

Series: Life's Defining Moments

VBC

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1 Samuel 16:14

“When God Leaves a Man”

Perseverance —persistent devotion—stubborn resolution—dogged faithfulness—tireless commitment

- I understand something of the words
- after all—after 60 years, I still follow the San Diego Chargers
- read the latest moves by the Padres
- after 3 long years—I still share space with our wire fox terrier
- I know something about endurance

But what about perseverance of the faith?

- will God persevere with us? Is there anything that we could do that would turn Him away from us?
- what about our perseverance?—can faith be lost by unfaith
- is it guaranteed that a person who comes to God will remain with God?

-one can't help but raise these questions when looking at the life of Saul—for it would appear Saul did not endure

- there was a defining moment for Saul—when God changed him into another man
- we saw this earlier—read 10:9-10
- there was a “conversion”, a new birth—a decisive work in which God turned Saul's heart into another heart
- there was an encounter with God's Spirit—the Spirit “rushed upon him”—equipping him to fight, speak, rule
- anointed and empowered—Saul went out as God's king—11:6
- true—it doesn't say he went forward, joined the church, joined a LG, signed up for Village University—and had morning devotions—and faithfully gave 10% of his income*
- but there was a dramatic spiritual encounter

- but as we saw in chapter 13—there was a relapse
- Saul began to drift, lose sight of his spiritual direction
- show less and less evidence of a Spirit filled life
- there was no intentional, purposive interaction with God*
- no supernatural power, no clarity as to his role

-in chapter 14, we see Saul now out of step with God—paralyzed by fear—sitting idly under the shade of a pomegranate tree, sharing in the dismay of his troop

-*trees were regarded as ladder to heaven—but Saul is hearing nothing*

- by chapter 15, Saul disregarded the instructions of God
- his disobedience amounted to wickedness and idolatry
- all of which led Samuel to withdraw any further relationship with Saul—15:35
- Saul became increasingly irrelevant and of no interest to the life of Israel
- for when a man refuses to listen to God—eventually no one will listen to him*

-it all culminated in a DEFINING MOMENT—the worst kind of defining moment—read I Samuel 16:14

- in this moment—God left Saul
- the Spirit “turned aside”, withdrew, departed
- (this so unnerved David in later years when he made huge misjudgments—that he pleaded with God—“Do not throw me from Your presence and take your Spirit from me”—Psalm 51:11)

- as a result—God no longer listened to Saul
- worse—God became his enemy—28:6, 16
- even more ruinous for Saul—a vacuum was created in his interior
- opening him to another kind of spirit
- Saul would live as a disturbed man—possessed by fear and paranoia and fits of madness
- the rest of I Samuel is lived in the shadow of this verse*

So what does all of this mean?

- when God comes upon a man—comes into a man—is it possible God may also leave a man?
- most of us have grown up with the assurance that grace that regenerates a heart is irreversible
- that once saved—always saved—once a changed man—always a changed man—for Scripture tells us this—right?

-Jesus affirms this—

“My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand.”—John 6:27-28

Paul gives this same hope—

- “Therefore no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus”—Romans 8:1
- we have been sealed for the day of redemption—Ephesians 1:13
- and this is because God guards the life He has given us—2 Timothy 1:12
- so to the Philippians Paul writes these assuring words—
- “I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”—Philippians 1:6*

- we may make poor choices—give our best energies to other things besides God
- become stagnant in our faith—never really bear fruit

- even leave the church, deny Christ, and lose all possibility of heavenly rewards
- but our eternal hope remains intact
- 1 Corinthians 3:15—“If anyone’s work is burned up, it will be lost, but he will be saved, yet it will be like an escape through fire”*
- our salvation is incapable of being destroyed—it endures—I Peter 1:3-5

But we come back to this passage about Saul—and it doesn’t seem to square—things don’t level

- maybe Saul wasn’t changed—did not receive the Spirit
- because if he did—he would have persevered until the end—right??
- but the text says God elected Saul
- he was changed, did receive the Spirit
- but as a result of persistent disobedience—the Spirit left Saul
- if it happened to him, can this happen to us?
- could we be disqualified because of our disobedience?*

Illustration—Lents—but he went forward

- Saul’s story gives me pause
- and it’s not just Saul’s story—

- Alongside assurance, Jesus gave this warning to His disciples
- “If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned”—John 15:6*
- He used a parable to warn that people who do not forgive could find them in a worse state than the one they were in prior to Christ—Matthew 18:32-35

