

Last week we began a study of the life of David. I mentioned then, that it's my intention to follow his life chronologically through First and Second Samuel, limiting ourselves to the major events. Last week, we considered the first major event of his life – his anointing.

God had rejected Saul as king and anointed David as king-elect. As I mentioned last week, David will again be anointed (and enthroned) as king in 2Samuel 2 and 5 (at least 10 years later). In the meanwhile, the Lord has many things to teach young David.

Thus, no sooner does the Holy Spirit come upon David (having departed from Saul), we find David summoned to the king's court, which as we shall learn today, would serve as a classroom to prepare David, to one day rule as king.

And so, I want to come to our theme, David's Service in Saul's Court, with the help of three headings: God Troubles Saul (vv14-18); Saul Summons David (vv19-22); David Refreshes Saul (v23).

- I. God Troubles Saul (vv14-18)
- II. Saul Summons David (vv19-22)
- III. David Refreshes Saul (v23)
- IV. Practical Lessons

I. God Troubles Saul (vv14-18)

1. V14—"But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him."
2. This verse of course, is in contrast to v13—having anointed David the Spirit of the LORD came upon him—"but the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul."
3. In other words, the Spirit of God would no longer assist Saul to be king, as He would now prepare and assist David.
4. Thus, for God's Spirit to leave Saul and come upon David meant, God was no longer with Saul but was with David.
5. Put another way—God had rejected Saul but selected David—thus, there's a sense in which vv13-14 begin the transition from Saul's kinship to David's.
6. But v14 not only says that God's Spirit left Saul, it also affirms that—"a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him (notice three things about this distressing spirit)."
7. (1) It was an evil Spirit—the Hebrew word rendered "spirit" is the same Hebrew word earlier applied to God's Spirit.
8. The first Spirit mentioned in v14 is the holy Spirit and the second is an evil spirit, or what is commonly called a demon.
9. Thus, the word translated "distressing" by the NJV is translated "evil" by the KJV and "harmful" by the ESV.
10. Now, most of you know, that at some point soon after creation, a percentage of the angels rebelled against God.
11. They did this under the leadership of a single angel, who would be identified as Satan and his followers as demons.
12. Accordingly, Scripture teaches that all angels are spirits—some are evil spirits and some good spirits (and so this distressing spirit was an unclean spirit or demon).
13. (2) It was from God, v14—"a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him"—that is, God sent the spirit to Saul.
14. Now, as you can imagine, many professing Christians are uneasy with this verse—it seems to say God intended to torment Saul.
15. Well, dear brethren, this is exactly what this text says, and this is exactly what this text means—the Spirit came from God.
16. Now, of course this clearly teaches—God is sovereign over all things, and this of necessity includes evil spirits.

17. Furthermore, it also underscores that evil spirits are real, and they can negatively affect those rejected by God.
18. Some have suggested that it's better to say God allowed the evil spirit to torment Saul and did not send him to Saul.
19. But friends, this is really an unnecessary distinction—the text says the spirit came from God, because it was God's will the spirit come.
20. If Scripture teaches us anything, it teaches us God is sovereign over all creation and that includes Satan and the fallen angels.
21. Thus, it's rather important to this passage to understand, this evil and tormenting spirit "came from God" or was "sent by God."
22. (3) It troubled Saul—the Hebrew word rendered "troubled" literally mean "to terrify or torment"—the evil spirit terrified or tormented Saul.
23. Now, obviously brethren, we are not told the specifics as to how this distressing spirit tormented or terrorized Saul.
24. But, from the context and the rest of Scripture, we can conclude three things—the spirit tormented Saul occasionally, mentally, and judicially.
25. (a) The spirit tormented Saul occasionally, v23—"And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul."
26. This means that the spirit did not always torment Saul—apparently, the spirit came upon him at various times.
27. (b) The spirit tormented Saul mentally—by this I mean, there's no evidence that Saul was tormented bodily (physically).
28. Now, this doesn't deny there's a close connection between the body and soul, but we must distinguish the body from the soul.
29. The fact that this word rendered "troubled" carries with the idea of "terror" underscores it was a mental (spiritual) torment.
30. Thus, it's likely that Saul was tormented with terrorizing thoughts about God, his sin, and the judgment to come.
31. I suggest this, because of the instance recorded for us in the Gospels, of the man possessed of an unclean spirit.
32. Mk.5:2—"And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit."
33. V6—"When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell before Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, 'What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You by God that You do not torment me.'"
34. Here we learn, that the unclean spirit within this man, knew that he would eventually be tormented by Christ Himself.
35. It's in part for this reason, that this unclean spirit tormented this man, as the spirit itself was tormented at its future.
36. (c) The spirit tormented Saul judicially—by this I mean, Saul was tormented by the spirit because of his rebellion.
37. The spirit terrified and tormented Saul as a judgment from God—perhaps I can say, Saul was tormented justly.
38. This is to say—God did not allow this evil spirit to torment Saul for no reason—it wasn't a random decision on God's part.
39. Because Saul rejected God, God rejected Saul, and with this rejection, God replaced His Spirit with an evil spirit.
40. This is what's called a "judicial judgment" which simply means, a judgment from God that is just and deserved.
41. 1Sam.15:26—"You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel."
42. Thus, it's because of the distressing and tormenting spirit, that Saul's servants make a recommendation to Saul.

