

# Saul, David and the Reason for Christmas

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*Faithfulness of God*

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles in the Old Testament to the book of 1 Samuel 26. Now I realize that the environment has the look of Christmas, I realize the music has the sound of Christmas, and also realize that 1 Samuel 26 actually takes place about 1,000 years before what we know as the famous Christmas story, however, if you take the Christmas stories from Luke 2 and Matthew 1, they barely comprise an entire chapter of scripture. And why is that important? Because the Christmas story in conjunction with the resurrection story is really the solution to the problem and so today from 1 Samuel 26, I want to look at the reason for Christmas. You may have never thought about this but the entire Old Testament, all 39 books of the Old Testament basically build a case for why we need what we know as Christmas and today when we come to chapter 26 of the book of 1 Samuel, for those of you that are guests and visitors with us, we are continuing a journey not only through the book of 1 Samuel but really seeing this reason for Christmas played out in front of our very eyes. You see, the book of 1 Samuel begins with a group of people who worship the Lord, obey the word of the Lord, and claim to be of the Lord, but only eight chapters in they looked around them, they looked at everybody else and said, "Do you know what? We would rather have what they have. We would rather be what they are." And so they said, "God, we're not satisfied doing it your way. We want a king. We want to do it the world's way." And throughout what we know as 1 Samuel we see this slow progression into secularism. They walk away from the things of God into the things of the world.

It's not really a story that's ancient, is it? It's really the story of the world that we're walking in today but as you get to the end of 1 Samuel and we see these two characters highlighted whom we know as Saul and David and they're really a microcosm of the clash that is happening. On a larger scale, the culture's going one way, the Lord desires to go another. The same could be said about Saul and David and today as we read once again another account of Saul desiring to take David's life and David extending mercy unto him, we see the same song, third verse, could be better but it's always worse. But more than that, we see in Saul's life, we see in David's response the reason of why we need Christmas.

Beginning in verse 1 of 1 Samuel 26 it says,

1 And the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon? 2 Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. 3 And Saul pitched in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, by the way. But David abode in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. 4 David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul was come in very deed. 5 And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him. 6 Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will go down with thee. 7 So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him. 8 Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. 9 And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD'S anointed, and be guiltless? 10 David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. 11 The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD'S anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go. 12 So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the LORD was fallen upon them.

Now on the surface it appears like once again this constant battle, this struggle between Saul whose crown has been prophetically removed from him, and David the king in waiting. And again, it sounds like we're just repeating the same story over and over. Saul comes after David. David extends mercy. Saul repents. We do it again in the next chapter. And to be honest with you, that really is humanity's story and what I want you to see from this chapter in light of the Christmas season are several things in Saul's life but also in David's response.

The first one is this: the depravity of man. On man's best day he is still wicked. In fact, the Bible in Genesis 6, I mean think about that, there are 1,189 chapters in your Bible and by chapter 6 the Lord says everything that man does is wicked. Now how does this relate to you and I today? What's the picture that God is drawing for us? You know, in Matthew 24, do you know what Jesus said? Jesus said as we get closer to the end, as we get closer to his return it's going to look a whole lot like the days of Noah. Now you go back to Genesis 6, it says that everything they did was wicked. Now I don't know about you this last week but I watched a lot of football. I'm just saying. It's one of those times where we

have the opportunity in that Thanksgiving soon to be Christmas season where a lot of football is being played. Did it not shock some of you the content of the commercials at 3 in the afternoon on a "Thanksgiving day"? I mean, it's one of those that you look at the content and say, "Why are we talking about this? Why are we showing this?" Do you know why? Because we have become Genesis 6 again. We have become wicked in everything we do, everything we support, and everything we pronounce. We have not evolved at all, we've just changed the names of the characters that are involved.

So what do we see here in the first three verses? What does Saul do? He's after David again. He is wicked to the core. He is seeking his life. David has done nothing but be good to him. He's done nothing but been merciful to him but what does Saul do? He comes after him to seek him and to destroy him. Saul is a picture of this depravity, this wickedness of man. Here's the other issue: his propensity. You do realize this isn't the first time that he's come after David. This isn't the first time that he sought after his life. In fact, when you get out of Genesis 6 with the wickedness of humanity, you know it only takes five more chapters before we really do it again as a group assignment. In fact, the Bible talks about in the book of Judges something that we've labeled the sin cycle. You may not be familiar with the sin cycle but it's Saul's cycle, it's humanity's cycle, and unfortunately it's our cycle as well. It goes a little something like this, that humanity's in a good position with the Lord. We're walking the way we should be walking, doing the things we should be doing, but then we fall into temptation. We see others around us and we seek to be like them, to advocate like them, and to live like them. So we fall into the trap of temptation, we fall into the depths of sin, and much like the prodigal son in Luke 15, we find ourselves wallowing in the mud of our sin and we cry out, "O God, please forgive me!" What does God do? He forgives us. We are again in a right restored relationship with him until the next temptation comes down the road and we fall into the trap again, we get in the mud again, we cry out to God again, he forgives us again, and we call it the sin cycle because humanity is perpetually in this place where we cannot help ourselves remove the depravity from our lives. Again, this is who Saul is. You would think, as we'll talk about in a moment, that he would have learned his lesson but he did not.

