

God's Last Gracious Words to Saul

1 Samuel 28:15-25

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-25-2012

Introduction

This morning as an exercise in understanding the Gospel I want you to consider the *possibility* that Saul went to paradise and showed that he had eternal life with God forever. For some Christians, that thought might be revolting. They might think, "But Saul was such a bad guy. He did so many terrible things to David. He doesn't deserve to be saved. He killed so many pastors. He took David's wife away from him and gave her to another man." And if those are some of the first thoughts that cross your mind, you might need a refresher course in the Gospel because nobody deserves to be saved. We all deserve to burn in hell. Ephesians 2:3 says that we were all "**by nature children of wrath, just as the others.**" Just as the others. Isaiah 64:6 says, "**We have all become like one who is defiled, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted menstrual rag.**" That's the literal Hebrew. Outside of Christ, God describes all of us as an offense in His sight.

What gave David the right to heaven? Was it that he was not a murderer like Saul? No, we know that he almost murdered the household of Abigail two chapters earlier, and that in the next book he will indeed murder Uriah. Horrible sins – but they did not keep him out of heaven. Was it because his good deeds outweighed his bad deeds? No. Even one rotten egg will make your omelette unacceptable. Listen to how David describes his own wretched condition in Psalm 40. He says, "**For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.**" He said that his iniquities were innumerable and more than the hairs of his head. That's a lot of iniquities – unless he was bald, which he wasn't. It's not sin that keeps us out of paradise, but failure to repent of our sin and failure to believe in the Gospel.

So what about verse 16? Doesn't that say that Saul had become God's enemy? Yes it does. But James 4:4 says that this happens to anyone in the church who willfully continues in sin. He says,

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

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Phillip G. Kayser • Dominion Covenant Church • 307.N 41st Ave. Omaha, NE 68131 • 402.934.3300

He said that some of those believers had made themselves enemies of God; God hadn't made them that way. Now, it is true that 1 John says that even though a true believer may backslide, God will always bring him back to repentance eventually. He will not persevere in his sin. That's the fifth point of Calvinism. And there are other Scriptures that indicate that the perseverance of the saints is true of all believers – they will eventually persevere or continue in God's grace.

Now, can I guarantee that Saul was truly saved? No. He gives almost as many evidences that he was not. And in the past we have looked at the evidences both ways. We have seen that his times of repentance seemed so half-hearted. On the other hand, he did repent of trying to kill David a number of times. We could go back and forth on numerous evidences, and still not know for sure what happened to Saul's soul. I think God deliberately does it that way so that we will not presume.

Jonathan Edwards pointed out that the Scriptures give examples of people who seemed to be saved, and yet the Bible says that they were not. Judas would be an example. All the other disciples thought he was saved. And Jonathan Edwards points out that Scripture gives examples of people like Lot whom we could have been absolutely certain were not saved, and yet 2 Peter 2:8 says that Lot was justified and had a righteous soul that was vexed every day with the sinfulness of his neighbors. We wouldn't have known that. And so this morning, I want you to bear with me, and test the degree to which you really believe that salvation is by Christ's goodness, not ours. Don't look so much at whether you believe Saul was saved (though I will present that as a possibility). Look at your own heart. And I think this interchange with Saul is a great way of exploring our own hearts.

I. The place from which Samuel came (vv. 15,19) – What is Sheol?

A. A place of peace (v. 15a)

We will start by setting the context. Verse 15 begins, “**Now Samuel said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?’**” Where did Samuel come from? First of all, he came from a place of peace – a place that had no disturbance. By comparison, coming back to earth was not pleasant.

B. A place that was down (v. 15b)

Second, it was a place that was down. You can deduce that from Samuel's statement that he had been brought up. It wasn't his body that came up; it was his spirit. So his spirit was in a place that was down.

C. A place that Saul and Jonathan were heading to (v. 19)

And third, it was a place that both Saul and Jonathan were headed towards the next day. Verse 19 says, "**Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.**" But notice that phrase, "**tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.**" So wherever Samuel had come up from, Saul and his sons would be there as well.