43. V16—"Let our master now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is a skillful play on the harp. And it shall be that he will play it with his hands when the distressing spirit from God is upon you, and you shall be well."
44. V17—"So Saul said to his servants, Provide me now a man who can play well, and bring him to me"—that is, find me someone who fits this description.
45. V18—"Then one of the servants answered and said, Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the LORD is with Him."
46. Now, there are two questions that are difficult to answer—first, why did the servants suggest a harp player, and secondly, how did Saul's servant know of David?
47. Well, with regards to the first question, there's simply no good answer to this question, except God was arranging it.
48. And with regards to the second question, again, there's no way to know for sure, how the servant heard of David.
49. It's rather likely that Jesse and/or his sons, had told people about David's anointing, and that may have gotten out.
50. Perhaps the greatest difficulty here is, understanding why the servant referred to David as a mighty man of valor, a man of war?
51. Well, I suggest a hint is found at the end of v18—"and the LORD is with him"—that is, it was evident that God had uniquely empowered David.
52. Some have suggested, the facts that David killed a lion and bear, were feats well-known by most surrounding areas.
53. Furthermore, it's also likely that David had to defend his sheep from robbers, which demanded he learn to fight.
54. But either way, one thing is evident, David had earned a reputation of being a brave, honest, and prudent man, who was especially favored by God.

II. Saul Summons David (vv19-22)

1. We are not told what David did after Samuel anointed him—we can only assume he eventually returned to the sheep.
2. In fact, in v19, when Saul sent word to Jesse to send David, he said—"Send me your son David, who is with the sheep."
3. Thus, we find from v20, that Jesse sent his youngest son to Saul, along with various items meant as gifts for the king.
4. V20—"And Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a younger goat, and sent them by his son David to Saul."
5. These were no doubt meant as gifts, given by Jesse to his king—they were a sign of respect for the office Saul held.
6. V21—"So David came to Saul and stood before him. And he loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer."
7. The phrase "stood before him" describes David as an obedient and willing servant—David presented himself to Saul.
8. We learn that Saul "loved David greatly" which says more about David than Saul—it says that David was lovable.
9. Saul loved David because He was a pleasant and obedient young man, who had given himself for his king's good.
10. He has whole-heartedly thrown himself into the service of his king—David proved himself to be very useful to Saul.
11. As a result, we learn that Saul made him "his armor-bearer"—which meant more than merely bearing Saul's armor.
12. To serve as the king's armor-bearer meant that David was like a personal assistant, helping the king in practical ways.

13. Now, let me simply point out, while Saul is described as loving David greatly, in a few chapters, he will hate David greatly.
14. Dear friends, isn't it something, how a person can so quickly and radical change—love you today, hate you tomorrow!

