

Lutheran Vespers, Sometime during 1947-1948
Recording #2
KVNU, 610, Logan, Utah
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Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God, which shall form the basis of our meditation in this service is recorded in the first book of Samuel in the 28th chapter, reading in verse 8 as follows:

And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to a woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring him up, whom I shall name unto thee.

This is our text.

Beloved fellow Christians. A strange and tragic figure introduces this night scene of the Bible. In Saul, the first King of Israel, there was a strange mixture of the good and the bad, of power and weakness, of success and failure, so that we have to pity him, even though we know he deserved the punishment that came to him. Physically he was outstanding among men, but he fell prey to his weaknesses more than once. In his make up there were contrasting qualities and surprising contradictions. He had the courage of an heroic leader, and the timidity of a coward. He was often devious in danger and cautious in safety. He would have put his best friend to death, but spared the life of his worst enemy. Under the influence of sacred songs, he would be carried away with deep religious feelings and would pray and prophesy. But at other times his soul was plagued by an evil spirit that made him a raging madman and filled him with murderous hatred. He had banished soothsayers and fortunetellers from his kingdom. But now on the last night of his life, we see him sneaking 10 miles like a fugitive to consult a woman with a familiar spirit. At the time of this night scene of the Bible, Saul had drawn up the forces of Israel 300,000 strong for battle against the greater army of the Philistines, which was encamped about 5 miles away. It was an historic spot, the same place where Gideon and his small band of 300 men had routed the Midianites with the cry "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" and with the smashing of pitchers and the throwing of torches.

At that place on the night of which our text speaks. Saul had a thousand times as many men as did Gideon of old, and they were men who were trained for war. His position was a strong one, but the King was in no condition to meet the crisis of that hour. His shaky rule had strained the ties of loyalty in Israel. Increasing numbers were turning to David. The great prophet Samuel was dead and his last words to Saul had been words of refusal and a threat of divine punishment. When Saul went to God for advice, there was no answer. For because of his disobedience God had withdrawn from him. So as night came on and Saul looked across the valley to the camp of the Philistines his heart was filled with fear. Although he had a large army encamped around him, Saul felt weak and defenseless because God had withdrawn from him. Now when he needed a friend, he

could not even turn to God because God had forsaken him. Saul was experiencing what happens when God permits a willful and disobedient man to have his own way.

When night came, Saul could not sleep. He bitterly thought of the morrow. Now he needed God's counsel. But he had ignored it so often that it was no longer offered. So Saul instead of humbly and penitently seeking God's help, sought light in darkness, sought advice inspired by hell. He put aside his weapons, took off his royal clothing, disguised himself as a lowly peasant and left the camp in the darkness of night with two trusted men. For about 10 miles Saul and his men made their way to Endor. There the king was looking for a woman who was said to have a familiar spirit who practice fortune-telling and to be in touch with the dead. She received the late visitors with suspicion and feared that this might be a trap to convict her. When she was assured by a strong oath that no harm would come to her, the woman agreed to perform her services for the strangers. She asked whom shall I bring up unto thee and the tallest of the visitors asked that the prophet Samuel be recalled from the other world.

Think of all the mystic filling barbs. The King of Israel supposed to be the servant of the most high God comes at night under cover of darkness at a time of crisis to consult a sooth-saying woman in her mountain cavern. He who was pledged to obey the Lord and to follow his guidance alone goes to a miserable witch for advice on the eve of a decisive battle.

And what happened? Almost before the woman had time to begin her witchcraft, a strange figure appeared. Outwardly it looked like Samuel, but actually it was an evil spirit who had assumed the appearance in the likeness of the departed prophet. When the woman recognized the figure, she at once guessed who was consulting her and cried out, "Thou art Saul." But that did not matter now.

Saul wanted to talk to Samuel to obtain his advice. Though some believe that Samuel really appeared here, we hold on the basis of other statements of God's Word that one of the devil's own messengers brought a message to Saul out of the darkness. That dreadful message was "The Lord hath yanked the kingdom out of thine hands and given it to thy neighbor, even David. Moreover, the Lord will deliver Israel with thee into the hands of the Philistines. Tomorrow shalt thou, and thy sons be with me. The dreaded outcome of the next day's battle was foretold by that figure, which had to serve the Lord to pronounce his coming doom upon Saul, the disobedient, self-willed ruler of Israel. Under the impact of that message as though struck by a flash of lightning, Saul fell down as though dead. When he was revived later, he went back to the camp of the Israelites with a heavy heart.

