

A Deafening Silence and a Hopeless Situation

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Preacher: Peter Ervine

[0 : 00] So, can I just say before we get started that this is likely to be the best sermon that you will have heard on this passage. Because it seems that this is not a passage that is often preached on, and I suspect that not many of you have heard this passage preached on.

But it is the word of the Lord, and we expect to hear from him. So let me just pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that you are good.

Thank you for your word. Thank you that it is alive and all useful for teaching. Lord, speak to us and help us to really hear what you have to say.

I ask that anything that is just of me will quickly be forgotten, and that you will be glorified here in this place tonight. So I've titled this A Deafening Silence and a Hopeless Situation.

Okay, maybe not a very inspiring title, but let me reassure you that there is hope. There is hope at the end, at least.

[1 : 13] So, a deafening silence then. Verses 3 to 14. Now, silence generally means that there is no communication.

If you are leading a discussion group, as I often do with young people, and you ask a question and you get no answer, there is just silence.

It can be really hard to work out what is going on. It can be really difficult. You know, has nobody understood what you've just asked?

Has nobody understood what you've been talking about? Is everyone just shy or bored? You know, who knows what's going on? It can be really tricky when there's silence.

On the other hand, silence can say a lot. Like for parents whose kids have gone silent, there's a good chance that they're up to something and you need to go investigate what they are up to.

[2 : 22] Or in a noisy classroom, if pupils realize that their teacher is silently standing, waiting at the front of the class, they should know that it's time to be quiet.

And if they don't watch out, there could be trouble. Silence can speak volumes, and a deafening silence says a lot.

So let's look at this deafening silence that we see in Samuel chapter 28. If you can have the passage open, that will be helpful as we go through the verses.

There will be some other Bible verses, but I'll put those up on the screen. So right at the start of our passage, we are given two important facts to understand the rest of the chapter.

One, Samuel is dead and buried. And two, Saul has expelled the mediums. Okay, those who believe they can talk to the dead.

[3 : 28] He's expelled them from the land. And it quickly becomes apparent why these details are so relevant. Next, we see that the Philistines, shown in red here, the enemies of God's people have assembled, ready to battle Saul and the Israelites.

Saul has gathered his army, shown in green here. And as he looks at the enemy army, he's filled with terror.

He does exactly what he should do and asks God what he should do. But God is silent. He doesn't answer through dreams or through the Urim, which was some kind of priestly device to find God's will.

And he doesn't answer through prophets. Saul is stuck. What can he do in this situation? He's tried the normal ways of getting answers from God to no avail.

He feels the need for guidance. Somehow, he's got to find out what to do. It's not that he really wanted God.

[4 : 46] No, he just wanted guidance, the guidance of God, not God himself. And it's tempting to want God's stuff. To want that stuff without really wanting God.

Without really wanting him. I find that even when writing a sermon, instead of wanting to take the time to really wrestle with God's word and learn from it, and have God change me and help me to love him more, it's tempting to just want God to make it a bit easier. To just give me the sermon. To just simply give me the words to say. So that I have a good sermon, and I don't look like an idiot standing here, not knowing what to say. But God wants us to desire him. Not just what he can give. Saul just wants to know what to do. How to get out of trouble. And God won't give him the answer. What can he do in this desperate situation?

[6 : 05] Well, as far as Saul is concerned, desperate times call for desperate measures. Even though Saul had followed God's law, and gotten rid of the mediums from his kingdom, he decides he must now consult a medium to get advice.

So he tells the servants to find a woman who is a medium, so he can inquire of her. Somehow, the rules don't apply to him. And here we see two things.

One, we see that bad rulers can do good things. Saul did get rid of the mediums. Our own governments can be similar. Although they may be bad, they can still do some good things. Likewise, doing something good doesn't necessarily make a government or ruler good. And then secondly, we see the utter hypocrisy of Saul.

Saul did not do it. To have tried to get everyone else to stop doing something, and then to go and do it himself. It's like the classic bad politician.