III. David Refreshes Saul (v23)

1. V23—"And so it was, whenever the (evil) spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him."
2. Now, here we learn that David's harp playing, through the blessing of God, was a source of relief and comfort to Saul (notice two things about David's harp playing).
3. (1) It was musical—that is, the harp was a musical instrument used to play melodious tunes and songs—now, we have no way of knowing how these tunes or songs sounded.
4. Nor are we told when or how David learned to play the harp—it's very possible he learned as he tended the sheep.
5. It's also very possible that he learned after he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, as he began to compose Psalms.
6. Thus, it's been suggested, that the songs David played for Saul were in fact inspired Psalms that included words.
7. Personally, I envision David playing his harp and reciting the words of Psalm 23—"The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want."
8. In fact, in 2Samuel 23, in the David's final words, he describes himself in v1—"Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel; The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue."
9. And so, while only the harp is mentioned, it's very likely this included both the instrument as well as the vocals.
10. MH—"Only his instrumental music with his harp is mentioned, but it should seem, that he added vocal music to it, and sung hymns, probably divine hymns, songs of praise, to his harp."
11. Now, there's actually better evidence that David likely sang Psalms to Saul, that our beloved and trustworthy, Matthew Henry.
12. The Hebrew word for "Psalm" literally means "to pluck" and refers to the plucking of cords on a stringed instrument.
13. In fact, in the most literally sense, a Psalm is a song sung to a stringed instrument—that's what the word means.
14. It's for this reason, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), actually uses the word for Psalm three times in our passage.
15. The phrases "skillful player" in v16 and in v18 are translated with the word "Psalm" and also the phrase "play it with his hand."
16. Literally, the Septuagint renders v23—"David would take a harp and Psalm it"—that is, pluck it or sing to it.
17. Thus, it's for this reason, many (if not most) commentators suggest, David not only played the harp, but sang Psalms.
18. (2) It was medicinal—that is, David's harp playing was therapeutic to Saul—it brought healing to his mind and soul.
19. V23—"Then Saul would become refreshed and well"—this word translated "refreshed" means "to find relief."
20. When David played His harp (and assumedly repeated the Psalms), the evil spirit would temporarily depart from him.
21. And this departure gave Saul relief which resulted in him being "well"—that is, "well" as in being mentally sound.
22. This doesn't mean he was converted, but it merely means, he had temporary relief from the evil and tormenting spirit.

23. Thus, I don't believe it was merely the harp playing itself, that drove the spirit away and gave Saul temporary relief.
24. It was God Himself who did this, through (or in conjunction with) David's harp playing and likely Psalm reciting.
25. I say this to say, it was God's Spirit who anointed David, who enabled him to be a means of refreshment to Saul.
26. Perhaps I can put it this way—had the servants suggested another harp player (other than David), it would not have brought any relief.
27. Another harp player would not have worked—it was because God had put His Spirit upon David, that David could drive the evil spirit away.
28. Now, let me say in passing, before we come to our lessons, a few words about the potential influence of music.
29. Music, both its tune and lyrics, can have a wonderful and even powerful influence on a person, either for good or bad.
30. And it's for this reason, God Himself has introduced corporate or congregational singing, as a part of NC worship.
31. And furthermore, brethren, as you know, God has also provided an inspired hymnbook for the church in the Psalms.
32. Now, friends, as you know, we believe Scripture teaches it's lawful for us to sing hymns and songs in addition to Psalms.
33. These are lawful to sing providing (1) they are intended for congregational singing, and (2) are Biblical in nature.
34. But here's my point for you, especially the young people among us—be very careful what you allow in your ears!

IV Lessons

1. Here I want to back up from this passage, and suggest five broad and selective lessons from this time of David's life.
2. (1) We learn about God's sovereign providence over all things—here, I want to remind you of the big-picture.
3. It's rather easy to forget the truth, that God is behind the scenes, orchestrating and governing the affairs of men.
4. And this is a primary reason for the narrative sections of our Bible—these teach us that God is ultimately in control.
5. It's much easier to look back over a historical narrative, and behold God's sovereign and powerful oversight of all things.
6. For example, as we look back over what we've seen about David's life, we see that God is controlling every event.
7. God Himself rejects Saul and chooses David—He sends Samuel to Bethlehem and to Jesse and his eight sons.
8. God Himself reveals to Samuel that he has rejected the first 7 and chosen the youngest—he then has Samuel anoint him.
9. And then, Samuel leaves David to return to the sheep—He then sends an evil spirit to torment and terrorize Saul.
10. He then has one of Saul's servants to seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp—then one of the servants suggests David.
11. Friends, this was not random! Why did one of these servants suggest David, but because God wanted David to minister to Saul!
12. Nothing in this narrative, not a single thing, is random—nothing merely happens by chance or without a reason.
13. God wanted David to serve in Saul's court, and all these minor details, were all orchestrated by God to fulfill His plan.

