

MESSAGE - The Real Danger of Sin - 1 Samuel 19 - 4.12.26

Have you ever stood in a place and felt the weight of what happened there? History tends to leave its imprint on certain places... and sometimes you can almost feel it.

This happened to me when I visited Caesarea Philippi during my trip to Israel.

[SLIDE 1] Mountains Pic

Driving through the valley, you could see mountains in the distance. These are the Mountains of Hermon — the tallest in the region.

People like Abraham, Joshua, David and Elijah were all very familiar with these mountains.

Mountains in the ancient world were seen as places connected to the divine realm — they were thought to be the home of the gods.

In Old Testament times, the Canaanites believed Baal lived on Mount Hermon. It's said that Baal would ride the clouds and bring the rain.

But by the time of Jesus, Mount Hermon became a melting pot of pagan worship.

[SLIDE 2] Arrival Pic

So when we arrived at the base of Mount Hermon, I was surprised to see so many trees. And through the trees was a path.

[SLIDE 2A] Mountain Stream

Along that path was a stream flowing down from the mountain. At the end of the path is what looks like a massive rock wall.

[SLIDE 3] Rock Wall Pic

And carved into the rock were spaces for all the different pagan idols.

[SLIDE 3A] Gates of Hades Pic

But on the far left was a huge cave.
That cave was believed to be the entrance to the realm of the dead.
It's what many called the "gates of Hades."

And so, as I stood there...
I couldn't help but think of the moment Peter stood in this spot with Jesus.

In the middle of all that pagan worship...
Peter declares Jesus is the Messiah,
the Son of the living God.

And Jesus said to Peter...

[SLIDE 4] Matthew 16:18-19 - ...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades [the realm of the dead] will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

We talked about this last week...
When Jesus died on the cross, He went to the realm of the dead.
But death couldn't keep Jesus tied down.

As Peter said:
"It was *impossible* for death to keep its hold on Him."¹

So, Jesus didn't just escape death...
The gates of death *never stood a chance*.

**There's no power in existence that can hold our King down.
And that means death can't hold His people down either.**

That's the message of Easter.
But really... that's been God's plan all along.

¹ Acts 2:24

God is in the business of *rescuing* His people.

[SLIDE 5] God loosens what evil tries to bind.

And that's exactly what we're seeing unfold in 1 Samuel 19.

In fact, one scholar I read this week said that,
"if there's one word that captures 1 Samuel 19, it's escape."²

On the surface, this entire chapter is about David escaping death.

But underneath the surface...

We're left to wonder whether Saul will ever escape the grip sin has on his heart.

Because the further we get into 1 Samuel,
the tighter sin's grip seems to be on Saul.

It actually reminds me of Genesis 4 when sin took hold of Cain's heart.

Cain became jealous of his brother Abel.

And so the LORD warned him, saying...

[SLIDE 6] Genesis 4:7 - "...sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

Sin is pictured as this beast lurking at Cain's door.
It's ready and waiting to capture his heart and rule over him.

We all know what happened.

Cain gave himself over to sin and killed his brother.

This is the same desire that Saul feels.

Sin has been crouching at his door for a long time.

Anger, jealousy and fear have been building up.

But by the time we reach 1 Samuel 19...

Sin isn't crouching at Saul's door anymore.

² Dr. Justin Bass, The Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 467 — 1 Samuel 19

It's now *ruling* his heart.

Look at the first verse:

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 19:1 - Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David.

Why?

Because every time the Philistines attacked, David pushed them back. In fact, he had more success than any officer in Saul's army. They were even writing songs about him.

Saul could clearly see that the LORD was with David, and that scared him. Because he realized David was the LORD's choice for Israel's next king.

**So now he's determined to kill David.
But Jonathan appeals to Saul.**

He told his dad...

David hasn't sinned against you.

If anything, David's victories have benefited you!

So why would you sin against him by killing him for no reason?

[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 19:6 - Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death."

Saul wasn't just trying to appease Jonathan. These words held a lot of weight in the ancient world.

This was an official oath, witnessed by God, and sworn on the name of the LORD by the king. To break this kind of oath was serious.

So, whether Saul meant what he said or not...

We can't know for sure.

All we know is that in verse 7, Jonathan brings David to Saul, And things are good for now.

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 19:8

Then in verse 8, war breaks out.
David went and fought, and again, the Philistines fled from him.

Verse 8 serves as a test.

We should read that and wonder...

How will Saul react?

Will he keep his oath?

Or will his jealousy take over?

Look at verses 9-10...

[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 19:9-10 - But an evil spirit from the LORD came on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the lyre, Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape.

Obviously Saul failed the test.

As soon as David begins having success again,
Saul's anger returns.

Suddenly the oath he took in the presence of his own son,
and in the name of the LORD... meant nothing.

