

“David – Saul’s Remedy”

1 Samuel 16:14-23

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. ¹⁵ And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶ Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well." ¹⁷ So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me." ¹⁸ One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him." ¹⁹ Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep." ²⁰ And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul. ²¹ And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. ²² And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." ²³ And whenever the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. (ESV)

This is the last sermon in the series on 1 Samuel for this year. For those of you who are new, my basic pattern for preaching is to do Old Testament in the fall until Christmas, and then after advent we will do the Gospels until sometime after Easter, and then usually one of the New Testament epistles during the summer. I had hoped to make it through David and Goliath by now, but I have not. So forgive me. I was actually tempted to skip this section. It's a little dicey and it can't be as important as David and Goliath, and maybe I should do that instead of this. Instead, as I thought about it and worked on it I thought it was, in fact, as important. So, what do you know?

As we look at today's text we're just going to look at two big, macro points. The first point is the power of music, and the second point is going to be the importance of singing.

If you remember, the purpose for this whole book is to make the case that Israel needs a king, and not just any old king, they need a king like David. Just last week we noticed that this king, David, came on the scene. Up to this point Israel had asked for a king like the other nations and God gave it to them, and his name was Saul, and he was a disaster. In chapter 12 he's given the reigns of the kingdom and his first day on the job, chapter 13, he blows it. God says, "You're rejected. You will not have an eternal dynasty under me." In chapter 14 Saul blows it again and he is reminded again that, "The kingdom has been taken from you." In chapter 15 was the biggie, remember? Saul tore Samuel's robe, the one that his mom probably made for him, and Samuel turned around and said, "That's it. You mess with my mama's robe and it's over. From this moment on you are rejected as king over Israel by God." Now he's still in the role, but he's basically like a lame duck king. Immediately, in chapter 16 we see that God comes to Samuel and says, "Why are you grieving over Saul. I'm over it. Here's what I want you to do. Go to Jesse in Bethlehem and I will show you who is going to be my anointed."

As we looked at it last week, it was about David being anointed, but the whole story of David is upside down and backwards. It's easy to miss because when you think of King David, he's the biggie in the Old Testament, and yet when you look at his calling, it's backwards and it's upside down. You see, first of all God tells Samuel, "Go to Bethlehem which is in Judah which is in southern Israel." It's not in northern Israel where he would have expected to find the next king. Then he goes to Jesse's house and he does what common sense would dictate, and he says, "Who's your oldest son, and who's your biggest son?" They happened to be the same guy, Eliab. Samuel looks at him and says, "He must be the one." And God said, "Nope. He's not the one. Don't consider his height or his stature. I look at things differently than you do." Ultimately, David in the birth order is number eight. In the Bible, the perfect number of sons is seven. Once you get past seven it doesn't matter. So of the seven sons, none of them were chosen. Who's going to be the king? Number eight. It's going to be the tallest brother? Nope. It's going to be the smallest brother. Is it going to be the oldest brother? No, it's going to be the youngest brother. It's upside down and backwards. Samuel anoints him as king. Remember the passage at the end of last week where it said, "and the spirit rushed upon David from that day forward." In other words, it came upon David and never left him. The first verse here says, "Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul . . ." So

David is receiving God's spirit, Saul is losing it. The question, first of all, is, "What does that mean?" Can you lose the Holy Spirit, and what does it have to do with God's empowering or his anointing to be king? That is probably why in Psalm 51 (that's David's big confession after his sin with Bathsheba) among other things he says, "... take not your Holy Spirit from me." In other words, David knows the story of Saul and he knows that he has sinned, and he's asking God, "Don't do the same thing to me that you've done to Saul. You took your Spirit from him, you didn't empower him anymore." David says, "Please don't do that with me." So as this story opens up, Saul has lost God's Spirit but then something else strange happens, at least in modern years. An evil spirit from God comes to torment him. That will be our first point to the power of music. Let's look at it quickly.

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. ¹⁵ And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶ Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well." (ESV)

