Today is the last in our sermon teaching series called "Questions you always wanted a sermon on". Lord willing, we will take questions again for next year’s series, in November and December – don’t give them to me before.

- 2 of the questions this year dealt with hot topics of our day: LGBT and gender;
- 2 of the questions dealt with ethics: dishonest behavior and sex trafficking
- and 2 of the questions dealt with false teaching & the spirit world around us.

It is that question on the spirit world around us that we tackle today. The exact question given was...

**Question: In I Samuel 28:11-19 did the medium really encounter the spirit of Samuel or a familiar spirit? Did Saul end up in heaven or hell?**

That brings up such questions as: Can we communicate with the dead? Was that the prophet Samuel’s actual spirit or a demonic spirit that knew a lot about him and could mimic him (something called a ‘familiar spirit’)? What boundaries and guidelines does God give us about the spirit world around us?

PROPOSITION: The spirit world around us is real, God warns us not to try to communicate with it except going directly to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I. Our situations in life become tougher when we compromise God’s commands

This event in 1 Samuel 28 happened at the end of Saul’s life – in fact it is the day before his death.

A. Saul had chosen his own way over God’s clear commands I Sam 13, 15

*Who is Saul?* He is the first king of the nation of Israel. He started out seeming to be humble and obedient to God, but soon started choosing his own way over God’s commands. Even when he clearly disobeyed God or the prophet Samuel, Saul would insist he was doing exactly what was asked. He constantly tried to excuse his disobedience. Then after God proclaimed that Saul’s rule would end with him (and his children would never replace him on the throne), Saul tried to kill God’s heir apparent, David, many times. Saul is a person who outwardly says that he follows the Lord, but actually lives his life his own way.

B. Saul’s main positive spiritual influence has died I Sam 28:3a

The one person who regularly taught, directed, brought back, counseled and confronted Saul with God’s truth was Samuel. **READ v 3a.** Samuel was a priest, a prophet, the last judge and the one who anointed the first 2 Kings of Israel. Samuel was Saul’s main *positive spiritual influence* and now he is gone.
C. Saul earlier obedience

READ v 3. Then we find this seemingly out of place sentence “Saul had expelled the medians and spiritists from the land.” “Mediums” are people who communicate with the dead, they are also called necromancers; while “spiritists” are people who contact the spirits around us. This is reminding us of Saul’s better days. As we will see in a few minutes the Bible is very clear not to contact mediums and spiritists or to practice divination. Earlier in Saul’s reign as king he sought to honor God and obey him by turning the nation away from divination.

D. Saul faces an overwhelming situation

READ v 4-5. Now Saul faces an overwhelming situation. The Philistines had assembled their army on the north of the Jezreel Valley in an attempt to split the country in half while Saul & the Israelite army are a few miles away on Mt Gilboa on the south side of the Jezreel Valley. What they saw from their vantage point was a no win situation that Saul had no desire to tackle. The nation was about to be crushed, many would be killed, raped, & robbed, people would be taken as slaves, towns will be destroyed. Saul is afraid, his world was collapsing from his years of disobedience, and the present crisis was too much for him.

E. Saul, frustrated with God’s ‘non-answer”, disobeys yet again

READ v 6. It is always good and wise to inquire of the Lord first. So when we read that God didn’t answer we might be tempted to think “Why didn’t the Lord answered, Saul is in trouble and seems sincere?” To us, it seems that God is not being helpful here until one remembers what Saul had done before. After multiple times of disobeying and refusing to owe up to his willful choices, God clearly told Saul he was no longer qualified to be the King. Instead of accepting that, Saul did everything he could to try to thwart God’s plan for David to become King. The Urim was a device God gave the Israelites to determine God’s will but it could only be used with the assistance of a priest from the line of Aaron. But Saul had killed many Aaronic priests, and the one surviving priest of Nob we know of had fled to David with the ephod. As far as prophets, Samuel had died and the others had abandoned Saul once God declared Saul’s Kingdom rule over. Saul had cut himself off from the Lord through continual personal disobedience, rationalizing his sins, abusing the priesthood and ignoring the prophets. Saul again goes back to his way of doing things – this time doing both what God and he had clearly forbidden.