What was that place? It couldn't be the grave, because the bodies of Saul and his sons were not in the grave the next day; they hung on the walls of the Philistine town of Beth Shan for quite some time. And last week I gave a brief introduction to the place of the dead in the Old Testament. It's called Sheol in Hebrew, and Hades in the Greek New Testament. So when Jesus said to the Father, "**You will not leave my soul in Hades,**" He was quoting the Old Testament Psalm that says, "**You will not leave my soul in Sheol.**" Same place.

But Sheol or Hades had two compartments. There was a provisional hell, which two passages call "**the lowest part of Sheol**" (Deut. 32:22; Psalm 86:13), and two passages which call hell "**the lowest depths of Sheol**" (Isaiah 14:15; Prov. 9:18). Here are the things that are associated with that lower portion of Sheol: torment (Luke 16:23-31), pain and suffering (Psalm 116:3), "sorrows" (2 Sam. 22:6) and burning fire (Deut. 32:22; Luke 16:23-24). And we know that there is consciousness there because the non-elect dead communicate with each other (Isaiah 14:9,10; Ezekiel 32:21-33; cf. Luke 16:19-31). So that's lower Sheol.

Upper Sheol was said in Luke 16 to be a long ways off, and a great gulf being between the two compartments. It was a place of rest and comfort (Job 3:11-19). It was called paradise and Abraham's bosom. When a believer died he was said to be "**gathered unto his people**" or to have "**rested with his fathers.**" And so it was a place of rest, and joy, and comfort, and blessing, and fellowship.

And both places were said to be "down." Let me give some examples of unbelievers who go down to Sheol: Isaiah 14:15: "**You shall be brought**

down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.” Concerning pagan Egypt which perished, Ezekiel 31 says, **“it went down to hell,”** (v. 15), **“I cast it down to hell together with those who descend into the Pit”** (v. 16), **“they also went down to hell”** (v. 17). The word “hell” in each of those verses and dozens more is Sheol. So the hell portion of Sheol is definitely down. That is stated over and over again in Scripture.

But the paradise portion of Sheol is down as well. Jacob says, **“I will go down to my son in Sheol...”** (Gen. 37:35). He believed that his son had been eaten by animals, so he wasn't thinking of joining him in a grave. He is talking about his soul going down to Sheol to meet his son. 1 Samuel 2:6 says, **“The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and brings up.”** In Isaiah 38 good king Hezekiah was about to die and he describes his condition as being about to **“go down to Sheol”** (vv. 10,18). That's where his soul was headed – down (until God did a miracle and healed him). In Psalm 30 David said that God had spared his life and brought his soul **“up from Sheol”** (v. 3) and kept it from going **“down to that pit”** (v. 9). Job 7:9 says, **“he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.”** In Job 17:16 Job denies that anyone will be able to **“go down to the gates of Sheol”** to help him if he dies. And our text here says that Samuel came up.

So, prior to the resurrection, both places were down. Well, that means that saying that Saul went to be where Samuel was doesn't totally settle the question of whether Saul went to the lowest Sheol or to upper Sheol. When Samuel says, **“tomorrow you and your sons will be with me,”** he could have just meant somewhere in Sheol. Of course, from my perspective, with the great gulf between the two places, I think the most natural reading of verse 19 is to say that Saul joined Samuel in paradise. But people could still argue the point with me on that. It's not a slam-dunk argument. So I think we have demonstrated that both Samuel and Saul went down to Sheol.

Last week Bill asked a very good question. He said, “If all the saints went down to Sheol prior to the resurrection of Jesus, why was Elijah caught up into heaven with a chariot?” And that's a good question. And what makes the question especially interesting is that Jesus said, **“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”** (John 3:13). He said, “No one has ascended to heaven.” That means Elijah had not yet ascended to heaven.

And people say, “What about the thief on the cross? Didn't Jesus say, **“Today you will be with me in paradise”**”? Yes he did. And we saw in

