

Sermon Title: Wanting Answers More Than God

Series: Seeking God's Kingdom, Part 27

Scripture: 1 Samuel 28:3-25

Main Takeaway: Do we want Jesus more than we want answers?

When it comes to Ghost stories...

Spirits...

Magic...

Witchcraft...

And other hard to explain things...

There tend to be two extremes...

Two different worldviews...

[SLIDE 1] Side-by-side Picture: Agent Dana Scully (“Logically, I would have to say no.”) and Fox Mulder (“I want to believe.”)

I think of Mulder and Scully from the X-Files.

Some people are like Mulder.

They not only *want* to believe...

They're *fascinated* by the supernatural and the unexplained.

Others are more like Scully.

They don't believe any of it.

They're convinced that what seems supernatural can be explained by science.

But the thing is...

As Christians, where are we supposed to land?

Well, I recently heard a story from Dr. Ronn Johnson.

He's a bible scholar that did his PHD work on Paul's view of the supernatural.

So... When it comes to **the biblical supernatural worldview**,

Ronn knows his stuff.

And so... picture him teaching at a bible college.
And one day after class some of his students came up to him.
They wanted to know if he'd be free that evening.
They were planning to visit a house in town that was said to be haunted,
And they thought their professor might like to join them.

What do you think Ronn said?

He said...

Absolutely not!

And that's interesting, isn't it?

Here's a man who spent years studying angels,
demons, spiritual beings,
and the supernatural worldview of the Bible...

Yet when asked to go looking for supernatural experiences...
He wanted nothing to do with it.

He wasn't trying to be rude.

This was an opportunity to help them see a biblical perspective.

Because the Bible not only affirms a supernatural reality...
But it also warns us against looking for it.

In fact, in Deuteronomy,
Moses warned the Israelites about this exact thing...

[SLIDE 2] Deuteronomy 18:10-13 - Let no one be found among you... who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD ... You must be blameless before the LORD your God.

So things like ghost hunting might seem like no big deal...
But to God, the supernatural is a very big deal.

We might think:

Yeah but supernatural evil can't stand up to the Name of Jesus.

That's true.

We don't have to be afraid of it.

But we're also not supposed to go looking for it.

Ronn's students hadn't really thought about that before.

And maybe we haven't either?

I wonder...

How did hearing 1 Samuel 28 make you feel?

I mean... think about it...

You got up today...

You got in the car and drove to church...

You said "Hi" to some familiar faces...

You probably checked your texts before we started...

We just got done singing worship songs and praying...

And now we're hearing about a woman who talks with the dead.

The Scully in us might think:

There's no way this happened.

The Mulder in us might think:

Man... this is awesome!

But the Bible's saying:

This really happened...

*And it's **not** awesome.*

The reality is...

This isn't hocus pocus, fantasy, make-believe stuff.

It needs to be taken seriously...

Because this is the kind of thing that's detestable to the LORD.

And yet...

That's exactly where Saul finds himself in 1 Samuel 28.

So chapter 28 tells us...

[SLIDE 3] 1 Samuel 28:3 - Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah...

We heard this before in chapter 25.
Think of this like the beginning of a show...

Like... *"Previously, in 1 Samuel..."*

We've seen what David was up to.
Now we're about to watch what Saul's been doing.

[SLIDE 4] (MAP) 1 Samuel 28:4 - The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa.

You can see on the map that both armies were across the valley from each other.
That means they could see each other camped on the hillsides.

And...

[SLIDE 5] 1 Samuel 28:5-6 - When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.

Notice Saul's fear.
Terror "filled his heart."

So, Saul prayed.
But Yahweh wasn't answering.

It's worth noting that dreams, Urim and the prophets were the three main ways the ancient Hebrew people expected to hear from the LORD.

Dreams were **personal** revelations from God.
Urim was something the **priests** used.
And the **prophets** literally spoke revelations from God.

**Saul tried all three...
But the LORD kept silent.**

Why?
Because...

[SLIDE 6] The LORD already gave Saul His answer.

Way back in chapter 15,
Samuel said to Saul...

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 15:26, 28 - "You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel" ... "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today"

In other words...

Saul's time as king now has an expiration.

And it seems like that time is nearing...

Because now he's looking across the battlefield at the Philistines...

And he's terrified.

He turns to the LORD in desperation...

But nothing changes.

And out of pure self preservation...

Look at what happens next...

[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 28:7 - Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said.

This is something the Israelites were forbidden to do.