Perhaps most unsettling are Paul’s warnings—

- after noting how God cut off unfaithful Israel—he warns followers of Christ—
- “Therefore consider God’s kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness toward you—if you remain in His kindness, Otherwise, you too will be cut off”—Romans 11:22*
- to Timothy he cautioned—*“If we deny Him, He will also deny us”—2 Timothy 2:12*
- warned the Corinthians that if you think you are standing firm—be careful you don’t fall—1 Corinthians 10:12
- told them not to receive God’s grace in vain—2 Corinthians 6:1

Warned believers in Rome—

- “God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness”, against people who knew God, yet did not glorify Him, and so God “delivered them over to the cravings of their heart—although they knew full well God’s just sentence”—Romans 1:8*

- some passages even suggest that for those who have become followers of Jesus and turn against God that it would have been better not to have known God—
- “For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, became companions with the Holy Spirit, tasted God’s good word and the powers of the coming age, and who have fallen away”—Hebrews 6:4-5*

Likewise, Peter warns—

“For if, having escaped the world’s impurity through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in these things and defeated, the last state is worse for them than the first”...for it would have been better if they had not known the way”—2 Peter 2:20

It all sets up a TENSION—certainty collides with certainty...

-on one hand, scripture emphasizes both the guarantee of divine faithfulness—believers can rest secure in the assurance that their salvation is permanent—*nothing can separate those who believe from the love of God*

-on the other hand, scripture repeatedly warns of the possibility of falling away—revealing a God who sometimes withdraws His goodness from those who have spurned it

-who—when we persist in sin—just may give us over to the sin we love more than the God we should love

-our tendency in theological circles is to explain one away while holding to the other
-for both of these cannot be true at the same time

-BUT WHAT IF THEY ARE?

-what if they are two truths we must rely on absolutely—even when we can’t see how they fit together?

-isn’t life full of contradictions—tensions—incongruities?

-like divine election/human responsibility

-two realities I cannot reconcile

-it’s a little bit like paid volunteer, pretty ugly, original copy, bitter sweet, and seriously funny—inherent incongruities

Saul is an OT reminder that divine truths often shade into divine mystery

So here are two things to get—

1. WHERE THERE IS DIVINE SEVERITY—IT ALWAYS COMES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF PROFOUND PATIENCE

-for God is a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in faithful love—Nehemiah 9:17

-He is longsuffering—He has a long runway—He gives great space for repentance—2 Peter 3:9

-for He is profoundly in love with us—the Cross demonstrates this

-He has pursued us to the point of His own torturous death

-if necessary—He may sometimes bring hard things, to awaken us out of complacency—turn us from our misbehaviors, our idolatries

-like a patient father who disciplines with the aim of restoration

2. GOD'S PATIENCE DOES HAVE ITS LIMITS

-there can come a moment—if all of this is ignored—that God leaves a man—that's the warning of I Samuel 16:14

CONCLUSION—

- 1) perhaps you are living a faithful life—you love God and you are serious about following Him
-don't relax your grip!
-“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall”—I Corinthians 10:12

- 2) perhaps you are coasting in your spiritual life—not taking God too seriously
-aiming for God's “minimum requirements”
-HE HAS NO MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS!
-He wants all of us—every minute—every day
-don't presume on the kindness of God!

- 3) maybe you are living like hell
-holding on to your get out of hell card—relying on eternal security
-comforted by the fact God is this indulgent father who has to fulfill his promises of assurance no matter what
-you might want to rethink your faith before it is too late!

- 4) perhaps you have made a series of bad choices—and you are wondering—“God are you done with me?”
-or maybe you have concluded—“He is done with me!”

-but these thoughts can only come from the Spirit
-they only affirm He is NOT with you
-so get right with God—NOW!

-if and when He is done with you—you won't be asking—you won't care to ask

LG QUESTIONS

1. How did this sermon impact you? Comfort you? Unnerve you?
2. Was God unusually harsh on Saul? Was he an accident from the start?
3. Are you sure of your salvation?
4. What do you say to someone who says—“I used to be a Christian?”
5. Can a person lose their salvation? Based on what?
6. Is a believer assured of life in heaven? Based on what?