This bothers some people, I know. What is this talking about when it says, "an evil spirit from the Lord?" There are a couple ways to look at this. One is that, at the end of the day, God's providence rules over all of this. In other words He's in control of everything. The Heidelberg catechism says, "that whatever adversity He sends to me in this sad world, I know comes to me not by chance but from His fatherly hand." A better translation of this text that says, "an evil spirit from the Lord," would be "a tormenting spirit from the Lord," or "a harmful spirit from the Lord." In other words it's not a malicious, unregenerate demon who is sent by God to torment him. In fact, it could very well have been an angel, or a righteous spirit from God who is coming to torment Saul. So God sent it. You can't get around that. You see, a lot of people look at a lot of these texts in the Old Testament and they say, "Well gosh, this is probably their version of mental disease or a mental disorder." I have a little bit of background in neurosciences. I looked at Saul and I would diagnose him probably as being bipolar at least, if not sort of schizo-affected, if not being deeply depressed. In modern times, how would we deal with that? A person comes in and they say, "You know I really feel tormented. I feel bad. I don't know what to do." Most of the time we would say, "Here's a prescription for Prozac." If it were I, I would say "Cymbalta" or something that I've sold. But nonetheless, you write him a prescription. Saul may, in fact, have some kind of mental issues, but Saul's main problem is not a psychological disorder, but it's a theological disorder. The problem with Saul is that he knows the words of the Gospel. He knows what he should say and he knows what religious people are supposed to do, but he doesn't know the music. He doesn't really know the music of the Gospel. He doesn't know what it's really like to have a relationship with God. He just knows about him. Since he doesn't know about him, when God sends a tormenting spirit to him, I don't see that as necessarily a curse to Saul, but in fact it might be blessing. Because we look backward, if you're a Christian at least, and you say, "Gosh, what should Saul do? Maybe he should turn to God and ask him for some help and to remove this tormenting spirit, and this is actually an opportunity for him to figure things out." But instead, just like they sought a king like the other nations, they sought a remedy like the other nations. In the ancient Near East the treatment for being tormented by an evil spirit was music, particularly the lyre. So his servants see Saul. They diagnose him and they say, "An evil spirit from the Lord is tormenting you." If you read this closely, it's amazing that Saul never gets it. "An evil spirit from the Lord is tormenting you, so here's what we'll do for you. We'll find someone who is skillful with the lyre and he'll come and play for you and the evil spirit will leave." In the ancient Near East that's what you would have done. You would have went and got the lyre in particular. What's interesting here is that out of nowhere apparently one of his servants pipes up, "I know a guy. He's the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite." Now this is the most bizarre thing in the world if you think about it. There in northern Israel, how would this guy have known about this obscure shepherd down in Judah? But he pipes up. Let me read to you what he says about him.

¹⁸ One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him." (ESV)

So he says, "I know this guy, a son of Jesse who's skillful in playing, he's a man of valor, a man of war, all of these things." What's ironic is basically he's saying to Saul, "Saul, I know a guy, he's not only a good player, but

he's everything you're not." In other words, "He's got character, he comes from a good family, he's a man of valor, he's a man of faith and the Lord is with him. He's everything you're not." If you're Saul, you might think, "I don't want that. He'd be a threat to me." Ultimately he figures that out. Yet, Saul is so tormented he's willing to do anything and he says, "Fine. Bring him. Bring that guy to me." So what does Jesse do? Jesse sends David. Look at the next verse. Saul says,

¹⁹ . . . "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep."²⁰ And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul.

If you were reading this originally (remember this was probably written after they came back from exile), you would have had the benefit of hindsight. As you read this, this would be the craziest thing in the world because you would have known that over and over again that Saul tried to kill David. Over and over Saul tried to get other people to kill David. Saul tried to turn his own children against David. Now here is David in this story being sent by his father at the risk of his life, right into the belly of the beast. You have to ask yourself, "What kind of father, knowing this about Saul, would send his son at the risk of his life in order to help someone who hates him?" Yet, Jesse did it, and David was helpful. But it actually points to an even greater son of David, and his name is Jesus. Just as Jesse sent his son, David, at the risk of his life into the belly of the beast to help someone who would ultimately hate him, God sent Jesus at the cost of his life to bring relief to people who hate him. Think about that. He sent his son, Christ, to people knowing that he would kill him. Knowing that he would give his life for them, and so why did he do it? Because the offering of relief to the people who hated him was more important than his own life. David goes and he does this. David ministers to Saul. David in fact is the only one who can bring relief to Saul. If you're in Israel, you're asking, "Can David help us?" You look and you read this story and you realize that David, God's anointed, was able to help Saul. If David can help Saul, the worst of sinners, he can help anybody. "He can certainly help us." You ask that question, "Who can Jesus help? Who can Jesus bring relief to with this song of the Gospel, this thing he brings?" The answer is easy. It's the worst of sinners. Only He can help you. The question is, "How can He help you?" He helps you by singing to you this song of the Gospel, this music. You see, we often think of the Gospel in terms of words only. Here's your doctrine: a) you're a sinner, b) you've offended God, c) trust Jesus. But it's so much bigger than that. It's a relationship.