Luke 16 last week that both the hell portion and the paradise portion of Sheol/Hades were in the heart of the earth. Where was Jesus' soul for three days and three nights? It was not in heaven, because immediately after the resurrection Jesus said, "**I have not yet ascended to My Father**" (John 20:17). Well, if He had not yet ascended to the Father, where was He during the previous three days? Ephesians 4:8-10 says that His soul was in the lower parts of the earth and had not yet ascended to heaven. That's so clear. Acts 2:31-32 says that Christ's soul was in Hades (the Greek word for Sheol). His body wasn't, but His *soul* was in Hades. Romans 10:7 makes clear that on the day of resurrection Jesus' soul came up from the dead and he ascended out of the "Abyss." Of course, Isaiah 14:15 makes clear that Sheol and the Abyss are synonyms for the same place. And Romans 10 says that Jesus' soul was in the Abyss for three days. Thus the thief was in paradise Sheol in the heart of the earth. John 14 makes clear that Christ had not yet prepared a place for his disciples in heaven. That place was made ready in the days immediately after Christ's resurrection. We are not told how many days it was before He took the souls of believers from Hades to heaven, but Matthew 27:53 says that those souls were on earth for a period of time. This was the standard doctrine of the Jews in the first century and this was the standard teaching of the church of the first ten centuries. Prior to the resurrection of Jesus all the saints went down to paradise, and after the resurrection we go straight to heaven, which is now called paradise.

I know for some of you this is a paradigm shift. And it still leaves the puzzle, "Why does 2 Kings 2:11 say that Elijah was caught up into heaven?" And the answer is really quite simple. First of all, what was caught up? It was his whole being, including his body, right? Did his body really go to heaven and become glorified? No. You can't believe that because *nobody* had a glorified body before Jesus. Scripture is quite clear that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead with a glorified body (Acts 26:23). So saying that he was caught up to heaven proves too much. It proves his body would be in heaven.

But we really don't need to go there if we understand how many heavens there are. 2 Corinthians 12:2 says that there are three heavens. Let me list them for you. The first heaven is simply the atmosphere, or air, or where the clouds are, or the blue sky. The second heaven is the space into which the stars were placed. The third heaven was the throne room of God, which is where paradise is now. But Elijah didn't go there. I believe the only way of reconciling 2 Kings 2:11 with all the other Scriptures that describe saints as going down is that Elijah was caught up into the first heaven. In

other words, as some translate it, he was caught up into the sky just like an airplane would be and transported to a place where God could bury his body.

And before you think that is a weird explanation, the next verses in 2 Kings say that this was exactly the inspired interpretation of the inspired prophets who were associated with Elijah. When Elisha came back after Elijah had been caught up, the prophets asked his permission to search for the body of Elijah. They are convinced that (and let me quote their words), **“the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley”** (v. 16). At first Elisha wouldn't let them look, but upon their insistence, he relented. They searched for three days and couldn't find him.

Now, why would God do that? I believe that God did not want people making an idol out of the bones of Elijah. It would have been a huge temptation. The Jews wanted to make an idol out of Moses' body, and God had to take Moses up and take him away from the view of the people. But what did God do with Moses? Deuteronomy 34:6 says that God Himself buried Moses in an undisclosed place so that no one would be able to find his grave. It's exactly parallel to Elijah. Apparently Satan motivated people to try to find Moses' body, because Jude 9 says that Michael the archangel had to fight with Satan in a dispute over the body of Moses. Satan wanted it. He wanted to turn it into a shrine, just like the Roman Catholics do. But God would not let him. And if you want more Scriptures on the place of the dead in the Old and the New Testaments, I can give you a paper. But I think I have given enough evidence between last week and this week that Samuel was down in paradise Sheol.

II. The reason for Samuel's speech (vv. 15-19) – Why did God do this miracle?

A. Why did God do this for Saul?

But with that background, I think we can adequately wrestle with the rest of the passage fairly quickly. Why did God bother to bring Samuel up from Sheol? This was such an unusual miracle. We saw all kinds of reasons last week why mediums absolutely do not have the power to do this, and she was totally surprised by what happened. In fact, she was frightened by what happened. It wasn't the medium who did this. So why did *God* do it? If she didn't have the power, why did God do it? If Saul was a non-elect person, why give him the time of day? He wouldn't be worth it. We saw last week that Samuel didn't give the *woman* the time of day. Samuel appeared by

God's power the moment Saul asked for him and before she could go through any ritual. Samuel completely bypassed her and ignored her in the speech. This was all done for Saul. Why?

To me this is a hint that God cared about Saul. It is a hint that Saul was a believer. Yes, he was a believer in bondage. And yes he was backslidden. But God will bring about bondage, misery, and even death in order to bring His children to repentance and restoration. Why? Because He cares for them. He does not want them comfortable in their sin. And Saul was anything but comfortable in his sin. He was distressed.