So what are the depths of sin? You know, there's an old statement: sin will take you further than you ever want to go and cost you more than you ever want to pay and it'll keep you longer than you ever intended to stay. Look in verse 5. It says, "David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him." Now I understand he's technically the king of Israel. I understand that in those days the Secret Service had said, "We have a protocol here to protect our king." I know why they did what they did on the surface but let's peel some layers away here for just a moment. We're dealing with a depraved man who continually falls into the trap of sin, continually goes contrary to the things of the Lord. Do you find it ironic that he's laying in a trench? I mean, think about that picture for just a moment, that he has taken himself and he has placed it under the ground.

Some years ago, a very famous pastor and preacher was sharing his testimony of his story, his walk with the Lord, his conversion and his calling to preach. He happened to be a pretty successful college football player at the time and the Lord was wrestling with him about the battle, the difference between or the tension between the athletic success and his call upon his life. He said in the middle of the night he went out to that football field that he'd been so successful in, and he said he cried out to God and he pleaded with God and he prayed unto God, and he said the Lord told him to get lower. Get lower. So he got down on his knees and he cried out to God, he cried out to God for answers to what was happening and all he heard the Lord say was get lower. Get lower. He said, okay. So he lay prostrate. He said he was there on all fours crying out, tears dropping on the grass and all the Lord said was get lower. Get lower. He said, "God, I don't know how to get lower." He said, "Get lower." So the only thing he could think to do is he reached his hand up and he grabbed a handful of soil out of the ground and he plucked it from that field and he put his nose in it. He said, "God, I've gotten as low as I can get." He said, "I heard God say, 'You should have brought a shovel.'"

Now you find that humorous but it's a very serious statement that when we talk about humanity's depravity I want you to hear something clear: there is no depth that we will not go to run contrary to the Lord in our lives. What did Saul do? He dug a trench. He said, "I'm gonna get so low in the earth, I'm gonna get so far from standing for God, I'm gonna lay in the heart of the earth." And I want you to notice the propensity here, notice what it says. There are people gathered around him. You say, "Well, why is that significant?" I'm going to tell you why it's significant because when humanity decides to go to the depths of sin we never go alone. Do you know what we do? We get people to surround us to protect our sin, to champion our sin, and to celebrate our sin.

That's what we do and so the story of Saul is not just his story it's our story because it shows us what happens when left to our own devices, what happens in our life when we follow the flesh. We repeat the same mistakes over and over. We don't learn from history. We don't learn from days past and it ends up putting us in places where the depth of our sin is so grave that we surround ourselves with people to make sure that our sin is protected, to make sure that our sin will have a mechanism to which nobody can take us out therein. We want to wallow in it all the days of our lives.

When we get to verse 8 and 9, we discover a very harsh truth not just about Saul, not just about humanity but about what we know as the Christmas story is that every single one of us is deserving of death. Notice what it says in verse 8, "Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not." I want to picture the scene for you for just a moment. Saul is out cold. I mean, he is asleep in the trench. His men that were there to protect him are asleep on the edge. This is the picture I get, I just kind of see David and his right-hand man just kind of sitting there going, "Well, this was low hanging fruit. I mean, this is easy. I mean, not only did we not have to bring the weapons up into where we are, there's a sword right there." I don't think we realize, particularly because of where we live and who we are as a culture, at how readily death befalls humanity, and what I

mean by that is that we are always surprised when death knocks on our door. Why? Because we have access to the greatest healthcare, we have access to the greatest nutrition. I mean, after all in the last 120 years we have almost doubled the life expectancy. Can I give you a harsh dose of reality? You do realize our life expectancy today is nothing compared to the guys in the chapter before Noah's flood. I mean, if we think we've really done something, man, Methuselah's got a whole lot on all of us, let me put it that way. But I want you to notice the picture. Saul's life could have been instantly taken from him and he wouldn't have even known it was coming. I mean, he's asleep. He's minding his own business. He is sawing logs. He is dreaming. And in just an instant he would have never awoken again.