When the battle was fought in the morning, 700,000 men met in bloody combat and the ranks of Israel were smashed. In despair, amid his routed forces, Saul killed himself. Already wounded, he fell upon his own sword.

God's word adds this final commentary upon the man who is the central figure of this

night scene. First Corinthians chapter 10 we read: So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the Word of the Lord which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit to inquire of it and inquired not of the Lord. Therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David, the son of Jesse.

Obvious depressing night scene from the Bible brings its timely truths to us. The world has made wonderful strides forward since the time the events of our text occurred. In science, in invention, in life in general, things have progressed remarkably. But with all our added enlightenment in certain directions, people reveal that the hearts of men in their ways have not changed greatly.

Today, in what we are accustomed to call our enlightened 20th-century, people turn from God and his guiding Word and still seek light in darkness, that is, look for counsel and guidance where there is none. Year in and year out, whether times are good or bad, soothsayers, mediums, fortunetellers, necromancers, palm readers and others claiming unusual powers of communication with the unknown or with the dead, reap a tremendous harvest. Many seek the answer to the question, "what lies beyond today" by following the modern equivalent of the way to Endor. Like Saul of old, many outstanding prominent figures in business, financial, or national life, current the places of darkness for advice.

It has been said that during the past war, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini were guided in their actions by advice from such fortunetellers. And it has also been said that some who were high in our country's affairs resorted for guidance in perplexing situations to astrology and black delusions. Many poor, misguided ordinary people try to find answers to the problems of their little lives and affairs of business and love by resorting to such unions.

Without question any course of that kind is entirely contrary to Christian life and profession. In His Word, God gives an answer to every need and problem of life and has revealed as much as men need to know now about the world to come. People who are foolish enough to do today what Saul did, are disobedient to God's word and will just as he was.

Most of those who claim to have power to tell the future or to speak with the dead are frauds and have been exposed as such more than once by truly scientific investigators. Their practices have been unwillingly revealed and laid bare. But we cannot say definitely that all are to be classed as fraud. There may be some who working by the power of the devil can do some things which science cannot explain.

But for us Christians, there comes out of the darkness of that house at Endor the warning: Seek only the counsel of God's Word for every problem and question of life or when facing any of life's battles and important decisions. To turn from the light of that word is to stumble in the darkness of uncertainty and to follow the path which has led many to despair and soul destruction. For when faith goes out, superstition comes into the heart.

The first ruler of Israel was overtaken by disaster because he did not make obedience to God the great ruling principle of his life. He failed in his God-given duty as a king and as a child of God, because he insisted upon following his own faulty and perverted will, rather than the perfect will of God. That should mean something to us.

God may not have called us to be kings or to occupy places of the greatest importance in the affairs of men. But He does have work for us to do in our lives, in our own sphere, humble though it may be. The success or failure, which shall be ours will depend largely upon the measure in which our lives have been lived or have not been lived in accordance with God's will for them. The only failure in life which we need to fear is failure to walk in the way which God has marked out for us. So this night scene reminds us that there is no folly so hopeless, no effort so useless, as trying to live without God. Saul's life and death are a practical demonstration of that fact.

We read of so-called atheists who prescribe that their body shall be burned and the ashes scattered to the four winds to show how firmly they believe that there is no God before they must one day stand to give an account of their lives. Think of such a life, of its full spirit and philosophy and outlook, and compared it with a real Christian life that looks to God for all things and is guided alone by His will. You will see a contrast there, if there ever was one.

The Christian's life, which is lived with assurance of the Father's love in Christ, which knows peace of conscience through God's gracious forgiveness, which strives to follow God's will in all things, that is the only profitable life, the only happy and blessed life.

So, friends may God through the consideration of this night scene from the Bible lead us to the prayerful determination that as He blesses us, we shall live more for Him, seeking only His help and guidance through time into eternity. Amen.

And now may the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.