

1 Samuel 22:1-23

SI: On a historical level, the book of 1 Samuel is about the establishment of Israel’s monarchy, and about how David became God’s chosen king. On a spiritual level, 1 Samuel is about what it means to live by faith.

INTRO: I once talked to a man who told me he couldn’t believe in God because of the things he had seen in the Vietnam War.

If there is a God, he wouldn’t have let those terrible things happen. That’s one of the biggest objections to belief in God— not just God in general, but specifically in the God of the Bible, Christianity. Because we believe, Bible says that God is all good and all loving and all powerful. But if that’s who he is, then why doesn’t he stop evil? Why does he allow some people to do such vile, cruel, horrible things to other human beings? Abusing, raping, murdering.

This objection to Christianity has been around for a long time.

Either he’s not loving, doesn’t care, or he does care but powerless to do anything. So the Christian conception of God is wrong.

That’s the logical conclusion many people come to. And even for Christians, who know God is loving and all powerful, and who believe that with all their hearts, even for us there are times when the problem of evil is perplexing.

A few years ago when we studied Paul Miller’s book *A Praying Life*, one of his points was that every Christian ought to be praying for one or two big things, world-changing things.

I took that to heart and started praying for North Korea because, at the time, a fellow Covenant Seminary graduate named Kenneth Bae was in prison there. He was sentenced to 15 years but released after serving two years.

I began praying for him and for North Korea.

Started reading about North Korea. The more I read, the more perplexed.

From late 1800s to 1940s Pyongyang, Korea was called the Jerusalem of the East. There were hundreds of thousands of Christians, numerous churches, Christian schools, Bible colleges, seminaries.

Ruth Bell Graham, Billy’s wife went to Christian high school in Pyongyang.

Her parents were Presbyterian missionaries in China, sent here there. But every single church and Christian institution has been destroyed.

For the past 70 years North Korea has been crushed under an atheistic regime. The health and happiness of millions of people has been stolen by three generations dictatorship by the Kim family.
What is God doing there? Why is he allowing such evil?

We're overloaded with news stories. It's hard to be moved by every one. But sometimes a story comes along that punches you in the stomach. I read recently about a little boy, living in a city here in America, who was beaten to death by mother's boyfriend because he ate a piece of cake without permission. When I read that I thought: Lord, you know how much little children love sweets. You know how precious it is to see their pleasure eating cake and ice cream. Why on earth did you allow this twisted man to even get close to this child? And maybe, for some of you, the question is even more personal. You've been the victim of evil and wondered: Why God?

The Bible gives answers to the problem of evil. There are answers in this chapter which we're going to ponder. But of course the issue then becomes:
Are you willing to accept the Bible's answers?
Because they probably aren't exactly what we want to hear.
They don't explain every complex and perplexing situation.

But they do give us a big way of looking at God and the world and evil. They tell us the important things we need to know and remember. so we can continue to trust God in the face of evil and suffering we can't account for or explain.

So let's jump in. I'm going to give you three points as we go.

MP#1 God cannot be blamed for evil; people are responsible for evil in the world.

Look at the way the writer of 1 Samuel builds the case that Saul, and Saul alone

is responsible for the evil he inflicts on these fellow Israelites.
The first thing is he allowed fear and envy and hatred to run rampant in his thinking
Over and over his own son Jonathan told him, Father, stop this.

David is loyal to you. He's been a blessing to you and to Israel.
But Saul chose to indulge in these thoughts and emotions and made no effort
to suppress them. He feasted on them.

There's a poem by Stephen Crane called "In the Desert."

Crane was certainly not a Christian but he understood this is where evil starts.

It starts in the mind of a person indulging in certain thoughts and emotions.

In the desert

I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.

I said, "Is it good, friend?"

"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;

"But I like it

"Because it is bitter,

"And because it is my heart."

That's Saul, feasting on the bitterness of his heart.

Notice how that makes him view other people. He's holding court in Gibeah.

He has his spear in his hand which we know he is ready to throw. Enraged.

His officials are all standing around him and he's berating them.

I've given you fields and vineyards, I've given you all positions of authority.

What has David given you? He's given you nothing.

He makes a point of calling them men of Benjamin as a reminder that David
is from a different tribe. He's from the tribe of Judah, can't be trusted.

It's obvious that Saul thinks these men will be as motivated by self-interest
because that's how he is motivated.

He can't conceive that these men might still respect David since they
fought along side him and followed his leadership in many victories.

All Saul can see is self-interest. He can't see anything beyond that.

This is another aspect of evil in the world, people being driven by self-interest
instead of love and loyalty.