That proves just how little the LORD's authority meant to Saul.

And so, verses 9-10 bring us back into Saul's house to witness a familiar scene.

If these verses sound familiar, it's because this is the **third time** the LORD sends an "evil" spirit to Saul.

We've already talked about the fact that this spirit isn't necessarily "evil."
That's the NIV's interpretation — some translations call it a "harmful" spirit.

I'm persuaded to simply say:

This spirit from the LORD is sent to do a job.

The job he's sent to do doesn't automatically make the spirit "evil."

Spirit's in the Bible have many jobs.
Some are messengers... warriors... watchers...
And some have jobs for specific moments.

So is this spirit actually doing something *evil* to Saul?

Or is there a *good* reason for the torment?

Like... What *good* could come from this kind of psychological torment?

Think about Saul's position as king,
his spiritual decline, and his mental state.

Considering where we're at in the story...
What would actually cause Saul this kind of inner torment?

**Well, notice that each time this spirit comes to Saul,
it exposes things like fear, anger and jealousy.**

The spirit doesn't *create* these things.
It's just amplifying what's already inside him.

So *maybe* the spirit's job is to reveal what's been ruling in Saul's heart?

I mean.... Honestly that's the role of the Holy Spirit.
But remember, at this point in the story,
the Holy Spirit comes on those who are chosen to be king.

So if the Holy Spirit is with David...
Then how might God intervene in Saul's life to nudge him in the right direction?
He sends a spirit... a member of His divine council.
And the work of this spirit reveals Saul's heart.

Again, all of this is just my own thought experiment...

But if what I'm thinking is correct...
The torment Saul feels is from the fact that Saul *already knows* the LORD is with
David, and that David is God's choice to be Israel's king.

And so maybe the spirit is bringing all of this to the surface...
And it's causing Saul extreme distress.

Because unlike his son Jonathan,
Saul's resisting God's plan to put David on the throne.

Again, Saul doesn't want to give up his position.
He's not ready to let go of his power and control.

**But the more Saul resists God...
the more distress and torment he feels.**

And each time this spirit comes,
Saul's heart is shown to be deeper in the grip of sin.

And so, my *opinion* on all of this is that...

[SLIDE 11] The spirit's job is to expose Saul's resistance to God's will.

Why would God send a spirit to do that?

It's so that *everyone*, including Saul,
can clearly see where his allegiance is.

**What they're seeing is that:
While Saul continues to resist the LORD...
David is aligned with the LORD.**

Again...

What's the key interpretive verse for the whole book of Samuel?

**[SLIDE 12] 1 Samuel 16:7 - The LORD does not look at the things people
look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the
heart.**

And here, the LORD is allowing Saul's heart to be *clearly* seen by everyone.

What does his heart look like?

It looks like the heart of Cain...
It looks like a heart of anger, jealousy and murder.

[SLIDE 13] 1 Samuel 19:9-10

And so by the time we get to this scene,
Saul already had his spear in hand.

His mind is made up.

Despite the oath he took to not kill David,
He's willing to go against the wishes of his son,
And against the very name of the LORD...

Just to keep his spot on the throne.

And so while David was playing,
Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear.
But he missed.

Things were getting dangerous for David.
His wife was worried.

And so David made preparations to leave Saul's house...

[SLIDE 14] 1 Samuel 19:11-13 - Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed." So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head.

Seems like a good plan — but hold on a second...

Why in the world was there a life-sized idol in Saul's house?!

Everyone knew idols were against God's Law.

So this could be a hint in the story that Saul was drifting into Israel's old habit of worshipping other gods.

But ironically, Michal uses it to serve God's purpose.

She dressed it up enough to fool Saul's men into thinking that it was David.
And by the time they figured it out, David was long gone.

Check out verse 18...

[SLIDE 15] 1 Samuel 19:18 - When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there.

Hey! Samuel's back!

We haven't seen him since chapter 16 when he left for his home in Ramah. He's still there doing his prophet thing.

But now he's got a group of prophets under him in a place called Naioth.

Naioth was a community in Ramah where prophets lived and trained together under Samuel.

The prophet's job would prove to be essential throughout Israel's history. They would be the ones who always pointed Israel back to the LORD... Even if what they said wasn't popular.

But I was wondering...

**Of all the places David could've hidden from Saul...
What made him think to go to Samuel?**

Well, David isn't just running to a safe place... He's running to the place where God's Word is honored.

That's incredibly significant.

Naioth is a spiritual refuge.
It's not a military barracks.

In fact...
This might be the *worst* place you could go if you were looking for military protection.

But David wasn't looking for that.

He was looking for the LORD's protection.

But why?

You know, I was thinking...

When Goliath was on the battlefield,
Every single Israelite was shaking in fear...
Except for David.

So why's David looking for protection from Saul?