[7 : 19] Or even worse, the hypocritical, do as I say, not as I do, preacher. It again shows Saul up for the kind of leader he is.

Now, even though Saul had enacted God's law on mediums, his servants seemed to quite easily be able to tell Saul of one such woman not too far away in Endor.

So, he decides to go, completely forgetting what God says in Leviticus chapter 20, verse 6. And unfortunately, that has gone off the screen.

But it says, if a person turns to mediums and necromancers whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among the people.

In his desperation to have, sorry, in his desperation to save himself, Saul is helping to put the final nail in the coffin of his kingship. Saul knows that as king he can't be seen going to a medium, so he disguises himself and he goes out at night with just two of his servants.

[8 : 42] He also needed to hide himself from the Philistines whose camp at Shunem he had to skirt around to get to Endor where the medium was.

So Saul gets there and he asks the medium to consult a spirit but she's concerned that this is a trap.

She'll be found out and punished. Now notice the irony of Saul's response. He swears in God's name. As surely as Yahweh lives, you will not be punished for this.

He uses God's name to promise her she will not be punished for something God has decreed must be punished. Then we get to the question of who she should bring up from the dead.

Here we see the reason that Saul wanted to go to a medium. Saul wants Samuel. If only he could speak to Samuel.

[9 : 54] Samuel would tell him what to do. Samuel would be able to get God's guidance for him. As far as Saul is concerned, this is his only hope.

Now, no details are given of what exactly the medium does and for good reason. There are two main problems we tend to have when thinking about the occult.

Either we write it off as just silly nonsense or we become far too interested in it. And if the details were given, no doubt many would try to reenact the practice themselves.

And it reminds me of a time in secondary school, early secondary school, and for some reason my form class at lunchtime decided to get involved in some of this stuff.

they decided to play with a Ouija board of their own making. And I can remember I just laughed it off as silly nonsense. And it was just silly nonsense.

[11 : 01] But yet, two of the girls that were involved afterwards became really paranoid. and for a few weeks they really had a hard time.

You know, Satan had used that situation to really affect them and to impose on them and ruin their life for just a few weeks.

Thankfully, it was short-lived. But it just shows us that we shouldn't take these kind of things lightly. Then in verse 12 we see that the woman sees Samuel and cries out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, Why have you deceived me?

You are Saul. Now these verses throw up all sorts of questions. Is this really Samuel? Did this woman really know how to speak to the dead?

Why is she so scared? Well, last question first. Why is she scared? Well, I believe there are two main options. Option one, she is just a scammer, a trickster, and never expected to really see a ghostly figure.

[12:22] So when she actually sees one, it scares her. Or, option two, which I would tend towards, is that she did believe she could speak to the dead, but on seeing Samuel and realizing who he was, she also realized who her client was.

Her client was Saul. And that is why she cried out saying, Why have you deceived me? You are Saul. She was scared that she had been found out.

and she was going to be in big trouble. So then, do I believe that this woman could really speak to the dead?

No, I don't. I could be wrong, but I don't see any reason to believe that anyone but God can bridge the chasm between the living and the dead.

it's my belief that mediums that truly believe they are contacting the dead are more than likely being deceived by evil spirits. So, was this really Samuel?

[13:38] I think so. Some would argue that it is instead an evil spirit or demon, but given the message that is conveyed and the way he is described, I think it is much more likely that it really is Samuel.

But would God really use an evil situation like this to speak? I think so. Just like when the chief priests were plotting to kill Jesus and Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year, said, you know nothing at all.

You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation.

Now, it is hard to imagine what Saul was thinking here. How is anything good going to come from this? But such is Saul's state of mind, that he sees speaking to Samuel as his only hope.

God's silence has driven him to despair. And there will be times in our lives when God will seem silent.

[15:09] And we will be in good company, like with Job and King David. in Job chapter 30 verse 20 it says this, I cry out to you for help and you do not answer me.

I stand and you only look at me. Job feels God's silence. And then King David, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry by day but you do not answer and by night but I find no rest.