Saul is not only motivated by self-interest, he's eaten up with self-pity and paranoia

He says to his officers: Why have you all conspired against me?

No one has been honest with me. You've all deceived me.

None of you are concerned about me.

In *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, William Shirer describes the last days in Hitler's bunker and his paranoid rantings;
"Everyone has deceived me! No one has told me the truth! The Armed Forces have lied to me!
Hitler was practically quoting King Saul.

And Hitler's mistress Eva Braun said:

"Poor, poor, Adolf. Deserted by everyone, betrayed by all. Better that ten thousand others die than that he be lost to Germany."

Hitler surrounded himself with people like her and many others who chose to support him and do his dirty work.

That's what you see with Saul as well. He finds people as corrupt as he is to agree with him and carry out his plans.

There is the interesting detail that when Saul ordered his guards to kill the priests, they all refused. This shows clearly that this was a moral choice.

Saul should have taken that refusal as a warning this was not right, but he didn't. He ordered Doeg the Edomite to kill the priests and put the whole town of Nob to the sword, which he did.

David reflected on this massacre in Psalm 52. Here's how he starts.

Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man?

Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?

David clearly understood that God cannot be in any sense held responsible for this evil. It's evil men that carry it out and God will judge them.

Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin.

This doesn't answer all our questions.

What about the suffering caused by natural disasters?

That's another topic that would require studying Genesis 3, Romans 8, exploring how Adam's fall and the curse affected all creation.

But the Bible clearly lays the blame for evil in this world on people who choose to embrace sinful thoughts and attitudes and to act out of self interest and self pity and to gather people around them with the same view.

Extreme examples like Saul, like the dictators even in our modern times are

MP#2 God is not powerless; he uses the evil actions of people for his purposes.

As we've just seen, sin and evil comes from fallen creatures.

First from Satan and then from Adam and Eve and their posterity.

God is not the source of evil but he's not powerless before it either.

He is sovereign over it and uses it for his purposes.

Someone has said God uses sin sinlessly.
Let's look at this story and then at a wider biblical picture.
How did God use the massacre of the priests of Nob for his purposes?

This complicated but important.

Do you remember back in chapter 2 of 1 Samuel there was something else evil that was going on in Israel? Old priest Eli had two sons, Hophni, Phineas. These sons were misusing their position as religious leaders.

It says they were getting fat off the sacrifices of the people.

They were taking their offerings, using them for their own enrichment.

They were threatening people, sexually abusing women who came to worship. God warned Eli but he did nothing to stop his sons so the Lord spoke to the little boy Samuel, who was serving there. Gave him a message for Eli.

God said, because you have honored your sons over me,

I'm going to remove them and all your descendants from the priesthood.

I'm going to raise up a line and family of priests who love me and love my people, but Eli, I'm going to end your line.

Right after that, Hophni and Phineas are killed by the Philistines, but their descendants continued to serve as priests until this event.

You see Ahimelech and the priests of Nob were all descendants of Eli's sons.

And even though Saul's action was evil and condemned by God, in carrying out that massacre, he fulfilled God's purposes.

Saul also inadvertently accomplished another thing God had planned.

When the one surviving priest fled to David, this man Abiathar—the next chapter tell us that he brought the ephod with him.

Ephod was a vestment that was somehow used to determine the Lord's will.

Should we attack the Philistines on this day or not?

Before Saul killed the priests, even though the Lord had rejected him, he was apparently still able to get counsel from them through the ephod.

It was in a sense the last formal connection Saul had with God.

When he killed the priests he lost the ephod and was then totally disconnected even formally from God's grace and guidance.

And instead it went to David, who now had this source of divine guidance.

So Saul's evil attempts to frustrate God's purposes actually fulfilled them.

This occurs over and over in the Bible. Joseph is a good example.

The supreme example is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Peter, Acts 2

Jesus was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead

Who put Jesus to death? Wicked men. They were responsible.
But he did so by God's set purpose and foreknowledge.
And God used his Son's death to conquer death by the resurrection.

We want specifics. What possible good could come from this?
Isn't there some other way for God to accomplish his purposes?
Someone experienced an evil in life: I can't think of a single good thing God
couldn't have accomplished in my life some other way.
But he has his reasons and he wants us to trust him.

Marco Island was in news this week. Second place after Key West hit by Irma.
When we lived there in the early 90s, people who has lived there in the 80s had
had some wild stories about the drug trafficking. Cocaine coming in off Gulf.
There was a couple in our church who told me how they were convinced their
neighbor was trafficking drugs. So they went to the sheriff's department.
But nothing happened, activity continued.

Some little details that made them think sheriff's department was involved

So contacted a DEA agent they knew, a ruling elder in PCA church in Naples.