Back in the 1980's when I was in the PCA, there was a pastor who had a crush on a married woman in his congregation. He talked that woman into divorcing her husband, and he was in process of divorcing his wife when Presbytery found out, stepped in, and intervened. They first of all deposed him from his office. But he didn't repent. They escalated discipline. But he would not repent. He got mad at presbytery. He got mad at his wife for fighting the divorce. One day he took a claw hammer and destroyed every wall on the main floor of his house just out of spite. He must have thought, "Fine, if you're going to get the house, you're going to get a messed up house." He showed evidence of demonic bondage and blindness just like Saul did. I remember pleading with him for an hour from the Scriptures, and there was a total blindness on him that was becoming worse and worse, just like it had been for king Saul. He was absolutely convinced that he was doing God's will. In fact, things were so bad that I didn't think he could possibly be regenerate. I questioned his salvation. Well, since that incident I have learned to leave such a judgment in the hands of God – even with a Saul.

This pastor's hard-heartedness led to church discipline. And by the way, in excommunication we don't guarantee that an excommunicated person is an unbeliever. Matthew 18 says that we must *treat him as if he is a heathen and a tax collector*. But the discipline itself is actually an act of love designed to restore those who are true believers. Anyway, back to the story, when the former pastor was excommunicated, God's discipline was instantaneous and became extremely heavy in his life. Everything started falling apart. God was beating up on him financially, socially, and in other ways. But like Saul, he didn't repent. And at some point (I forget how many weeks later it was) God took him out with an extremely rare infection of the brain. Something had somehow crossed the brain barrier and infected his brain. And he was dying a miserable death. Several of the elders from presbytery came to visit him in the hospital. And to our joy we found that he

had not only repented, but that he was thankful for *our* discipline and thankful for *God's* discipline, and he was so thankful that God had used this *brain infection* to bring him to a place of total poverty of heart.

Let me give you a little secret. When nothing happens to people after they are excommunicated, it is very likely that they are not elect. Christ promised that what we bind on earth He will bind in heaven. He brings His disciplines when we are willing to bring ours. And I have seen this in case after case of God pursuing excommunicated people that He loves and bringing them into such misery that they finally come to repentance. Of course, I have seen other cases where God does nothing. Apparently He doesn't love that person, because Hebrews 12 says that God chastens everyone whom He loves and scourges every son whom He receives, and he goes on to say, **"If you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons."** So it's always a scary thing to me when I see a person excommunicated, and nothing happens. In the case of that pastor, God's discipline and death was a loving way of restoring him.

Can I guarantee that this is what happened with Saul? No. But let me share the hints from this passage as to why I think this may have been the case. First of all, I have already mentioned that God did an amazing miracle here for Saul. If he wasn't elect, it doesn't make sense that God would even bother to do that. It shows that God cared.

B. The first question probes Saul's poverty of heart and his honesty (v. 15)

Second, God had Samuel ask the kind of pointed questions that are designed to bring confession and repentance. The first question probes Saul's poverty of heart and whether he is going to be honest with God or continue to live a lie. He had been living a lie for too long. Verse 15:

1Samuel 28:15 Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"

That's not exactly a polite question. It's not designed to put Saul at ease. It's designed to probe Saul's heart. "Why should I give you the time of day, Saul? Why are you bothering me?"

And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do."

To me this shows a different Saul than the Saul of 1 Samuel 13 and the following chapters. He's different on four levels. Let me list them for you.

First, back in those chapters Saul didn't want to hear from Samuel, and once Samuel brought the message, didn't want to ever see or hear from Samuel again. And he didn't. Of course, this is an ignorant and rebellious way to seek Samuel, but the fact that he wants to hear Samuel's opinion shows a change in attitude. He hadn't wanted to hear from Samuel in any chapter after chapter 15.

Second, in the earlier chapters Saul wouldn't admit that God had departed from him. As late as chapter 26 Saul thought that God was still on his side and Saul kept talking like God had *not* departed from him. He was self-deceived into thinking that things were OK between him and God. Have you ever seen that? I have. I have seen it in people who are totally backslidden. That kind of self-deception is amazing. But now for the first time Saul admits, "**God has departed from me.**" I'm no longer going to pretend otherwise.