Speaking of pictures, on July 8, 1741, one of the most picturesque sermons that's ever been preached on this soil was spoken. In fact, it would be the instrument that God would use to bring about what we call today historically the first Great Awakening, a movement of God that began in the middle colonies and went to the upper colonies, and then it came down to the southern colonies. A man by the name of Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon that most of y'all read in English class in high school, or at least you were told to read it in English class. It's called "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." It's based on Deuteronomy 32:34 where basically it speaks to this fact that man does not realize that with one slip of his foot he finds himself in the grave, and the picture that Jonathan Edwards gave that day in that famous sermon was humanity dangling over the pit of eternity separated from God in a place called hell by a string no more wide than that of a spider's web.

What's interesting is on that day in 1741 there were hundreds of people that flocked to the altar. It began a movement because people realized that it really doesn't take much for death to set foot. There are plans that we have, there are things that we have in place, we always have projected out but the Lord says nobody knows when that day will be. In fact, Jesus told a parable about the man who built his barns. Remember that? He said, "Oh, I've got so much, I need to build bigger barns." It says, "Thou fool, you knowest not that tonight your soul will be required of thee." What is our propensity? Our propensity is to somehow get in this frame of mind that I can somehow avoid, delay or somehow get around what you and I know as death.

Now I know what you're thinking, "I thought this was a Christmas message." You understand the Christmas story is great but you've got to get the reason why. The reason why Christmas is so important is because you and I have done everything we humanly know how to do to avoid death and none of us have figured it out. Why? Because it befalls all of us.

Let me give you a propensity. 1900. The average age of death for an American male was 47. For most of you, you think that's young. 47, that was the prime of my life. Those were the good old days. Those were the days when things actually hurt. They quit hurting now because I don't know what works and what doesn't work. Isn't that our propensity? Our propensity says, "Do you know what? We can buy a little more time." Our propensity is we can do this, we can do that, but the picture and the propensity here is this, that Saul is

us. Here is a man depraved in sin, at the depths of sin, and does not have a clue that in a single moment it could all be taken from him.

Ah, but there's some determination. Look at what David does in verse 12. He says, "So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and he got away." The determination, I want to draw a picture for you. What does David do here that is so significant to us? In his mind does he know that Saul deserves death? Absolutely. In his mind does he know that Saul's gone places he's never even gone before? Absolutely. Does he realize that he has the ability to remove his life in an instant without him even knowing? Absolutely. But here's the picture: what David's about to do is what God has done in all of our lives through the Christmas story, he's trying to get Saul's attention. In fact, if you read the rest of the story beginning in verse 13, David awakes Saul, they have this long conversation about how he spared his life once again, and they banter and they debate but you know the Christmas story is really about God trying to get our attention and I don't know about you but there are times where God uses a 2x4 on me. Do you ever have one of those God-led 2x4 moments where you're walking the wrong direction and God just thumps you? You do realize that's pretty much every one of our moments, every one of our days in today's culture. God is thumping us. God is trying to get our attention. God is saying, "How much longer are you going to continue down this path?"

Have you ever asked this question about our culture: how much longer is God going to put up with this mess? According to this chapter, not much longer. He tells Saul beginning in verse 13, "We're going to do this one more time." Do you know what God has determined to do? God is determined to get your attention. He will allow situations, he will allow circumstances in your life, and what we know as Christmas should have been and should be the ultimate humanity God get our attention event. I mean, after all, think about the story for just a moment. Shepherds on a hill. Angels show up. The sky lights up. Glory to God in the highest. If that's not enough, how about a virgin who's given birth? I mean, the story's pretty impressive if you think about it. Every time you turn around you cannot escape the fact that God's saying, "I'm here to get your attention."

He's 12 years of age. He goes among the religious leaders. They can't answer his questions and he can answer every one of theirs better than they can. He lives an entire life of sinlessness. He walks on water. He heals the blind. He converts untold thousands unto his message. So what does humanity say? "Crucify him! Crucify him! We'd rather have Barabbas." Three days later, he raises from the grave and, by the way, if that's not an attention-getter, I don't know what is, and do you know what humanity says? "Why don't we just tell people his disciples stole him?"