READ v 7-10. The very commandment of God that Saul had so diligently enforced in his kingdom he now breaks – proving even Saul’s best works were nothing. Tough times reveal what we really believe. To make Saul’s complete disobedience even clearer, Endor is north of the Philistine army. In other words, Saul and his two body guards must sneak through enemy lines to see this person. Saul’s “decision to seek help from a medium” is an indication of his moral exhaustion from disobedience, compromise and rationalization as well as his failed life. This is what Ephesians 2:12 refers to as being “without hope and without God.” Even the medium’s own words
that he should not ask for this because Saul would punish it, gave one last chance for Saul to do what he has consistently refused to do – truly repent and cooperate with God’s ways. But Saul was in no mood for self-examination. Even the most positive action Saul did in his life for the Lord he will now undo personally. AND Saul will swear by the One who he has continually acted against.

II. Can we communicate with the dead?

**Turn to Deuteronomy 18 (that’s the 5th book of the Old Testament).** Let’s focus on the bigger question first, then the specific question that was asked. The bigger question is “Can we communicate with the dead?”

A. God tells us not to try

Deuteronomy 18:10-11

(Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isa 8:19; I Samuel 15:23)

God clearly tells all His followers that we should not try!

- “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:31, NIV) God is the only spirit we are to turn to.
- “I will set my face against anyone who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people.” (Leviticus 20:6, NIV)
- “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.” (Leviticus 20:27, NIV)
- “When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (Isaiah 8:19, NIV)

And if those verses aren’t clear enough we read here in Deuteronomy 18:9-13. READ. It can’t get any clearer that God considers any attempt to gain power, insight into the future or communication with the dead AS DEADLY POISON. Don’t touch. Don’t dabble. Don’t give in to people who say you are missing out. Don’t think it will help in any way. It does not matter if we can – don’t! Go back to I Samuel 28.

B. Medium at Endor was shocked

I Samuel 28:12

What happened next helps us answer the specific question asked. READ v 11-12. Did this woman have the power to bring Samuel back from the dead? The text does not say so. It simply tells us that Samuel appeared. In fact the text tells us this medium was shocked when she saw Samuel. Clearly this was not what she expected to happen and it immediately opened up her eyes to who was actually asking. So this appearance was different from what she normally experienced doing what she did.

C. There was something different about this spirit

I Samuel 28:13-14

But let’s go deeper. Saul himself could not see or hear Samuel’s spirit yet. READ v 13-14. Notice that phrase “ghostly figure” – here the NIV translation is weak for the Hebrew used here is ‘êlôhîm which means “god”. The woman expected an ancestral
spirit or a ghost, but instead she saw something different which she could only refer to as a divine being or a god. So we know that some sort of spirit normally appears for this medium or necromancer when she tries to contact the dead, but this appearance is different – it is like a god, but looks like Samuel. That is because I believe this is actually Samuel whom the Lord has sent back, much like He sent Moses and Elijah to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:3. I say this because...

- First, the plain statement of the Hebrew text is that she did in fact see Samuel.
- Second, the medium reacted to Samuel’s appearance as though it was a genuine—and terrifying experience.
- Third, her strong reaction also suggests that Samuel’s appearance was unexpected; perhaps this was the first time she had ever actually succeeded in contacting the dead. All the times before this she thought she was contacting the dead, but what she was really contacting was a demonic spirit who knew the person well so could give information only that dead person could. That is what is called “a familiar spirit” because they are familiar with the person. You can see even clearer why God tells us to NEVER contact the spirit world outside of going directly to God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This woman had given her whole life to a lie.
- Fourth, the words attributed to Samuel here contain allusions to prior communications with Saul – although a ‘familiar spirit’ could also duplicate that one so that point isn’t very strong.
- Fifth, Samuel’s role and message as a prophet, so much a part of his ministry in life, was unchanged in his encounter with Saul here. It was not the skill of the medium but rather a unique act of God that brought Saul into contact with Samuel. The scripture prohibits us trying to contact the dead not because it is a hoax & nothing really happens but because it opens us up to supernatural guidance from some source other than the Lord – that is never good!