He listened to their story and said he would look into it.

Few days later he got back with them and he said:

I can't tell you any details, but trust me, the sheriff's department is not ignoring
the problem and they certainly aren't criminally involved. I'll tell you when over.
Some time later found out that this was a long and successful plan by law
enforcement to catch, not just some local traffickers, but big wigs.

So all that time when they were saying: Where's the sheriff? What's he thinking?

Why doesn't he do something? Does he not care? Can he be trusted?

All that time the sheriff was using the crimes of their neighbors to accomplish
his bigger purposes for good.

Now that's not a perfect analogy by any means,

but just think how long and complicated and involved God's plans are.

We probably wouldn't even be able to understand them if he told us.

How easy it is for us to get the wrong ideas about him and what he's doing.

But he's not tainted by evil. He's working things out for good.

We have to trust him until all is accomplished in his time.

That brings us to a third and vital truth.

**MP#3 God does not remove himself from evil, but he entered into and suffered
it in order to bring it to an end.**

The problem with the first two points I've made is that if they stand alone, or if that's where we stop in addressing the problem of evil, it feels like God is remote.

Almost like he's a puppet master pulling the strings, using evil for his grand purposes, and that's ok, but here we are down in the thick of it suffering. But that's not the whole story. God is not remote.

When we looked at David last week, he didn't look too good.

He made decisions out of fear and self-pity.

David's faults and weaknesses are one of the important features of 1 Samuel.

It doesn't put David on an impossible pedestal. He's a man like us.

That's one thing that makes this such a great book.

The Bible's heroes are flawed and sinful people in need of God's grace.

But there is another way of looking at David in 1 Samuel.

He's a prototype of Jesus Christ.

All of the heroic men and women of faith in the Old Testament foreshadowed Jesus Christ in different ways.

But David is the greatest of all prototypes of Christ.

He's such a Christ-figure, that sometimes prophecies about Christ just say David. Ezekiel 37 My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.

So when it comes to the problem of evil, what does David show us about Jesus?

What do we see in this story that indicates he was not remote and removed?

Look how the chapter starts.

David was on the run for his life. He found a remote cave as his hideout.

And all these different people began to find their way to where David was and attach themselves to him.

First, his brothers and his father's household came to be with him.

Remember his brothers had doubted him when first stepped on battlefield.

They didn't believe in him, but now they do.

They were being threatened by Saul, had to leave their homes, and fled for help to their brother David.

By the way, a fascinating parallel: Jesus' brothers doubted him. Thought insane.

But later brothers James and Jude became believers and leaders.

So the doubters who were suffering came to David.

Who else? Those in distress, in debt, discontented.

These were all people who in various ways were suffering under Saul's regime. They were a ragtag bunch but what united them is that they were all suffering and they sought help and encouragement from God's anointed king.

He was a fellow sufferer, and he took them in and accepted them one and all and did his best to protect them and provide for them.

This is just like Jesus. He was the leader of a rag-tag bunch.

Fishermen, tax collectors, zealots, prostitutes, sick, demon possessed.

They came to him in faith and he took them in.

He does that today. He accepts anyone who comes to him in faith.

One more amazing detail about David the prototype of Jesus. At end of chapter. Abiathar escaped the massacre and came to David. Told him what happened.

David said with deep regret. I knew it would happen. I'm responsible.

Of course, Saul was the one ultimately responsible. David took responsibility. How is this like Jesus? Jesus was perfect and sinless.

He never acted out of fear and self-pity. He never lied like David did.

But in a legal sense, for our justification, Jesus was responsible for our sin.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus became sin for us. He became responsible for sin and suffered for it.

Suffered all his life but mostly at the end at Gethsemane and Calvary.

Through his death and resurrection he has unleashed on this suffering world the power of eternal life.

We await the certain day when all evil is banished, and God wipes away every tear.

That's what David was saying to Abiathar and this ragtag bunch.

I'm the Lord's anointed, and even though we're suffering and living in a cave.

I'm with you and the certain day is coming when I will be king indeed.

When it comes to the problem of evil, it's vitally important that we see clearly that God is not the source of evil, he's all good and all loving.

Evil comes from the hearts of mankind.

And it's also vital to see that God is not powerless before evil, he is using it to accomplish his greater purposes.

But when you suffer and are perplexed over evil, your help and comfort will come from Jesus Christ, who suffered life in an evil world, suffered the evil of sin for us, so that through his resurrection power, everything made right.

What's the last thing David told Abiathar?

Stay with me. You'll be safe with me.

That's Jesus' word to you.

Until all is set right: Stay with me. You'll be safe with me.