

# Saul and the Shadow

## 1 Samuel 16:14-23

When Saul was still a simple farm boy, he praised God with the prophets. But the anointing oil that soaked his hair has all dried up.

God's Spirit came upon Saul that day. But that dried up too. Still he was not alone.

Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him. Verse 14

The first king of Israel brooded and seethed and raged in his tent. He hardly remembered the joy he once knew.

The change came when the big man turned away from God, disobeying and dishonoring his Lord again and again. Disgusted and disappointed, God's Spirit drifted away from the king,

That was David's great fear after he sinned with Bathsheba. And in his Psalm of penitence, he pleaded with God. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Psalm 51:11

In Old Testament times, God's Spirit was a rare gift. The Spirit came upon no more than one or two men in a generation.

But since the Savior shed His blood and gave His life as the pure and perfect sacrifice for sin, His precious Spirit comes, not merely upon, but as a permanent presence within the very body of each and every person who chooses to trust in Jesus Christ and Savior and King.

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; John 14:16

However, that does not mean believers are immune to the torment which turned Saul's sunny sky into a moonless midnight. When saints are sinful and selfish, foolish and faithless, our Savior's Spirit is so grieved His great power is quenched within believers.

We study Saul's torment reluctantly. It is sad to see a great man brought down. But study it we must, lest we share his sorrow.

## The Principle

When all was darkness, God called light into existence. But the hearts of men were still dark. So God sent His own Son as the eternal Light to illuminate the spirits of humankind.

I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. John 12:46

The images of light and darkness are repeated again and again throughout the New Testament. And we do not have to wonder or speculate precisely what they mean.

When Christ first sent Saul of Tarsus to proclaim the Gospel to both commoners and kings, our Lord defined precisely what the images light and darkness mean.

I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. Acts 26:17-18

So darkness refers to the power and presence of Satan. And Light refers to the power and presence of God.

Christ's commission to Paul also tells us that to become a Christian we must turn away from the darkness to the Light of Jesus Christ. In other words, we must reject the sin, selfishness and sensuality of Satan. Instead, we must choose to be ruled by the Redeemer who loves us and laid down His life for us.

Jesus said everyone who sins is a slave to sin and Satan. And we are far too weak to deliver ourselves from that darkness. But when we turn toward the Light of our Lord, He does what we cannot do. He delivers us from the darkness of death, despair, and defeat.

He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, Colossians 1:13

When we give our hearts and our lives to Jesus Christ, God transfers us from the devil's kingdom of darkness to His own glorious kingdom of Light and Life. So we actually become part of that Christ's kingdom of Light.

...you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; Ephesians 5:8

The Light of the Holy Spirit shines within us. And we become beacons, shining Jesus' love to those who still slog through life, lost and alone in the devil's darkness. For Satan was defeated when our Savior lifted his bloody face to toward the sky and cried out, "It is finished!"

...since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. Hebrews 2:14-15

That is the glory of the Gospel. We do not have to live in the despair of sin, dreading the day when death will plunge us into the arching agony of Hell.

Through Jesus, we can live forever as children of Light.

## The Penalty

It is faith in Jesus Christ that frees us from the devil's darkness. But faith is an active on-going activity. Christ called it following Him.

Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." John 8:12

It is kindergarten simple. If there is but one light, all else is darkness. So if we turn toward the light, the darkness has to be behind us. And conversely, turning away from the light is turning toward the darkness.

I doubt King Saul realized it at the time. But that is what he did when he chose riches over obeying God. He turned away from the God who had called and commissioned him to rule over Israel.

He did not intend to offer himself to the devil. But that is what sin always does. It shackles us as slaves in the darkness of death.

But Saul is not the only one who makes foolish decisions. We do, too. And like Saul, we seldom stop to consider the impact and implications of the choices we make.

In the end, every choice we make in life is either an act of turning toward or away from the Light of Jesus Christ. Saul is an extreme example. His turn away from God's Light to the devil's darkness was utter and absolute.

Our decisions are seldom that clear and complete. Sometimes we choose to seek pleasure, possessions or power, but only in a slight way. But the principle is the same.

Our self-centered choices are still willfully turning away from the Light in some slight degree. And to that same degree, we are turning toward the power and presence of the darkness.

That is why Satan offers sensations that seem to sparkle. He wants to lure us away from following after Jesus' Light. He knows that, no matter which way we turn, if it is not toward the Light of our Lord, it is toward the darkness of his influence. Then he is free to fill our lives with His poison. That is just what happened to Saul.

Jesus once explained why some of the people He delivered from demons did not remain free.

When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, "I will return to my house from which I came." And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Luke 11:24-26

It is true, both scientifically and spiritually. Nothing can remain utterly empty. If we scoop a hole in the sand at the beach, the hole might look empty. But it is really full of air.

And if we evict God's Spirit from any area of our lives. It does not remain empty, either. The devil is always ready and eager to take control of any aspect of our lives which we do not want God to control.