Well, this isn't a clear cut situation for David.

Goliath was clearly the enemy.
David knew without a doubt that it was the LORD's will for Goliath to fall.

But Saul is family.
Saul is David's king.

So I don't think David ran because he was scared of Saul.
— the text doesn't say that.

I think David escaped Saul because he was looking for a place where he could safely pray and spend time with the LORD — asking for His help.

And what better place to do that, than with Samuel?

In fact, David has a prayer in Psalm 59 that may have been written about this time in his life.

David prayed:

[SLIDE 16] Psalm 59:1,3 - Deliver me from my enemies, O God; be my fortress against those who are attacking me ... See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, LORD.

[SLIDE 17] Psalm 59:4,16 - I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight ... I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.

So, while David is seeking God's help,
Saul sent his men to capture him.
But every time they tried, the Spirit of the LORD stopped them.

I imagine Saul thinking something like:

If you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself!

[SLIDE 18] 1 Samuel 19:23-24 - So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night.

This feels like a weird, almost funny scene... right?

But even this is really important.

Saul is the king.

And as the king, he wouldn't have traveled alone.

He would've had a whole entourage of people.

And if you saw them pass in the street,
you probably would've seen Saul dressed in his royal robes.

But as Saul neared Naioth, the Spirit of God stopped him!
Saul no longer had control of himself.

So now he's prophesying all the way to Naioth.

And when he got there, he stood in front of Samuel,
stripped off his royal robes,
And laid on the ground.

This is not going according to Saul's plan!

Saul came there to kill David.

And instead, he's being held down in the very posture he should've had all along.

And that's where 1 Samuel 19 ends!

So what can we take away from today's passage?

Well, if we zoom out...

We've got two men...

[SLIDE 19] David and Saul. David is pictured as running to the LORD. While Saul resists the LORD.

Saul wasn't willing to give up what he had in order to follow God's will.
That tension causes Saul all kinds of distress.

It amplifies his fear, his anger and jealousy...
to the point where murder seemed like the right thing to do!

Yet the LORD doesn't leave him alone.
The LORD is always in the business of rescuing His people.
Saul always has the choice to turn back to the LORD.

And you know...
There's a story in the New Testament that's similar to the one we just heard...
except it has a different outcome.³

You might remember in the book of Acts when Saul,
—a high ranking Pharisee,
—was breathing murderous threats against the Lord's people.

And while Saul was on the road to Damascus,
Fully intending to kill Christians...
Jesus stopped him.

Just like king Saul fell at the feet of Samuel,
this Saul fell at the feet of Jesus.
And he's presented with a choice: Either obey the LORD, or don't.

New Testament Saul chose to obey the LORD.
Old Testament Saul chose to resist the LORD.

**And the more king Saul resists,
The deeper into sin he gets.**

There's the warning for us...

**[SLIDE 20] The more we resist the LORD, the more our hearts harden,
making it even more difficult to let go of sin.**

³ Acts 9

We've seen this pattern before...

The enemy's strategy of fear has always been:

Distort reality...

Magnify the threat...

and slowly erode our trust in the LORD.

And when trust erodes...

Deception grows.

And when that happens...

Our willingness to resist God intensifies.

That's the real danger of sin.

But here's the thing...

God doesn't leave His people alone.

He's constantly pursuing...

Constantly acting...

Constantly revealing...

And constantly drawing people to Himself.

But it's always with a choice.

Will we embrace His will?

Are we willing to let go of our desire to control...

And let the LORD rule our lives...

Even if it costs us?

Because once we learn to let go...

That's when God enables us to participate in His will.

That's when He begins to use us to intervene in the lives of those who don't know Him.

But what does "letting go" *actually* look like?

You've probably heard the phrase: "Let go and let God."

That's great. But what does that look like in a practical sense?

It looks like trust.

It looks like the moment when we decide not to take control.

It looks like running to the LORD and asking for His wisdom before we take matters into our own hands.

It looks like the prayer Jesus prayed while in the Garden...

Just hours before He faced death,

He said to the disciples:

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Stay here and keep watch with me."

[SLIDE 21] Matthew 26:39 - Going a little farther, [Jesus] fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Notice His posture... face to the ground in prayer...

That's what it looks like to let go and let God.

It doesn't mean we don't have our own desires.

But it does mean that at the end of the day,

We want the LORD's will to be done...

Even if it costs us.

And so may that be our posture this week.

Let's run to the LORD before taking control ourselves.

Let's be willing to allow God to "loosen the ties that bind" us...

Releasing the restraints that hold us back from participating in His will.

But again, that's a daily choice.

And so I'll leave us with a final thought from Joshua.

He said...

[SLIDE 22] Joshua 24:15 - if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

May that be our choice as well.

Let's Pray

We pray as Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into testing, but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever,
Amen.