This is what King David writes in Psalm 22. So I say don't despair if God seems silent to you. You are in good company and if we now look at the hopeless situation that Saul is in, let me reassure you that there is hope.

So a hopeless situation verses 15 to 25. So we come to Samuel and verse 15 and this is what he says.

[16:40] Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up? Now I can't help but think that he is not best pleased. Saul explains his situation.

He explains that God has departed from him and no longer answers and he wants Samuel to tell him what to do. Samuel in turn explains that in reality God's silence is speaking loud and clear. God had already spoken and this is God fulfilling that prophecy spoken through Samuel in chapter 15.

18. He adds that the next day Saul and his sons would be dead and that the Philistines will defeat Israel's army.

If Saul was in despair before he must now be in complete and utter despair. So much for trying to get guidance through illegitimate means.

[17:54] Saul collapses in hopelessness having not eaten and refuses to eat but is eventually persuaded by the woman and his two men to eat something.

They succeed in making Saul a little more comfortable as he faces complete disaster. This food has been described as a meal fit for a king eaten by a man not fit to be king.

This one hope that Saul had this hope that to speak to Samuel would fix things has really blown up in his face.

This is now a truly hopeless situation. It is clear for all to see. The hopelessness has been laid bare. Now let me just say there are two kinds of hopeless situation. There are the truly hopeless situations like Saul's and there are situations that merely seem to be hopeless.

[19:19] Often though the problem is that one appears to be the other and vice versa. Often people are lured into a false sense of security feeling that everything is fine and dandy.

And Jesus gave an example in the parable of the foolish rich farmer. In Luke chapter 12 and this is what he said and he told them this parable the ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.

He thought to himself what shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. Then he said this is what I'll do I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and there I will store my surplus grain and I'll say to myself you have plenty of grain laid up for many years take life easy eat drink and be merry but God said to him you fool this very night your life will be demanded from you then who will get what you have prepared for yourself he thought he had it all but without God his situation was truly hopeless as Jesus said in Mark chapter 8 verse 36 what good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul so those are situations that are truly hopeless that appear like they are not hopeless but on the other hand we have what appear to be hopeless situations that are actually far from it in

Acts chapter 7 we see Stephen preaching to the members of the Sanhedrin after being falsely accused of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God okay and this is what it says in Acts chapter 7 verse 30 sorry verse 54 when the members of the Sanhedrin heard this they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him but Stephen full of the Holy Spirit looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God look he said I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God at this they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices they all rushed at him dragged him out of the city and began to stone him meanwhile the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul a different Saul while they were stoning him Stephen prayed Lord Jesus receive my spirit then he fell on his knees and cried out Lord do not hold this sin against them when he had said this he fell asleep humanly speaking Stephen's situation was hopeless he was about to be stoned to death for simply speaking the truth there was no possibility of escape but we don't see someone filled with fear and hopelessness like Saul instead we see Stephen is filled with forgiveness and hope this is the difference God makes this is the difference Jesus makes and there are Christians in these times today who face persecution and death in a similar way to

[23:29] Stephen Jesus is still making that difference so as we look at Saul at the very end of our passage we see a man forsaken by God going out into the dark of the night I hope we can see how easily this could be us without Jesus and I wonder what kind of situation you are in if God seems silent or you feel forsaken let me point you to Jesus God has spoken through his word and through sending Jesus those same words we saw

King David using earlier Jesus cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me if we are trusting in Jesus we will never be forsaken because he was let me just finish with some of the words of the song we'll be singing next I'm forgiven because he was forsaken I'm accepted he was condemned I'm alive and well his spirit is within me because he died and rose again let me just pray Lord I thank you for your word Lord I thank you for Jesus I thank you that he came he died and he rose again Lord I thank you that he was willing to be forsaken so that we don't have to be and Lord I thank you that we can put our trust in Jesus and we can know that we will never be forsaken and Lord I pray that that would be true of every one of us here tonight Lord help us to know Jesus help us to know your word alive in our lives we pray this in Jesus precious name
Amen