In fact the Law says...

[SLIDE 9] Leviticus 19:31 - "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God."

Mediums and spiritists were people who somehow tapped into the spirit world and spoke with the dead.

You know...

We might find ourselves talking with our loved ones who passed into heaven...

I've talked to pastors and friends that do this...

I do this...

But talking to those who are with Jesus about our lives...
Telling them that we love them and miss them...
That's very different from what Saul's medium was doing.

She practiced necromancy...
Which involved witchcraft, skulls, bones, chants, spells...
And all kinds of occult stuff that was detestable to the LORD.

This is seriously evil stuff.
It's what Deuteronomy 18 warned about.
In fact, it's so serious that the Law says...

**[SLIDE 10] Exodus 22:18 - "Do not allow a sorceress to live." [And...]
Leviticus 20:27 - "A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you
must be put to death."**

Now... to be fair...
Saul did order all the mediums and spiritists to leave Israel.

But apparently not all of them left.
Some were in hiding.
Saul knew that.

His men said that they knew of a medium in Endor.

So he and two of his men disguised themselves,
And left their camp for Endor.

You can see that they would've had to sneak around the Philistine army.

And it wasn't an easy walk.
This wasn't a nice little evening rail-trail stroll...
This was some serious hiking through the mountains.

But they made it!
And when they got there, Saul said to the woman...

**[SLIDE 11] 1 Samuel 28:8-9 - "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring
up for me the one I name." But the woman said to him, "Surely you know**

what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?"

We actually saw this back in verse 3.

There's this little detail that says Saul

"expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land."

So, she's afraid that if she's caught, she'll be put to death.

But...

[SLIDE 12] 1 Samuel 28:10 - Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this."

You know...

We've spent months in 1 Samuel.

We've seen what fear has done in Saul's life.

We've seen him swear to people in the name of the LORD.

We've seen him lie and go back on his word.

I don't know how well this woman knows Saul...

But at this point... I wouldn't trust anything he says!

So the woman asks who she should bring up for him.

Saul asked for Samuel.

[SLIDE 13] 1 Samuel 28:12 - When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!"

Couple things...

She saw Samuel.

Some people think this wasn't really Samuel.

They say it must have been a demon impersonating Samuel.

But honestly, I don't see anything in the text that points in that direction.

The text says:

The woman saw Samuel.

Saul knew it was Samuel.

And Samuel spoke to Saul.

I personally believe this really was Samuel...

And that the LORD allowed Samuel to appear for a reason.

But if what she was doing was legit...

Why did she cry out in a loud voice?

I don't think she's surprised that Samuel was appearing...

I think when she saw Samuel, it hit her that it was Saul that asked for him.

The king of Israel is in her house...

She knows that she's essentially running an illegal business...

And so now she's scared for her life.

But...

[SLIDE 14] 1 Samuel 28:13 - The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a ghostly figure [elohim] coming up out of the earth."

This is the only time in the Old Testament where the word "ghost" is used.

But the woman wasn't talking about Casper, haunted houses, or people floating around stuck between this world and the next here...

The Hebrew word behind "ghostly figure" is: *elohim*.

[SLIDE 15] *elohim* (word study chart)

Elohim is a word that's used to describe:

- Yahweh God
- Members of Yahweh's divine council
- The gods of the nations
- Angels and Demons
- And even deceased human beings like Samuel

It's usually translated as "God" or "gods" ...
 Sometimes it's translated as "spirit" ...
 It's got a wide range of uses.

So think of it like this:

An *elohim* is anyone whose home address is the spiritual realm.

So when the woman says:

"I see an elohim (a ghostly figure) coming up out of the earth..."

She's describing a being from the spiritual realm.

And in this case, it's Samuel.

It's interesting...

Verse 14 even says "Saul **knew** it was Samuel."

And while Saul bowed down, face to the ground in front of Samuel...

[SLIDE 16] 1 Samuel 28:15 - Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do."

And Samuel proceeds to tell Saul what he already knew...

[SLIDE 17] 1 Samuel 28:16-17 - Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy? The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David."

None of this is new.

Samuel already told Saul all of this back in chapter 15.

"The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands..."

[SLIDE 18] 1 Samuel 28:18 - "Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today."

The next thing Samuel says is a new piece of information...

And it's the last words we'll hear from Samuel...

[SLIDE 19] 1 Samuel 28:19 - "The LORD will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines."

In other words,
Saul and his sons aren't going to live past tomorrow.
They're going to fall in battle,
And the army of Israel is going to lose.