Third, back then Saul didn't seem too concerned about God's guidance, and now suddenly he is heart broken that God is so distant and that God won't speak to him. He wants to hear from God. That is a change.

Fourth, back then Saul didn't ask Samuel "What shall *I* do?" He minimized and excused his sin and only wanted *God* to change *His* opinion. His seeking of Samuel's prophetic insight – "**that you may reveal to me what I should do,**" shows a change in attitude. And he knows that Samuel is a curmudgeon who won't be polite. In this speech he seems just as crusty. (Which is interesting that some of our personality seems to carry over into the afterlife.) But Saul wanted prophetic revelation anyway.

Maybe I am reading too much into the passage, but to me, those four hints are indicators that God might have been doing a work in Saul's heart – first of all through the means of discipline, second through means of the miracle, and third through the means of Samuel's in-your-face dialogue. He seems to be progressively working in Saul's heart. So that's the first question.

C. The second question probes Saul's willingness to acknowledge his wrong and to mourn (v. 16)

The second question probes Saul's willingness to acknowledge his wrong and to mourn. Verse 16:

1Samuel 28:16 Then Samuel said: “So why do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy?”

He is probing. Was your previous statement simply a statement of despair or was it a statement of faith? If God is really your enemy, there is no point in coming to me, because I am God’s prophet. Are you coming to me as a substitute for God?

I admit that it is possible that this is simply a rebuke for having used a medium. But again I ask, “Millions of other pagans used mediums, and he wasn’t sent to rebuke them. So why bother interacting with Saul at all?” It seems to me that there is more going on here than simply a rebuke, though it is that. Samuel is giving Saul a chance to repent. And the probing continues with a series of statements. Look at them, beginning with verse 17.

D. He then gives a series of statements that press home Saul’s sin, highlighting what had always been hard for Saul to acknowledge:

1. Do you acknowledge God’s word that He spoke through me? (v. 17a)

He says, “**And the LORD has done for Himself as He spoke by me.**” In effect Samuel is forcing Saul to reevaluate all of his past bad responses to God. You could rephrase each of these statements as a question: First, “Oh, do you finally acknowledge that God’s word that He spoke through me in chapters 13 and 15 was true?” That’s the thrust of that statement. “You didn’t want to listen to me before; why do you want to listen to me now?” Think about it, Saul. Think about it. What is going on here?

2. Do you acknowledge that the kingdom belongs to David (v. 17b)

He goes on: “**For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David.**” These are words designed to hurt. They are God’s scalpel cutting out the parts of the heart that resisted what God had been doing in the past. In effect, he is giving Saul an opportunity to acknowledge that the kingdom does indeed belong to David.

Now, I would be a lot more comfortable in saying that this scalpel brought repentance if Saul had sent messengers to David saying that he could have the throne. He didn’t do that. But then, he does know that he will die within hours too, so he might have considered that to be resisting God’s will. We are not told. But every question and statement seems designed to be *able* to accomplish that work. That’s at *least* what I want you to see.

3. Do you acknowledge that you should have given radical obedience to God's command concerning Amalek (v. 18a)

The next statement is in verse 18: **“Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek.”** It's like, ouch, ouch, ouch. Why is it that God just never let's these things go? I've summarized the impact of that scalpel cut with the question in point 3 – “Do you acknowledge that you should have given radical obedience to God's command concerning Amalek?” Genuine repentance is not half-hearted. It has to agree with God on all points. Otherwise the sin continues to fester. Two weeks ago we were watching one of the segments of the movie series *Band of Brothers* – the one where the Dutch farmer is reluctantly digging shrapnel out of the man's shoulder with a knife. The digging hurts, but the shrapnel has to come out.

4. Do you acknowledge that the Philistine presence is God's judgment on you? (v. 18b)

The next statement: **“...therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day.”** Do you acknowledge that the overwhelming Philistine presence today is *God's* act of discipline upon you? If you can't embrace what God is doing here, there is no true repentance. And so Samuel is probing. Why have you called me? Is it for self-preservation, or are you finally willing to submit to God? Will you go to battle and submit to the discipline that God is going to dish out?

