**Week Four - February 7/8 - 1 Samuel 28:3 - 29:11**

**Introduction**

We pick up this week after the cliffhanger of David’s predicament last week, and in the midst of that and some other things going on in these chapters we focus a lot on the idea of seeking God when we can’t feel his presence and things all seem to be pointing to his absence. Coming into this study, it is a great opportunity for each of us to examine ourselves to see if the way we either approach or ignore God is indicative of our faith. **Would you say you can often fall victim to allowing your circumstances to dictate your closeness to God?**

**Read v. 1 Samuel 28:3-11**

The author provides us with key context right at the beginning that Saul had banished mediums and spiritists (people who seek contact with the dead; practice witchcraft). This is a rare good move from Saul, and in full accordance with God’s law. **Read Deut. 18:9-14.** Despite the clear instruction from the law, as soon as Saul got scared of the Philistine army gathered against Israel and the lack of direction from the Lord, he turned directly to the wickedness that he had previously banned. **Like Saul, do you sometimes find yourselves falling away from what you know to be right and into sin because of desperation or fear? What should our response be when faced with desperate times or fearful circumstances?** Even though Saul had made a good move by going on the offensive and banishing a form of sin, he still had a heart that was not oriented toward God. **While practical methods of getting rid of sin are important, why is it significant to focus on our heart’s condition and try to grow personal holiness rather than JUST focusing on practical methods of banishing sin?** *(by focusing on our hearts condition, we recognize our will power and practical methods fail and we remind ourselves that we rely upon grace and God’s transformative power, not our performance.).*

**Read 1 Samuel 28:12-19**

There is a lot in this section that can distract from the main purpose of this passage. The point is not the theological implications of how Samuel came to them from the Earth, nor supposedly justifying talking to the dead, as we saw how it is detestable to the Lord earlier. This section brings to mind all that happened up to this point in Saul and Samuel’s relationship as well as Saul’s relationship with God. **Looking specifically at what Saul had said to Samuel, what shows that his heart is in a place of extreme distance from God?** *(Focuses only on himself and not the danger of the Israelites; mentions Philistines coming against them as a more prominent issue than God turning away from him).*

Samuel’s message to Saul from God is the same now as it was when he was alive: “God has rejected you.” “The text is not gentle but it is clear: If you despise God’s word he will take it from you. If you persistently refuse to obey God’s speech you will endure God’s silence” (Davis, 293). **Why are we so slow as a people to obey God? What is revealed about the state of our hearts by our unwillingness to submit to His word?**

Nevertheless, we are never truly in Saul’s shoes, as the Lord’s presence will never be permanently removed from His children. He may hide it for a time, but nothing we do will ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus for us if we believe and have been bought by the blood. **What should we as believers do if we feel like God has hidden his face from us for a period of time?***(Plead with God and seek him more adamantly through prayer)* **Read Psalms 13:1; 30:7; 88:14** to see David himself struggling with this. **Is seeking God when He feels distant a struggle for any of you? What does that struggle look like when you are in the middle of it? How do we combat reluctance to seek him??**

**Read 1 Samuel 28:20-25**

Here we see the saddening irony of Saul’s God-less condition. **Compare and contrast the way Saul was first introduced to us to where he is in this passage.** The man who was once head and shoulders above everyone else and as handsome as they come, was now sucked of all his strength in energy in the realization of what has happened. He finally believes what he had been told and the reality has finally sunk in. As this chapter ends we see Saul go out at night, a possible metaphor for the light of his kingship finally coming to its conclusion.

**Read 1 Samuel 29**

As we switch gears from the outgoing king’s struggles to the incoming king’s struggles, we see God’s deliverance for David yet again. Placed in a situation where he was going to have to fight against his own people, and much more God’s own people, David was seamlessly delivered and sent from the ranks of the Philistines. **What is revealed about God’s character by the way he rescued David despite David’s foolishness in fearfully joining the Philistines?** *(Patience and Mercy; undeniable love; faithfulness through our mistakes).*

We can often be in a position where we do not show full trust in God and get into difficult situations as a result. This can often lead us to feel like we do not deserve deliverance and thus, why would God grant it to us? While it is true that we do not deserve it, we need to be cautious about doubting God’s ability and willingness to deliver us. **How can we protect ourselves from a mindset that doubts God’s ability and willingness to work everything out for good? What does it look like for us to have a good balance between understanding our undeservedness and praising God for His mercy?**

**Conclusion:** In these two chapters we have seen a continued contrast between David and Saul that has been brewing for most of the book up to this point. The key idea of contrast this week is the perspective differences we can observe between Saul’s circumstances and David’s circumstances. David is undeniably in a sticky situation at the beginning of chapter 29 (mostly of his own doing), but it is a light burden compared to the defeated Saul realizing that the Lord has rejected him and his reign, closing off his voice and presence forever.

While we have troubles in this life, we can take heart knowing that we have a hope unlike any other - God never forsakes us because of what Jesus accomplished for those who believe in him and what he secused for us on the cross.

**Spend some time getting into small groups and praising God for some of the things listed below. Also pray for each other's trials and temptations that are distracting them from fully realizing the promises of God.**

* God’s faithfulness in our lives as a sustainer
* God’s presence in our lives that will never end
* God’s working ALL things out for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
* God’s perfection in everything He does; including giving us trials so that our Faith may be strengthened and His name would be magnified further.