I'll move on to the second point, the importance of singing. In the ancient Near East other cultures looked at the lyre as this all-purpose remedy for spiritual tormenting. But in Israel the lyre was the chosen instrument for rejoicing. It was the instrument you chose when you wanted to rejoice. And by the way as a side note, David is sent to play and probably sing for Saul. If there's anything that happens in worship that bothers you like for example you don't like guitar playing in worship or if you don't like drums in worship, or you don't like clanging cymbals, or if you don't like choirs, all of this stuff if you don't like it, blame David. I'm not kidding! 1 Chronicles chapter 6, I believe, attributes these to David. Up until David took over there was no musical accompaniment with temple worship and all these things. David was the one who introduced stringed instruments. The lyre is a stringed instrument. David is the one who introduced percussion. David is the one who introduced clapping. David is the one who introduced cymbals. David introduced all of these things because David more than anyone else knew this song of the Gospel. Most commentators believe that when David went and played for Saul and Saul got relief, it's because David didn't only play, but he sang. We know what David sang, he sang the Psalms because he wrote a great deal of them. So the thing that David did was that he sang the promises of God to Saul and it brought relief. But it was only temporary. Why? Look at the last verse here.

²³ . . . whenever the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. (ESV)

You see the song is helpful. If you hear it, it might be calming, but it can't change you. What do I mean?

When Judy and I lived in Capitol Hill we planted a church there and we were about a block south of Volunteer Park and a few blocks away from St. Marks, and I'd go to Compline [a formal choral service each Sunday

evening] every now and then. Many of you have probably been. A Compline is amazing because it would be completely packed. I mean not only the pews but the floor was filled with people laying, and the huge choir, most of whom did not believe the promises of God, and the people in the building didn't believe the Gospel and yet they would all come out to here this. Why? I'd ask people, "Why'd you come?" "It just makes me feel better. It makes me feel calm. It makes me feel relaxed, at least for awhile."

"What about Monday?" "Neah, then it's back to the grindstone." In other words you can listen to the song and it might be helpful, but something else has to happen in order for you to actually get it. Maybe you're in church today because your wife makes you come. Or maybe you're in church because your parents make you come. Or maybe you're in church because your kids make you come. You say, "It's not that bad, you know. I like the singing and the preaching. I can deal with that, you know. And when I go home it's back to normal." The only way that your life and your heart can be changed by this song is not only for you to hear it but also for you to embrace it, and then for you personally to sing. I think the difference between Saul and David, the reason that David's playing and singing brought relief to Saul, but only temporarily is because while Saul listened to the music of the Gospel he never sang it. He never sang it because he didn't know it. He never sang the promises of God as found in the Psalms because he didn't know them. He didn't sing the promises of God about deliverance because he didn't understand them. To the extent that you understand it is the extent you'll be able to sing it. Let me take it a step further: to the extent that you understand it you will have no choice but to sing it. It will just burst forth from you. So the question you have to ask yourself is, "Why don't I sing? Why am I not found in this constant state of song? Why am I not found in this constant state of either praising God or crying out to him or lamenting him?" The extent that you understand the Gospel is the extent to which you will also be a singer of the Gospel. You won't be able to help it. The more your heart is affected and the more you are able to sing, the more people around you will be able to hear that music.

I think I've told this story before. On one hand I'm almost embarrassed because it's so corny. On the other hand it is absolutely true. It's almost a joke in my family. Judy pointed it out to me only a few months ago. She said, "Tommy, every morning when you wake up, as soon as you get out of bed you're singing something. Sometimes hymns, sometimes Frank Sinatra, but for some reason you're always singing." People often poke their head into the workshop, "Dad, I'm trying to watch TV in here." I know people hear me in the hall. When I was in college I worked at one of the nicest restaurants in Tallahassee, Florida, which happened to be the Olive Garden. You know a town is small when the Olive Garden is the big place to take your prom date. But, I worked there and when things got busy I would always catch myself singing. I remember one day walking up and down the aisle singing "Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending" at the top of my lungs. I'm getting drinks. 'Lo! He comes with clouds descending, Once for favored sinners slain; Thousand thousand saints attending, Swell the triumph of his train: Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Christ the Lord returns to reign." At some point a girl named Julie stopped me and said, "Tommy, two questions. What are you singing, and why are you singing it?" I said, "Talk to me at our break." We talked during the break and I told her the reason why I was singing was because of what I was singing. I shared the Gospel with her. Julie became a Christian that day. The corny part of this story is that about a year later the restaurant gave me a party to send me away to seminary. As I was leaving Julie cried out. She said, "Hey Tommy." I looked back and she said, "Thanks for singing." Am I advocating that you walk around Boeing or your workplace belting it out? No. Only a few of us can get away with that. On the other hand, do people look at your life and they see a song? Do they say, "Man, it's like there's a song emanating from that person? There is a constant singing about that person. There's a constant music. There's something about that person that I need to ask about." The question is that if people are not doing that you have to ask yourself, "Why?" If you really understand the Gospel, if you really understand that God sent His Son at the cost of His life in to the belly of the beast to live the life you and I should have lived and to die the death we should have died. To the extent you really get that is the extent to which you, like David, will sing. Think about that.