5. Will you accept the fact that you and many in Israel will suffer (v. 19a)

The next statement exposes the fact that Saul's sins have caused many in Israel to suffer. "Hey, Saul, it's not just you who is suffering. Your sins have exposed the entire army to danger." So that statement probes Saul's heart as to whether he is willing to accept that fact, or whether he is going to run: **“Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines.”** The fact that Saul went into battle shows to me that he was willing to take his medicine. He was no longer going to run from the Lord.

6. Will you submit to death tomorrow? (v. 19b)

And the next sentence as well: **“And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”** With that knowledge, Saul could have tried to escape. But I believe he fights because he *has* submitted to the message. And

that is in part why Samuel says that Saul would be with him the next day. It's only hinted at, but I believe they are strong hints.

III. The result of Samuel's speech (vv. 20-25) – Did Saul repent (2Sam. 1:23-24)? Here are some hints that he may have:

A. See Saul's answers to Samuel's dialogue (vv. 15-19)

Now, I've gotten ahead of myself. Point II is dealing with the purpose of Samuel's probing. But I've already dealt quite a bit with the result of Samuel's speech. So we will skip over point A. I think I have already shown that verses 15-19 strongly hint that Saul had repented.

B. He had started off fasting for self-preservation (v. 20)

We can't know for sure, but there are a couple of other hints in this passage as well. Consider this: Verse 20 shows that he had come to the medium already fasting.

1Samuel 28:20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night.

He had been fasting. Now, you could interpret that in different ways. Was his fasting hoping to gain God's favor by manipulation? That's one possible interpretation. Or it could indicate that Saul was genuinely humbling himself. Let's just assume the worst, and assume that he wanted to save his life prior to coming here. We already know that going to the medium would be consistent with such rebellion.

C. Now perhaps he decides to fast for a different reason (vv. 21-23a)

But what about Saul's changed attitudes once Samuel spoke to him? Did they contribute to a different kind of fasting in verses 21-23a? Maybe he is now fasting in repentance. We aren't told. Beginning at verse 21:

1Samuel 28:21 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me.

1Samuel 28:22 Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way."

1Samuel 28:23 But he refused and said, "I will not eat."...

Again, these are only tiny hints, but fasting often accompanies repentance. And maybe he couldn't eat while he was prostrate before God on the floor. Maybe this continued fasting was while God continued to deal with heart.

D. Though facing death he decided to feast (vv. 23b-25a)

But the text goes on to indicate that at some point he was talked out of fasting. And logically, if what Samuel said was inevitable, there was no point in trying to avoid it; there would be no point in fasting anymore. The best course of action would be to submit to what Samuel said, and go into battle.

...So his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed.

1Samuel 28:24 Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it.

1Samuel 28:25 So she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate.

Now, this would have taken quite a bit of time – hours. So why does Saul wait around? He could have eaten something like bread or dates quite quickly and gotten his strength back. But he chose to wait. This too may be a hint that Saul finally came to completely accept God's will. He wouldn't run away from battle, because it would be in battle that God would take him. He won't continue fasting because he has finally come to believe God's Word, and that God *won't* change His mind. This could indeed be his resignation. And it makes better sense out of what commentators say is an unusual feast – a feast fit for a king. In other words, it wasn't just a pragmatic getting of strength; it may have been symbolic. This would have been an expensive meal. And almost all commentators say that there is a deliberate parallel in Saul being fed by a woman after his death has been predicted and David being fed by a woman (Abigail) after his success has been predicted. But actually, that symbolism could go either way.

E. Rather than running away from Samuel's words (self-preservation) he faced the death (vv. 25bff)

The last words and into the next chapter indicate that rather than running away (which would be self-preservation – something he has been preoccupied with since chapter 13) he is now facing his death like a man. He is not going to try any longer to preserve his life.

F. Though Saul and Jonathan were divided in life (2Sam. 1:23a), they were not divided in death (2Sam. 1:23b with 1Sam. 28:19)

There is one more hint that Saul may have repented, and that's in 2 Samuel 1:23, where David says,

2Samuel 1:23 "Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, And in their death they were not divided; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions."