That's not what Saul wanted to hear!

So he immediately fell to the ground...
He's filled with fear...
His strength is gone.

The medium lady prepared a meal for him,
And Saul eventually went on his way.

And that brings us to the end of 1 Samuel 28.

I hope you're seeing today that it's about much more than a ghost story.

It's a story about fear and desperation.

Saul had questions.
He wanted to know how to defeat the Philistines.
But no matter what he tried,
The LORD was silent.

So he came looking for answers through unconventional means...

And instead of answers, he gets questions.

Four different times Saul's heart was called into question...

[SLIDE 20] 1 Samuel 28 "Why" Chart

- (v9) "Why have you set a trap for my life?"

- (v12) “Why have you deceived me?”
- (v15) “Why have you disturbed me?”
- (v16) “Why do you consult me?”

Notice that each question addressed one of Saul’s sins...

Q1 - The sin of violence.

Think about when he ordered all the priests at Nob to be killed...
And his attempts on David and Jonathan’s lives.

Q2 - The sin of Lying.

How many times did he deceive people?
He’d constantly promise people in the LORD’s name...
And then go back on his word.

Q3 - Rebelling against God’s Law.

Necromancy was illegal...
And he knew it...
But we’ve seen that he often ignored God’s Word.

Q4 - Refusing to accept God’s judgement and will.

He already knew God tore the kingdom away from him...
Yet he tried to keep it any way he could.

But the reality is...

Saul rejected the word of the LORD.

Let’s be clear...

At this point in his life...
Saul **did not** follow Yahweh...
He **rejected** Yahweh...

He may have gone through the religious motions...
He *believed* Yahweh exists...

But what does James say in the New Testament?
Even the demons believe—and shudder. (James 2:19)

Saul **believed...**
 But he didn't **follow** in the ways of the LORD.
 His love and loyalty were in himself.

And so...
 Because Saul rejected Yahweh...
Yahweh rejected him.

Moses warned his people about this in a passage we've already read...

[SLIDE 21] Deuteronomy 18:13 - You must be blameless before the LORD your God.

In other words...
We're to give our undivided loyalty and love to God.

Being "**blameless**" isn't about perfection...
 It's about **belonging**.

We belong to Him...
 Therefore we give Him our **total allegiance**.

Saul was the opposite of that.

He was like the waves of the sea...
 Constantly being blown and tossed by the wind...

He was seeking answers everywhere except where he should.

Not only that...
He's been seeking answers to the wrong questions.

Saul wanted to know how to win tomorrow's battle.
 But he should have been asking...

[SLIDE 22] How did I get here?

Because what started in fear...
 Led to jealousy...

Deception...
 Rage...
 And now... desperation.

All of that could have been avoided if he had just humbled himself...
 And given his full allegiance to Yahweh God.

But Saul stopped seeking the LORD long before he ever went to Endor.

The reality is...
Saul wanted answers more than he wanted God.

That should cause us to reflect on our own lives...

[SLIDE 23] Do we want Jesus more than we want answers?

That's hard.

Choosing to trust Jesus no matter what is hard...
 ...especially when we're not sure how things will work out.

Think of David...
 When his life was threatened...
 And he didn't know how to move forward...

He'd often go to the LORD in prayer.
 He'd cry out:
Why LORD? Why do you not answer me? (Psalm 22:2)
How long, LORD? (Psalm 13:1)

But he didn't stay there.

Unlike Saul...
He trusted the LORD.

In fact...
 Even when facing his worst fears...
 David would say...

[SLIDE 24] Psalm 23 - "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing... He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake... I will fear no evil, for

you are with me... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies..."

Saul wouldn't say any of that.

He lacked trust...

He rejected the LORD's wisdom...

He was filled with fear...

The LORD was not with him...

And, interestingly enough...

In 1 Samuel 28, a table was prepared for Saul...

But it was at a medium's house...

As he was hiding behind enemy lines...

David's table was different.

The LORD not only prepared it...

But the table was *in the presence of his enemies*.

I realize that's poetic...

But for David, this is tied to real experiences.

Even when he was surrounded by his enemies...

David trusted Yahweh in the uncertainty.

We can choose to do the same.

[SLIDE 25] It all comes down to who we choose to trust.

When we don't have the answers...

Will we have the patience...

and boldness...

to trust in the very real presence and wisdom of God?

Or...

Will we run somewhere else for answers?

Let's Pray