D. There is no new information

I Samuel 28:15-19

Why do people try to contact the dead? For comfort or to find out about the future or to get hidden knowledge or to use that spirit as a weapon. But notice there is no new or secret information given by Samuel. READ v 15-19. Samuel did not provide Saul with the information he desired. Instead, Samuel simply repeated what God had said to Saul numerous times before – the Lord has left him and now fighting him because of his constant disobedience without genuine repentance. The Lord is doing what He said He would do. Going around God to get what only God can give doesn’t give us any new information, power, or strength for the future. Samuel simply reiterated his message from that day at Gilgal in 1 Samuel 15. The only new item was David’s actual name, which was hardly news to Saul.

E. Result is NEVER good

I Samuel 28:19-25

As Samuel had warned the people, the consequence of unfaithfulness and rebellion would be “the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king” (1 Samuel 12:15). The very next day this would be fulfilled. Disobedience never brings good!
III. Reminders about the real spiritual world around us

So let's remember some of God's truths about the real spiritual world around us

A. satan & the demonic seek to deceive, intimidate, destroy or get us off-track

No matter what are so-called “enlightened age” says, there are genuine evil spiritual forces around us which we can not see or hear who are actively trying to deceive, intimidate, get us off track or falsely shame us so we will get off God’s path and walk away from God’s truth and ways. Although there are a lot of fakes, satan & demonic spirits are real and active around us at all times. They are our true enemy, not humans we disagree with. Now here is the amazing thing – God does not generally give us the ability to see our enemy. So when we walk into areas God tells us NEVER to go, then we do not have the ability to discern right & wrong, good & evil, helpful or hurtful in THOSE ENVIRONMENTS! Never go there. Don’t go to séances, don’t try to contact the dead, don’t have your palm read, don’t consult horoscopes, don’t do anything that is seeking spiritual knowledge or power outside of going directly to God the Father, through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead picture the incredible power of God – He is asking us to do battle with an enemy that is stronger than us normally and God doesn’t generally allow us to see them before they attack. Who could survive that? No one unless God’s protection and provision were so much greater. The fact you are sitting here right now and being encouraged to follow Jesus is a miracle you will be astonished by for all eternity! When God just partially lifted His protection, Job lost his business, retirement, possessions, house, children and health – and none of Job’s earthly abilities, power or resources could help in the least! You, as a child of God, are a walking miracles everytime you worship, pray, share Jesus or do something in Jesus’ name. Christians are walking miracles EVERY DAY.

B. Angels are ministering spirits helping us

Not only are there evil spirits, but there are twice as many good spirits, called angels. They are also far more powerful than we are, until we get our resurrected bodies and become totally Christlike in our character. We generally can’t see angels either, but the Bible calls them “ministering spirits”. They are constantly helping us – now we are not to pray to them or the saints or anyone else because we only seek spiritual wisdom, guidance and help by going directly to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit – anything else and we will be deceived. If you remember nothing else, remember all humans are to seek guidance, strength and knowledge FROM the spiritual realm ONLY by communicating directly with God the Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

C. We are to ONLY communicate to God the Father through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit

D. God alone is the one who decides who goes to heaven or hell

So did Saul go to heaven or hell – only God decides that. God gives us clear indications of those who will or won’t, not so we judge individuals, but so we don’t follow the way of Saul. The phrase “tomorrow you and yours sons will be with me” in this context is simply referring to their earthly deaths. God doesn’t want us to read anything positive into any carnality. God alone is judge. Overcome in power of Jesus