But he says, "**In their death they were not divided.**" We know for sure that Jonathan was a believer. Well, that would indicate that Sheol did not divide Jonathan from his father. So that would be one hint that he did indeed go to paradise. And of course the most natural reading of Samuel's words in 1 Samuel 28:19 is that Saul and Jonathan would be with Samuel in paradise. With the huge gulf between hell and paradise in Sheol, I don't see how Samuel could say, "**you will be with me,**" if Saul did indeed end up in hell. And this then would make better sense of 1 Samuel 10:9 which seems to indicate that Saul was regenerated in that chapter. It says, "**...when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart...**" and then it goes on to say that "**the Spirit of God came upon him.**" Being given another heart sure seems like regeneration and going to be with Samuel after his death sure seems like he is going to paradise. Can I guarantee all of this? No. I believe God leaves it unclear so that we do not presume upon God.

Conclusion

But let me conclude with some applications. If my thesis is correct (which I am personally convinced that it is), then this passage really highlights the fact that we are justified by faith alone, through grace alone, in the finished work of Christ alone, and to God's glory alone. It has nothing to do with how messed up we are or how good we are. It has to do with how good Christ is. Secondly, it highlights the five points of Calvinism – and especially the perseverance of the saints – that God will do everything that is needed (even raising a Samuel from the dead) in order to keep His people in His grace. We persevere because He preserves us. Third, it gives us hope that it is never too late to pray for the backslidden people of God to repent and to turn around. *Barbara Come Home* is a book by an OPC pastor whose daughter had turned away as far as Saul had, and how God turned her heart. It is very encouraging. Fourth, it highlights that God is more interested in our holiness than in our comfort.

On the other hand, it illustrates how far believers can fall and how far they can be victimized by Satan when they give Satan legal ground, as Saul had through his rebellion. Can Christians be demonized? Yes they can. The New Testament is quite clear on that. And so, as 1 Corinthians 10 says, these kinds of passages serve as a warning to us that rebellion is not worth it. This passage illustrates that we shouldn't mess around in a backslidden state because there does come a time when we cross a line and God has to take us out – even if we are the elect. 1 Corinthians 11 talks about many Corinthians who had died under the Lord's judgment. 1 John 5 tells us that there is a sin that a "brother" can commit that is unto death, and when such a brother commits that sin, no prayer will avert that death. He says, "Don't even bother praying about it." Like my pastor friend who repented, they are made right with God, but God has no more use for them on earth. He takes them out. So this passage highlights both the grace of God and the severity of God. Though we are secure in our justification, it does not erase the disastrous consequences of sin. So, whether or not Saul actually repented, I am grateful for the generosity of God in making such repentance possible. Amen.

God's Last Gracious Words to Saul 1 Samuel 28:15-25

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-25-2012

Introduction

- I. The place from which Samuel came (vv. 15,19) – What is Sheol?
 - A. A place of peace (v. 15a)
 - B. A place that was down (v. 15b)
 - C. A place that Saul and Jonathan were heading to (v. 19)

- II. The reason for Samuel's speech (vv. 15-19) – Why did God do this miracle?
 - A. Why did God do this for Saul?
 - B. The first question probes Saul's poverty of heart and his honesty (v. 15)
 - C. The second question probes Saul's willingness to acknowledge his wrong and to mourn (v. 16)
 - D. He then gives a series of statements that press home Saul's sin, highlighting what had always been hard for Saul to acknowledge:
 1. Do you acknowledge God's word that He spoke through me? (v. 17a)
 2. Do you acknowledge that the kingdom belongs to David? (v. 17b)
 3. Do you acknowledge that you should have given radical obedience to God's command concerning Amalek? (v. 18a)
 4. Do you acknowledge that the Philistine presence is God's judgment on you? (v. 18b)
 5. Will you accept the fact that you and many in Israel will suffer? (v. 19a)
 6. Will you submit to death tomorrow? (v. 19b)

- III. The result of Samuel's speech (vv. 20-25) – Did Saul repent? (2Sam. 1:23-24)
Here are more hints that he may have:
 - A. See Saul's answers to Samuel's dialogue (vv. 15-19)
 - B. He had started off fasting for self-preservation (v. 20)
 - C. Now perhaps he decides to fast for a different reason (vv. 21-23a)
 - D. Though facing death he decided to feast (vv. 23b-25a)
 - E. Rather than running away from Samuel's words (self-preservation) he faced the death (vv. 25bff)
 - F. Though Saul and Jonathan were divided in life (2Sam. 1:23a), they were not divided in death (2Sam. 1:23b with 1Sam. 28:19)

Conclusion