14. Now, here's my point—one purpose of Old and NT narrative is to allow us to behold God's sovereign providence.
15. And if God was in total control over the life of David, then He is just as in control over the life of every Christian.
16. Christian friend, God is no less in control of your life than He was of David's—He's arranging every detail to fulfill His plan.
17. I really like the imagery of an orchestra—an orchestra contains numerous people with various musical instruments.
18. Now, if there wasn't a conductor or arranger, all of these instruments playing at the same time would sound terrible.
19. But because the conductor orchestrates or arranges the instruments in a certain way, they play in perfect harmony.
20. Well, God is the Grand Conductor, who orchestrates and arranges every single event in our lives in perfect harmony.
21. You might say—Recent events in my life seem out of tune with the rest—NO, dear friend, they are in perfect tune with the rest.
22. You may say—From my perspective they seem out of place—and I would say—Yea, perhaps from your perspective, but not from the perspective of the Conductor!
23. (2) We learn about the need for diligence in the Christian life—this is a lesson we learn from the young David.
24. As I have already said, we learn from v19, that David had returned to the sheepfold to care for and feed the sheep.
25. Brethren, think of it! This is God's king-elect! He was anointed by Samuel the prophet! He was rather special!
26. And yet, how does David view himself? How does He respond? Does he sit down and wait to be exalted to the throne?
27. No! He humbly and diligently returns to his duty! He returns to the regular and mundane! He returns to his sheep!
28. And then, when Saul calls his father to send him to royal court, what does he do? He presents himself to serve the king!
29. Now, what does this say to us—well, do you remember I said last week, that David had to wait until he became king.
30. Although he was anointed to be king in 1Samuel 16, he wouldn't become king until 2Samuel 5—he had to wait—but what did he do while he waited—he worked!
31. And if you remember, I also suggested last week, that we too have been anointed to reign as kings with Christ.
32. And what are we to do while we wait? We are to work! We must prove to be faithful in every calling we have (though we've been anointed to one day rule, in the meanwhile, like David, we may have to tend the sheep.
33. (3) We learn about God's judicial judgment upon defiant sinners—here I am thinking about the evil tormenting spirit.
34. Dear friends, some of the most frightful words in Scripture are found repeated in Romans 1—"And God gave them up."
35. When God gives up on a person, there's no hope for them—He simply gives them over to themselves and evil spirits.
36. Though it may not be a very popular thought, but it's the truth of Scripture, God does give up on nations and people.
37. If a person or nation continues to reject the truth of God, it's possible that God will turn His back upon that person or nation.
38. And sometimes, if not oftentimes, He will allow such people, abandoned by God, to be filled with unclean spirits.
39. (4) We learn about the folly of turning to the world for relief—here I am thinking about Saul turning to music for help.

40. It's a tragic thing, that when God begins to trouble a man's conscience, he looks to the world for relieve and comfort.
41. What Saul should have done was this—he should have humbled himself, and turned to God for mercy and forgives.
42. But instead what does he do? He follows the counsel of his servants, to find someone who was skilled on a harp.
43. Now, as we've seen, because God brought David to minister to him, this brought a measure of temporary relief.
44. But brethren, just stop and think for a second—the fact that Saul agreed with the servant, is rather far-fetched.
45. Saul was actually desperate for help, and basically, goes along with his servants, and follows their suggestion.
46. Now, here's the lesson or principle—when God troubles the mind or soul, do not look to the world for a remedy.
47. I want to say something at this point that may be misunderstood—thus, let me say it and then clarify what I mean.
48. We live in a day, when every form of mental illness, is viewed as physical sickness which needs medical help.
49. But here we learn, that much of what does under the title of mental illness, is nothing more than God troubling hearts.
50. Now, me clarify—are there legitimate mental illness that may need various medications to bring proper relief?
51. Yes! But, the majority of people who claim to suffer with mental illness are merely looking to the world for a remedy.
52. Now, I've described God's sending a distressing (evil) spirt to torment Saul, as an expression of judicial judgment.
53. But God troubles the conscience of sinners (through a variety of ways), for the purpose of driving them to Him.
54. Richard Phillips—"While we should acknowledge that not all psychological struggles stem directly from spiritual roots, it remains the case that unrepented sin is often the cause for emotional, psychological, and even physical distress."
55. (5) We learn about the power of the gospel to dispel all torment—I want to suggest this is really the main point.
56. The point of this passage is to illustrate the fact, that nothing can heal a sinner's heart, but Christ and His harp.
57. What do I mean by Christ and His harp? Well, I mean Christ and His gospel, which is about Christ and His cross.
58. Do you remember what that heavenly host sang in celebration of the birth of God's beloved and only begotten Son?
59. Lk.2:14—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men"—this is the only song that heals.
60. In other words, the gift of Christ was an expression of God's goodwill (His benevolent love) towards men—and there's two reasons behind the gift.
61. (a) Glory to God in the highest, and (b) peace on earth—that is, He gave His Son to bring to poor troubled sinners, that results in bringing glory to God.
62. O poor troubled soul, regardless of the causes of your torment, look away from the mere harp-playing of this world.
63. Look away from its supposed remedies! Look no further than to David's Greater Son, who alone can bring relief.
64. He alone can drive out that fear that torments your soul! He alone can heal the tormented soul and bring peace!