Again, the entire story of Jesus is one big God trying to get our attention. He is determined to show us our sinful condition. He is determined to show us how merciful and how graceful he is but what's our propensity? I want you to turn to the end of chapter 26. I want you to see what Saul says, I want you to see what David says because if this is not the reason for Christmas, I don't know what is. It says, verse 25,

25 Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

Now I want you to imagine if the story ended right there. Boy, it sounds good, doesn't it? God has finally gotten Saul's attention. We're gonna quit this mess and we're gonna go a different direction. That's the way it looks, right? Read verse 1 of chapter 27,

1 And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.

Do you know what we perpetually do as humanity? Are you ready for this? This is going to be a tough pill to swallow. We continually give God lip-service. "I promise, God, I'm gonna get better. I promise, God, I'm gonna stop this mess. I mean, after all, this is the Christmas season, this is the time where we're supposed to be nice and not naughty and I'm gonna behave myself." And the problem is then comes January and we go through the cycle all over again.

I'm going to give you a real harsh dose of biblical reality this morning. Did you know that there is nothing that you can do today to impress God? Some of you are thinking, "You know what? After today I'm gonna clean my act up." Do you know what? You're just like Saul. "Oh, David, I promise we're not gonna do this again." Some of you are going to leave here today going, "I'm gonna quit that. I'm gonna start this. I'm gonna be about this." I've got news for you: even if you succeed it doesn't impress God at all. Do you know why? Because we're all depraved. We all fall into the depths of sin. We keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again but God in his determination said, "Do you know what? If they can't do it themselves, how about I do it for them?"

So the Christmas story is about God coming to depraved, in the depths, deserving death humanity so determined for our sins to be forgiven, so determined for our souls to be saved, he said, "If you can't fix it, I'll do it for you. I'll come to earth. I'll dwell as a man. I'll walk in the dust of this depraved planet. I'll go through the perils of this life. I'll even allow your depravity to nail me to a cruel cross. But then I'm going to raise from the dead. I am so determined to show you a better way that I will take the punishment that you deserve so you can have the life that you can never have on your own." You see, the story of David and Saul isn't just a historical account of thousands of years ago, it's not just a repeat performance of the chapters prior to, it's a chapter in the Bible that once again shows us the reason for Christmas. Why would we perpetually ignore the message again?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today you're here in person, maybe you're watching online, maybe you're even listening on the radio, and maybe today is that day where the Spirit of God took the word of God and really showed you where you stood with God. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be

saved and maybe today you're that person, maybe you've been trying to fix it yourself, maybe somehow, somehow you've been trying to deflect the consequences of whatever it may be, and maybe today you realize that all the songs we sing of this year, all the decorations of this year are really God's way of trying to get your attention that he's the only one who can fix your sin problem. Today if you're that one who needs to call upon the Lord, let me invite you to cry from your heart. It's not about saying a prescribed series of words. It's not about checking off a box or jumping through a hoop or passing a course. It's about crying out, "God, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix." If you're in that place today desiring that forgiveness of sin, realizing that determination of God's love for you, can I encourage you just to call out to him. Maybe your crying out would sound a little something like this. "God, today I confess something that you already know about me, I have sinned, I am depraved and, God, I've gone to the depths of the earth just like Saul did. And so today, God, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. God, I believe he loved me so much that he came on my behalf. God, I believe he loved me so much he resisted all temptation and lived a sinless life. And God, today I believe that those nails that he allowed to pierce him to a cross should have been my nails. God, I believe that I deserve them and he bore the punishment for my sins. But thank you, God, today I believe that the tomb is empty, that Jesus Christ rose from the grave and that I can be forgiven and I can be saved not because I'll get better or stop being bad but because Jesus Christ has satisfied the punishment and the wrath of sin on my life. So God, today the best way I know how I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today that had that conversation with the Lord. We'd love to celebrate with you. In fact, in a moment I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and sing and I want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We've got a whole team set aside, we've got a room set aside, we would just love to hear your story, we'd love to pray with you, we'd love to pray for you. Or maybe today you say, "Do you know what, pastor? I've already taken care of that." Maybe today is the day you say, "Do you know what? But I need to follow in believer's baptism." Or maybe today is the day you say, "Do you know what? I need to be a part of this family of faith." Whatever the decision is, we want to invite you, we're here to celebrate with you. But before I pray, maybe you're one of those saying, "Do you know what, pastor? There's nothing I need to step out and step forward for. I've got all that covered." Maybe today in stepping out of here and going to Sunday school and Bible study in just a moment realizing that the reason for Christmas is so much more than even what we see and hear around us.

*Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you, thank you for Christmas, God, thank you your word says that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. God, thank you that even though we live a life like Saul that you are willing to save us in spite of ourselves. God, today as we are surrounded with all the beauty of the season, may we not miss the beauty of the salvation that you offer us this season. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*