That is precisely what happened to Saul. By disobeying God, Israel's king rebelled against his Lord's control over his life. So God's Spirit simply moved out.

And when the Spirit moved away, Satan eagerly entered. But Saul did not find the power and pleasure he thought he would.

Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him. Verse 14

Whenever anyone draws close to Christ, His Holy Spirit produces wonderful fruit within the person's life.

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; Galatians 5:22-23

However, whenever we turn away from Christ, those fruits are not merely absent. Since turning from the Light is necessarily turning toward the darkness of self and Satan, we cannot help but suffer the opposites of the Spirit's fruits.

So instead of love, we are filled with hatred. That is why, although Saul started out loving David, later the king repeatedly tried to kill him.

Instead of joy, we have sorrow. Instead of peace we have tension, torment and worry. And peace is replaced by anxiety and inner struggles.

Kindness becomes callous disregard. Goodness becomes evil. Faithfulness becomes infidelity and instability. Gentleness is replaced by cold, harsh winds. And self-control is supplanted by a wayward weakness of spirit.

That is the penalty of turning away from the Light of our Lord. And it is unavoidable if we do not follow close to Christ.

## The Problem

It was obvious to everyone in King Saul's court. The big man was in torment. Sometimes, he moaned and wept. Other times, he ranted and raged. And no one was safe in his presence.

At night, servants heard his footsteps and saw his shadow. The king could not seem to sleep soundly.

Saul may not have understood why he was in such pain. But some of his servants did. And they had the courage to say it out loud.

Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you."  
Verse 15

It is important to read God's Word carefully. The evil spirit was from God. It was not the Spirit of God.

The Lord did not want Saul to suffer, any more than He wants to see us drown in pain and problems. Nevertheless, our Lord allows Satan to fill whatever men foolishly insisted that God vacate.

So Saul lived a life of torment and terror. The courage that once characterized all he did was gone. And with it every shred of joy and peace fled away. But his servants had a solution.

Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well." Verse 16

It is strange that Saul's servants were so very astute when it came to diagnosing the king's disease. Yet they were fatally foolish when it came to treating the malady.

The servants knew it was God who allowed the evil spirit to terrorized the king. Yet they never even considered trying to solve the problem by urging Saul to repent and forsake his sinful ways.

Instead, they focused upon the symptoms. Why not get someone who was skillful in music to come and play and sing soothing songs? Then the evil spirit would be driven away. Saul smiled and agreed. Then he commanded that such a musician be found.

So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me now a man who can play well and bring him to me." Then one of the young men said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the Lord is with him." Verses 17-18

So Saul sent messengers down the dusty road to Bethlehem. And soon a young shepherd named David arrived. Saul immediately felt a love for the young man and made him his armor bearer.

Then he sent his messenger back to Jesse once more. The king wanted David to stay.

Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight." So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him. Verses 22-23

But simply driving the demon away was not enough. Satan must not only be thrown out of our lives; he must also be kept out. And he cannot be kept out if someone stronger does not guard our lives.

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder. Luke 11:21-22

Only God Himself is stronger than Satan. So simply confessing and forsaking our sin is not enough. We cannot stop at evicting Satan from some area of our lives.

We must also turn that area of our lives over to Christ's control. We must invite His Spirit to own and occupy that attitude or action, that relationship or realm.

That is what turning toward the Light requires. And there is no other cure for the sour sting of sin.

## The Promotion

After Samuel anointed him as Israel's next king, David walked back to the pasture. Long months went by and yet he was still a shepherd.

Ah, but David was a shepherd with God's Spirit upon him. He was not only walking in the Light of his Lord. He was striving to get as close as he could to that Light.

And God was at work in his life. Later, David recalled how God had given him strength and courage when he was alone in the pasture.

Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him...The Lord...delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, 1 Samuel 17:34-35,37

Even Saul's servants had heard how the Lord worked powerfully in young David's life. That is why they considered him a warrior in the making.

David's reputation spread far from his home at Bethelhem for but one reason. He had been faithful, shepherding his small flock. And God never forgets faithfulness.

You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; Matthew 25:21

Our God is made so glad when He sees His children serving and standing for Him faithfully in small, out of the way places, He promotes such faithful believers to greater places of service.

That is what happened to David. His every decision was an act of turning toward the Light of His God's presence and purposes. So God promoted him to the very court of the king.

David did not fail God in Saul's presence, either. The young shepherd served Saul faithfully.

And even that is not all. David spent his time, not merely playing music. Josephus wrote that David played his harp and sang songs of praise to God.

That was what eased Saul's mind and soothed his spirit. He was healed by words of praise and worship, sung by a simply shepherd boy.

There are two important lessons in that. First, we must never forget that there is no more powerful cure for depression and despair than praising and worshiping God.

Also, David would remind us that wherever we are, our God would have us to honor him. After all, David did not merely praise God with his music and his words. He also honored and exalted his Lord in the way he lived and what he did. And that is what we must also do.

We must walk in the light!