul had sat looking at them everyday gripped with fear. Years later he is still looking out at the Philistines gripped with fear.

Saul's behavior is that of a believer who thinks it strange that they would fall into various trials. Instead he ought to realize that they are an important part of the Christian life as God seeks to refine you.

It's all too common to think it strange when we are facing difficulties. But rather than fear, God would remind us that faith sees behind them, looks above them, to the Lord realizing He is using them to make us more like Jesus.

1 Samuel 28:6 And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.

Inquiring of the Lord is the very best thing you can do to counter fear. We're specifically told to be anxious for nothing but to pray and let our requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6).

Saul inquired. Why didn't God answer Saul? Saul's praying was hindered because he was in sin. Sin hinders prayer. So do a few other things:

- According to Matthew 6:15 unforgiveness will hinder prayer.

- If you're a husband, if you are not dwelling peacefully with your wife in an understanding manner your prayers will be hindered (1Peter 3).
- Selfishness will hinder prayers. James says "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (4:3).

Keep yourself in a place where your prayers can be heard and then commit to prayer for your situation.

1 Samuel 28:7 Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor."

A "medium" was someone who contacted the dead then channeled them to bring a message to the living. The word for "medium" describes the mumbling sound that the person would make as they (supposedly) channeled the voice of the dead.

Even though banished, she was not hard to find. How close are you living to some habit or some sin that was banished from your life? How quick are you to go there to satisfy some urge? *Be careful!* **The banishing does nothing if you still visit whenever you choose.**

1 Samuel 28:8 So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please conduct a séance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you."

1 Samuel 28:9 Then the woman said to him, "Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?"

1 Samuel 28:10 And Saul swore to her by the Lord, saying, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing."

The source of your spiritual information is extremely important. Once in the Book of Acts the apostle Paul was being followed by a young girl who was announcing that the message he was sharing was true and from God. But she was demon possessed and so he cast the demon out of her.

Currently there's a movement in the church to supposedly 'return' to ancient methods of prayer and meditation. I've mentioned prayer labyrinths before, where you essentially set up a maze with different stations at which you pray specific guided prayers, often accompanied by some physical

object to focus your attention upon. It's an ancient method, all right, but it's *not* Christian. Be wary of things that smack of the occult, of mysticism.

1 Samuel 28:11 Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me."

Note to Saul. Samuel is the last person you'd want to see in a situation like this. It just shows how skewed your thinking can get when you're backslidden.

1 Samuel 28:12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!"

1 Samuel 28:13 And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth."

1 Samuel 28:14 So he said to her, "What is his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down.

Was it really Samuel?

- Maybe this was a hallucination of the medium. This doesn't make sense, because it doesn't explain why the medium was so frightened. It doesn't explain why Saul saw Samuel also, and why Samuel spoke to Saul, not to the medium.
- Maybe this was a deception by the medium. But this also isn't an adequate explanation, for the same reasons I just stated.
- Maybe this was a demonic impersonation of Samuel. It is possible that the medium, with her occultic powers, summoned a demonic spirit that deceived both her and Saul. But this suggestion is also inadequate, because it does not speak to the issue of motive. After all, what advantage does Satan gain by "Samuel's" words to Saul?

This was a genuine (but strange) appearance of Samuel. This is the best explanation, because it is supported by the reaction of the medium, who got more than she bargained for. It is also supported by the truth of what Samuel said (and the text says that Samuel said it).

Saul was afraid. The trigger for his fear was the Philistine invasion.

Was that a reason to be afraid? *Sure it was!* But it was also the perfect training ground upon which to learn how to go from fear to faith. Saul didn't but we can.

- We can hold God's Word in high esteem and therefore believe Him when He commands us, "Fear not."
- We can remind ourselves and others that facing dangers and difficulties and distresses is nothing strange for a believer but, rather, something to be expected.
- We can in our fear seek the Lord in prayer and continue to pray until His presence in our lives is bigger than our difficulty.

Depending on your particular trouble or trial, you may go back and forth from fear to faith. *You're in good company!* Persevere, keep moving forward, looking to the Lord.

#2 Are You Afraid Of Who Holds The Future? (v15-28)

We see in Saul's conversation with Samuel that his fears extended beyond the grave. Saul was afraid to die.

1 Samuel 28:15 Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do."

Samuel could only be "disturbed" if he had been resting. Indeed, for the believer life after death is rest. In the Old Testament, and before the resurrection of Jesus Christ, at death the believer's spirit went to Hades, to a place of rest Jesus called Abraham's Bosom. Now to be absent from our bodies at death is to be present with the Lord in Heaven.

How can you fear death when it is to be with the Lord, Who Himself died to conquer death and lead us to eternity? Death, where is your victory; grave, where is your sting?

1 Samuel 28:16 Then Samuel said: "So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy?"

1 Samuel 28:17 And the Lord has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David.

1 Samuel 28:18 Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day.

1 Samuel 28:19 Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines."

The battle was set. The outcome certain. There was nothing Saul could do but be defeated and die.

Ah, but Samuel said, "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." I can't help but read that as hopeful, as encouraging, as wonderful. Especially if you are Saul, and you've made an enemy of God in your life, to be told you will still be with Samuel, in Abraham's Bosom, after death has to be an amazing spiritual encouragement!

I guess you could argue that Samuel only meant Saul would be in Hades and that he might be over on the other side, across the chasm, in the place of suffering. But I don't think so because Samuel tells Saul that his sons will be with him and we know that Jonathan (at least) was a godly man.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, death is no longer an enemy. It has been overcome. You need not fear it, nor what happens afterward.

Saul, however, was afraid to die. He goes into a full-blown panic attack.

1 Samuel 28:20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night.

1 Samuel 28:21 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me.

1 Samuel 28:22 Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way."

1 Samuel 28:23 But he refused and said, "I will not eat." So his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed.

1 Samuel 28:24 Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it.

1 Samuel 28:25 So she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

Let's not cut Saul any slack. Sure, he was going to die fighting the Philistines. He had only one more day to live. But what is our life? It is described as a vapor of smoke which appears but for a moment then vanishes away. Knowing he would die the next day was a tremendous blessing to Saul. It gave him time, if he would do it, to prepare.

If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you need to know that it is appointed for you to die and, afterward, there is judgment.

If you are a believer there will be judgment of a different sort as you face the Lord and He seeks to reward you for a job well done on earth sharing His love with others.

You have no need of being afraid of the One Who holds the future. The Lord has done everything necessary to save you. Once you are saved, He has promised to complete the good work He has begun in you until the day you see Him face-to-face.

Your part is to look forward to that day, not with fear but with excitement. That day is pictured for you in the Bible as if it was a wedding day. It is like the Bridegroom coming to take His bride to their new home to live happily ever after.

Now, obviously, it's possible for the bride, during the engagement, to lose sight of the Bridegroom in His absence. It's possible to be ashamed at His coming.

But it's also possible for the bride to keep herself ready, anticipating the imminent return of the One Who loves her and is coming to take her home. It's possible to adorn herself with all manner of beautiful things serving Him while she waits.

Would you be ashamed if the Lord came right now? If so, it may be contributing to a sense of fear you can't quite shake. Take some time and get right with the Lord. He doesn't want any of us to be afraid of Him when we see Him.

And we may see Him at any moment!

